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Visualising Racism through the Moments of Motion and Concept:

Exploring Long Exposure Photography

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ABSTRACT

This master's thesis discusses the field of visual narratives of racism, focusing on moments of motion and concept through long-exposure photography. My journey started with crafting DIY lenses from old cameras, which eventually led to a deep passion for photography where I was motivated by a desire to convey untold stories, particularly those related to societal issues. The research centres on visualising racism through a unique and challenging technique that brings dynamism and narrative depth to the captured moments. The research paradigm traced the evolution of my interest and highlighted the fusion of technical and theoretical knowledge throughout this excursion. The research strategy was centred on art-based action research and aimed to investigate the power of photography, identify moments of motion and concept of photography techniques, highlight the significance of visual storytelling, and visualise racism as a social issue. The study included a literature review, observation, discussion, workshop, and exhibition and aimed to promote critical thinking, reflection, and creative practices for visualisation, contributing to the field of visual arts and activism. A key artistic part of this research culminated in the exhibition '*A Group Exhibition Exploring Racism, Heritage, and Connection*', held at Gallery Kilo, University of Lapland, from January 28 to February 20, 2025. The exhibition served as both a reflective space and a platform for engaging discussions, allowing the audience to experience my artistic and conceptual depth of the study firsthand. By prioritising processes and strategies, the study aimed to go beyond traditional research boundaries in photography and provide a unique perspective on the connection between art, social issues, and research.

Keywords: *Conceptual photography, Long-Exposure, Visual storytelling, Creative Process, Visual Arts and Activism*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Photography has grown from a mere scientific invention in the 19th century to a deep medium for artistic expression and social commentary (Wright, 2016). Initially celebrated as a new technology with an unparalleled ability to grasp reality with accuracy, photography today is a multiform work of art, fully expressing complex narratives and depths of feeling (Alan, 2024; Marius, 2023; Snyder & Allen, 1975). It has been through many socio-cultural contexts, advances in technology, and theoretical frameworks all combined to bring about the meaning and use of photography today (Azoulay, 2010; Liu, 2022).

The historical development of photography had passed through the stages of experimentation by the pioneering spirits of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre. In their innovation lay the solid structure for this powerful means of documenting life (Daniel, 2004; Easby, 2015). Until photography techniques began to improve mostly with the use of colour photography and digital imaging-so did the possibilities for artistic expression and exploration (Touchette, 2017). The artists began gradually to consider photography not just as a representative medium but as a medium for introspection and as a means to externalise one's emotional expression. This became a floor whereby people were telling their stories and finding identity, as can be noticed from the various works of Francesca Woodman. Woodman established her photography conceptually between presence and absence pointing out how photographic media can stimulate deep, introspective modes of reflection into the nature of the self (Rogers, 2018; Simon, 2010).

The development of photography has been deeply influenced by its ability to capture moments in time, the moments that are unique and will never happen in exactly the same way again. Whereas all these techniques of long exposure, motion blur, and double exposures use sequential evidential elements in a frame to create dynamism by inviting further engagement of the viewer, as Luo et al. (2018) say, while photographing adding motion blur effects can significantly increase the seriousness of not only the overall perceived quality of the image but also the narrative, making static scenes potentially inviting representations of change and softness. This interest in movement represents a broader artistic mind which seeks to

understand and convey the complexities of time, identity, and perception in contemporary society (Xuejiao et al., 2018).

Moreover, beyond this, photography is also an important medium of storytelling which offers unique way specially in the means of communicating both individual and social narratives. One such development an exciting one is the rise of the photobook, these being sequences of images chosen to create a consistent visual narrative speaking to viewers on both emotional and cognitive levels. Sinner and Owen (2011) illustrate how visual narratives can enrich self-reflection and personal stories in an educational context, a use which shows that photography can have transformational potential in individual and communal contexts. These tell other stories of photography moving out of the frame into a visual documentation that invites viewers into a conversation instead of narrowing observation (Sinner & Owen, 2011).

Documenting photography represents or gives a loud voice to the injustice within social activism. The images have the potential to evoke empathy and inspire action which make it a powerful arm for social movements throughout the world. Images help creating the bridge boundaries and encouraging solidarity by connecting audiences to human experiences among the visuals. For example, the photography of the #BlackLivesMatter movement has presented witness to police violence and racial injustice by taking discrete events-cumulative and powerful records that raise international consciousness about the issue (Yang, 2016). The photographs serve as a powerful call to action to confront uncomfortable truths through inspiring people, which helped to communities to engage deeply to pressing the issue down. Moreover, iconic images of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee who died while escaping the violence in his country, serve to illustrate just how one single photo can catalyse the response of the international community to humanitarian crises (Prøitz, 2018). These examples emphasis the power photography in shaping the public discussion and influencing social change by exposing potentiality to bridge the gap between personal experience and communal action.

To deepen our understanding of how photography affects memory and identity, we can explore the interplay between these elements. Delucia and Maldia (2006) found that seeing ourselves in motion can actually distort our memories, adding a layer of complexity to how we remember places and experiences. Their research shows how visual perception shapes our personal memories and sense of self in surprising ways.

In addition, the artistic and social aspects of the art the photography is not deprived of ethical consideration. Representation with integrity and respect has increasingly become the photographers' responsibility crucial in discussions involving visual media in activism. As Young (2021) argued, the performative quality of visual activism demands critical attention to the narratives built up through photography. There is an increasing need to consider acts of image production, transmission, and interpretation in photography when images represent marginalized communities. It is not only the possibility of its use for abuse and misrepresentation that creates an ethical dilemma, but how well it has to be balances so that photography can serve as a real means of empowerment and advocacy, rather than of objectification.

My own journey with photography began in 2013 when I crafted DIY lenses from discarded cameras to improve my smartphone photography. I vividly recall the day when my neighbour handed me a YASHICA vintage reel camera, which marked the inception of my passion and fascination for lenses, cameras, and photography. This newfound interest allowed me to convey my thoughts through the medium of light. During my undergraduate years, I had the invaluable opportunity to refine my skills by immersing myself in technical and theoretical aspects of photography and cameras. Since that time, the photography world of conceptual has been motivating me with a high drive to be more and more deeply involved, highly focused on the long exposure technique.

