JUVENESCENCE

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March 2010
When I was accepted into Cal Poly’s photo department, film was still in.
Digital cameras were available, but 35mm film was the biggest part of our
portfolios. When I noticed everyone around me buying digital SLRs, I told them I
would never give in to that, that I was strictly film.

Digital photography eventually took over, and made everyone a
“photographer.” I missed the feeling of being unique by choice of film or
processing, the wait for your negatives to develop; all of a sudden, 35mm film
became nostalgic.

A lot has changed since freshmen year of college. Originally, I thought I
wanted to be a fine art photographer, and then later I thought I could be a
photojournalist. But I was raised on Vanity Fair and Vogue magazines lying on the
coffee table, watching MTV religiously, and the idea that California was the
fountain of youth, and my photography was destined to show that. This project
was my return to film, sort of an homage to it. What better way to finalize my
photography education than by shooting my last assignment on outdated film.

During the final 2 years of my education at Cal Poly, I began realizing and
defining my personal photographic style. Generally I guess it would be referred
to as “lifestyle” photography, but really it’s the culmination of many influences
throughout my life. My photos are intended to evoke positive emotion through young people, colors, and activity. There often is a sense of freedom, though what some people call “no worries,” other people may call “escapism.”

However, by no means do I consider myself an artist; I think of my photos as tools, something to share with other people to be used. I enjoy highlighting the youthful, social, and rebellious quirks of life. Often these images can look cheesy, or as if they came directly from a stock photo agency. That is what this project arose from. The goal was for me to continue developing my style of sun, surf and sex, but add a distance to it, a certain maturity that could make this photo series unique. I needed something that would allow colors to play a key role and had a youthful impurity to it, while still presenting itself as a nearly professional venture.

So the research began- tearing through contemporary magazines, stockpiling websites, sketches and notes on napkins, desperately searching for inspiration. I finally stumbled upon a photographer named Neil Krug. The following page shows some of his recent images.
Neil Krug’s work:

He has no website, no contact info, nothing, just some images posted on a random blog. But his photos instantly instilled in me what I wanted to instill in other people. What he was doing was shooting on old (10 years or more) expired film, and often cross processing them. His results were filled with random color shifts, nearly tie-dying the images. He created photos that were faded yet saturated, nostalgic yet contemporary. I quickly realized this would be
the perfect medium for my project. I had an old technology to represent a modern youth. While there were many other influences and inspirations, aside from Neil Krug there was one other big influence on the final product of my project. Without learning about Robert Frank and his “Americans” series, I never would have appreciated the power of a series of images. His book has played a huge role in developing my taste for grouping images, notably in diptych form. Frank’s faith in the snapshot has been a huge motivation in how I format my photos.

My project would be a series of lifestyle photographs shot on expired film in printed in book form, with the purpose of perpetuating the “no old people allowed” appeal and at the same time giving each composition a timeless element not only because of the film it was shot on, but also due to the props, styling, model selection and locations used.

Luckily, as film is becoming declared dead, rolls of 35mm are very easy to find, and often are offered at discount price. As much as this book was a new way of representing my photographic style, it was also a research project. I wanted to discover what each film had to offer after it passed its expiration date—its color shifts, its reliability, its predictability. I wanted to find out how to match a roll of films personality with the personalities of my compositions. I snatched any
roll of film that I could get my hands on. I followed recommendations off of film blogs and purchased film based on their (often misleading) results. I read posts about toy cameras and holgas and light leaks. I had film shipped from England even. Anything that would give me substantially different results. I then turned my research to the art of cross processing- a relatively risky technique. Going back and forth between C-41 and E-6 processing could make or break a photoshoot. I learned that shooting C-41 negative film and processing it E-6 would yield desaturated images, but processing E-6 film in C-41 chemicals would do the opposite, so I decided to stick to that. If I was shooting C-41 film, I would not cross process it. I shot tests on the 2 largest quantities of film I had gotten my hands on: Kodak Ektachrome tungsten balanced slide film, and cheap Kodak Ultramax daylight negative film. They both resulted in what I had been told- the Ektachrome went blue due to the tungsten balance, so once color corrected in cross processing it turned very saturated with green and yellow color shifts. The Ultramax had a slight desaturation of colors, but held reds and oranges well. From there I grabbed similar slide and negative films that I believed would yield similar results, and associated them as best I could with appropriate photoshoots/models/times of day. Again, I wanted the freedom of youth represented through color, motion and space, and in near-candid form. On the
following page is the log of each roll of film shot, with expiration date of the roll, how it was processed, the subject matter, and any special treatment.

