

Corey Webb - Research In Context:

Question:

Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technology Society?

Since technology has rapidly advanced, photographers and artists have used it to their advantage. Through digital editing, they've gained a wider creative range. They're no longer limited to just a camera lens and a background. We can fully transform now images with today's standard technology. While there are both pros and cons to this, it seems that more people are drawn to bold, highly edited visuals that stand out. Here are some multiple examples of that.

As a first example of how contemporary image makers have embraced digital technology in their artistic practices, the work of Cindy Sherman showcases a striking example. Known for her long standing exploration of identity and self representation. She has created a series of manipulated images, many of which she shares through her Instagram page. In these posts, she transforms herself into various characters through elaborate costumes, makeup, prosthetics, and sometimes digital manipulation, the results are fictional characters, often surreal or terrifyingly weird. Her passion for dressing up is reflected in her own words: "I wish I could treat every day as Halloween, and get dressed up and go out into the world as some eccentric character." This quote captures her playful, creative spirit and her deep interest in using appearance as a form of expression. These manipulations allow her to distort and reinvent her own image in unnatural ways, pushing the boundaries of traditional portrait photography. Combined with her established use of costumes, makeup, and props, these digital tools enable her to further explore complex themes such as identity, gender, aging, and the artificial nature of self presentation in the digital age. Her work encourages viewers to consider how technology shapes not only how we see ourselves, but how we construct and perform identity in an increasingly image saturated culture.



Sherman's digital self portraits can make me feel a mix of curiosity, confusion, and reflection. When I first see her images, I'm often not even sure it's her. She transforms herself into so many different characters, young, old, glamorous, strange that it's hard to tell who the real Cindy Sherman is, the results are always very convincing. This instantly makes me question how we define identity. It also reminds me how easy it is to change how we look using makeup, costume, and digital editing. In a world where social media encourages us to present perfect versions of ourselves, Sherman takes this idea to the extreme and forces us to think about how much of our identity is real and how much is created.

Her work can also feel unsettling. Some of the characters she becomes are exaggerated, even disturbing. She plays with awkward expressions, strange outfits, and unnatural poses. Sometimes the images look fake or over edited on purpose. Subconsciously. We recognise this and, it creates a feeling that something is "off," which makes me uncomfortable.

That discomfort makes me stop and think. Why do these images feel strange? Is it because they remind me of how people sometimes try too hard to fit into certain roles or standards of beauty?

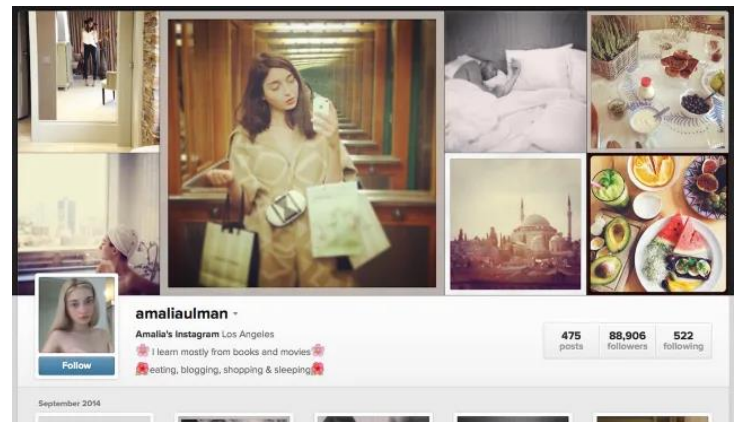
At the same time, I feel impressed by her creativity. Sherman doesn't just take selfies. She builds entire characters and scenes, often doing everything herself. The makeup, the costume, the photography, and the digital editing is carried out by herself. As a creator myself this is admirable to view. She turns herself into a work of art, again and

again. It's inspiring to see someone use digital tools not just to enhance an image but to explore big ideas while creating a point about identity, appearance, and how we see ourselves and others.