Opening up possibilities to push the boundaries beyond conventional photography, as it may allow the use of lighting, props, and such other tools in creating an environment for enhancing and adding further depth to the conceptual message behind each image. Long exposure alone allows me to play with time within one frame: capturing motion, lights, or even minute atmospheric changes that could be well hidden from the naked human eye. I try to include all those elements thoughtfully with what I would consider storytelling on both an intellectual and emotional level, whereby viewers try to find meaning and connect more with each piece. In doing so, long exposure photography turns not just a technique but very much a medium in storytelling where every light streak forms or every blurred motion forms part of the overarching concept and elements in the environment make the concept more stand out. The photography process for me is one of pushing the artistic and expressive boundaries while producing images that are as visually compelling as they can be conceptually rich. I have found that telling stories through photography is a more expressive medium than verbal narration.

When a story is told verbally, it tends to evoke a uniform visualisation among the audience. In contrast, conceptual photography allows each viewer to interpret the narrative differently and connect with the image in a personal and meaningful way through their observations.

Subsequently, I seized various opportunities to explore different concepts. I experimented long exposure technic of photography, where I visualised several stories that were frozen inside me. In one of my projects, I developed a concept where a young boy rises as a rebel against injustice where I used a creative technique called long-exposure photography technique to give voice to this struggle. This project taught me that while visualizing a concept can be challenging, time-consuming, and requires huge amount of preparation from the developing a concept to post-production. However, it produces high dynamic and rich layered narrative results compared to general technique which is worth of thousand sleepless nights.

During my first year at the University of Lapland, I had the opportunity to work on a project titled Sustainability Portraits, a sub-project of New Genre Art Education in the Arctic (Jokela, Berliner, et al., 2024). The project aimed to create a participatory art experience for students, emphasizing the development of participatory art education and prioritizing the amplification of youth voices and their well-being in the rapidly evolving Arctic communities. Through a series of participatory activities, photography exercises, and discussions, students explored their connection to the Arctic environment and expressed themselves creatively. The long-exposure technique was employed to enhance the thematic depth of the composition. Each photograph of the students uniquely tells a story, reflecting their inner emotions and representing their identity, community, and the Arctic environment. The workshop not only empowered youth voices but also promoted a deeper connection to their identity and surroundings.

As time went on, I became particularly drawn to developing a concept that visualizes racism. I chose racism a theme for my research because it is one of the major current social issues that exists in various forms across the world, even in the happiest nations. Racism heralds its effect on individuals and society in latent mannerisms-conspicuous ways, and therefore I felt it was really important to delve into through art and activism. This will be for dual purposes: first, to create awareness about racism and secondly, to exhibit how long exposure photography can be used to show visually powerful messages. With that in mind, I do think photography, especially obscured or abstract visuals, can talk much louder than words. The idea of obscured images, more precisely the approach of long exposure photography, mounts a creative and evocative

way of showing the shades of grey and complexity that surround certain social issues such as racism. This also serves as my way to express emotional depth and complex facets of racial discrimination and at the same time show how photography could be an activism tool.

The transformative power of photography enables one to capture the minutest details of human life. By its very nature-evoking emotion, challenging perception, and documenting reality-photography extends from being art to a vital medium of self-expression, storytelling, and social activism. The research aims at exposing the different roles of photography in shaping individual and collective identities while investigating further into the ethics involved in practicing it as it relates to contexts in which photography is both set and received.

The research also explores the technical process of long exposure photography and approaches to understanding racism, hence helping future photographers to develop concepts and their work for social advocacy. Such a use of artistic expression, combined with one's social commentary, makes this project apt to help inform the ongoing debate about racism and its effects in society, further nurturing the field of visual arts.

1.2 Research Questions

Despite the rich history of photography as a medium for storytelling and social critique, there remains a gap in understanding how long exposure techniques can be specifically utilized to convey complex narratives about racism. This research seeks to address the following questions:

- i. Can concept-based motion photographs convey stories, messages and emotions more effectively than static photos?
- ii. What are the processes involved in capturing motion photography?

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of how long exposure photography can serve as a medium for addressing and expressing themes of racism. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are established:

- I. To investigate the theoretical frameworks of long-exposure photography as a form of art-based action research
- II. To explore the processes of long-exposure photography and their implications for storytelling
- III. Explore the power of long-exposure photography and highlight the significance of concept-based visual storytelling
- IV. Promote critical thinking and reflection and contribute to the field of visual arts and activism

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research is its potential to fill the gap in artistic expression and social advocacy through the perspective of long-exposure photography. This paper looks at long-exposure photography for an inquiry into themes relating to racism, and it deals with the pressing social issue by using a medium that shows just how vital visual storytelling is in shaping public discourses. As Young (2021), photography is an act of performative action and an invitation to solidarity; thus, the medium itself is important to voice and communities that have been marginalised.

Furthermore, the research contributes to the expanding knowledge of art-based action research, using novel methodologies that emphasize practical knowledge and creative engagement. Quite specifically, the study will use methods such as photovoice and collaborative analysis to bring new learning regarding photography's role in documenting lived experiences and catalysing social change. The findings might eventually be valuable resources for artists, educators, and activists working at the nexus between art and social justice. Finally, the process of long-exposure photography will contribute to the visual arts and activism.

1.5 Methodology Overview

My interest in photography and expressing personal thoughts began out of curiosity during my teenage years. In my bachelor's period, I had the chance to enhance my skills by delving into the technical and theoretical aspects of photography and cameras. Subsequently, I actively pursued opportunities to explore different concepts. My research discovers a new field of photography with an artistic touch. I had a chance to work with experts in the field and those

who know much about concepts practically, theoretically, or curiously. In this research, I explored a particular aspect of photography techniques which is mostly popular as long exposure photography techniques. I used racism as an example to illustrate a process that can be applied to address other social issues and raise awareness about them. The desired outcome or goal of the research in terms of knowledge, understanding, and expertise is to gain a deeper understanding and development of conceptual, practical, and theoretical knowledge. The research aims to improve practices and generate better outcomes through motion photography techniques, analysis, and interpretation of the research material. The objective is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and share the processes that have been followed for practical projects and expertise in art-based action research to make any concept more expressive.

