Photography Report

Photography is a medium used across many industry’s like journalism, advertising and art. This report will look at the invention of capturing images and techniques involved in available light photography. Then discuss how photography communicates, finishing with a deconstruction of the panoramic image.

The name photography derived from Greek words meaning light and draw. A quest to capture images has been recorded as early as ancient Greece with no successes until the 11th century with the Camera Obscura. Projecting images into a darkened room onto a wall by using a pin hole. By the 17th century the camera Obscura was made small enough to become portable devices, using lenses. In the 1830’s, images were captured onto plates using chemical reactions, with no fading like previous attempts. Techniques continued developing from Daguerreotype to Wet plates until the 1870’s. Dry plates were introduced improving photography dramatically. The plates could be stored over time, unlike the wet plates that had to be made and used straight away. This brought freedom, smaller cameras and shorter exposure times, introducing mechanical shutter speeds to camera’s. George Eastman started the company Kodak. Using film Eastman replaced plates for good, film has been used ever since with digital photography introduced in the 1990’s.

When using available light it can often be too bright or dark creating issues for the photographer. Don Marr (2009) looks at ways to control light using simple techniques. Overcast days are notorious for causing flat, dull photographs one reason being the lack of shadows. Subtractive techniques help by blocking light adding shadows, creating dimensions and depth. Another method is using tunnels of light. Photographing your subject by a window or open door creates a tunnel lighting effect. According to the book Masters of Photography (2008: p.220) Willy Ronis was “One of the most interesting of the French humanists, Ronis was able to translate the movements fascination with the lives of ordinary French people into images of lasting significance.”

Left, Willy Ronis. (1949). Le Nu Provençal Gordes,
Ronis used the tunnel method perfectly. What would have been an under-exposed lifeless image become something of beauty. Ronis had the ability to use a full palette of Grey’s and his musical background helped with his composition and form. The images he produced often using darkened rooms with the subject lit by a single source of light were stunning and communicated life in France over the 40’s and 50’s.

In camera controls are used for controlling the amount of light that enters the camera and the speed involved in exposure. The Aperture controls the amount of light entering the camera. The smaller the aperture, the larger the opening for light to enter. This also controls depth of field. Ronis’ picture has a large depth of field, to take the same image today a small aperture would be used. Aperture works is in f stops that indicate the size of the opening of the lens. They double or half at each stop.

The shutter speed works in the same way, doubling or halving at each stop. The shutter controls how long the light is exposing onto the chip at the back of the camera that captures the image. Shutter speed also has another role.
Using a slow shutter speed creates motion blur. The faster the shutter speed the crisper the image. The picture to the right named ‘Girl on a ‘Space hopper’ was photographed by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen in 1971. “Taken over an eleven-year period beginning in 1970, the Byker pictures are a defining example of community photography.”

(The photo book 1997: p.250)

The girl is suspended in time with no motion blur, in a deserted street. She is jumping for joy yet the image has a sense of ending and loss of what was once good.

ISO controls the amount of time the chip in the back of the camera reacts to light. As you increase the ISO it captures more light but loses quality of image by grouping pixels and resulting in a grainy effect.

Using the Kelvin scale to white balance, the camera aims for a mid day temperature of around 4,000k to 6,000k. By manually setting the white balance, the camera will add blues (when set below 4,000k) or reds (when set above 6,000k) to produce a mid day temperature.

Filters are often used in available light photography, for example, UV filters work by removing short light wave lengths reducing lens flare. Polarizing filters are used to push contrasts apart, darks become darker and whites become lighter. Certain filters reduce the amount of light getting into the lens. These work the same way the camera controls, work in stops. This is so photographers can use aperture and shutter settings to achieve their composition and avoid over exposure using filters.

Communication is essential to great photography, Roland Gomez (2010) states “The greatest photographers in the world have three things in common, a creative eye, the comprehension of their equipment and the ability to communicate both to their subject and the intended audience - or as I like to say the three C’s of photography, creativity, comprehension and communication.”

Left Eve Arnolds, Marylin Monroe, Hollywood (1960)

Marylin Monroe is known for her hatred of how she became nothing but a sex symbol to people. Eve Arnold captured this to reveal to the nation that Monroe was a human like everybody else and not an object. The communication is put into context by the arm coming across to adjust Monroe like a prop. Monroe looks fragile and alone which reflects her mental state at the time.

Context isn't just about the situation in a photograph its also about influences for example from history. Masters of Photography (2008: p.220) talks about how Ronis had an early fascination with Flemish art which comes across in many of his street scenes “…a Bruegel painting in their animation and apparent orchestration.”
Content and Form are the, where’s, what, when, how and whys of photography. Take the image to the left, Count De Montizon, (1852). The hippopotamus at the Zoological Gardens. The content, a sleeping Hippo and viewing public taken at regent park. The form is made up of colours, lines, shapes and patterns. The vertical bars holding back the public above a horizontal, smiling hippo with the warm tone giving a relaxed feeling. What the image communicates is that the hippo is relaxed and happy in the knowledge that the humans are safely locked away behind bars.

John Harvey (2009) talks about certain rules of composition in photography based on tends. An example of one of his rules for creating a three dimensional style is using silhouettes creating a sense of depth of field. The rule of thirds is also a part of composition, as well as motion, symmetry and patterns. There are many rules but as John Harvey (2009) states in his blog, rules are meant to be broken.

Techniques
Taken on an SLR Canon the photographer captured motion blur in the left tree and depth of field by using 1/10 shutter speed and f5.6 aperture. As the image moves out from the center point it begins to loose focus achieved by a manual focus, in order to avoid banding and create depth of field. The camera was mounted on a tripod and took each photograph from the same point, then stitched together in Photoshop. The bend has been achieved because the wall gets further away from the camera as it turns. The image has been changed to black and white in Photoshop using adjustment tools.

The panoramic is based on the emotions and thoughts people have when a loved one dies, not the death itself. Looking at previous photography about death. The Victorians took pictures of there dead family members dressed as if they were still alive. Not to remind them of their death but to preserve their living memory. When taken with the living due to the slow exposure of the old cameras the living were often blurred while the dead stayed crystal clear. Proud? Has a similar effect from the motion blur in the tree and loss of focus as it moves away from the center.

Looking at Bert Hardy’s (1948) Leap Frog, above, the picture is at a graveyard yet the communication is not about death. The boys from Glasgow playing in the graveyard represent a youthful naivety and disregard of conventions.

Proud? Has been based around the photographers feelings about the loss of her father. Having died before she achieved anything, the scarf represents the question, are you proud?

The unorganized arrangements, and darker contrasts away from the wall to the right represent her past. The organised left side, lighter contrasts and motion blur in the tree represents her future.

Disregarding the rule of thirds in order to dramatize the bending wall and the loss of focus from the center outwards takes the image out of reality to communicate the photographers narrative.

The use of Black and White puts the image in context with historical influences. The Whites to Grey’s almost blending together generate a feeling of stepping out of reality into the mind of the photographer.

There is an almost symmetrical form to the image. The paths at each side represent the feeling of all roads leading to this question. The faceless mourners to the left adds a heartbeat to the image which helps the audience to relate to the narrative and add interest to the image.

Photography has developed rapidly from early camera Obscura’s to digital SLR’s. Using photography to communicate has been a part of the medium since the beginning. Content, Form, Context and Composition are important in the process. As the panoramic Proud? Shows, considerations and implementation of these methods will reflect into the communication and narrative of the image. Even if all images are open to interpretation.


Images


Bibliography


Getty image http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/group-of-boys-from-the-gorbals-play-amongst-the-gravestones-news-photo/2639130


