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### Shadow and Light

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# Shadows and Light

Students learn the simple power of a black-and-white photo to reveal truths about their classmates and themselves.

As students in the May Term course “Photographic Portraiture” review each others’ final projects, critiques are punctuated with warm laughter and empathetic smiles. They’ve become a close-knit group over the past four weeks, often using one another as subjects for their black-and-white photo portraits.

“I found that students really respond well to a portraiture theme,” says adjunct School of Art Instructor Marie-Susanne Langille, who herself is a professional portrait photographer. “As members of the Facebook and MySpace generation, they already enjoy taking and sharing digital photos of themselves and their friends.”

Langille funneled that enthusiasm to help students discover how photo portraiture can rise to the level of art. Students learned how their cameras could serve both as windows through which to gaze into someone else’s life and as mirrors reflecting back truths about themselves. Through it all, they used simple \$30 film cameras — reflecting Langille’s belief that digital photography just doesn’t deliver the detail and emotional impact of film.

“Plus it’s just a really fun camera to use because you don’t have to learn a lot about technical stuff to take interesting photos,” she adds. “It allows them to just dive in.” During the month, students also learned basic darkroom techniques and took a trip to Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Art Institute and the Catherine Edelman Gallery.

Jie Min, an international student who is double-majoring in art and economics, said the course “totally changed my view about photography.”

That kind of change is exactly what Langille wanted to inspire. A master’s graduate in photojournalism whose work has appeared in the *New York Times* and other major publications, Langille says her passion for photography began after seeing an 1866 image by Julia Margaret Cameron, a pioneer of portrait photography.

“That a face photographed more than 100 years ago could be so arresting was a revelation to me. I didn’t know anything about the female subject or the photographer, yet suddenly I shared something with them both,” says Langille, whose portrait photos of members of the IWU community were featured in the Summer 2008 issue of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*. “That is the power of portrait photography.”

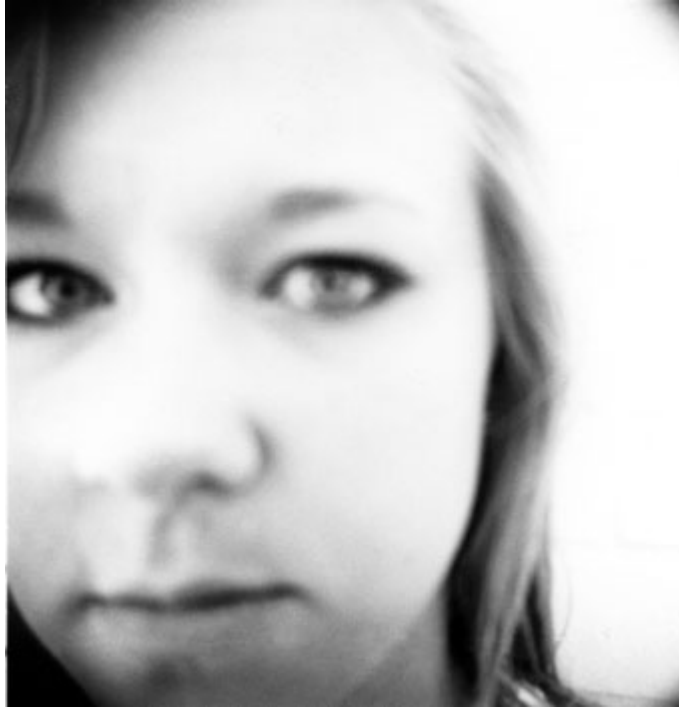


For a self-portrait assignment, international student Xiaoxiao Zhang '12 created this double-exposure focusing on her hands and expressing her playful side through a game of rock-paper-scissors.

"This game reminds me of my childhood, which was simple and happy," she writes in her artist's statement. Thinking of her childhood made Xiaoxiao decide to shoot the photo with a grass background.

"Grass has a natural flavor which can also be found in a child," she writes. "When looking at the grass, I remembered those days when I ran crazily on a lawn."

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When shooting a photo to provide a glimpse into the subject's life, Courtney Conzelman '12 stuck to the belief that the eyes are windows to the soul.

"In any photograph that I take or even photographs I have come across in the past, the ones that always grab my attention are the ones with eyes as the prominent feature," writes Courtney, who shot an entire roll of film with that focus. "To me, one can see the subject's story clearly through their eyes."

Courtney deliberately chose a background and contrast that would make the subject's eyes stand out as much as possible.

"Although her eyes are the center of attention, they aren't placed directly in the center of the shot," she writes. "I wanted her to look straight into the camera in order to make it look like she was staring out of the photo."

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This double-exposed shot by Kacie Dieter '09 exposes a lighter, feminine side of the subject, classmate Xiaoxiao Zhang.

"This image is meant to be a window into the more feminine side of Xiaoxiao's self," writes Kacie. "Her everyday persona is often much more casual and masculine, as she is usually dressed in pants and a sweatshirt and may more often be found playing basketball than picking flowers."

Kacie took the photo with the subject facing away from the camera because it suggested a slowing of her fast-paced life.

"She has paused for a moment in her busy existence to smell the flowers and ponder life," Kacie writes. "It is apparent in this picture that Xiaoxiao chooses to enjoy every moment and notices even the little things, such as this flower."

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After observing photographs by other artists that included masks, Matt Freedman '12 decided to make one of his own.

"I was interested in the implications this created, as if the subject is stuck behind this set of constraints, forced to watch without any capability of changing the situation," he writes in his artist's statement.

His subject, classmate and international student Xiaoxiao Zhang, embodies the stereotypes of Americans with her mask and the Chinese characters found around her body, which list her assumptions about what college life would be like in the United States.

"The insight that is provided by 'outsiders' can be a valuable tool to analyze ourselves," Matt writes. "The ideas [from] these people, who have not been disillusioned by living their entire lives here, are the key to improving this country."

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Photographer Jie Min '12 shot classmate Jocelyn Finley '12 as she attempted to move beads from one cup to another using chopsticks.

"I think the image gives a sense of struggling," Jie writes in her artist's statement. "You can feel Jocelyn was struggling at that time because of her eye contact and her movement."

The photo was constructed to give insight into the life of the subject, a Japanese-American woman who has worked to balance her two cultures.

The work also acts as a mirror of the photographer, Jie writes, because as an international student, it expresses her own frustrations with living in a foreign country.

"At first, it was interesting to live in an atmosphere that is totally different from [where] I lived before," she writes. "As time [goes] on, the novelty and freshness are replaced by frustration and nostalgia. However, as Jocelyn finally [is] able to use chopsticks very well, my life in the United States becomes better and better."

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Cameron Ohlendorf '12 shot this photo for a portraiture assignment that could not include a face.

“As I contemplated what to photograph as my self-portrait, I was tossing the ball to myself,” he writes. “It occurred to me to use this childhood icon as a part of my self-portrait.”

A baseball player since childhood, Cameron incorporated the ball into the photo to inspire memories.

“Those that have played this game still remember what it was like to stand up at the plate and stare down a pitcher or to make a great play in the field to stop a rally,” he writes. “I hope viewers of the picture look inside of themselves to something that was a part of their childhood. Whether it is a piece of sports equipment like this photograph or something else, look inside yourself to see what had a major effect on you growing up.”