

Teaching classical photography in the digital age

PROFESSOR SANDY LOPEZ-ISNARDI HAS SEEN A TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION IN THE MORE THAN 20 YEARS SHE HAS TAUGHT PHOTOGRAPHY AT ALMA COLLEGE — FROM FILM TO DIGITAL, FROM KODAK TO IPHONE, FROM DARKROOM TO PHOTOSHOP. SHE REFLECTS ON HOW RAPID TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE HAS IMPACTED HOW SHE TEACHES TRADITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

I own an iPhone 7, a point and shoot and a high-end DSLR. Most people own one of these camera formats that technically corrects everything except sharpness, although I understand that, too, is going to be a thing of the past.

You may wonder, “What’s the point of taking a class in photography” — or better yet, who would choose such a major and why? What does photography offer beyond the technical issues?

I liken photography to writing. It is an available, everyday means of communication and used for almost all transactions

on any social and cultural level. One can take photographs much in the same way that one can write in a journal. Making a photograph requires more critical thinking, similar to writing a research paper, poem, prose or short story.

We are bombarded with thousands of pictures daily from the media and, like writing and reading, one needs to be literate to know how to discern the difference between well-researched or well-written creative writing versus writing in the vernacular to communicate everyday information.

Teaching traditional or classical photography (film and darkroom) at the college level gives students a chance to deal with the bare bones technology that creates less distraction, due to the many bells and whistles available on digital cameras that may often become a distraction to making good photos.

Once students learn the basics of the mechanical film camera, where previews are not available until the darkroom work reveals the image, they have a new-found respect for creating a photograph. The process of creating a photograph has a different level of investment, so they slow down and look at scenes they wish to capture more carefully before releasing the shutter. They have a new appreciation for the work of others and better understand historically recognized photographers and some of the images they produced. Students grasp the meaning of making a picture that communicates most powerfully and can deliver a message, just like a well-written communique, a beautiful poem or a great novel.

Enlarging their images in the darkroom is always a challenge as well, as they begin to understand why software such as Photoshop has levels and curves, burning and dodging tools, and the importance of these tools to enhance an image not just for “coolness,” but to add to the power of the communique.

The slowing-down of picture making through classical photography allows students to understand — not memorize — the power of the photograph as a medium to communicate ideas: factually, poetically and as a narrative. They understand the notion of context and what happens when you read photos out of context as they better grasp their viewfinder’s power to add and subtract information.

Personally, I experience photography as another language. I see all camera formats, technology and processes for what they offer an artist to best communicate their ideas. It is important for me to understand and explore how all the processes/techniques/camera formats I select offer the best means of enhancing my idea so that it works on many levels — and therefore it is a unified piece visually, technically and compositionally. ❖

— SANDY LOPEZ-ISNARDI



ABOUT SANDY LOPEZ-ISNARDI

- Professor and Chair of the Art and Design Department
- Member of the Alma College faculty since 1995
- Teaches photography, digital imaging, graphic design and new media arts
- Has led Spring Term classes to Copper Harbor, Mich., Chicago and New York and the countries of Argentina, Ecuador and Spain

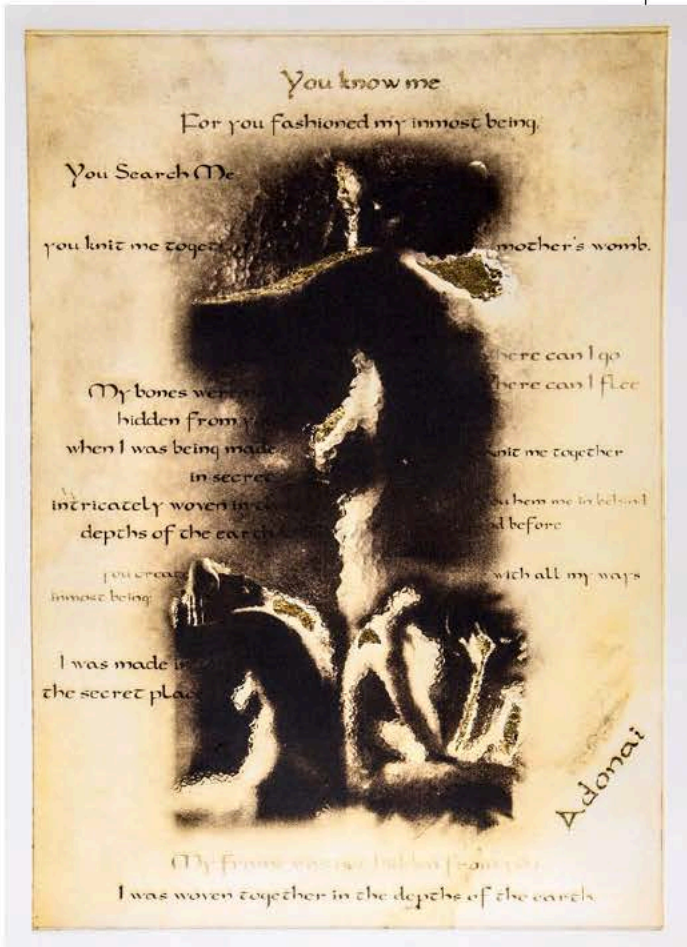
"Journey in Copper,"
artist's proof, intaglio-relief print