FILM LOG
1} kodak ektachrome iso 64 tungsten exp 9/03
   natalie at shell beach
   processed normal-slides
   color corrected when scanned- very blue

2} albertsons iso 200 exp 10/03
   processed normal- negs/prints
   randoms around hermosa

3} kodak ultramax iso 400 exp 4/09
   processed normal- negs/prints
   ventura waves

4} english iso 400 exp-n/a
   processed normal- negs/prints
   waves and horses

5} kodak ektachrome iso 64 tungsten exp 9/03
   cross processed c-41
   wes on bike, alli arms up in field
   color corrected by lab- green/yellow shift

6} fuji sensia 400 exp 10/09
   placed near heater/sun for 4+ hours
   meghan and jamee facepaint
   processed normal-clean

7} fuji superia iso 800 exp 9/03
   left in sun for 4+ days
   allison topless at shell
   processed normal- negs/prints
   poor quality, slight fade in colors
A few times I tried to further “tweak” the film by attempting to speed up the aging process. Instructions on film boxes normally state to keep film in cool, dry places, and as photographers we often put rolls of film in the fridge. So I did the opposite of that. If the sun was out, I’d leave a roll or two in direct sun. If it was cloudy, I’d place rolls next to a space heater for a few days. I heard rumors of placing film in an oven set around 200 degrees, but I chose not to risk melting it.

I had 2 rules for this project: 1- to shoot strictly expired 35mm film, and 2- to not edit or enhance any of my photographs, be it in the darkroom or computer. This was my challenge, a back-to-basics approach.
The most interesting part of this project I think though, was how competent I felt shooting film. Because it was film, and because there was a due date, there was pressure for me to perform. I wanted to prove that I could compose and expose an image properly given the idea in my head. And every time I released the shutter, I looked at the back of the camera waiting for an image to pop up on the LCD screen that didn’t exist. I was really on my own for deciding if this would be a successful image or not- I had to be more aware of my ISO, shutter speed and aperture than I’ve been in a long time. There was no “shoot until it looks good” approach. There’s a Henry David Thoreau quote that says, “Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplify, simplify, simplify!” I really felt the simplicity during this project- I re-discovered that love for simply pressing the button, a feeling that I think can be lost when shooting digital. At some points during photoshoots, it felt like I had very little control on anything whatsoever. Some people identified those photos as “artsy” because they were blurry or oddly colored, but I disagree with them. I feel like with cameras and software being so accessible by the public, more image tweaking is happening on digital than ever on film. The film I shot was “take it as it is.”

Shooting on film and really diving into the research and planning gave me an opportunity to come full circle. I wanted this project to really show a
culmination of my experiences at Cal Poly, both in the classroom and out of it. I wanted the photography to show a mastery of technical skill, and a choice to shoot in a rougher style. The production of this book was something I believe I could not have done 4 years ago- casting models; organizing shoot times; knowledge and operation of specific lighting equipment; managing people, time and money; and getting a complex idea to become a reality. The book proved to be the perfect way to showcase this new series. As I said before, I think of my photographs as tools- I don’t want them to be static, I want them passed around, touched, emulated, stolen even. The book let me do all that. It was also perfect, as I have been working on my professional branding. Having a book opens up a lot of doors for my post-college career; I worked with a designer on my personal logo, and am excited about the business side of photography. But ultimately, this book was about the photos. The double page diptych spreads and being able to flip through it in succession gave it the montage feel I wanted. A gallery showing would not have had that same feeling of motion; it wouldn’t have pulled the viewer into his or her own space. Through the book, I think people get to see my fantasy world, and understand how youth and vitality are the biggest concepts in my work. My photos are supposed to motivate and invigorate, and I think this book will be successful in doing so.