

Wet and Dry Photography and Workflow

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Wet and Dry Photography Workflow and Mindfulness



Darkroom

A **darkroom** is used to process photographic film; make prints and carry out other associated tasks.

It is a room that can be made completely dark to allow the processing of light-sensitive photographic materials, including film and photographic paper.

Various equipment is used in the darkroom, including an enlarger, baths containing chemicals, and running water.



Photography and the Darkroom

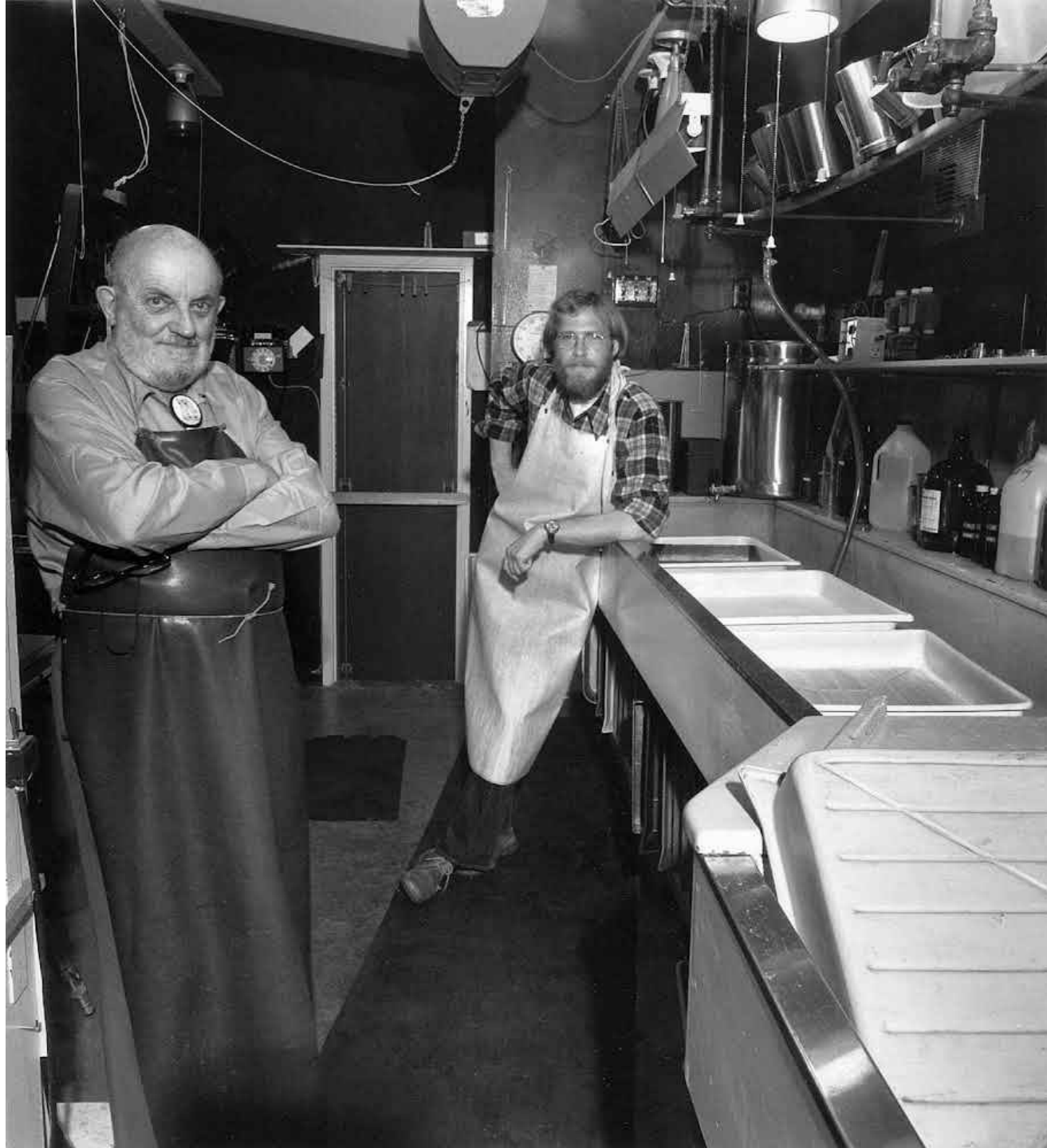
Darkrooms have been used since the inception of photography in the early 19th century.

Darkrooms have many various manifestations, from the elaborate space used by key modernists and even contemporary modern-day artists to the C19th when pioneers would make customised ambulance wagons drawn by horses. The first images of war (Crimean War 1853-58) were processed and produced in this way.

From the initial development of the film to the creation of prints, the darkroom process allows complete control over the medium.







Demise and Rebirth of Darkroom

Due to the popularity of colour photography and complexity of processing colour film (*this is known as the C41 Process*) and also printing colour photographs darkrooms started to decrease during the second half of the last century.

The sweeping changes brought about by digital computing and communication technologies during this period with the global effect of the digital revolution the impact was that darkrooms almost ceased to exist.

Whilst darkrooms have decreased in popularity they have been and still remain commonplace on college campuses, some schools and increasingly more so now in many professional photographers studios.

Other applications of darkrooms are attributed to scientific use in non-destructive testing and magnetic particle inspection





A Mindful Practice

- In a world where millions of images are shot every day and fast-paced environments can exhaust and stifle creativity, working in the darkroom and making physical photographs proposes a simple antidote to learning about photography by slowing down and physically *doing* it.
- The act of *doing* this in this context relates not only to producing a particular aesthetic to the quality and style of the work but also provides other important overlooked skills and experiences - this is in no way an antithesis to digital photography rather it is a process to support and lean into - understanding the importance of physical workflow is an excellent foundation for high end digital workflow



Concepts

- By forming a relationship through the physical act of photography learners can explore concepts such as **Confidence**, **Gratitude** and **Compassion**.