This thesis uses an art-based action research approach, which emphasises the integration of artistic practice into the research methodology. According to Jokela et al. (2018), art-based action research allows the researcher to investigate complex social phenomena easier through creative activity, hence fitting into this study. Art-based research incorporates visual and sensory elements, is closely linked to exploring social and environmental issues. While distinctive, it is still classified as a subset of qualitative research, aligning with the principles of case-specific and developmental inquiry in action research (Leavy, 2009). Art-based action research involves the utilisation of artistic knowledge, including non-verbal forms of expression (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

The methods used in the research include carrying out an extensive literature review to contextualise the study within the broader photographic discourses on racism and social justice. Besides this, Photovoice workshops conducted the participatory approach used in empowering individuals to express their lived experiences and insights about racism through photography. The photographic analysis is also ensured in this research, focusing on the technical and emotional issues of long-exposure photography showing how different techniques work in storytelling and narrative representations. It also shared the creative process involved in producing motion photography so one can reflect on the choices made throughout an artistic journey. Finally, the efficiency of the photographs in delivering their messages was assessed through audience feedback via questionnaires and artistic exhibition. In using such a methodology, the research hopes to disclose a variety of ways in which racism can be portrayed using long-exposure photography while gaining a complex awareness of the medium's full potential for social involvement.

1.6 Gaps in the Literature

While photography has a longstanding role in storytelling and social advocacy, there is a significant gap in how long-exposure techniques can be applied to portray complex social issues like racism. Current research primarily focuses on static, moment-based photography that captures singular instances of social injustice, leaving the potential of motion photography largely unexplored. However, long-exposure techniques offer a powerful alternative by capturing movement and layered narratives, which can symbolise the extensive, often hidden dimensions of social issues like racial discrimination.

Few studies have taken into close consideration how long-exposure photography, with its ability to reveal time and flow, might be a singular form of visual activism since it invites viewers to engage more deeply with complex, dynamic social stories. This research addresses this literature gap through the investigation of the processes and impacts of using long-exposure photography in creating conceptually rich and emotionally resonant images that speak to issues of racism. It also intends to expand the toolkit of both visual storytelling and social advocacy by showing how long exposure photography can foster empathy, self-observation, and critical dialogue around pressing social issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Photography

Photography has documented diverse aspects of human life, evolving to capture both time and space. It allows us to perceive fleeting moments, explore vast or minute details, and offers insights into remote regions, outer space, and modern social complexities (Wright, 2016). The term ‘photography’ comes from two Greek words: ‘photo,’ derived from phos (meaning light), and ‘graphy,’ from graphe (meaning writing or drawing). This gives photography the literal meaning of ‘drawing or writing with light’ (Bull, 2010).

Photography is an art form of image-making by using light. Under normal conditions, this involves capturing the light patterns from objects and recording it on a light-sensitive surface or digital storage using a camera (Robinson, 2007). Photography is not a single perspective product, but an event that acts dynamically through the interaction between the photographer, subject, and viewer. It captures more than just what is framed, as it reflects multiple viewpoints and interpretations (Azoulay, 2010). A person who uses technical skill and artistic vision to capture images that convey emotions, tell stories, or document moments, work in diverse settings, employ various equipment, and may edit their images using post-processing software is called photographer (CareerExplorer, 2023).

Photography has been debated as a unique form of artistic expression, different from painting, due to its inherent connection to reality and objectivity. J. Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen (1975) delve into the distinct nature of photography compared to other visual arts like painting, emphasising its perceived objectivity due to the mechanical process of image capture. They argue that these characteristics shape the unique ways photographs are interpreted, as they directly reflect reality rather than being the result of an artist's hand. This perception of objectivity, they suggest, sets photography apart, leading to different standards and methods of critical evaluation (Snyder & Allen, 1975).

2.2 Conceptual Photography

Conceptual photography is an art form in which the photographers use pictures to express abstract ideas, emotions, or concepts. For this type of photography, creativity and expression play a profound role, and the photographing process is most often mounted to bring about some reflection or message with the aid of visual metaphors and symbolic imagery-make it one strong medium for the exploration of social and cultural themes (Agarwal, 2023). This approach uses visual metaphors and storytelling to help photographers explore deeper emotions and abstract ideas, creating thought-provoking images that transform how stories are told through photography (Cotton, 2010). Unlike traditional photography, which provides an image of what we can see, conceptual photography carries a deeper meaning through an idea or story to drive a powerful message across and finds its application in advertisements and public service announcements (Ezzat, 2022).

The beginning of Conceptual Photography can be traced from the larger conceptual movement of the 1960s and the 1970s. The inspiration was a situation where the concept was the most important aspect, instead of the real manifestation of the work. As expressed by artists such as Sol LeWitt, the idea or concept behind a work of art was more important than the visual presentation thereof; henceforth, a new role for photography took flight. Rather than being seen as a means to create works based on aesthetics or displaying technical skills, photography evolved into recording and expressing abstract themes. This perspective allowed artists to challenge the boundaries of traditional art forms, using photographs to represent the thought processes and conceptual frameworks underlying their work. By prioritising the message over the medium, conceptual photographers transformed how photography was perceived in the art world, laying the groundwork for a more intellectual approach to visual arts (Soutter, 1999).

The digital age has further evolved conceptual photography, allowing artists to integrate digital manipulation and complex visual effects into their work. This integration enables a fusion of physical and virtual elements, creating new opportunities for artistic expression. Digital tools have allowed photographers to push the barrier in storytelling and visuals (Liu, 2022). Conceptual photography depicts the artist's message as socially relevant to critical issues and provides some type of interpretation of events connected with identity, politics, and environmental problems. This approach allows artists to challenge viewers' perspectives and encourage deeper reflection on societal conditions (Szeman & Whiteman, 2009).

