

The Photographic Portfolio

Project Overview

Photographers should not put pictures in a box under their beds and be the only ones to see them. If they put film in their cameras it presupposes that they want to record what they see and show somebody else. Photography is about communication.

- David Hurn, from *The Picture Essay*, a conversation between David Hurn and Bill Jay, published in *On Being A Photographer* : Bill Jay and David Hurn

Once the photographer has created a body of photographs, it becomes necessary to do something with them so that they don't stay in the box under the bed or in the closet. Today, photographer's have many choices and subsequent decisions to make when it comes to producing a portfolio to share with a potential audience, including the type of portfolio to make, whether it be a print portfolio, slide portfolio, a digital portfolio on a CD-ROM or a website portfolio (which is becoming more and more important), how many images should be in the portfolio, and what other materials should be included in the portfolio. Regardless if you are working within a commercial, editorial and/or fine art context or most likely have a foot in each, it becomes necessary to prepare your work to be viewed in each of these portfolio strategies. Art buyers, picture editors, galleries, and museum curators each have different sensibilities in how they choose to view work. While some may prefer a portfolio of nicely matted prints that demonstrate a concern and care for the work and photographic craft, others may prefer to see portfolios that are easily handled with smaller prints that are not matted, and then others may want your website URL to review your work.

Regardless of the type of portfolio you'll be creating, there are some guidelines and professional practices to take into consideration. Here are some thoughts:

Purpose of Portfolio and Goals

Why is the portfolio being created? Determine what your goals and objectives are in preparing and presenting your portfolio. While you're preparing this portfolio to demonstrate what you've accomplished thus far, how may the portfolio be utilized with future endeavors?

Will this portfolio be used as you prepare for the next step in your photographic career, whether it be going on to enroll in an undergraduate art / photography program and/or attend graduate school? Are you going to be seeking commercial work or possibly an exhibition opportunity?

Regardless of any immediate short-term objectives and experience as a photographer, it is strongly suggested that the preparation of the portfolio is prepared with the highest level of professional standards possible. Keep in mind, how you present your work and yourself speaks volumes to others. A high level of care and consideration on your part can only enhance the possibilities that you and your work will be taken seriously.

Edit

Show only those works that reflect your conceptual concerns and vision in a cohesive manner. It is important that the work in the portfolio demonstrates your sense of vision and craft. While the project you're preparing the portfolio for may include a significant number of images, an initial portfolio of 20 images is not uncommon to show given the amount of time someone may spend with you and/or just the work. If they're interested in the first 20, then there will most likely be opportunities to show the other images.

Audience

Who are you planning on showing your work to? It is important to define a target audience for which your work may best be suited.

Do research.

While art buyers, picture editors, galleries, and museum curators are all searching for a unique vision that will suit their needs, it will be necessary to develop and tailor your portfolio in such a manner that specifically targets their particular needs. While an art director or picture editor for a fashion magazine may find your landscape photographs interesting, they are looking for a vision and attitude that demonstrates your ability to create moments and work with others in the studio and on the street. Know whom you are showing your work to and develop your portfolio in a manner that addresses their potential needs.

A helpful online resource for how to think about developing a portfolio and working as a photographer is A Photo Editor, a blog by Rob Haggart, the former Director of Photography for Men's Journal and Outside Magazine.

Presentation

Your work and yourself, keeping in mind that presentation is about making first, and lasting impressions.

As you continue to develop your photographic career, it will be essential and most likely necessary to create different types of portfolios, including a print portfolio, slide portfolio, a digital portfolio on a CD-ROM and a website portfolio. Considering there are a significant amount of others embarking on the same journey into photography as yourself, it is essential to develop a sense of professional consistency with the presentation and marketing/promotion of the work. The care and craftsmanship demonstrated in creating the portfolio will go a long way to communicating what you and your work are about, your vision and nature of your working process.

Print portfolio

With a print portfolio, it is suggested that the work is printed the same size and on the same material. The size of the prints should be such that most importantly demonstrate your vision and what the work is about, but is also a size that makes them easily manageable for review in a timely manner. Depending on the needs of your audience and the context in which you are presenting the portfolio, it may or may not be necessary to matt the work as this increases the weight and size of the portfolio. In general, a print portfolio of 8" x 10" and 11" x 14" photographs can be enhanced with matting, while works of a larger size are best presented without matting.

