



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

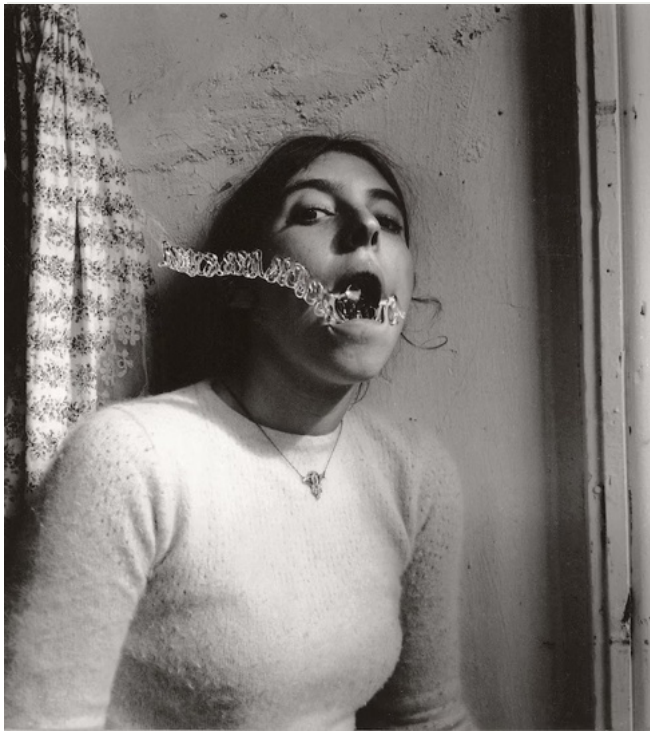
Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk



- Welcome. This is one of over 200 talks on the history of Western Art. I have arranged the talks chronologically starting with cave art through to art produced in the last few years.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



24-05 MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

Francesca
Woodman, Self-
Portrait Talking to
Vince, detail, c.
1976-77

- This is Section 24 on Photography and this is talk 5 on Modern Photography, that is, the last hundred years of fine art photography. It is a guide to the various intertwining and overlapping style of photography of the 20th and 21st centuries. The categories are loose and a photographer can be in more than one so they are useful but not precise.

NOTES

The Major Art Photography Styles of the 20th and 21st Centuries

Pictorialism

Era: late 19th century – 1910s

Overview: This early movement sought to establish photography as a legitimate fine art by having it emulate the aesthetics of painting and drawing. Characterized by a focus on beauty, mood, and composition, Pictorialist photographers often manipulated their images to achieve painterly effects, moving beyond simple documentation.

Key Characteristics: Soft focus, Romantic or idealised scenes, Elaborate printing techniques (e.g., gum bichromate, platinum)

Notable Photographers: Alfred Stieglitz (a key proponent whose early work, like *The Flatiron*, epitomized the style's soft focus and atmospheric effects before he famously shifted philosophies), Gertrude Käsebier (a leading figure known for her emotive, soft-focus portraits of mothers and children, such as *The Manger*)

Straight Photography

Era: 1910s – 1940s

Overview: Arising as a direct reaction against the painterly manipulations of Pictorialism, Straight Photography championed an honest portrayal of the world. Adherents believed in celebrating the camera's unique qualities—clarity, detail, and realism—and argued that a work of art should be what the camera took, with no manipulation in the darkroom to alter the negative.

Key Characteristics: Sharp focus, High contrast, No manipulation, Subjects are often everyday objects or landscapes

Notable Photographers: Paul Strand (a pioneer whose work like Wall Street combined sharp clarity with modernist composition), Edward Weston, Ansel Adams (f/64 Group) (a co-founder of the influential f/64 Group, which championed sharp focus and meticulous technical precision to capture the American West)

Modernist Photography

Era: 1920s – 1950s

Overview: Deeply influenced by European art movements like Bauhaus, Constructivism, and Surrealism, Modernist photography embraced abstraction and new ways of seeing. Photographers moved beyond straightforward representation to explore the formal qualities of the medium itself, experimenting with light, form, and perspective.

Key Characteristics: Geometric compositions, Unusual angles, Experimentation with light and form

Notable Photographers: László Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Rodchenko, Berenice Abbott (known for her detailed urban landscapes, such as Nightview, New York, which focused on geometric form)

Surrealist and Experimental Photography

Era: 1920s – 1950s, revived later

Overview: Drawing inspiration from the literary and artistic movements of Surrealism and Dada, this style sought to explore the subconscious, dreams, and the irrational. Photographers used the darkroom not for simple printing but as a laboratory for creative manipulation, challenging the camera's traditional role as a recorder of reality.

Key Characteristics: Photomontage, Double exposure, Solarization,

Manipulated imagery

Notable Photographers: Man Ray (a central figure in the Surrealist movement in Paris who pioneered experimental techniques), Hans Bellmer, Dora Maar, Jerry Uelsmann

Documentary Photography

Era: 1930s – present

Overview: This style uses the principles of Straight Photography to focus on social issues, historical events, war, and the human condition. While it sometimes overlaps with photojournalism, its primary aim is often to create a lasting record or inspire social change rather than report on breaking news.

Key Characteristics: Realistic, Often black-and-white, Aims to inform or inspire change

Notable Photographers: Dorothea Lange (whose iconic photograph Migrant Mother became a powerful symbol of the Great Depression, using Straight Photography's principles for social realism), Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, Sebastião Salgado

Street Photography

Era: 1950s – present

Overview: This genre is dedicated to capturing candid, unmediated moments of everyday life in public places. Practitioners often work quickly and intuitively, aiming to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. The style is defined by its spontaneity and its focus on human interaction within the urban environment.

Key Characteristics: Spontaneity, Unposed subjects, Often black-and-white, Strong compositional elements

Notable Photographers: Henri Cartier-Bresson (a master of the genre who coined the term "the decisive moment" to describe the act of capturing a fleeting event at the perfect instant), Garry Winograd, Vivian Maier, took 150,000 photographs of NY, Chicago recognised after her death, Joel Meyerowitz

Colour Photography

Era: 1960s – present

Overview: For much of the 20th century, colour was associated with commercial work and snapshots, while black-and-white was the standard for fine art. This changed in the 1960s and 70s, as a new generation of photographers began to explore colour's expressive potential, proving it could be a serious artistic medium.

Key Characteristics: Emphasis on colour relationships, Use of colour to evoke a specific mood or emotional response, Realism

Notable Photographers: William Eggleston Untitled (Red Ceiling) 1976, Stephen Shore, Nan Goldin, Alex Webb

Conceptual Photography

Era: 1960s – present

Overview: Emerging from the broader Conceptual Art movement, this style prioritizes the idea or concept behind the photograph over its aesthetic and technical qualities. Here, the photograph serves as documentation of an idea, a performance, or a question, often challenging the very nature of photography itself.

Key Characteristics: Staged or constructed images, Text integration, Seriality, Emphasis on meaning over aesthetics

Notable Photographers: John Baldessari, Cindy Sherman (whose staged self-portraits explore identity and representation), Barbara Kruger, Sophie Calle

New Topographics

Era: 1970s

Overview: This style marked a significant break from the romantic and majestic landscape traditions, particularly those of photographers like Ansel Adams. Practitioners of New Topographics turned their lenses to the man-altered landscape—suburban sprawl, industrial parks, and unremarkable cityscapes—capturing them with a deliberately neutral, deadpan style.

Key Characteristics: Deadpan style, Neutral tone, Suburban and industrial scenes

Notable Photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore (whose work also represents a pioneering use of colour to document the American vernacular landscape)

Portrait Photography

Era: 1950s and 1960s

Overview: During the 1950s and 1960s, portrait photography underwent a significant transformation. Moving beyond traditional studio conventions, photographers began exploring more intimate, psychologically complex, and sometimes unsettling representations of the individual. The period is marked by a tension between documentary realism and experimental approaches, often highlighting the subject's identity, social context, or inner life rather than merely recording their appearance. This era laid the groundwork for later conceptual and feminist portraiture, using the human figure not just as a subject but as a vehicle to interrogate culture, identity, and perception.

Key Characteristics: an emphasis on psychological depth and character, the use of both formal studio settings and informal or personal spaces, an experimentation with framing, lighting, and scale to convey mood, the exploration of identity, otherness, and the uncanny and often black-and-white, though colour was emerging

Notable Photographers: Diane Arbus, Francesca Woodman, Richard Avedon and Irving Penn

Feminist Photography

Era: 1970s and 1980s

Overview: Arising from the Second Wave of feminism, this movement used the lens to critique the patriarchal portrayal and objectification of women in art and media. Artists subverted the "male gaze" and explored female identity, domesticity, and the body, often through self-portraiture and conceptual work to assert female autonomy.

Key characteristics: subversion of the "male gaze", the female body and self-portraiture, deconstruction of stereotypes and a focus on personal experience

Notable Photographers: Francesca Woodman, Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger

Photojournalism

Era: 1930s to 1970s

Overview: Photojournalism is the use of images to tell a timely, objective, and truthful narrative about an event or subject, often with the aim of social

commentary. The Golden Age saw the rise of the portable 35mm camera, allowing photographers unprecedented access to conflicts, social issues, and daily life for major illustrated magazines.

Key characteristics: timeliness and objectivity, the "decisive moment", photo essay format, empathy and humanism

Notable Photographers: Martin Parr, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Dorothea Lange

Postmodern Photography

Era: 1980s – 2000s

Overview: In this era, photographers began to systematically critique the core tenets of modernism, such as originality, authorship, and the notion of a single truth. Through strategies like appropriation and simulation, they questioned the photograph's status as an authentic document and explored how images construct our understanding of reality and identity.

