

Documentary Photography

Documentary Photography refers to the area of photography in which pictures are used as historical documents. Rather than serving as a source of art or aesthetic pleasure, documentary photography is often used to incite political and social change due to its ability to capture the “true” nature of an image or location. In simple terms, this school of photography uses pictures as documented evidence of a particular situation.

Lewis Hine and James Van DerZee are two of the pioneers of documentary photography. While documentary and artistic photography are considered to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, Paul Strand is one of the few photographers famous for slyly blending these two opposing schools through his avant-garde style. Often pictures taken in the vein of documentary photography tend to be shocking, grotesque, vivid and intense to prove a point and evoke a viewer’s emotions. Some of the most common examples of documentary photographs are featured in modern newspapers and magazines. Through these images, the public learns truth information about cultural, political and environmental situations. Given this fact, it is no surprise that documentary photography exploded into the American consciousness during the Great Depression of 1930s when photographers were documenting the pervasive poverty.

Fashion Photography

Fashion Photography is the area of photography that concentrates on taking pictures of clothing or accessories (on models or alone) to be published in fashion magazines, advertisements or circulated among designers. Baron Adolphe de Meyer is credited as the first fashion photographer. In 1913, Meyer took the first fashion photographs for Vogue. Modern fashion photography can be done with a commercial or aesthetic twist. Fashion shots tend to be taken in exotic locales with dramatic lighting.

Some of the more noted fashion photographers include Phillippe Halsman, Helmut Newton and Herb Ritts. Vogue, Bizarre and Life magazines have all been noted sources of fashion photography. Fashion photography tends to be a credible watermark of beauty ideals of a given era, as well as an indicator of the political and social climate.

Glamour Photography History

Glamour photography is redefined by every generation depending on the social and political currents of the time.

In the 1940s, pictures of “pinup” girls were considered glamorous. Pictures of Betty Grable, one of the most popular glamour photography models, were carried to war by hundreds of G.I’s. Glamour photography from the war era featured models either fully clothed or wearing swimsuits.

Over time, glamour photography has become more risqué. By the 1960s, models were posing for glamour shots in skimpier clothing, smaller bathing suits, lacy lingerie or partially nude. Women have most often been the subject of glamour photography, probably because men were usually behind the camera! While today women are still posing for glamour shots more than men, men are gaining a stronger presence in the realm of glamour photography.

War Photography and Combat Photography

War photography changed how people perceived war and how news publications reported armed conflict. While people may not fully understand the grim reality of war by reading a news article, they often immediately grasp it by viewing graphic pictures of war. War photography has always been controversial, both in terms of the explicit nature of combat photography and potential military censorship of images. Both issues are as true to day as they were when Mathew Brady’s team first took pictures of the American Civil War during the 1860s.

Combat Photography Today

Combat photographers place themselves in great danger to capture pictures of war. Although international law protects journalists and photographers, both are still targets in a war zone. In addition to the dangers inherent to a war zone, war photographers are sometimes deliberately targeted, abducted or executed.

War photos have often been decried as too gruesome or violent for the public. Attempts by the military (in any country) to control pictures of war have led to what some call a whitewashed portrayal of war.

Combat Photography Today cont....

War photos released of smart bombs striking buildings are not as personal as pictures of dirty, exhausted combatants. Some have claimed military-sanctioned war photos attempt to portray the image of a war without casualties.

One fact remains clear: For better or worse, combat photography influences how we see war and conflict.

Fine Art Photography

Fine Art Photography, also known simply as art photography, refers to the branch of photography dedicated to producing photos for purely aesthetic purposes. Fine art photography, housed in museums and galleries, is mainly concerned with presenting beautiful objects or ordinary objects in beautiful ways to convey intensity and emotion.

Much of art photography is produced in limited quantities and, at times, is used in advertisements or magazines. However, because each person has an individual view of what constitutes beauty, deciphering what is or isn't fine art photography is entirely subjective. Another challenge in the world of fine art photography is the fact that photography is a relatively new medium of art, as compared to painting or music.

Portrait Photography

In simple terms, portrait photography is a photograph of a person, usually focused on the face. While many immediately think of portraiture as pictures taken by a professional photographer, it can also include candid photos taken by amateur shutterbugs. In either case, the goal of portraits is to capture the physical likeness, as well as the personality, of the subject.

Gothic Photography

Gothic photography is an elusive term that is almost as hard to define as Goth culture itself. Although some Goth photography is dark, sombre and macabre, the subjects of gothic photography can be more diverse than cemeteries and desolate landscapes.

Goth photography may include portraits that range from being serious and fetishist to playful and darkly humorous.

Goth Culture

As a product of the Goth subculture, gothic photography can be understood only through having an understanding of Goth culture. The Goth subculture began over the late 1970s and early 1980s. Initially part of the punk scene, Goths gradually diverged from punks to take on a distinct identity.

Rather than ignore the darker side of life, Goth culture accepts and focuses on death, suffering and pain. However, this doesn't mean that Goths deny life and positive emotions. Instead, they have an interest in areas of life that non-Goths usually view with discomfort. While Goth fashions tend towards predominantly black and white colours, reds and purples also play a role. Yet, like any area of fashion, individual tastes come into play. While some Goths favour fishnets and the lacy fashions of 18th century costumes, other Goths prefer more industrial or leather-based fashions. Goth culture, and Goth photography, is ultimately about a willingness to see beauty in the disturbing or morbid. Goth is as diverse as the writings of Poe and the lyrics of contemporary Goth bands.

Black and White Goth Photography

Because of the centrality of the colours black and white to Goth culture, black and white film is a natural choice for Goth photography. By removing colour from photographs, black and white Goth photography can concentrate on the interplay of light and shadows. Cemetery photos are popular, whether or not people are present in the picture.

Black and white film lends Goth photography a mysterious, nostalgic feel. Similarly, the timelessness of the black and white tones helps gothic photography set scenes that remind the viewers of life, death and other such constants.