This is a photo-based intaglio relief print with copper and gold leaf. It was created by mounting two digital images, printing them out as digital negatives and positives to create solar intaglio and relief plates. This processes printmaking with photography using newer technology available in both mediums. This photograph was selected by the Muskegon Museum of Art's 89th Regional Exhibition.



"Adonai in Gold," artist's proof, intaglio-relief print

This image is created with the same technique described above.

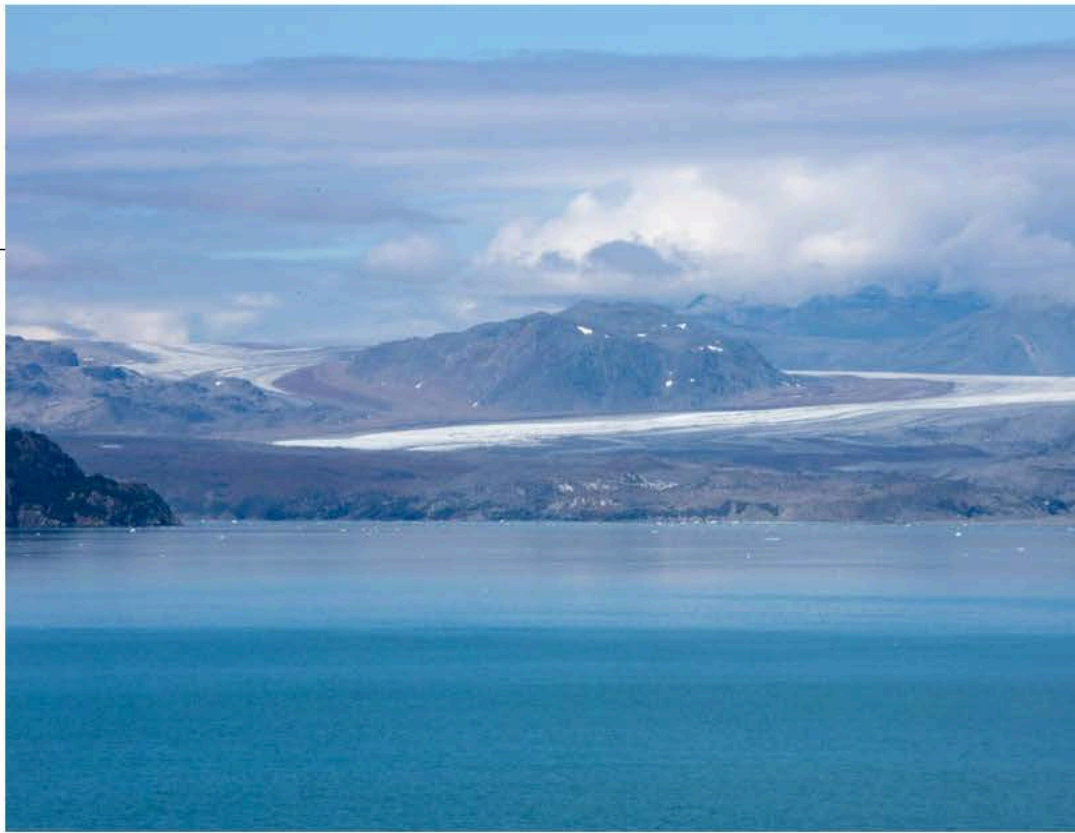


"MY OWN WORK EXPLORES A VARIETY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES THAT ALWAYS ADD TO MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEDIUM, HOW IT COMMUNICATES AND HOW TO MAKE IT METAPHORIC TO REACH A BROADER AUDIENCE.

HERE ARE DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES THAT I AM USING NOW AND HAVE USED IN THE PAST. THESE IMAGES DO NOT CREATE A BODY OF WORK WITH ONE THEME, BUT RATHER ARE EXAMPLES FROM VARIOUS BODIES OF WORK TO SUPPORT MY POINT."

