

american

PHOTO

ON CAMPUS

FEBRUARY 2011

RESCUING AMERICA'S TREES

**A Photographic
Campaign**

LESSON PLAN

Photo teachers'
favorite assignments

PHOTO BUSINESS

Digital printmaking
as a career

A subtly Photoshopped image created by City College of San Francisco student Brandon Norris for Erika Gentry's "Truth or Fiction" assignment.



Not So Simple

How teachers show their students that there's more to photography than meets the eye

BY MICHELLE BOGRE

It's complicated. In one sense, photography is easy, which is why Facebook users upload nearly 2,000 images every second. In another sense, photography is hard—technically and conceptually ambitious, at least if you want to create images that challenge your viewers. In today's photography-is-easy world, photo teachers may find themselves trying to convince students that there's more to photography than meets the eye—that the medium requires a greater investment of thought and energy than they might have believed. To that end, photo teachers often create layered assignments that appear easy but contain hidden challenges. Here are a few good examples.

• **Erika Gentry challenges** students in her Intermediate Photoshop class at the City College of San Francisco with an assignment titled "Truth or Fiction." At first the assignment appears to be a matter of standard digital compositing: Students must combine three images into one, making sure that shadow direction, tonal values and scale are consistent and believable in the new image.

However, Gentry turns this seemingly basic technical assignment into a rigorous theoretical and critical inquiry into whether photography can or should be considered truth—a debate that has been taking place almost since the medium's inception. She tells students that while their finished composites must be realistic, they should also compel the viewer to consider whether the scene really existed.

To prepare students for class discussions, Gentry asks them to read about Pedro Meyer, a pioneer in the digital manipulation of photographs for creative and conceptual purposes, and to read an article on *The New York Times* website titled "Faked Photographs: Look, and Then Look Again." She also points them to relevant essays by photo critic Fred Ritchin as well as the websites of artists like Anthony Goicolea, Andreas Gefeller and Maggie Taylor, each of whom uses digital manipulation for different purposes. Throughout the discussion, Gentry challenges students to consider how combining and manipulating photographs changes meaning and memory, along with the possible societal consequences of such fakery.

As an added benefit, Gentry throws in a short lesson on copyright. Students must either use their own images or, if they need something they can't create, buy it from stock sources. "I don't let them use low-res images from the web unless they get the copyright owner's permission," she says.

SHARE YOUR IMAGINATION

SAVINGS FOR STUDENTS & INSTRUCTORS
ON AWARD WINNING BRANDS.
FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO
WWW.MANFROTTO.US



Manfrotto
Imagine More

ASSIGNMENT



Teacher: Elaine Crivelli
School: Phillips Academy,
Andover, MA
Assignment: Progression

• **Elaine Crivelli** believes that one of her main tasks as a visual studies teacher is to “unfreeze” students and get them to think more experimentally. One digital photography assignment that has this effect, she says, is what she calls “Progression.” The assignment’s description is uncomplicated: Produce an eight-image grid that consists of four pairs of images, with each pair defined by four “stages.” As defined by Crivelli, these are shape and abstraction, line and repetition, light and shadow, and color and abstraction.

