

GENRE ANALYSIS

Photobooks, not to be confused with photography books, dictate an visual essay, a statement comprised of mostly photographic elements. Martin Parr and Gerry Badger's *The Photobook: A History* states the photobook must have "a specific theme...[and] will generally [be] clear, if not immediately obnoxious" (7). Unlike photography books—pieces typically curated by persons other than the creator—photobooks exhibit the photographer's artist statement. Photographers can choose whether to include written work detailing the photobook's vision and purpose. The placement of such pieces within the photobook depends on the photographer's preference. For my photo book, I look to the works of Joel Meyerowitz and Brandon Stanton for inspiration. Their different constructs within the same genre serve as two interpretations of the photobook. I piece together my photobook from the defining characteristics of theirs.

In his 1985 photobook, *A Summer's Day*, treasured street photographer Joel Meyerowitz places his colorful images on white background, one after the other. The occasional page unfurls into a magnificent seascape, but for the most part, the images are contained to one page. At the end of the book, Meyerowitz includes names for each image along with their corresponding page number. He follows the "table of contents" so to speak with a lengthy artist statement detailing his vision for *A Summer's Day*. Meyerowitz places his written piece after the fact, allowing the reader to make their own interpretations before seeing those of the creator. Meyerowitz therefore places the power in the hands of his viewers, forcing them to interact with his work.

On the other hand, Brandon Stanton in *Humans of New York* places his artist statement at the very front. He also includes often lengthy captions with his images, the text at times running across the images themselves. Stanton's work revolves vastly around the stories of his subjects, and he accordingly crafts his book to reflect this; he uses the written word to enhance his photographs. His photobook's theme comes from the intersection of the stories and the images and fulfills the characteristics set forth by Parr and Badger.

Stanton's subject in *Humans of New York* matter differs greatly from Meyerowitz's in *A Summer's Day*, but both volumes carry the foundational premise describes by Parr and Badger: the "obnoxious" artist statement. Their visual essays both follow "intention, logic, continuity, climax, sense and perfection," as described by Lincoln Kirstein (Parr and Badger 8). My photobook sits in between the styles of Meyerowitz and Stanton; I place my artist statement at the end of the photobook while placing captions alongside the images. Before beginning, I will research photography artist statements, with a particular emphasis on how they affect image order. From my previous experiences with photography classes, I understand the importance of placing photographs in a specific order as to tell a story with the images themselves.

PROPOSAL

The perspective of Ann Arbor apart and separate from the University of Michigan's students, who come and go, serves as a foundation for the writing and photography experiments within *Glow*. For the first experiment, I chose to introduce a photo book based on this visual statement. The book itself serves as a formalization of the blog: capturing the streets of Ann Arbor. However, I want to particularly focus on the permanent residents, not the students. The experiment will specifically include a front cover, introductory piece, as well as an artist statement. The front cover encapsulated images within text to visually represent the method in which the photographs' thematic elements tie to the written words in the photobook. The images selected aim to project the photobook artist statement. Following the first cover, I placed piece prologue to help guide the audience before seeing the photographs.qw

PROJECT MAP

Cover

See below

Opening

The book will open with a poem (see below)

First Images

The first couple images in the book instill a “visitor” or outsider perspective of Ann Arbor akin to a new student’s first experience at Michigan. The first photograph is of an image of downtown Ann Arbor, shot in an tourist-esque, passerby perspective. The image will focus on the iconic buildings of downtown rather than the people walking through the streets. Stylistically, images will use large depth of field as to not draw the viewer’s eyes to a specific point in the image. I hope to convey a generic nature in the images through this choice. Other example images include pictures of popular places on campus such as the Diag and State Street. Images may also come from the dorms and depict student life. Examples include the Michigan Theatre, intersection of E Liberty and Main and the Big House on game day.

Transition

As the images progress, the themes will shift from less building and student focused to a more people and downtown Ann Arbor focused, especially neighborhoods further away from downtown. The focus in the images will slowly start to narrow; I will also use elements in the environment such as architectural features and motion blur to draw the viewer’s eyes to specific points in the images, places I want to highlight. Points of emphasis include employees of downtown shops or locals in cafes on Main Street. Other images may come from places further away from downtown such as beyond Main street. Images may also come from places outside of Ann Arbor, taken during day trips to Grand Rapids, Flint, and even Penn State on assignment for the Daily.

Ending Images

The final images will showcase a sort of retreat as I plan to leave Ann Arbor after graduation to attend medical school. With a nostalgic sense, the images may present popular Ann Arbor hang outs first seen at the beginning of the book from afar. However these final shots will be much closer, much more personal to represent my attachment to the place I called my second home for four years.

The Artist Statement

(see below)

At the very end of the book, I will include the artist statement, or an artist’s guide to the thematic elements in the photobook. In making the photobook, I hope to convey my time in Ann Arbor as a long-term passerby. My four years in Ann Arbor expose me to a city deeply rooted in its college culture, but as I explore more I see aspects of the life beyond the university. I want the photographs to capture the shift in thought, the change in my perspective. The artist statement will include many of the elements in the photographs I described in the previous paragraphs.

