

PHMD 201 - Photography I: View Camera, Fall 2013
Writing Prompt No. 3

Read the chapter Once Upon A Time posted under Course Documents. Ideally, read this before you begin the Constructed Narrative assignment, as it will provide inspiration as you develop your idea. In the reading, identify and write about the two following things:

1. A statement, sentence, or paragraph that resonates with you or makes you consider photography in a way you had not before. Write it down, and explain why it resonates with you.
2. Formulate a question for discussion in regards to the reading. This should be something you don't understand or don't agree with and why. Be critical and inquisitive.

"There were a lot of things I found interesting in the reading of Once Upon a Time. However one thing that resonated with me was the fact that most artists that create a narrative with photographs are using specific imagery and narratives that are specific to a place or culture. For example in Sarah Dobias Red Room, there is an intentionally open - ended narrative that is happening. There are personal choices that she decided to leave out of the frame which is unclear to the viewer. Also the blanket could be taken many different ways psychologically. Another thing that I found interesting was that Backstrom photographs do not contain a human element. Thus asking the viewer to engage with institutionalized and commercialized aspects of the scene.

I guess a question that I would ask many of these artist would be, what makes a constructed narrative so strong? Does there have to be a human element present in the equation? The reason I ask this question is because most of the images that are within this reading have figures/models within them and some do not. So does that make for a better photo or lead to more questions than answers?"

"After reading Once Upon a Time the passage that stuck out most to me was "Backstrom is asking us to engage With the plausibility of the room so that we can think about the institutionalized and commercialized construct of the domestic living area. A space that we may ordinarily consider to be defined by an individual's tastes and activities is shown as being prescribed. Our display of personal identity in our homes is not only commercially reproducible but also easily mimicked". By photographing space we can either show the space simply and how it is designed to be used, or by changing things around the photographer can make the space into something new. Different techniques such as staging or lighting can affect how we see the room and how we perceive its use.

The question I have after reading the article is how are we affected by viewing tableau photography. Is it important for the artist to put some of their personal feelings into the work or should it merely be a representation of a scene?"

"The labour and skill involved in reconstructing such a scene is arguably equivalent to the time and dexterity expended by a painter in his studio. What is also brought into question by such practice , where everything is gathered together expressly for the realization of a photograph, is the idea of the photographer working alone. The use of actors, assistants and technicians needed to create a photographic tableau redefines the photographer as the orchestrator of a cast and crew, the key rather than sole producer. He or she is similar to a film director who imaginatively harnesses collective fantasies and realities.' This paragraph likens the practice of the photographic tableau to the work of a painter or film director. The emphasis is not on the picture taken in the moment, but on the scene that is photographed; how it is staged, how it is framed, what is included, and what is excluded. The focus is less on the work of a single photographer and instead on the result of a collaborative effort. The finished

work is understood to be detailed and intentional. Everything is planned and everything that is included is intentional.

With the careful consideration that is involved in creating a photographic tableau, why do certain photographers intentionally puncture the illusion of reality in their photographs? Why draw attention to the "fake" or crafted aspect of the picture?"

"A dreamlike quality is often created by reducing the specificity of a place and a culture to such a degree that it closes down our expectation of uncovering the 'where and when' of a photograph.' This statement sticks out the most to me because I have used it in the assignment. I wanted to show just my subject and leave the audience question. "Where is this? What is he doing? Why? When?" All of these questions should remain almost unanswered in order for the picture to capture your attention.

What questions need to be unanswered? Where is the line drawn between tableau and photojournalism? How many answers are too many? Does having too many answers make it "photojournalism" and not tableau?"

"A sentence that stuck with me while reading this chapter was early on in the reading. On the second page, there is a line that says, "The labour and skill involved in reconstructing such a scene is arguably equivalent to the time and dexterity expended by a painter in his studio." This really stuck with me because it hits on all the "rules" of tableau vivant photography. The photo must be made with the gallery wall in mind, much like a painter with his painting. The photo must be pictorial. The photo must use all the intrinsic qualities of the camera, while the painter must use his paintbrush to depict a scene that only a paintbrush can. And lastly, the photo must be an object of thought, which obviously a painting is. I just think its interesting how similar the process of painting and the process of tableau vivant are.

