PHOT 11H: HONORS CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Fall 2026
Units:	4
Hours:	3 lecture, 3 laboratory per week (72 total per quarter)
Advisory:	Not open to students with credit in PHOT 11 or 59.
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 3: Arts & Humanities
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

Student Learning Outcomes

- Analyze the artistic styles and visual strategies used by contemporary photographers to convey meaning.
- Evaluate how the topics and themes explored by contemporary photographers engage with broader social and cultural issues.

Description

Survey of contemporary issues in photography. Critical theory and other issues surrounding contemporary photographic practices are explored through the style and content of work by selected contemporary photographers. Censorship, copyright, appropriation, and other current issues affecting the contemporary photographer are discussed. The interplay of traditional and digital photography and how it affects our concepts of truth, reality, society, and culture. The honors course offers an enriched and challenging experience for the more talented student, including deeper content, more rigorous grading, and more demanding and creative assignments requiring application of higher-level thinking, writing, and communication skills.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast various contemporary trends in photography and their effect on aesthetics and techniques in the visual arts.
2. Trace the effects of other visual media on photography, and the effect of photography on other visual media.
3. Recognize the major photographic artists and gain insight into how contemporary photography has been influenced by their vision.
4. Understand better one's own abilities and potential in relation to current photographic styles and techniques.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the changing nature of photography that has accompanied the advent of electronic imaging.
6. Recognize the contributions made in this field by people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, and the contributions of photographers who work outside normal academic and artistic environments.

Course Content

1. The relationship of aesthetics and technology in photography
   a. An overview of early 19th century photographic vision and processes
   b. The evolution of photographic vision and technology in the 20th century
   c. The development of photographic processes as industrial and manufacturing tools
   d. Electronic imaging and future trends
2. The integration and use of photographs in other media
   a. Photographic exploration and documentation in the sciences
   b. Trends in photojournalism, the single image, and the photo essay
   c. Creative, expressive, and experimental photography
3. Introduction to contemporary photographic issues:
   a. Contemporary photographic technology
   b. The nature of photographic style
   c. Relevance and relationship of technology to aesthetics and creative art
4. The role of the photographic artist in society
   a. Documentary and journalistic photography
   b. Photography as art
   c. Multi-media, video, and alternative processes
   d. The depiction and expression of current philosophical and cultural concerns through the photographic image
   e. Visits to institutions, museums, galleries, industrial and commercial sites, as appropriate
   f. Contributions to photography by artists from diverse backgrounds and cultures
5. Selected issues in photographic ethics and aesthetics
   a. Censorship
   b. Electronic alteration of photographs
   c. Right of privacy, freedom of expression, and political correctness
   d. Copyrights and appropriated imagery
   e. Current issues

Lab Content

Lab hours consist of one or more of the following options:

1. Students will view and then analyze work by contemporary photographers
2. Students will watch and then analyze selected films on contemporary photographers
3. Students participate in online discussions based on questions posed in weekly lessons. This participation consists of students posting answers to written questions provided by the instructor and/or posting responses to other student comments in an online discussion forum
4. Students will attend exhibitions (both independently and as a class). Students will then write descriptive/analytical/experiential summaries based on their exhibit attendance

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

1. Lecture room equipped for computer projection with web access.
2. When taught online/hybrid: ongoing access to computer with email software and hardware; email address.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

Written papers or project on selected topics in photography
Instructor's review of student's contribution to class discussions
Final examination
The honors course requires additional in-class portfolio, consisting of lecture notes, individual responses to discussion prompts, and personal reflections; expository essays, requiring research, integration, and synthesis; and choice of creative project reflective of course content, such as creation of photographs, webpage design, or class presentation

Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Lecture presentations to prepare students to evaluate and compare works by different contemporary photographers and identify the photographs' place in the social, cultural, and artist climate of our time
Classroom discussion and electronic discussions/chat, as appropriate, demonstrating skill in the use of the language of photography and art history
Field trips to museums and galleries to see and critique examples of contemporary photographic imagery

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Hirsch, Robert. Seizing The Light: A Social & Aesthetic History of Photography. 2024.

Wells, Liz. Photography: A Critical Introduction. 2021.

Barrett, Terry. Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images, 6th ed.. 2020.

Cotton, Charlotte. The Photograph as Contemporary Art (World of Art), 4th ed.. 2020.

Although some of these texts are older than the suggested "5 years or newer" standard, they remain seminal in this area of study. Supplemental readings are provided in the form of a course reader for more current analysis.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Reading assignments: Reading of one or more textbook essays for each of the lecture topics, plus online lecture
2. Writing assignments: Three 1000-word essays responding to a prompt, such as:
   a. Address the following in a 1000 word essay on Sandy Skoglund's image titled "Radioactive Cats?"
      i. Definitions of art
         1. Is the work of art the photograph, the installation, or both?
         2. If this were a documentary photograph taken by Skoglund of an actual situation, would the photograph have the same status as art as Skoglund's photograph of the installation?
      ii. Artist-centered issues
         1. Had Skoglund used mannequins instead of models for this work, how would it be different?
      iii. Audience-centered issues
         1. If you hate this kind of green or gray, do you have to hate this piece?
         2. Does the artist tell you something you already know about cats or does she give you new information about them?
      iv. Cultural context
         1. What does this work tell you about men and women in this society?
         2. How might people from other societies view these pets?
      v. Criticism and interpretation
         1. What does the title tell you about this work's meaning? Do you have to know the title to have the same interpretation?
         2. Would a cat lover be likely to like this work or think it is good art? Would someone who is allergic to cats?
      vi. Values in art
         1. Does this work teach us a lesson about people and animals? About how life should be?
         2. What kind of place besides an art museum would be a good place to show this work? Why?

Discipline(s)

Photography