Key Characteristics: Irony, Appropriation (re-using or borrowing imagery from other artists or media to question originality), Simulation, Pastiche, Identity politics

Notable Photographers: Cindy Sherman (whose work also represents a foundational example of Conceptual photography), Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Jeff Wall

Digital & Manipulated Photography

Era: 1990s – present

Overview: While image manipulation has existed since photography's inception, the advent of digital tools like Photoshop made the process infinitely more accessible and powerful. This technological shift expanded the creative possibilities exponentially, allowing artists to construct entirely new realities, blur the line between photography and painting, and create hyperreal or fantastical scenes.

Key Characteristics: Heavily edited or digitally constructed images, Hyperreal or fantastical

Notable Photographers: Andreas Gursky, Loretta Lux, Erik Johansson

Snapshot Aesthetic

Era: 1950s to 1970s

Overview: An art photography that mimics the casual, unposed, and technically imperfect images of amateur photography. It features unconventional framing, tilted horizons, grain, blur, and flash to convey immediacy. Its subjects are often intimate, everyday, or previously marginalized moments, aiming for an unfiltered sense of real life and raw, personal documentation

Key characteristics: immediacy, spontaneity, technical imperfections, informal composition, intimate subject matter and non-hierarchical

Key Photographers, Robert Frank, Garry Winograd, Lee Friedlander, Nan Goldin, William Eggleston and Wolfgang Tillman

Contemporary & Hybrid Styles

Era: 2000s – present

Overview: Contemporary art photography is characterized by its eclecticism and the blending of genres, media, and disciplines. Artists frequently integrate photography with video, installation, and mixed media, often using their work to engage with pressing global themes such as identity, ecology, globalization, and social justice.

Key Characteristics: Mixed media, Installation, Video integration, AI-generated elements, Social commentary

Notable Photographers/Artists: Zanele Muholi, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Thomas Ruff, Trevor Paglen

Photo-Painting and Abstraction

Era: 1960s and 1970s

Overview: A conceptual approach that challenges the medium's role by merging photographic objectivity with the material subjectivity of painting. Artists blur, scrape, layer, or deliberately misuse the processes of both media to question representation, authorship, and the notion of a single "truthful" image.

Key characteristics: blurring and scraping, appropriation, process over subject and challenging authenticity

Notable Photographers: Gerhard Richter, Thomas Ruff, Wolfgang Tillmann, Sigmar Polke and Barbara Kasten

Social Media & Mobile Photography

Era: 2010s – present

Overview: The rise of smartphones and social media platforms like Instagram has led to a profound democratization of photography, creating new aesthetic movements and visual languages. This style is defined by its immediacy and its connection to online trends, communities, and the performance of daily life.

Key Characteristics: Casual, Filtered, Often influenced by vernacular or visual trends ("Instagram aesthetic")

Key Concepts & Platforms: Hashtag art communities, VSCO culture, Influencer photography

AI and Photography

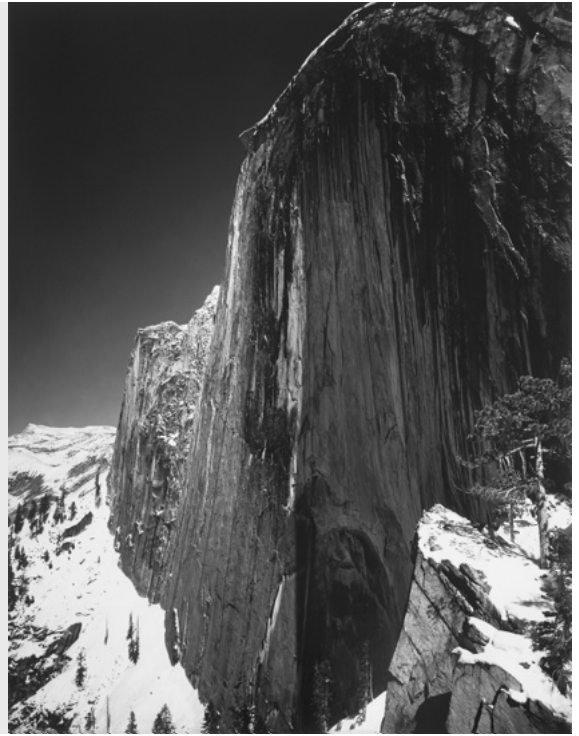
Era: founded in the 1970s but boomed in the 2020s specifically 2022

Description: Images created entirely or significantly by a machine learning model (AI) in response to a text prompt (a "promptogram") or by computationally manipulating a real photograph. The images often possess a hyper-photorealistic quality, making them indistinguishable from traditional photography.

Notable Photographers: there is no clear artist: The 'artist' is often a collective entity: the software developers, the dataset contributors, the prompt engineer (user), and the AI model itself. This is the central conceptual challenge of the category.



Peter Henry Emerson (1856–1936), *Ricking the Reed*, 1886



Ansel Adams (1902-1984), *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome*, 1927, gelatine silver print, Library of Congress

- For the sake of completeness I mention here Pictorialism and Straight Photography. I cover these in two other talks 24-02 Pictorialism and Late Victorian Photography and 24-04 Straight Photography.
- Here are examples taken from those talks, on the left Peter Henry Emerson and his constructed picture. Pictorialism sought to emulate the composition and subject matter of fine art painting.
- On the right is Ansel Adams and *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome*, a high resolution photograph of nature and a perfect example of Straight Photography.



Modernist Photography:
Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956),
Steps, 1929,
38.8 × 56.8 cm

Modernist Photography: Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956), *Steps*, 1929, 38.8 × 56.8 cm

- But let us move on. **Modernist photography** is a broad category which could be used to cover most of what I will be showing you today. It embraces abstraction and new ways of seeing. Photographers moved beyond straightforward representation to explore the formal qualities of the medium itself, experimenting with light, form, and perspective.
- This photograph is by the Russian artist Alexander Rodchenko. He said '**I want to take some quite incredible photos that have never been taken before, of life itself, absolutely real, photographs which are simple and complex at the same time, which will amaze and overwhelm people... then it will be worthwhile working and fighting for Photography as an art**'.
- He was influenced by Cubism and Futurism and following the Russian Revolution when anything and everything seemed possible he in 1920 became responsible for the organisation of art schools and museums. He became secretary of the Moscow Artists' Union and set up the Fine Arts Division of the People's Commissariat for Education, and helped found the Institute for Artistic Culture. However, by the late 1920s the rise of Joseph Stalin required artists to conform with the requirement to only produce Socialist Realism. Pictures of happy peasants and factory workers. Rodchenko oscillated between conforming and rebelling and by the 1930s was blacklisted and lived in poverty until his death from cancer in 1956.

NOTES

Modernist Photography

Era: 1920s – 1950s

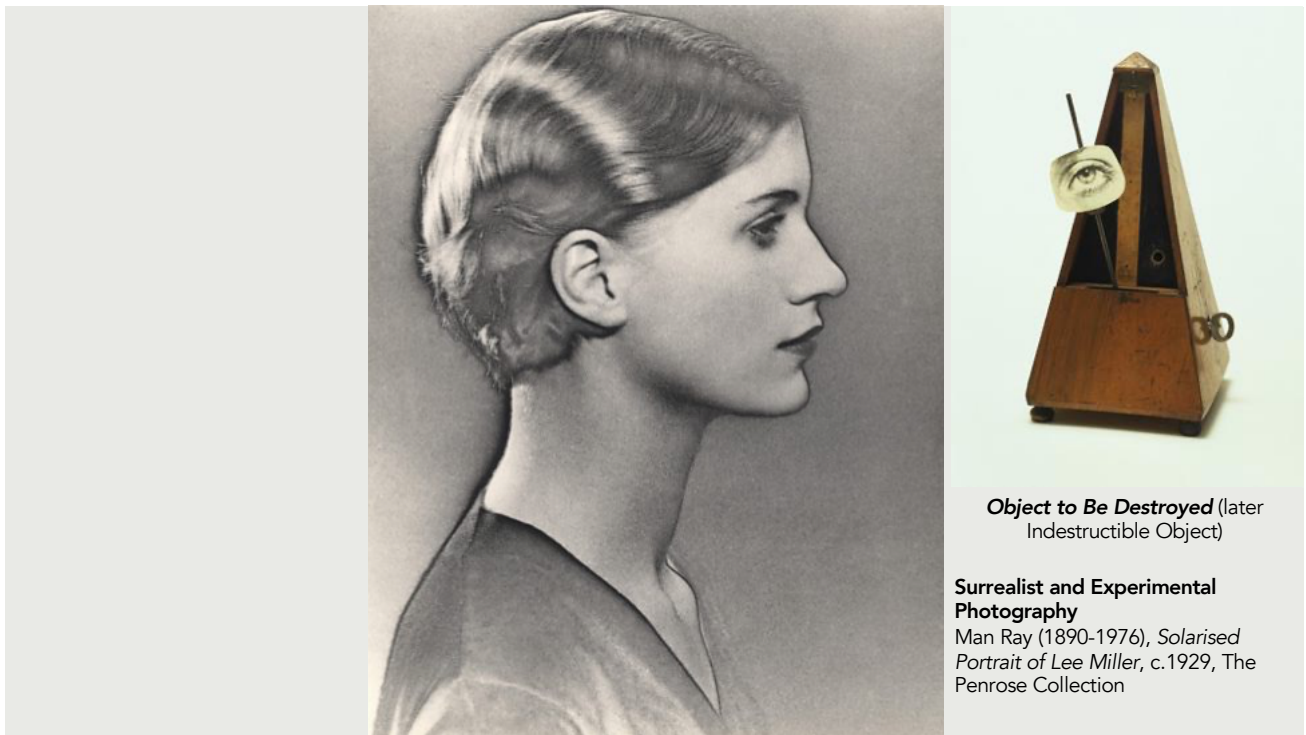
Overview: Deeply influenced by European art movements like Bauhaus, Constructivism, and Surrealism, Modernist photography embraced abstraction and new ways of seeing. Photographers moved beyond straightforward representation to explore the formal qualities of the medium itself, experimenting with light, form, and perspective.

