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Japanese Person's View of Reading: Color of Reading

Natsumi Ito

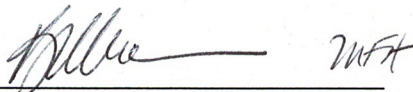
Bachelor of Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

College Honors

Departmental Distinction in Put Name of Department Here

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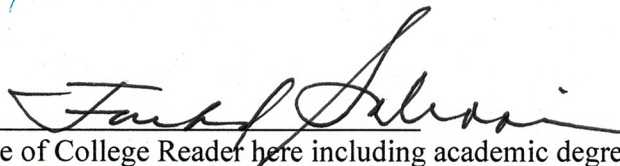
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Senior thesis

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The Color of Reading

Artist Statement

When my parents talk about my childhood, I can picture the events they are referring to because I have looked at all the albums stacked on the shelves in our house. My mother told me that I have always made her take pictures of many situations; she thought I was only being a kid and excited about everything. In reality, I wanted to capture moments in my lifetime and nostalgically remember them later on as time passes, like a documentary.

I bought my first instant camera when I was an eight-year-old. I was the only one in my class who came in with a camera. I try to go around with my camera whenever possible to shoot moments in my life that I want to remember with friends, pets, gardens, and landscapes.

I got serious about photography especially when I bought my first digital point and shoot, before that camera I casually photographed friends and landscapes whenever I wanted to. I started seeing the world differently through the camera: light, shapes, colors, textures, people, buildings, trees, flowers, and everything. Photography is a fantastic story-telling medium like the albums my mother made for me. One can tell a story with one image, a sequence, a series, or an entire portfolio, so the possibilities are endless. Photographs can also produce every emotion, from happiness to sadness, or fear and excitement. For me art is one of the

ways to communicate to the world without any language. There are no language barriers or cultural barriers. I can communicate with people around the world with an image I capture. That is why I take picture, and will do so in the future.

The Color of Reading

The Color of Reading is a series of documentary photographs for my senior thesis at Albright College. The photographically based works entitled, “An International Person’s View of Reading”, capture a view of Reading, PA with a digital camera. Japanese people see the world differently than people in western culture because they naturally have *mono no aware* in their culture. *Mono no aware* is sensitivity to things. It describes beauty as an awareness of the transience of all things, and has a gentle sadness at their passing. It can also be translated as the “ah-ness” of things, life, and love. Japanese people will say a falling or wilting cheery blossom is more beautiful than one in full bloom; a fading sound more beautiful than one clearly heard. Mono no aware states that beauty is a subjective rather than objective experience, a state of being ultimately internal rather than external. Beauty in the West is sought in the ultimate perfection of an external object: a sublime painting, perfect sculpture or intricate musical composition, a beauty that could be said to be only skin-deep. The Japanese ideal sees beauty instead as an experience of the heart and soul, a feeling for and appreciation of objects or artwork—most commonly nature or the depiction of—in a pristine, untouched state.

I came to the United States for the very first time three years ago when I entered Albright College in 2014. As I saw and realized, there were not many

international people from Asia, especially from Japan. I was the only Japanese international student at that time, and it was very different than what I had pictured in my head before I came. The city looked grey and the people were mysterious in Reading. I was surprised how cold the weather was, how many different races there were, how old the cars were, the big roads, how the houses looked, how people cut the trees, and how people looked at me but did not have any interest in foreigners. I had been living in Taiwan and attended seven different schools, but coming to Albright was the biggest culture shock ever.

Forty years ago when current Albright professors attended school as college students, there were no international students at most of the schools in the United States. For many of the international students, there are so many things that are unusual for them about Reading, PA. *The Color of Reading* shows the viewer how an international person who has a totally different background than everybody else in Reading sees any differences with a series of manipulated photographs.

The Color of Reading is edited with unusual local color. The reason for the unusual colors is to represent the people in Reading, PA. In 2013, Reading ranked the second poorest American city, which was very sad news for the residents. Here in Reading, 40 percent of the population lives in poverty and unemployment is more than 7 percent. Despite these difficult circumstances, some entrepreneurs have flourished. The Reading area is headquarters to a handful of homegrown, multimillion-dollar companies—even three on the Fortune 500 list. It is true that Reading has many problems with drugs and crime. The color also represents how many people are on drugs in their everyday life; maybe the color is how they see the

world when they are using. There is even a street sign that says “No Drugs, School Zone” on 13th street where an elementary school, a middle school, a high school, and Albright College are all located.