I thought it was really interesting that most of the subjects in these photos are young children. The reading mentions this but I was just wondering what kind of conscious decisions photographers make when choosing a young subject (how will it change the meaning, evoke the message that they're wanting) and how do viewers respond to it, and how would we respond to the photos if they were made with older subjects."

"Whereas the photographs mentioned above draw on specific imagery and cultural codes for their narratives, other photographers use the tableau formula for much more ambiguous and unreferenced narratives.' page 57 of *Once Upon A Time*. I really enjoy when there is a lot left to wonder about in a picture. I believe that this add more life and mystery to a photograph. you can also invent your own stories to go along with these kinds of images.

What is the best to do a more specific narratives? I have tried and they all look bad or people don't look that good."

"The second that stated, "The final part of this chapter concentrates on tableau photography that is not reliant on human prescence, but that finds drama and allegory and architectural spaces." This was the "ah-ha" part of the reading for me because, well, I'm new to Lawrence, and I was extremely concerned with finding a human subject for my narrative piece. I thought that in order for a piece to be a narrative, a key element was a human form. This realization took a lot of weight off my shoulders in realizing I could open up my creativity without a person. The reading then introducing Katharina Bosse who takes photos of themed rooms for "sexual play." I think those are very interesting because the photos are dramatic themselves with a burlesque feel although there are no actual people in the act in the photos. But it's as if you know what goes down there so the photos are immediately sexual.

As I was looking through the images without the human subjects, I thought that many of them lacked an actual narrative. To me they just looked like images taken of settings. There were hardly any distinct clues in them, so I don't know if I would actually consider them dramatic or narrative photos? Take for example, Miriam Backstrom's piece with the set up of a living room. Although it was a reconstruction to look like someone's home, that's all it is. It's just a picture of a living room. I don't see the story there as it is something everybody who has a home sees everyday. It doesn't raise any questions. So I suppose my question about this narrative photography is, are we considering some photos to be narrative photography that actually aren't?"

"Once Upon A Time makes me consider photography in a way that I had not before by making me think about what I am photographing. Every little detail you put in the frame matters. When the viewers look at the photograph they will think about what you, as a photographer wants to do see and know about this photograph.

My question is about narrative photography. There are many photographs that are narrative, but what makes a photograph a narrative photograph or what makes it not? Some photographs in the reading have people in the photo. Does this make a photo a narrative photo or not? How can we tell if it is a narrative photograph?"

"I really liked the statement in regards to Desiree Dolron's work "this photograph similarly encourages us to mentally fill the visual absence of people through the traces of their actions and thoughts". I appreciated this approach to story telling, because I find it to be easier for a viewer to connect with a story where there are people present in the image, and without the presence of human subjects but the level of connection that is achieved in 'Cerca Paseo de Marti' is remarkable.

Why do you think that a majority of great story telling images contain people and why this is less of a connection from the viewer towards an image without a human subject?"

"Something that I really found interesting was when reading about Gregory Crewdson he states that his tableau work is influenced by his childhood. "His psychoanalyst-father's office was in the basement of their New York City home, and Crewdson would press his ear to the floorboards to try and imagine the stories being told in the therapy sessions." Being able to use his imagination during childhood it makes his work different from any other because where other artists may be recreating a particular work of art, Crewdson is recreating images he created in his head as a child. By using a bigger crew capable of dramatic lighting and bigger sets, he is better able to recreate these memories. While some of his work is rather dark and disturbing at times, it is still worth looking at.

Something I would ask is even though I love Crewdson's work, the bulk of his work is done on sets with dramatic lighting and effects to get the picture he wants. Whereas others may go a more natural route to get a similar result. His work has a more commercial background when you think about it so does the use of such a large crew capable of manipulating a set to get the shot they want take away from the art? Does it deem it as not art? Is there a line that distinguishes the two?"

