

## Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching creative photography echoes the words of renowned Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein. He said often when introducing his classes, "I can't teach you anything. But look here, you can learn!"

I believe that what he meant by this, from accounts of his teaching, is that he could not teach creativity, as this is a very subjective and personal process for every artist. But he could provide the necessary tools for students to find and then successfully display their individual art, with his guidance and example.

There are many ways to provide such examples and guidance. My experience in teaching photography is to provide and encourage a hands-on approach to equipment and techniques. This method has proven to be extremely effective and seems to be a significant way of creating a more exciting and challenging educational environment. In my own experience, one year prior to entering art school I had the good fortune to work as an assistant to a number of well-known photographers in New York City. This provided me with such a wealth of knowledge that I was able to use my four years at The School Of Visual Arts to develop and grow, knowing that I had the luxury of time without dealing with all the pressures of the real world.

With that in mind for my fashion studio classes, I throw my students into the deep end of the pool very soon into the class. I have them shoot with professional models and stylists as a trade of their time in exchange for pictures. I have them work collaboratively in small student groups together, as a way of gaining additional knowledge from their peers. This methodology also prepares them for the real world of working well with others in the professional community. The next week I would follow with a critique of the work. In some instances, I like to have the same professionals present to collect and inspect the students' work. For the students, the opportunity to present their work to professionals is not only challenging, but also an effective learning experience.

The critique is one of the best ways of helping students to produce better and better work. I give credit for both concept and skill level and try to find a healthy balance by supporting both. Critiques are not just the responsibility of the instructor but must be shared by all of the individual students in my class. One of the primary goals of the crit is to enable each student to become their own best and objective critic. It creates healthy competition, and helps them to become more informed and aware. It's one of the best ways to teach students to become self-reliant, confident and independent.

I believe we, as educators need to look toward the working future of each individual student, and guide him or her, with honesty as well as a mutual respect. I try to talk with each student privately early in the class, if possible, to grasp their artistic direction, interests and potentials. What does this person want to be doing in five or ten years, and what could they be doing, what will it take to get there, and what sacrifices will they need to make? Often, some may not really know what they want to do, but I believe that a teacher's primary job is to guide them by opening many doors, creating excitement with a particular artistic direction, and helping them to find their passion, whatever that may be.

In all of the courses I've taught I include at least one class session where I invite an industry professional to visit and speak with the students about their work and then participate in an open discussion of each student's work. The guests range from successful fine art photographers to commercial photographers, or more often, combinations of the two. I also include curators, magazine photo editors and art directors, all at the top of their fields. These are always people I am fortunate to have a personal working relationship with. I usually schedule this towards the end of the course when students are more developed in their direction. Students gain a wealth of knowledge from this class and are always very excited by it.

In the beginning stage of each course I find it's valuable to have a slide show and lecture exposing students to a large variety of photographic artists from differing genres and sensibilities, both past and present. I've built a very extensive slide collection for this purpose. This class leads to two assignments that helped me a great deal as a student. The first assignment is for each student to create for themselves, an "Inspiration File", a collection of their favorite published photographs torn from magazines. I ask them to continually update this file and begin to categorize it. It is a great help for both of us in finding and understanding their individual influences and artistic direction. The student can then later analyze each influence by taking a bit from each and creating their own unique vision or sauce. I believe that we at first learn best through imitation, which gives us the tools to go far beyond that and develop a very unique and personal style. This leads us to the second assignment, which is to create five photographs reflecting the work of their favorite artist of any medium or era.

In summation I would like to say that I find teaching to be a collaborative experience. The students in my classes grow and develop, and I offer them my many years of experience. However, I also learn something new in each class. I discover a fresh concept or I stumble upon an interesting technique, but each class offers the opportunity for me to grow and to be challenged as an artist and as a teacher.