MIDTERM STUDY GUIDE—ESSAY ANSWERS

Study the info for each section, questions 1 and 2 should be answered exactly as written for full credit. Question 3, remember 2 of the techniques listed, and for Question 4, remember as much as you can, but make certain you at least mention what is in bold.

SECTION 2—SHORT ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. Short Essay Question: Worth 4 points
Describes the social and historic significance of the photographs by Alexander Gardner depicting the execution of the Lincoln conspirators.

- Gardner was Lincoln’s favorite photographer, and photographed him throughout his career and helped cultivate his positive image through photographs. His photographs of the execution of Lincoln’s conspirators had personal importance to Gardner because of his friendship with Lincoln, and social significance to Americans who were divided in their admiration and hatred for the man.

- Within the History of Photography, these sequential series of photographs were the first word picture photojournalistic story published of an event as it unfolded, and influenced future reporting of news events.

- First photograph of first woman (Mary Surratt) executed by the Federal US government had historic significance.

2. Short Essay Question: Worth 4 points
19th C. photographers approached the landscape with the conviction that the camera might perform a dual function. Explain this purpose briefly.

19th C. photographers approached the landscape with the conviction that the camera might reveal form and structure accurately and at the same time present information in an artistically appealing fashion.

3. Short Essay Question: Worth 4 Points
Photography had a profound influence on French Impressionist Painting, name at least two techniques seen in stereographs and other photographs depicting motion that can be found in many paintings from this period?

Motion Techniques seen in stereographs and photographs that were imitated in paintings were:
- movement of crowds and dancers
- blurring of movements that are realistic, i.e. wheels
- changed battle scenes
- corrected wrong gestures
- frozen moments like mid-air positions of humans and animals
- sequential freeze frame photography (use of sequence of like/same subjects in sequence to simulate movement)
- shadows
- cutoff from edges
- depth of field-selective focus and other optic qualities a lens does
- asymmetry/cropping
- fragmented views (focus on individual objects, figures, compositional elements rather than showing scene in its entirety—similar to how a lens can isolate subject.

4. Short Essay Question: 6 Points
"Nothing in nature has a hard outline, but everything is seen against something else, and its outlines fade gently into something else, often so subtly that you cannot quite distinguish where one ends and the other begins. In this mingled decision and indecision, this lost and found, lies all the charm and mystery of nature" –PH EMERSON

Briefly describe English photographer, P.H. Emerson’s theory of aesthetics which he developed, refined, and then renounced from 1885-1893.

English photographer, P.H. Emerson’s theory of aesthetics which he developed, refined, and then renounced from 1885-1893 was called Naturalism, outlined in his 1889 handbook, Naturalistic Photography. He believed photographs should represent nature as truthfully as possible without manipulation by the photographer. His use of Naturalism, should be understood as synonymous with Impressionism, to give a tone and natural expression of an impression of Nature. Naturalistic photography is photography used to translate impressions of nature into visible forms. Realism is more scientific, and naturalism is more artistic. Realism was more accurate and less impressionistic or artistic.

Emerson’s main message was, “photograph people as they really are-do not dress them up...the photographic technique is perfect and needs no bungling”. He argued that the photograph should imitate nature rather than alter it. Emerson took his subjects not from literary narratives but from an examination of the environment and daily rituals of rural life in the marshy coastal region northeast of London.

He thought photographs should look like photographs rather than paintings. He was against any artificial manipulation of photographs, and despised the photographs of H.P. Robinson. However, both Emerson and Robinson, wanted photography recognized as a fine art, and championed this cause. As a means of avoiding fiction and false in artmaking, his theory of naturalism inspired a generation of photographers to seek both truth and beauty in reality or actuality.

Emerson suggested the use of selective focus, and the careful gradation of tones rendered by the Platinum Process. His use of selective focus went against the very aim of most photographers up until this point, since they wanted to have everything sharp in their pictures. H.P. Robinson claimed healthy human eyes never saw any part of a scene out of focus. While Emerson sought a scientific basis for his art of photography, his theory of vision was incorrect since the brain corrects for the scene) Emerson, being a doctor, with a scientific background further muddied the waters of the science and art debate of photography, by observing that the human eye only focuses sharply on the main subject of its attention, and that everything all around this was in fact out of focus. He therefore concluded that to imitate this, a photograph should be slightly out of focus, ensuring that it is sharp at the main subject point.

Emerson preferred book or album presentation for photographs so that text could accompany the image. He abandoned his theory, dramatically revising his views, deciding that untouched photography was not “art” at all. With his arrogant nature, he wrote that while photographs do give some aesthetic pleasure, that photography must rank the lowest of the arts. The reason why he gave up on his ideas in 1890, were due to the pioneering studies in sensitometry, the scientific relation of tonality to exposure. The study proved that photographers could not truly control the tonal quality of the print, and therefore the medium at best was a secondary art. Convinced, Emerson, went on to renounce “The Death of Naturalistic Photography” in a pamphlet.

Emerson broke the existing mold of photography at the time which was sharp, straightforward documentation and contrived compositions. He opted for a more impressionist vision and blazed the trail that would be followed by the American Pictorialists, the Photo-Secession, and modern photography.