Art 263/363: Documentary Photography, Fall 2011

Instructor: Professor Pradip Malde

Office Hours: Carnegie Room 305, M F, 9:00 - 11:00 or by appointment.
Tel: x1537

About the Course

This course introduces students to making documentary work with still photography, and considers approaches that range between, but fall short of including, photojournalism and photographic essay. Doing documentary work is challenging and often highlights ethical issues pertaining to the process itself. All documentary work touches on the human condition, to some extent includes photographs of people, and consequently requires attention and sensitivity to the subject/object relationship. To prepare for such challenges, students will study exemplary photodocumentaries, put into practice core visual and technical skills, collaborate with peers and community partners, learn to photograph empathetically and express their understanding of particular issues in relation to systemic patterns.

Sewanee is in close proximity to one of the poorest counties in the nation. It is widely understood that poverty, environmental and human health, education, race and human rights are correlated.

This class therefore collaborates with Professor Deborah McGrath's Biology 232: Human Health and Environment (Spring 2012) and Professor Paige Schneider's Political Science / Women's Studies 310: Politics of Poverty (Fall 2011) courses. Course projects will be defined by the relationship between particular community issues and the systemic and societal dynamics that determine them.

Paramount in the course objectives is that students learn to contribute to a discourse about the human condition in visual terms.

Honor Code

The pledge each student makes is founded on the ethic of reciprocity and by extension on the most fundamental principles of human rights. It is expected that all work in this course is carried out with honesty, respect for self and others, and full accreditation when necessary. This includes a thorough acknowledgment of collaborators, full permission and subject releases by people in photographs and quotes from interviews, and citations of any work that has any visible influence on assignments.

Violations of the Honor Code include submitting work done for other courses towards graded assignments for this course, providing misleading and dishonest reasons for missing class and community partner meetings, photographing a person when he/she/a guardian of a minor has specifically denied permission to be photographed, and presenting a photograph that is a composite of multiple frames without acknowledging so.

I understand that field work often highlights ethical ambiguities, and there are times when one acts or has to respond to rapidly shifting situations without fully considering or being aware of the repercussions. It is always helpful to seek advice when you are uncertain about the Honor Code in such situations. Please do not hesitate in approaching me if you have any questions about, or even wish to discuss hypothetical situations in relation to the Honor Code.

Course Assignments

Students will complete five Exercises, each one graded on a pass / fail basis;

complete and give a presentation of two Projects, one which requires you to participate in a Community Engagement project, and each graded according to criteria posted with the project descriptions. The final grade will be a composite of all of the above grades plus an overall class attendance/participation grade.

This class has a 'Community Engagement' designation and is listed as a part of Sewanee's Community Engagement and Learning (CEL) program. All students taking this course are

required to participate in an approved service learning / community engagement project or activity. This class collaborate's with Professor Paige Schneider's Politics of Poverty class on special projects, lectures and possible field trips. Most importantly, most students in these classes will be working with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) program in Franklin County, which meets every other Monday evening in Winchester, from 5-6:30pm throughout the semester. Students with Monday evening scheduling conflicts will have a choice between participating in other related projects sponsored by the same community partner organization in Winchester, or with other community service agencies with which Sewanee has an ongoing partnership (i.e. the Grundy County Food Bank; tutoring at Grundy County High School; Community Action Council; Sewanee Senior Center). We have some resources to allay the costs (travel, materials, etc….) associated with conducting our service learning projects.

Your participation in the community engagement project is welcomed and valued by our community partners. They consider your assistance a real contribution and they are counting on you. You are expected to keep all appointments and commitments made with your community partner agency. Failing to show up for a commitment (or showing up late) not only reflects poorly on you and Sewanee students more generally, but may also result in increasing the workload on already overburdened GRG directors and staff who must make last minute adjustments to compensate for your absence. Many (most) of the children that you will be working with have experienced disappointments, abrupt and unexpected changes in their lives, and often unfulfilled promises and commitments from adults they have trusted. It is absolutely essential that you keep all commitments made to them. If you are unsure whether you can live up to a promise — don't make it until you are sure. If you make it — keep it.

Exercises

Each of these exercises are designed to hone your photographic skills and visual literacy. Each exercise requires that you present 20 photographs, projected on screen via Lightroom, on the due date.

This applies to all except the first exercise, for which, you are asked to bring 20 photographs, as digital files on a thumb drive, to the first class meeting. The files may be in any format. It is recommended that you shoot with your camera set at the highest possible resolution, ideally in RAW.

