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Programme – BA Documentary Photography & Visual Activism

Module – Contextual Studies – Research in Context

Module Code – ADAD5003

Assignment Title – Lens Based Image Making

Submission deadline – 10th December 2020

Question ‘Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technological World?’

The digital technology evolution has dramatically influenced the photography world over the last 30 years. As artists we are no longer limited to long drawn-out processing of film photography where outcomes are not guaranteed to digital imagery, manipulation and editing of the digital images to enhance or influence the outcomes. The main advantage is that we are not restricted in how we present our portfolio. we no longer only exhibit at a physical location. There has been a continued drive to evolve how we present and represent topical issues via the media of imagery, challenging both the artist and the viewer. In particular photography has played a large part in the message about climate change and the effect of global warming and pollution on our planet.

The improvements in the technical aspect of equipment in pc's and processors, media that we can capture images, achieve faster download and upload and the added pressure of the viewers desire and need for instant gratification of data has influenced how, when and where we get our message across. The use of digital cameras and particularly DSLR's has meant that you no longer must take 50 images in the hope that 2 turn out ok or repeated visited to capture a moment. It is easy to catalogue your images by themes, dates and in their Raw and edited formats whereas, it was time consuming to catalogue your negatives from film. Non digital photography focused on set ratios and composition of setting up your image and the science of developing in the dark room. There are so many settings and variations use ISO, depth of field, f/stop, and aperture on modern cameras that it can take you a long time to really understand your camera and create your desired effect but when you do the style of photography is enhanced. The modern camera satisfies the need for instantly being able to see something and that no one can wait, and you can gain instant feedback on the screen to check how a photo looks but also via social media platforms such as Instagram, Flickr and Twitter but if you do want to wait there is fast download from camera to pc and the dozens of software tools for image editing and post processing. There are other editing techniques that can add illusion to traditional photography such as pixels, addition of paint splatters or liquids to add depth or change of illusion.

A key photographer who uses digital technology to master her craft is Mandy Barker, to allow her show case her mission of highlighting the blight of plastic in our oceans, both with the use of digital cameras but also the studio lighting, and the editing tools and manipulation. Her work predominately focuses on marine pollution and the effect this has on the environment by collecting and photographing litter washed up on beaches around the world. She produces from something sinister into something very beautiful. Her style and outcomes are made up via the meticulous precises process of collecting a group of litter she can collate as themes by digitally enhancing the image extreme detail using software to create complex designed collages of the objects. She also catalogues items that she has photographed and has digitally grafted image on image to create an effect before trialling designs out in the studio.

Barker is well known for her commission pieces for which she travels across the world, the outcome called 'WE MUST ACT NOW' commissioned by WeTransfer – Union of Concerned Photographers UCP, is an image that is made up of plastic smarties lids. When you first look at the image it is space like and the range of colours which are bold and haphazard in design are emphasised which the stark contrast black background and the 2D design drags you into the image. The variations of the size and trajectory of the lids going from larger in the foreground to much smaller in the background creates the visual of distance and remind me of a jigsaw being dropped from a height. The advancement of digital skills of the audience allows the viewers to enhance the image to find the subtle letters on the packet lids. You must appreciate the level of detail that Barker puts into carefully collecting these items, positioning and design and the subtle undertones which possibly would not have been possible 40 years ago without the enhancements in digital technology in form of cameras, lighting into the studio and the editing tools such as Photoshop and other editing software to enhance clarity, tone and colour adjustments. Barker captures her thoughts in a sketchbook which is a combination of hand drawn and digital notes and facts.

