

Alternate photos

In doing my book project I discovered an artist who used an online social app such as zoom or Skype to frame their subjects as a solution to the lockdown and I found this work incredible interesting just because of the way it was executed. Firstly I want to have a look at alternate ways that I can shoot my subjects inspired by this. The good thing about this is I can look at students from other uni's and find out how things compare for them.

Jackie Russo



This work I really like just because it does give you context on what is happening in the current time. I have this idea of showing what could be considered the new normal in today's standards mainly because I don't know what is going to happen in the future and I am fascinated by this new part of our history. This idea that everything that is to come will be moulded by what is happening right now I find extremely interesting.

I think what could be really interesting is if I was to try to shoot them with a classic look like Rembrandt lighting just to put a bit more of an aesthetic twist on it. I can also maybe include a text change conversion to better explain the individual's situation and to reflect their new normal. Like I previously stated I want to make this into a book but I don't want it to be just this one style as what could be considered the new normal extends to beyond just students.

Another idea I have floating around is focusing on the eyes of people which sounds cliché but something I've noticed a lot more is reading people and having general interactions is a lot harder because you can't see each other's faces. The idea is more streets based but I can see it maybe working as a second chapter of sorts.

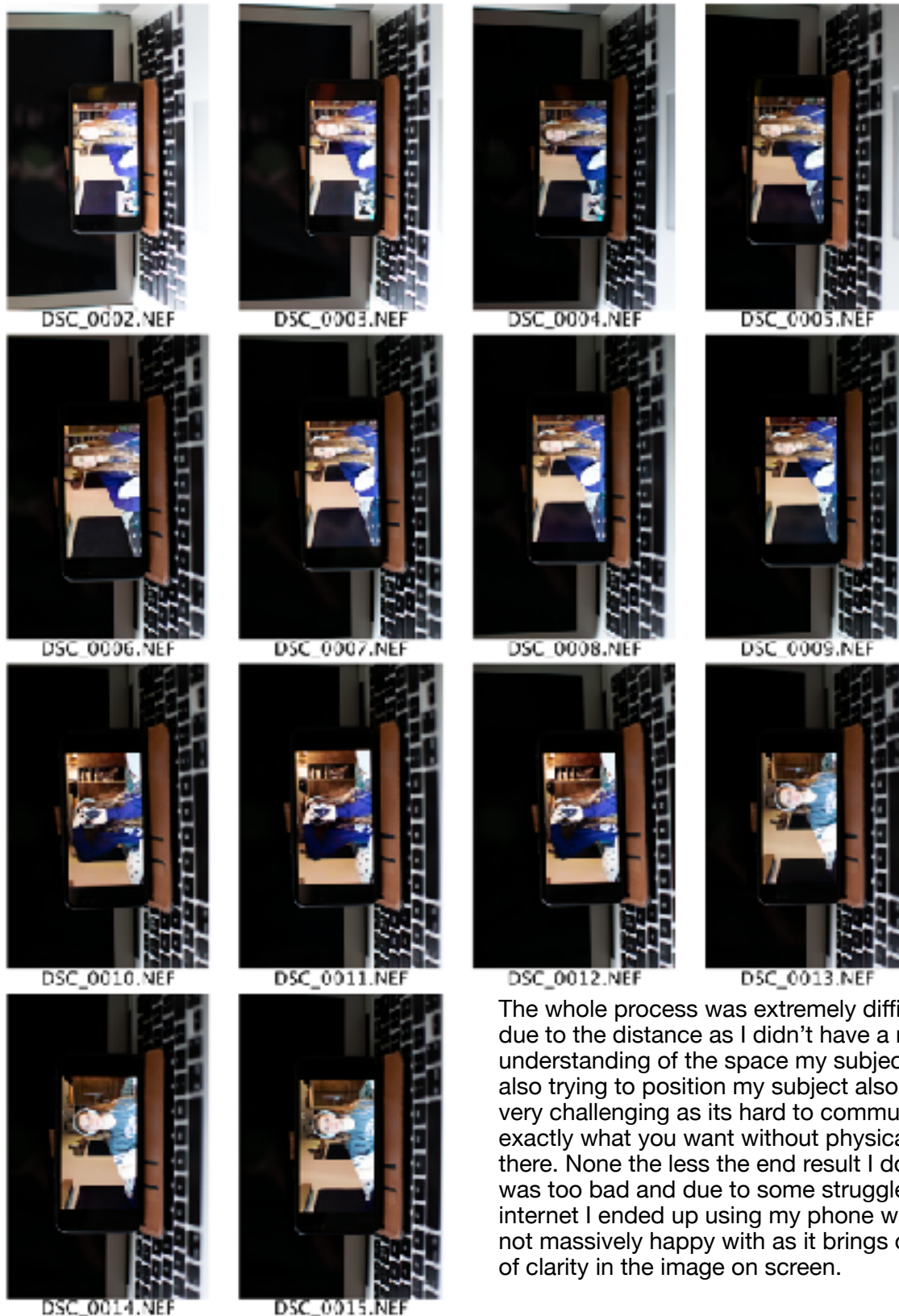


A quick google search shows that street artists are one of the first to respond to this new wave of influence and the humour shown in the images are always interesting and it's also something that I like to use as a form of communicating.

Recap

My goal is to make a book project based around the new normal of everything thats happening around me, my currently directions is to normalise or record the way things are done now beginning with a series of portraits shot over the Internet to express the distancing but also because it means I don't have to limit myself to those who are close to me but instead to most people I know. I want to include text as it has been drastically increased in terms of how much its been used but also I think it can help to better tell the events but this is not something I have massively invested in reading into and I might not use but its still worth exploring.

Test image contact sheet



