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A collection of art-making ideas by artists

Yvonne Venegas's Shooting Blind: Photographing without preview mode

I have been shooting with film since I began taking pictures. I have always thought there is something beautiful about the latent image: that exposed but yet undeveloped piece of film with all its potential to become a good photograph. This sensation of uncertainty (the film could actually still get wet or something else could happen to it) is a feeling I have come to extend to my process of working. There is always something to discover in a subject, in a frame you could not imagine taking and might only be able to discover months or even years after shooting it. (Hopefully you didn't delete it before getting the chance to understand it.)

One of the wonders of digital photography is that it allows you immediate access to the images you shoot. You are in constant dialogue with the images you are producing, having access to them a fragment of a second after you shoot them. I find that this dialogue can sometimes be a dialogue with a photographer's own ego, which I have never considered the best advisor. So I am going to ask you to shoot preview-blind and not have that dialogue for a change. Other than our egos, we also take pictures with something deeper within us (if we allow the process to be as intuitive as possible). With this exercise, I want you to explore what that part of you is saying in the pictures that you take.

So, this exercise will involve will as much as it involves photography (there is more need for will in photography than we sometimes imagine). It is also an exercise in looking at photographs.

Assignment

STEP 1: Choosing a Subject
Think of a subject you really want to photograph. It is best if you are very honest with yourself, and choose a subject that you are truly interested in. Choose something accessible. For instance, please

Media:
Photography

Materials:
+Computer

+Digital camera

+Printer

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don't choose "stray dogs in Cuba"; it may be a great
subject, but we need something more immediate, such
as your home, your friends, your girlfriend or
boyfriend, landscapes from school to home, downtown
buzz, your grandmother, or somebody you don't know
but you like, etc. Please choose something that is
coherent with your character, that is, if you don't
like to speak to people you don't know, please don't
choose to photograph somebody you don't know! You
will do this assignment for one week. Each day you
will focus on your chosen subject and take at least
take 20 to 30 photographs of it. So if it is a person
you must negotiate with them and tell them you would
like to photograph them for a week.

STEP 2: Shooting Preview-Blind
The plan is to allow some time between taking the
picture and seeing it, so you will either need to
turn off the preview mode on your camera or simply
cover it. You are not going to see the pictures you
are taking. If you typically use the preview feature
to check your exposure, then simply do the exposure
tests before you shoot your subject, or try shooting
in automatic mode. What I would like is for you not
to look at your photographs for the whole week that
you are shooting. The photographs should be stored
somewhere and stay there waiting to be edited. Try to
download your images every day so you won't be
tempted to look at them.

STEP 3: Editing
After your week of shooting, it's time to edit. You
will sit at your computer (or whatever computer you
can get your hands on) and look at your images for
the first time. One by one you see them without
looking for anything in particular, simply
remembering what you shot, wondering what you were
looking for, and maybe discovering a thing or two.
Mark the ones you immediately like. Then go through
the images again and mark the ones that you `really`
like, especially if you don't know why. Sometimes the
pictures one can't understand immediately will turn
out to be the most interesting ones to look at!

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STEP 4: Printing

This step involves one last edit. Choose your pictures well; printing is always the part that costs the most, and the images you print are the ones that will remain on your wall. You don't need to make very expensive prints, they can just be laser prints. A good number to have here is about 10 to 15 pictures. The idea is not necessarily to make a story but to find links between the pictures that are either visual or more subjective: gestures, colors, mood, etc. Try to see if you find things that you like in the images that remind you of something personal, or have a gesture that you use a lot, or a color that you like most. Editing should be completely subjective and you should be able to put things exactly the way that you want them.

STEP 5: Looking and talking

Part one of this final step is to put the printed images on the wall of your bedroom or somewhere that you are comfortable. The idea is to have you look at the images away from your computer; in other words, to live with them. When you look at your pictures on the computer, you see them as individual images, but I am interested in having you think of them in groups. Also, as you sit at a computer you are doing a very specific thing, and sometimes you are also multitasking. I want you to leave the images on the wall and perhaps catch glimpses of them on the way to the bathroom or while you are doing homework.

The second part will be to bring your printed images to class to talk about them with the other students. You will hang the pictures on the wall and walk around the room to look at each group individually. Then, the class will gather at each set of pictures and have a conversation about them. First, the student who took the pictures can tell the group what s/he found in the pictures, what was the subject is, and what s/he discovered with this exercise. Then the group will tell the photographer what they see in the pictures, and which ones they have feelings for and why.

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**Artist Biography:
Yvonne Venegas**

Yvonne Venegas

**Born in 1970 in Long Beach, California
Currently lives in Mexico City**

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