

Architecture & Time

“Reflections of the city”



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Upper school Architecture

"A moment in time, reflections of the city"

Throughout this exercise, I aim to investigate the idea of the reflected city and the distortion of reality that these reflections create.

Following the footsteps of photographers such as Vivian Maier and Lee Friedlander, I intend to explore their photographic techniques and compositional skills in order to help me explore how time and architecture can be merged into one thing through reflections.

The method I intend to follow is to take black and white photographs of the cityscape, in order to remove the element of color and just to focus on the reflective nature of the composition, light and darkness. It will also create an imaginary realm of intrigue, melancholy and romanticism.

An important element of this investigation is to explore how the city became the subject for the artist in the beginning of the 1900's, and how surrealism used these reflections of the city as an inspirational form for a dream like state in their imagination.

I like that through reflections architecture is abstracted. The eye focuses on the shape rather than having to take in all the detail that there is in the actual building. It also opens up a window to see how the building as an abstracted form, is often deformed and twisted. Depending on the angle, this can be upside down, on it's side or blurred. All these can only be captured at a particular moment in time, and each time will be unique.

There is a element of layering as well. By using reflections one can condense in a photograph the many layers that reflections shows. The subject becomes more than one and it its a number of objects which can be at different distances transforming the image into almost a collage.

Window shops are an interesting element of architecture. The elements displayed tend to stand fixed in one position, while outside on the streets time goes by, but the window shop seems to stay frozen in time melting together mannequins, clothes and the city in front.

Time is a moving concept, the photograph is a fraction of time, the building is the subject that remains the longest in place, and the reflections are a mixture of all the surrounding elements merging into one. The photographs immortalizes just that moment when all these elements came together.

By taking a journey though the city searching for improbabilities, and the surrealism that reflections on different surfaces can provide, I entered a world where time seams relative and multi layered.

The beginning of Surrealism and photography

Surrealism started as a movement thanks to the release of the manifest of poet André Breton's named "Manifesto of Surrealism" in 1924.

The surrealist movement covered, all the arts from poetry, film, painting and photography, where the artist rejected a rational and sober calculation of things and embraced the creative powers of the unconscious and the dream like state.

Photography became a medium for the surrealist to explore. The works of Eugène Atget a French flâneur, was inspirational to those seeking to tap into this imaginary realm.

Atget (1857-1927) was determined to create an architectural archive of old Paris before its renovations. These images are often airy and dream like, where time seems to be still. He created the perfect canvas for the surrealist movement in photography that would later come to inspire the North American surrealist Man Ray.

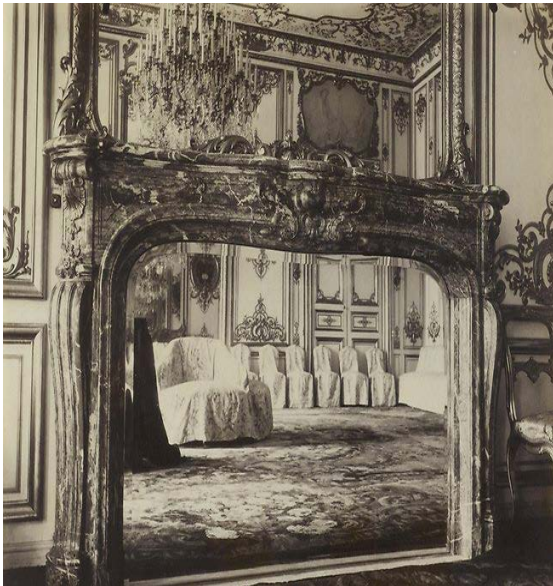


Fig. 1_ Ambassade d'Autriche, 1905



Fig.2 'Au Tambour, 1908

In Atget's photographs of old Paris, the city seems to be haunted and mysterious. The reflections on the window shops distort reality (Fig.2) and the melancholy of an empty room reflected in a mirror forces the spectator to enter a world of intrigue. Time has frozen in an architectural relic. This does not exist anymore.

Photographic techniques such as double exposure, combination printing, montage, rotation, distortion and solarization were used during this period, encouraging the duality of a dream like state, and a reality where time was not questioned.

"Of course, there will always be those who look only at technique, who ask 'how', while others of a more curious nature will ask 'why'. Personally, I have always preferred inspiration to information." Man Ray

The city, Light and Reflections

The city has always been an excellent subject to study and explore. Its architectural diversity, materiality and textures are a vast source of inspiration for the artist to explore.

From the works of Berenice Abbott in her work titled "Changing New York" (1939) where like Atget, freezes in time what once was; to the more modern work of Vivian Maier and Lee Friedlander, where the city is a person's playground and a form of escapism.

