location photography
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Essential Skills

location photography

second edition

mark galter
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Introduction

Location photography covers a wide range of disciplines. From the captured image of a fleeting moment using existing light to the highly structured and preconceived advertising image using introduced lighting. This book is intended for students of photography working on location using primarily the existing light source. The information, activities and assignments provide the essential techniques for creative and competent location photography. The subject guides offer a comprehensive and highly structured learning approach, giving support and guidance to both staff and students. Basic theoretical information is included along with practical advice gathered from numerous professional photographers. An emphasis on useful (essential) practical advice maximises the opportunities for creative photography.

Acquisition of technique

The first half of the book concentrates on the acquisition of skills necessary for location photography. Emphasis is placed on image design, communication of content and the essential techniques required for competent and consistent image capture and creation. The book builds student competence to make correct exposures under difficult lighting conditions. The practical problems of contrast are discussed and additional lighting in the form of flash is introduced. Terminology is kept as simple as possible using only those terms in common usage by practising professionals.

Application of technique

The second half of the book is devoted to the practical application of student skills. A historical context is given for two of the major areas of location work (photo-essay and landscape). The difference between capturing and creating images is discussed along with the appropriate application of each commercial working style. Assignments are undertaken in each of the three areas allowing students to express themselves and their ideas through the appropriate application of design and technique.
Introduction to teachers

This book is intended as an introduction to location photography for full-time students of photography and/or design. The emphasis has been placed upon a practical approach to the subject and the application of the essential skills. The activities and assignments cover a broad range of skills but avoid the need for the students to use large amounts of expensive equipment on location.

A structured learning approach
The photographic study guides contained in this book offer a structured learning approach that will give students a framework for working on photographic assignments and the essential skills for personal communication.
The study guides are intended as an independent learning resource to help build design skills, including the ability to research, plan and execute work in a systematic manner. The students are encouraged to adopt a thematic approach, recording all research and activities in the form of a visual diary.

Flexibility and motivation
The study guides contain a degree of flexibility often giving students the choice of subject matter. This allows the student to pursue individual interests whilst still directing their work towards answering specific criteria. This approach gives the student maximum opportunity to develop self-motivation. It is envisaged that staff will introduce each assignment and negotiate the suitability of subject matter with the students. Individual student progress should be monitored through group meetings and personal tutorials. Students should be encouraged to demonstrate the skills which they have learnt in preceding study guides whenever appropriate.

Implementation of the curriculum
For students studying photography full time the complete curriculum contained in this book would cover the first semester of the first year. If the curriculum contained in this book is combined with ‘Studio photography’ and ‘Digital Imaging’ (also available in the series) this would constitute the majority of the first-year practical curriculum.
Introduction to students

The study guides that you will be given on this course are designed to help you learn both the technical and creative aspects of photography. The initial study guides provide the framework for the assignment briefs that follow. The study guides will build the essential skills required to confidently undertake a broad range of location work.

Activities and assignments

By completing all the activities and assignments in each of the study guides you will learn how other images were created or captured and how to communicate visually utilising your own camera as a tool. You will be given the freedom to choose the subject of your photographs in many of the assignments. The images that you produce will be a means of expressing your ideas and recording your observations.

Photography is a process that can be learnt as a series of steps. Once you apply these steps to new assignments you will learn how to be creative with your camera and produce effective images. The information and experience that you gain from the study guides will provide you with a framework for all of your future location work.

Using the study guides

The study guides have been designed to offer you support during your photography work. On the first page of each study guide is a list of aims and objectives laying out the skills covered and how they can be achieved.

The activities are to be started only after you have first read and understood the supporting section on the same page. If at any time you feel unclear about what is being asked of you, consult a lecturer.

The skills

To acquire the essential skills required to become a photographer takes time and motivation. The skills covered should be practised repeatedly so that they become practical working knowledge rather than just basic understanding. Practice the skills obtained in one study guide and apply them to each following guide where appropriate. Eventually the technical and creative skills can be applied intuitively or instinctively and you will be able to communicate clearly and effectively.
Research and resources

The way to get the best out of each assignment is to use the activities contained in the study guides as a starting point for your research. You will only realise your full creative potential by looking at a variety of images from different sources. Creative artists and designers find inspiration for their work in different ways, but most find that they are influenced by other work they have seen and admired.

Getting started
Start by collecting and photocopying images that are relevant to the activity you have been asked to complete. This collection of images will act as a valuable resource for your future work. By taking different elements from these different images, e.g. the lighting technique from one and the design from another, you are not copying somebody else’s work but using them as inspiration for your own creation. Talking through ideas with other students, friends, members of your family and with a lecturer will help you to clarify your thinking, and develop your ideas further.

