

Extended Portraits

A Senior Project

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Bachelor of Fine Arts

by

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Abstract

For my senior project, I wanted to do something photographically diverse and creative with the classmates of my major. I decided the focus of my project would be portraits and interviews documenting the experiences of those classmates; who they were as people and why they picked Cal Poly as their school. I researched various forms of portraiture and gathered those ideas and various questions to help flesh out my concept. My photo shoots experimented in various forms of alternative portraiture, accompanied with an answered questionnaire filled out by each of them. I wanted the finished product to be well laid out and professional, so I put a lot of time into researching and gathering a fair amount of ideas and digital materials.

The main idea for each person I photographed was to effectively display the photos and text in a manner loosely similar to that of a magazine article or an old scrapbook. I created a template-like layout that allowed me to change and move certain elements from one person's layout to the next, while still displaying a cohesive dynamic between all the layouts that kept the book tied together as a whole. The final product is displayed as a high quality book, ordered through a professional book printing company.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The subject or topic of my senior project was to create documentation of my classmates and to create a book that encapsulated the group as a whole. There wasn't so much of a problem that I was attempting to deal with in doing this senior project, more as an idea or concept that I believe was worth identifying and showcasing. Photography is about capturing the essence of who people are and I wanted to use the skills I had gathered during my time at Cal Poly to showcase my classmates as unique individuals and discover what their experience with our school had been like. In doing so, I also wanted to pay homage to the friendships I had made with them during my time in the department. For me, it was a good opportunity to not only experiment with different forms of portraiture but to also get used to dealing with acquaintances in an intimate, one on one photo situation. That has always been hard for me to do and I wanted to continue to put myself in a situation where I had to deal with that issue. The limitations on this study were that I would not use any artificial lighting in my project. The focus of a lot of our classes is artificial lighting but I fell in love with photography because of concepts like light and shadow and candid shots in the moment. I also limited my photo shoots to where each specific person lived. I didn't want the lighting or their environments to be artificial to who they were and where they lived. Photography can create the illusion of completely different worlds and make them look like a reality; my goal was to capture these people in *their* reality.

Chapter 2

Review of Research

The research I did for this project was primarily done for a specific form of portraiture referred to as a photo collage. A photo collage is a series of photos taken in succession of an object and then later assembled together, like a puzzle, to form the portrait as a whole. There are slightly different approaches to shooting a photo collage and my research involved how I would specifically approach it in order to make an affective portrait. My first few attempts of photo collage distorted the model's face too much, making them hard to recognize and unattractive. After a series of attempts, I started taking bigger pictures that would allow the model's face to fit into one picture perfectly and then I'd continue to photograph the other parts of them and their environment in order to assemble them later. Supplementing my attempts to understand this approach to photography, I visited David Hockney's website to see some examples of what photo collage could look like. David is one of the artists who popularized photo collage years ago so I studied some of the pieces he had assembled and displayed online. There were other online examples I had found but they weren't always successful examples of what photo collage could look like and found many of them crude and lacking.

As well as studying photography techniques, I also had to research for materials and a printer with examples of the kind of book I wanted to make. In order to create the illusion of an old scrapbook, I had to find hi quality-scanned materials online that were available without copyright issues being broached. There was a stock photography

website, called the stock.xchg.com that offered free images as well as images you had to pay for to use. I searched in their free images area for things like old paper, transparent textures and various design elements to implement into my pieces. The other website that helped me the most was Flickr.com, which is a photo networking site with many high quality photos. The issue with Flickr.com was to read below each photo I was interested in to make sure they were releasing said photo to be used or not. There were times that a photo that worked with my design could not be used without the creator's consent. In those cases, I didn't bother using those items because most of the time the creator would post that they were more than happy to let people use their photos or scans.

In regards to a printing company I was to go with, a professor of mine, Bob Howell, had mentioned Blurb.com as one of the websites students could use to get a high quality book printed and other students had used that website as well. What sold me on it though was that a successful local wedding photographer used Blurb.com to print out all of her wedding album books for her clients. I felt that if she trusted the site to produce books for her clients that were paying thousands of dollars for her photography, I could trust them with my project. A subsequent visit to their site showed me that they had many professional book options and a size that I felt was satisfactory to displaying the photos and interviews of my project.

After reviewing the creative choices I had made, in regards to the content and finished product of my book, I decided that I was satisfied with its direction and the product it could become. The photo collage element was something I had to learn specifically for this project and it varied the portraiture techniques I was using in a satisfying manner. Everything I was going to create, from the photos to the layout was

going to be unique and the highest of quality and clarity that I could afford to make it and Blurb.com was a site that could take a project with those expectations and make it a physical reality.

Chapter 3

Procedures and Results

The procedures and results included a lot of pre and post photo shoot work. In regards to what my book would look like, I didn't see a lot of inspiration, so I knew I had to create the layout myself. I knew I wanted to run with the idea of staying away from the artificial and keeping things real looking and tactile (ironic, that I was making artificial "real looking" objects) so I tried implementing a scrapbook type feel to my layouts. Since there was an interview involved with each person, I knew that the layout would have to have a flow based loosely on that of a magazine article, but my plan was to merge both of these ideas into one seamless layout.