2.3 Photography as a Medium of Visual Narrative and Storytelling

Storytelling photography goes way beyond the act of taking pictures; it is an art form that has been reopening the doors of reality and can make viewers feel emotions so strong that it involves them with the subject matter on quite a deeper level. This is because, through photo stories, photographers are able to take their audiences through time paths and places for feelings that may be astonishing or shocking, thereby leaving an impression that will last forever. In photography, one needs to create a photograph with intention and a message in mind. Storytelling in photography may be further enhanced by techniques such as composition, lighting, and post-processing to shape what the viewer is experiencing and their emotional reaction to the scene. The connection that captures real emotion through the expressions and mannerisms of your subjects may create a way for viewers to understand and connect to the story that is being told. Above anything else, storytelling photography is a potent way of expression whereby a photographer is afforded ways of telling his story and allowing the viewer into his/her visual journey. The images become meaningful stories that strike a chord with the human experience since it is poignant; this alone underlines the importance of photography as a means of forming visual narration (Alan, 2024). Each click of the shutter frames one moment in time within an overarching narrative that demands deeper understanding. Photography opens us up to the art of storytelling; in that sense, it is an avenue through which we can build connections and even share perspectives, a way of exposing in speech what we could never really say with words from within every picture (Marius, 2023). This well reflects in the saying: ‘a picture paints a thousand words by Fred R. Barnard’. This adage pretty much shows us how images have exceptional skills in talking explicitly to convey such complex messages. Mark talked about photography playing a huge role in the modern aspect of storytelling, especially in business cases where touching hearts means everything. The broader message, however, is that photography is one of the most powerful media for visual narration that shapes perceptions and experiences. Merging words into images makes storytelling one of the most connective methods to touch human nature and thus improve communication across cultures. He made this comment in a bid to mean that the combination of storytelling and photography enriches personal interactions but, on the whole, raises a deeper understanding of the world surrounding us. Photography has been used not only for factual storytelling but also as a medium for more abstract and poetic narrations (Mark, 2023).

Photography has been utilized not only for factual storytelling but also as a medium for more abstract, poetic narratives. Sigurðardóttir discusses the ‘poetic storytelling’ that befits the making of subjective and objective realities together. This has been most evident in Icelandic and Nordic photography, alike, where photographers use photography to explore themes of nature, climate crisis, and existentialism. The photographic image here acts as a medium of reflection on personal and collective experiences that exceed the limitations imposed by traditional forms of narration (Sigurðardóttir, 2020).

The medium of photobooks has become an important tool in constructing visual narratives. Photobooks, such as Alec Soth's *Niagara* (2006), are designed to juxtapose photographic images in a manner that develops narrative structures in ways paralleling literary devices used in storytelling. As Brant tells us, photobooks are nurtured frames through which photographers can embrace the possibilities for telling a narrative through arrangement and sequencing to allow the readers the agency to piece together meaning from a story (Brant, 2021).

Second, narrative research in everyday photography presents the medium of photography as a powerful agent visually narrating identity and memory. Photographs used in research may offer access to narratives and counter-narratives, which give them the ability to represent personal experiences. Harrison shows how photography can constitute a storytelling practice of itself that is autonomous from textual or oral narration (Harrison, 2002).

Despite its potential, visual journalism through photography has challenges. For instance, fixed images face limitations in representing the passage of time, a critical element in narrative construction. Baetens (2009) addresses this by comparing photography to film, suggesting that under certain conditions, a single photograph can be more powerful than moving images in conveying a story. He notes that the narrative power of photography lies in its ability to prompt viewer interpretation, filling in the gaps left by the still image (Baetens, 2009).

2.4 Long-Exposure Photography Techniques and Theories

Long-exposure photography finds its historical roots in the 19th century when early photographic processes, using daguerreotype for example, required long exposure times due to the low sensitivity of the photographic materials. Gradually, as technology improved, the exposure times were reduced; however, even then long exposure found applications in more

artistic and scientific uses. By the late 19th century, pioneers like Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey were studying the patterns of motion with photography, which laid the foundation for modern long-exposure techniques (De Dios Rodríguez et al., 2021). Long exposure photography is one such technique within creative photography where extended shutter speeds is used to capture motion and thereby achieve unique visual effects (Villa, 2018). The motion blur is one of the long exposure techniques in photography used to portray movements in a still photo and allow us to see motions that are invisible to the naked eye (Chris & Chris, n.d.). Unlike the usual action freeze attempt in cameras, which goes from 1/60th to 1/2000th of a second for the creation of detail in action, long exposure deliberately slows down the shutter to blur or obscure the moving elements present inside a scene, creating fluidity and motion (Villa, 2018). This technique is a favourite of many landscape photographers, given the fact that it can create silky or fog-like textures in water and cause cloud streaks across the sky. It is also widely used by urban photographers for creative portraits, light painting, and star trails (Hoiberg, 2017). The fundamental principles behind desired exposure involve the quantity of light reaching the sensor. This can be controlled by the aperture, ISO sensitivity, and shutter speed combined in different ways, all kept constant in the sensor (Robinson, 2007b).

Mastering long exposure requires understanding these exposure settings and using them to creatively manipulate light and movement, making it a versatile technique for diverse photographic styles (Robinson, 2007b). Motion blur can be strategically applied to create a sharp contrast between stationary and moving elements, further enhancing the aesthetics of the photograph (Rengarajan et al., 2020). Susan Lirakis employs long exposure and motion blur techniques in her photography to emphasise universal human experiences rather than focusing on individual identities. The blurred subjects represent transitions and changes, symbolising life stages and personal growth. Her work draws inspiration from myths and shared stories, reflecting common human experiences and the challenges of making decisions at key life moments. These images capture the emotions and complexities of such transitions, highlighting themes of connection, personal value, and the search for meaning in relation to others and the wider world (Faris-Belt, 2011).



Figure 1 Personal Mythology and Tempest (Susan Lirakis, 2011)

'Because photography is technically ... such a precise medium, aberrant effects, which once occurred quite unpredictably, can be controlled and skilfully exploited in service of greater expression. —Martin Freeman' (Faris-Belt, 2011, p. 265).

2.4.1 The Decisive Moment: The Three Key Factors

The Decisive Moment highlights the interaction of three key factors in photography: shutter speed, static media, and motion. The photographer plays a crucial role in determining the significance of these elements by framing moments effectively. Henri Cartier-Bresson coined the term "the decisive moment" to describe the instant when visual elements align to convey deeper meanings (Faris-Belt, 2011, p. 229-236).

