

Sabbatical Report

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Acknowledgments: I would like to sincerely thank Collin College, President Cary Israel, the Board of Trustees, Dean Gaye Cooksey, and the members of the Sabbatical Committee for granting me the opportunity to work on my dissertation and creative photography project during fall 2014.

Summary of Creative Project: My ultimate goal was to adopt the visual language of photography by creating a narrative about the millions of Latin American immigrants discussed in the news, those who serve us on a daily basis. However, instead of marginalizing the laborer by depicting them in their work environment, or in a uniform, the immigrants in my photographic project are dressed in their best attire and collaborated in the decisions regarding their portrayal. The photographs serve as a documentary record of the many hardworking immigrant laborers who usually are relegated to the status of “non-belonging other” and not as an equal. I was able to create a small archive to illuminate the face of the unseen worker and to raise their status from insignificant to equal. The images within the frame are comprised of a formal portrait of the individual dressed in their best clothes, text covering current wage statistics or work information in jobs commonly performed by immigrants, maps of the sitter’s home country, and an appropriated traditional ‘straight’ documentary photograph of laborers involved in the same occupation as the sitter.

Methodology for Photographic Work: I first photographed fifty immigrant laborers against a white backdrop. The group included men and women of different ages who arrived in the US at different stages. While I contacted laborers from Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Costa Rica, the only two countries represented in this body of work are Mexico and Costa Rica. The shots were taken in the subject's backyard and a short interview was conducted in their homes. I researched various wage statistics and maps to include in the final images, scanned historical images from books, and began the process of creating a unique collage for each individual. Once I had all the portraits, I began creating the collages using the Adobe Photoshop application. First, I removed the subjects from the white backdrop and placed them on a blank 30"x 40" white canvas. Lastly, I incorporated maps, text, and other graphics along with the formal portrait and a historical photograph.

Interview Questions:

1. Where were you born?
¿Donde naciste?
2. Why did you decide to leave your home country for the United States?
¿Por qué decidiste dejar tu país para venir a los Estados Unidos?
3. How old were you when you arrived?
¿Qué edad tenías cuando llegaste?
4. What was your first job in the US?
¿Cuál fue tu primer trabajo en los EE.UU.?
5. What is your job now?
¿En qué trabajas ahora?

Written Component of Dissertation: I was able to complete the first drafts of two chapters of the accompanying scholarly essay. In chapter one, I examine the history of social documentary photography through the lens of immigration. The focus is directed on the pioneers of traditional documentary photography, Jacob A. Riis, Lewis Wickes Hine, those who worked for the Farm Security Administration, and the street photographers of the 1950s and 1960s. The chapter analyzes images that have historically served as a teaching tool by social organizations and the way the documentary practice has traditionally been accepted as truthful evidence of the real.

Chapter two examines contemporary challenges to documentary photography as a tool for social change in a digital world where audiences are more sophisticated and far more suspicious of images as evidence of the real. New digital technology, such as the use of animation or other computer-generated material, has forced the challenge to dated theories and definitions of what is real and what constitutes a documentary. Since the 1970s and 1980s, critics such as Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler argued that the documentary photograph should be called into question. The chapter also discusses the work of contemporary documentary photographers and filmmakers who adopt non-traditional methods to raise social awareness. I argue that the photograph as evidence of the real endures, and currently has the political power to raise social awareness despite the proliferation of images society encounters on a daily basis.

Creative Exhibition: The University of Texas at Dallas Visual Arts Gallery will host an exhibition of my photographs from June 26-July 24, 2015. An opening reception will be held on Friday, June 26, 2015.

Sample images: Digital Inkjet Prints, 30"x40"





Summary of Experience: My sabbatical leave was spent productively researching, writing, and creating. The time off allowed me the opportunity to work on my own photographs as well as research various contemporary photographers still working within the genre of documentary photography. I have begun to incorporate my research into the classroom by updating lectures and assignments for my students. They will be able to ask questions and challenge preconceived notions of what

constitutes a documentary photograph. In addition, I have become more proficient at working with Adobe Photoshop, mastering new concepts, learning new tricks, and honing my skills to improve my productivity.