The magazine article look was just a matter of organizing the text, so the big issue was creating a layout and organizing my photographic content so that there was room for the interview as well. I played with four-page layouts for a time but soon realized that the only effective way to display my work was by extending them to six-page layouts instead. The first page I created was a title page of sorts that included a large picture of the person accompanied with a quote from their interview and a large version of their name. I wanted the beginning of each layout to look like the beginning of a chapter in a book or the main article in any given magazine. The second page contained the subjects name and the start of the interview. The third page of the layout was solely dedicated to displaying a large version of the photo collage result because I needed to effectively display the subject through the distortion the process created. Text from the interview

would run next to the photo collage if there was sufficient space provided. Page four was a cropped close-up shot that usually had part of the subject's body or face along the edge of the page with the text taking up most of the page itself. A vertical or horizontal element was created by the use of a film-negative strip I had made. This negative strip separated the photo from the text on the page.

The last two pages were dedicated to only the photographs I created. Each photograph I used in my book was digitally distressed in order to make it look old. I wanted my photos to exhibit a timelessness to them as well as invoking a mood or emotion from the viewer. Creating distressed photos that effectively communicated this mood was difficult at times. Within Photoshop, I had to usually make three copies of the same photo and use mode blends between the three of them, an old piece of paper and 1-3 textures to accomplish a believable and unique photo. I wanted all the photos to look realistically distressed but also uniquely distressed from the others, so I never used the same elements together in the same place if I could help it. Examples of creating my layout, attempting my photo collages and distressing photos are located at the end of this report.

