

Photographic Exchange with *Photo Boys*

Maeve Bradley
Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Report



While my original proposal centered around my experience living in the International Residential College, as I moved out and started brainstorming ideas for my thesis show, I ended up devoting my attention to more of an insular community I had greater access to: male photographers. My interest in the process of exchange through portraiture became distilled to the power dynamics between photographer and subject, and the complexity of this mix of gendered seeing/being seen, how the subject's understanding of the process of film photography could inform their sense of self-presentation and collaboration with me, how the process could

facilitate a kind of vulnerability that being the one who usually operates the camera can easily avoid, were all circumstances that this specific relationship provided. The idea of photographing exclusively young male photographers intrigued me because putting these men in a position of being looked at rather than doing the looking, taking away the instrument that in many ways defines their identity, we could explore a reversed power dynamic of the long-standing male photographer/female model trope. However, as I further developed this body of work, it became important to create a space for their vulnerability without abusing it. In countering the male gaze, I wished to express an alternative gaze, a way of seeing that would not be simply an equal and opposite exploitation, but an expression of my own eye as soft and understanding with a touch of humor.

Funding thanks to Miller Art Scholars afforded me an incredible amount of freedom to experiment with different types of film, where I have been able to go through countless rolls of medium format film, polaroid's, 35mm, and the expensive processing of large format color film. Using various films and cameras for repeated portrait sessions with my subjects allowed for fine-tuning of my concepts, taking what I thought went better or worse the first shoot and adjusting for later shoots. While the constraints of this project like scheduling



Portrait of Will, shot on a 4x5 view camera

conflicts, weather, and available light made it a challenge, the rigor with which I could approach playing with the medium was truly beneficial to my creative process.



Stefanos, shot on medium-format C41 film



Alex, shot on Polaroid Originals 600 Film

The display of this body of work for my fourth-year thesis show up in Ruffin Hall April 14-20th will marry the photographic results of these exchanges with elements of my experience in working with these *photo boys*. It's important to my photographic process to incorporate my other major, integrating American studies-type ethnographic research and theory into the work I create. Reading theory about the male gaze, taking note of my experiences and observations about my subjects, from their discomfort in front of the camera to the unsolicited photo I received of one's collection of cameras and photo-gear, it was also a complex



study of people who define their identity around a practice that is both technical and artistic and how variations in individuals' sense of their own power and masculinity affect their relationship to photography. My critical and humorous readings came from the more obsessive aspects of their interests in objects (i.e. the cameras, the lens', having all the *stuff*), in the technical jargon they can disseminate as if speaking a different language, in the discomfort some felt from a process that they regularly subject others to; the aspects that differed the most from my own experience of the medium. It was an incredibly informative endeavor to delve deep into the world of male photographers, to talk about the art I love with other passionate people and meet others doing amazing work, but also to navigate this space as a woman, putting myself in a relative position of power during these portrait sessions, while coming to terms with some of the more negative products of these photographic exchanges.

I am deeply grateful to the Miller family and the Miller Arts Scholars program for this opportunity to strengthen my artistic work over the last year. The confidence I gained in seeking others out to photograph and becoming more decisive in my creative intentions are direct results of this space opened up for me to work vigorously and unapologetically.