IMPRESSION
ON ART & DESIGN

BY EILEEN WU

EDITOR'S NOTE

Coming into the digital media program at the University of Houston's College of Technology, I was extremely skeptical. The first chance I got to talk to an advisor, they told me that the program would be getting rid of the dark room. That was blasphemous to me. Not because I'm crazy passionate about film photography, or photography at all, but to diminish traditional arts? It hurts my heart. I didn't expect for a technology program to be big on fine arts, but style and design has been important to me since I could remember. Being familiar with the roots of media, especially the traditional forms of it, that is what can get you from a good product to an even better product.

However, the decision was already made, by the ever so naïve, high school senior Eileen. My mindset at that time was, "Hey, whatever crap I get thrown into, I will and can definitely make the most of it." Fortunately, digital media hasn't been so bad. My first semester, I took on a lot of business-related and philosophy classes. Not so great at business, but philosophy turned into one of my biggest hobbies. From interpreting marketing strategies to solving the structure of an argument, it felt as if I had chosen the good path. With building my analytical skills from my first year, it has definitely enhanced my ability to define a set style for myself, and with being definite about what I think better style and design is.

The thing about going into a media related field is that you have to know what you like, but most importantly, keeping in mind who your audience is and what will also appeal to them. That's something I had to learn after going through freelancing for a few local folks and a company. Too many times, a client will have a really simplistic idea for designs and forms of marketing, but if they're people who come to you, already seeing what you are capable of and what your style is, they must trust your judgement in design, right? Clients will reach out to me and expect my work, but come out with their requests, which doesn't fall into that so-called style. It's easier when I just do work to please a more general audience than just a singular client. In essence, doing work for others is better than doing it for a client trying to make profit from your work.

I let that freelancing time period influence my level of passion on design, but understanding the medium more from taking courses, learning from my peers, and hearing different perspectives from professors, it opened me up to a less cynical view of doing work for others. I have a lot to thank for to these teachers within the past couple of years. I hope my gratitude will show at the end of my college career.

ON BEING AVANT-GARDE
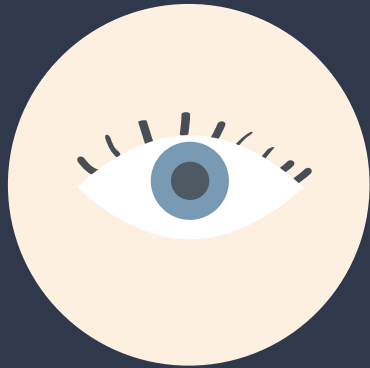
IF avant-garde is considered an art theory, then avant-garde artists would be aiming to theorizing the concept of art. This isn't the case since avant-garde art only prompted for one to notice certain concepts without straightforwardly presenting the idea through surrealism and sadistic impressions.

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Avant-garde is regarded as and allusive to a theory to show the irony of concepts. It is hardly theoretical in a sense of demonstrating an idea, but is more of the threshold to that philosophy. Avant-garde art is partially a theory of its own, but rather it is an element to theorizing. One can make an artwork that fits a theory but one can also just make an artwork and it later categorized as a theory. Avant-garde art does neither support nor argue against theories that already exist.

Man Ray demonstrates the misconception of avant-garde as a theory itself. In truth, Ray merely tries to hint a message rather than giving a full-blown message. For instance, his photo series consisted of ready-made objects that were modified to where they were not feasible to use anymore, such as the Gift. The tacks contrast with the iron, which is meant to smoothly glide, and both are rendered useless thereafter. Its frightening domesticity serves less to illustrate reality than to express Ray's surrealistically. His style of avant-garde is synonymous to experimentation, but its relation to theorizing is small because of the little importance these objects are to Ray, given he just trashed or lost most of them later. He isn't trying to show any sort of idea, but to mock the iron's functions as more subtle. In this case, he provides the iron with a new role that accounts to the ordinary object's new, strange fascination. Rather than the object representing a concept, Ray revolutionizes another purpose for it. Artists that are called avant-garde don't intend to make a statement, but only choose to separate themselves from the mainstream in its most understated form.