Key Characteristics: Geometric compositions, Unusual angles, Experimentation with light and form

Notable Photographers: László Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Rodchenko, Berenice Abbott (known for her detailed urban landscapes, such as Nightview, New York, which focused on geometric form)

REFERENCES

<https://www.phillips.com/detail/alexander-rodchenko/UK040215/67>



Object to Be Destroyed (later Indestructible Object)

Surrealist and Experimental Photography
 Man Ray (1890-1976), *Solarised Portrait of Lee Miller*, c.1929, The Penrose Collection

Surrealist and Experimental Photography: Man Ray (1890-1976), *Solarised Portrait of Lee Miller*, c.1929, The Penrose Collection

- Surrealist and Experimental Photography drew inspiration from Surrealism and Dada and it sought to explore the subconscious, dreams, and the irrational. Photographers used the darkroom not for simple printing but as you see here as a laboratory for creative manipulation, challenging the camera's traditional role as a recorder of reality.
- This is a solarised photograph of Lee Miller by Man Ray, born Emmanuel Radnitzky (1890-1976).
- Their story started when Miller, the **formidable model** arrived in Man Ray's Paris studio in 1929, declaring, "**I'm your new student.**" Ray, seventeen years her senior, quickly took her not just as an apprentice, but as his **lover and collaborator** (replacing his former muse, Kiki de Montparnasse). Their **fiery, three-year relationship** became the melting pot within which crucible some of the most Surreal photographic experiments took place.
- **Man Ray**, who often **considered photography merely a means to fund his painting**, was creatively re-energized by Miller. The most famous outcome of their darkroom synergy was the solarisation technique. Solarisation was discovered very early, in the 1840s, but rediscovered and then used as a deliberate artistic technique by Lee Miller and Man Ray. It is said that Miller was developing plates when a mouse ran over her foot. She screamed and switched on the light briefly exposing the negatives she was developing. When Man Ray quickly switched the light off and tossed the plates in the fixer, the resulting

effect was the breakthrough they spent years perfecting. The brief exposure to light during the development stage results in a tone reversal that gives prints this striking, silvery halo and sooty outline, perfect for the dreamlike quality of Surrealism.

- (CLICK) Miller **left him** in 1932 to **pursue her own career and he was devastated**. His **heartbreak** led to the creation of the **Object to Be Destroyed** (later Indestructible Object), a metronome with a photograph of Miller's eye pinned to the pendulum, which he instructively encouraged others to smash "at a single blow." (CLICK)
- Despite this dramatic ending, they became **lifelong friends**. Following the Second World War—where Miller excelled as a war correspondent, as we shall see next—Man Ray and Miller and her husband, Roland Penrose, maintained what was they called a "**creative triangle of intelligences**".

NOTES

Surrealist and Experimental Photography

Era: 1920s – 1950s, revived later

Overview: Drawing inspiration from the literary and artistic movements of Surrealism and Dada, this style sought to explore the subconscious, dreams, and the irrational. Photographers used the darkroom not for simple printing but as a laboratory for creative manipulation, challenging the camera's traditional role as a recorder of reality.

Key Characteristics: Photomontage, Double exposure, Solarization, Manipulated imagery

Notable Photographers: Man Ray (a central figure in the Surrealist movement in Paris who pioneered experimental techniques), Hans Bellmer, Dora Maar, Jerry Uelsmann

REFERENCES

General: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_Ray

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Miller

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object_to_Be_Destroyed

The Partnership and Surrealist Vision: Covers their intense period of collaboration from 1929–1932, the solarisation discovery, and the evolution of their lifelong connection.

<https://mastermindparis.com/features/between-two-minds-lee-miller-man-ray-surrealist/>

On Solarisation and the Mouse Anecdote: The Mouse Interruption: Provides the specific and often-cited anecdote of Lee Miller discovering the Sabattier effect (solarisation) due to a mouse in the darkroom.

<https://mouseinterrupted.wordpress.com/tag/solarization/>

On the Post-Breakup Art (Object to Be Destroyed): The Metronome: Discusses the famous Indestructible Object (formerly Object to Be Destroyed) and how Man Ray used Miller's image (her eye) as an expression of his heartbreak after she left.

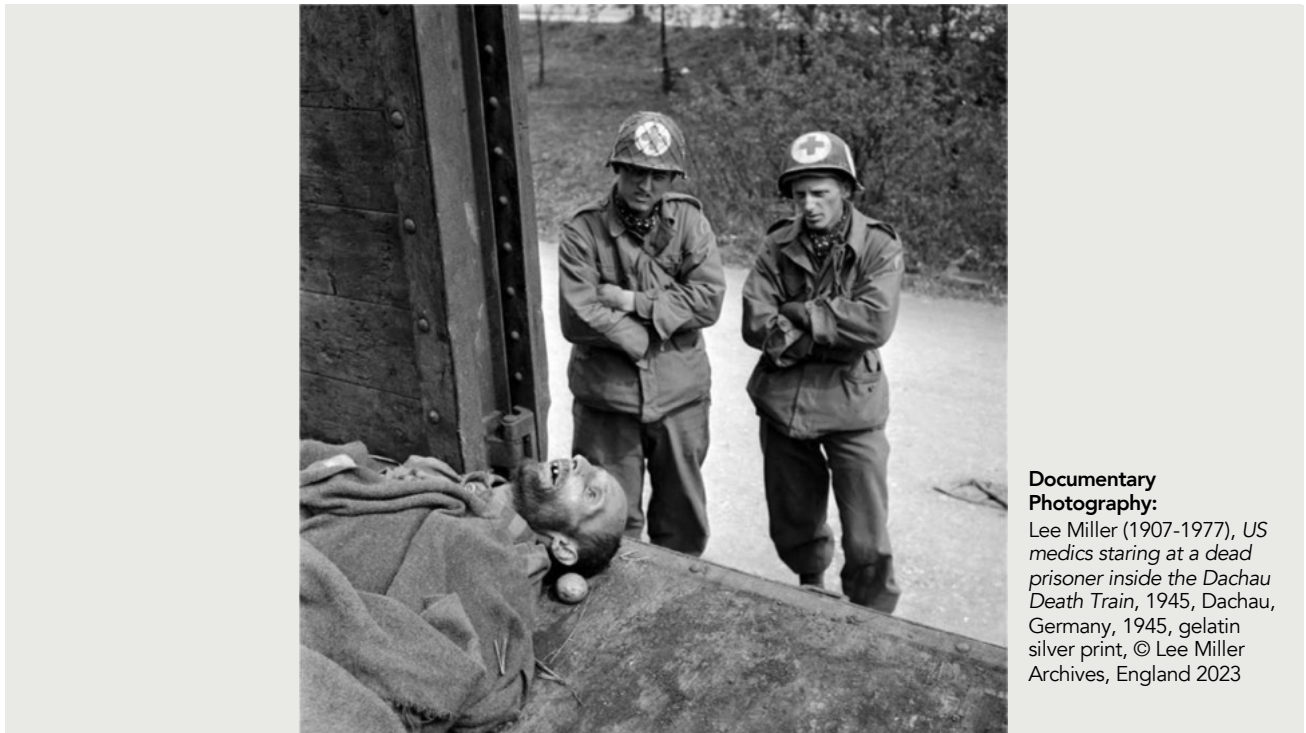
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/man-ray-1563/man-ray-lovers>

General Biographical and Contextual Information: Lee Miller's Biography (Solarisation and Career): Provides an overview of Miller's transition from model to photographer, confirming the joint refinement of solarisation and her later role as a war correspondent.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Miller

On the Iconic Portrait: MoMA Collection Entry: Confirms the details and medium for the key photograph discussed: Lee Miller (1929), gelatin silver print (solarized).

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/46890>



Documentary Photography:
Lee Miller (1907-1977), *US medics staring at a dead prisoner inside the Dachau Death Train*, 1945, Dachau, Germany, 1945, gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2023

Documentary Photography: Lee Miller (1907-1977), *US medics staring at a dead prisoner inside the Dachau Death Train*, 1945, Dachau, Germany, 1945, gelatin silver print, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2023

- I apologise for showing this documentary photograph. In the recent Lee Miller exhibition at Tate Britain photography was banned in the room where this and other concentration camp photographs were shown. However, I think it need to be shown, with respect to give a more rounded picture of Lee Miller (1907–1977).
- Her life was defined by radical shifts, transitioning from a successful American Vogue model to an accomplished Surrealist photographer in 1930s Paris.
- Her most important work came during World War II, where she served as Vogue's official war correspondent. She refused US Embassy orders to return home, instead following the Allied advance across Europe. This culminated in her arriving at Dachau concentration camp on April 30, 1945.
- This photograph, *US medics staring at a dead prisoner inside the Dachau Death Train*, 1945, is a **harrowing piece of visual testimony**. To capture the shock, Miller positioned her camera inside the carriage, among the piled corpses. The composition forces the viewer's eye past the dead bodies to the American medics, whose averted or fixed gazes embody the overwhelming horror of confronting the Nazis' systematic barbarism. The image, published in Vogue, was part of a spread Miller cabled to her editor with the urgent demand: "I IMPLORE YOU TO BELIEVE THIS IS TRUE."
- Later that same day, in Munich, she staged her renowned **photograph in Adolf**

Hitler's bathtub, a visceral act of defiance where the **dirt of Dachau** was intentionally **left on the dictator's bathmat**. This famous juxtaposition—personal cleansing juxtaposed with symbolic political defeat—perfectly showcases how Miller's art merged reportage with the surrealist's eye for the dramatic symbol, ensuring the reality of the atrocities would not be ignored. Her experience, though liberating for her career, also left her suffering from what is now understood as post-traumatic stress disorder.

NOTES

Documentary Photography

Era: 1930s – present

Overview: This style uses the principles of Straight Photography to focus on social issues, historical events, war, and the human condition. While it sometimes overlaps with photojournalism, its primary aim is often to create a lasting record or inspire social change rather than report on breaking news.

