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TEACHING TRADITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Teaching Traditional Photography in the Digital Age

This presentation considers the importance of teaching traditional (wet-room) photography alongside digital photography within a Fine Arts and New Media Studies context at the College level. Many colleges have done away with their darkrooms in exchange for digital labs, decreasing the learning impact for students and their understanding of photo syntax (connection between camera and printing process and their aesthetic equivalence).

Abstract:

This presentation discusses the importance of teaching traditional (wet-room) photography alongside Digital Photography within a Fine Arts and New Media Studies context at the College level. Many colleges have done away with their darkrooms in exchange for digital labs, decreasing the learning impact for students and their understanding of photo syntax. Photo syntax connects the technology of the camera and print output processes with their aesthetic equivalents. Today, the digital world has democratized photography so that most people can create a technically good image regardless of their technical ability, and disseminating these images via social networking allows for larger and more inclusive audiences. The rapidity of creating photos, coupled with postmodern attitudes, have brought us further away from the essence of why we make images, what makes an image a powerful communiqué and the notion of photo syntax.

The digital imaging world introduced a technology that further echoes George Eastman's notion of "you press the button we do the rest." Today, you push the button and the camera does it all. This creates a disconnect between the camera's technology and how to use that technology to help communicate an idea. The digital camera is often reduced to a mere tool that simply and robotically records what is in front of the lens. Once students use a simpler mechanical camera with film, they see a direct connection and implication between the camera's technology and the aesthetic equivalent and more easily understand the digital camera.