The whole process was extremely difficult mainly due to the distance as I didn't have a massive understanding of the space my subject was in also trying to position my subject also proved very challenging as its hard to communicate exactly what you want without physically being there. None the less the end result I don't think was too bad and due to some struggles with the internet I ended up using my phone which I was not massively happy with as it brings out the lack of clarity in the image on screen.

Edited image



Raw image



This was the first time I edited an image that had another screen image on it and it was one of the harder things I have done simply because it was easier to over do it. I tried to stick to the basics and keep the skin tones accurate as the laptop camera was blowing it out. I also tried to increase the clarity of the screen itself but obviously you can only do that so far when your working with phone pixels especially when shooting from this close. The light could have been better on the subject but it was very difficult when your working from a distance like this, I also realise the value in accuracy with shooting like this due to all the straight lines and angles and theres only so much you can do in post production without causing warping.

In terms of how the image landed I like the general look and I think it works well too in terms of giving context while also being aesthetically decent and I think with text chain next to it might a stronger direction. This all early days though I'm not sold on everything yet but I think this is working. I do want to maybe go for a more classic portrait look but it is difficult to do that while restricted to this format but challenges like this often inspire new ways of working. The last thing that I didn't think would be the most challenging is the position of the camera on the subject as most people will have a limited amount of places that they can put it but this is something I can try to solve next time.

Bringing out personality

So like I've said before I really like the way this looks but the image of the subject itself is lacking character and I need to bring out the personality of my subject. Ways I'm going to this is by getting my laptop set up just so theres enough detail to see the subjects eyes. A big part of a person is their eyes as it acts as a way of actually humanising them and in having more detail should allow me to actually be able to show that. Obviously each subject is going to be different and I will have to find different ways to bring it out into the image but thats why I just need to shoot more with more people which is my next step.



