PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1950: THE STRAIGHT IMAGE

- Name 2 influential photographers that studied at the Institute of Design in Chicago (the American incarnation of the Bauhaus) in its early days, and whose work reflected the school’s emphasis on experimentation.

*-Which photographer, Swiss born, received a Guggenheim grant in 1955, using the money to take a photographic odyssey through the US working with a Leica 35mm camera, establishing a tone and style for the next generation? Briefly describe the themes of this body of work, culminating in the groundbreaking book, "The Americans", as well as its reception?

-Which photographer’s raw grating views of New York in the 1950’s which ignored traditional ideas about sharpness, tonal range, and print quality, were received as a rather unacceptable critical vision of American society, especially middle class?

-Which photographer’s images showed compassion for individuals considered bizarre by conventional society, and yet displayed mocking treatment of so-called normal individuals? Who was this photographer’s mentor, and her model?

*-What was one of the major influences on straight photography during the 1960’s called which reflected the desire for naïve camera imagery depicting this decade’s vernacular and “pop” culture, showing the emblems of contemporary culture in a casual style that had a lack of artifice and a neutral emotional tone? What did Nathan Lyons, photographer/educator in 1966, call this type of documentation that avoided the sentimentality in the older documentary style?

-What are the usually highly structured deadpan photographs called that evolved out of the concept of “social landscape” images that present the artifacts and landscapes of contemporary industrial culture without emotional shading? Name two photographers practicing this? Name two photographers who work in this style with strong feelings about the desecration of the landscape?

-Which photographer’s images depicted lyrical views of youngsters, begun in the 1940’s in b/w and continued intermittently up through the 1970’s in color that illuminated the toughness, grace, and humor of those growing up in New York’s inner city neighborhoods?

-Who was the Black photographer that photographed his neighborhood Harlem in the late 40’s through 60’s with a humanist outlook, a profound sense of intimacy, and an acute attention to the handling of light and structure of forms?

-Name at least two photojournalists who covered the civil rights struggles of the 1960’s and then continued afterward to confront social issues on their own, developing their themes with greater depth?

-Who is the photographer whose early 1970’s book “Tulsa”, has attained cult status, depicting the unsettling self-destructiveness of young people who have become part of the drug culture?

-Less restrictive notions as to what kind of sexual imagery might constitute serious photographic expression rather than pornography coincided with the emergence in the 1970’s of feminist and gay rights movements, which sought to raise consciousness about gender roles in society and specifically the depiction of women and homosexuals. Name at least one photographer who employed “straight photography”, to picture their own gender more perceptively?

-Which photographer following the direction in straight photography began by Stieglitz and Weston, with an eye for equivalences between form and feeling, searched for allusive or metaphorical meanings in the appearance of reality, attracting a cult following in the 1960’s, and persuasively arguing that photos be made to embody a mystic essence, that the camera reveal “things for what they are”, and “for what else they are”.?

Images to remember for identification: Photographer, Title, Date, Process that could appear on quizzes or final exam.


Important Quotes: Be able to identify to whom these quotes are attributed.

-“Be still with yourself until the object of your attention affirms your presence”. Minor White

-“I’m always mentally photographing everything as practice”. Minor White

-“Black and white are the colors of photography. To me they symbolize the alternatives of hope and despair to which mankind is forever subjected.” Robert Frank

-“I always say that I don’t want to be sentimental, that the photographs shouldn’t be sentimental, and yet, I am conscious of my sentimentality.” Robert Frank

-“I have been frequently accused of deliberately twisting subject matter to my point of view. Above all, I know that life for a photographer cannot be a matter of indifference. Opinion often consists of a kind of criticism. But criticism can come out of
love. “Robert Frank

-"It is always the instantaneous reaction to oneself that produces a photograph. “Robert Frank
-"There is one thing the photograph must contain, the humanity of the moment. This kind of photography is realism. But realism is not enough - there has to be vision, and the two together can make a good photograph. “Robert Frank
-"Robert Frank, Swiss, unobtrusive, nice, with that little camera that he raises and snaps with one hand he sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world.” Jack Kerouac
-"A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know. “Diane Arbus
-"I never have taken a picture I’ve intended. They’re always better or worse.” Diane Arbus
-"I really believe there are things nobody would see if I didn’t photograph them. “Diane Arbus
-"I work from awkwardness. By that I mean I don’t like to arrange things. If I stand in front of something, instead of arranging it, I arrange myself. “Diane Arbus
-"Most people go through life dreading they’ll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They’ve already passed their test in life. They’re aristocrats. “Diane Arbus
-"There are an awful lot of people in the world and it’s going to be terribly hard to photograph all of them... It was my teacher Lisette Model who finally made it clear to me that the more specific you are, the more general it will be.” Diane Arbus
-“Photography is not about the thing photographed. It is about how that thing looks photographed.” Gary Winogrand

General concepts to remember:

*- A new sensibility appeared in the US after WWII, a period that was characterized (until the mid 1960’s), by domestic peace, political conformism, and expansive consumerism. Many artists began to explore problems of pure form, with the expression of inner visions, and with representing new perceptions of social realities. Some photographers dealt with “private realities”, drawing ideas and inspiration from a variety of sources, such as Abstract Expressionist painting, psychoanalytic thought, Zen, and other forms of Eastern philosophy. Others were inspired by those that organized the American Bauhaus, as well as painters working in mixed media blurring the line between photography and the graphic arts. The photographic work by those who pursued straight photography also exhibited subtle changes, such as more subjective or ironic attitudes. Alongside all of these new sensibilities, traditional approaches still had significance, thus, giving photography extraordinary range and vitality.

-The vernacular mode prepared the way for the acceptance of humor in seriously conceived images. Pictorialists and Modernists alike relegated witty or humorous images to advertising or pop entertainment or family snapshots.

*-The desire to make pictures that affirmed the camera’s potential for neutral observation evolved from interest in the snapshot, creating ambiguous statements that allowed the viewer to interpret its meaning freely. Photographers practicing this uninflected street photography, such as Winogrand, Friedlander, Larry Fink, Joel Meyerowitz to name a few, permitted viewers to decide for themselves whether a particular image is derising or amusing, interesting as social or political comment, examples of the formal problems of picture-making, or, like the vast majority of photographs, just momentarily eye-catching.

*-Subjective realism ("humanized and individualized photography) in photography is best described as images with themes that are social in nature, but are concerned mainly with expressing, “a personal vibration, an autobiographical sign.”

Handout Study Guide: Session 12

PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1950: MANIPULATIONS AND COLOR

-Who is the influential photographer who photographs himself, or directs others in staged, preconceived photo-sequences, known for writing on his photographs, (mainly in the borders), inspired by Surrealist ideas, examining emotion and philosophy, while revealing his private realities?

-Who is the influential Post-modern photographer who photographs herself, (although these photographs wouldn’t be described as self-portraits), in a variety of guises as a vehicle for commentary on a variety of issues of the modern world, and especially the role of the woman and artist?

Images to remember for identification: Photographer, Title, Date, Process that could appear on quizzes or final exam.


General concepts to remember:

-The extensive use of models acting out scenes in fabricated settings that suggest the irrational content of dreams and visions is perhaps the most singular change to occur in photography since the 1960’s.

-Another significant transformation of camera imagery since the 1960’s has been the increase in the number of creative photographers working with dye-color materials.