Choosing resources
When you are looking for images that will help you with your research activities try to be very selective, using high quality sources. Not all photographs that are printed are necessarily well designed or appropriate to use. Good sources of photography may include high quality magazines and journals, photographic books and photography exhibitions. You may have to try many libraries to find appropriate material or borrow used magazines from friends and relatives. Keep an eye on the local press to find out what exhibitions are coming to your local galleries.
The work process

The structure and nature of your imaging work needs to be fashioned around a number of important principles and approaches.

Visual Diary

This diary is your record of all stimuli that may have influenced you or helped you to form an idea. In its most simplistic form this could be a scrapbook of tear-sheets (examples) and personal scribbles. It would however be of far more value if the visual diary contained detail relating to an awareness of style and context, as well as a development of your ability to intelligently critique images. This should include aspects of design, composition, form and lighting which would be applicable to any of the visual arts.

The visual diary should contain:
- A collection of work by photographers, artists, writers, poets, songwriters and film-makers, relevant to your imaging studies.
- Sketches of ideas for images.
- A collection of images that illustrate specific techniques relevant to your work.
- Brief written notes supporting and expanding upon each entry in the diary.

Research

- For each assignment provide evidence in your visual diary of how you developed your ideas and perfected the techniques you have been using. This should be presented neatly, in an organised way so that anyone assessing your work can easily see the creative and technical development of the finished piece.
- Make brief comments about images that you have been looking at and how they have been of influence. Photocopy these and include them with your research.

Presentation

Presentation of work can influence your final mark.
- Ensure that all of your digital images are cropped neatly and do not display unwanted edge pixels.
- Ensure that horizontal and/or vertical elements are corrected if this is appropriate (sloping horizon lines are visually unnerving to look at).
- Mount all printed work neatly and label appropriately.

Storage

It is best to standardise your final portfolio so that it has an overall ‘look’ and style.
- Assignments should be kept in a folder slightly larger than your mounted work.
- Film should be stored in file sheets, in a dust and moisture-free environment.
- Digital files should be either burned to a CD or saved to a removable disk and stored away from magnetic devices that could corrupt the data.
Choice of equipment

Digital and 35mm SLR cameras are the popular choice for most photographers working on location. It is compact, light and quick to use. With built-in through-the-lens metering (TTL) and the ability to change lenses it is extremely versatile.

Medium format cameras are also used professionally on location. With the increased bulk, weight and cost of the equipment the photographer must decide whether to choose superior quality or convenience and speed of operation.

Additional lenses and camera accessories should be purchased through actual, rather than perceived, need. Autofocus zoom lenses, motor-drives and programme modes are expensive extras if you never use them. When using film many photographers find it more useful to budget for two SLR camera bodies of the same make rather than one very expensive one. In this way the photographer is able to load each body with a different film giving increased working flexibility and back-up in case of mechanical failure. It is important that the lenses are interchangeable with both bodies. When selecting a medium format camera the photographer should consider a model which has removable film backs to reduce the outlay of a second camera body.

Many photographers prefer to travel and work light, others prefer to take every piece of equipment they might need to meet any unforeseen circumstance. If the amount of equipment is kept to a minimum it follows that the bag required to carry it in will also be small. This is of great value when photographing in crowded markets, squeezing onto packed buses and working in confined interior locations. A soft case is nearly always preferable in these situations, allowing you to move through crowds with the minimum of fuss, thus avoiding the situations where a hard case is reluctant to follow or takes chunks out of the furniture on the way through.
Equipment
Photographers’ individual requirements for equipment vary enormously. This list is intended as a guide only to the equipment commonly used by many photographers. Many photographers start with a single SLR body with one zoom lens. Subsequent purchases usually include additional lenses. It is possible to cover an enormous range of focal lengths with only two lenses. The drawback of zoom lenses are their relatively poor maximum apertures when compared to the larger apertures found on fixed focal length lenses. This will usually require a photographer to use faster films or flash in low light conditions reducing the quality or mood of the final image. The decision to purchase fixed or zoom lenses should be made after much consideration of the many pros and cons. Discuss your preferences with experienced photographers rather than sales staff in camera stores.

SLR Equipment

1. SLR camera (second camera body is particularly useful when shooting film)
2. Tripod, G-clamp with camera mount or bean bag
3. Additional lenses - fixed or zoom to cover wide angle to telephoto
4. Flash - dedicated or automatic
5. Lens hoods - (designed for widest focal length of the lens)
6. Film or additional memory card
7. Camera strap - wrist or neck
8. Filters + spare lens caps and body cap
9. Pocket torch - for setting controls at night and film retriever if required.
10. Spare batteries for camera and flash and camera cleaning cloth and brush
Gallery

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