In Japan, it is not permitted to have a weapon or any type of drug. One would probably get arrested for at least a year or more. What most Japanese imagine about the United States is more of the city side, very stylish and so nice to be there and take pictures because it is a city, and they never realize the real side of this country because of the media, movies or television shows. Most interesting were the buildings in Reading. They seem built in the same time period and many of them are abandoned and dilapidated. The buildings tell outsiders that this city used to be wealthy and the time has passed, but new people always come in to find a place to live. Americans know that many Puerto Rican, Dominican and Hispanic people live in Reading, but for international students it is mind blowing. It is because some peoples thoughts and in images of America aren't like that until they come and see with their eyes.

The audience for this series of photography could be anybody: international person who had never been to Reading or the resident of the city. Using a digital camera makes it possible to share the work data to the world through the Internet. Hopefully, each audience will have something to feel by looking at *the Color of Reading* because the city is not a bad place to be. Some people are very generous and kind, and the kids are precious as anywhere else. Nobody is scary or horrible when they are born; it is how you are raised and where you belong at the end of your life.

The Body of Works



“Hello from Next Window: the Freedom and the Reality”

He lives with his sisters and his mom. However, one of his sisters seems not biologically related; she calls his mom as grandma. The mom has a thirty-year-old daughter and son as well, but she is taking care of all without a father. He is saying hi whenever he sees me. The big image of America is the freedom there, but he does not have much freedom to go outside to play. Where I grow up was more freedom for kids and always we went out for adventure with friends. Safety is important for kids.



“Through the Generations”

It was interesting to watch how the puppy was playing with the man while his grandsons were looking at them, but the man kept touching the puppy while he was smoking his cigarette. Two kids noticed that I was taking a picture of them but the man did not look at me even once.



“No Drugs, School Zone”

This is North 13th street where all four schools are located: elementary, middle school, high school, and Albright College. I did not know that a street sign “no drugs, school zone” exists. I wonder how they see the world? Maybe like this picture.



“Smartphones are Everywhere”

Even in the second poorest city, Reading has kids playing on their phone at the park. The innovation of new technology is all around the world. Sometimes I don't know whether this idea was good for us. One-day communication may become a skill.



“Light in Dark”

The person in the middle kept walking back and forth. I never understood what he was doing. This setting of the ladder is a very western look, such as in West Side Story’s scene.



“Untitled”



“13th & Union Elementary”

This was when I went to teach a cultural art crafting project at the elementary school. The most behaved table group gets to stand in the line to finish the class. Visiting this local elementary school showed me that American education is more like to develop individuals' skills, not to develop its teamwork.



“How many siblings you have?”

He answered, “I think about five.” Did that mean he doesn’t know how many total siblings he has? Or he has multiple moms or dads? I would not know, but he loves his sisters and it was so easy to tell that by his actions.

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“The Fast & The Furious”

Japan has the high elderly population and the longest life expectancy for both genders of the world, but you will not see people on an electronic wheelchair on the street. The woman on a wheelchair seems not too old. It made me wonder if she could walk because the men walking next to her seem about the same age.

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“Daddy’s Time”

It was Tuesday at 5:30 in the afternoon. A dad was playing with all of his kids at the park, full of smiles. Tattoos are associated with the Japanese mafia. His tattoos and the way he dressed made me question, “What does he do for living?”



“Fall of Reading”

Nature is always one of the most beautiful things anywhere.

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“Sunshine”

There is still some snow left on the side of the road, but the weather is nice today. The sun is warming the town and makes our hearts warmer. Hello spring!



“Space Diner”

The Reading Diner is one of my favorite pieces of architecture in Reading, because this building makes me realize I am in America. The diner is such a part of western culture, and this is set up like from the movie Cinderella Story.



“Afterschool”

There is always a park in any city and many kids gather after school. Their age definitely looks more than they actually are because of how they dress, especially girls. Maybe girls do really grow up faster than boys.



“B29”

The Boeing B-29 Super fortress is a four-engine propeller-driven heavy bomber designed by Boeing, which was flown primarily by the United States during World War II. My grandmother is a survivor of the Bombing of Tokyo. Small planes flying in the sky remind her of the horrible image that never goes away from her memory. Japanese people always kept the war stories and passed them to the next generation to remember what happened before we were born.



“100 Years Old”

It is rare to see an old house like this in Japan mainly because of earthquakes. 70% of Japan's land is made out of mountains and there are many earthquakes compared with other countries. Also, Japan's land is almost the same size as California. The suburban area in Japan still looks like urban United States; the houses are close to each other and the road is smaller in general.



“Playing with Himself”

“Hello.” – He did not answer and kept making the hole.

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“Winter Warning”

I never knew there were so many places where a huge snow falls and it is a powder snow in United States. I had been to Hawaii before I came to the mainland and always thought this country was warm, but it is dryer and colder than I thought. Also the school gets canceled when the snow is high. I never had the same experience in Japan. Snow could destroy our daily schedule and not be fun especially after the snow day, but make the landscape more beautiful for sure.

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