Course Description

Architectural Photography: Imaging by Design

The architectural photographer must reconcile divergent communicative goals and manipulate a variety of pictorial forms. The descriptive value of a photograph depends upon formalisms, but its evocative power may turn upon measured departure from those formalism and depend upon the photographer's novel use of style. Strong architectural photography tends toward dualities of form and function.

The visual design of imagery resides on a continuum between purely objective documentation and complete abstraction. The extent to which a photograph inevitably maps and transforms the subject into an artifact completely distinct from the subject itself is measured by this relationship between the literal and the abstract, and this transformation may even yield high art. A photo may be elaborately produced and stylistically contrived, or it may be spontaneous and serendipitously beautiful. Architectural photography is both taken and made. Thus, the photographic representation of architecture is, in itself, a design problem.

This course will explore the principals of architectural photography as a language of design through lectures, demonstrations, and critical discussions about weekly submissions of your work. Students will engage in ongoing photographic study under a framework of conceptual themes. Specific photographic problems drawn from the ongoing process will be examined in detail, the application of standard compositional forms, graphic styling, use of natural and artificial light, technical issues relative to image acquisition, rendering and presentation & etc.

Students will collect a substantial body of work using their own digital cameras and will handle their work editorially and technically using Photoshop and Adobe Bridge. Weekly work will be formatted and submitted to a class server for review in the classroom, group discussion and critique. Students will design and produce an exhibition drawn from their best imagery (expect a cash expense of approximately $50 per student).

In forum discussions, we will examine conceptual topics such as the distinction between "taking pictures" vs. "making images", and we will question our assumptions about what photos are and how they function.

Technical principles of photography and digital imaging will be addressed generically, or as needed to facilitate the main objective of producing a body of thematically coherent work. The primary emphasis of this workshop will be on the thematic direction of weekly shooting assignments and their critical review, so students are advised to enter this workshop having at least a basic functional understanding of their camera, use of their computer system for handling imagery and a basic understanding of Photoshop and related tools.

Requirements for enrollment in this course are;

- a digital camera
- a means of offloading image files from the camera to permanent hard drive storage
- a laptop computer
- a reliable connection between the laptop and the UMN network and class folder server system
- a fully licensed and functioning installation of Photoshop (CS3 or higher) and Adobe Bridge (the browser system that installs with Photoshop and Adobe Creative Suite packages)

Anyone without this equipment and software will be immediately un-enrolled.

Technical Recommendations;

Students in this course will be required to work with digital cameras (not film) and produce a large master volume of raw imagery from which presentation subsets will be formatted and from which meaningful arrangements will be drawn. Consumer level, automatic & "point & shoot" cameras yielding a 6 megapixel file are acceptable and can be used very effectively. However, these cameras present definite technical limitations due to their characteristic lack of manual controls for the lens and exposure systems. A tripod is highly recommended, as shooting from a tripod is the essential solution for many of the photographic problems that will be encountered during this workshop. The greatest degree of technical flexibility and creative controls can be had with any DSLR camera system, a zoom lens and a full height tripod. Wide angle lenses - those with shorter focal length - are standard in architectural photography, so if given a choice, opt for the wider rather than telephoto lens. Working with "camera raw" files is also recommended as it provides an additional level of imaging and rendering options, but it will also require more work in handling the master archive and presenting your imagery for review and in the final exhibition.

Due to the large volume of imagery to be shot and handled, an efficient means of off-loading image files from the camera system in to permanent, hard-drive storage will be required. 20 Gb is a conservative estimate of the working storage space you may require. The same volume in redundant backup space on a separate device is strongly advised. Adobe Bridge will be used for browsing your master archive, for editing and presenting image groups and for file re-naming manipulations that will be required in formatting your work to be submitted for periodic review.

Your computer system should have processing and memory resources somewhat in excess of the minimum requirements typically cited for installation of Adobe software, and your computer system must be able to make reliable network connections to the CDES class server system. Finally, be advised that many of the image editing tools in Photoshop are best used with a mouse rather than a track-pad.

Adobe has student discount programs, as does UMN and CDES. The UMN also has a technical support staff that can advise you about how to make campus network connections.