- Like all technologies, photography can either intensify or diminish our presence in the world. We have all seen people with their head trapped behind a large SLR or stuck in a phone and know that the camera can easily become just another digital distraction.
- The Author and Photography critic, Sophie Howarth, insists that taking a lot of photographs does not automatically mean that we can become successful in the discipline of photography. Yet, practised thoughtfully, Howarth believes that photography has tremendous potential for helping us cultivate an embodied state of **clarity, curiosity, compassion, calm** and **confidence**.

Mind over Matter

- Throughout my research and time spent with learners - there are a number of recurring themes and traits that are attributed to the environment when students begin on the magical journey of discovering what photography actually is.
- A singular pursuit that requires attention, dedication and discipline - photography is an often overlooked and misunderstood subject.
- This in some part, relies on its sheer immediacy and effect. The technological act of making photographs and capturing what is in front of us is relatively straightforward. And of course, the outcome is now instant. So much so that a photojournalist can take a picture of an event in one part of the world and within seconds it can be distributed and disseminated throughout a chain of global media feeds and social networks. Its impact is of course dependent upon its content and composition.

Photography and Education

- Photography programmes in Higher Education have been severely challenged by unprecedented forces - largely associated with technological advances and the - evolving learner - Generation Z. As the first social generation to have grown up with access to the Internet and portable digital technology from a young age, members of Generation Z, even if not necessarily digitally literate have been dubbed “digital natives”. Moreover, the negative effects of screen time are most pronounced in adolescents compared to younger children.

Gen Z Digital Native

- Whilst the Generation Z cohort (defined by birth from the late 1990s and ending in 2010) come to study photography with a confidence in digital ability, they have an inherent misunderstanding of what Photography actually is. This is largely to do with the institutions that provide a foundation in the subject at Level 3.
- There is too much repetitive emphasis on the meaning of the work rather than the process of HOW to produce the work.
- Work that is being presented at interview general lacks any substantial understanding of workflow and/or practical competence. Yet work is benchmarked and merited to high levels of achievement.



Covid and the effects of social inclusivity

- Dealing with the effects of Covid had immediate impact on teaching photography. The push to online was the only way to maintain communication and deliver set tasks. This was achieved throughout the period by all staff involved.
- What I have found is that the major longer-term effects of covid with current level 5 cohorts (and this seems to be in other institutions) is the restricted access that many had to socialise and develop key skills whilst developing as young adults. Many are lacking the required social skills to work in pairs, groups, contribute to class discussion and frustratingly for academic staff - **the group critique**. And of course resistance to go out into the world and look.



So how can the Darkroom help?

- In the redesign of the new curriculum and before and during the validation my research revealed that it was essential to revisit some key aspects of photographic practice aligned to what we are establishing as new learners. By embracing changes and developments in the digital sector and directing attention to Digital Capture and emphasising workflow students expressed a desire to work in the darkroom
- Ninety percent of Photography students who apply for the programme have no or very limited experience of working in this environment.



Wellbeing and work

- Developing a learner's technical and practical competence in their respective discipline (photography) is important.
- While improving personal well-being is reason enough to embrace mindful photography, I also believe that there is a case for this in having a larger social value too.
- A generation of young people has encountered the beginning of their adult life in a state of complete instability and fear. This leads to doubt, lack of self-esteem and anxiety.
- Working in the darkroom during the induction year of HE study in photography for a full seven week module provides a number of actions and initiatives that can take to task some of the problems identified. Establishing this with even more time to develop is something not to be dismissed.
- The environment is social and students are deliberately pulled away from their screens and phones in the attempt to question and investigate a wider perspective of the discipline.



ALWAYS WEAR
GLOVES WHEN
PROCESSING FILM

Fire Action

USED DEVELOPER
TO THE BIG BLUE
CONTAINERS.
THANK YOU

Developer

Kinesthetic Learning

A kinesthetic learner is someone who needs to be actively engaged in their education.

They are 'tactile' learners who use movement, testing, trial and error and a non-traditional learning environment to retain and recall information.

A way to achieve this is to introduce and emphasise the learner space - rather than the process. Accommodation is key to learning. Presenting the learner with a unique space is both non-traditional and yet at the same time very exciting.

Producing work in the darkroom provides a number of essential skills. The obvious skills are technical - the physical process of workflow - loading a camera with film - processing - contact sheets and then printing is purely tactile. Learners are introduced to a number of activities that are totally unrelated to digital photography. For example, mixing chemicals and following simple procedures that involve specific periods of time at each point of the process - are quite daunting at first - but students quickly adapt and create ways of working to these specs. This encourages the development of confidence, independence and responsibility. The working environment is formal yet creative - rules need to be followed for the full process to be successful. This is interesting as many fail and find it all overwhelming but with perseverance and guidance they all succeed.

The following short film provides insight into the process of developing a photograph.

Wet Photography Project

- The following images are from a Level 4 photography project where the student was set the task to photograph:
- A person/s (portrait) and
- A piece of architecture (building/s)
- The ONLY proviso was that ALL Photographs were produced on a large format Camera with a Tripod using sheet film.
- Practical Workshops supported the final outcomes
- Capture (taking) Processing (film) Printing + then exhibiting





In Conclusion

- *A Photographer can describe a better world only by better seeing the world as it is in front of them. Robert Adams*
- *Having the confidence and understanding the humility in how to achieve this can be introduced at the beginning of the graduate photographers' journey. The darkroom not only provides a high level of self-achievement in photographic output it also provides social interaction and playfulness.*



Below left to right:
Cody Martin
Paul Brown
Cody Martin
Cody Martin
Paul Brown

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