1. **Self-portrai**t
   Make a set of self portrait photographs, comprising both literal and metaphoric portrayals. This exercise requires you to consider how the relationship between you and your surroundings, or in other words the 'subject' of a photograph and the 'back ground' combine to express emotion and feeling via metaphor, symbol, allegory, narrative, composition and form.

2. **Where is my lens when I take the photograph?**
   Produce a set of photographs that consider any combination of camera position, focus, shutter speed and lighting in relation to subject matter. These are most of the key qualities, along with time (which we address in the next exercise) that form the basis of photographic language, and they largely determine whether or not a photograph is eloquent.

3. **When do I take the photograph**
   Make a set of photographs that are clearly time-specific. In other words, the moment of taking a photograph has particular significance and to a large extent becomes the subject of the image. This particular aspect of photography bears the burden of photographic truth: the understanding that a photograph actually happened is based on our experience of time, and we believe the continuum of time to be true.

4. **What does it feel like to be here?**
   Build on the 'Self Portrait' exercise and produce a set of photographs that describes your emotional, perhaps even sentimental experiences of a particular place. The only restriction to this exercise is that you may not photograph on the University Domain.

5. **What am I not seeing?**

Due Dates: See Schedule

Additional instructions for each exercise will be provided during class.

Grade: 30% of final grade

Projects

1. **Letter to my subject**

Spend time with someone you know well (e.g. a roommate,close friend,family member) for an extended period of time. Produce a study that results directly from your overall experience of this person and with specific references to this time. The final piece should function as a photographic 'letter' to that person. It could express, for instance, your feelings for the person; your insights into his/her life or particular situation; any thoughts and insights you may have about your relationship to each other. Consider also how your subject presents a particularization of larger issues such as shelter (home, work, environmental spaces); health (nutritional, behavioral, emotional/mental); economy (financial status, possessions, materialistic behavior); and community (social sphere, communication, access to resources, education) to name only some of the most important. Consider how each of the Exercises will help inform your work for this project.

Present a set of 30 photographs as a digital slideshow. These may be in color or black and white, but not a mixture of both. The presentation should be formatted to run automatically for a total runtime of between 2 –5 minutes. Time permitting, this project may also manifest in print form as a book. The project may be accompanied by a brief written statement, which itself can take the form of a letter. The work may or may not be shown publicly, but must be presented to the entire Documentary Photography class.

Assessment Criteria

- Effective visualization of issues and concerns
- Expressive use of environmental conditions and formal controls
- Establishing a relationship between particular and societal issues
- Communicating a sense of familiarity and having spent time with the subject
- Proficient use of presentation technology
- Meetings with instructor during office hours to discuss progress of project
- Response and participation in final critique

Due Date: See Schedule

Additional instructions will be provided during class.

Grade: 30% of final grade

2. **Community Engagement project**

Complete a photographic documentary that grows out of your experiences with our community partners. The topic is to be defined in consultation with the course instructor, and in keeping with the CE designation, must meet the following criteria:

a. The project must address a real social/political/economic development concern in the community and contribute to a broader discussion and understanding of poverty or vast income inequality in the United States.

b. The project should involve some engagement or partnership with stakeholders in the community. Photo documentary projects are to be developed and initiated in a spirit of inclusion and collaboration with community partners/members.

c. The project should create the opportunity to reflect upon student's and community partners'

experiences and provide feedback and analysis of the project and their participation in it, through class discussions, journal entries, and final project presentations.
d. Students are expected to spend a minimum of thirty hours over the course of the semester on their service learning project. This works out to about two hours, on average per week, with some weeks requiring a greater number of hours, and other weeks, fewer hours. If you are unable to make an honest commitment to this requirement then you may want to consider choosing another class this term.

The final form of presentation is to be determined in consultation with the course instructor, but all submitted work must meet these conditions:
a. All title and caption material should be scrupulously edited,and supplementary information for each image attached to the project as an appendix.
b. Supplementary information must include the approximate time,date and location of the image; people who are clearly identifiable in any photograph must have signed a Subject Release Form, copies of which are to be attached to the project.
c. Regardless of the final form of presentation, all images files in the project must be placed in a Lightroom folder, the filename prefixed by sequence number,and burned to a CD or DVD,which is to be submitted to the instructor. Please follow these steps to do this:

i. Create a collection: Lightroom Folder should be a collection,called "Art263_2011_INITIALNAME"
e.g. Art263_2011_PMALDE

ii. Export the collection:
Place all images in this folder, sequence images,then File > Export as Catalogue. Be sure to give the same name as the collection to the export folder, and check both option boxes. It may be easiest to export to your desktop.