Overall, Sherman's digital self portraits make me think deeply about identity in today's world. Her work makes me aware of how easily images can be manipulated, and how quickly we accept those images as natural because they're online where majority of the content is unauthentic. They also remind me that identity isn't fixed, it can be fluid, playful, and even confusing. In a time when so much of our identity is shaped by digital technology, Sherman's work encourages me to look beyond the surface and question what's real, what's fake, and what it all means. I think the message she raises is important and a valuable point which will be timeless.

While researching I found this very interesting project by Amalia Ulman who is a photographer and digital artist best known for her Instagram project Excellences & Perfections. Where she created a fake lifestyle and shared it online as though it were real. Her project reminds me of Shaman's work because they're based on identity, but Ulman's project has a more realistic and modern approach. Ulman pretended to be a young woman who moved to Los Angeles, got plastic surgery, partied, and tried to become a famous influencer. The photos looked completely believable, but the entire thing was staged. Her posts were carefully planned and acted out as part of a performance.



At first, most people believed the story. They reacted as they would to any real influencer, liking her photos, leaving comments, and following along with her journey. Some praised her transformation, while others judged her choices. Once she revealed that the whole thing was fake and part of an art project, people had mixed feelings. Some were impressed by how cleverly she exposed the way people behave on social media. Others felt confused or even misled.

Her main message was to show how easily people can fake a "perfect" life online and how quickly others will believe it. She wasn't trying to impress anyone. She was exploring how women are expected to act and look a certain way online. Her work points out how fake and performative social media has become, especially in influencer culture.

I find her work interesting but also a bit strange. It makes me uncomfortable how easily people believed the story, even though none of it was real. But that's also the point, she's showing us just how fake social media can be. I don't like the idea of faking everything, just to prove a point, but I understand the message. I'm not comfortable with the fact that I would have believed it if I hadn't done my own research and that alone proves her point. She's not trying to be an influencer, she's using images to make people understand how gullible people are online, in that way, her work is clever and powerful. I wish I'd discovered Amalia Ulman's work sooner.

My first two examples both speak on identity and how people perceive you. I prefer Ulman's work because there was no margin to believe it wasn't fiction, there were no indications that anything was edited. It was a character she played without any editing. That itself is dangerously scary and a bold point not to believe everything you see online. Makes me think what's the point of using social media? If everything is fictional.

After researching individuals who use digital technology to express identity, I decided to explore photographers who use it to raise awareness about the environment we live in. A powerful example of this is James Balog, a photographer who uses digital timelapse photography to show the effects of climate change, especially the rapid melting of glaciers.

In 2007 Balog started the Extreme Ice Survey, a project where cameras are placed in remote icy regions like Greenland, Alaska, Iceland, and the Himalayas. These cameras take photos

every hour during daylight, capturing slow changes in the glaciers over months and years. When played back in a sequence, the photos become powerful timelapse videos that show how quickly the ice is disappearing. What would take years to see in real life can now be seen in just seconds, making climate change easier to understand.



Balog's work became widely known after the release of the 2012 documentary *Chasing Ice*. The film follows him and his team as they set up and maintain the cameras in harsh environments. It highlights both the challenges they faced and the powerful images they captured, helping more people understand the urgency of global warming.

This kind of photography is important because it gives clear visual proof that climate change is real. It helps scientists track changes and makes the issue more relatable to the public. Seeing the damage in photos can be more powerful than just hearing about it.

Balog's work blends art and science in a way that educates, inspires, and moves people. His photography reminds us that the environment is changing fast and that we need to take action now, before it's too late.

Building on the idea of using photography to raise awareness about environmental issues, Edward Burtynsky takes this further by showing how industries harm the planet. He uses high resolution digital cameras and drones to capture large scale images of landscapes damaged by human activity, such as mines, factories, oil fields, and quarries. His aerial views show the true size of the damage, giving us a perspective we can't normally see from the ground.

What makes Burtynsky's work powerful is how it mixes beauty with a serious message. His photos often look like abstract art, with patterns and colours that are visually appealing at first glance. But when you look closer, you realize these beautiful patterns are the result of industrial destruction. The use of drones allows him to capture these scenes from above, showing how vast the damage really is. The high resolution lets us see the details, like the lines in a factory's waste pool or the scars left by mining.