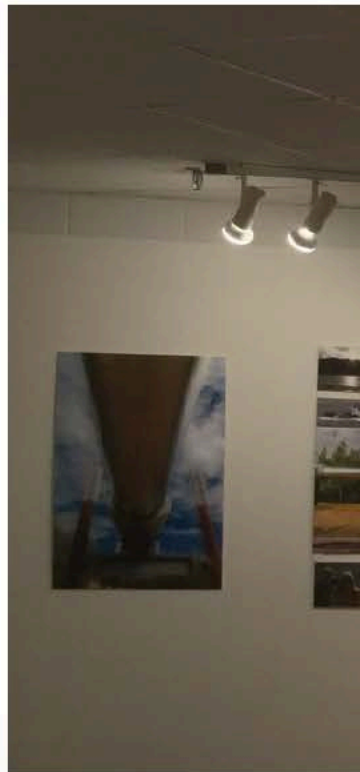
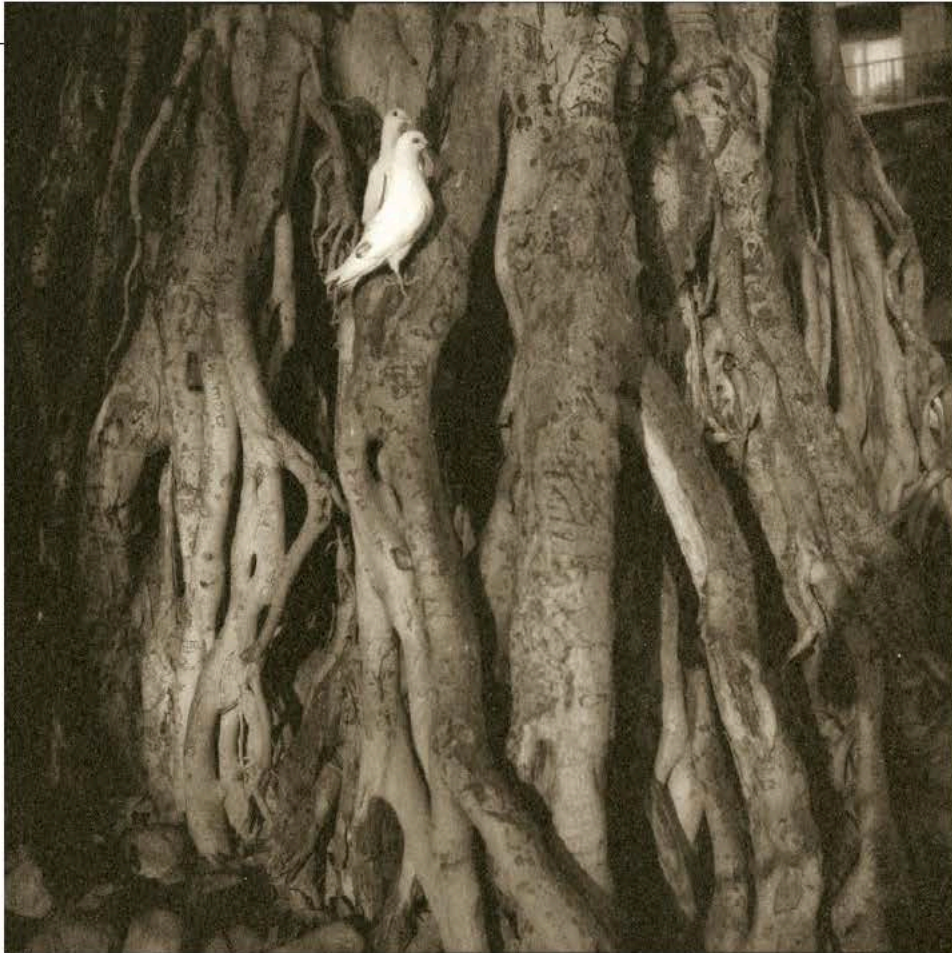
— SANDY LOPEZ-ISNARDI

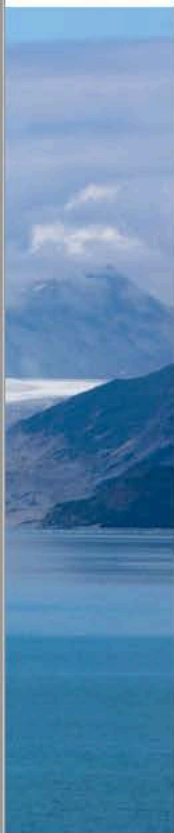
*Work in Progress, untitled,
pigment inkjet print*



*"Palomitas," artist's proof,
platinum/palladium print*

This image was created with an old film-based Twin Lens Reflex camera dating back to the 1950s. The film was scanned to create a digital negative via Photoshop, whereby the curves must be adjusted to create a negative with enough density to expose various older processes. Series in progress.





*"Shimmer," artist's proof, platinum/palladium print
Series in progress.*

*"Installation – The Alyeska Pipe Line and the Environment,"
on display at the Flora Kirsch Beck Gallery, Alma College,
November-December 2016.*

