Photography in the global age

Has the globalisation of the art world caused a loss of artistic freedom and is photography in danger of becoming a commodity?

Commodity: A product that can be bought and sold
Art should not be appreciated simply because of its monetary value yet the prices paid for the photographs in this list https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_expensive_photographs are eye-watering and suggests their purchase was considered a shrewd asset by the buyer.

Globalisation: The process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale. Sponsorship might be determined by certain conditions and restrictions.

Photography is shared on the WWW, viewed at art exhibitions, museums, festivals, entered into competitions, etc. In Bending the Frame Fred Ritchin suggests such events encourage 'the expected cliches ......globalisation has resulted in photographs that look more alike and use similar visual strategies' (p.p 51). Whilst these generate commerce and tourism, they 'also create widespread opportunities to promote certain brands so that sponsorship is now a clear branch and form of company marketing strategy' (Bate. p.p 183).

However, sharing and getting work 'out there' via a website, social media site etc. is essential to make photography accessible to a wide and diverse audience. The course notes ask if globalisation will result in the homogenisation of photography and whilst social mores, culture and personal experience will have an impact on how they are perceived locally I think to a certain extent this is inevitable as the world becomes more connected. Yet despite this innovative art continues to be created and as a student being able to view and
access this work and take inspiration from it can only be considered advantageous. The hard bit is then creating my own BoW!

My aim is not to change career (I've recently retired) nor for monetary gain but to continue making art that means something to me on a personal level and hopefully resonates with my present and any potential future audience.

Without the internet I would not be able to download digital imagery for my own personal use (from stock photo website https://www.pexels.com) as I did during my previous course DI&C https://judybachdigitalimageandculture.wordpress.com.

I’ve recently created two more montages using images from the site ——see BoW in progress https://judybachbodyofwork.wordpress.com/2019/05/27/wip-18/ that have been shared online on my Instagram page and OCA blog.

I buy photographs from eBay online, artefacts that once belonged to someone else that I re-purpose. Again the internet enables me to search easily and quickly for images I can incorporate into my own work.

I intend to set up a Website too hence my audience at the moment is predominately 'virtual'. However, my plan is for my final BoW to be presented in print as an exhibition.

Read Alan Sekula’s essay 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital' in Evans & Hall (1999) Visual Culture: The Reader

The chapter considers a book containing images taken between 1948--1968 by commercial photographer / studio owner Leslie Sneddon of an industrialised coal mining region in Cape Bretton and looks at the connection be-
tween economy & photographs. Sneddon had various clients, the coal company being his biggest, in addition to individual miners and their families.

There are many categories of archive:

1. Commercial
2. Corporate
3. Museum
4. Government
5. Family / personal

'One characteristic of photography is that authorship of individual images and the control and ownership of archives do not commonly reside in the same individual' (p.182). The Ownership of Sneddon's negatives was passed on when he retired. 'Not only are the pictures in archives often literally for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs. New owners are invited, new interpretations promised' (p.183).

I purchase vintage photographs from eBay, these have no familial connection --- I'm exploring how taking them out of their original context and including them with my own archival images can be used to evoke my own childhood memories.

Consider the context archives are used in + the construction
Archives are not objective 'meaning is always directed by layout, captions, text and site and mode of presentation' (p.p 184). Sneddon's photographs were printed in annual reports, displayed in homes or kept in miner's wallets. The gaze of a supplier to the mine to that of the working men and their families 'financial on one hand, emotional on the other--are not compatible' (p.p 183). Yet, when presented together in book form the fundamental difference is concealed 'through the shock of montage, when pictures from antagonistic categories are juxtaposed in a polemic and distorting way' (p.p 184).

I re-interpret both my bought and personal archives creating new narratives. However, I am not the original owner (or creator) of the photographs, using montage I alter their original context with the intention of connoting an alternative meaning. 'We...need to grasp the way in which photography constructs an imaginary world and passes it off as reality' (p.p 181).

Sekula comments that archives generally have some form of structure, either classified by type or in a logical order. The traditional family album is typically in sequential order, but who chooses what is included / excluded assembles the family archive, they are not objective choices. Hence the archive can be 'contradictory in character' & 'one is torn between chronology and inventory' (p.p 185). He continues that when archival photography is presented in exhibitions or as a book such as Seddon's the original layout is kept the same (chronologically) 'and in so doing implicitly claim a share in both the authority and the illusionary neutrality of the archive' (p.p 186).

Memory is affected by photography; need to consider what is left out / remains / is altered.

'How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted and obliterated by photographs ? What futures are promised ; what futures are forgotten ?' (p.p 182).
The archival photographs in Sneddon's book

1. Might be considered factual records of the past and used in history books, etc. 'The viewer is confronted, not by historical writing, but by the appearance of history itself' (p.p 187). Due to the mechanical nature of the camera a photograph is perceived as verifiable evidence, it is thought to be a reliable and trustworthy source of information.

2. Might be regarded as artistic objects 'the very removal of these photographs from their initial contexts invites aestheticism' (p.p 189).

Sekula notes 'photography is both and art and a science' (p.p 190) they can be compatible. The private and corporate images in Sneddon's book are 'divided and yet connected elements of an imaginary social mechanism' what Sekula calls 'a peculiar archive' (p.p 191). They are open to interpretation.

Summary:

1. Archives are not static

2. Have limitless interpretations

3. Context alters when removed from archive

Bibliography / References


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_expensive_photographs
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