

PHMD 560 – Special Topics: View Camera, Fall 2012
Writing Prompt No. 1

What did you know about the view camera when you enrolled in this course? Why, do you think, would we offer a view camera class in this day and age? And, ultimately, why did you enroll in this course?

“Prior to this view camera class, i took Luke Jordan's alternative process class my freshmen year. He briefly went over working an 8x10 camera using paper negatives. At the time the process with the paper negatives and the massive 8x10 camera was pretty overwhelming. Since then i felt like i had the gist of the view camera, but there were defiantly some grey areas. What i took away from it was that view camera "look" and i tried implementing it into my digital shooting style. I feel like having to take a large format class would force students to slow down and really think before getting trigger happy; ultimately making them a more well rounded photographer. That is why i enrolled in this course, as well as to fill in some of those grey areas i had with the entire process/movements of the camera.”

“Going into this course, I knew nothing about a view camera other than that it was an older style of film photography that was still used by some photographers today (like Sally Mann, my idol). A view camera class in this day and age can be helpful is teaching students to slow down and have to pay full attention to each aspect of a picture before actually taking it. There are also advantages that view cameras have over other cameras used today, like it's ability to change shapes and lines, altering the point of view. there are many more options for focal plane than there are with more up-to-date cameras. I enrolled in view camera because I enjoyed film based photography with Luke last year and wanted to continue with film in some way. I also thought I would look really cool if people saw me using a view camera and it makes me feel smart when people see me using it.”

“When I enrolled in the view camera course I was only vaguely familiar with the camera. I had only seen, don't hate me for saying this, examples of Alec Soth, and also Richard Mosse using the cameras. With that stated, I didn't know much about the technical functions of the camera.

I think we would offer this course to slow us down and think about every image we make (why is this image important, what are we viewing, and composition, etc..). It also provides an outlet for students to appreciate and familiar themselves with different photographic techniques. This meaning in today's "digital" photographic realm, students who have only experimented with 35mm film, are now exposed to large format photography and are presented with the qualities film still possesses still today. And in most cases film quality is better than digital.

I enrolled in this course because I wanted to experience 4x5 large format photography first hand. I had previously been shooting with medium format, and wanted the opportunity to learn perspective controls, and work with the large format medium.”

“Prior to enrolling in this course I had one semesters worth of time with the view camera shooting color neg. I struggled with the camera at first but started seeing positive results towards the end. I took this class in order to test my skills a little bit and focus on the fundamentals... and of course to make high quality, large format, portfolio quality photographs. I think the view camera course is a great addition to the Photo Media department as it requires patience, forethought, and the application of the fundamental skills of photography. The skills that this class emphasizes will be helpful in our making of future photographs and in our preparation for tougher obstacles in the future. “

"I knew very little about view cameras when I enrolled in this course. I knew that they were very large camera that can capture a lot of detail because of the size of the negative. I also knew that shooting with one would be very labor intensive. I think that a view camera class offers an opportunity to students at KU that most students do not get to have. Shooting with the view camera really makes you slow down the photographic process and think about every step. It helps develop fundamental skills of photography while challenging the students and letting us produce quality work. I decided to take the class because I wanted the opportunity to work with a different type of camera because I haven't had the chance to do so at KU so far. I also wanted the opportunity to work with a 4 x 5 negatives because of their intense detail and ability to make large prints. Ultimately, I wanted to challenge myself this semester and maybe improve the way I take photographs through this course."

"I knew very little about the view camera before enrolling in the class besides that it was large, expensive, and had the ability to capture photographs with a lot of detail. Even though the procedure for photographing has evolved greatly since the invention of the view camera, I think it is important for photographers to understand the planning that goes into taking a picture with this type of camera. Now that we have the technology to create thousands of images a day digitally, forcing yourself to slow down and make photographs very consciously will probably positively change the way you work for the better. I enrolled in this class because I knew it was a unique opportunity and would benefit the way I make pictures after the semester. Another reason was because I had never worked with film before and wanted to see what it was all about."

"When I found out that KU would be offering a view camera course I immediately thought of the Alec Soth presentation video last year. It was the first time that I really learned anything about the process of using a view camera because I figured it was just an old way of taking photographs. I never considered myself having the opportunity to learn and use one until my advising appointment.

I think that KU would decide to teach this type of class because they want their students to have a broad understanding of what photography is, in its entirety. Plus, it is probably a fun class to teach.

