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There seems to be growing concern among the students that, for financial reasons, FEPC has dropped the academic offering of photography at Bennington. This is not true, and I feel this subject should be qualified immediately. FEPC has not discussed the subject, nor has the art division. I resigned some weeks ago from the teaching of photography for a variety of professional reasons. Basically my reasons were that I have neglected my own photographic work; that I find it necessary now to devote greatly increased amounts of time to the College's publications; that photography, in order to be offered properly, needs more faculty time and monetary expenditure than the College can now afford; and, finally, that the art division is not convinced that the medium is valid as a graphic art or that the teaching of photography at Bennington is as important as architecture or ceramics or other art division studio courses.

Essentially the problem now rests with the art division. Despite an obvious student interest in photography, on both beginning and advanced levels, the division has no intention of offering the subject as a "legitimate" course offering. In the plans for the new Visual and Performing Arts Complex there is a small room assigned as "Photography Lab" but which, according to the architect and several art division members, is to be used for the processing of cinematographic film. Even if the space were used for still photography it would constitute less space than is now available in Welling Basement, which is certainly not sufficient for long-range use. An additional faculty slot allotted to the art division is reportedly to be given to a "curator" for the new museum in the VAPA Complex, despite a large grant I understand was given to the College by a donor expressly for still photography. This means that the art division has no immediate or long-range plans for offering photography seriously at Bennington, and can only be induced to do so through student and faculty pressure.

It is certainly true that Bennington is too small, by design, to compete with universities in the range of academic offering. It is also true that photography is a tremendously expensive medium. But there can be no doubt that photography is valid as an art form and thus worthy of any serious art division's attention. It should not be dealt with in the same package as cinematography (which has enjoyed some amount of positive attention from the art division, but which is also, sadly, not being offered here next year) but should instead be dealt with on its own potential merits. That the division, which once was an attraction to internationally-known artists and critics, is moving towards curators rather than teachers is indicative of Bennington's growing conservatism. If photography is a relatively new art form, and frightens the painters, it should stand an even greater chance of acceptance at Bennington than at the conservative, established institutions which are now offering it as a department.

I do not wish here to debate photography's artistic merits, or to debate its relative importance with other fields more commonly accepted in the art division. I am only concerned that photography be offered here in some form. The worst possible thing that could happen now, short of total abandonment, would be for the art division to take over the darkrooms and incorporate photography into the current art division offering, with its present faculty, or to open the darkrooms to untutored and inexperienced students. Without careful instruction in the technical procedures and regular review of technical competency the equipment, which is extremely costly, would be destroyed in a very short period of time. The best thing that could happen now, with student support, is that a photography department be established, perhaps connected with cinematography (only because both share the dubious distinction of working with photosensitized materials, and film doesn't really belong in the drama division anyway) which would function apart from the art division and which would be free to move in positive directions.

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