- i. ***Timing and Anticipation:*** Capturing the 'decisive moment' requires the photographer to anticipate the exact moment when the action or subject reaches its peak. This involves being acutely aware of what is happening and timing the shot perfectly to catch a fleeting moment that will never occur in the same way again (Bair, 2016).
- ii. ***Composition:*** In addition to timing, composition plays a crucial role. Cartier-Bresson emphasized that a well-composed image must have internal balance and geometry. The perfect composition organizes the elements in a frame harmoniously, so the photograph feels both spontaneous and aesthetically structured (Brogden, 2019).

- iii. **Subject and Context:** The significance of the subject and its context is key to the decisive moment. Whether capturing human emotions, social dynamics, or environmental elements, the subject must convey a deeper meaning that resonates with viewers, elevating the photograph from merely documenting a scene to telling a powerful story (Leny Pimenta & Dionéia M. Monte-Serrat, 2015).

Faris-Belt shares a concept that continues to inspire photographers across various genres. The chapter discusses how time in photography can be represented through single captures (frozen, blurred, or static) or multiple exposures, allowing for rich storytelling and expanded visual expression (Faris-Belt, 2011, p. 229-236).

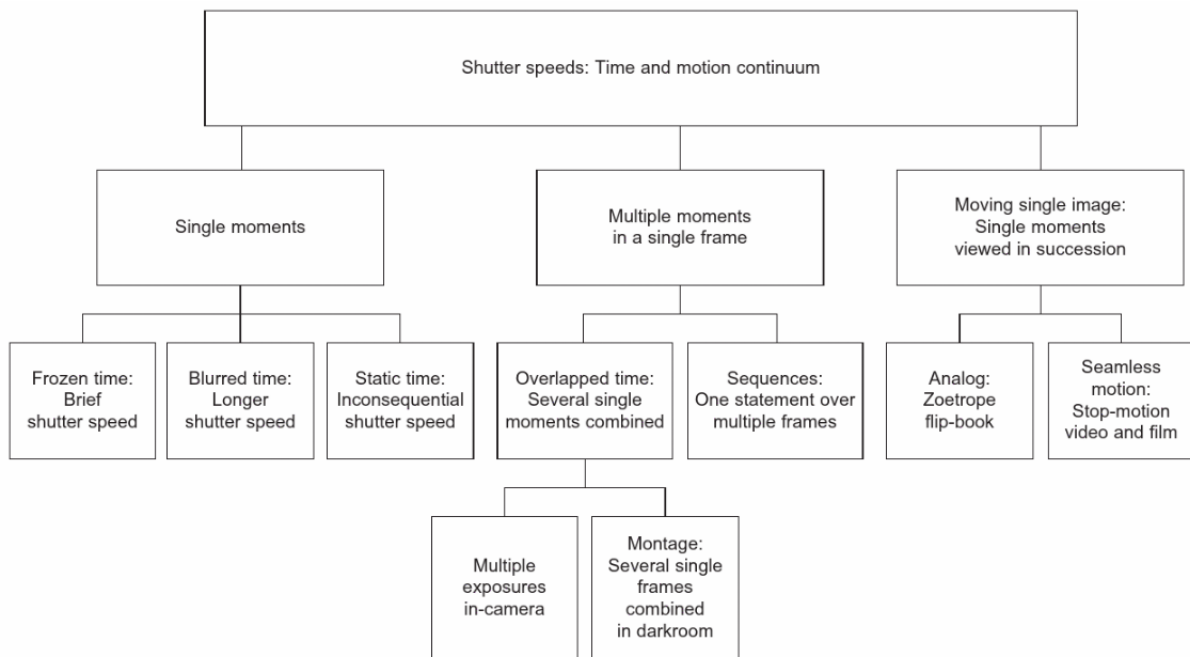


Figure 2 Shutter speeds: Time and motion continuum (Angela Faris Belt, 2010)

Additionally, it mentions the potential of sequencing images to create the illusion of motion, inviting exploration of both analogue and video techniques. The author says this is a process for photographers who want to go beyond simple documentation, using time as a creative element to convey specific feelings or ideas. (Faris-Belt, 2011, p. 229-236).

2.4.2 Key Techniques and Equipment

Norwegian Landscape Photographer Christian Hoiberg emphasises that while having top-of-the-line equipment is not crucial for beginners, specific tools become essential when attempting specialised techniques like long-exposure photography. To achieve this style effectively, he recommends a camera with manual and Bulb modes, a sturdy tripod, neutral density (ND) filters, and a remote shutter. Hoiberg also suggests a solid tripod to stabilise the camera for sharp results at slow shutter speeds and ND filters to reduce light and extend exposure times without sacrificing photo quality. A remote shutter prevents shake during long exposures, offering precision timing and ease of use in Bulb mode (Hoiberg, 2011). Leanne Cole and Adrian Vila share similar views on the necessity of the right equipment for stability and using ND filters to create dramatic effects in long exposure shots and enhance clarity and control (Leanne, 2018; Vila, 2018).

Adjusting the shutter speed to allow more light into the camera sensor is central to the long exposure technique. The slower the shutter speed, the more dramatic the blur and movement effects captured. Long exposures are also used to deliberately capture motion blur, adding a stronger sense of presence to photographs (Telleen et al., 2007). The aperture is the size of the opening in the lens through which light hits the sensor. In long exposure photography, while the shutter speed is the major control, your chosen aperture still governs the light. When photographing landscapes, f/8 to f/13 settings are used by photographers, but when photographing portraits, an open aperture is employed (Ricart, 2019). ISO measures how sensitive your camera sensor is to light. The rule of thumb for beginners is to keep your ISO as low as possible to avoid noise. It is a good idea to experiment with different ISO settings beforehand—view the results on a bigger screen than the camera's LCD. That way, we can get to know how much we can increase the ISO without too much noise appearing (Ricart, 2019).

The most important piece of equipment employed by photographers during photography is a tripod. Images taken during these periods have to be exposed for a long time, and in certain instances, they can take minutes or even seconds. Therefore, a good tripod is essential to prevent photos from blurring (Creek, 2013). Using a faster shutter speed like 1/250 seconds or more is suitable for capturing fast-moving objects, however, a slower shutter speed like 1/60 seconds causes a blurring effect, therefore, a tripod is one of the required tools for stability and reduces unwanted camera movement (Sony, 2019).

