OPEN THE WINDOW

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Art,

Visual Arts

By

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Abstract

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Subtle color creates a unique impact in photography (Zuckerman), and shadows are an essential part of the process. The interaction of subtle color and tangible shadows populate my digital photographs. I use color photography to investigate familiar elements in a new country. Although I am studying abroad without family nearby, I do not feel a sense of loneliness; instead, I embrace solitude. I have no obligation to others, leaving me much time to observe my immediate surroundings. As a result, I see ordinary objects with a fresh perspective and find myself more open to and present in new experiences.
Introduction

When I left China, I missed being with my parents and friends. However, I came to learn that studying abroad would not only help academically, but also it would prepare me to live independently. The most rewarding discovery for me has been perseverance and patience.

Studying abroad has benefitted me greatly, because I have the opportunity to learn about and see the world from a new point of view. From the moment I left China and went abroad, I found myself on my own, without a home or parents beside me. My so-called home in this new city is a rented apartment. Everything in it is new to me, but somehow this new place seems familiar; many subjects that populate the photographs I have made in Southern California are similar to those in my hometown of Liaoning, China. However, I embrace the immediacy of the scenery and events along the way with refreshed vision.

American poet and writer May Sarton (1912-1995) inspires my work. Sarton was a lifelong loner, but her life was rich and colorful. In *Journal of Solitude* she recorded her moods and daily life. Similarly, my photographs explore my moods and daily experiences. Sarton said, “Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self” (Sarton, *Quotes*). Her journal emphasizes that solitude does not imply loneliness; rather, it is what one does when one is alone.

Solitude affords me freedom and lessens my sense of obligation. I am not selfish,
but I do not like to wait. The photographs in *Open the Window* investigate different times and places in my apartment. I photograph when the sunlight is strong and directional, usually late morning and early evening, without the addition of artificial lighting. I use a square format to maintain balance and a macro lens to emphasize gesture and scale.
Open the Window

The series *Open the Window* investigates the feeling of being at home in a new city. Home is where I spend much of the day; it is a quiet place in which I study, eat, and sleep. The mood in the photographs appears gloomy. The intersection of subtle color, directional light, and many tangible shadows become the focal point. Shadows permeate the work; they signify the simultaneous absence and presence of light. I consider the shadows when composing my images, because the distribution of shadows affects the entire frame. Shadows establish balance and enhance the emotional impact in my photographs.

The photographer actively observes her surroundings, and when I walk through my apartment, I consider each room and the objects that furnish it. Books and drawers, windows and waste bins, and cords and bowls fill my photographs and create unexpected compositions using available light. Some of my photographs use proper focus, while others embrace a deliberate optical blur. These same, ordinary things in my hometown become photogenic objects of appreciation when I see them in a new place.

Many of the photographs are in my bedroom, including *In a Corner, Shadow in the Wind*, and *Out the Window*. From the bedroom I observe my immediate surroundings, using the wall or floor as a background.

I made *Shadow in the Wind* under my writing desk in the late afternoon. The strong wind shook the shutters in my bedroom and caught my attention, and I saw the shadows
crossing the gaps on the wall.

*Out of the Window* uses early morning light. The California sky is often bright, blue, and sunny; it represents freedom without constraints, and its variability mirrors my emotions. I fragment the sky with the camera’s frame and use the window as a foreground element to reveal the sky’s constant transformation.

*Shutter Figure, Messy Cords, Neighborhood*, and *Two Chairs* use the living room in my apartment. A large aperture and fast shutter speed yield dramatically shallow depth of field. *Shutter Figure* takes advantage of early evening light and the long shadows it creates.

Making *Messy Cords* was a coincidence. Trying to watch television, I discovered a problem with the disconnected, dusty cords and made a photograph. The orange cord among mostly neutral colors and shadows provides an engaging contrast.

*Neighborhood* is out of focus. Looking out my window, I saw the early evening light spread over my neighborhood, creating a sense of home. This photograph embodies solitude.

Color evokes memories, and I remember the details and atmosphere of each day by looking at the photographs I took. Four untidy, wooden chairs watch me every night when I eat dinner. While cooking, I look at these chairs and imagine my parents visiting me in Southern California and having dinner with me. *Two Chairs* is a tribute to my parents.

*Book Resource* and *The Bedroom Window* represent my looking in from the outside.
After dinner, I went outside with my camera. The artificial light emanating from the textured windows evokes an emotional sensibility, a quiet simplicity at night. When I move out, these two photographs will help me remember how I feel living in this home, no matter where I live.

American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) said, “I don’t think about art when I’m working. I try to think about life” (Fretz). Basquiat created art for himself, not for others. His paintings depicted his reality. The focal point of his painting *The King of the Zulus* (1984-1985) is a large, coarse African mask. This autobiographical element symbolizes the artist’s mixed family background, and Basquiat drew from his personal history as well as from his surroundings, saying, “Every line means something.”
Conclusion

The photographs that comprise *Open the Window* record my footprints, so to speak. They prompt me to recall events and thoughts, while signaling my evolution as an artist. Most important, making photographs helps me to be a more discriminating observer of my surroundings. But I need to be disciplined, patient, and persistent.

*Open the Window* is not finished; I continue to photograph certain details of each day. Living in this new place has enhanced my visual field, and I use photography to remember. My home is a limited space, yet I discover something new every day.
Illustrations

*In a Corner*, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches

*Shadow in the Wind*, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches
Out of the Window, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches

Shutter Figure, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches
*Messy Cords*, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches

*Neighborhood*, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches
Two Chairs, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches

Book Resource, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches
The Bedroom Window, 2013, Archival Pigment Print, 15 by 15 inches
Works Cited


   <http://www.photographic.com/issue-6-color-and-design/0310mood/>