"Reading Once Upon a Time I came across quite a few things that caught my interest. Christopher Stewarts outlook on photography changed the way I see some aspects of photography. He uses social and political stances of Tableau. He also focuses on temporary allegories to express western insecurities and paranoias. Instead of doing documentary or photojournalism he chooses Tableau to give a weighty drama. Seeing Stewarts view of photography made me wonder what the difference is between photojournalism and Tableau. Both of them tell stories about an event and a lot of times they are staged photographs. However, Tableau is a little more personal. I realized that there are very similar characteristics between Tableau and the photojournalism aspect.

Collishaw takes photos in a different way. "The photographs are made with lenticular cameras, a novelty process more commonly used for postcards to create an exaggerated sense of the third dimension. This non-art, lighthearted process allows Collishaw to raise disturbing questions about how our relationship to the bodies of children has shifted from one sentimentality and adoration to cynicism and difficulty." After researching lenticular printing, I learned that they create an illusion of depth. When you change angles, there is a different picture. I disagree with the statement that it is a "non-art process." Choosing which two photographs to use can make a huge difference in the emotions portrayed so saying that it is non-art process is ludacris."

"One of the pictorial devices used in tableau photography to engender anxiety or uncertainty about the meaning of an image is to depict figures with their faces turned away from us, leaving their character unexplained.' This quote says something to me because it is so true, and it is something I had not noticed on numerous occasions before. I had considered images in which the identity of the subject is unknown, to be mysterious or even uneasy. This statement pushes a pin into that topic and plants a few ideas when coming into this project. Without a face, the subject has no sense of being, no sense of individualism. The viewer is then affected and forced to answer unknown questions, and leaving them wondering and wanting to know more about the image itself.

A lot of questions arise when dealing with "artistic" photography. Especially photography that stems off of original paintings works of art, stories, myths, and folklore. One of the questions I often wonder when it comes to imitation photography is, why? Why would one want to imitate other works of art when photography is in its own right, an individual art form? They are not as interesting personally than other works of photography with more mystery. That leads to the next, and perhaps more loaded, question. Why are we drawn to mystery and questionable photography more so than strait laced, easily recognized, photography? Especially when it comes to tableau photography? For example; take a look at Charlie White's photography. What mystery, what question, and what outstandingly interesting photography he produces. Why is there so much mystery, and why does it leave the viewer wanting more from the image, and more images to follow?"

"On page 60, I resonated with the first paragraph. It briefly talks about how in tableau - vivant photography, subjects are often facing away from the viewer. I think that this is a neat perspective to perhaps attempt in the next assignment. I agree with the statement that by making the subject do this, it makes the viewer question what is actually going on in the scene. It makes the viewer stop and think about what the narrative is in the image.

However, on page 64 in the reading, it describes how Wendy McMurdo took photographs that represented fairy tales and myths with female children and including "disturbing results." My impression of constructing a narrative involved somehow recreating a painting or piece of wall art and replicating it with a photograph with all of the same character elements and placements of all the objects in the photograph and match them up as they are in the painting. Is McMurdo still portraying this concept, but in a dynamic way or is it a concept of photography entirely different than tableau-vivant photography?"

"Tableau photography does not seek to ape the movies in order to enact the same effect on the viewer, and if it were to do so, it would be bound to fail for it does not fully function in the same way.' This quote struck me as a point of interest because this type of photography is described as 'cinematic' but this quote is counteracting that statement. Obviously the viewer of a tableau photograph is not going to have the same emotions as they would watching an actual cinematic film. There would be a lot more questions and assumptions involved with viewing a tableau photograph, as opposed to a movie. These photographs are somewhat set up in the same way as a set from a movie, almost like a movie still. The

only difference is that with a movie still there are thousands of other frames to go along with it to tell a story. With tableau there is one single shot to tell a story, so many more details are needed within the shot to tell the viewer as much as possible.

My question is what camera angles give you the optimum tableau photograph? Because there is an obvious difference between a regular photograph and a tableau photograph just by the angle of the camera.”