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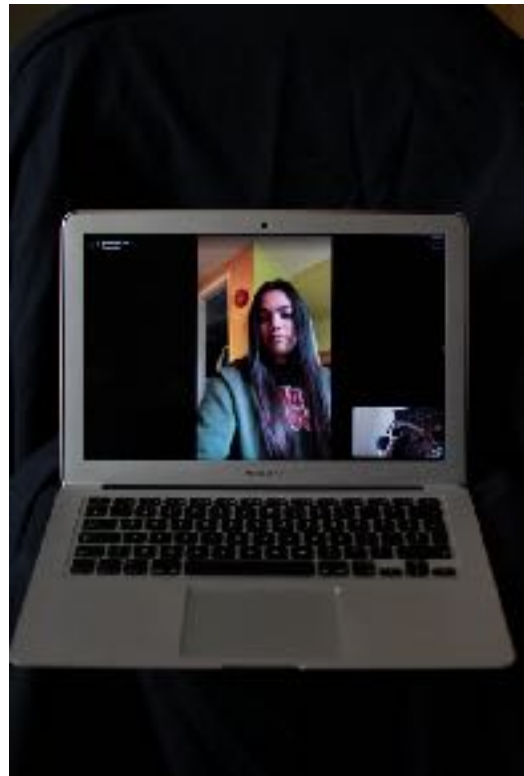
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This shoot felt better in terms of the end results. The image was cleaner and the lighting looked nicer on the subject so that was a plus but I really tried to bring my subject out and show them better as an individual but I struggled so much with it. Communicating was easily the hardest part because the model was the one who was framing the shot (with my guidance) and because of this it was really hard to have them focus on themselves. I think the other issue is some of them don't/won't know me as anything less than a friend which makes it harder when I'm in a professional position. Im writing this after forgetting how the final image looks so maybe it's not so bad.

Edited



Original



Im fairly happy with how this one edited as the colours are quite nice and overall look is really quite interesting. I prefer having the reflected image with me in the bottom right just because it adds more detail that you might miss also I think I might try to embrace the bad quality image from now on just because it is part of the process and I don't want to have these as massive images as is. Im also glad I got it working on my laptop opposed to my phone just because it does improve the image a little but also I don't have to be so close to my subject so I can take a step back. The biggest flaw I think with this might be the same as the last where I'm struggling to get these more intimate images that actually tell you about the person and on a more basic editing level her hair has turned blue which I don't fully understand but I assume because I'm taking an image of an image the highlights get confused and instead see it as a brighter version of a colour but I know I can fix this if I go back into the software.

Overall I am more happy with this image over the last one as there are a number of improvements and I feel if I keep going then I should finally be happy with the images and have a process that means I can do multiple people in a day which will help fill out the book that I want to have towards the end.

Currently I need to see what I'm trying to say with this project because I feel like all of this might be meaningless if there isn't something to take away towards the end of it. I've always compared my work to being similar to that of story telling and without a moral of sorts I find it really hard to have a direction.

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Annie Leibovitz

When it comes to capturing personality in photos Leibovitz is one of the first photographers I can think of just for the unusual way she poses her subjects but while also holding onto this more classical, almost painting like, aesthetic. Its worth noting that although she does a lot of work with celebrities and general cinema industry she still has an artistic style which really carries through.



I chose these images because I feel like she managed to capture a lot of character in these shots. I think a lot of her style comes from the lighting of her subject as well as the backdrops but they remind me of 19th century painters who would light their subjects using a skylight, particularly the one on the far left and right. The images also appear to be softer than your traditional images and I mean that with the lighting as well as the skin tones, whether this is done in post production or if they used a filter I'm not sure but I do really like the aesthetic.

In light of this shoot I think I want to get away from doing the images over the internet as it has just been too difficult to direct people over a call as well as the whole editing process. I do still want to continue in the direction of the alternate portraits based around students in this new world that the corona virus has made.



In trying to get back to my roots I've started to look at a portrait project I've done in the past based around students and I've forgotten how much I enjoyed taking these images and how well they came out. I see now better than before how I use to get better images of people more naturally and it was by catching people in their normal environment in quick passing moments which meant no one was focusing too much on the camera itself which really helped to bring them out as individuals. This is not to say that these images are perfect but they have a look I really like.

Film photography to me has a honesty that I feel digital doesn't which realistically doesn't make sense but I've always found that the skin tones and natural look of the images mixed with the dynamic range just help to carry the images meaning there is less post processing.

In the ideal world I would shoot on medium format but looking at the cost of film and the amount of shots I'm aiming for it just isn't as realistic to do it with that few amount of shots that I would have with a bigger camera. As a bonus this would mean I get to use my OM10 which is a camera I will always stand by in quality and practicality.

