Experimental Photography: Innovation in History and Practice
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Course Description

Florence can be considered the historic capital of optics: as the leading center for the production of lenses and spectacles in the Renaissance, it was also a center for extraordinary experimentation regarding the science of vision. The experiments and writings of such masters as Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Leonardo da Vinci, Giovan Battista della Porta and Galileo, among others, are testimony to the extraordinary contributions made here to the understanding of sight and to the development of devices that aided, altered or controlled vision for artistic purpose.

This course proposes to contextualize historic photographic techniques within this rich context of the history of optics. An invaluable resource for this exploration will be the Acton Photograph Archive at Villa La Pietra with its rich collection of stereographs, daguerrotypes, ambrotypes, silver prints and albumen prints. Students will thus be able to learn about these historic techniques by examining firsthand surviving, in some cases extremely rare, examples of them.

Following the inspiration of these historic techniques, from the experiments of the Florentine Renaissance artists to those of the Alinari Brothers, a firm founded in Florence in the nineteenth century and renowned throughout the world as an early innovator in the uses and techniques of photography, students will have the opportunity to explore these techniques themselves hands on. They will be encouraged to develop their individual expression through their own projects employing one or more of these historic photographic techniques. This inspiring course on experimental photography explores new possibilities of imagemaking by combining pinhole and toy cameras and other alternative techniques with a theoretical approach to representation.

Course Objectives

This is a double purpose course that allows students to explore technical, aesthetic, and conceptual development of image-making using various traditional and contemporary alternative photographic processes while taking advantage of the inspiring location that Florence represents. The course is dedicated to students who
want to investigate a deeper level of vision, combined with non-traditional photographic methods.

During the course, the instructors present the different techniques required to yield a creative body of work: Photograms, Pinhole photography, Cyanotype print, Van Dyke Brown print, Stereographs, and other techniques. Students also learn the assets of each method as a creative image making system.

Each process is fully explained with handouts and recipes, and students are shown how to use these techniques with the minimum equipment. Group discussion is also an essential feature of each class.

Throughout the course, group and individual meetings are scheduled with the instructors to talk about and assess their work in progress.

Lectures and slideshows on contemporary alternative photography and visits to Museums and the Acton Photography Archive are given to expand perspectives on one's own vision.

Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites for this course. A basic experience of B&W darkroom is not necessary, but desirable.

Teaching Method
The course consists of lectures, critiques, slide show, museums and archives visits, practical demonstrations, and lab time. The course concentrates on unconventional materials, techniques and processes as well as exploring alternative methods to create photography and develop a body of work.

Assignments are designed to help look into options for technical control as well as visual experimentation. Keeping in mind the inseparability of photographic technique and expression, students are expected to articulate their particular choices in relation to the overall conceptual and technical approach of the projects.

Students are required to take pictures and research in the Archive on a regular basis. Some classes can be dedicated to picture taking.

Texts
Online resources and handouts.

Recommended books

- Pinhole Journal – A tour or Renaissance Pinhole sites in Italy, Vol 14 #1
- Michelle Bates, Plastic Cameras – Toying with Creativity, Focal Press
• Laura Blacklow, *New Dimensions in Photo Processes*, Focal Press
• Angela Cartwright, *Altered Art Techniques for Photographic Imagery*, Quarry Books
• John Evans, *Adventures with Pinhole and Home-made Cameras*, RotoVision
• Brian J. Krummel, *The Pinhole Camera*, CreateSpace
• Justin Quinnell, *Build Fun Paper Cameras*, A Lark Photographic Book
• Eric Renner, *Pinhole Photography – From Historic Technique to Digital Application*, Focal Press
• Fred Ritchin, *After Photography*, Norton
• Christopher James, *The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes*, Delmar Cengage Learning