

DECK

Contemplating Images: History and Theory of Photography

Photography Lecture Series (ONLINE) —

by Sebastian Mary Tay

11th Oct — 28th Oct 2021

Contemplating Images: History and Theory of Photography is a series of 6 public lectures by DECK to promote insightful thought and further understanding of the photographic medium. Differing from the previous public lecture series on the history of photography, this new course consists a total of six individual lessons across three weeks, and focuses upon significant critical ideas and philosophical concepts that are important to the theoretical understanding of the photographic medium. Without compromising the historicity of photography, this lecture series attempts an integration of the theoretical and the conceptual with the historical. The subsequent six parts of the lecture series are thus designed specifically accordingly to the unique characteristics of the photographic medium. Lesson 1, titled Reality and the Mirrored World, explores the intimate relationship between the photographic medium and reality, as well as its capacity for realism, representation, and the ideal. Lesson 2, Knowledge and the Sphere of Truth, discusses the epistemic properties associated with the photographic, the subsequent possibility of knowledge, the subjectivity and objectivity of images, and the medium's extraordinary relationship with the sciences. Lesson 3, title Movement and Storytelling, investigates photography and its development into moving image, how the two mediums share and differ in conceptual perspectives, and how they both embody the capacity for narratives in their unique ways. Lesson 4, Abstraction and the Experimental Spirit, focuses upon photography's shift from realism into formal abstractions through discussing important theoretical frameworks that ground the premise of such change in aesthetics. Lesson 5, Colour and Poetic Progress, surveys the photographic medium and its search for colour, through studying the different principles and examining the various experiments that led to the greater replication of our world through photographic images. Lesson 6, titled Meaning and Future Possibilities, considers the conceptual framework and theoretical ideas that marked a shift in photographic practices in our contemporary age to include meaning and messages, as well as examines the many roles and functions of the medium in both our society and our individual lives today. Through the purposefully designed structure of this course, DECK hopes to inspire the audience to cultivate a continual contemplation and a deeper understanding of the exceptional complexities of photography.

Programme Lineup

11th Oct - Reality and the Mirrored World

14th Oct - Knowledge and the Sphere of Truth

18th Oct - Movement and Storytelling

21st Oct - Abstraction and the Experimental Spirit

25th Oct - Colour and the Poetic Progress

28th Oct - Meaning and Future Possibilities

Duration

8PM to 9:30PM (90 minutes)

Duration breakdown

60mins class, 10mins break, 20mins Q&A

Delivery Format

Online Webinar

Speaker

Sebastian Mary Tay

Course Fees

\$30 per lecture, \$150 bundle of all 6 sessions.

For Students:

\$15 per lecture, \$75 bundle of all 6 sessions.

Course registration:

Course Content

11th Oct - Lesson 1: Reality and the Mirrored World

The first lesson focuses on the relations between photography and reality, representation, and the ideal. With references to various thinkers and philosophical concepts revolving around discussions of the real, the represented and the ideal, the lesson takes a look at the historical development of the photographic medium, commencing from the early experiments in the ancient world, fundamental photographic principles, and the grounding processes of the permanent image. The first class will also survey the genre of portraiture in photographic imaging, from the beginning of portrait making culture in Europe, to ethnographic enquiries in colonised territories, and to the popularisation of photography and the consequent rise of everyday portraiture, and finally to the contemporary trend of portrait imaging, for oneself and for modern entertainment. The last part of this class will attempt a revision and discussion into the concepts significant to the beginning of early photography, its close relation to experiences and reality, its capacity for representation and the ideal, and the medium's affinity with certain philosophical thought and their outlook on the real.

14th Oct - Lesson 2: Knowledge and the Sphere of Truth

The second lesson investigates the conceptual affiliation between photography and the notion of truth, thus inquiring into ideas concerning representation in photographic images and their capacity for epistemic certainty. The lesson will reference the analytic works of scholars specific to photographic theory, particularly on the relation between the medium and knowledge apprehension, as well as thinkers who distinct on the field of epistemology. This lesson will commence with a look at early photographic processes, particularly the paper process and the use of positive and negative images, as well as the intention of behind innovations and the consequent advancements of photographic technology. The next part of the class will investigate a case study on photographic images and their capacity for knowledge, examining how photography changed our understanding of the fundamental nature of our universe in the 1900s. The lesson will then continue to look at various contemporary examples on how photographic imaging contributed to our pursuit of knowledge in and beyond the world.

Course Content

18th Oct - Lesson 3: Movement and Storytelling

The third lesson examines a specific moment in the history of photography; the search for movement and the subsequent development of moving pictures. This lesson will thus survey the early technologies that led to the dawn of moving images, the subsequent purpose of early videography, the changing intention of early film production, and the medium's capacity for narrative and emotional expression. The class will also progress to examine the function of the moving image medium in 1900s, as well as investigate the changing purpose of videography and other forms of moving images in contemporary culture. With particular emphasis on the moving image and its ability for narrative and storytelling, the lesson will analyse how artists have engaged this time-based medium and consider the role of moving image in our technologically advance culture through examples and case studies. This lesson will reference the conceptual ideas of thinkers who worked on theoretical analyses of the moving image medium, as well as discuss the conceptual differences and similarities between both still and moving images.

