Pictorialism in the victorian era;

History, Middle Ages

Pictorialism in the Victorian Era; The Works of Julia Margaret Cameron and Madame Yevonde A Personal Research Project Looking at Two Female Photographers of the Victorian Era and Their Styles of Photography Contents

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. 5 Introduction In this investigation I will look at the genre of Pictorialism and consider the styles of Julia Margaret Cameron and Madame Yevonde. I particularly admire Yvonne's " Goddess Series" produced in 1935 and Cameron's style of portraiture. Using Greek mythology as inspiration, and contemporary photographic techniques, I hope to produce a series of portraits that are true to the ideal of Pictorialism.

I also want to briefly examine the way these female photographers portray their female subjects. Chapter 1 – PictorialismPictorialism was in vogue from around 1885 and declined after 1914 with the emergence of Modernism. Pictorialists strove to make photographs as much like paintings as possible.

Portraits were often linked to biblical, classical or literary subjects. The emotional impact of an image was more important than what was in front of the camera. The aim was to demonstrate that photography was the equal of traditional painting, rather than just a technical skill that anybody could master.

The technology available in the 19th Century necessitated slow exposure times and the use of studio settings. Subjects were posed to achieve the ideal composition. Most of these pictures were black and white or sepia toned. Examples of this approach include; combination printing, the use of soft focus, special filters and lens coatings and manipulation of negatives.

The use of gum dichromate lessened detail and produced a more artistic image. Rough surface printing papers also reduced sharpness. Some artists " etched" the surface of their prints using fine needles. Attempts to make fine art photography can be traced back to Oscar Gustave Reijlander, Julia Margaret Cameron and Madame Yevonde. The debate whether photography is art continues unresolved today.

Photographers such as Ansel Adams still strive to produce unique artworks that are indistinguishable from paintings. Chapter 2 – Julia Margaret Cameron Cameron started photography in the early 1860s and experimented for about ten years, producing extraordinary portraits of Victorian England. Her photographs were mainly two types; those of famous Victorians (such as Lord Tennyson and Charles Darwin) and recreations of literary and historical events. She was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite School, and her explicit goal was to secure the status of high art for photography. Cameron's posed

photographs were designed to emulate oil paintings from historic time periods; including rich details like costumes and intricate draperies. She drew on eclectic sources for inspiration; The Old/New Testament, Greek mythology, Renaissance painting, and the classics of English literature.

Her female portraits are of women as symbols of timelessness and ideal beauty. These images convey a range of emotion and experiences rarely openly expressed during the Victorian era; and are arguably her strongest works. Cameron's women embody sorrow, resignation, composure and love. Her softly lit women with unpinned hair, are full of sensuality, longing, sadness and beauty. Their powerful emotions fill the dark shadows and diffused backgrounds of their portraits.

Her soft-focus technique gave her images a dream-like quality, often using dramatic and symbolic lighting. Cameron had no desire to produce sharply focussed descriptions of her models. She wanted to create photographs with the subtle qualities of light and shadow that she admired in the high drama of Old Master paintings, rather than a depiction of fact. Cameron used the " wet" collodion negative process; a cumbersome and dangerous method, that required working with flammable chemicals in near darkness.

It differed from earlier techniques, such as the Daguerreotype and the Calotype, by reducing exposure time, and producing a sharp negative from which multiple prints could be made. Chapter 3 – Madame Yevonde Yevonde established her studio in 1914. With a strong sense of the theatrical, her style evolved from traditional portraits, to highly stylised and slightly surreal images in the 1930s; when she famously used The Vivex Colour Process to

photograph society ladies in roles from classical mythology. Realising the highly romanticised images of stiff Edwardian beauties were no longer fashionable, Yevonde's approach was designed to bring out the individuality of her sitters. She experimented with lighting systems, backgrounds and papers. She also began using a variety of props to balance her compositions.

Vivex was a subtractive process using three glass quarter-plates for the cyan, magenta and yellow separations; which were processed individually and then brought together at the printing stage to produce a colour image. The process was highly sophisticated and allowed for almost infinite retouching during processing to correct minor flaws. The freedom to manipulate colour encouraged her to experiment on an artistic level. She tried coloured cellophanes over the lights and lens, and manipulated the balance of the three plates at exposure, as well as raising/lowering the level of a given colour on printing.

By underexposing her negatives, she obtained reflection in shadows, and a luminous glow to flesh tones, which was otherwise difficult to achieve. Finding the depth of focus available with her automatic repeating camera back was quite shallow (normally limiting its scope for use) she turned this to her advantage. Using exotic fabrics and a variety of reflecting objects to separate the colour, she created exciting backgrounds, against which her subjects stood out in sharp focus. After World War II broke out, Yevonde was forced to stop working in colour with Vivex. Instead of settling with another form of colour process, she began experimenting with black and white and developed an interest in Solarisation.

Chapter 4 – Analysis of Photographs " Mountain Nymph" Julia Margaret Cameron 1866 Rather than composing a full-length portrait of a figure in a woodland setting#, Cameron concentrated on the model's face and hair, filling the entire frame with her subject's head and shoulders. Cameron chose to focus specifically on a youthful face, giving no hint of the time period through dress or background detail. Flowing, untamed hair is common in Cameron's imagery of women. Cameron often asked her models to take their hair down and wrap themselves in shawls and turbans, in order to eternalise their beauty, and give an air of abandon and sensuality. Here the model's eyes, nose and mouth are more sharply focussed than her hair and cloak.

Through contrast in focus and lighting, Cameron made her head appear to jut forward from her neck and shoulders. Cameron manipulated focus and the impression of depth in this way, casting light on the model's face and letting her shoulders recede into the background. " The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" Julia Margaret Cameron 1875Cameron's photographs show women in contrast to objectified female images previously represented in photography. In this shot Guinevere regrets her sin#.

