

George Mason University  
College of Visual and Performing Arts  
School of Art  
AVT 253– Introduction to Digital Photography  
Instructor: Stephanie Benassi  
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Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Description:**

This course will explore digital photography as an art medium. No previous experience in photography is necessary, however Studio Fundamentals I and II are suggested prerequisites and serve as strong foundation courses. Although this class will concentrate on digital processes and the technical aspect of digital SLR cameras, it will not emphasize traditional problems and routine or formalized solutions. Specific unique seeing is our goal and success is incumbent upon the ability to explore, with an open mind, a number of visual possibilities. Personal taste is an issue in this course, not as something to be satisfied and not as a criterion for judgment, but instead as something to be made more intelligent and more sophisticated, through a process of continual challenge. This course is designed to give students control over basic technical aspects of digital image making, while encouraging them to develop their artistic vision.

**Student Responsibilities:** Students should also spend time in the library looking at as many artists and work as possible. We will spend time in class each week in the lab as a group. This time should be spent exploring digital input and output methods with the instructor in order to help with any questions. Students should come to class prepared with digital files. (**We will not spend class time shooting images.**) Students will need to spend additional time outside of regular class time for shooting images and also exploring visual opportunities in the computer lab. **Students should expect to shoot at least 90 or more digital RAW files per week** (except for the first assignment).

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Students will research and discuss the history of photography, film and video art through current day works to gain an understanding of digital media and its art forms.
2. Students will gain and/or increase photography terminology by learning and applying them in assignments and in class critiques.
3. Students will create a variety of projects that demonstrate skills with camera equipment and image software as well as striving to communicate visually with imagery.
4. Students will gain and/or increase basic skills including various input and output methodologies by using digital means and Adobe Light Room techniques.
5. Students will obtain a personal collection of work through shooting, organizing (workflow), and using their photographs in an intelligent manner.
6. Students will gain basic ink jet printing skills and as well as begin to exercise various display methods of their work.

**Grading is based on several factors:**

- 1) Satisfactory completion of visual assignments. These assignments are due periodically throughout the semester with a particular emphasis on a final project. Solutions to the assignments will be discussed and evaluated in class critiques and grades will be based on aesthetic merit, conceptual depth, and technical competence.
- 2) Your personal contribution to the class. Each student is partially responsible for the success of the class.
- 3) Regular attendance on work days and all critiques. Critiques are mandatory. I will not accept any work that is emailed!
- 4) Completion of assignments on time and handed in in person at the beginning of the designated class period. (Late assignments will be graded accordingly – no assignment(s) will be accepted after the due date without prior permission of the instructor. **NO EMAILED ASSIGNMENTS!**)
- 5) Willingness to participate in class discussions, this includes preparation both in terms of completion of projects and coming to class with ideas and opinions that will promote discussion.
- 6) Participation in the orderly functioning of the lab...clean up, care of equipment, proper return of borrowed equipment, etc. are responsibilities everyone must share.
- 7) Presentation of a final series at the end of the semester. This body of work is given utmost consideration in determining your final grade.

**Criteria for Evaluation:**

- 1) An acknowledged understanding of the assignment and the seeking of unique solutions.
- 2) Demonstration of sensitivity to the camera as an image-making tool.
- 3) Degree to which you develop a concept or idea; indications of your invention and creative thought.
- 4) Willingness to discuss openly all solutions to the visual problems you face with the class as well as the ability to respond to constructive criticism from the class.
- 5) Ambition, rigor, and involvement with the projects undertaken.
- 6) Ability to work independently, with discipline and responsibility.

**Grade Breakdown:**

11 assignments count for 60% of your final grade. - Class participation, preparedness and research count for 40% of your final grade.

**Grade Factors to Consider:** Perfect attendance, meeting all deadlines and working at your peak ability are universal expectations. Art and Visual Technology standards are high and only the most rigorous and consistently exceptional students earn high grades. Expect your grade to be lowered if you do not meet the standards and deadlines set by your instructor. Classroom conduct has an impact on course grades. You are expected to actively participate in class activities and be a considerate member of the “community” within the classroom. Students who are disruptive to class may be removed from the class and their grades lowered accordingly. Please refer to University policies relating to conduct.

A Outstanding - Consistently exceptional work that raises the standards for one's entire peer group  
B Above Average - Exceeding the requirements/ expectations of the class  
C Average - Meeting all class requirements  
D Below Average - Completion of most, but not all, course requirements  
F Fail - Failure to meet the requirements of the course

**Critiques:**

Critiques are an essential part of the practice of art and require a strong commitment on the part of all students and the instructor. Critiques are exhausting but very beneficial. Critique is the educational equivalent of exam. Therefore, work must be ready for critique and you must be in attendance at critique. ACTIVE AND THOUGHTFUL participation is required. Physical attendance alone does not constitute participation in critique. You will be graded on the quality of your participation in critique.

