



A Movie in a Single Frame: The Photography of Jason Shulman



by Fabian Chaundy | 16th May 2016



Photograph by Jason Schulman

With “Photographs of Films” Jason Shulman presents us with long-exposure photographs of iconic movies, resulting in images that are both eerie and intriguing. Browsing the end result, there was a question that I couldn’t help but ask myself: could they teach us anything about cinematography?

There are many ways to analyse a film: the script, the acting, the editing, the technical elements chosen to bring the production to fruition and so much more. Ultimately, what you experience as a viewer is the director’s vision brought to life as the sum of all of these elements. For decades we have studied film in retrospect, only turning to analysis after all of the frames have passed in front of our eyes, one twenty-fourth of a second at a time.

But, what if we could see the entirety of a movie in a single frame? Jason Shulman’s exhibition “Photographs of Films” is a collection of images that capture the whole duration of classic movies in a series of long exposure photographs. Examples include *Citizen Kane*, *Voyage de la Lune*, *Rear Window*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* among others.

Yes, the experiments are jumbled and they are chaotic, but they are never cluttered. The results, all bordering on the abstract and the impressionistic, could even be said to be quite pleasing. Describing the photographs, Shulman equates each of the film's individual frames as a deck of cards, "and no matter the shuffle, you would end up with the same image I have arrived at. Each of these photographs is the genetic code of a film – its visual DNA". Is there, then, anything we could learn from reading such a code?

In some, the ghostly shapes are all but hints of the actor's silhouettes, only outlines of shoulders and faces whose framing perhaps offer an indication of the director's preoccupations with character and their representation. Faster-paced movies, on the other hand, don't allow human shapes to be imprinted on the image — perhaps, even, our eye — losing all recognisable tangibility in favour of the movement of colour. This, of course, reveals at a single glance the general colour scheme chosen for each particular movie. To dive deeper into colour schemes and their importance in the production of a film, make sure to read Richard's excellent article.

Of course, there is a valid argument that Shulman's photographs should stand as pieces of visual art on their own. But their very nature makes it unavoidable to want to see them in connection to the source material. We want to forensically compare them to the originals, to the emotions that we felt when we watched them, to our own experience in front of the screen. It is almost inevitable to wonder if the photographs offer any added layer of meaning.

Maybe there is some further insight we can infer from the photos and maybe there isn't. Where they succeed, though, is in inviting us to revisit the films in our mind's eye. To question them, to breathe new life into these icons of popular culture whose medium we have chosen as a channel to express our own creativity — a medium which in most of our cases we have turned into our profession. In short, these photographs make us think about something old in a new way. And — at least the way I see it — that is what art is all about.