Applying to my project

Keeping with the portrait project and basing it around the current events I'm essentially doing the same work only doing it in person because I'm finding it too hard to shoot over the Internet. Focusing intensely on the change in the way of life I like the idea of meeting the students I want to take photos of but applying the rules we abide into the images to show what's going on. This is very similar to what I first started doing over the summer but I changed it due to the lack of people in my images. I feel if I was to do something similar but make more person to the people I know it could carry more weight in my images and make for a better book. It'll also work to document how things have changed and show what this time is like for the students. There are other elements I want to include in this project as well but if it turns out better to simply keep it simplistic then that's what I'll end up doing. Also below will be the images from my previous project that I mentioned above.

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These were the better images I got from the summer shoot I did during lockdown and as much as I like the typography vibes I do want a more close perspective which is why I want to go in the direction of portraits.



This book, Early Color by Saul Leiter, is one that I really like not just for the work itself but the way its set out page by page. All the images have this uniformed look that help to create this artificial link between the shots which look really good. No single image is overshadowed though by the one print per double spread giving each image a chance to be individual while also being apart of something bigger. The books paper is also a really important factor for bringing it all together as I think its actually a little warm instead of true white and this reflects the images that it prints on. This brings out the colour in the image which is a major theme in this book.

I really like how this one comes together and is probably one I will buy soon for myself. This idea of telling a story in a single image while also coming together to build up this individual style I love and definitely want to carry over to my final piece. My next step in terms of book prep will probably be paper types and the effects they can give.

Plan Of Action

As of the moment I think it might be best to get out and get a digital image of the style of image I want to end my project with just so I have a better idea. I want to have the look from my previous work which will be hard because its a different medium but more just to see how it will look. I'll try and build a mock of the book as well or at least a page to see how it all looks.

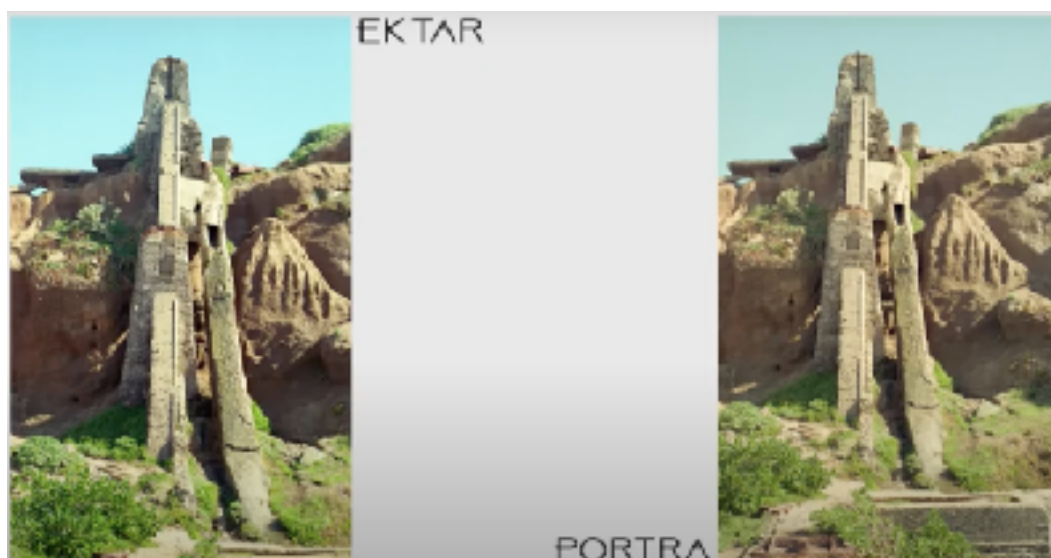
Film Choice

I've decide to go for portra 160 colour film which is a little bit more pricey then the standard colour film and a little slower as well. I think this will be preferable because it means I can have a sharper image for my portraits compared to something like the 400. The dynamic range of this film is also quite high which will be better for making skin tones slightly softer by hiding the shadows slightly. Its also not as vibrant as something like Ektar 100 (comparison below) which is admittedly for landscapes but still worth mentioning. Because I wont be able to go into peoples houses I will more likely than not have to do the shoot outside which I will actually prefer as it gives a nice change to what i'm use to doing.

A lot of the style that I like about this film is achievable through editing but honestly you lose something by doing that and I think its the realism. There is more accurate film out there with better blacks and more Accurate colours but the slightly off tint that you get with this film just makes it for me. Another bonus of this film is that it is very forgiving if you get your exposure which is not something I plan on doing but that safety net is always appreciated.

