

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Barcelona

Course Code / Title: BC/PHTO 360 Framing Barcelona: Photography, Identity, and Urban Space

Contact Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Photography / Urban Studies, History, Cultural Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: None

Description

Photography has long shaped how we perceive the world, from early documentary images of city life to contemporary explorations of urban change. The first known photograph taken in Spain — a daguerreotype of Barcelona's Sea Loggia in 1839 — marks the city's deep connection to the medium. In a place as visually and historically layered as Barcelona, photography has often been the lens through which space, identity, and memory intersect. Today, photography is digital and ubiquitous, allowing anyone to capture an image in an instant. This course explores Barcelona's identity through its photographic representation while encouraging students to engage directly with the city. Through hands-on exercises and assignments, students will investigate how different districts reflect Barcelona's past and present, using the camera as both a documentary and creative tool.

Students will develop a portfolio that reflects their engagement with the city while studying the history, geography, and visual identity of Barcelona. The course introduces key concepts in photography history and theory alongside technical instruction in digital photography, including camera operation, composition, and post-production editing. Through discussions, readings, site explorations, and guest lectures, students will develop visual literacy and a critical understanding of photography's role in shaping urban identity.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Explore how photography has shaped Barcelona's urban identity, from documenting social change and migration to influencing perceptions of tourism and gentrification
- Analyze the relationship between photography and the city, considering how documentary, reportage, propaganda, and artistic photography have captured Barcelona's transformation over time

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- Engage with diverse visual and historical sources — including archival photographs, contemporary street photography, film, and photojournalism — to assess how Barcelona has been represented through the camera lens
- Develop technical and creative skills in digital photography, including camera operation, composition, and post-production editing, while critically reflecting on the ethics of urban image-making
- Investigate Barcelona's districts through field-based research, using site visits, photographic exercises, and local exhibitions to connect theoretical knowledge with firsthand exploration
- Consider the role of historically underrepresented perspectives in urban photography, including working-class communities, migrant populations, and grassroots artistic movements
- Create a cohesive photographic portfolio that documents Barcelona's diverse districts, demonstrating technical proficiency, visual storytelling, and a critical engagement with the city's evolving urban identity

Requirements

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class session and all scheduled field study course components, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students must actively engage in discussions, participate in critiques, and demonstrate commitment to their photographic practice through weekly assignments. This course emphasizes hands-on photographic exercises. Each week, students will complete Urban Photo Logs, experimenting with different photographic approaches and presenting their work for feedback. Steady progress on their portfolio is expected, as the course builds toward the Final Photo Project, which documents Barcelona's districts through photography. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions. Engagement will be assessed based on the quality of contributions, critical inquiry, and interaction with course materials and site visits.
- **Quizzes:** Quizzes on theory and context will assess engagement with photography history and theory. Students will complete three short quizzes with multiple-choice and short-answer questions. (See *Interludes* in course content.)
- **Urban photo logs:** For each of Barcelona's 10 districts, students will produce a six-image photographic narrative exploring a theme or concept,

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accompanied by a 200–300 word text explaining creative choices and approach.

- **Final photo project:** Students will select one Barcelona district and produce a curated photo essay of 10–12 images, accompanied by an 8–10-page written analysis. This paper should reflect on their conceptual approach, technical choices, and the district's history, geography, and identity. The project includes a midterm portfolio review for feedback and refinement, and concludes with a presentation following the final submission.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Participation (*see rubric below*) 15%
- Quizzes (3 at 5%) 15%
- Urban photo logs (10 at 3%) 30%
- Final photo project 40%
 - Midterm portfolio review: 10%
 - Photo essay: 10%
 - Written analysis: 10%
 - Presentation: 10%

Class Participation Grading Rubric

	A – 90-100% Exemplary	B – 80-89% Proficient	C – 70-79% Developing	D – 60-69% Unacceptable	F – 0-59% Missing
Frequency of class participation	Actively contributes 2+ times per meeting	Actively contributes at least 1 time per meeting	Actively contributes at least half of the time during term	Actively contributes less than half of the time during term	Does not contribute
Quality of class participation*	Contribution is always thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, frequently interacting with peers	Contribution is mostly thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, usually interacting with peers	Contribution is somewhat thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, sometimes interacting with peers	Contribution is rarely thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, rarely interacting with peers	Does not contribute or interact with peers

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Level of class preparation	Always fully prepared and on task	Mostly prepared and on task	Somewhat prepared and on task	Rarely prepared and on task	Consistently unprepared and not on task
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Readings / Resources

Agustí Belart, David. *A Brief History of Barcelona*. Barcelona: Editorial Comanegra, 2014.