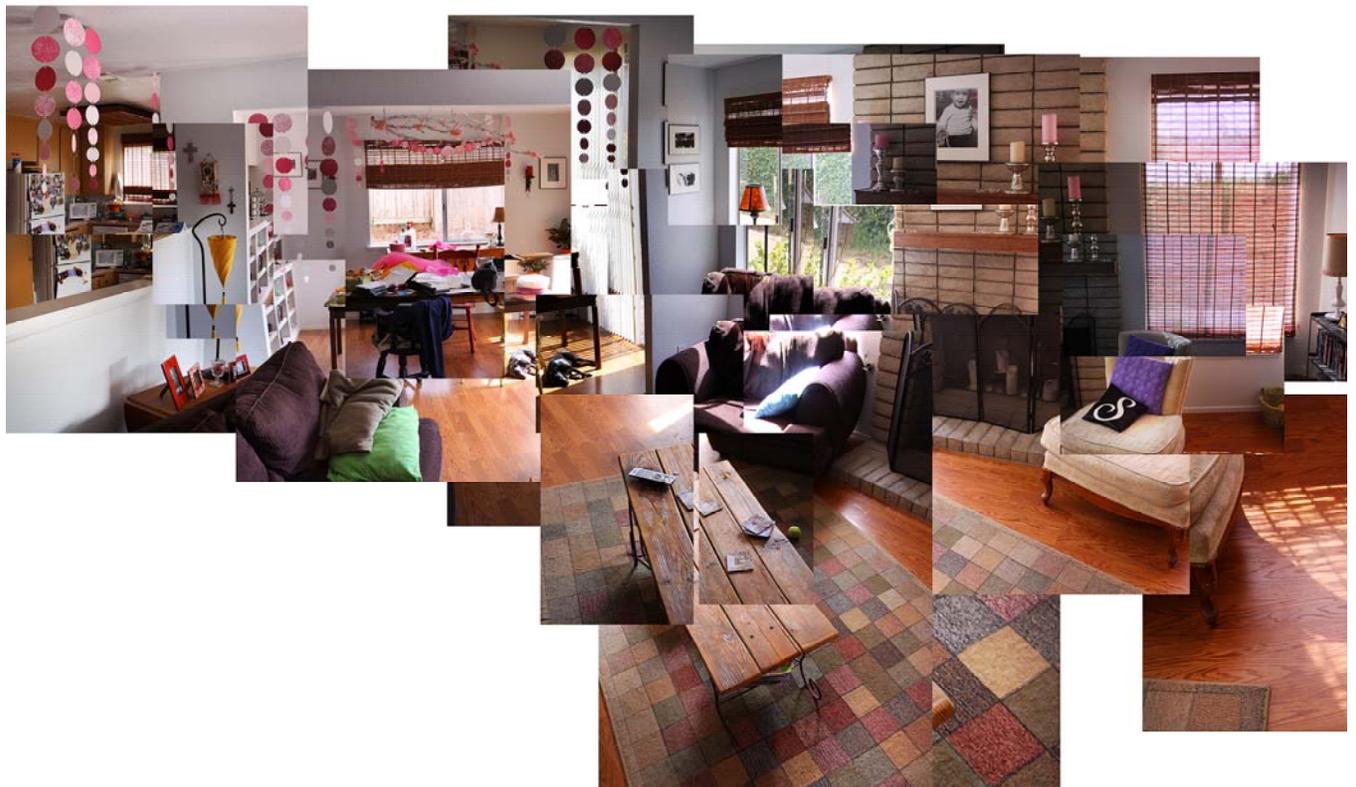
Chapter 4

Summary and Recommendations

My senior project was a book that paid homage to my classmates. It contained photo shoots and answered questionnaires for each person that tell the reader about the experiences they had while at Cal Poly. I researched different photo techniques and settled on a few approaches to portraiture that I used while photographing each person. I practiced photographing a subject in the form of photo collage and settled on an effective approach to using it in my photo shoots. After trying to make a four-page layout, I expanded it to a six-page layout for each classmate. Each person's layout blended the interview questions and photography together. The layout was loosely based on a large magazine article and combined with the idea of a distressed scrapbook. I put all of the layouts I created into a book to be printed professionally. The project as a whole was an exercise for me to get used to working with people in a one on one situation. It challenged me to use the person's home environment as the backdrop to display who they were. Using only available light allowed me to photograph in the manner I enjoy most. The end result is something that can be used by my fellow classmates to remember one another and for prospective art students to read about first hand what it's like going to school here.



tests 5/3/09



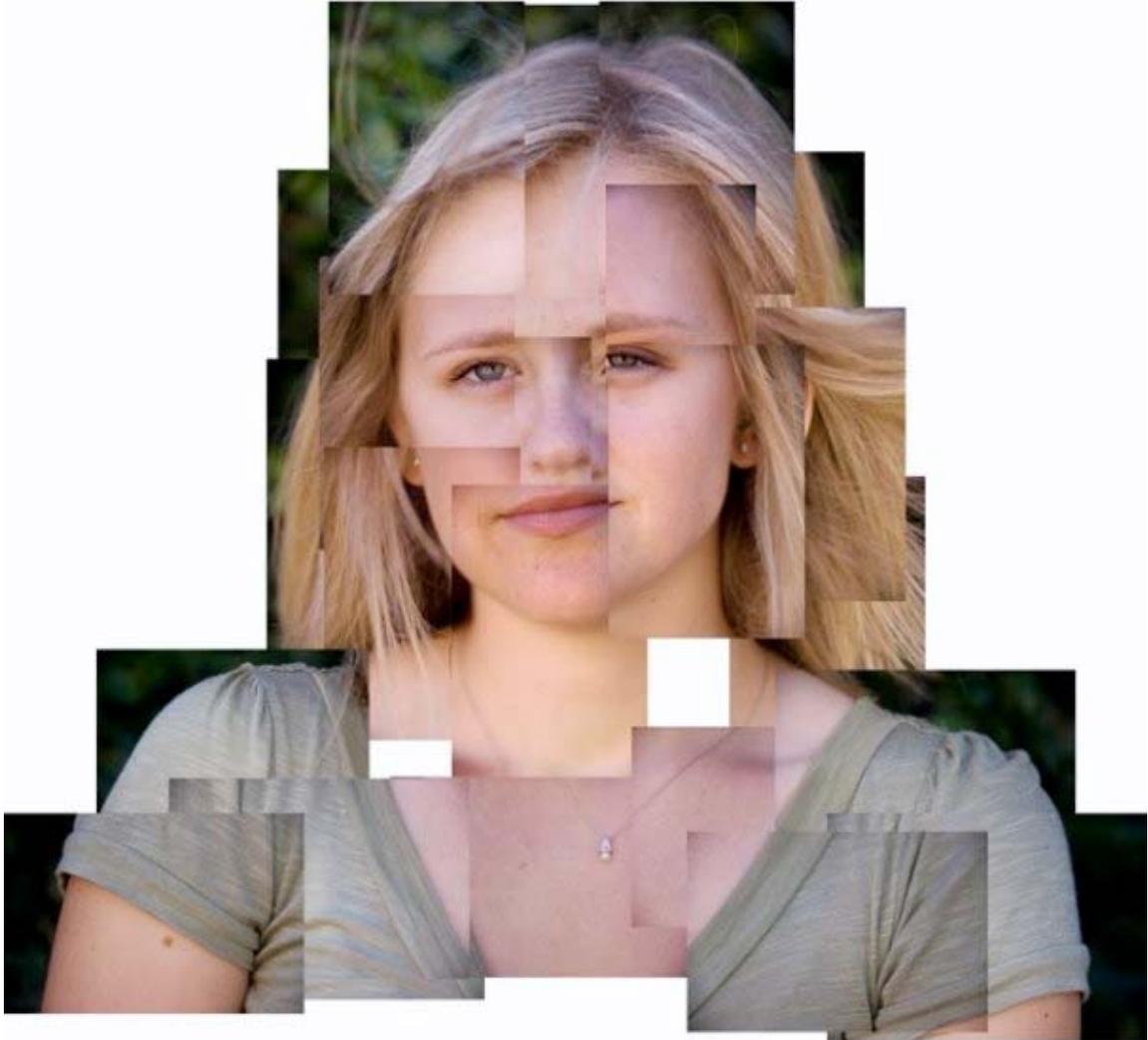


photo collage test

7/08/09



final test 7/14/09