2.4.3 Overview of the Various Effects of Long-Exposure Photography

Long exposure photography captures the passage of time by keeping the camera's shutter open longer, recording motion like light trails, water flow, and star trails. Once a necessity due to slow early photographic materials, it has evolved into a creative technique to convey movement, atmosphere, and time in a single image (Tabellion et al., 2023). This method has evolved significantly, incorporating both traditional practices and modern computational techniques to achieve a range of artistic and technical effects.

Light Painting: It allows photographers to paint skeins of light either by moving the light source in front of a camera or by moving the camera around the static light source to create patterns and trails. Salamon et al. introduced a computational procedure for the simplification of this process through video input, thus making light painting more accessible and precise (Salamon et al., 2017).

Panning and Motion Blur: This can be achieved when a camera follows a moving subject to keep it sharp, while it also blurs the background. An attempt to improve the effect was made by Lancelle et al. in 2019 to balance the sharpness of the subject in sight and the blurring of the background (Lancelle et al., 2019).

Double-Exposure Photography: With long-exposure photography, the whole double-exposure photography opens a totally different world of creativity. To do this conventionally, one would expose a single frame twice to allow superimposition of images. This can be used to create ghost-like effects or to blend different scenes (Dombrowski & Levy, 1964).

2.5 Self-Expression Through Motion and Photography

Photography can also serve as a medium for life writing, capturing personal experiences and reflections. Sinner and Owen (2011) explore how visual expressions, in the form of pinhole photography, provide an opportunity to elicit stories about personal narratives and reflection within pedagogical settings, demonstrating that through the telling of a story using imagery, photography can be transformative (Sinner & Owen, 2011). In this way, another artistic tool involves the use of motion blur in photography, creating the impression of mobility in moving change. Luo et al. (2018) propose methods for adding motion blur to images post-capture,

emphasising the creative potential of digitally manipulated motion effects to convey movement (Xuejiao et al., 2018). The perception of self-motion through visual stimuli has been studied extensively. The Study explores how visual perception of self-motion relies on optic flow, which refers to the pattern of visual movement across the retina as we move through an environment. They emphasize that this optic flow allows individuals to quickly and accurately determine their direction of movement, crucial for maintaining spatial awareness during motion (Lappe et al., 1999). Delucia and Maldia (2006) investigated how motion affects memory for visual scenes, particularly focusing on the phenomenon of boundary extension. This occurs when individuals remember the boundaries of a scene as larger than they appeared. Their research found that simulated self-motion (like a moving scene) can distort memory similarly to static scenes, suggesting that our perception of movement can influence how we recall spatial layouts and boundaries (DeLucia & Maldia, 2006).

Zhijun Wang's (2020) study, *Real Vision Construction and Reading Experience: Visual-Reading Conceptual Photography*, examines the expressive and aesthetic aspects of conceptual photography. It emphasizes how visual storytelling in this medium conveys deeper meanings and spiritual connotations, requiring viewers to engage with the underlying messages beyond the image. Wang highlights that conceptual photography transforms the act of 'seeing' into a deeper interpretive experience, enhancing the audience's aesthetic engagement (Wang, 2020).

Self-portrait photography offers a unique lens to understand the balance between automatism and artistic agency in the medium. Wilson discusses the tension between the mechanical nature of photography and the creative choices made by artists, emphasising that self-portraits provide a means for photographers to delve into their own identities. The study examines various methods, including the use of mirrors and direct techniques, showing how these approaches allow photographers to extend traditional self-portraiture into more introspective and conceptually driven forms. This work highlights the evolving role of self-portraiture in expressing individuality and artistic intention (Wilson, 2012).

Francesca Woodman developed a peculiar conceptual approach to photography that aimed at capturing a possible thin balance between presence and absence in the photo, using her body as a medium to investigate ideas of identity, vulnerability, and change. Her images often show blurred or partially hidden figures set against decaying, textured backgrounds, which create an atmosphere of intimacy and personal reflection. Additionally, she used mirrors, double

exposures, and carefully staged scenes to evoke a dreamlike, surreal quality in her photos, blending reality with the imagined (Simon, 2010). Through these approaches, Woodman aimed to express the in-between states of existence, capturing moments where the self feels simultaneously present and absent (Rogers, 2018). As Simon (2010) highlights, these intimate and experimental techniques invite viewers to engage deeply with the mysterious, fragile nature of memory and self. Through these creative choices, Woodman crafted a visual language that expressed her inner world and the complex emotions of self-discovery (Simon, 2010).

2.6 The Role of Photography in Social Justice Activism

Photography plays a crucial role in saving the documentation of social injustices and valorising the stories that were buried or well-hidden. The usage of images extends from protests and events to the much wider dissemination via multiple media platforms that cumulatively create a kind of public record. Tamar W. Carroll's 2021 study, 'Social protest photography and public history: 'Whose streets? Our streets!': New York City, 1980-2000', looks at the critical roles that photography has played with respect to documenting and informing social justice movements. 37 independent photographers who captured protest activities in New York City from 1980 to 2000. Such documentation has been key to preserving the narratives of the social movements, apart from educating future generations on past struggles (Carroll, 2021).

According to Noble (2010), in *Recognizing Historical Injustice through Photography: Mexico 1968*, speaks about an evolution and development within photography as a vital means of documentation and illumination of the truth representative of the events that occurred when government forces brutally repressed the protest made by students in Tlatelolco in 1968. Photographs taken during and after the incident, which were published later on in 2001 by the Mexican newsweekly *Proceso*, showed hidden instances of violence, detention, and torture that were occluded from public attention. Such images constituted vital visual evidence against the official version of the government and, furthermore, presented a strong testimony of brutality against the protesters. Noble says the photographs not only preserved the memory of that traumatic experience but contributed vitally to the broader democratization process in Mexico. Through the work of the photographs, these images were exposed to the public sphere, which catalysed discussions around accountability and historical justice—a capacity of the visual media to act as a catalyst for social change and historical accounting. This allows the viewer to express

emotions and shows that only photography can effectively visually handle rhetoric in activism (Noble, 2010).