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WRITING 200 - I
T Hetzel
February 17 2018

SAMPLE EXCERPT

Cover



Opening Page: Intro Poem - Untitled

I catch the unfolding scenes
the potential photographs
in the corners of my eyes,
glowing at the edges
the natural beauty of everyday life.
My photography strolls always pull at the corners of my lips,
teasing concealed smiles as I walk around downtown.
I don't want to look mad,
but I can't help but feel free,
feel warm in the glowing light of an Ann Arbor day.
Gone is the uptight photographer fresh out of a
Dallas high school. Instead stands
a college student, a semisolid confident
yet all too sure herself.
Because with her camera,
she can do anything.



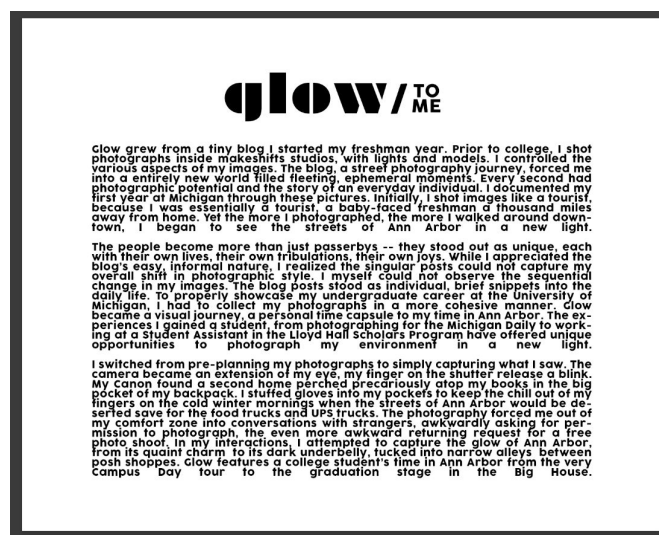
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Artist Statement

Glow grew from a tiny blog I started my freshman year. Prior to college, I shot photographs inside makeshift studios, with lights and models. I controlled the various aspects of my images. The blog, a street photography journey, forced me into a entirely new world filled fleeting, ephemeral moments. Every second had photographic potential and the story of an everyday individual. I documented my first year at Michigan through these pictures. Initially, I shot images like a tourist, because I was essentially a tourist, a baby-faced freshman a thousand miles away from home. Yet the more I photographed, the more I walked around downtown, I began to see the streets of Ann Arbor in a new light.

The people become more than just passerbys -- they stood out as unique, each with their own lives, their own tribulations, their own joys. While I appreciated the blog's easy, informal nature, I realized the singular posts could not capture my overall shift in photographic style. I myself could not observe the sequential change in my images. The blog posts stood as individual, brief snippets into the daily life. To properly showcase my undergraduate career at the University of Michigan, I had to collect my photographs in a more cohesive manner. *Glow* became a visual journey, a personal time capsule to my time in Ann Arbor. The experiences I gained a student, from photographing for the Michigan Daily to working at a Student Assistant in the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program have offered unique opportunities to photograph my environment in a new light.

I switched from pre-planning my photographs to simply capturing what I saw. The camera became an extension of my eye, my finger on the shutter release a blink. My Canon found a second home perched precariously atop my books in the big pocket of my backpack. I stuffed gloves into my pockets to keep the chill out of my fingers on the cold winter mornings when the streets of Ann Arbor would be deserted save for the food trucks and UPS trucks. The photography forced me out of my comfort zone into conversations with strangers, awkwardly asking for permission to photograph, the even more awkward returning request for a free photo shoot. In my interactions, I attempted to capture the glow of Ann Arbor, from its quaint charm to its dark underbelly, tucked into narrow alleys between posh shoppes. *Glow* features a college student's time in Ann Arbor from the very Campus Day tour to the graduation stage in the Big House.



REFLECTION

Performing this experiment leaves me wanting to fully complete the *Glow* photobook. In my previous experience creating a photobook in high school, I pieced together the final product *after* shooting the images. While I set to take photographs out with semisolid themes in mind, I did not have specific goals or photographs in mind. Making *Glow* has given me a taste of a different artist process as I work to tailor photographs to an artists vision long in the making. I have also furthered my work combining writing and photography.

One of the biggest challenges I faced in this experiment was the title. In general, I often struggle with creating “catchy,” interesting titles for my pieces. *Glow* proved to be especially difficult as I wanted to keep the themes developed originally in the photography blog, while straying far enough to consider the project separate and stand alone. Initially, my ideas were synonymous to the blog: brief, one-word titles often meaning “fleeting” or “evanescent,” to encapsulate the essence of my photographs. I realized, however, as I pondered the themes portrayed in the book, that *Glow* did not set out to simply immortalize moments of everyday life, but rather capture my college experience and my perspective of Ann Arbor. I think students often see the cutesy college town as a quaint and almost surreal, like there aren’t any real problems in the city. However, upon closer inspection, its glow does shine so cleanly and brightly; I can see a little darkness around the edges.

I came to this realization while struggling with the title, and it altered the course of my photobook. I tweaked the project layout to reflect the changes. While I still include a change my perspective, I go beyond a superficial, stylistic change in photographs, to present a thematic differences as I began to truly see Ann Arbor as it is. I think this consciousness further helps me separate *Glow* from my original material, which in turn spurs incentive to complete the project sometime in the future. *Glow’s* success makes me excited for the future experiments and their vastly different ideas and creative potential.

REFERENCES

Meyerowitz, Joel. *A Summer's Day*. Times Books, 1985.

Stanton, Brandon. *Humans of New York*. St. Martins Press, 2013.

Parr, Martin, and Gerry Badger. *The Photobook: A History*. Phaidon, 2014.