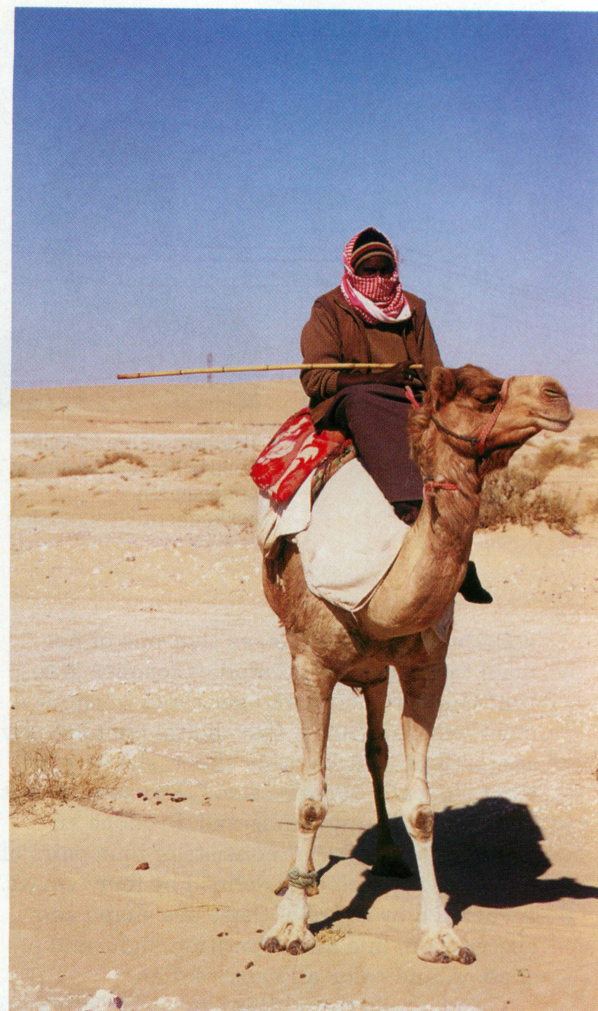
Crivelli tells her Phillips Academy students to make many pairs of images for each stage because she knows that they will find the assignment much more complicated than it seems. After the students select their four pairs from the many they’ve shot, they use Photoshop to refine the images, making them consistent in format, size, tone and contrast. This gives them the opportunity to work with basic Photoshop tools such as cropping, adjustments, levels, resizing and resolution.

Once that’s done, the complexity of the assignment emerges. As students create their grids, they realize that in addition to images having to work as pairs, the pairs have to work with other pairs. Sometimes this discovery sends the students back to their outtakes. “The assignment challenges the students to produce images that work individually and as pairs, and then collectively in an eight-image whole,” Crivelli explains. “And for the project to be really successful, there should be a visual, compositional and narrative progression from the first image to the last image.”

Crivelli likes the layers of learning and practice that this assignment creates. “Even though the students don’t realize it at first, choosing the eight images adds a lesson in curating,” she says. “The images have to work together in every direction—horizontally, vertically and diagonally.” **AP**



Phillips Academy student Rochelle Wilbun created this eight-panel grid for Elaine Crivelli’s “Progression” assignment.



Photographs shot for Amy Stein's Winter Break assignment, by Parsons The New School for Design students Jeanie Choi (above, left) and Ayesha Malik (above).



Teacher Erika Gentry
School City College of San Francisco
Assignment Truth or Fiction?

● **The year-long** Freshman Seminar at Parsons The New School for Design integrates the technique, theory and conceptualization that might normally be taught in separate classes—at least the way Amy Stein teaches it. “I love teaching freshmen because they are still scared,” Stein says. “Spending a year with the same students lets me really get to know them. It becomes personal, and I try to engage them by talking a lot about my own art practice.” Stein’s students spend the first semester working mainly in black and white, processing and printing film. In the second semester they learn about color negative film, color printing and digital photography.

To kick-start the move to color, Stein assigns a homework project over the winter break. The assignment’s description is simple: Buy two rolls of color transparency film and, during break, photograph family, home life or anything else that has personal meaning. Students soon learn that the combination of shooting unforgiving color transparency film and finding meaningful photographs in a world they take for granted is anything but simple. “I choose slide film because they don’t know how to print color yet,” Stein

says. “I also want them to discover how color changes their photographic thinking.”

Before students leave for break, Stein shows them a short film about William Eggleston, along with his work, to introduce the idea that color can add emotional nuance and meaning to a photograph. Requiring students to shoot slides adds an important technical element to the assignment. “Chrome is a great process for teaching,” Stein says. “Exposure and color balance must be precise, so there’s a serious chance students will mess it up, which is good. I use their successes and their mistakes as a starting point for conversations about color.”

Since everyone is required to show the entire contents of his or her two rolls in a group slide show, the work is more personal than anything they presented in the fall, allowing students to get to know each other better. And that familiarity facilitates more in-depth critiques. “A slide show is also fun because it’s an old-fashioned way of looking at images,” Stein says. “Seeing everyone’s work on the first day of class helps bring us back together. We learn a lot about each other, and what has meaning to us.”



Teacher Amy Stein
School Parsons The New School for Design, New York, NY
Assignment Winter Break