Fine Arts Application of Infrared Photography

Kevin Kau (Maureen O’Hara Ure)
Department of Art and Art History, University of Utah

Infrared photography has not been truly explored in historical and contemporary art. Many photographers at some point in their careers have dabbled with infrared images more as a curiosity than as a tool for visual expression. Historically only a small number of great photographers have successfully used infrared as their medium. Minor White’s work in the 1950’s represents one of the only major works of infrared photography. Since Minor White, infrared photography has been largely ignored in art photography.

I believe that infrared photography has tremendous potential. Most photographers have glossed over this way of photographing because of the technical demands and time needed for this process. I have overcome many of these technical issues to the point where I can comfortably focus primarily on the fine arts application of infrared photography.

Images created from pure infrared light yield starkly surreal imagery. While shapes and forms are recognizable as things we have encountered in our physical world, the way infrared light behaves can be vastly different. In this project I explore the way that infrared light reacts with the world around us while focusing on creating art. I try to capture a world with which we cannot see yet still exists just beyond our visual spectrum.

I have chosen to focus my work on the relationship between our environment and man-made creations primarily because of the richness of infrared imagery that I have encountered in this setting. These settings are familiar to us, and by showing them through infrared I show how vastly surreal they can appear. Also, by creating images through infrared light I push the subject matter one step further from reality, bringing the viewers attention more towards texture, shape, and gradient instead of dwelling on what is actually in the photograph. By focusing on the aesthetics of my imagery my results are more than an exploration, but rather focused on fine art.