"In a unique way Mandy's all encompassing 'process' has captured a journey from the cohesive implementation of fact, influences, and concepts recorded in her sketchbook log. This combination of development I feel is intrinsic to the final result allowing the viewer to engage at a deeper level"

Greg Lucas



Barker, M | We Must Act Now



Barker, M | Sketchbook

"Mandy Barker's photography is a beautiful and shocking commentary on our excessive plastic consumption" Jyni Ong

In contrast, Christophe Gilbert does not focus on one genre but takes images and manipulates the objects to create surreal outcomes. Gilbert works a lot in the commercial industry mainly for large companies for example, Ford, Mercedes, LG Electronics, His reputation is renowned in the industry for his unique style and his main asset is his incredible attention to detail, especially the minutia which Gilbert

believes make the notable visual differences to the final product. Gilbert shows an aptitude and skill with the software he uses to enhance his images, which enables him to transform people into plants and vice versa with a morphing process. I particularly like how he transforms objects and forms into liquids and then these liquids back into their original form. He seems to challenge reality pushing your imagination into a whimsical, fantasy style world, there does not seem to be anything you could ask for that he would not attempt to create. Gilbert creates unreal, dream like environments and worlds but is only able to create such masterpieces with the development of digital editing software and the enhancements of colour, texture and expansion of the images to create the overarching effect, on a traditional image prior to editing tools the only option would have been to overpaint the printed image which liquids or paints, like the styles of Aliza Razell and Gerhard Richter.

When he started working with photographing cars in the 80s as photography assistant, during this time he discovered how light can influence how metals are captured and can bring still objects to life. Gilbert believes that photography does not have that much to do with technique, but if you have a tendency for creative brain functions your eyes see images in a totally different way than if you have a tendency towards a logical brain function. This creates diversity to the viewers interpretation and perception. He then moved into the advertising sector which challenged his previous views and adapt his thinking of how viewers see things.

“it is not about what you see, or even how you see things anymore, it is about how you want things to be seen.” Gilbert



The image that I have selected to critique is a commercial commission for Toyota, the image is made of three different components, the car, the forest background and a deer. The original image of the forest is very picturesque and visually striking with the green of the forestry and the sun beaming through from the back. It also looks like a stock image that would be used commercially. For this commission piece Gilbert used a stock image of the Toyota which he has manipulated using Photoshop

and Lightroom where he overlayed the car onto the background image and strategically placed in a way to make it look as if the car is driving towards the deer or even looks like the car is about to hit the deer. The deer has been added and is very small to perhaps warm the viewer into imaging this is a baby and invokes a feeling of panic and warmth towards the deer and hoping the car does not hit it. The deer has been deliberately placed in the driving line of the car. Whilst researching Gilbert and more specifically this image, it appears that the deer has been computer generated so it is CGI created and then transformed small and editing into the image to look as if its running across the road in front of the car. With further investigation into this image it seems there are 2 outcomes with slightly different deer's, the final outcome which was used commercially has a more realistic bulkier deer whereas the first deer is smaller and skinner looking less realistic.

Photoshop and similar editing software have been around about the same time as Gilbert but the ability to edit and manipulate like you can today has not always been possible, like other technology it continues to evolve and the ability to alter your original images into unrealistic outcomes or enhance your original image is endless. It was not until 2003 when you could really edit photos and make subtle changes to make a maximum effect, 2005 saw the introduction of tools which allowed you to handle and reverse common photographic issues such as, red-eye, noise, lens distortion etc. The ability to warp, scale and transform objects without losing quality in the image also came in this 2005 update of Photoshop CS2. It was not until 2011 with the release of CS5.5 that tools were released that really helped refine digitally manipulated images in the way Gilbert has done. This included 3D brushes and 3D warping tools, refine edge tools, Content-Aware fill, Puppet warp and many more. These tools are on top of the 100 of other tools released in the 10 years prior to this version. So, without updates and development and advancements to editing software Gilbert would not be able to create work in as much detail and as surreal environments that he does. These software updates are only released because of the constant feedback and demand from artists like Christophe Gilbert with the want and need to be able to create more detailed and more advanced and skilful pieces of artwork.