**Collaborative Projects:**

Participation, and Effort - Everyone will participate in designing and realizing an overall structure and flow of the various public and/ or class presentations of our work. Preparedness:

You are expected to arrive to class prepared to work. any additional technologies/materials that are required of you on that day. If there is a scheduled in-class discussion of readings, you are required to arrive with a hard copy of the text. In addition to the required technology/supplies, you are obligated to purchase specific materials as indicated in each assignment. It is mandatory that you stick to the materials stated on the assignment sheets and purchase them before you arrive to class. Failure to arrive prepared will result in an absence and/or lowering of your grade.

**Deadlines:**

Because of the collective aspect of the critique, it is mandatory that your project be presented on time, so that the critique covers the widest possible breadth of work. Failure to present a project at the start of class on the day of a "crit" will result in the automatic lowering of your grade for that project.

**Disclaimer:**

Because of the provocative nature of much contemporary art, some materials presented in this course may be offensive to some people. These materials may include language, body fluids, nudity and radical political viewpoints, etc. If you have any concerns, please consult me. \*\*\* Any self harm and / or to others will not be tolerated in this class. Please consult me if you have any questions.

**University and School of Art Policies**

In accordance with George Mason University policy, **turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class.** The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the instructor does not have a cell phone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

**Commitment to Diversity**

This class will be conducted as an *intentionally* inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

### **Statement on Ethics in Teaching and Practicing Art and Design**

As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

### **Open Studio Hours**

SOA teaching studios are open to students for extended periods of time mornings, evenings and weekends whenever classes are not in progress. Policies, procedures and schedules for studio use are established by the SOA studio faculty and are posted in the studios.

**ArtsBus** - Dates for ArtsBus can be found at <https://artsbus.gmu.edu/>

### **ArtsBus Credit**

- Each student must have up to 5 AVT 300/Artsbus credits before graduation. For credit to appear on your transcript you must enroll in AVT 300. This also applies to anyone who intends to travel to New York independently, or do the DC Alternate Assignment.
- If you plan/need to go on multiple ArtsBus trips during a semester and need them towards your total requirement, you must enroll in multiple sections of AVT 300. Please go to the ArtsBus website: <http://artsbus.gmu.edu> "Student Information" for additional, very important information regarding ArtsBus policy.
- Non-AVT majors taking art classes do not need Artsbus credit **BUT** may need to go on the Artsbus for a class assignment. You can either sign up for AVT 300 or buy a ticket for the bus trip at the Center of the Arts. Alternate trips must be approved by the instructor of the course that is requiring an ArtsBus trip.

### **Visual Voices Lecture Series**

Visual Voices is a year-long series of lectures by artists, art historians and others about contemporary art and art practice. Visual Voices lectures are held on Thursday evenings from 7:20- 9:00 p.m. in Harris Theater. Dates can be found at <https://soa.gmu.edu/visualvoices/>

### **Important Deadlines**

Add/ Drop dates can be found at <https://www2.gmu.edu/academics/academic-calendar>

Once the add and drop deadlines have passed, instructors do not have the authority to approve requests from students to add or drop/withdraw late. Requests for *late adds* (up until the last day of classes) must be made by the student in the SOA office (or the office of the department offering the course), and generally are only approved in the case of a documented university error (such as a problem with financial aid being processed) , LATE ADD fee will apply. Requests for non-selective *withdrawals* and *retroactive adds* (adds after the last day of classes) must be approved by the academic dean of the college in which the student's major is located. For AVT majors, that is the CVPA Office of Academic Affairs, Performing Arts Building A407.

### **Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences**

If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

### **Official Communications via GMU E-Mail**

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

### **Attendance Policies**

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

### **Honor Code**

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by your instructor.) As a faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously.

No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences that will follow you for the rest of your life. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or to a member of the GMU Counseling Center staff.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is *plagiarism*, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format. (For assistance with documentation, GMU recommends Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*.) The exception to this rule is information termed *general knowledge*—information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so the wise course is, "When in doubt, cite."

Be especially careful when using the Internet for research. Not all Internet sources are equally reliable; some are just plain wrong. Also, since you can download text, it becomes very easy to inadvertently plagiarize. If you use an Internet source, you must cite the exact URL in your paper and include with it the last date that you successfully accessed the site.

### **Writing Center**

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

### **The Collaborative Learning Hub**

Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for the Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and a variety of other software. Dual monitor PCs make the lab ideal for collaborating on group projects, Macs are also available; as well as a digital recording space, collaborative tables, and a SMART Board. Free workshops are also available (Adobe and Microsoft) through Training and Certification; visit [ittraining.gmu.edu](http://ittraining.gmu.edu) to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.

