

11. Basics of Photography

Synopsis

This module provides an overview of the basics of photography..

Lectures

- 11.1 Cameras
- 11.2 Aperture
- 11.3 Shutter Speed
- 11.4 Light
- 11.5 Composition
- 11.6 Creative Exercises

11.6 Creative Exercises

i. Less is More

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore benefit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.
~ Lao Tse

Information Overload

Each day our senses are assaulted by an overload of information. This is not surprising for after all this is the age of information. The main section of the Times of India, on 26th September 2006 had 42 pages. The newspaper has an eight column grid with about 4 words in a row. A full column has about 100 rows. That makes 400 words a column; 3200 words a page. Multiply by 42 and that is over one lakh words a day!

If you add together the number of images in the newspaper each day, the tally might well touch a double hundred. With television the visual diarrhoea equals the verbal one...it is hardly surprising that the pores of our minds are all clogged like a sponge that has soaked in all it can.

Paths to minimalism

Brevity speaks more eloquently than verbosity; a moment's silence can mean more than all the music and the noise in the world put together. This task requires you to say a lot but with very little.

Some possible approaches:

<1> You may approach this from a formal standpoint, where you are guided more by a sense of composition rather than meaning, though the image may suggest meanings.

<2> Alternately you may want to communicate an idea, in which case you are directed by the meaning you seek to communicate. However what is unsaid (and invisible) needs to speak much more than what is said.

<3> In a different approach you may begin with the familiar and visualize it such that it becomes unfamiliar and yet carries a sense of intrigue.

ii. Photomontage

A montage is a juxtaposition or partial superimposition of several shots to form a single image. Before the advent of digital technology, this was achieved by multiple exposures on the same negative in the camera, or by exposing different negatives on photo sensitive paper in the dark room. A collage is an artistic composition of materials and objects pasted over a surface, often with unifying lines and colour, and the two words are often used synonymously. A subtle distinction might be that a montage often 'superimposes' images, whereas in a collage images are 'pasted over'.

John Heartfield used photo montage to criticize the rise of fascism in thirties and forties.

Peter Kennard who used photomontage in the 1980s to speak against war, observes that in recent times "There is a problem with montage in that you see it everywhere now because of digital technology. There is so much transformed imagery around that people accept constructed images without questioning their meaning. I think my work was losing impact because of that."

The artist David Hockney makes use of montage in a sense that resembles cubist interpretations of landscapes and of human interactions that he observes with an eye for detail.

The use of montage is often used in films to create meaning through a sequence of images that are stitched together in the mind to create meaning. Eisenstein was one of the pioneers in the use of montage in his film 'Battleship Potemkin.'

Assignment:

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Create an interesting photo montage by digitally super imposing two (or more) images.

An appropriate choice of two images that are juxtaposed or superimposed, often creates an entirely new meaning – thus leading to the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

iii. Exploring Blue

"La terre est bleue comme une orange" (the earth is blue like an orange).

Paul Eluard

"One square centimere of blue is not as blue as a square metre of blue."

Henry Matisse

Matisse's observation suggests that quantity of surface determines how we see a color. Johannes Itten regarded colours as forces, that radiate energies that affect us positively or negatively, whether we are aware of it or not. In his work, 'The Art of Color' Itten observes that colours can be examined from several aspects.

The physicist studies it as electromagnetic vibrations; the chemist as dyes and pigments; the physiologist investigates the effects on eye and brain; the psychologist on their influence on mind and spirit; the artist explores the aesthetic realm that includes both the physiological and the psychological.

'Colour aesthetics', Itten mentions, 'may be approached from three directions':

Impressions (visually); Expression (emotionally); Construction (symbolically).

Symbolism without visual accuracy and emotional force would be anemic formalism; visually impressive effects without symbolic verity and emotional power would be banal imitative naturalism; emotional effect without constructive symbolic content or visual strength would be limited to the plane of

sentimental expression. Of course every artist will work according to his (or her) temperament, and must emphasize one or another of these aspects.

Assignment:

Exploring 'Blue'

Explore colour relationships using the colour 'blue' as a point of departure.

Kandinsky felt that every colour has an expressional value and it is therefore possible to create meaningful realities without representing objects. You may, if you wish, let your work be dictated by 'representational' inclinations – to suggest an example, you may wish to begin your exploration by framing the blue sky in some special way that allows the entry of another colour into the picture-frame, so as to explore colour relationships with blue. Alternately you choose to move away from the 'representational' and explore blue's relationship with other colours in the manner suggested by Kandinsky.

References:

The Photographers Handbook, Ed. Reynolds David, Ebury Press, 1977

Make the most of your pictures, Darker Roger, Focal Press, 1982

Digital Photography, Bavister Steve, Collins and Brown, 2000