

ART FOR ARTISTS' SAKE

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO'S RESPECTED GRADUATE PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM. BY RUSSELL HART



Jim Stone originally came to New England to study photography at the Rhode Island School of Design and never left. He pursued his own work, wrote and edited photography books, and taught at his alma mater. But a few years ago he was lured back to the Southwest, where he grew up, by the photographic riches of the University of New Mexico. "I was looking for a great program where

the students would be challenging and where my colleagues would be artists passionate about their own work but who would still be a team interested in constant improvement of the program," says Stone, who joined the school's faculty in 1998. "I have found it."

UNM's Albuquerque campus hosts extensive and varied undergraduate offerings in photography, but it is perhaps best known for its graduate program. And one thing that distinguishes the UNM graduate program from comparable, equally prestigious programs is that it is part of a full-scale university environment. UNM photo students therefore have access to a full range of liberal arts resources—not the case at independent art schools—and are able to study and interact with other disciplines. "Students are encouraged to work with faculty in all disciplines and to use any medium appropriate for their emerging concerns," says Stone. "We forward no limiting ideas about what photography is or is not." (Another benefit of being part of a state university is that tuition is a fraction of the cost of private art schools and colleges!) Nor does the program make any effort to "train" photographers for a commercial career.

The roster of well-known UNM grads confirms that philosophy. Alumni include fine-art photographers Joel-Peter Witkin, Nicholas Nixon, and Eve Sonneman; more recent graduates include Robert Parke-Harrison and Elijah Gowin, both of whom have gone on to teach as well. But not all alumni are photographer-teachers. Sarah Greenough is photography curator at the National Gallery; Bill Jay is a respected and widely published photography critic. Such talent reflects the fact that the UNM program was created by eminent art historian Van Deren Coke (himself an active photographer), who in turn hired photo historian Beaumont Newhall to teach. Indeed, applicants to the program must have at least 18 hours' worth of course work in art history—the idea being that anyone in the program can place the work being done by peers in a broad artistic context. As Stone puts it, "Much of the educational worth of any program depends on the catalytic value of other students."

That said, UNM's photo faculty (which teaches both the graduate and undergraduate programs) is as stellar as it is diverse. Past members include Thomas Barrow and Betty Hahn. In addition to Stone, the current faculty includes Jocelyn Nevel, Adrienne Salinger, and Patrick Nagatani. Joyce Neimanas recently left her long-term post at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to teach at UNM.

The program is greatly enhanced by the University of New Mexico Art Museum's extensive photography collection, also conceived by Coke. Now numbering over 10,000 items, the collection is available to grad students for hands-on inspection; they just set up appointments with the museum's print room. For learning purposes, the viewing of actual prints offers a sensory experience

AT A GLANCE: UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PHOTOGRAPHY

- Founded: 1889 (photo program began in 1962) • Enrollment: about 15 MFA students (300 in undergraduate photo classes)
- Class size: about 12 (Graduate Photo Seminar) • Photo faculty: five full-time members, not including art and photo history
- Tuition: About \$3,200/year (12-month state resident) or \$5,900/year (out of state); financial aid is available. • For more information, including catalog, application requirements, deadlines, and forms, visit unm.edu or unm.edu/~artdept2/, or write to Photography, Department of Art and Art History, MSC04 2560, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001. •

that simply can't be conveyed by lecture slides, which are often copied from books. Students also get their own studio space for the duration of their stay; black-and-white darkrooms are shared with just one or two other students, while color darkrooms are individual. (Paper is run through a 32-inch print processor in the main lab.) There's also a nonsilver lab and a shooting studio with lighting gear. UNM's digital amenities include wide-format printers.

While the UNM program's most important commitment is to its students' growth as artists—and there seems to be a presumption that graduates will become important photographers—it also recognizes that many will support themselves by teaching. For this reason, students can teach a lab section of the undergraduate beginning photography class (supervised by a faculty member) as part of their coursework. At the same time, they participate in a teaching seminar currently led by Stone. Some students qualify to teach second-level undergraduate classes—affording them teaching experience in a variety of subject areas by the time they finish the program, which can take as long as three years.

Studio and art history coursework, including outside electives, is generally completed within three or four semesters. In the third semester, students form a committee of their choosing—usually four faculty members, with at least one from outside the studio art area—that holds major reviews of the student's progress and supervises a final exhibition, catalog, and oral presentation. How is it possible to give one student so much attention? Perhaps because the University of New Mexico graduate photography program accepts as few as five students each year! ■

JULIE ANAND



ALISON CAREY

UNM graduate student work, clockwise from opposite: Jyl Kelley's pinhole photograph explores the roles of old and new technology; one of Julie Anand's series on water use in the west; and Alison Carey's desert fantasy, an ambrotype of a room-sized model she built.