Key Characteristics: Realistic, Often black-and-white, Aims to inform or inspire change

Notable Photographers: Dorothea Lange (whose iconic photograph Migrant Mother became a powerful symbol of the Great Depression, using Straight Photography's principles for social realism), Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, Sebastião Salgado, Lee Miller

REFERENCES

<https://scispace.com/pdf/visual-testimony-lee-miller-s-dachau-57j3c574k0.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/sep/19/lee-miller-a-womans-war-exhibition-imperial-war-museum-second-world-war-dachau-hitler>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/lee-miller-witness-concentration-camps-and-fall-third-reich>

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/features/lee-miller>

<https://aperture.org/editorial/how-lee-miller-out-surrealed-the-surrealists/>

<https://www.sheilaomalley.com/?p=163214>

<https://photogpedia.com/lee-miller-quotes/>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/lee-millers-second-world-war>



Street Photography Vivian Maier (1926-2009)

Street Photography: Vivian Maier (1926-2009), took 150,000 photographs of NY, Chicago recognised after her death and of course Henri Cartier-Bresson: Street Photography (The Decisive Moment)

- Street Photography is dedicated to capturing candid, unmediated moments of everyday life in public places. Practitioners often work quickly and intuitively, aiming to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. The style is defined by its spontaneity and its focus on human interaction within the urban environment.
- Vivian Maier's (1926-2009) secret life as one of the 20th century's great street photographers was only revealed when a historian, John Maloof, bought the contents of her unpaid storage lockers at auction in 2007. The boxes contained over **100,000 negatives, prints, and undeveloped rolls of film.**
- Until then, Maier was primarily known as a fiercely private, eccentric nanny in Chicago, a "**real, live Mary Poppins,**" according to one of her former charges. This Mary Poppins, however, carried a Rolleiflex around her neck and dragged her young wards into the seedier parts of the city to broaden their perspectives.
- Her genius lay in her "**genuine curiosity; and undeniable, humanistic warmth, irony, and humour,**" (critic Colin Westerbeck). Her street photography—taken almost entirely for herself—is a masterclass in candid, unsentimental observation. She captured everyone from the affluent to the marginalized with an eye that saw both the absurdity and the dignity of city life.

- (CLICK) For someone so intent on remaining unseen it is surprising she took many self-portraits—captured in reflections on store windows and mirrors, they are often humorous, playful and sometimes deeply revealing. Her story is a perfect, modern paradox: a **fiercely independent, secretive artist** throughout her life who became a **global sensation** after her death.

NOTES

Street Photography

Era: 1950s – present

Overview: This genre is dedicated to capturing candid, unmediated moments of everyday life in public places. Practitioners often work quickly and intuitively, aiming to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. The style is defined by its spontaneity and its focus on human interaction within the urban environment.

Key Characteristics: Spontaneity, Unposed subjects, Often black-and-white, Strong compositional elements

Notable Photographers: Henri Cartier-Bresson (a master of the genre who coined the term "the decisive moment" to describe the act of capturing a fleeting event at the perfect instant), Garry Winograd, Vivian Maier, took 150,000 photographs of NY, Chicago recognised after her death, Joel Meyerowitz

- Vivian Maier is best known for her extensive body of street photography, capturing candid moments of everyday life primarily in Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles. Her most celebrated work consists of more than 150,000 photographs taken during her lifetime, mostly unrecognized until after her death in 2009. Among her best-known images are her self-portraits and striking portraits of ordinary people, including immigrants, the homeless, and street scenes reflecting the social realities and architectural changes of mid-20th century America.
- One particularly iconic work that encapsulates her style is her 1954 "Self-Portrait, New York, NY," showing her reflecting herself in a mirror while photographing with a Rolleiflex camera. Her photographs are praised for their empathy, nuance, and the way they dignify overlooked individuals, illustrating urban life as a great equalizer. Vivian Maier's archive was discovered at a Chicago thrift auction in 2007 and only publicly exhibited

posthumously, sparking worldwide acclaim and retrospectives of her work including exhibitions like "Unseen Work" at Fotografiska New York (1950s–1980s) and shows dedicated to her colour photography and newspaper portraits.[2][6][10]

- She reportedly once said, "If you really have something to say better to be behind the camera than in front of it."
- In summary, Vivian Maier's best known works are her raw, intimate candid street photographs and self-portraits that capture the human condition in urban America from the 1950s to the 1980s, often taken with a Rolleiflex camera and never seen by the public during her life.[6][10][2]

REFERENCES

<https://mymodernmet.com/vivian-maier-fotografiska-nyc-exhibit/>

[1](<https://www.vivianmaier.com>)

[2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivian_Maier)

[3](<https://www.dostreetphotography.com/blog/vivian-maier>)

[4](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/vivian-maier>)

[5](<https://www.vivianmaier.com/about-vivian-maier/>)

[6](<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-vivian-maiers-street-photography>)

[7](<https://www.artnet.com/artists/vivian-maier/>)

[8](<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/news/this-must-see-exhibit-showcases-the-work-of-one-of-the-greatest-photographers-of-the-20th-century-060424>)

[9](<https://artpil.com/news/vivian-maier-works-in-colour/>)

[10](<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2024/06/vivian-maier-unseen-works/>)

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/meet-vivian-maier-reclusive-nanny-street-photographer-20th-century-180984665/>

<https://www.dostreetphotography.com/blog/vivian-maier>

<https://www.chicagomag.com/chicago-magazine/january-2011/vivian-maier-street-photographer/>

<https://www.vivianmaier.com/about-vivian-maier/>

<https://commonedge.org/vivian-maier-nanny-with-a-rolleiflex/>



Colour Photography: William Eggleston (b. 1939), *Untitled (Memphis)*, also known as *The Red Ceiling*, c. 1973

Colour Photography: William Eggleston (b. 1939), *Untitled (Memphis)*, also known as *The Red Ceiling*, c. 1973

- It is important to understand that for much of the 20th century, **colour was associated with commercial work** and snapshots, while **black-and-white was the standard for fine art**. This changed in the 1960s and 70s, as a new generation of photographers began to explore colour's expressive potential, proving it could be a serious artistic medium.
- So this photograph by William Eggleston's called *Untitled (Memphis)*, universally known as "The Red Ceiling", is a powerful statement and it brought colour photography into the hallowed halls of fine art. Before Eggleston, colour was widely dismissed as "vulgar" and merely suitable for advertising or family snapshots, while serious artistic photography remained the domain of black and white.
- "The Red Ceiling" is a stark shot of a single bare lightbulb on an intensely crimson ceiling in a friend's guest room in Mississippi. The work uses the technically demanding dye-transfer process, which yields extraordinarily rich, saturated, and permanent colours. Eggleston embraced the colour red, which he described as the "most difficult colour to work with." He famously said of the print: "When you look at the dye it is like red blood that's wet on the wall."
- The key to colour photography's acceptance lay in Eggleston's 1976 solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the museum's first-ever show devoted to colour photographs. It was initially met with **hostile reviews**, but it was a **crucial event** that broke the colour barrier. Eggleston was

unfazed by the initial criticism, saying, **"The immediate reviews were very hostile, but they didn't bother me—I had the attitude that I was right."**

- He was a maverick and partied hard, sometimes missing his own exhibition openings as he was fast asleep in his hotel room. But his pictures of everyday, mundane scenes—the inside of a freezer, a supermarket aisle, a tricycle elevated the ordinary to fine art.

NOTES

Colour Photography

Era: 1960s – present

Overview: For much of the 20th century, colour was associated with commercial work and snapshots, while black-and-white was the standard for fine art. This changed in the 1960s and 70s, as a new generation of photographers began to explore colour's expressive potential, proving it could be a serious artistic medium.

Key Characteristics: Emphasis on colour relationships, Use of colour to evoke a specific mood or emotional response, Realism

Notable Photographers: William Eggleston Untitled (Red Ceiling) 1976, Stephen Shore, Nan Goldin, Alex Webb

- William Eggleston is best known for his pioneering colour photography that transformed the mundane into art with his distinctive use of vibrant, high-chroma hues. His most famous work is the photograph known as "The Red Ceiling" (officially Untitled, Greenwood, Mississippi, 1973). This striking image features a bare, exposed lightbulb against an intense red ceiling, elevated by Eggleston's dye-transfer printing process, which beautifully exaggerates the rich cherry-red colour. This photograph stands out for its formal beauty and unsettling, almost cinematic quality, reflecting Eggleston's reputation as a "great poet of the colour red." The unsettling red hue has been likened to "red blood that's wet on the wall," giving the image an evocative and provocative aura.
- Eggleston was a key figure credited with legitimizing colour photography as fine art. His work is characterized by a democratic approach to subject matter, treating everyday scenes and ordinary people with equal importance. Besides "The Red Ceiling," Eggleston's photographs of ordinary life in the American South, such as scenes inside convenience

stores or everyday street views, contribute to his legacy as a revolutionary photographer who captured beauty and significance in the banal and overlooked moments of everyday life.