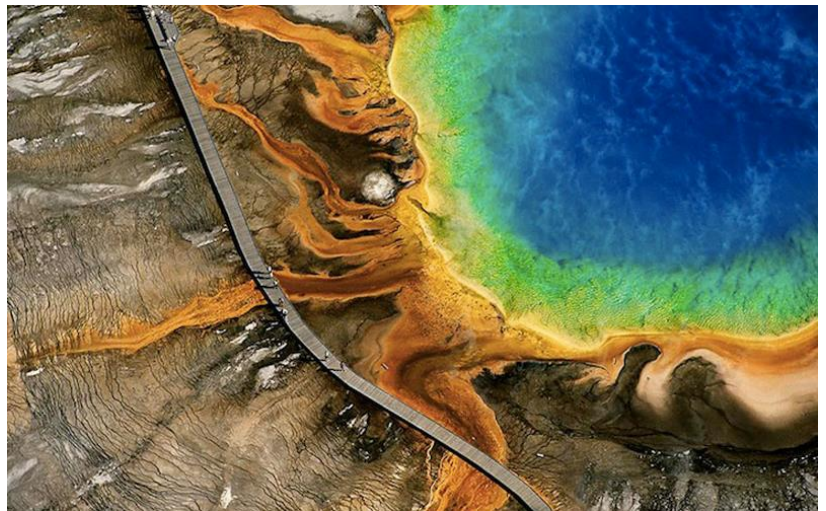
Burtynsky's work is important because it helps us understand the true cost of modern life. His photos don't just show the destruction; they make us think about the choices we make and the impact they have on the environment. The scale of the damage in his images forces us to face the reality of how industrialization harms nature, even if we don't see it in our daily lives.

For me, Burtynsky's work makes me think about the balance between progress and protecting the environment. While technology has allowed us to capture these incredible images, it also shows the price we're paying for progress. His photographs remind us that the beauty of nature is being lost, and we need to take action before it's too late. Burtynsky's art isn't just about showing us the damage. It's a call to think about our role in it and how we

can make better choices for the future. His work encourages us to look beyond the surface and understand the cost of industrial progress.

Building on the notion that photography can enhance our awareness of environmental issues. Yann Arthus Bertrand is another important photographer who uses digital tools like drones and aerial photography to show the beauty and fragility of our planet. By taking photos from above, he gives us a unique view of Earth that most people never get to see. His work shows problems like deforestation, pollution, and overpopulation in a clear and powerful way. What makes his photos special is that they are both beautiful and meaningful. At first, you might just see a stunning landscape with interesting colours and shapes. But when you look closer, you notice signs of damage, like forests being cut down or cities growing too fast. His images help us see how human activity is changing the planet. Yann's photography is important because it makes people think about the environment in a new way. Seeing things from the sky helps us understand how big and serious these problems really are. His work also helps us care about places we may never visit by showing how connected everything is. To me, his work is a reminder that Earth is both amazing and fragile. His use of drones and high quality cameras helps us see the world clearly, both its beauty and its problems. It's useful because it makes people feel something, not just learn something. That emotional connection can inspire more people to care and take action. Yann Arthus Bertrand's photos are more than just pictures. They are a way to tell the story of our planet. Through his art, he shows us what's at risk and encourages us to protect the Earth for future generations.

Digital technology is now a big part of how today's artists and photographers create their work. Tools like drones, high quality cameras, and editing software help them capture and share powerful images. This makes it easier to show important topics like caring for the environment, expressing identity, and talking about problems in the world. With digital tools, creators can reach more people and tell their stories in clearer, more emotional ways. It's not just about making something that looks good. It's about using art to help people understand and care about what's happening



around them. This kind of work really inspires me to create. Seeing how photographers use technology to tell powerful stories makes me want to do the same. I'm always excited to learn about new tools and how they can be used to capture the world in different ways. It's amazing how technology helps artists show important messages in a way that connects with people. It motivates me to keep learning, experimenting, and finding my own voice through photography.

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