

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. 3.2.00

3.2 Going beyond “Pretty Pictures”

The well-known photographer Raghu Rai makes an interesting point about how many people approach photography. He observes that aspiring photographers have an image of some pretty picture in their heads. This is possibly something that they have seen at sometime and this is the image they try to re-create. What is being suggested here is possibly the fact that when we try to imitate something, we might end up creating something similar (and something pretty to look at), but that picture will not be our own. The emphasis here is not so much on being different but being aware of the influences that we might unknowingly carry. It is not a bad idea to attempt to imitate a master, when one is learning, but one should be aware of this.



Fig. 3.2.01

Most digital cameras are capable of focusing and compensating for deviations in order to create a pleasing image. In film photography, the photographer had to be 'more alert' and could see the results only after the film was processed and printed. The enhanced capabilities of the digital camera is liberating but also brings back the question of meaning to the image making urge.



Fig. 3.2.02a



Fig. 3.2.02b



Fig. 3.2.02c

Is this urge to photograph a beautiful place a shadow of the urge to possess beauty? To cut out a rectangle from the continuum of the universe and play with the visual grammar and logic within the frame of the rectangle is called as composition. Understanding composition, light and shadow holds the key to create a 'pretty picture.' By changing the manner in which we cut out the rectangle (or the manner in which we compose or frame) we can bring in creative variations to all that happens within the frame.



Fig. 3.2.03

Avoiding the electric wires that cut across the blue or the transmission tower could possibly have been achieved by choosing a different camera angle. One may however choose to include these elements to create a documentary image of contemporary urban spaces where heritage buildings share the landscape with the cellphone tower.

Raghu Rai's observation also suggests that one should slowly nurture one's own way of looking at the world around, It is not necessary that this nurturing happens only through the lens of the camera. It requires us to be responsive to the several things that keep happening around us. To first notice something unusual in the ordinary, is a talent that comes from being patient.



Fig. 3.2.04a



Fig. 3.2.04b



Fig. 3.2.04c



Fig. 3.2.04d

The first urge is to record one's own presence in the company of ancestors. The ability to see a world outside such narcissistic joys, offers the possibility of an impersonal aesthetic.



Fig. 3.2.05a



Fig. 3.2.05b



Fig. 3.2.05c



Fig. 3.2.05d

The four images above were taken at almost the same location and reveal four very different relationships with the objective world. Though it is widely believed that photographs are objective documentaries, they reveal as much about our own subjectivities as the 'objective reality' that they record.



Fig. 3.2.06a



Fig. 3.2.06b

The two images above were taken at the same location and within a span of an hour or so. The first was an attempt to record the unusual light prior to a thunderstorm and the second image conceals a chuckle as a line of little marchers stride forward purposefully.



Fig. 3.2.07

Does one read the image above as waves crashing onto concrete blocks with graffiti or does one interpret it as the fragility of human love and our obsession with seeking permanence? Seeing an image

is a delicate art and we often read too little or read far too much. Creating images is an equally delicate art – how much does one put in and how much does one leave out is a question that photographers take a lifetime to answer.