- His 1976 solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, titled "William Eggleston's Guide," was a landmark event, marking one of the first major solo shows of colour photography in a prestigious art institution, and it helped shift perceptions of colour photography from commercial usage to fine art. Other important works include various portraits and street scenes that reflect his unique eye and democratic photographic philosophy.[1][2][3][7][8]

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Red_Ceiling

[Sources for William Eggleston, Untitled \(Memphis\)](#)

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6497953>

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/108EJ1>

<https://www.davidzwirner.com/exhibitions/2022/exceptional-works-william-eggleston>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Red_Ceiling

<https://www.davidzwirner.com/news/2017/how-william-eggleston-changed-the-way-we-see-the-world>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-eggleston-5327/william-eggleston-godfather-colour-photography>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/jul/25/photography1>

<https://photogpedia.com/william-eggleston-quotes/>

[1](<https://www.davidzwirner.com/news/2020/william-eggleston-s-colourful-photographs-of-the-everyday-shocked-the-art-world>)

[2](<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/eggleston-william/>)

[3](<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-william-egglestons-colourful-photographs-everyday-shocked-art>)

[4](<https://jamesmaherphotography.com/historical-photography-articles/photographing-boring-history-photography-of-william-eggleston/>)

[5](<http://emilyallenphotographyblog.blogspot.com/2016/11/william-eggleston.html>)

[6](<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/51630>)

[7](<https://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/william-eggleston>)

[8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Eggleston)

[9](<https://www.cluster-london.com/william-eggleston-article-pp-cluster-2020>)



Conceptual Photography:
Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945), *One and Three Chairs*, 1965

Conceptual Photography: Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945), *One and Three Chairs*, 1965

- Conceptual Art prioritises the idea or concept behind the work of art over its aesthetic and technical qualities. Conceptual photographers value an idea, a performance, or a question, over a representation of a person or scene so challenging the normal assumptions we make about the role of photography.
- Joseph Kosuth is best known for this groundbreaking conceptual artwork ***One and Three Chairs*** (1965). It features a physical wooden chair, a photograph of that chair mounted on the wall, and an enlarged photographic print of the dictionary definition of the word "chair." By juxtaposing **the object, its image, and the linguistic definition**, Kosuth challenges viewers to reflect on the nature of representation, meaning, and language. The piece questions what truly defines the essence of a chair: the physical object, its representation, or the concept conveyed through language.
- ***One and Three Chairs*** is considered a landmark of Conceptual art. It emphasises the primacy of ideas over traditional aesthetics. It visually and intellectually explores the relationship between words, objects, and their meanings, influenced heavily by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. [1][2][4][9][10]
- Other notable works include his neon text installations such as *Five Words in Orange Neon* and public commissions such as his large-scale *Rosetta Stone* facsimile in Figeac, France, which further explore language, meaning, and cultural communication. [2][3]

NOTES

Conceptual Photography

Era: 1960s – present

Overview: Emerging from the broader Conceptual Art movement, this style prioritises the idea or concept behind the photograph over its aesthetic and technical qualities. Here, the photograph serves as documentation of an idea, a performance, or a question, often challenging the very nature of photography itself.

Key Characteristics: Staged or constructed images, Text integration, Seriality, Emphasis on meaning over aesthetics

Notable Photographers: John Baldessari, Cindy Sherman (whose staged self-portraits explore identity and representation), Barbara Kruger, Sophie Calle

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs

[1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Kosuth)

[2](<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/kosuth-joseph/>)

[3](<https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/the-question-joseph-kosuth-in-conversation/>)

[4](<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81435>)

[5](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/joseph-kosuth>)

[6](<https://www.skny.com/artists/joseph-kosuth>)

[7](<https://spruethmagers.com/artists/joseph-kosuth/>)

[8](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/joseph-kosuth-1437>)

[9](<https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collections/artwork/one-and-three-chairs>)

[10](<https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/the-1st-at-moderna-joseph-kosuth/>)



New Topographics:
Robert Adams (b.
1937), *Mobile Homes*,
Jefferson County,
Colorado, 1973

New Topographics: Robert Adams (b. 1937), *Mobile Homes*, Jefferson County, Colorado, 1973

- This style marked a significant break from the romantic and majestic landscape traditions, particularly those of photographers like **Ansel Adams**. Practitioners of New Topographics turned to man-altered landscapes such as suburban sprawl, industrial parks, and unremarkable cityscapes, capturing them with a deliberately neutral, deadpan style.
- Robert Adams (born 1937) is best known for his restrained yet unsettling depictions of the transformed landscapes of the American West. He was a literature scholar, he earned a PhD in English from the University of Southern California, before he turned to photography in the 1960s after settling in Colorado. His adopted state became his lifelong subject, specifically the suburban sprawl, deforestation, and industrial developments that reshaped it.
- This work shows his quiet, dispassionate style. We see a row of trailers against a flat, overexposed sky, their geometry and repetition reducing the scene to something both banal and haunting. There is no overt commentary—Adams avoids moralising—but the image exposes the paradox of modern settlement in the West. A landscape once celebrated for its freedom and grandeur, now parcelled into uniform lots.
- Adams was a central figure in the 1975 exhibition ***New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape***. The exhibition marked a decisive shift in landscape photography—from Ansel Adams's majestic wilderness to the sober documentation of suburbia and industrial sprawl.

NOTES

New Topographics

Era: 1970s

Overview: This style marked a significant break from the romantic and majestic landscape traditions, particularly those of photographers like Ansel Adams. Practitioners of New Topographics turned their lenses to the man-altered landscape—suburban sprawl, industrial parks, and unremarkable cityscapes—capturing them with a deliberately neutral, deadpan style.

Key Characteristics: Deadpan style, Neutral tone, Suburban and industrial scenes

Notable Photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore (whose work also represents a pioneering use of colour to document the American vernacular landscape)

REFERENCES



Diane Arbus (1923-1971), *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.*, 1962, 30.2 × 29.5 cm

Diane Arbus (1923-1971), *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.*, 1962, 30.2 × 29.5 cm

- During the 1950s and 1960s, portrait photography underwent a significant transformation. Moving beyond traditional studio conventions, photographers began exploring more intimate, psychologically complex, and sometimes unsettling representations of the individual. The period is marked by a tension between documentary realism and experimental approaches, often highlighting the subject's identity, social context, or inner life rather than merely recording their appearance. This era laid the groundwork for later conceptual and feminist portraiture, using the human figure not just as a subject but as a vehicle to interrogate culture, identity, and perception.
- Diane Arbus (1923–1971) began in commercial photography but shifted to fine art portraits in the 1950s and 1960s, photographing circus performers, transgender people, dwarfs, and other outsiders. Her style is marked by empathy, direct engagement, and a stark, unadorned aesthetic. She struggled with depression and ended her life in 1971. Despite her early death, her work profoundly influenced the ethics and psychology of portraiture, shaping how photographers approach identity, marginality, and representation.

NOTES

Portrait Photography

Era: 1950s and 1960s

Overview: During the 1950s and 1960s, portrait photography underwent a

significant transformation. Moving beyond traditional studio conventions, photographers began exploring more intimate, psychologically complex, and sometimes unsettling representations of the individual. The period is marked by a tension between documentary realism and experimental approaches, often highlighting the subject's identity, social context, or inner life rather than merely recording their appearance. This era laid the groundwork for later conceptual and feminist portraiture, using the human figure not just as a subject but as a vehicle to interrogate culture, identity, and perception.

Key Characteristics: an emphasis on psychological depth and character, the use of both formal studio settings and informal or personal spaces, an experimentation with framing, lighting, and scale to convey mood, the exploration of identity, otherness, and the uncanny and often black-and-white, though colour was emerging

Notable Photographers: Diane Arbus, Francesca Woodman, Richard Avedon and Irving Penn

- This lifetime print shown above was made by Arbus of Child with a Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C. 1962 and is exceedingly rare. Only six other extant examples are known, and reside in The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and four private American collections. This is the only print of this image to have been signed by Arbus on the recto. (Christies)

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_with_Toy_Hand_Grenade_in_Central_Park

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5895980>



Feminist art: Francesca Woodman (1958-1981), *Eel Series*, 1978

Feminist art: Francesca Woodman (1958-1981), *Eel Series*, 1978, committed suicide in 1981 aged 22 (also conceptual, surreal and experimental)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/woodman-untitled-from-eel-series-venice-italy-ar00348>

- Francesca Woodman (1958–1981) is difficult to characterise but I have categorised her as a Feminist Photographer. The Second Wave of feminism used photography to critique the patriarchal portrayal and objectification of women in art and the media. Artists subverted the "**male gaze**" and explored female identity, domesticity, and the body, often through self-portraiture and conceptual work to assert female autonomy.
- Despite dying when she was 22 she produced one of the most **haunting and influential bodies** of photographic work of the late twentieth century. I must admit here to a bias, for me she is one of the greatest photographers who has ever lived alongside Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), Ansel Adams (1902–1984) and Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004).
- She was born in Denver, Colorado, to parents who were artists and she studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and spent periods in Rome and New York. Her work, including this ***Eel Series*** (1978). Her work is characterised by intimate, often unsettling **black-and-white self-portraits** in which her body merges with decaying interiors, mirrors, and symbolic props.
- In ***Eel Series***, Woodman poses with a **live eel**, her pale figure entwined with the slick, animate creature. The image is both **sensual and disturbing**, exploring boundaries between **control and surrender, self and other**. Like much of her

work, it reflects a **distinctly feminist engagement** with the female body—**not as object of male desire**, but as a site of **vulnerability, power, and transformation**.

- At a time when feminist photography sought to reclaim representation from patriarchal norms, Woodman's approach was intensely personal, poetic rather than polemical. She internalised feminist questions about identity and visibility, expressing them through performance, concealment, and metamorphosis.
- Woodman's **artistic promise was recognised only within small circles** during her lifetime. She struggled with **depression and the indifference of a largely male-dominated art world**. In 1981, aged twenty-two, she took her own life in New York. Posthumously, **her photographs have gained immense acclaim** for their emotional depth, technical precision, and psychological complexity. Today, Woodman stands as a **cult figure in feminist art**.

NOTES

Feminist Photography

Era: 1970s and 1980s

Overview: Arising from the Second Wave of feminism, this movement used the lens to critique the patriarchal portrayal and objectification of women in art and media. Artists subverted the "male gaze" and explored female identity, domesticity, and the body, often through self-portraiture and conceptual work to assert female autonomy.