Light in all these instances is essential to photography. Light has the power to change the effect of the photograph depending on the time of the day, the angle and the skill of the photographer in terms of aperture and sensibility to observe how this renders different scenarios of the same subject.

By using reflected light one can create a range of scenarios that often depending on the surface from which this is reflected, glass, a puddle, or a shiny material, can alter reality, just like a surrealist picture.

In order to understand reflections one has to look at the behavior of specular reflection which is the mirror-like reflections of light off a surface, in which light from a single incoming direction is reflected into a single outgoing direction.

Specular reflection behaves different than from diffused reflection, which is when light is reflected in a broad range of directions. A good way to understand the difference is by observing how these lights behave in glossy and matte materials. Matte is almost all diffused reflection, and glossy has both specular and diffused.

I find this important in order to describe and to understand how reflections work, and can render an image under different materials upon which light is reflected; while light is another component essential to this composition, and behaves in a variety of ways subject to the time of the day.

This is where I find the common link between light, reflection and time. In order to create this surrealist dream like and multi-layered composition you need all these things to come together. Firstly your subject, second a reflective surface, thirdly light, and finally the photographer to flatten all these elements together onto one single photograph.

As part of my research I found the works of Vivian Maier and Lee Friedlander incredibly inspirational.

In Vivian Maier's works in particular in her self portraits, she used light and reflections to create images where she was part of the bigger picture. By using reflective surfaces she created a scenario where she was part of the stage, together with other people and the surrounding city scape, making the photograph multi dimensional and rich.

In all these instances, Vivian used her sensibility to capture at the exact moment in time an image that could only be caught at that particular point in time. One of the cameras she used the most was the Rolleiflex camera in black & white which shoots on large negative format. She would later graduate to Kodak Ektachrome 35mm film in color.

Vivian Maier, self portraits 1960–1961



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

"I only wanted Uncle Vernon standing by his own car (a Hudson) on a clear day, I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on the fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and 78 trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more.

It's a generous medium, photography." – Lee Friedlander



Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

Lee Friedlander's use of reflections, particularly shop windows, opens the doors to a larger world where again the picture becomes multi dimensional. Friedlander loved this idea of super imposing several elements onto one picture. His susceptibility and attention to detail creates a perfectly time urban landscape where a variation of elements come together at only one particular moment in time. I find this fascinating how someone can capture a precise moment where the composition of the picture came together in harmony.

Subject : "The city reflected"– Water reflections

**Dublin
Dec. 2014**



In this picture we can see the in the rippling of the water the reflections of the building next to the side walk, a person walking by and the photographer. All these elements are on the reflective surface, while the pavement of the street with its textures dark surface provides a backdrop for these to happen. The sidewalk frames and adds movement to the picture.

Reality is distorted, none of these elements would be together if it wasn't for the reflective surface that merges them together.

All the aspects that make up this picture are temporary, and will change and alter with the passing of time. The picture is in a sense a moment frozen in time, which will never again happen., The water will eventually evaporate.



I find this picture plays with the eye of the spectator. The two different textures and grains on the ground create a distorted reflection. The water itself is vanishing and running towards the darkest part of the reflection, in itself, re-iterating the concept and idea that this is only temporary.

Subject : "The city reflected"– Window reflections

Dublin
Dec. 2014



The depth in this image is very interesting. There are two reflective surfaces and on of them is a fish eye mirror, which extents the vision and distorts reality. In the center of the image is the photographer while on the other side of the window customers sit for lunch. At this point all of this elements come together in unison.



A window shop sits still. The photographer plays with the idea of wearing the foxes head in the image, which in reality is only the t-shirt the displayed on the torso of the mannequin. In the far back glimpses of the city fight center stage with the interior of the shop.



The window shop, just like Lee Friedlander, I tried to incorporate the city scape as part of display of the widow. Mannequins were also a subject of investigation for the surrealist artist. When I see this image I can see a new shop selling old clothes on a old street reflection and new intervention. Temple bar.



The textures in this image all fuse together, the city scape reflected merges with the mannequins clothes, while Sam Stevenson's iconic building is the strongest element in the composition almost like a hat for the mannequin.

Conclusion:

My aim throughout this study was to find the common element of architecture and time through reflections. I find that reflections, because they reflect many things at the same time can often fuse things that probably don't belong together.

In terms of architecture one can play with reflections to create a range of textures, moods and surfaces that are just happening due the reflective nature of the object, but when it comes down to reality are not really there.

I find this idea very interesting, something that only exist in the eye of the beholder but can not be sensed any other way. That can lead to the idea that it just happened in a particular moment in time, when all these elements come together in harmony to create a picture.

The concept of layering and working with photography as a medium of creating a collage opens a new dimension on how to see, perceive and compose an image, it forces the eye to look beyond what's in front and pushed the idea of superimposing several elements that perhaps don't belong together onto one image.

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