

3. Photography

Synopsis

This module provides an introduction to photography. It emphasizes that it is important to develop a worldview and extend this into the realm of photography. Basic exercises for understanding the camera and certain aspects of the history of photography are addressed in the appendix.

Lectures

- 3.1 The Increasing Popularity of the Camera
- 3.2 Going beyond Pretty Pictures
- 3.3 Creative Imagery through Photomontage
- 3.4 Rumi Under the Palas
- 3.5 The Camera as an Extension of the Eye



Fig. 3.5.00

3.5 The Camera as an Extension of the Eye

The meanings, purposes and relevance of the photo-image has undergone a significant change since the digital camera crept into the lives of people. It is not an unusual sight to see children play with cell-phone cameras and the availability of a wide range of cameras for the amateur and the professional, often makes it rather confusing for a prospective camera owner.



Fig. 3.5.01a



Fig. 3.5.01b



Fig. 3.5.01c

A closer scrutiny of one's own work over the years might reveal inclinations and approaches that are difficult to understand when one seeks to understand this in a more immediate manner. Students are often keen to receive a feedback after having taken a few dozen images. In this era of digital imagery, a good way to get a feedback is to dispassionately look at one's own work over a long period of time. It helps to keep in mind that in an aesthetic journey, there is just a sense of a direction and often there are no clear destinations.

In passing, we might benefit from dwelling upon the two words – 'amateur' and 'professional'. The connotation of 'amateur' is a hobbyist or a dabbler and that of a 'professional' is a trained veteran, adept at creating 'good-looking' images. While this is often true, it is of interest to note that the roots of the word 'amateur' are in the French word 'amor' (meaning love). This suggests that amateurs are people who do things that they love to do. Professionals too, in all likelihood, love what they do, but often fall into the routine of a profession. They become so good at their work that they can almost do it with their eyes closed. An amateur, on the other hand has a kind of curiosity that has by and large faded from the life of a professional.

With so many images being created (and many of them of a reasonably 'professional' quality), the question that is worth asking is about the meaning of the photo-image. Photographers often make enlargements of their work for purposes of display and exhibition. Recently some students had put up a photo-exhibition that had many 'good-looking' images. If we return to where we started, would it be accurate to observe that it is no longer an extremely time-consuming task to develop some expertise in taking 'pretty pictures'. Would it be accurate to observe that of the several ten-thousand images uploaded to photo-sites, there are several hundred that are "pretty"? And, if so, should making pretty pictures be a goal worthy of an aspiring photographer?

Instead, would it be a more challenging task to develop a way of seeing and a way of interpreting the various events one is witness to? The act of interpretation and analysis is not normally considered a goal while learning photography. Yet, it is precisely this ability to develop clarities while seeing, that could inform and shape the work of a student of photography.



Fig. 3.5.02a



Fig. 3.5.02b



Fig. 3.5.02c



Fig. 3.5.02d

Raindrops on pots, moss and quiet days are a few of my favourite things.

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
Lawrence Weschler and David Hockney, Cameraworks, Knopf, 1984
Elliot Erwitt, Elliot Erwitt Snaps, Phaidon Press, 2003
Raghu Rai, Raghu Rai's India: Reflections in Colour, Haus Publishing, 2008
Henri Cartier-Bresson, Henri Cartier-Bresson in India, Thames and Hudson, 2006
Susan Sontag, On Photography, Picador, 2001
John Beger, Ways of Seeing, Viking, 1995

Exercises

A set of basic exercises and some creative ones are given along with notes on the basics of photography, in the appendix.