

## Phoenix Brighton Photography Course Proposal by

**Title:** Abstraction, Photography and Play: an experimental approach to photography.

**Duration:** 3 hours per week over 8 weeks

**Aim:** This experimental course on photography will encourage the participants to follow a playful approach to all the stages of the creative process of producing an image. It will instigate you to engage in making use of photography in a free, unobstructed manner, liberated from its technical and theoretical restrictions and use it as an independent artistic medium. In this context, you will be encouraged to release your imaginations and play with the often misunderstood idea of 'abstraction' in photography.

The course will be based on historical visual references as a point of inspiration and initiation of discussion, which you will take on to produce your own photographs. The visual references will include a historical development of abstraction in photography as well as further references from important art movements, which were influenced by photography and from which photography took influences too. The visual references will be designed as such, so that they introduce you to a diversity of techniques and methods and they will be concise with only the necessary information.

Each week we will explore a different period and style of photographic abstraction and you will be asked to experiment and explore some of the techniques suggested by that particular photographic style and/or invent your own. You will produce some images which you will discuss the following week. It will be quite open as regards the themes, on which you will work in your practice. Although, you will be given some themes to work on, it will also be up to you to decide whether you want to work with a particular idea in mind as a group theme, and/or whether you want to explore something individually. Also, you will be free to choose whether you want to work in small groups to produce a collaborative project or individually.

By exploring freely different aspects of all the main photographic movements, you will gain a good knowledge of the history of photographic abstraction and of photography in general within the broader context of the historical developments in the arts. You will obtain this knowledge through your own practice.

The attitude of this course will be focused on the idea of play and this will be introduced not only in the making of the images but also in the way of presenting them. You will be encouraged to be creative and push the traditional boundaries of presenting a photograph. Other art forms can be introduced, such as drawing, sculpture, music, writing etc depending on individual talents.

Each session will last three hours. The majority of the time will be devoted to presenting and discussing your work produced the week before. During this discussion all of you will talk about your work and comment on each other's photographs. This discussion will be the core of each session, as it will provide you with the opportunity to extract ideas from your own work, discuss the process you followed, reflect on it and on the result you achieved and make decisions for your future explorations on the weekly projects to follow. At the same time, I will be answering your questions, helping you to clarify your ideas and giving you suggestions for further experimentation.

The rest of the time of each session will be devoted to introducing the next style of photographic abstraction and providing you with some food for thought in order to embark on a new photographic exploration until the next session. Occasionally, during this section of the session, I will encourage you to play for five minutes with your cameras inside the room with whatever objects, surfaces and lighting are available. The purpose of this will be to produce sketch images as a brainstorming of the new ideas you are going to explore after you leave the session. In this sense, the sessions themselves will have a playful character and they will introduce you to different levels of receiving and processing information. At the end of each lesson handouts will be given with the visual references printed in contact sheets and with some relevant bibliography for further reading for those interested. Occasionally, I will also be bringing books and photographic albums in the sessions for you to look at.

By the end of this course on abstract photography it will have become clear to all the participants that all the play, you will have engaged in, will have taken place around four motivations for taking a photograph:

1. appropriating outer reality
2. conveying inner reality
3. creating new reality
4. reflecting media reality.

## **Weekly Lesson Plans**

### **Preparation before the first lesson.**

You will be asked to produce and bring with you in the first session one photograph, which will reflect your answer to the question : *what is an abstract photograph?*

We will accept any kind of prints, any sizes, digital images, etc. small non-expensive prints are preferable as they will help in breaking the ice too.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Week - *First Steps to Abstraction in Photography***

- Short introduction to the course
- Personal introductions / breaking the ice playfully
- Brain storming and discussion on the subject *what is an abstract photograph?* based on the photographs brought by the participants.
- Reading of the Poem *The Ballad of Drawing with Light* – Responses over a cup of tea follow.
- Slide show: *First Steps to Abstraction* (camera obscura, the first photograph, Vortographs, Schadographs, photograms, rayograms) – I will talk about the first steps of photographic abstraction, explain the images of the slide show and comment on them.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Week – *Photography and Surrealism***

This session will help you understand how some of the techniques explored in a free manner in the previous session were used to investigate more complicated ideas, such as visualizing the unconscious.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Slide show: *Photography and Surrealism* - I will talk about photographic abstraction in the context of surrealism. I will explain the images of the slide show and comment on them and on the different techniques used.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Week – *New Objectivity in Europe – seeing things in a different way***

During this session we will direct creativity to the transformation of the objects in the real world.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Slide show: *New Objectivity in Europe* - I will explain the images of the slide show and comment on different strategies and techniques used to manipulate photographically the form of an object.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

## **4<sup>th</sup> Week – *American New Objectivity – a subjective vision***

This session will help you understand how some of the creative ways you employed in the previous session to transform an object were used metaphorically to express more subjective ideas.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.

- Slide show: American New Objectivity - I will explain the images of the slide show with emphasis given on the work of Alfred Stieglitz and some of his followers. I will comment on the different techniques used and ideas explored to use photographic abstraction in a metaphorical way.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Week – *Photographic Abstraction, Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism***

During this session we will focus on the relationship between photography and abstract expressionism and explore similarities and differences through creative playing with these ideas.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Slide show: Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and Photography - I will explain the images of the slide show with emphasis given on the work of Aaron Siskind and some contemporary artists/photographers. I will comment on the different techniques used and ideas explored to push photographic abstraction even further.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Week – *Generative/Conceptual Photography – digital abstraction***

This session will explore how the idea of artistic constructivism has led to the use of different kinds of apparatuses and different programmes of various devices to create abstract structure images.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Slide show: Generative/Conceptual Photography - I will explain the images of the slide show with emphasis focused on both contemporary images and images that reflect the period of the beginnings of Generative photography. I will comment on the different techniques used and ideas explored.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Week – Concrete Photography: photographic abstraction in its extreme form.**

This session will introduce the not widely yet known category of Concrete Photography – a term used to describe the objectification of the idea of photography into an object. Its nature is self-reflective, self referential, extremely experimental and its photographic result is constituted of objects of photographic materials. It is open to endless explorations.

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Slide show: Concrete Photography - I will explain the images of the slide show with emphasis given on references based on Gottfried Jäger's book about Concrete photography (the only book currently on this type of photography) and on some contemporary examples. I will comment on the different techniques used and ideas explored.
- Short discussion follows about how you respond to the images shown.
- Explanation of practical tasks to be undertaken for the following lesson-suggestions, guidance and tips will be given.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Week – The Empty Space in abstract photography.**

- Presentation of the photographs produced the previous week
- Discussion follows and questions are answered about any technical or other problems that emerged from the practical exploration. Comments on each other's images will help you get better feedback on your work.
- Five to ten minutes tea break.
- Summing up of all the ideas explored during the course.
- Slide show: The Empty Space in abstract photography – A taster and a very short introduction to my work on abstract photography, which I explored during my practice-based PhD research.
- Suggestions and ideas discussed for exhibition plans based on the work produced during the course.

### **Equipment needed for the course**

- All participants should have or be able to borrow a camera. Any kind of camera is fine, manual or digital in any kind of format. The complexity of the camera is not important as we will play against what it is programmed to do.
- A laptop or PC and a projector will be needed for each session.

**Eva Kalpadaki, April 2009**