Key characteristics: subversion of the "male gaze", the female body and self-portraiture, deconstruction of stereotypes and a focus on personal experience

Notable Photographers: Francesca Woodman, Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesca_Woodman

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-unseen-sides-of-francesca-woodman>



Photojournalism:
Martin Parr (b. 1952),
New Brighton,
England, from *The
Last Resort*, 1983-85

Photojournalism: Martin Parr (b. 1952), *New Brighton, England*, from *The Last Resort*, 1983-85

1980s, social documentary photography

- Photojournalism is the use of images to tell a **timely, objective, and truthful narrative** about an event or subject, often with the aim of social commentary. The key breakthrough came with the **Leica 35mm camera**, introduced in **1925**. Its portability, quiet operation, and fast 35mm film format revolutionised photography, enabling photographers to work unobtrusively in public spaces and in the field allowing them unprecedented access to conflicts, social issues, and daily life often for major illustrated magazines.
- Martin Parr was born in 1952 in Epsom and studied photography at Manchester Polytechnic, where he became interested in capturing everyday experiences with a satirical, yet sympathetic eye. He emerged in the 1970s alongside a generation of British photographers committed to social documentary, but his approach diverged through his embrace of colour, humour, and the banal realities of modern consumer culture.
- *New Brighton, England* (1983–85) is part of his series ***The Last Resort***. It documents the English seaside town of New Brighton, a once-thriving holiday destination that had fallen into decline. Parr's photographs capture the vibrancy, absurdity, and sometimes stark sadness of working-class holidaymakers. His subjects—sunbathers, swimmers, families, and the elderly—are rendered with uncompromising honesty, often highlighting eccentric behaviours, garish fashion, and kitsch surroundings. Using saturated colour,

tight framing, and a formal attention to composition, Parr both celebrates and critiques his subjects, presenting social realities that are simultaneously affectionate, humorous, and discomforting.

- ***The Last Resort*** was a **turning point in photojournalism** and documentary photography as it challenged contemporary notions of taste, propriety, and the picturesque by focusing on ordinary people in everyday environments. His work continues to combine sharp observation, social critique, and vivid colour to explore contemporary life in Britain and beyond.

NOTES

Photojournalism

Era: 1930s to 1970s

Overview: Photojournalism is the use of images to tell a timely, objective, and truthful narrative about an event or subject, often with the aim of social commentary. The Golden Age saw the rise of the portable 35mm camera, allowing photographers unprecedented access to conflicts, social issues, and daily life for major illustrated magazines.

Key characteristics: timeliness and objectivity, the “decisive moment”, photo essay format, empathy and humanism

Notable Photographers: Martin Parr, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Dorothea Lange

REFERENCES

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/martin-parr-the-last-resort/>



Postmodern Photography:
Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978

Postmodern Photography: Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978

- We now come to artists who systematically critiqued the core beliefs of modernism, such as originality, authorship, and the notion of a single truth. Through strategies like appropriation and simulation, they questioned the photograph's status as an authentic document and explored how images construct our understanding of reality and identity.
- This is by Cindy Sherman (born 1954) is one of the most **influential American artists of the late twentieth century**, renowned for her use of photography to **question identity, gender, and the construction of reality itself**. She trained at the State University College at Buffalo and began her ***Untitled Film Stills*** series in the late 1970s, shortly after moving to New York. In these small black-and-white photographs, including this one, ***Untitled Film Still #21*** (1978), she is the model—posing as archetypal female characters drawn from the visual language of **mid-century cinema**.
- She dresses and presents herself as one of the many female stereotypes in our society—secretary, film star, housewife, seductress and so on. By doing this she draws attention to the way mass media creates our identity, how our image of ourselves is moulded by these stereotypes.
- Here she appears as a young woman in a city street, turning her head as if suddenly aware of being watched. The image feels familiar—like a still from an American film noir—but it is entirely fabricated. There is no real movie, only the echo of our cultural memory of similar scenes. She constructs these stereotypes so she can dismantles the illusion: she shows that femininity, and of course

masculinity, are a performance assembled from poses, gestures, and images we have seen.

- So her aim is not self-portraiture but deconstruction. Her photographs operate as mirrors held up to a culture addicted to surface appearance. She forces us to confront how easily we create narrative and fashion our desires from image we have seen. This in turn demonstrates the **instability of our identity** and the **artificiality of what is called photographic truth**, turning the medium against its own claim to **objectivity and realism**.

NOTES

Postmodern Photography

Era: 1980s – 2000s

Overview: In this era, photographers began to systematically critique the core tenets of modernism, such as originality, authorship, and the notion of a single truth. Through strategies like appropriation and simulation, they questioned the photograph's status as an authentic document and explored how images construct our understanding of reality and identity.

Key Characteristics: Irony, Appropriation (re-using or borrowing imagery from other artists or media to question originality), Simulation, Pastiche, Identity politics

Notable Photographers: Cindy Sherman (whose work also represents a foundational example of Conceptual photography), Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Jeff Wall

REFERENCES



Digital & Manipulated Photography: Andreas Gursky (b. 1955), *Rhein II*, 1999

Digital & Manipulated Photography: Andreas Gursky (b. 1955), *Rhein II*, 1999, 156.4 x 308.3 cm, Tate

Large-Scale Hyper-realistic Landscape

- We now come to digitally manipulated photography using tools such as Photoshop. Image manipulation has existed since photography's birth but the process became much more accessible and powerful. This expanded the creative possibilities available to artists to construct entirely new realities, blur the line between photography and painting, and create hyperreal or fantastical scenes.
- This extremely large colour photograph is ***Rhine II*** by Andreas Gursky (b. 1955). It shows a stretch of the Rhine outside Düsseldorf. The image is immediately legible as a view of a straight stretch of water, but it is also an abstract configuration of horizontal bands of colour of varying widths. The horizon line bisects the picture almost exactly in the middle. Above it the overcast sky is a blue-grey. In the bottom half of the image, the river is a glassy, unbroken band between green stripes of grass. At the bottom of the picture in the immediate foreground is a narrow path. Below it is another thin band of manicured green grass.
- Gursky works with a medium format camera, taking pictures which he then scans into a computer where he can manipulate them. His aim in using digital technology is not to create fictions but rather to heighten the image of something that exists in the world.
- Gursky **digitally erased buildings** on the far side of the river from his picture.

This manipulation enhances the image visually, giving it more formal coherence. He has described this, saying, **'there is a particular place with a view over the Rhine which has somehow always fascinated me, but it didn't suffice for a picture as it basically constituted only part of a picture. I carried this idea for a picture around with me for a year and a half and thought about whether I ought perhaps to change my viewpoint ... In the end I decided to digitalise the pictures and leave out the elements that bothered me'** (quoted in Annelie Lütgens, *Shrines and Ornaments: A Look into the Display Cabinet*, Andreas Gursky: Fotografien 1994-1998, p.xvi).

- Gursky said, **'I wasn't interested in an unusual, possibly picturesque view of the Rhine, but in the most contemporary possible view of it. Paradoxically, this view of the Rhine cannot be obtained in situ; a fictitious construction was required to provide an accurate image of a modern river'** (quoted in *'... I generally let things develop slowly'*, Andreas Gursky: Fotografien 1994-1998, p.ix).

NOTES

Digital & Manipulated Photography

Era: 1990s – present

Overview: While image manipulation has existed since photography's inception, the advent of digital tools like Photoshop made the process infinitely more accessible and powerful. This technological shift expanded the creative possibilities exponentially, allowing artists to construct entirely new realities, blur the line between photography and painting, and create hyperreal or fantastical scenes.

Key Characteristics: Heavily edited or digitally constructed images, Hyperreal or fantastical

Notable Photographers: Andreas Gursky, Loretta Lux, Erik Johansson

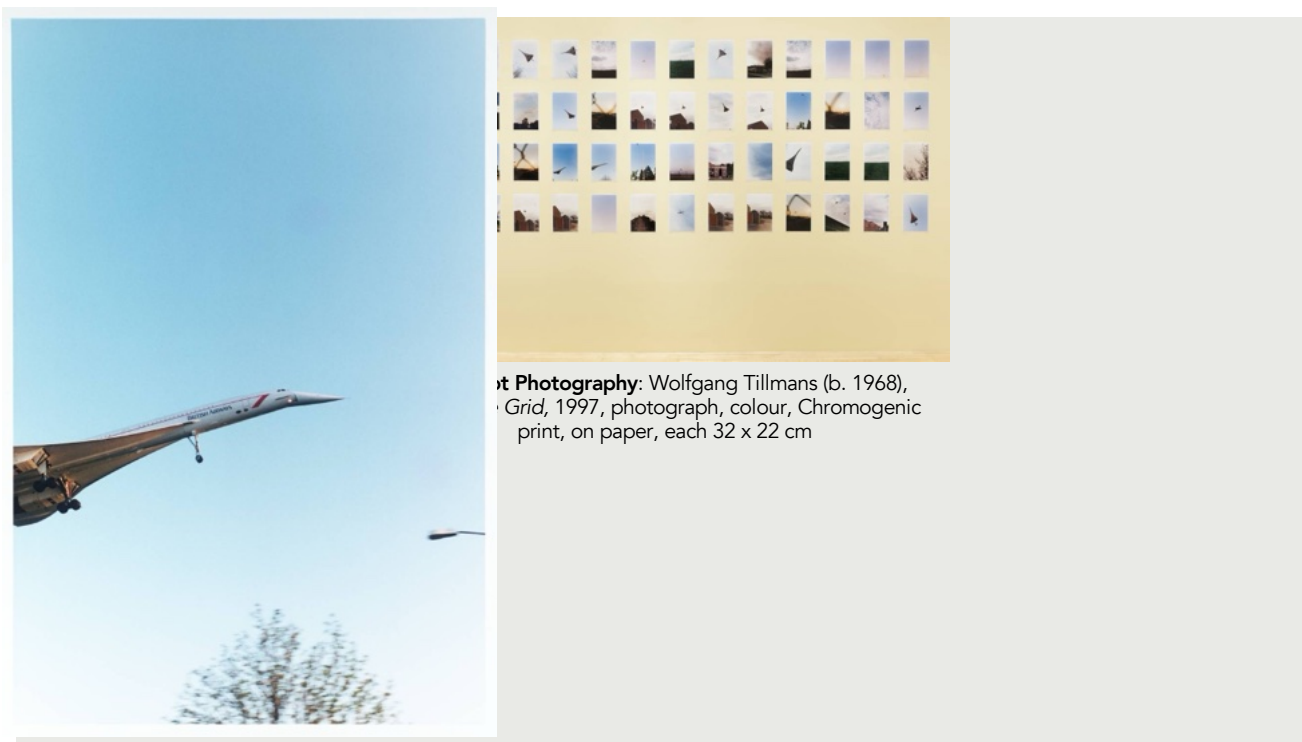
- "The *Rhine II* represents a tendency in Gursky's work towards abstraction. Throughout his career he has periodically made images whose formal and conceptual simplicity place them closer to the tradition of abstract art. *Untitled I*, 1993 is a close-up of an industrial carpet that recalls a grey monochrome painting. The grid-like ceiling depicted in *Brasília, General Assembly I*, 1994 has affinities with minimal objects. The *Rhine II* shares with

these earlier photographs an emphasis on textures; the distinctions between the shimmering gloss of the river, the smudged softness of the clouds, the lush carpet of the verges and the hard matte path lend the photograph sensual contrast.