My view is that the endless image altering tools will have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the traditional photographer, there is this pressing need to present a perfect image whereas in the context of the environment I believe that we should be presenting our audiences with the world as it is, to show the genuine article of what something looks like. Whilst Gilbert obviously enjoys producing pieces that have been altered, it does not help with highlighting the true plight the world is currently facing.

Another photographer that utilises digital technology to influence the viewer on the environment is Jaime Rojo, he is a Spanish born photographer who moved to Mexico to work with several different wildlife and environmental conservation groups. During his career he has co-ordinated many different conservation initiatives. The San Pedro Mezquital campaign, was a representation of a protest to save the last free-flowing river in The Natural Numbers of the Western Sierra Madre. This is an online portfolio, which is another advantage of the digital era in that our message can

be viewed anywhere in the world and by anyone who has access to the World wide web. Rojo is a trustee of many environmental organizations and conservation groups.

His passion for wildlife and nature is evident in the number of series that he has in his portfolio, whereby he uses a combination of his visual story telling skills and his training in environmental sciences to create impressive visual projects which he hopes help people reconnect with the natural world.



Jaime Rojo – San Pedro Mezquital River

This image is part of a project on the San Pedro Mezquital river. The last free flowing river is under threat from a dam being built. The images were produced for conservation groups to help show and engage the civil society to try and make change and stop the dam being built and protect the river. I like that these images appear to have not been edited to extreme and capture the area in its natural light and showcase it as it is.

The advancement of the internet and what you can access makes it easier to research and find locations, issues, natural disasters, different species and where things are in the world, something people would struggle to do a couple of decades ago. This makes Rojo job slightly easier in terms of contacts and identifying new and existing conservation groups. It provides the ability to find different wildlife species which are possibly endangered and can go to these places easily to document changes and impact on the environment and highlight issues in that area. The development of the internet has driven the viewers ability to research and expand knowledge, for example if a disaster or event happens in china, we find out about it almost instantly. It allows photographers like Rojo to be able to travel to wildlife and environmental event or disasters to inform and show people and help people understand the issues happening as we speak. This has made it easier to find people like Rojo and be able to see the work he is doing and helps create his goal of helping people reconnecting with the natural world as you are able to do it from the comfort of your home and are able to help from your home by donating to conversation groups like the ones Rojo is a part of.

I am sure that Rojo must use editing tools to maximise the colours and lighting particularly for the wildlife photography even though the colours in the rainforests are intense, to satisfy the viewers need for perfection he frames the image to suit the subject. He uses lens that can be used from a long distance from the subject and give the effect that he is right on top of the animal and landscapes. However as per

the quote *“Almost everything looks great in the afternoon golden light. Even the urban development tsunami that is devouring the once wild surroundings of my hometown” Jaime Rojo*

He does try to use the natural light that is available, and it does produce fantastic results even when travelling on a commercial airline. Why would you enhance something that is already beautiful and bright even if it is portraying something more sinister that is happening in the area.



There is much debate amongst photographers as to whether, when we use advance technological advancements are, we truly capturing the world as it is or are, we creating a dystopian world where we bombard the viewers with so much unreal imagery that they have not a clue what is real or not! As a population there is the expectation to present the perfect you on social media and people alter their appearance both physically and digitally. I cannot help but wonder if this is evolution or whether as an industry we have influenced and encouraged this.

I totally agree that the advancement in camera technology and ways to present data to a far-reaching audience particularly to demonstrate that the environment is suffering as anything that helps with this mission is fantastic. I concur that some manipulation using editing tools is required to correct colour clarity, tones and to crop images to focus on subject matters. I appreciate that as artist we love to push boundaries and create alternative art out of our photography and we certainly have the tools now to create them and that certainly has its place, particularly in the style of Barker where her aim is to shock us to how much plastic is left in our oceans. However, I strongly disagree that these should be used to gloss over the deprivation and destruction of our environment and when it comes to natural disasters, we should be showing them in their unedited form and using our skills as photographers to capture the best picture rather than relying on technology.

Word Count – 2713

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