iii. Add a prefix to filenames:
Once the export is complete,quit LR. Go to the exported collection and double-click the .LRCAT file. LR will startup,create a backup if asked **to this same directory**. Select the "Art263_2011_…"collection (you may see other collections too). Make sure the sequence is as desired. Click on the first image. In the Library view, Metadata pane > filename, add a two-digit prefix followed by a dash to the filename that corresponds to the sequence. e.g.
original filename (of the first image in the sequence):IMG_2028.CR
new filename:01-IMG_2028.CR2

iv. Add more metadata:
Still in Library view, select all thumbnails in the collection. In the pane Metadata >Contact, insert your Full name in 'creator',and Sewanee email address in 'email'

v. Quit LR

vi. Burn this folder to a disc, attach a label or write on the disc: "Art263/363, Fall 2010, <Your Name>, <your email address>, <Project Title>"

Assessment Criteria

- Contributing to a broader discussion and understanding of poverty or vast income inequality in the United States
- Effective visualization of social/political/economic issues and concerns
- Expressive use of environmental conditions and formal controls
- Establishing a relationship between particular and societal issues
- Communicating a sense of familiarity and having spent time with the subject
- Proficient use of presentation technology

- Meetings with instructor during office hours to discuss progress of project
- Response and participation in final critique

Due Date: See Schedule

Additional instructions for this project will be provided during class.

Grade: 30% of final grade

Required Texts:

Ken Light, Witness in Our Time, Smithsonian Press
Alessandro Mauro, editor, My Brother's Keeper: documentary photographers and human rights, Contrasto Press

Equipment and Supplies

It is required that students work with digital SLRs, capable of rendering at least 8 megapixel RAW files or an equivalent (or better) professional-level camera and compatible lens. Additionally, students must have an external storage drive of no less than 250GB and a card data reader. Highly recommended are owning a licensed copy of Adobe Lightroom 2.x or higher, a Mac laptop with at least 2GB of RAM, a small camera bag/back pack, and an audio recording device of some sort.

Schedule

Class meetings occur three times a week, Tuesday and THursday from 9:30 to 10:45, and Friday from 2:00 to 4:30, in Carnegie 311 unless otherwise announced. Additionally all students are required to participate in weekly meetings with community partners. Field trips may require excused absences from other faculty. While the instructor will validate the requests, it is each student's responsibility to acquire these excuses.

Readings

Readings and the related discussions will occur on a weekly basis. The discussion of each reading will be facilitated by a designated pair of students. Each pair will post a set of discussion prompts on the class blog no later than 9:30 AM of the week before the reading is to be discussed. The entire class will participate in the ensuing discussion, guided by these prompts and by the discussion facilitators. Two students will be designated as note-keepers and will post a summary of the discussion in the comment section of that discussion within 24 hours.

Attendance and Deadlines

Studio class meetings are concentrated and often a lot needs to be covered in a short amount of time. Missing a class will set you back. Missing more than two classes will impair your studio skills and will affect your grades. Class times are often devoted to technical demonstrations and instruction. Meetings outside of class times are reserved for discussing project work and dealing with specific technical issues, and students are strongly encouraged to meet during instructor office hours on a regular basis. However, if a class is missed, it is your responsibility to make up for any material covered during that class period; the instructor will not be available for extra, make-up demonstrations. Note that your final grade will be reduced if you have more than two absences.

The review and critique sessions provide a potent learning forum and you may not miss them without a very good reason and an excused absence. An un-excused absence from a critique session will result in an automatic Fail grade for that project. Extensions may be requested for medical or other bona fide reason. Any extension, or overdue project will be graded, BUT the project will not receive a class or personal critique.

Please note that Project deadlines must be observed: unless otherwise stated, not doing so will result in a 1/3 grade-point penalty per each 24 hour period overdue. Any assignment may be re-worked for a better grade, provided that the project was submitted on time, the critique attended and any other project criteria met. All re-submissions must be handed in by the last day of classes. Each re-submission should be clearly identified with your name, the project title and a note describing the nature of the re-worked areas.

Grading Policy

F Fail: unsatisfactory, almost always an indication of not enough commitment; incomplete submission and / or 5 or more classes missed.
D- to D: This grade requires, as a minimum, that all project work be completed. Irregular attendance: This grade is automatically issued if more than four classes are missed without a bona fide excuse.
D+: Satisfactory; consistent attendance but minimal effort.
C- to C: Satisfactory to good; consistent attendance and effort.
C+ to B-: Good; consistent attendance and effort; some progress; understanding of fundamental issues.
B to B+: Good to excellent; indication of progress; creative use of fundamental issues; good technique.
A- : Excellent; rarely issued; great effort and progress; creative work; excellent technique and presentation.
A to A+: Excellent; very rarely issued; work displaying great effort, progress, and technique; mature and insightful.

