

Photography in Focus: an introduction to history(ies) and theor(ies)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this crash course students will have a foundational understanding of the major historical milestones and theoretical frameworks of photography studies. They will be able to identify some key figures and movements and discuss the evolution of photographic practices between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Course Contents

This course will cover the inception and development of photography from its 19th-century beginnings to some contemporary practices. Topics include early photography pioneers, the relationship between photography and fine arts, feminist and decolonial perspectives, and the impact of digital technologies and AI on photography. Each session will blend historical overviews with theoretical discussions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the medium.

Teaching Methods

The course will utilise a combination of lectures, interactive discussions and activities to facilitate learning. Lectures will provide foundational knowledge, while interactive surveys, self-evaluation tests and round table discussions will engage students in active learning.

Readings/Bibliography

Each lecture will be accompanied by a curated list of reference readings, providing deeper insights into the topics covered. These readings will include a mix of seminal texts, contemporary research articles and relevant book chapters. Additionally, the instructor's slides will be made available to students on Teams at the conclusion of each class, ensuring they have access to all key points and visual aids discussed during the sessions. This approach will help students reinforce their understanding and engage more thoroughly with the course material.

Teaching Tools

To support the learning process, the course will utilise a variety of teaching tools including PowerPoint presentations, videos and online galleries. Interactive platforms such as discussion forums and quizzes will be used to facilitate engagement and self-assessment. Supplementary materials and resources will be accessible through a dedicated online portal, ensuring that students have ample support throughout the course.

Course Structure:

● LESSON 1 (2H): Introduction and background. Pt 1

- An overview of the course objectives and student learning outcomes
- Introduction to key concepts: photography “history” and “theory”
- The inception of the medium and its pioneers Pt 1

● LESSON 2 (2H): Introduction and background. Pt 2

- The inception of the medium and its pioneers Pt 2
- What is photography? Some theoretical approaches

● LESSON 3 (2H): Photography and visual arts

- Photography and the fine arts: a historical debate
- Pictorialism and modernism: the first exhibitions

● LESSON 4 (2H): Photography cultures reader: decentring the gaze

- Women and photography in the 19th century
- A focus on feminist photography
- Decolonising the gaze, decolonising the archive

● LESSON 5 (2H): Contemporary photography and theory

- What is post-photography? An open debate
- Photography and AI
- Final review of key concepts and cases