I decided to enroll in this class mainly because of the class description. Reading about how taking a class would change the way that I take photographs is really an intriguing thing to think about. The challenge of learning a new way of taking pictures is something that most photographers should push themselves towards in order to shape what they become."

"Before enrollment in this class I was very unsure what a view camera was. I viewed a showing of an Alec Soth documentary last semester that showed him using a view camera. From this film I obtained a very basic knowledge of view cameras, but I was still mainly motivated to take the class because my peers assured me it would be a great experience.

After spending almost a semester in the class, I understand the importance of studying this format. It reinforces the basics of photography and causes the photographer to take proper care on composing the image. Beyond that, the qualities of the view camera and 4x5 film are very different than digital images. The high quality of the large film allows for incredible detail. The mechanics of the view camera also allow for different effects such as correcting for converging verticals and altering the focal plane. All of these features combined, create very different looking images."

"When I enrolled, I knew View Cameras were large, cumbersome cameras used by fine art photographers. I knew the larger negative size allowed for greater recorded detail, and that focusing took place on the ground glass. I knew of only a handful of photographers that primarily used view cameras. I thought they were usually only used for architectural, landscape, and portrait photography.

View cameras offer a completely different approach to thinking about and creating photographs than the dSLRs that have become a modern standard. View compositions are forced to be slow, methodical, and thoughtful by the speed of the laborious processes and the limits of the materials. Learning in this way has forced me as a photographer to slow down and focus on my craft. My goal becomes produce a few quality exposures that behave in a way I expect them to rather than dozens of images where the composition and exposure may be successful.

I enrolled in this course because I wanted to make photographs that had the aesthetic only achievable with a view camera. I saw Alec Soth making portraits with an ethereal quality, and the way Travis Schaffer was able to straighten-out the vertical lines in his suburban architectural photos. I wanted that level of control and results in my own work.”

“I knew very little about view cameras before this course. I only knew them as the huge cameras that I would see in old movies with the “accordion things”. I knew that several well-known photographers used them in their contemporary work. I think it’s a great idea to offer this course. If other students are like me then they would not understand the advantages of this type of camera and might not even look into it. The detail you can obtain from the negative and the control that the movements have on the picture plane make it all worth the laborious process. Also, it gives students an opportunity to try out an instrument that they might not have access to. I think it’s beneficial for students to slow down in the image making process. It forces us to really analyze how and why we are doing what we’re doing. I ultimately enrolled in this course because I thought it would be interesting to use a different instrument. I also have had past interest in working in a larger format. Even though I may never pick up a view camera again, it will definitely impact the way I take photographs and look at view camera photographers from the masters.”

“Before taking this course I knew little about the large format camera besides that it was more tedious and that it typically yielded very high quality photographs. Photography today is often more about how many exposures can be taken in a single second - 6, 8, 10, etc. Mind blowing quality with very little, if any effort. But that is just recording light, not necessarily composing and creating a photograph.

I think the University of Kansas offered this course in an effort to slow the photographer down, to force the photographer to make very conscious decisions. The long process and current price of film really do make me as a photographer compose the image mentally before I even go through the effort of taking the camera out of its giant case. Some argue that film has already died out and it would seem that digital cameras would be a better teaching tool because of the instant feedback but I think film has taught me the basics that I've applied to digital process. I think slowing down is the most important thing a photographer can do. Going out and taking 300 digital photos and finding three that I feel 'alright' about doesn't teach me nearly as much as taking 8 analog photos and realizing I didn't get the shot I wanted. Out of that frustration I think back to what I could of done differently and do it right the second, third, or fourth time.

I enrolled in this course for that very reason. I was really lucky to have learned the analog process in high school. Like I mentioned above it taught me much more than years with a digital camera. I thought that being in an upper level college course with one of the slowest analog processes would really teach me a lot. Thankfully I was right and I have learned a lot from the shaping of the light through the camera to professional developing, scanning and editing processes. All skills that I can apply to jobs and projects later in life. Oh, and I think the camera looks pretty cool as well.”

“My experience with a view camera was limited before taking the class. I use a 85mm tilt shift for some jobs so I had an idea what some of the movement could do but I knew that lens was only a fraction to what an actual view camera could do. By taking the class in this day and age you learn to slow down to

really think about what you are taking photos of. This can be achieved by any all manual camera as well. Using the view camera shows how the camera is flawed in many ways and that it can be controlled with a view camera. It also makes you think about how you shoot with a 35mm digital because know that you realize all of these flaws a camera has it makes you think about how you want to photograph your subject. I took the class to slow down to think about what I was taking photos of. I also wanted to learn how to perfect the flaws of a camera by using the movements of the camera. I wanted to take advantage of the class being offered because I didn't know if I would ever get the opportunity again."