A grassroots movement might provoke empathy and a sense of urgency through visual media that viewers need to take action. Visual media have been used in grassroots movements in Cambodia, where they have already proved effective in raising the profile of socio-environmental issues, shaping discourses of grassroots movements, and giving voices to affected communities. With such beliefs, Young supports that photography is not just a mode of documentation but also a performative act that invokes action and solidarity amongst its members. It is visual activism helpful to underprivileged groups in using their stories as leverage to get noticed or gain support. Thus, it is an effective mobilising tool in the digital era (Young, 2021).

Photography played a vital role in describing the #BlackLivesMatter movement, visually documenting police violence and racial atrocities and turning discrete events into one forceful, tightly knit narrative. Shared in masses across social media, the images mixed with jokes, slogans, curses, and cartoons spread the movement's message and imbued a viral global awareness of it (Yang, 2016). This is the picture of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee who drowned and washed onto a Turkish beach that became the symbol of the refugee crisis. The picture went viral on social media, catalysing the world's response to refugees as many users and organizations took to sharing this image to drive home the human element behind the statistics of this crisis. It lessened an abstract issue to a relevant, intimate, and humanitarian heartbreak-that is what moved the public opinion significantly but also urged humanitarian undertakings. Moreover, social media provided divisions in the rapid global circulation of the image forming the shape of social bonds and collective emotional feelings around the crisis (Prøitz, 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Art-based action research is united by the continuous progress of the projects, planning, practical actions, practice-driven, and reflections and relies on self-reflection (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). Arts are essential not just for self-expression or aesthetic purposes, have powerful methods for inquiry, transformation, and education, arguing that they enable individuals and communities to reimagine and communicate their realities in meaningful ways (Rolling, 2016). Therefore, creativity in merging creative experimentation into long-exposure techniques to show, reveal, explain, and describe the emotional complexity of racism and let the individual rethink. For the art, I used personal stories combined with interviews along with visual experimentations to relate comprehensively to the issue that was tackled and try to raise full awareness.

Central to this research is Figure 3, which presents the ‘Jigsaw Puzzle in Action’ model exertion, illustrating how the research process unfolds like assembling a puzzle. Every stage of the journey is a key piece of the puzzle: the spark, the framework, the sandbox, and the expression. The final image is a far deeper understanding of how photography can be used as an activist tool. The model shows how the stages need to be connected so that one puzzle piece tells and builds from the next. This is an iterative nature that would be reflective of art-based action research in its spiral and continuous learning process in which creative works come to life.

It fills the gaps within the existing body of literature dealing with art-based action research, indicating precisely how photography, beyond being an immediately expression-oriented medium, also acts as an influential medium toward activism. Another direction it pursues is investigating the potential visual arts hold to help face sociopolitical dilemmas by creating a collaborative, participatory social practice. With this in view, the rationale guiding the whole investigative effort within the framework of photography serves to catalyse understanding on deeper levels that can trigger genuinely transformative social outcomes.

3.1 Research Design

The seed of this research was planted back in 2013, undiscovered until I started my thesis in 2023. **The Spark:** in 2013, a creative DIY project using old cameras to enhance smartphone photos sparked a passion for photography, turning it into a medium for expressing ideas through images. **The Framework:** During my undergraduate years, I developed my photography skills by exploring technical and theoretical aspects and discovered my passion for conceptual photography, especially long exposure techniques. **The Sandbox Stage:** I explored long-exposure photography to express powerful stories, including a project where a young boy rebels against injustice, teaching me that the effort and preparation behind creative concepts are challenging but highly satisfying. **Parallel Pathways:** during my first year at the University of Lapland, I worked on *Sustainability Portraits*, a participatory art project that used photography and discussions to help Arctic youth creatively express their identities, emotions, and connection to their rapidly changing environment. **The Expression:** I'm exploring the theme of racism through long exposure photography to show the processes, raise awareness, and convey the emotional depth and complexity of this global issue, demonstrating how art can be a powerful tool for activism.

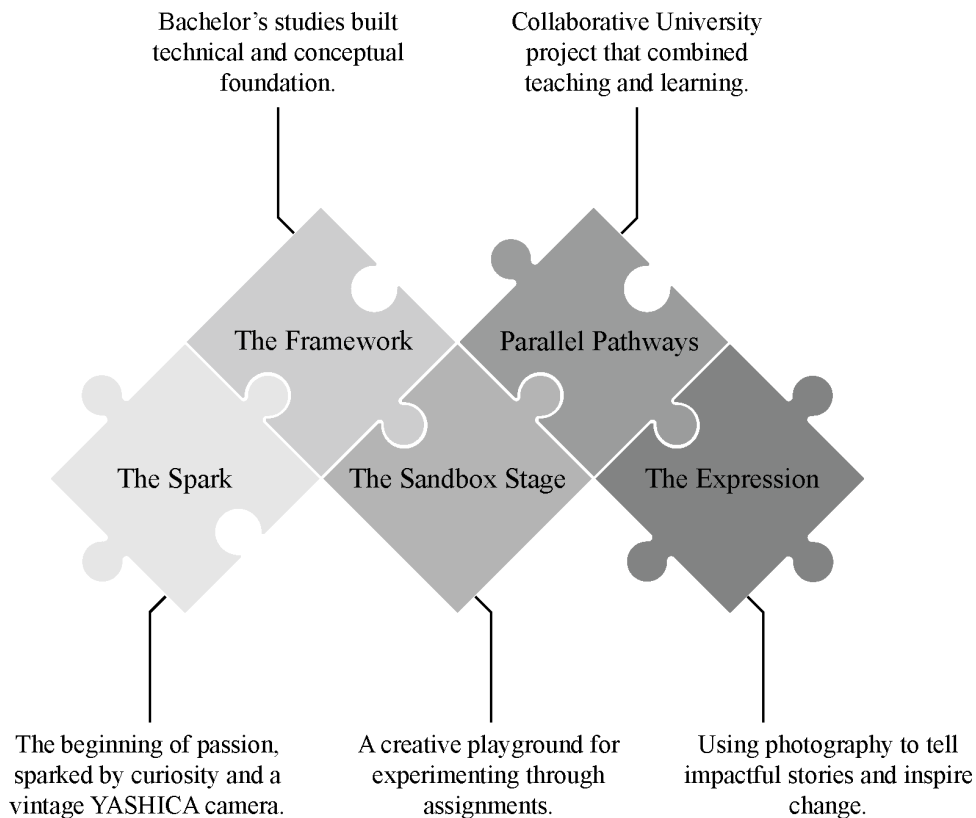


Figure 3 Jigsaw Puzzle in Action Research Model (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

