

Exploring the Future Roles for Archaeological Photography

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What role should photography play in archaeology?

We should break down the traditional notions of photography as object or artifact.

Photography is a media that can tell a story about the process and has significance for archaeological work in general, since photographs can document parts of the process that we are not even conscious of.

The documentation of the sensory experience enhances our understanding of the process as a whole and paints the story as it takes place in the field, from the shovel lying on the ground to the bucket of soil by the screen.

It is time to move away from solely using static imagery limited to a scaled two-dimensional reference. Instead of taking photographs that are without movement, archaeological photography should aim towards documenting the experience of working on the site.

Methodology

My photography aims to actively capture and depict the motion and subtleties that exist in the active processes on the archaeological site, the things that are not normally considered – not the finds, not the records, but the action of excavation.

Furthermore, the photos can capture the human interaction with the landscape and environment.

The concept of sensory imagery has significance for archaeological work in general by bringing a greater level of accessibility to the public through documenting the experience of being on site.

The balance of photographic scholarship and aesthetics are essential to the future of archaeology, which can only be sustained by acquiring the interest of the public.

Sensory Experience and Phenomenology

In C. Tilley's *Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994), he wrote on the value of experiencing a landscape through the senses as a means of understanding the past.

The viewing of both close-ups and broad contextual panoramas in the following photos creates a sensory or phenomenological experience for the viewer, allowing one to see the miniscule aspects of excavation as well as its macroscopic aspects.

This creates an experience for the viewer, bringing the viewer on to the archaeological site and into the processes involved, giving a sense of the overall nature of fieldwork.

Aesthetics and Techniques

As seen in these photos, by looking at the aesthetics of an archaeological site, one can explore the cultural landscape through storytelling. These photos capture the visceral aspects of the experience with the depth of the artifact bags, the hardness of the soil, and the wetness clinging to the screens.

Past techniques of archaeological site photography have overlooked the fieldwork process, leaving it hidden behind the camera lens.

The technique in digital technology of macro-style, used here with extreme close-ups, brings the viewer into the photo and achieves a sense of depth. Macro is best used for close-up shots within the context of larger excavations, allowing one to focus on the more intimate aspects of excavations.

Other aspects include studies of light and color, highlighting texture through the use of de-saturation and bleaching, and capturing action by still-framing motion.

Digital Media Tools and Meta-Data

Meta-data is used for cataloguing purposes and for determining the point at which photographs were shot during excavations.

Meta-data allows one to determine when photographs were shot, the conditions, and their overall relation within the framework of the site and excavations.

Digital photography allows for a more direct association between the act of photographing and the excavation recording process.

Meta-data catalogues the activities that are photographed and enhances the traditional records of site excavations. It not only can record *when* in the process the photo was taken, it can also occasionally record where on the site that photo was taken.

Conclusion

Digital photography has changed the ways sites are photo-documented and will continue to change it even more with time - digital media tools (such as meta-data and macro) will have an increasing role in archaeological fieldwork.

Access to the public through digital media is much easier due to the world wide web and we need the public's interest in order to sustain the field of archaeology; therefore, photo-documentation on site should expand to bring an outside viewer in.

Instead of only doing the traditional straight down shot of a stratigraphic or feature layer, photograph the process. By capturing the overall process and experience and by highlighting both the intimate and the global details, we can tell the story.

The future of archaeological photography is greater accessibility by bringing in the sensory experience.