

SMU-IN-TAOS, Fort Burgwin Campus
Summer 2013 Term, June 4 – July 3

ASPH 3320 – The Documentary Impulse in Taos

Instructor: Kael Alford, email: kalford@mail.smu.edu

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The Environment:

The Fort Burgwin campus is an interdisciplinary teaching and research facility located at 7,400 feet in a valley of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The natural environment, history and culture of the region are ideal for exploration through photography. Photographers have been coming to New Mexico for the remarkable natural light and landscape since the early inception of the medium. The human prehistory and history in Taos are vividly represented by the oldest inhabited Pueblo in New Mexico, Spanish colonial and Frontier Western architecture, and rock art traditions that date from the Archaic Period (5500 BC to 100 AD) to modern times. The city of Taos hosts a vibrant contemporary photography and art community.

The Facilities:

At the Taos campus, students have access to photographic laboratories and computer facilities for the practice and support of traditional darkroom and digital photography. Students live in small dormitories, casitas of adobe construction. Each casita is electrically heated and provides complete lavatory and shower facilities as well as a living room-study area with fireplace. Meals are served in a spacious dining-assembly hall.

Course Description and Field Trips:

The Documentary Impulse in Taos is an advanced photography course that explores traditional and contemporary approaches to documentary photography through shooting exercises, field trips, lectures, critiques and readings. Students will explore the unique environment, light and cultures of Taos photographically, and produce a body of work on a personally selected topic. The course will be tailored to specific skills and creative responses of the students enrolled. Field trips will be designed according to student skill level and may include Ghost Ranch, Chaco Canyon, Santa Fe and local pueblos. Students must supply their own digital, single-lens reflex or advanced digital point-and-shoot cameras with *manual settings*. Assignments will be submitted digitally and may be printed during the final week of the course. Students will carry a camera, journal and pen to all classes and excursions.

Pre-requisite: ASPH 1300. (It may be possible to take both ASPH 1300 and this course simultaneously with permission of the instructor). With course questions contact: Kael Alford at kalford@smu.edu

Course Objectives:

The course will include (1) instruction in the advanced use of DSLR cameras (2) instruction in the techniques and approaches of documentary photography (3) critical reflection on the documentary practice of photography and photographic interaction with local landscapes and cultures (4) critical reflection on major movements in the history of documentary photography, particularly in the southwest.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for the various historical and contemporary practices of documentary approaches to photography.
2. Students will demonstrate a the ability to communicate effectively through documentary photography.
3. Students will demonstrate a facility for interacting with an unfamiliar environment and developing a creative response through photography.
4. Students will demonstrate critical reflection on the documentary photographic practice in an unfamiliar culture and environment.

Required Texts:

Photography Changes Everything, Editor Marvin Heiferman. Aperture, 2012.

Students without ASPH1300 or who need more technical guidance are recommended to purchase and bring to Taos *A Short Course in Digital Photography*, by Barbara London or Jim Stone, 2nd edition.

Additional Recommended Reading:

Photography: New Mexico, Editors Thomas Barrow, Kristin Barendsen. Fresco Fine Art Publications, 2008.

Barry Lopez, *Desert Notes*.

An Illustrated History of New Mexico, Thomas E. Chavez. University of Mexico Press, 2002.

Equipment:

As stated above, students are required to bring to Taos a Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) camera or a high quality digital camera with *manual exposure controls*, multiple memory cards for that camera, batteries battery chargers, and UV filters to protect DSLR lenses are highly recommended. A protective camera bag, and backpack are invaluable. Travel tripods are recommended but optional. Students should contact the instructor for questions about appropriate equipment (kalford@mail.smu.edu).

Students are required to bring a dedicated notebook and pencil to each class and field trip and to write in that journal daily. Students should bring a water bottle, a wide brimmed hat to protect from sun, light, long sleeved shirts, and comfortable, closed walking/hiking shoes.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp <<http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp>> to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

Instructor CV

Kael Alford

A documentary photographer, writer and journalist, Kael Alford takes an immersive and long-term approach to the subjects she engages. Her work has focused on political conflict, underrepresented communities, cultural identity and humans' relationship to the natural environment. Alford began her career in 1996, covering culture and conflict in the Balkans and the Middle East for many major European and American newspapers and magazines. Her work from Iraq is included in the book *Unembedded: Four Independent Photojournalists on the War in Iraq* (Chelsea Green, 2005) and her photographs of Native American Communities on the environmentally damaged coast of Louisiana are collected in *Bottom of da Boot: The Disappearing Coast of Louisiana* (Fall Line Press, 2012). That project was partially funded by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta's "Picturing the South" series and was exhibited at the High Museum June-September 2012.

As a visiting artist and adjunct faculty member in the Meadows Division of Art this year, Alford is teaching several photography courses and is partnering with regional arts and community organizations to help students find ways to engage with the broader community through their art. Alford holds an M.A. from the University of Missouri and was a 2009 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and a Knight Luce Fellow at USC Annenberg in 2011. She was recently granted the Michael P. Smith Award (2012) by the New Orleans Photo Alliance and teaches at the annual, international *Foundry Photojournalism Workshop*.