AN ANALOG APPROACH TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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Contemporary Creative Art Practices: An Analog Approach to Digital Photography

Pinterest Board: https://www.pinterest.com/gofneybl/contemporary-creative-art-practices/

Mrs. Gofney’s website: http://brittanygofney.weebly.com/contemporary-art-practices.html

Introduction

As photography continues to move towards digital, many photographers are remembering photography’s analog roots. This research study focuses on contemporary digital photographers and the styles and techniques that make their works unique. The photographers studied are blurring the line between digital technology and fine art. Many of the artists featured here share my Surrealist aesthetic, achieving imagery that pushes the boundaries of realism, a value that photography was once known for.

History of Photography: Analog to Digital

Digital technology has truly revolutionized the art of photography by taking a process that once took hours and condensing it into seconds. Today, digital images can be taken and printed within minutes of capturing a scene. The art of photography has come a long way since the first analog image was captured in the 1800s.

The first digital image was produced by Russell Kirsh on a computer in 1957 using a scanning process for the United States National Bureau of Standards (Galal, 2016). The next major milestone in digital photography was in 1975, when Steven Sasson invented the first digital camera at Eastman Kodak (Galal, 2016). Sasson’s camera (Figure 1) weighed 8 pounds
and only had 0.01 megapixels; it took 23 seconds to record a black and white image on a cassette tape (Galal, 2016). This breakthrough led to Konica developing the first SLR (single lens reflex) camera in 1978, the prototype for what contemporary digital photographers use to capture images today (Galal, 2016).

In 1988, the first JPEG and MPEG were developed, allowing for the compression of digital image files (Galal, 2016), a standard format used today by professionals and amateurs alike. In 1990, Adobe released the very first version of Photoshop (Galal, 2016), a program that is still widely used by digital photographers and artists in the 21st century, though there have been many updates since the original 1.0 version. As digital cameras, software and image quality have developed over the past several decades, so has the artwork that is created using such technologies.

**Contemporary Digital Photographers**

Due to the continuing advancement of digital technologies, digital photographers today have the unique ability to transform “reality” by creating imagery that can defy nature and portray powerful visual messages. “Thus, artists employ the tradition of photography’s indexical function so digital images seem to represent reality to viewers” (Dzenko, 2009, pp. 22). Oftentimes, this results in Surrealistic style characteristic of contemporary digital imagery. While digital photography cannot truly replicate the dark room process, many digital photographers today are returning to some of the darkroom’s early experimentations and digitizing them.
Antonio Mora is creating digital collages reminiscent of traditional darkroom double exposure prints. Traditionally analog double exposure prints were either created by exposing the film twice or using negative sandwiching in the darkroom. Unlike traditional double exposures, Mora is able to eliminate specific parts of the two photographs allowing select parts of each photo to be emphasized, enabling him to refocus the viewer’s attention. Mora combines images found in blogs and magazines by fusing them together digitally. Adjusting opacity and composition, his layered imagery creates a powerful, dream-like representation in which the subject’s face and thus identity is often masked.

Erin Case also uses a form of digital double exposure in which she layers digital photographs, although she uses a more collage-like technique than Mora. Case has digitized the analog method by using Photoshop to digitally “cut and paste” layers of images, adjusting transparency and masking tools to create new meaning. Her imagery includes photos from the Internet, magazines, newspapers and her own photography collection, combining images to create a Surreal quality that is intriguingly curious and deep.

Matthieu Bourel is also blending analog and digital methods in a Surrealistic way using a handmade collage technique. Bourel begins with “c-prints,” which is short for chromogenic color prints. A c-print is “a full-color, silver-based photograph that can be produced from a color negative, a slide, or a digital image” (ARCP, 2013, para 1). Bourel creates handmade collages using c-prints of vintage photographs, which he then cuts apart and repeats, rearranging them in the same composition. His Dada-ist inspiration is evident in the Surreal quality of his imagery and the way he re-thinks his subject matter.

Pablo Thecuardo also creates hand-cut collages, although his are inspired by fashion imagery he gathers from fashion editorials and his own original digital photographs. His work
AN ANALOG APPROACH TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Gofney

deals with themes of appearance versus reality and internal desires. He utilizes the method of trompe l’oeil to create illusive compositions of digital photography to trick the viewer’s eye. Some of his works even incorporate 3-dimensional layers, utilizing negative space and repetition to create added interest.

Sally Mankus is a digital photographer who transfers her images onto alternative surfaces, reminiscent of the darkroom practice of liquid emulsion. Mankus utilizes charred bakeware to extract natural compounds such as carbon and rust, serving as her image media. Although the artist does not divulge her image transfer process, I am led to believe she does a lithography transfer process using Xerox copies and the rust and carbon as her pigment. She transfers her imagery onto found objects, typically vintage domestic items such as fabric and bakeware further deepening the meaning behind her work.

Antoine Geiger’s photography reminds me of traditional high-speed photography as he represents his subjects being sucked into their phones. Traditionally, high-speed photography is captured by adjusting the exposure on the camera’s lens. Here, Geiger is re-creating the effect using Photoshop’s blur tool, among others, to create the illusion of high-speed movement. Geiger’s digital photography series, “SUR-FAKE,” explores the attention-sucking power of digital technology. It is ironic that a digital artist, who benefits from the advances in digital technologies, is conveying such a powerful message about the detrimental side of such advances.

Conclusion

The artists highlighted above are just a small selection of digital artists blurring the line between traditional and contemporary photography techniques. “Imaging technologies will continue to provide new possibilities for the format and distribution of images, and the developments will continue to be rooted in previous social uses of photography” (Dzenko, 2009,
As digital technologies advance, more photographers are experimenting with mixed media and new interpretations of analog techniques.
References