Batchen, Geoffrey. *Photography: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Edwards, Steve. *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Marien, Mary Warner. *Photography: A Cultural History*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2021.

Content

Topic 1 – Introduction to Barcelona: History, Geography, and Visual Identity

- Barcelona's urban evolution from Roman Barcino to the modern metropolis
- Barcelona's geography – from river to river, between the Mediterranean and the Collserola hills
- Visual representation and urban identity through history

Topic 2 – Ciutat Vella: Roman, Medieval, Modern

- History: a city within a wall
- Geography: Five neighborhoods (Gòtic, Raval, El Born, La Ribera, Barceloneta)
- Key identities: urban density, gentrification, migration and tourism

Topic 3 – Eixample: The Grid, Modernisme, and Urban Expansion

- History: the city under siege & Cerdà's urban grid
- Geography: the block and the grid's orientation
- Key identities: legacy of Modernisme (Gaudí, Domènech, Puig i Cadafalch), the bourgeoisie

Interlude 1 – The Birth of Photography & Urban Documentation

- The invention of photography and its early use in cities
- 19th-century photography and the visual archive of Barcelona
- Daguerreotypes, early street photography, and the tension between documentation and artistic vision

Topic 4 – Gràcia & Sant Andreu: Neighborhood Identity and Resistance

- History: two independent towns absorbed by Barcelona
- Geography: urban density and distance from Ciutat Vella

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- Key identities: anarchist and socialist movements, Catalan identity, popular traditions

Topic 5 – Horta-Guinardó & Nou Barris: Working-Class Struggles and Urban Peripheries

- History: from rural landscapes to Franco-era mass housing projects
- Geography: hills, valleys, and self-built neighborhoods on the city's periphery
- Key identities: anti-Francoist movements, squatting culture, and contemporary urban struggles

Topic 6 – Sants-Montjuïc: Industry, Expositions, and the Olympic Transformation

- History: industrial heritage, the 1929 International Exposition, and the 1992 Olympics
- Geography: from Poblenou and the railway hub to Montjuïc's slopes and exhibition spaces
- Key identities: working-class resistance, urban renewal, and the visual politics of spectacle

Interlude 2 – The Photographic Gaze: Documentary, Tourism, and Propaganda

- The ethics of photography in shaping urban narratives
- How tourism and photojournalism construct an image of Barcelona
- Civil War photography, propaganda, and the politics of representation

Topic 7 – Sant Martí: Industrial Ruins and the 22@ Gentrification Project

- History: Poblenou as Barcelona's "Manchester" and the decline of its industrial economy
- Geography: empty spaces, new architectures
- Key identities: worker cooperatives, post-industrial landscapes, and the impact of urban renewal

Topic 8 – Les Corts & Sarrià-Sant Gervasi: Wealth, Power, and the Elite City

- History: Aristocratic estates and Barcelona's financial expansion
- Geography: hills, gated communities, and high-end commercial zones
- Key identities: private schools, elite institutions, and the aesthetics of privilege + Camp Nou

Interlude 3 – Photography in the Digital Age: Memory, Surveillance, and Social Media

- How smartphones and digital platforms change urban photography
- Who controls the city's image? Public vs. corporate photography

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- AI, algorithms, and the future of visual documentation

Topic 9 – Barcelona in the Future: Challenges and Possibilities

- Tourism and gentrification: Rising housing prices, mass tourism tensions, and the ecological impact of airport expansion and cruise ship influx.
- Sustainability and climate resilience: Superblocks, pedestrianization, cycling infrastructure, and green urban planning.
- Evolving identity: Balancing Catalan identity with multicultural influences and immigration as a driver of cultural and social dynamism.

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Arts Santa Mònica
- CCCB (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona)
- Mapfre Photography Center
- Virreina Centre de la Imatge
- Fundació Miró

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** Syllabus is subject to minor changes in term-specific syllabus at instructor discretion.*