

PHMD 201 - Photography I: View Camera, Fall 2013
Writing Prompt No. 2

Has your time with a view camera affected your view of the early practitioners of the photographic medium? How so?

Has knowing, first hand, how other photographers (contemporary and otherwise) make photographs changed the way you view their photographs? i.e. Sally Mann, Richard Avedon, Alec Soth, Shelby Lee Adams and other large-format shooters. How so?

“My time with the view camera has dramatically affected of my view of the early practitioners of photography. Today we take for granted how easy it is to just point and shoot and make thousands of photos in one session. However with the view camera we can only shoot up to 8 pieces of film at a time. So you have to make sure you have the right shot even before you take it.

Looking back to famous photographers, i.e. Sally Mann, Richard Avedon, Alec Soth, Shelby Lee Adams and Ansel Adams, has made an impact on how I compose and develop my prints. Although I am learning how to dodge and burn images currently Ansel Adams has always been a favorite of mine. Most of the artist you listed are portrait photographers, which is not my favorite "category" of photography. However they are inspirational just due to the fact that they have worked with a large format camera, sometimes even larger than what we are currently working with.”

“I just can't imagine how much they must have shot to build up such skill and talent, to not only be photographers with view cameras, but to also create timeless works in photography. It is nothing short of incredible, and must have required an immense amount of practice. I also have realized how revolutionary the point and shoot camera must have been. It would be interesting to hear what photographers from that time would have to say on the modern camera phones we have today.

Knowing the process of creating a photograph with a view camera has definitely changed my outlook on how photos were made. Portraits are very interesting for two reasons. One, being the extreme difficulty on trying to match focus with a moving subject. And two, because I now understand that the subject must have had to stare into a giant box for an extended period of time which must have had an impact on how the subject's facial expressions came across. A shy person may very well have been hesitant to act like their self and show their true personality in front of such an intimidating box.”

“I do have a different perspective of early photographers and their methods. The increased amount of equipment that the view camera necessitates is still not as much the equipment used by photographers that used wet plate methods or glass negatives. Also, photographs that appear to be casual snapshots had more intention put into them prior to exposure. I am also more aware of the physical limitations that is connected to using larger scale equipment.

When I see photographs made by a large format camera, contemporary or otherwise, I know that the photographer had specific intent in the way they framed the shot and organized the scene. Most photographs of people with a view camera I understand that the subject is normally aware and participating in the shot. The photographer has a more visible presence in the scene as they shoot, some of the subtlety of photography has been removed.”

“Yes it has definitely changed my view. I realize now how focused the early photographers had to be. It takes time to produce a well-focused, well-composed and well-lit photo with these cameras. I realize now how quick and unconscious photography has become.

I view photos from view cameras differently now because I realize how long it takes to set a photo up. So photos that I originally thought were unposed or candid now have a different feel to them. This change of mind relates to the "truthfulness of photos." I can also appreciate how patient these photographers had to be, and respect them for how well their photos turned out."

"Yes, using a view camera has always made me appreciate the hard work that is mandatory for using the view camera.

I think that Sally Mann has made me rethink the importance of balancing the light in my photography. I also think that looking at Richard Avedon has changed my opinion of fashion photography which I used to think was really boring and bland."

"My time with the view camera has definitely made me develop more of a respect for early-on photographers. I've come to know, myself, the long process in which it takes to get an image together and exactly how you want it. I think that the early-on photographers could be considered more as actual artists than modern day, digital camera-using, photographers. It's still an art form, but so much more work and thought goes into film photography.

After working with the view camera, I'm viewing the famous photographers who use view cameras so differently. I see their work and I think "HOW DID THEY DO THAT" because I know how difficult it is to just shoot a house and they're out there making crisp portraits and spooky landscapes. It's definitely changed the way I view their photography because of the respect I've developed (as I mentioned earlier.) I see it as incredible art that took a lot of processing."

"Yes, it has affected my view of the early practitioners of the photographic medium by seeing how far they are willing to go just to photograph an image. I have always wanted to learn how photography all started. I know it is not early, but very interesting learning where photography all began.

Yes, it has changed my view. Knowing how hard and long they had to work to make wonderful and incredible photographs throughout our history helps me understand what I have to go through to do that same."

"My view has changed on the early practitioners. After working with a view camera I have realized how hard it actually is. There is so much to pay attention to. The lighting has to be perfect, the camera movements have to be perfect, even loading film can go very wrong. Having used a digital camera for so long I forgot the actual mechanics of photography. Using digital, there isn't as much that the photographer has control of.

My view on early photographers has also changed. I was never a big fan of Ansel Adams. For some reason I was a little bored with landscapes. But after learning all about the view camera, I have such a great respect for what he did and how much patience he had to have to get it perfect."

"This time with a view camera has been short, yet, very informational. It creates an entire newly found respect for all the past photographers / masters of the view camera. Also, it has taught me much more about the act of making photographs and seeing the world in a new way over all. This process has helped me view things more technically, more carefully. It has taught me to take my time to ensure that of success when creating a photo in such an intimate careful way. It has forced me to create compositions in my mind and tilt, and shift my own physical perspective when viewing the world, as if trying to view the world as a view camera would.

Knowing what the masters of the past have done to create such historical pictures with the same tools that are offered to us as students, is truly an honor. It gives an element of respect. Knowing how hard it is to work a view camera in such a careful technical way that they as photographers can pull

off flawlessly. It is inspiring and creates a drive to become like each of those photographers, creating images just as they once did and (mostly) still do to this day. It's most certainly a direct drive to try, try, try and succeed in the long haul."

"It has definitely changed my view of earlier photographers using this type of medium. This is because now I know how difficult it is to create photographs using the same process that they did.

Yes, it has changed my view on their photographs. I appreciate their photographs more than I would before ever taking a class such as this, because once again, I understand now how much care and preparation they took into taking these photographs and how hard they worked in order to achieve the images they are now known for."

"My time with the view camera has given me a new level of respect for the photographers in the past who have used them, and other large format cameras. When using a digital camera the photographer can set automatic focus settings and shoot the picture, with the view camera the image on the ground glass needs to be checked for the optimum focus several times before actually shooting the picture. The view camera takes a special level of care, knowledge, and accuracy to get a desired photograph.

One of the most astounding photographers I have gathered brief knowledge about over the past year is William Henry Jackson. I was able to view one of his very large albumen, contact prints. He used a very large format view camera to make his large scale prints of landscapes. The thing about him that is most impressive, in my eyes, is where he takes his photographs, like the side of a mountain, with his huge view camera. Since shooting with my view camera I have come to realize the physical limitations of where it is possible to take a photo, and have it possess all of the required criteria. "