



PG 300 PHOTOGRAPHY: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

IES Abroad Milan

DESCRIPTION: The two main purposes of this course are:

- 1) To introduce you to the basic techniques that help you to master the fundamental rules of “making,” not just simply “taking,” photographs.
- 2) To offer a general idea of the conceptual issues concerning the reading of photographs, and images, in general. This encompasses how photographs are taken, what their different forms and meanings can be, why they occupy such a key role in our society, who controls their circulation, where their main centers of production are located and when this overwhelming global process originated.

Since theory informs practice, the proposed conscientious engagement with questions about photographic meaning helps students develop not only a better critical understanding of the images they are wrapped up in the environment they live in, but also a deeper sense of the hidden agendas underlying the pictures they learn to both interpret and construct.

You will also discover how to combine your images with words and sounds to create your own multimedia “audio-slideshow.”

CREDITS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COSTS:

Students must supply their own digital camera (10 Megapixels or more) with manual controls, and a zoom lens, with a strong preference for a digital SLR (Single Lens Reflex) or a mirrorless camera. Fully automatic, compact digital cameras (“point-and-shoot camera”) are not recommended. Smartphones are not an accepted form of camera.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Lectures and discussions, presentations and video tutorials, critical analysis of required readings, experiments with photographic and lighting equipment, field study visits, student presentations of photographic projects, group discussions

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Course Participation – 20%
- Midterm Exam – 30% (20% First Photo Project + 10% Multiple-choice test)
- Second Photo Project – 20%
- Final Exam – 30% (20% Third Photo Project + 10% Research Paper)

Course Participation

Active class participation and regular homework completion

Midterm Exam

Photo project #1 (10-15 photos) plus a Multiple-choice test: understanding technique and the theory behind light, color, and composition controls

Second Photo Project

Photo project #2: A documentary or an art project (10-15 photos)

Final Exam

Photo project #3: Multi-media project (20-30 photos with audio)

Research Paper

Written essay (1500 words) regarding contemporary, critical issues on photography

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students are expected to be responsible for their own class attendance and to give academic responsibilities priority over other activities. Regular class attendance is mandatory. For physical and mental health reasons, IES Abroad Milano allows a maximum of THREE (3) absences in each Italian language course, TWO (2) absences in each Area Studies course, and ONE (1) absence in each Seminar course. Every absence beyond this allowance will automatically result in a penalty of 2 percentage points off the final grade. SEVEN (7) absences will result in a failing grade in Italian language and Area Studies courses. FOUR (4) absences will result in a failing grade in Seminar courses. Failure to attend a scheduled exam, test, quiz, or presentation will automatically result in an F grade on that assessment.

CONTENT:

The course is divided into three consecutive sections:

- A. **Technical:** Weeks 1 – 6 are devoted to an intensive survey of the technical concepts that constitute the fundamental bases of the photographic process. A multiple-choice test covering this section will be given to students. Students will need to carry out a photo project that will be presented to the class, and discussed jointly.
- B. **Theoretical-analytical:** Weeks 7 – 9 are devoted to the critical analysis of some crucial theoretical debates around photography. The second photo project will require students to tell a story through pictures. This photo project will be presented to the class, and discussed jointly.
- C. **Project-oriented:** Weeks 10 – 12 are devoted to the knowledge of the most up-to-date techniques of presentation of audio/visual projects, both in the art world and in the documentary/journalistic milieu. The final photo project should make use of these techniques. The final written study paper shall deal both with the critical issues of the second section of the course, and with the theory explained in the third section.

Session	Content	Assignments
<i>Session 1</i>	Course Introduction Overview, teaching methodology, bibliographical references, students' personal presentation of own experiences and needs, course grading criteria, and professor's expectations	
<i>Session 2</i>	Art and Visual Representation - The invention of perspective in the Renaissance - Painters using a camera obscura as "proto-photographers" and the evolution of automatic image-making technology	Written response paper to questions concerning the meaning of the word "critical" in the title of the course. Submit maximum three photos (portraits) of one classmate, taken during first lesson
<i>Session 3</i>	Camera Equipment I Films, digital sensors, and image format	Written response paper to questions concerning the meaning of self-portrait in humans and other species. Submit six photos, two taken during last class and four more showing your ability to control wide angle and telephoto lenses, together with horizontality and verticality of pictures of buildings. You should write down all the values you are using as you take the pictures, one by one.

Session 4	Camera Equipment II Lenses, focal length, and use of different lenses	Submit six photos, some taken during last class showing your ability to control wide angle and telephoto lenses, together with the switching between exposure positions: P, M, A, S. You should write down the all the values you are using as you take the pictures, one by one.
Session 5	Camera Equipment III Aperture, shutter speed, exposure controls, and sensitivity	Exercise on manual focusing. Submit 9 photos. Use 18mm, 35mm, 55mm with a building, a person, three identical objects placed in front of you at different distances.
Session 6	Camera Equipment III - More on Aperture, shutter speed, exposure controls, and sensitivity Lighting: Color - Color temperature	Exercise on Aperture settings and levels of illumination. Submit 8 photos. Written response paper on your results and findings from today's experiments in class, including explanations.
Session 7	Lighting, Color, and Contrast - Color, tones, dynamic range, and contrast - Light: Natural and artificial - Knowledge and control of practical lighting conditions	Exercise on time of exposure settings. Submit 10 photos, including 3 photos taken at night and 1 taken with "panning" technique.
Session 8	Image Design Composition, framing, proportions, perspective, and image design skills Course-related trip: Robert Capa's exhibit - MUDEC	Exercise on colour temperature, direction of light and quality of light. Submit 8 pictures. Written response paper concerning the possible way certain pictures were made
Session 9	Introduction to the Photo Essay - Eugene Smith's <i>Country Doctor</i>, and the art of storytelling using photos - How to find a story to tell - Examples of photographic stories and "collections"	Select a place (a room, a street, a building, etc.) and shoot TWO pictures for each of the 7 elements we have covered in lesson 8. Select and comment on five photos that captured your attention while visiting Robert Capa's exhibit, last Wednesday.
Session 10	Digital Workflow Digital workflow, image management, photographic processing software	Submit eight photos where composition plays a major role, including variations on the rule of thirds, repetitions, creative and original points of view.
Session 11	Midterm Exam - Multiple-choice Exam - Photo Project #1 Class Presentation - Open discussion with instructor and class	Submit 10 to 15 photos. Be ready for multiple-choice test.