Letter grades may be converted from percentage grades as follows:

F	60% or less	B-	80 - 84
D-	60 - 64	B	84 - 87
D	64 - 67	B+	87 - 90
D+	67 - 70	A-	90 - 94
C-	70 - 74	A	94 - 97
C	74 - 77	A+	97 -100%
C+	77 - 80		

Schedule

date	topic	Critique/assignment due
Fri - 08.26	Introduction Discussion of all exercises and projects Equipment setup, Lightroom, core camera controls	Exercise 1: Self portrait
Tue - 08.30	Introduction to "The Photographer's Eye", John Szarkowski, from The Photography Reader (ed. Liz Wells)	
Thu - 09.1	Photographic Perspective: camera location	
Fri - 09.2	Lightroom controls	Exercise 2 & 3: Where and When
Tue - 09.6	"The Gesture of Photography", Vilém Flusser, from Towards a Philosophy of Photography	
Thu - 09.8	Eugene Richards: The Fat Baby	
Fri - 09.9	Critique methods Discussion of Project 1: Letter to my Subject	Exercise 4 & 5: Feeling and Not Seeing

date	topic	Critique/assignment due
Tue - 09.13	"The Ethics of Vision", Susie Linfield, from My Brother's Keeper: Documentary Photographers and Human Rights	
Thu - 09.15	Aileen and Eugene Smith: Minamata	
Fri - 09.16	Review of work in progress for Project 1	work in progress, Project 1
Tue - 09.20	"Suggestions for Running Amok" (poem), Peter Handke, from The Lost Origins of the Essay (ed. John D'Agata)	
Thu - 09.22	Fazal Sheikh: Ladli	
Fri - 09.23	Discussion of Project 2 Introduction to print-on-demand book publishing Lightroom collections and slideshows	
Tue - 09.27	"Is Nothing Sacred? The Ethics of Television", Michael Ignatieff, from The Warrior's Honor	
Thu - 09.29	Antonin Kratochvil	
Fri - 09.30	Critique	Project 1: Letter to my Subject
Tue - 10.4	"Experts, Reporters, Witnesses: The Making of Anthropologists in States of Emergency", George E. Marcus from Contemporary States of Emergency: the politics of military and human interventions	
Thu - 10.6	Wolf Böwig	
Fri - 10.7	Transfer Project 1 to book form	Place Project 1 in Lightroom collection
Tue - 10.11	"Co-signers of a Covenant: snakes", Stanley Kunitz with Genine Lentine, from The Wild Braid	
Thu - 10.13	Nan Golding and Diane Arbus	
Fri - 10.14	Review work in progress for Project 2	work in progress, Project 2
Tue - 10.18	"In, Around, And Afterthoughts (on documentary photography)", Martha Rosler from The Photography Reader (ed. Liz Wells)	
Thu - 10.20	Josef Koudelka	
Fri - 10.21	Preliminary critique	Project 2
Tue - 10.25	UN Declaration of Human Rights	

date	topic	Critique/assignment due
Thu - 10.27	Bruce Davidson	
Fri - 10.28	Book dummy of Project 2	Place Project 2 in Lightroom collection and export as jpg folder
Tue - 11.1	Introduction from 'Magnum Stories", Chris Boot	
Thu - 11.3	Giles Perress	
Fri - 11.4	Review Project 2 in Blurb / book form	
Tue - 11.8	Introduction, and "The Museum Context", Anne Wilkes Tucker, from Witness In Our Time (ed. Ken Light)	
Thu - 11.10	Check and publish Project 2 to Blurb	Project 2 to Blurb
Fri - 11.11	Final Critique	Project 2
Tue - 11.15	"Photographs of Agony", John Berger from The Photography Reader (ed. Liz Wells)	
Thu - 11.17	Annabel Clarke and Stephen Alvarez	
Fri - 11.18	Final Critique continues	Project 2
Tue - 11.22	no class meeting	
Thu - 11.24	Thanksgiving	
Fri - 11.25	Thanksgiving	
Tue - 11.29	"Access and Consent in Public Photography", Lisa Henderson from The Photography Reader (ed. Liz Wells)	
Thu - 12.1	Early History of Documentary Photography	
Fri - 12.2	Presentations of project work	
Tue - 12.6	"And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos" (excerpt), John Berger	
Thu - 12.8	Course review and wrap up	

Last modified: Saturday, July 30, 2011, Pradip Malde