THE ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAIT

“…Inevitably there is a great deal of the photographer in his finished product…If there isn't much of him, then there isn't much of a portrait. In other words, the photographer must be part of the picture. It's a matter of joining forces with the sitter, in a sense…”

- Arnold Newman

“A good portrait is incredibly hard to create, there is too much temptation to pander to the individual rather than portray them as they really were.“

- Philippe Halsman

A portrait is not made in the camera but on either side of it.

- Edward Steichen

Since the dawn of photography, portraiture has been an important genre of the medium. When Louis Daguerre introduced the Daguerreotype in 1839, it quickly challenged and replaced the painted portrait. The low cost and its relative immediacy due to shorter sitting time, made photography the medium of choice for portraiture. The unique ability of the camera to render details has always distinguished it from other art mediums. But this often inhibited photography from being considered art, as the prevailing view was that the apparatus was more important than the photographer operating it. The French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire even declared that photography was painting's “mortal enemy”. The emphasis of a portrait has usually been on the face of the sitter and its expression.

Arnold Newman radically changed the way portraiture was shot by including the environment as an integral aspect of the photograph. This approach expanded the field of portraiture by including additional information related to the person being depicted. Often, Newman used the environment most familiar to his subjects, such as their home or studio.
**Project Objectives**

This assignment is as much about capturing the essence of a person as it is about working in different lighting environments. You will take environmental portraits in daylight and with available artificial light. The environment (and/or objects) you use for this assignment is an important factor that should reflect on the person you are photographing.

Lighting is a critical part of any photograph, but especially so in portraiture. It can alter the way we perceive the person, for better or for worse. Interesting lighting can set your photograph apart from all the others and should be given much weight, while unflattering light can seriously diminish the portrait.

As soon as you place a person in an environment, the decision of what to include and exclude becomes very important. Pay special attention to framing and especially to how you include the background. Ignoring other parts of the photograph can negatively impact your image and distract from the main subject.

**Project Learning Outcome**

Important technical decisions will have to be made, especially with the indoor portrait. It might require you to shoot on a steady surface, or use a tripod due to low light. Critical decisions regarding ISO as well as aperture and shutter speed will be made.

This assignment is also about observing light, how it falls on a person’s face and its impact on articulating your intent. Like a movie director, you need to be in charge of directing the sitter. Most likely, your models won’t know exactly what to do, and it is imperative that you guide them through the entire process of posing, including expression, gestures and composure.

**Technical**

It is easy to modify the ISO in digital photography without having to change a memory card. You have no such luxury in analog film photography. The entire roll has to be shot with the same ISO setting. 400 ISO can be a challenge in indoor photography and dim lighting. Fortunately, you can push b&w film one (800 ISO), two (1600 ISO) or 3 stops (3200 ISO) without too much loss in shadow detail and sharpness. However, you need to adjust the processing time to compensate for the under-exposure.

Submit 6 8x10” photos (4 indoor pictures with at least 2 different people and 2 outdoor pictures with at least 2 different people) and the proof sheets. Failure to submit the proof sheet(s) will lower your grade by 10 points. Make sure that the 6 photos are distinctively different. For example, I do not want to see almost identical images in which the angles or positions of the sitter(s) are just slightly altered.

This entire assignment must be shot with ISO 1600. No image will be accepted that has been shot with flash.

Animals can be in your portraits, but the emphasis should be on a person!
Arnold Newman

Diane Arbus
Steve McCurry