- The photograph is a reworking of an earlier image, *The Rhine*, 1996. The earlier work has a slightly higher and flatter viewpoint and a more uniformly grey sky. As Peter Galassi, Chief Curator of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, has pointed out, both images have been 'festooned by critic's invocations of Barnett Newman' (Peter Galassi, 'Gursky's World', Andreas Gursky, p.41). Newman (1905-70) favoured vertical compositions with straight lines or zips in a contrasting colour interrupting the monochrome surface of his canvases (see Adam, 1951-2, Tate T01091). Gursky's images read like horizontal versions of Newman paintings.
- Gursky's contemporary view of the Rhine also reflects historic depictions of the German landscape. The same subject was treated by Anselm Kiefer (born 1945) in his large book of woodcuts *The Rhine*, 1981 (Tate T04128). Like the seascapes of Gerhard Richter (born 1932), Gursky's photograph is a detached comment on the sublime connotations of Romanticism. Equally, the figurative content of the picture serves to gently parody the sublime connotations of Abstract Expressionism." (Tate)

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gursky-the-rhine-ii-p78372>



Snapshot Photography: Wolfgang Tillmans (b. 1968), *Concorde Grid*, 1997, photograph, colour, Chromogenic print, on paper, each 32 x 22 cm

Snapshot Photography: Wolfgang Tillmans (b. 1968), *Concorde Grid*, 1997, photograph, colour, Chromogenic print, on paper, each 32 x 22 cm

Wolfgang Tillmans *astro crusto*, a 2012, used to advertise the recent Tillman exhibition at Tate Modern

- Snapshot Photography or Snapshot Aesthetic is a form of art photography that **mimics** the casual, unposed, and technically imperfect images of **amateur photography**. It features **unconventional framing**, tilted horizons, grain, blur, and flash to convey immediacy. Its subjects are often intimate, everyday, or previously marginalised moments, aiming for an unfiltered sense of real life and raw, personal documentation
- In 2000 the Turner prize was won by Wolfgang Tillmans for a series of photographs of **Concorde from ground level**, under the flight path and outside the airport perimeter fence. He said the photographs "**are a representation of an unprivileged gaze or view ... I like to assume exactly the position that everybody can take**".
- Rather than thinking of Concorde as luxurious and inaccessible, he celebrates our **desire for a utopian future** when previously unimaginable technology becomes part of everyday life. Tillmans took the photographs **before Concorde was retired in 2003** following the crash three years earlier in which **all passengers and crew were killed**. Knowing this perhaps changes the way we perceive the photographs. I can now perhaps been seen as our naive desire for a utopian future destroyed by a dystopian reality.

NOTES

Snapshot Aesthetic

Era: 1950s to 1970s

Overview: An art photography that mimics the casual, unposed, and technically imperfect images of amateur photography. It features unconventional framing, tilted horizons, grain, blur, and flash to convey immediacy. Its subjects are often intimate, everyday, or previously marginalized moments, aiming for an unfiltered sense of real life and raw, personal documentation

Key characteristics: immediacy, spontaneity, technical imperfections, informal composition, intimate subject matter and non-hierarchical

Key Photographers, Robert Frank, Garry Winograd, Lee Friedlander, Nan Goldin, William Eggleston and Wolfgang Tillman

- Other entries included a large painting by Glenn Brown based very closely on a science fiction illustration published some years previously. Michael Raedecker and Tomoko Takahashi were also nominated.
- One of the earliest photographers who took photographs representing the common view was the American photographer Stephen Shore (b. 1947) and his pioneering colour photographs taken on his trip across America and published as *Uncommon Places* (1982).
- **Stuckism** is an international art movement founded in 1999 by Billy Childish and Charles Thomson to promote figurative painting as opposed to conceptual art. By May 2017 the initial group of 13 British artists had expanded to 236 groups in 52 countries. The group has demonstrated annually at Tate Britain against the Turner Prize since 2000, sometimes dressed in clown costumes. They have also come out in opposition to the Charles Saatchi-patronised Young British Artists.

BIO:TILLMANS

- **Wolfgang Tillmans** (born 1968) is a **German fine-art photographer**. Tillmans came to **England from Germany in 1990 when he was 22** to study at **Bournemouth** and Poole College of Art and Design. He had already begun taking and exhibiting the kind of photographs for which he has become known – colour images with a **snapshot aesthetic** apparently recording **ordinary moments** in his and his friends' lives. Inspired by the

rave culture of the late 1980s in which he was an enthusiastic participant, he took a camera to a **Hamburg nightclub** and sent the resulting photographs to i-D magazine, who printed a selection in May 1989. Throughout the early 1990s, i-D magazine commissioned spreads from Tillmans, whose pictures of **young people** and the **clubbing scene** quickly extended to subversive fashion shoots. With the collaboration of his subjects he began setting up scenarios which reflected his personal lifestyle and fantasies. His styles encompass **portraiture, documentary, still-life, landscape** and more recently, a **unique form of abstraction** created by manipulating light on photographic paper. He has said of his photographs that 'they are a representation of an unprivileged gaze or view ... In photography I like to assume exactly the **unprivileged position**, the position that everybody can take, that chooses to sit at an airplane window or chooses to climb a tower.'

- His diverse body of work is distinguished by observation of his surroundings and an ongoing investigation of the photographic medium's foundations. Tillmans was the **first photographer – and also the first non-British person – to be awarded the Turner Prize**. He has also been awarded the Hasselblad Award, the Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal, the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition's Charles Wollaston Award, The Culture Prize of the German Society for Photography, and is a member of the Royal Academy of Arts. Tillmans lives in Berlin and London.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2000>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/tillmans-concorde-grid-p11674>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/feb/13/wolfgang-tillmans-photographer-interview-tate-modern>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/politics-lobsters-wolfgang-tillmans-2017-tate-modern-review/>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/wolfgang-tillmans-2017>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/wolfgang-tillmans-2747>



Contemporary & Hybrid Styles:
Christy Lee Rogers,
An image from her
Muses or Hybrids
series, 2017

Contemporary & Hybrid Styles: Christy Lee Rogers, An image from her Muses or Hybrids series, 2017

- Contemporary and Hybrid art photography is eclectic and blends genres, media, and disciplines. Artists frequently integrate photography with video, installation, and mixed media, often using their work to engage with pressing global themes such as identity, ecology, globalization, and social justice.
- Here Christy Lee Rogers **Hybrids** series (2017) shows human figures floating underwater, with flowers from South Africa and Hawai i, where she was born. The dark pool is the stage, light refracts through water, fabrics swirl, petals drift and this creates a hybrid of human bodies and botanical forms. The result is neither purely painting nor conventional portrait photography but an image suspended between them. Here work is in demand and Deutsche Grammophone commissioned her to produce the album cover art for a boxed set of classical music and Apple to create underwater images with the iPhone 11 Pro.

NOTES

Contemporary & Hybrid Styles

Era: 2000s – present

Overview: Contemporary art photography is characterised by its eclecticism and the blending of genres, media, and disciplines. Artists frequently integrate photography with video, installation, and mixed media, often using their work to engage with pressing global themes such as identity, ecology, globalisation, and

social justice.

Key Characteristics: Mixed media, Installation, Video integration, AI-generated elements, Social commentary

Notable Photographers/Artists: Christy Lee Rogers, Zanele Muholi, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Thomas Ruff, Trevor Paglen

Christy Lee Rogers was born in Honolulu, Hawai i; she studied Fine Art/Theatre at the University of Hawai i and Film & Telecommunications at San Diego State University. She is based between Hawai i and Nashville, Tennessee. Known for her underwater photography, she stages human figures in water at night, harnessing light and movement to create images that resemble painting. Her career exhibits major solo shows internationally, and she has secured high-level commissions that reflect her command of this aesthetic. Rogers underwater photography [3][4] has been exhibited in the United States, France, and Monaco. Her work was commissioned by Deutsche Grammophone to provide the album cover art for a boxed set of classical music,[5] and by Apple to create underwater images with the iPhone 11 Pro.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christy_Lee_Rogers

<https://anthology-magazine.com/arts/christy-lee-rogers-muses/>



Photo-Painting and Abstraction, Gerhard Richter (b. 1932), 11.2.98, 1998, 10 × 14.7 cm

- Photo-Painting and Abstraction is a conceptual approach that challenges the medium's role by merging photography's apparent objectivity with the subjectivity of painting. Artists, here Gerhard Richter, blur, scrape, layer, or deliberately misuse the processes of both media to question representation, authorship, and the notion of a single "truthful" image.
- Since the mid 1980s, Gerhard Richter has created more than 2,000 overpainted photographs. This extensive body of work illustrates Richter's wide range of creative achievements in this medium which is described in his book ***The Overpainted Photographs, A Comprehensive Catalogue***, published in the UK in December 2024 and in the US in February 2025.
- In this work there is a figure in a floral dress over which Richter has applied broad green swathes of paint across forehead and mouth in a disruptive gesture.
- This is typical of photo-painting: the photographic image invites recognition but the paint wrecks that easy reading. The figure's gaze remains visible, but the painted streaks function as barriers to conventional interpretation. The work sits in Richter's ongoing investigation of abstraction: though the underlying image is figurative, the paint marks behave like abstract gestures, dragging, layering, transforming. It forces us to ask: is this a photograph that becomes painting, or a painting that uses photograph? And what does that mean for reality, memory and representation?