"I did not know anything about view cameras when I enrolled in this course. I think I just enrolled in it because it sounded different and interesting. I think it is good to offer this class in this day and age because it makes you slow down, and you really have to know how the camera functions to be able to take photos well. It is also very frustrating and time consuming. So being able to budget your time, think about what you are doing every step of the way, and realize what you have done wrong if something doesn't turn out the way you wanted it to."

"Before enrolling in this course I had a crash course about the view camera previously in Studio Photography. That's the only pervious experience I've had with a large format camera. I think the PHMD program offers a view camera class to learn the technical fundamentals of photography that you don't always understand with digital photography. I believe it helps with the overall perspective and knowledge of photography. I enrolled in this class because I've always wanted to learn how to use a view camera. I started out shooting film photography and have always had a love for it no matter what new fancy digital cameras come out. I love the craft and care that goes into an image with film instead of the instant satisfaction of digital photography."

"When I enrolled, I knew the basic functions of the camera and had used one maybe twice in another class, although I had not really used or understood any of the movements. I knew that shooting on 4x5 negatives would have much more information and detail, and consequently allow for much larger prints. I also knew that the process of shooting with a view camera was much more time consuming. The time factor is partly why I enrolled in the class. I really wanted to slow down with photography, to pay attention to the details before shooting. Having mostly digital classes, and even to an extent traditional photo classes, the process was much quicker so I tended to shoot first and think later, which would waste time. Which is my guess why this class was offered, to teach students how to think before shooting. Maybe also to help them better understand the functions of the camera and the relationships of the settings."

"When I enrolled in View Camera class, all I knew what that the View Camera was the camera with the accordion-looking things in the middle. I thought it was going to be fun until Bryon wrote an email out saying that the camera and the tripod were very heavy! Lol. Anyway, I think this was a good refresher course for me using film. I have been digital for so long, I had forgotten the frustration of dealing with a photo that you can't see the instant you take it. However, I am also re-learning how to SLOW DOWN to make sure the photo is right. I enrolled in the class because it fulfilled a requirement to graduate, but have found it fun and frustrating at the same time. I wish each of us could have had a view camera. I probably won't use view camera very often, but now I know how to use it!"

"What did you know about the view camera when you enrolled in this course? Why, do you think, would we offer a view camera class in this day and age? And, ultimately, why did you enroll in this course?"

I knew that most of the best known photographers from the past and present have all used view camera or at least some kind of medium or large format film. Over the years of shooting digital I have become more and more upset with the lack of resolution digital cameras can yield. I have always known that high art photographers used view cameras and that it was still the only way to obtain the highest resolution in your photographs. So, I have known about view cameras for a long time but never had the time or resources to actually transition into using them and that's why I am so excited about shooting view camera this year. I think teaching view camera is extremely relevant in this day and age. It is still the best photographic process out there and yields the best most high resolution and quality images.

This being said I feel that to not teach view camera would be a complete waste of a students time and keep them from being ready for the professional photography world. As a matter of fact it will be very hard for me to ever go back to shooting digital after using 4x5. I think view camera should be a part of the introductory course for photo media students and there needs to be a large emphasis on its importance in the medium. I think people these days don't understand the importance of it and are too lazy to transition from digital to view camera. However I am extremely grateful I had a chance to shoot view camera and I plan on continuing to shoot large format for the rest of my career."

"I had used the view camera only a few times beforehand: in the studio and field. It makes you slow down, understand the technical aspect of making a photograph, study your composition and surroundings, and appreciate the quality and craftsmanship involved. I was curious to learn more about this tool and how to apply it with the work that I am doing. I appreciate working with film and value making fine quality prints."

"I had read about view cameras and their process, the difficulties associated with it, the heavy equipment, and the appearance of the ground glass. I knew that it was labor intensive but at the time I had no idea learning the basics of camera movements would be something did not come naturally. It's a craft that involves skill. I mean, interpretative dance is still practiced though we have the written word. There are just some things expressed better in some mediums than others. When would I have another opportunity to learn about view cameras hands-on? I figured this wasn't something to pass up. I'm interested in all facets of images, still and moving."