The queen and the once shining knight Lancelot are cast in partial darkness; the costumes, poses and lighting convey the doom hanging over the lovers. Lancelot is cloaked in shadows, suggesting the dark aspect of his nature that is often overlooked. Although Guinevere is shown in partial profile, she is made to appear the victim of the situation; their hands show that the two have acted in concert, but the queen is dressed in white, bathed in light and

submissive to the will of Lancelot. The pose emphasizes the concept that Guinevere was the pawn that society expected women to be.

Cameron reveals Guinevere as a soul struggling to maintain her vows and innocence, and the harmony of Camelot, where the dominance of the male is unquestioned. " Mrs. Richard Hart-Davis as ' Ariel'" Madame Yevonde 1935 Yevonde originally intended this photograph to represent Andromeda# by including her chained wrists in the composition. However, when she saw the intensity of this image, she decided it better suited the weightlessness of a flying spirit#.

Yevonde's creative use of lighting and shadow, as well as her unique way of capturing her subjects in unexpected poses, means there is something off-balance about this portrait; yet is still works. Rather than facing the camera, it is typical of Yevonde to create portraits in profile, focussing exclusively on the head and shoulders. Instead of limiting the emotion the portrait conveys, this actually intensifies it. Her subject fills the entire frame. Yevonde's portraits are not as timeless as Cameron's, since the models are clearly styled according to cosmetic trends of the 1930s.

Whilst she made greater use of elaborate backgrounds, she also made similar choices to Cameron, in working with a shallow depth of field to emphasize her model's features. " Lady Dorothy Evelyn Campbell as ' Niobe'" Madame Yevonde 1935 This portrait# using glycerine and Vaseline for its crying effect, may have been inspired by Man Ray's Glass Tears, published the previous year. Yevonde wasn't afraid of cropping the frame, and highlighting specific features; here she concentrates on the model's

eyes and the narrow depth of field ensures we are able to see every tear glistening on her cheek. The effect of down-lighting emphasizes the model's face.

Her face takes up most of the frame; Yevonde's choice to concentrate on showing the model's face, rather than using a theatrical costume, portrays the character of Niobe and her story more effectively and intensely. The composition also makes this a powerful image on its own, without reference to the myth. Yevonde seemed to instinctively know which angles were best for maximum impact. By shooting her model looking upwards, she implies a sense of anguish and desperation; perhaps her character is seeking a higher form of solace from the divine. Had she simply shown her model face-on to camera, we would have merely seen a woman crying.

Chapter 5 – How Research Affected My Work Design Like Julia Margaret Cameron and Madame Yevonde I chose to take portraits inspired by characters from mythology; but unlike Cameron and Yevonde, I used simple backgrounds. I recreated Cameron's technique of concentrating mainly on the models' faces and hair. I was inspired by Yevonde's slightly surreal, theatrical images, so I chose to make mine very dramatic and highly stylised. I also wanted to emulate both Cameron's and Yevonde's use of changing depth of focus, by arranging my models with props or limbs nearer the camera.

Participants Yevonde tried to bring out the individuality of her sitters, and I attempted to make each image unique in hairstyle and cosmetics. I assigned " roles" based on the personality and background of each friend#. Unlike

Cameron, my portraits are not as timeless, because they show signs of the 21st century, whether it is in the tattoos or piercing my models have. I also asked them not to show too much emotion; a quality evident in both Cameron's and Yevonde's pictures.

Equipment and Procedure I originally used black and white film in my manual camera. I also had directional lighting at this point. However these pictures did not come out as negatives, so I was fortunate to have my digital images in reserve. In each shot on my digital camera I used the flash to achieve the same picture quality in all photographs, and had general lighting from overhead. I admired the way Madame Yevonde pioneered the use of Vivex and experimented with the developing process to affect her final images; so I chose to edit my photographs using modern imaging software. I changed them into black and white to emulate Cameron's haunting portraits.

I enhanced the difference between light areas and dark shadows as Cameron had done. However, unlike Cameron, I decided to bring my photographs more sharply into focus. Cameron often distinguished her perceived innocent characters by using models dressed in white and bathed in light. During manipulation I divided my portraits into groups. Each set had a different mood; Light; focussing on directional lighting to illuminate character – Aphrodite, Pandora and DemeterDark; focussing on lack of lighting to create a sense of doom – Hera and Arachne Soft and quiet; Not too much formatting, concentrating on highlighting classical poses and the gentle aspect of these characters. – Helen of Troy, Persephone and Athena Graphic

and harsh; Strongly contrasted/highly toned images with ' pop art' qualities to show the dynamic personality of these characters.

– Medusa and Artemis Conclusion This project was designed to look at the genre of Pictorialism, as demonstrated in the works of two female photographers in the Victorian era. As it progressed I also became interested in how they portrayed their female models. Following this research, I wanted my models to portray strong female characters, and to create beautiful, dramatic portraits. I was inspired by both Cameron's and Yevonde's creativity, and willingness to experiment with modern techniques. I had no experience of altering photographs using modern software; so this was a learning process for me.

I chose the same subject (mythology) and enjoyed being imaginative sourcing props and costumes, and directing the shoot. I also learned about depth of focus and how important lighting and shadows can be. I now appreciate the ideas behind Pictorialism, and agree that photography as a medium can produce authentic works of art. It is my opinion however that due to the highly theatrical nature of most portraits created in the Pictorialist style, that Pictorialism will still be regarded as cliched and less respected than other photographic genres. References Bibliography Rosenblum, N (1997) World History of Photography , Abbeville Press (3rd edn.) Busch, D (2007) Digital SLR Cameras and Photography for Dummies, Wiley Publishing Inc.

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