

SPECTRUM

by

Savannah E. Stewart

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Honors College

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for

Graduation with Honors

by

Savannah E. Stewart

Greenville, NC

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Approved by:

Angela Wells

School of Art and Design, College of Fine Arts and Communication

Artist's Statement

When I began this project, commercial photography was all I had known. I knew that I wanted to capture my world as opposed to photographing a client, but I wasn't sure how to accomplish that. Originally, I thought this show would be a literal representation of the significant elements of my life: people, places, even symbolic rites of passage that come with being a graduating senior. I set out to make photos that infused meaning into all of these places and transform them into what I wanted them to be. However, as I worked, I became increasingly frustrated with my photographs. None of them meant anything to me. My approach wasn't working. To relieve my frustration, I sought out why I loved photographing in the first place. I began to pay attention to the world around me. To see it in a new way and photograph it accordingly. Instead of changing the world to meet my vision, I let the world inspire my vision.

Finally, I was making photographs that were about me and for me. I was capturing what was truly important: the still small moments. It was less about the specific people and places and more about the experiences of life. These photos represent my personal encounters with the world around me throughout this past year. A "self-portrait", if you will, of my world – staying true to my initial vision. However, in the images I created the important aspects of life that I set out to capture are far more implicit, much like in life itself. The things you really appreciate are found in the fleeting moments you notice briefly, rather than the overt elements of life. As I started compiling them together, I noticed that the images were reminiscent of a spectrum ranging from dark to light, bad to good, uncomfortable to joyful. The images are both a visual spectrum moving from dark to light and an experiential spectrum of the small moments both good and bad. An apt metaphor for life as a whole. Furthermore, this spectrum of experiences was a phenomenon experienced by more than just me. It was representative of life with sparks of hope in the darkness and bits of bad in the light with the majority of moments falling in the grey space.

Spectrum

Growing up, my father would seemingly always have his professional camera with him in every moment, capturing life as we lived it. I would delight in the images he made and the special way he was able to view the world around us. These photos documented more than just the world around us, but the significance and emotion of each moment as a cherished memory. I knew I wanted the opportunity to see the world as he did, through the lens of a camera. When I was old enough to get a camera of my own, I taught myself the basics of photography and began photographing everything I could. However, most of my academic career centered around STEM with the goal of working in medicine. While I loved photography, it took a backseat to other areas of my life. When I was in high school, my father took our passions for photography and turned them into a family business that I still work with today. This business increased my photographing but focused me on the world of commercial photography.

When I decided to pursue this project, I knew that it would be out of my comfort zone. Photography, like much of art, is known for being quite different than what I typically studied: natural and social sciences. Pursing a project outside of my major meant that I had to be flexible with my understanding of academics. I was required to view skills like writing and research through the lens of art. However, I was able to bring a unique perspective because my experience is rooted so strongly in the sciences. Furthermore, my previous photographic experience centered around commercial photography. Not only was I viewing my academics in a new way, but I was pushed to explore photography as a fine art.

Going into the project, I knew that I wanted to photograph the world around me. However, my previous experience did little to prepare me for photography as a fine art. I began with the idea of photographing literal elements of my life that I felt were significant to me such as people and places. I thought that I could take these aspects and infuse meaning into them by altering them to what I wanted them to be. I made a list of what I wanted to include and began photographing as much as I could with

little thought into making the photographs. Sometimes I would photograph specific times in my day, other times I would plan specific subject to photograph. Yet each week I would review the photos to find a few that I liked and none that held any meaning to me or others. After months of this process, I was frustrated with myself. I wasn't producing what I thought would be easy and my photographs were not living up to the expectations that had been set for them. Even more upsetting was the fact that I did not know what I was doing wrong or how to fix it. I felt stuck. I was not getting anywhere with the photos I had been making and I was no longer enjoying the process. I needed a break.

Around the end of fall semester, I chose to step away from my project and rekindle my joy for photography. I spent the break remembering why I loved photographing in the first place: the unique way a photographer gets to view the world. Instead of planning ahead of time, I began to take a more intuitive approach to photographing. I was more intentional when looking at the world around me. I sought out the unique perspective I had as a photographer and photographed my environment accordingly. Instead of trying to transform the elements of my life into what I wanted them to be, I allowed my vision to be inspired by my environment. For the first time, my photographs were about me and for me. My focus changed from the overt people and places to still small moments. The experiences of life were always more important to me and my photographs were finally representative of that.

With my transition to intuitive photograph making, my perspective of all photographs changed. I learned to look at photographs as parts that contribute to the whole. Additionally, I was able to evaluate the aspects of my photographs and how the different reactions they elicit. One of my favorite elements to evaluate was the intentional use of light in photos and how strongly it correlated with the emotional strength of a photo. This allowed me to be more aware of, and thus intentional with, the images I was making and how to improve them.

As my photography grew, I was able to learn and grow as a person through my photography. One of the reasons I became so frustrated with my work was because I was crumbling under the

pressure of my expectations and others. In fact, my photos were more successful and more enjoyable when I was photographing alone because I was able to escape the pressure of living up to expectations. I was able to extend this knowledge to photographing others. I gave myself permission to show my unique vision through my photography rather than trying to live up to other's expectations and seeking their approval. Not only will this help me as I continue photographing for myself in the future, but it has grown me as a commercial photographer as well. Even as I pursue medicine, I will be able to use this to alleviate some of the pressure that comes with other's expectations.

The resulting photographs that make up my creative endeavor represent my encounters with the world throughout the past year. As I had originally hoped, the images are glimpses into my experience in my current stage of life. However, the images are not explicit in content like I originally attempted. Instead, the photos encompass the more significant, fleeting moments that a person truly appreciates. When I began viewing the photos as parts of a bigger project, I noticed that the images resembled a spectrum of both light and content. On a literal level the photos transition from dark to light in exposure and color. However, each photo has both pure black and pure white in them suggesting that nothing is entirely light or dark. Likewise, the content of the photos mirrors the light spectrum with an experiential spectrum. The darkest photos elicit the most negative, uncomfortable reactions while the lighter photos elicit more positivity.

I was drawn to this concept because it aptly represents life itself: a few good and bad extremes with most of life falling somewhere in between. Furthermore, the idea of an experiential spectrum was not something that was exclusive to me. The spectrum of life is a phenomenon experienced by other's as well. Everyone experiences their dark times, and everyone has their joyous moments, even if the experiences look different from person to person. I feel that is a sentiment mirrored in my images: brief sparks of hope in the darkest moments, glimpses of bad in the good and the majority of moments fall somewhere in the grey space.

SPECTRUM

Savannah Stewart

Mentor: Angela Wells







Exp 15
Unknown
CHEMICAL

Methanol

Et₂O

CHEMICAL
Neu-
OWNER























THANK YOU!

Health Science Student Center Gallery
April 17th, 2021 – August 27th, 2021