Something worth going into is the films ability to hold on to the highlights as well as the shadows which will be so useful for when I want to experiment with light and shapes that can be cast. Because of its more robustness you do lose a little in the colours and general warmth of the images which is great when your shooting more stripped back images but not if your subject is wearing a lot of colour. Again this is something that is great for skin tones but not so much for the clothes the subjects might be wearing.

Lastly this is more of a personal preference sort of thing but I'm not a massive fan of the colour green which this film does well to mute. But overall I would say I'm choosing this film because I know it will do really well with skin tones while also giving me a lot to work with. This film will do a lot better with headshots than it will full body shots which is Fine unless I want variety but I can still have the option to work with it then.



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As the restrictions are getting tighter and tighter it is getting progressively harder and harder to shoot in the way I want to and this is because the covid 19 restrictions prevent me from seeing anyone. There is a lot of anxiety around students and the way we are being kept inside feeling almost trapped.

I want to focus on this feeling while also using the way I'm displaying my images to make it work, ill do this through the idea of connectivity although before I struggled to make it work because I was directly recording my interactions which just resulted for some rather sloppy looking work. Instead what i'm thinking is ill use photoshop to make the connection while getting my subjects to take photos of themselves. I will supper impose the images onto my phone or laptop, depending on the image and maybe even try to get a background that matches the photo they have taken. This will add to the theme of connectivity as it shows that even though I'm the photographer I am still part of this conversation as well.

NOTES

"In a 2016 national survey of 18,875 French university students, 37% of the participants declared having experienced an episode of depression, and 8% reported having suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months," (**Marielle Wathelet**).

We are already one of the worst demographics when it comes to metal health let alone what the pandemic has put us through.

"Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to disrupt the provision of mental health services, and the most at-risk populations — primarily young individuals — are already the least likely to seek help. Finally, quarantine poses social and economic consequences, increasing the usual barriers to seeking care."

This shows that because everyone needs help students who need the support end up overlooked or rushed which isn't a helpful for them. But thats not to say that new systems haven't been put in place like there are now a lot of student support groups online and many people to talk to.

Its safe to say that it's the isolation that causes a lot of these feelings and states of mind as being looked indoors not being able to see anyone is very taxing, I myself am luckily enough to be in a house of 7 but even that isn't always enough.

Below is a direct copy of an article

"Wathelet and colleagues conducted the current study to determine the prevalence of self-reported mental health symptoms and associated factors, as well as to assess care seeking among 69,054 [university students](#), most of whom were women (72.8%) and first-year students (47%), during France's COVID-19 quarantine between April 17 and May 4. They asked all French universities to send an email to their students regarding completing an online questionnaire. Main outcomes and measures included rates of self-reported suicidal ideation, severe distress, stress, anxiety and depression according to results of the 22-item Impact of Events Scale-Revised, the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale, the 20-item State Trait Anxiety inventory (State subscale) and the 13-item Beck Depression Inventory, respectively. Sociodemographic characteristics, precariousness indicators, media consumption, information on the social environment and health-related data served as covariates. The researchers also collected data related to care seeking and identified risk factors using multivariable logistic regression analyses."

Results showed the following prevalence rates for mental health outcomes:

- suicidal thoughts = 11.4%;
- severe distress = 22.4%;
- high level of perceived stress = 24.7%;
- severe depression = 16.1%; and
- high level of [anxiety](#) = 27.5%.

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These photos by Ashley Gilberston stand out to me mainly because of the narrative in the images and the way it shows this new way of moving around and how the changes have effected us. The sequencing is very effective as it tells you that she's worried about getting close to other people while also showing in the next scene she's walking with someone presumably from her house. Its a very relatable moment and is very reminiscent of Duane Michals sequent narratives.