NOTES

Photo-Painting and Abstraction

Era: 1960s and 1970s

Overview: A conceptual approach that challenges the medium's role by merging photographic objectivity with the material subjectivity of painting. Artists blur, scrape, layer, or deliberately misuse the processes of both media to question representation, authorship, and the notion of a single "truthful" image.

Key characteristics: blurring and scraping, appropriation, process over subject and challenging authenticity

Notable Photographers: Gerhard Richter, Thomas Ruff, Wolfgang Tillmann, Sigmar Polke and Barbara Kasten

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerhard_Richter

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/sep/22/gerhard-richter-tate-retrospective-panorama>

<https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/overpainted-photographs/family-88/11298-14250?categoryid=19&p=1&sp=32&pg=9>



Social Media & Mobile Photography: François Goglin, Cours Mirabeau à Aix-en-Provence, Bouches-du-Rhône, France, 28 June 2017, 14:34:59

Social Media & Mobile Photography: François Goglin, Cours Mirabeau à Aix-en-Provence, Bouches-du-Rhône, France, 28 June 2017, 14:34:59

- The rise of smartphones and social media platforms like Instagram has led to a profound democratisation of photography, creating new aesthetic movements and visual languages. This style is defined by its immediacy and its connection to online trends, communities, and the performance of daily life. Often attributed to the public at large, an example might be a popular meme or viral image created with a smartphone camera.
- Such images flood the Internet, it is estimated that some 94% of all photographs are now taken by smartphones amounting to about 60,000 photos a second globally which is about 5 billion a day and 2 trillion a year. This is some 8 trillion megabytes (8 exabytes) though this is less than one hundredth of 1% of all new data created globally each year (which is 120,000 exabytes).

NOTES

Social Media & Mobile Photography

Era: 2010s – present

Overview: The rise of smartphones and social media platforms like Instagram has led to a profound democratization of photography, creating new aesthetic movements and visual languages. This style is defined by its immediacy and its connection to online trends, communities, and the performance of daily life.

Key Characteristics: Casual, Filtered, Often influenced by vernacular or visual trends ("Instagram aesthetic")

Key Concepts & Platforms: Hashtag art communities, VSCO culture, Influencer photography

REFERENCES

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selfie>



A 2023 AI-generated image of Pope Francis



Journalist Eliot Higgins' Midjourney-generated image depicts President Donald Trump getting arrested.

AI and Photography

AI and Photography: Unknown author, The Pope Drip, Midjourney, 24 March 2023 A 2023 AI-generated image of Pope Francis wearing a puffy winter jacket fooled some viewers into believing it was an actual photograph. It went viral on social media platforms.

Journalist Eliot Higgins' Midjourney-generated image depicts President Donald Trump getting arrested. The image was posted on Twitter and went viral.

- We now arrive at today and the future with **AI and Photography**. I start with some well-known images that highlight the dangers. Any image of anything can now be created in a few seconds that is indistinguishable from a genuine photograph in normal use although it will be 1-2 years before it is indistinguishable to a trained expert. This is using AI designed for the home and for amateurs. Professional grade AI is already capable of producing single frames indistinguishable from high-end photography under controlled conditions.
- There are great opportunities here and great dangers. The dangers are being addressed by AI companies but incorporating watermarks although it is a running battle with companies producing software that can remove watermarks.

REFERENCES

<https://olhardigital.com.br/2023/03/22/pro/inteligencia-artificial-fotos-falsas-de-prisao-de-trump-viralizam/>

<https://veja.abril.com.br/tecnologia/imagens-falsas-geradas-por-ia-mostram-presidente-trump-sendo-presos/>



AI and Photography: The AI model and the human prompter, Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial 2022

AI and Photography: The AI model and the human prompter, Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial 2022

Key Characteristics and Themes

- Given such AI software one key role now is the prompt engineer. If you look at most images intended as a form of art that are trite, cliched and sentimental. Learning how to create prompts that produce original, startling and significant images is still something artists are learning how to do.
- Promtography, that is images produced by AI from a prompt can be seen as the new negative. The text prompt is the source material. It replaces the camera, the lens, the film, and the physical scene. The art lies in the conceptual prompt-engineering rather than the physical act of capture.
- **Hyper-Realism without a Referent:** AI images can look perfectly realistic—capturing light, texture, and depth in 2025, almost, flawlessly—yet they depict something that has never existed in the real world. This questions photography's historical link to observable truth and documentation.
- However, in 2025 using home AI software images often display a subtle, recognisable AI "look" characterised by overly perfect (sometimes uncanny) symmetry, a lack of human error, and the effortless blending of disparate styles (e.g., "a Baroque still life, photographed in the style of street photography"). As I said this look will disappear within a year or two.
- **Authorship and Labour:** The sudden emergence of AI images raises profound legal and ethical questions about who owns the image, especially since the AI models are trained on billions of pre-existing, often copyrighted, images

created by human photographers and artists. I have no answer although I would point out that human photographers learn how to take photographs by looking at the work of other photographers. AI systems are similar, they do not remember images, they extract and remember features.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_intelligence_visual_art



VulcanSphere, A synthography of sunset valley created with FLUX 1.1 Pro in Raw Mode. The prompt is Sunset valley with river flowing between mountains with pine trees and rocks and house on the right side, majestic afterglow vibe. This artwork was created with text-to-image (txt2img) process, 14 November 2024, generated in Glif with FLUX Ultra instance RAW mode

- Look at this image, beautiful but empty, cliched, slick it lacks all conceptual depth that photography traditionally offers. The next wave will come from artists who use AI critically, not decoratively — those who expose the biases in datasets, stage “photographs” of impossible histories, or use generative tools to question the ontology of seeing itself.
- **In short, AI doesn't replace photography;** it simply divorces the image from the camera, forcing a long-overdue reckoning with what we value more: the act of looking or the final visual product, i.e. process versus product.
- We finally come to the core problem that AI creates:
 - AI can deliver a flawless, high-resolution, aesthetically perfect product without any of the process ever taking place.
 - For example, an AI can generate a stunning photograph of a snow leopard walking across a mountain range in the Himalayas at sunset. (CLICK) This is what I got from ChatGPT using a free account in 30 seconds.
 - The Product: 10/10. An incredible, impactful visual. Maybe too perfect.

- The Process: 0/10. There was no climbing, no waiting, no rare sighting, and no snow leopard was ever actually there.
- This forces us to ask: If the visual is perfect, but the effort is zero, what is the value?
- For commercial work (advertising, stock), the answer is usually: the product wins. Speed and perfection trump the backstory.
- For fine art the process has value when performed by an artist, it is genuine, (CLICK) like this photograph, it has what in his seminal paper in 1935 Walter Benjamin called an "Aura", a unique presence and authenticity. It may not be visible but it is something we know and it makes a difference.

NOTES

The Future of AI and Photography

The future of photography is likely to split into two main paths: The Tool and The Medium.

1. AI as a Tool for Photographers (Enhancement)

- The most certain future is AI becoming an essential, seamless part of the workflow.
 - **Automation:** AI will handle all tedious post-production (perfect object removal, complex sky replacement, noise reduction, and colour correction) in seconds, freeing up human photographers to focus only on the initial capture and creative direction.
 - **Computational Capture:** Traditional cameras and phone cameras will use AI to perform impossible tasks at the moment of capture—like shooting a perfect, noise-free, wide-dynamic-range image in near total darkness.
 - **The "Digital Prop":** Photographers will photograph real subjects in a studio and use generative AI (e.g., generative fill) to seamlessly add, remove, or change elements of the background that would have been costly or impossible to stage physically.

2. AI as a Medium in Itself (Conceptual Art)

- The more challenging and philosophically interesting future is where the prompt is the art.
 - **The Rise of the "Prompt Artist":** The value shifts from the ability to operate a camera to the ability to articulate a unique vision and guide the AI. Artists will be celebrated for their

conceptual clarity, originality of prompt language, and skill in iterating with the model.

- **The Return to Authenticity:** As AI-generated images flood the market (stock, advertising, social media), there will be a strong cultural counter-reaction. Authentic, verifiable, unedited documentary photography that captures a moment that actually happened will increase in critical and monetary value, ironically becoming the "specialty" or "fine art" niche.
- **The Fusion Artist:** The leading figures will be those who actively break the AI models—feeding them their own flawed, personal, or unique data to generate work that is entirely unlike the generic, flawless output, thus re-introducing human style and error back into the machine.

REFERENCES

Walter Benjamin introduced the concept of the "aura" of an original work of art in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit), first published in 1935.



Francesca Woodman,
"Untitled," detail,
c. 1979-80

24-05 MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

- So for art and journalism, the answer is: **the process must be re-emphasized.** The truth, the effort, and the physical presence of the photographer are now the distinguishing factors against a sea of flawless fakes.
- The reckoning is the realisation that to survive AI's dominance of the visual product, human-made photography must now double down on being proof of a **human's unique, limited, and essential experience. But, I ask myself, will we pay the cost?**
- That brings me to the end of today's talk. I sometimes think photography is an **under-rated art form** and I hope I have helped to **dispel that perception.**
- That is all for now, thank you for your time and attention and I must get on preparing my next talk.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