It is important to utilize a professional portfolio box such as those from Archival Methods and Light Impressions. Custom-made portfolios are available from Portfoliobox and The House of Portfolios.

Slide Portfolio

While print, CD-ROM and website portfolios are the most utilized presentation strategies, slide portfolios are still preferred in some contexts, particularly within an academic environment as part of an undergraduate or graduate school application. It is important that the slides are well exposed and should be projected prior to sending them out. It is particularly important the slides are labeled correctly and in some cases, as instructed. Unless instructed otherwise, follow the College Art Association Slide Labeling guidelines:

- Your name.
- Title of your work. All titles should be italicized or underlined. If your labels are handwritten simply underline the title.
- The medium. Be reasonable in your choice of terms. Slide label space may affect your word choice, so select your terms well.
- Date of completion.
- Dimensions. Whenever you provide dimensions for a work of art, you must use the following conventions:
 - Three-dimensional works: Height x Width x Depth (always in that order)
 - Two-dimensional works: Height x Width (always in that order)

CD-ROM Portfolio

The CD-ROM portfolio functions as a digital version of the print portfolio and as a supplement to a website. Such a portfolio should be created so that the viewer is able to control the pace of viewing images. While Flash and other types of presentations provide for an audio and sound experience, such as a QuickTime movie, the use of audio voice-over and/or sound should only be done to enhance the presentation so that it only enhances and doesn't distract from the viewing experience. It is important that the CD-ROM portfolio is able to function on both Macintosh and PC platforms.

Websites

With the Internet being the essential place for communication and resource, a website is a particularly beneficial strategy for presenting work. It is immediate and allows for anyone to view it at their convenience from anywhere in the world. While Flickr and other photo-sharing sites can function as a pseudo-website, keep in mind that you're going to want to create a sense of identity for yourself and your work.

Get your own URL and website.

Particularly for the emerging photographer with a minimal budget, it is not immediately necessary to have a slick, interactive website, but rather something simple that allows you to have a presence on the Internet. There are a number of website services available that provide template designs that can be customized and are affordable, even on a student budget.

Once you've developed your portfolio(s), at some point, it will be necessary to not only present the work, but yourself as well. While you don't want to always be taking yourself too seriously, it is important to take the presentation of your work and yourself to others seriously. As it is difficult to get individual meetings, when you do, present yourself and your work in such a manner that will leave a lasting, positive impression.

As such, be prepared and be professional.

Assignment

Using the feedback and discussion from the previous critiques continue to shoot images that reflect more-focused attention on a body of photographs in preparation for creating a print portfolio of photographs that demonstrates a cohesive conceptual concern through your sense of photographic vision and technical craftsmanship. At this stage of your conceptual development, it is essential and necessary that your idea(s) reflect a sense of considered thought, active visual exploration and is articulated with a cohesive vision and voice.

Give particular attention to the following:

- Edit and sequencing of work in the portfolio. Avoid duplication of similar types of imagery unless it is a function of your conceptual concern.
- Consistent image sizing, material sizing and use of materials.
- Refined sense of technical craftsmanship, including correct image density and contrast, color balance and print finishing (retouching and matting considerations).

Smaller prints, including 8" x 10" and 11" x 14" photographs are required to be matted, while works of a larger size, including 13" x 19", 16" x 20", 17" x 22" or larger, can be presented without matting.

All photographs, regardless of size, are required to be presented in a sized, professional portfolio box.

Requirements

For the portfolio presentation, please present the following:

- minimum of fifteen (15) and no more than a maximum of twenty (20) finished photographic prints that reflect focused attention on a conceptual concern/interest/curiosity through your photographic vision and sense of technical execution and craftsmanship.
- Each finished photographic print is required to be retouched, window-matted / mounted (depending on size) and presented in a sized portfolio box. Number each finished photographic print in pencil on the back of the print / matt.
- One-page artist statement (typed) that discusses the work presented in the final portfolio, including why you were inspired to develop the subject matter, how you utilized your photographic vision and use of materials to reveal and articulate your conceptual concern(s) and intentions, as well as the interpretive possibilities you want the viewer to consider.
- In addition to the portfolio, turn-in all contact sheets and edited contacts made for the project in a manila envelope.

See course calendar for due date. All final portfolios will be returned on the date of the Final Exam.