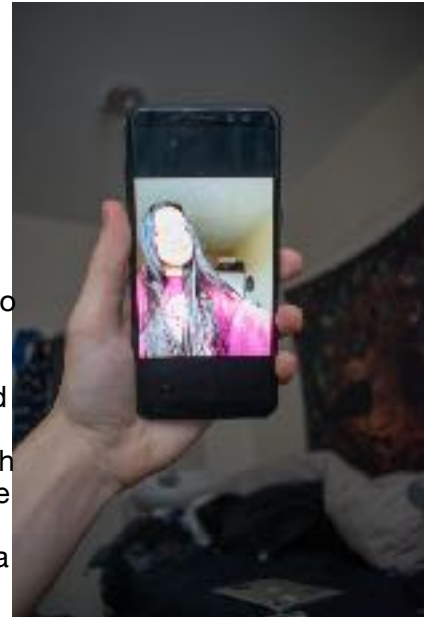
Gail Albert Halabans work carries a lot of the framing devices which doubles as a response to the pandemic as it is using this idea of shooting through the window to keep the social distancing measures up which is a similar technique to how i'm going to do my project only with an electronic devise. I also chose this image because I like how it shows the positivity in the hard times which is another element to my work I want to achieve. Although everyone is apart at least in todays technology we can all stay connected.

The last photo I chose from these images was taken by Bruno Taveira and it has a much more objective stance being a straight shot and the added contrast of the red trollies really sands out mainly because the image is lacking in a lot of colour. This almost gives it a negative kinda vibe just because of the desaturation and the relatively heavy vignetting. Other than that I don't really so much in the way that this relates to my work but I still thought it worth mentioning.





I got in contact with one of the previous subjects and asked them to simply take a self portrait using window light whilst avoiding making eye contact. The reason for this is because window light is soft and very natural as well as giving some guidance in how to take the image to better the understanding for the subject. With this particular image I had to flip the image because I wanted the room to line up with hers. The image she sent came out pretty good all things considering and I think I have a good idea of what I want.



The solution I came up with for this project to solve the quality issue was to photoshop the image into the one I took so it wasn't too low quality, then I would edit the image so they look like they were taken in the same sort of lighting. All of this is to make the image seem more connected to the subject as the theme is to show both how we are all divided but also how we can stay connected. The only thing that makes me slightly nervous about this project is the fact I have to rely on other people.



This is the first full edited image and I'm quite happy with how it came out as it doesn't look overly photoshopped to the average person and the fact that I had the real image on my phone means the light from it catches on my hand just adding to make it real. Something I will do next time is use my polarised filter to stop as many reflections. On a less technical note the rooms line up quite nicely and I think I managed to get the angle about right as well the only thing is that the angle is much wider on the phone than the lens.

With the goal of this being connectivity I think I've done a lot to match everything up right and the end result being a well framed portrait that carries the image in such a way that carries the context of the time. Another reason I've used the window which I forgot to mention is because it carries connotations of longing for freedom and there's an almost lonely aesthetic that comes with it which I find very fitting for the time and current conditions. It should go without saying but for each portrait I'm going to use what every space I have access for the best 'look alike' I can just to continue this style. Lastly I am considering using text with this with a quote from each person in an almost minimalistic kind of way.

REFLECTION

I feel I'm at a place now where I can start creating the work and start thinking about how I want to present my work which in this current time is a book form of around 20 to 30 images but because of the corona virus situation it is likely that the exhibition will be online in which case I would want to get enough photos, probably something like my best six, and lay them out in such way which looks aesthetically nice. Personally I really like the idea of the exhibition being online because for the themes of my project about students and being connected in hard times it helps push this idea because its a safe way to produce this work and share it online. I think our main audience for this project will be students as is because of the community we have here in Swansea.

Whats next

I need to have a look at some text and potentially introducing that to my images for an added effect to really nail down the whole reason for this project (being a representation of how the lockdown has effected students) by quoting the subjects non how they have felt/feeling. I think this will be nice as well in a sense that its almost like a signature for each person signing up to say something. In that sense I need to make sure I'm happy with the layout of my images as I need to be able to produce the images fairly efficiently. I have a fair few contacts across the country that I can get in touch with for this project so I don't think I will be too strapped for subjects but its just getting everyone involved which might be a struggle but thats why I need to have an example at the ready so the whole process doesn't come of as intimidating but instead unifying.