ON PHOTO-GRAPHY
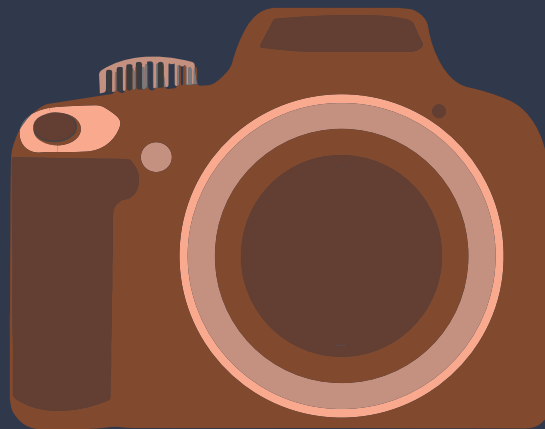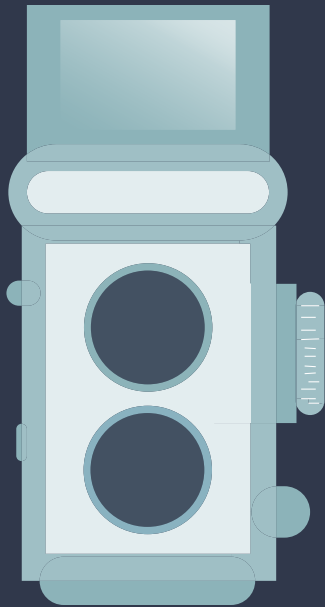
WE view aesthetic pleasure on the object in the photograph rather than the photograph itself because that's how we see paintings. We're more focused on what the picture is trying to represent. With representation, it is characterized by the artist. With photography, it is often generalized of remaining objective whereas traditional art, such as painting, can be mediated by the painter, but photography can also be skewed in order for the level of detail(s) to be enhanced. The details with the placement, the aperture, depth of field, coloring and lighting, all play a part in recognizing photography as a piece of artwork. If it was an amateur just pushing a button without much thought into the scene, placement, or other details, then there's not much aestheticism.

Its subject matter and composition is so limited because of the boundaries and size of what the camera lens can capture, but there are essentially an infinite number of things that can be done during a photo shoot to make the outside world appear different than it looks normally. There are different lenses that can be put on the camera, you can adjust the shutter speed, the aperture, and post production in darkroom is really important as well.
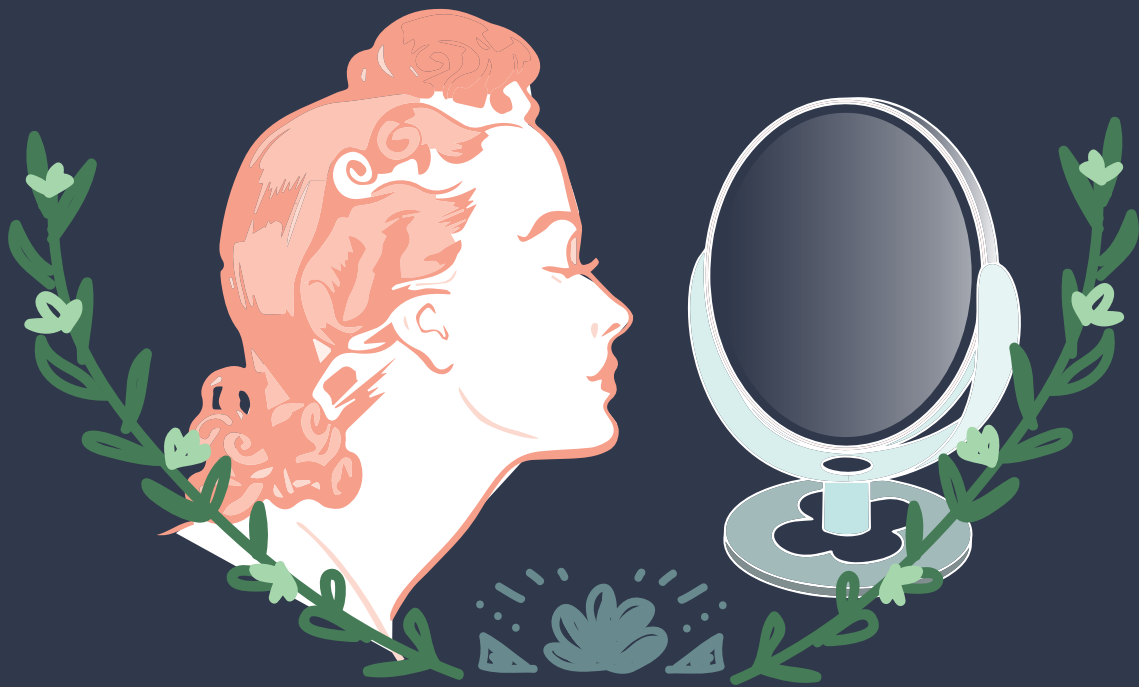
FOR EXAMPLE, Cindy Sherman may be her only subject in most of her work, but she manipulates herself in continually different ways to evoke different messages, which refutes the misconceptions of photography as just pressing a button and capturing the outside world exactly as it appears. If it were so, Sherman would be taking so many self-portraits of herself without planning part. In Sherman's case, the entire process of setting up the scenery of the photo and the way the photograph is being executed is what is of aesthetic interest. Photography is long assumed to be a medium that "mirrors" reality with precision, but photography in Sherman's hands simultaneously constructs and critiques its apparent subject. In this sense, Sherman's unique form of portrait photography functions as a sign for the subjective nature of visual perception. She utilizes the camera and the various tools of the everyday cinema, such as makeup, costumes, and stage scenery, to recreate common illusions, or iconic "snapshots," that signify various concepts of public celebrity, self-confidence, sexual adventure, entertainment, etc., just as traditional art can convey. This newfound genre of photography combining narrative and stasis is more than being interested in the object itself, but the process of putting it all together.