

Research Proposal

Research Problem Statement

Early photography is a fascinating area of study. The period that particularly interests me is the mid 1900s. There were so many improvements coming about and so much experimentation going on. Trade secrets were held tightly by individuals; meaning that many photographers had to design and build their own equipment. With this project, I wanted to research the style and methodology of a famous photographer from this time period and attempt to emulate it in my own work. As a point of clarification, the goal was not to recreate specific images but rather to capture the same feel as the photographer I chose. Also, I am not attempting to recreate the mechanical process. I used modern technology to achieve similar stylistic results. I chose Philippe Halsman, a portrait photographer who began his career around 1930. When I first saw Halsman's photography I was intrigued. The further I dug and read the more inspired I became. His portraits are unique, funny, serious, or whatever else best captured the person being photographed. I also resonated deeply with his fascination with people and desire to "unmask" the real self through his images. By studying his images and methodology I hoped to improve my own soul capturing abilities via camera.

Communication Objective

Philippe Halsman has had a broad impact on the realm of photography and has produced images that have become iconic. His journey as a self-taught photographer is inspirational as is his view behind portraiture. Learning about his life and his work has been a fascinating and inspirational process for me. I hope that my work will have a profound impact on people, specifically to draw them to Christ. Any opportunity I have to learn how to communicate better through my art is something I will readily jump on. It is undeniable that Halsman's work spoke to people. One need look no further than his 100 LIFE Magazine covers to be certain of that. Halsman was able to capture the person in their portrait; not merely what the person looked like but something of the essence of the person him or herself. The hope is that studying Halsman's process in capturing these sort of images as well as in studying the images themselves I will have learned to do the same with my photography, even if in small

part. I know that my portraiture has improved because of this project but ultimately it is up to the viewer to decide if I have been successful or not.

Visual Solution

I created a total of 25 photographs in which I attempted to emulate the style and methodology of photographer Philippe Halsman. Since he was a portrait photographer all of my images are also portraits. He put a high emphasis on getting people to “drop their masks” and thought that what he said to the people he was taking pictures of was more important than almost anything else. I tried to emulate this focus on drawing out the individual and as a result you will find the mood of the photographs to be very different from one another. Some of the photographs of the same person even vary drastically from one another giving the viewer glimpses into the different facets of the subject’s soul. All of the final images are in black and white and many of them are softer and grainier than is commonly found in modern photography as I was experimenting with the comparatively softer, vintage feel to Halsman’s images. Some specific subcategories of portraiture that Halsman was interested in and I spent time researching and attempting to emulate were his “jumping” photographs, some of his outdoor portrait shoots as well as a studio shoot he did entitled “The Frenchman.” This last group was unique in that Halsman’s goal was to ask his subject various questions and capture the man’s facial responses to those questions.

How it was Produced

While Philippe Halsman would have used a film camera, I executed this project with my Nikon D40. Some of the images were taken outside and some were taken in the lighting studio on campus. All images were initially taken in color and I put them all into black and white in Lightroom. I also intentionally added some grain to most of the images. Even though Halsman was known for the crispness of his images, they are still typically softer and more grainy than photographs by modern professionals. I was intentional through all of the shoots I did to try and show the person behind the image. I spent a lot of time just talking with my subjects to help them feel comfortable in front of the camera and so that I could capture genuine reactions. The jumping photographs took quite a few tries each to get right. I can only imagine

how difficult it would have been to get those images sharp during Halsman's time. I followed the same habit as he did to gather all of his jumping photographs. That is, for the duration of this project, every time I did a photoshoot or even just had my camera with me I would take a couple shots of the people jumping as opposed to having a dedicated shoot for images of people jumping.