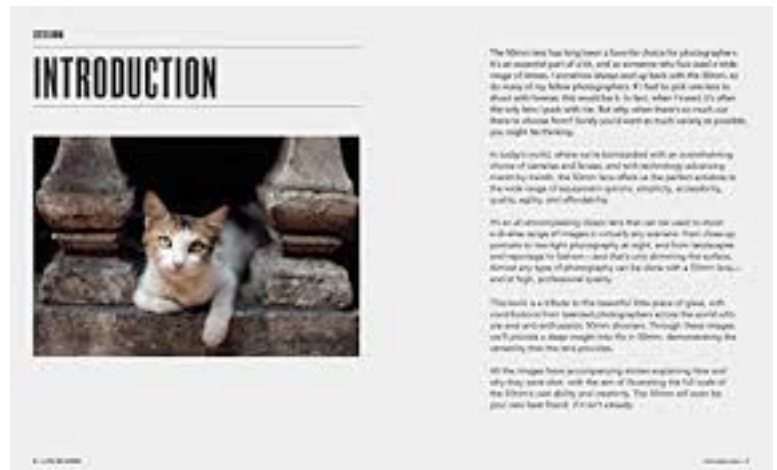
Someone worth noting is **Ben Heine** who is responsible for the way I've lined up my images to break down the divide the phone makes with the way he incorporates his drawings with real world images. This style I adore because it shows a way in which you can project an idea or in my case a subject into another space without actually doing so which is something I am making my project heavily focused on. Of course with his work it was more about putting his ideas and creativity into these spaces but I still find the similarity that these images have to be very influential to my work. Its also really nice that I can modernise this style using photoshop when the original was with simply paper.





This is a book that I really like the layout of with its minimalistic approach and simplicity and is the sort of look I want to go for. I've always been a really big fan of that kind of look and its something I definitely want to use for my own work but obviously I will make it my own way as I'm also more of a fan of the squad format for the fact is easier to centralise the images even when they are rectangular. It also means if I was to use text then it would be easy to focus on it on the right hand side. Whether or not the book would be hard back very much depends on how much money I have and if the current lockdown will effect it.

An introduction will be something I need to research into but this layout is something I quite like with the image on the left and the text on the right. It gives the image enough time to be viewed without being overshadowed by another image. It also means the text on the right hand side will have enough space and it can be easily be associated with the person in the image with too much trouble. This adds into the idea of each student having a voice while also showing them as a collective which makes the statement stronger.

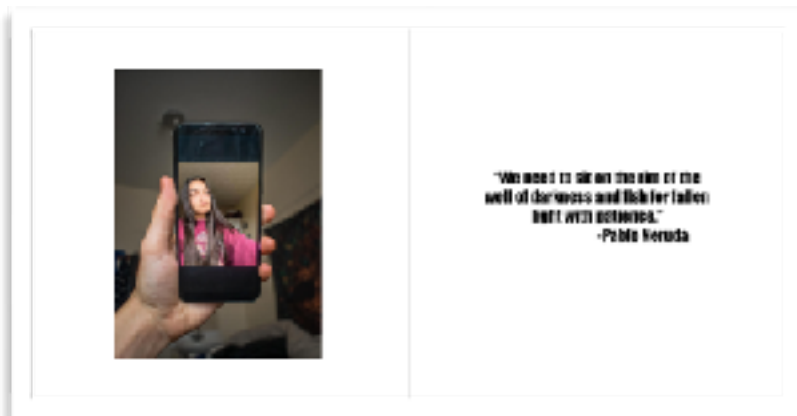


I included this page because a lot of different photography books do this nearly double page spread look which I've never massively liked because I find the split down the middle of the page takes away from the image but also with the type of images I'm doing it wouldn't make sense to do it as all the images would be the same kind of format. This is not to say that I won't use unique layouts if the image calls for it because it would make the work more dynamic I just don't want to make one bit of work stand out more because they need to be equal.