21st Oct - Lesson 4: Abstraction and the Experimental Spirit

The fourth lesson marks a shift away from photographic representation and realism, focusing instead on the rise of experimental imaging and the emergence of abstract photography within the last century. This lesson references the works of scholars from the same period who wrote heftily on the changing tendencies from representation to abstraction in art and in photography. The lesson will commence with an introduction to the theoretical concepts important to the emerging intellectual framework and cultural period of modernism, analysing how the disinterest in continuation of traditional practices resulted in an emphasis upon forms, shapes, texture, colour and the material, which inevitably effected the shift into abstraction in visual art practices. The lesson will look at examples of works by image makers from Europe, America, Japan and other parts of Asia, in an attempt to understand the universality of such paradigm shift in the increasingly globalised era. This lesson will also look at a return of interest in abstraction within photographic practices in the contemporary age, again surveying the works of image makers from both Asia and the west, analysing the conceptual similarities and differences between modern efforts and contemporary endeavour in photographic abstraction.

Course Content

25th Oct - Lesson 5: Colour and the Poetic Progress

The fifth lesson investigates the photographic medium's quest for colour, detailing accounts of early efforts by pioneer image makers to include chromatic pigment on photographic prints, then initial development of colour mechanics, improved understanding of colour theory in photographic medium, which led to the advancing of colour imaging, and finally, its application in modern digital technology. Throughout the sections of this class on chromatic development, images will be simultaneously screened, analysed, and considered, to provide a pictorial grasp of the theoretical ideas discussed. These images were made over the course of the last two centuries, in various parts of the world, and specifically in Europe and Japan. Through the analyses of these images, the lesson hope to deliver an understanding of different experiments and processes utilised around the globe in the same universal attempt to discover an effective method for colour in photography. The lesson references the theoretical works of various scholars who have contributed to the understanding and advancement of colour technology in the photographic medium, as well as thinkers who wrote and discussed ideas concerning colour and its relation to aesthetics and epistemology.

28th Oct - Lesson 6: Meaning and Future Possibilities

The sixth lesson is dedicated to the understanding of photography, its utilities, roles, and functions, in our contemporary era. This lesson will reference the critical thinkers from the past few decades, who wrote about significant theories concerning the intellectual framework and cultural phenomena that inform the tendencies of the current age. Through theoretical examination, the lesson attempts to analyse the photographic medium and its manifold positions, both externally in the wider aspects of society, as well as in the various situations of our individual, private lives. Some topics to be investigated include the medium in modern entertainment, social media culture, political and news misinformation, the wider present-day speculative tendencies, and particularly, the critical role photography plays in the ongoing pandemic. This lesson further marks a shift in intent and significance in photographic image making as creative practice, emphasising the search for meaning instead of mere formal abstraction. The lesson will, thus, also look at the evolving forms of photographic practices in the arts, analysing the conceptual and contextual changes in approaches, and discuss the possible directions in which the medium is proceeding.

About the speaker



Sebastian Mary Tay is an interdisciplinary artist and educator. He graduated from The Glasgow School of Art with Master of Research and Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Fine Art. In the last five years, Sebastian's works exhibited in the UK, Lithuania, Singapore, Malaysia, and China. Some exhibitions include 'Something Above; Somewhere Beyond' at FOST Gallery (solo exhibition, Singapore), Bus.Stop. Art (public installation, Singapore), 'Sandstorm in an Hourglass' (group exhibition, Singapore), 'Utopia' (group exhibition, UK), and The Society of Scottish Artists annual exhibitions.

Sebastian's works showed at The Royal Scottish Academy on multiple occasions; he also received the Royal Glasgow Institute prize and the Royal Scottish Academy Latimer Award. In 2020, Sebastian partook in Facebook Artist in Residence (AIR) programme, where he made a site-specific photographic print measuring twenty-five metres and across three walls. More recently, Sebastian collaborated in a project with Facebook Open Arts and Messenger to create a 360° augmented reality background experience.

Various institutions have invited Sebastian for talks and guest lectures in recent years; they include City of Glasgow College (UK), The Royal Scottish Academy (UK), Mount Florida Studios (UK), The University of the West of Scotland (UK), DECK (Singapore), Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore). Sebastian is currently an adjunct lecturer at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, and Nanyang Technological University. His research interests and teaching areas include art history, contextual studies, art theory, contemporary art practice, philosophy, critical theory, photography history, photography theory, photography practice, black and white darkroom photography, alternative processes. Sebastian is based in Singapore; he is currently making works and preparing for exhibitions in Singapore and the UK. He is an elected Professional Member of The Society of Scottish Artists.

About DECK



DECK is a not-for-profit independent art space launched in 2014 with the mission of supporting and nurturing the community of photography enthusiasts in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Housed within 20 modified shipping containers, DECK pushes the boundaries of photography with curated year-round exhibitions, cultivating the understanding of medium through its research-based projects, and supporting the community with its photobook library, school education, artist residency programmes, and analogue darkroom.

DECK is also the home to the biennial Singapore International Photography Festival. Art Photography Centre is a recipient of NAC Major Company Grant - April 2019 to March 2022.

This is the third lecture DECK is hosting by Sebastian Mary Tay.

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