Session 12	The Myth of Photographic Truth - The photograph as a document Mass Media - The mass media and the public sphere How to make more interesting Portraits - Portraits made through a visual obstacle	Written response paper on the midterm photo project: positive or enjoyable findings and critical or challenging tasks.
Session 13	Electronic Imaging - Photography in the age of electronic imaging - The use of software to enhance photographs Reflex vs. smartphones - A comparison of performances while doing similar jobs	Submit 5 portraits of at least two different people made looking through a visual obstacle Send a written Title and Summary of your Second Photo Project.
Session 14	Visual Persuasion - Visual Truth - Visual Lies Reflections Different types of surfaces reflect light differently	Select your 3 best portraits ever and edit them by cropping, adjusting color, contrast, brightness, etc. And submit them. Submit 3 photos where DSLR is better and 3 photos where smartphone wins
Session 15	The Art of Breaking the Rules of Perspective From Picasso to David Hockney	Submit 5 photos with your best reflection experiments using 5 different surfaces
Session 16	Second photo project: - most common technical mistakes to be avoided - parameters of evaluation - examples of stories - examples of "collections" Possible Course-Related Trip (TBC)	Edit and compile together the images shot in class using either Photoshop, or alternative online websites like www.pixlr.com or www.photopea.com or www.sumopaint.com or other photo editing software like GIMP or iPhoto
Session 17	Image Ethics James Nachtwey, War Photographer, Documentary Discussion of the ethics of taking photos of people in a war environment, as well as in normal situations	Pick four different portraits from selected websites and try to replicate the lighting, the mood, the composition. Send eight photos (two for each portrait)
Session 18	Photo Project #2 Class Presentation - Open debate with instructor and class Field study - to make a portrait and record the voice of a classmate	Submit 10 to 15 photos.
Session 19	Multimedia Storytelling: An Overview - Telling stories with pictures and sounds - The power of multimedia	Edit a brief multimedia with a movie-editing software (like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker) using the photo sequence from class. Total duration: 30 seconds (15 + 15 seconds).

Session 20	Multimedia Storytelling: An Overview - Notable examples from the web - Multimedia components Audio Slideshows - Examples of Audio Slideshows of previous IES students	Send a written Title and Summary of your final Multimedia Photo Project. Edit a brief multimedia with a movie-editing software (like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker) using the photo sequence of your second photo project, adding a background voice.
Session 21	Sound Editing - Audio technical specifications, sound editing tools and software, audio genres, and typologies - Privacy issues Audio Slideshows - Examples of Audio Slideshows of previous IES students	Add a second audio track with background music to your short movie, adjusting the volume to allow for a clear understanding of the recorded words.
Session 22	Audio Slideshows - Examples of Audio Slideshows - Elementary and complex editing software - Copyright issues	Send examples of multimedia found on the web similar to the one you would like to realize and questions related to its realization

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Visit to a **Robert Capa's Photographic Exhibition** at MUDEC Museum on March 1st.
- Second optional trip (TBC)

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Course-pack (digital form) including all of the instructor's presentations, required readings, and other study material. These materials will become available during the course, on a weekly basis
- Adair King, Julie. *Digital Photography For Dummies*. Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2020.
- Freeman, Michael. *The Photographer's Eye*, Oxford: Focal Press, 2007 - 2013.
- Gross, Larry, Katz, John Stuart, Ruby, Jay (Eds). *Image ethics in the digital age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Langford, Michael, Fox, Anna, Sawdon Smith, Richard. *Basic Photography* - 10th Edition. Oxford: Focal Press, 2015.
- Messaris, Paul. *Visual Persuasion. The role of images in advertising*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practices of looking*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Wells, Liz (ed). *Photography. A critical introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Adams, Ansel. *The Camera*. New York, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2005 [1980].
- Berger, John. *Ways of seeing*. London, New York: Penguin Books, 2008 [1972].
- Bolton, Richard (Ed). *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
- Frosh, Paul. *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography, and the Visual Content Industry*. Oxford, New York: Berg, 2003.
- Clarke, Graham. *The Photograph*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Evans, Jessica, Hall, Stuart (Eds). *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London, Thousand Oaks, New York: Sage Publications, 2001.
- Halpern Wenger, Debora, Potter, Debora. *Advancing the Story: Broadcast Journalism in a Multimedia World*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008.
- Kemp, Martin. *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1992.



- Newton, Julianne. *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in Mediating Reality*. Mahwah, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001.
- Levi Strauss, David. *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics*. New York: Aperture, 2003.

FILMOGRAPHY:

- James Nachtwey, *War Photographer*, Documentary Film by Christian Frei