Typography for work

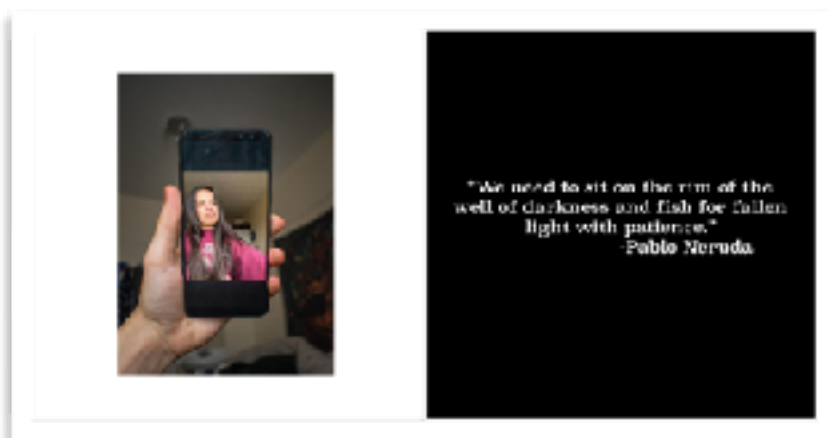
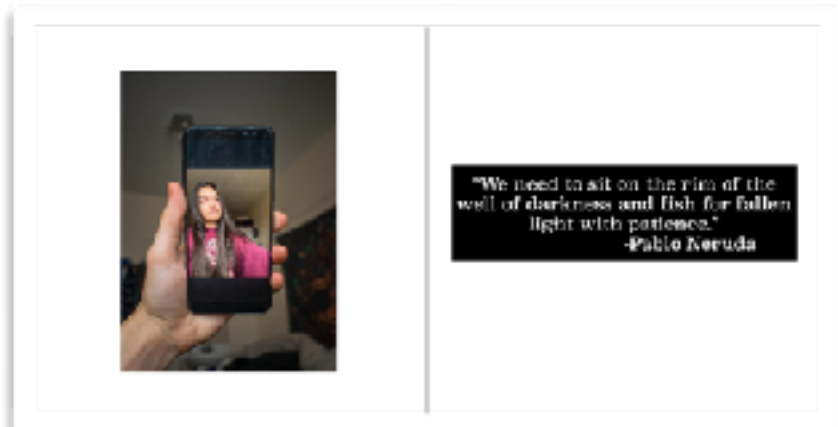
To go with the images that I'm producing I talked about having text as a way for them to say something to other people or at least to not speak alone. The current way I'm thinking of presenting it is by taking the text bubble from facebook as its the main way I'm communicating with my subjects/ fellow students but I worry it'll be a bit tacky so I might just opt for something simpler like a typed out text in quotations but with a particular font of course. Text is something that I've tried to include in my work before and I've often failed at but as long as I keep it simple I think it might work best plus I have a lot of peers that can tell me how it looks and give me any feedback that I might need.

I've developed a quick template which I quite like in terms of style and is by no means a finished representation of what the work will be but for the purposes of the font and how the text will look with the images is the aim of the template.



The text used is from Pablo Neruda and is simply a stand in for what will be from the subject. This font called impact has a very bold style which helps push the idea that the quote is something that wants to be heard with its ease of being read. This is good because it pushes this idea of giving the individuals a voice but the only concern is it seems to clash a little with the portrait in terms of style. The other note is I need to make this easily translated into something I can turn into a an exhibition piece with ease and this is too militaristic almost, to do that.

While getting ready to get the next bit of text created I kinda liked how the highlight black with the white text came through looked. It reminds me of the way they would sensor sensitive information in the army by blacking it out but this time its coming out of the dark, implying they will not be restricted. The white in the dark is also symbolising what the very stand in quote is saying, there is always light in the dark which for the current times is very a valid thing to remember. Because of the way the text is presented with this subtext I am more driven towards this idea. Actual font I might change.



Going off the last image I thought maybe if I made the entire right hand page black (note the one shown here has added a white border which is not intended) then the same effect might work with the image showing that the fact we can stay connected with each other is the silver lining so to speak. Personally I'm not too sure about this because I don't want the text to overly effect the work but in the same sense if this was to be an exhibition piece I can see it working to some extent in a framed book pages sort of way.

Reflection

The project I'll admit hasn't been quick as a lot of my time has been spent thinking more than about concepts but I can confidently say I am a lot happier with my project now than I was at the beginning and I am excited to see where it ends up.