All the stages (Puzzles) represent the sequences that are unimaginable without connecting the jigsaw puzzles. The more process is going the more it's getting deeper in me. This research represents the completion of a Jigsaw Puzzle from the passion sparking to the expression, and in between phrases made this research more relevant to art-based action research through continuous processes. Art-based action research is about constantly learning and adapting. After each action, researchers and participants reflect on what worked and what did not, allowing them to adjust their approach, this ongoing process helps improve the research, making it more relevant and effective over time (Jokela, 2019). Art-based action research and design research share similar characteristics and action research in design involves a cyclical process of planned interventions aimed at addressing practical problems and developing functional theories (Hannu L. T Heikkinen et al., 2006). This approach encourages collaboration, flexibility, and ongoing growth, making it a valuable way for groups to work together, share ideas, and tackle challenges effectively (Dickman-Burnett et al., 2021). Thus, the Jigsaw Puzzle in Action model has been developed over time, created, and proposed for this research.

3.2 Art Based Research

Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they are involved in their studies (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Art is not merely an outcome but also a process, serving as a meaningful component in problem-solving, art can deepen understanding of an issue and function as a tool for data collection (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018), while methods such as photography exemplify its dual role in artistic expression and research, as highlighted by Langmann and Pick (Langmann & Pick, 2018). Different genres, such as photo-narratives, documentary photography, and portraiture, offer valuable ways for researchers to engage with their subjects and capture complex social phenomena. By using photography, researchers not only gather visual data but also produce artistic representations that can evoke emotions and deeper insights. This blending of art and research highlights photography's capacity to convey nuanced human experiences in ways that traditional textual methods may not achieve (Langmann & Pick, 2018).

Arts-based methods focus on enhancing group reflection and collaboration. It emphasizes collective inquiry, where participants engage as co-researchers in iterative cycles of action and reflection (Dickman-Burnett et al., 2021). Art forms like storytelling or performance serve as catalysts for deeper understanding and emotional expression, enabling participants to explore complex issues collaboratively (Dickman-Burnett et al., 2021; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2019). This approach fosters inclusivity, adaptability, and continuous development, making it an effective method for addressing group challenges through shared knowledge creation and reflection (Dickman-Burnett et al., 2021). Leavy (2009) suggests that art-based research, employing visual and sensory elements, is particularly associated with social and environmental issues. Despite its unique features, it is considered a subset of qualitative research, following the principles of case-specific and developmental research within the tradition of action research (Leavy, 2009). As a subset of qualitative research, arts-based research falls into this particular category. Arts-based research underscores the creation of emotional expressions related to comprehending an individual, location, or circumstance. It goes beyond a mere quantitative revelation of variables and instead involves a deliberate effort to seek expressive forms to enhance understanding. Arts-based research involves the use of aesthetic judgment and the application of aesthetic criteria when making determinations about the nature of the desired outcome (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

3.3 Art-Based Action Research

Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR) refers to the ongoing process where each cycle of action and reflection builds upon previous experiences. This iterative approach allows researchers and participants to continuously assess, adapt, and refine their methods, ensuring that the research remains flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. By reflecting on action taken, it may allow revisions of strategies for the researchers so as to enrich and deepen their insights and increase their relevance and effectiveness, thus entering a kind of dynamic feedback cycle driving continual growth and development throughout (Jokela, 2019). Art-based Action Research is, therefore, generally a research method leading to the cycles of action in research development and using art to boost the developmental work (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). This approach is widely used in the development projects of art education, applied visual arts, and contemporary art. Art may have various roles in these developmental processes: it can be

an intervention for solving a problem or gaining new knowledge and understanding (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018)

Art-based action research and design research share similar characteristics and action research in design involves a cyclical process of planned interventions aimed at addressing practical problems and developing functional theories (Hannu L. T Heikkinen et al., 2006). A study on art-based action research to promote social justice, focusing on empowering homeless domestic violence survivors through community arts by showcasing their art in an exhibit to foster dialogue and empathy. Findings showed art effectively raised awareness, built mutual respect, and promoted social justice, emphasising its potential for community healing and policy integration (Hutzel & Kim, 2013). Art-based action research maintains a close connection with design research, which aims to create new action models or products. The practical association between realistic evaluation research and its correlation with knowledge and skills aligns closely with the context of art-based action research (Heikkinen et al. 2006). Art-based action research emphasizes practical knowledge where the outcome will be dynamic, and innovative (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2019). In arts-based action research, a key belief is that the artistic outcomes and how the process is portrayed should be easily seen and understood by a broad and varied audience (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

Art-based action research (ABAR) integrates artistic practices into participatory methodologies, focusing on collaborative inquiry and social change (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015). The processes of ABAR are shared through various means, ensuring inclusivity, creativity, and accessibility (Finley, 2008; McNiff, 2013). Art can also serve both as a research strategy and part of documentation itself, capturing how participants reveal and articulate experiences through artwork (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The very arts form a library of information wherein it forms an opportunity to circulate awareness in ways that feel fair (Leavy, 2015). A mural perhaps expresses a combined story about all its participants or participants' relations, while a video recording or documented journal could trace nuances of an engaging approach toward the performance itself (McNiff, 2013). The participants in the ABAR are treated as co-researchers who are active in the process through iterative reflection and dialogue (Leavy, 2015). In most cases, sharing takes place during group reflections, where participants collectively analyse their contributions and generate meaning (Finley, 2008). These reflections are then communicated through exhibitions, publications, or public forums to ensure that the research remains participatory and transparent (McNiff, 2013). Public

presentations such as art exhibitions, performances, or installations are primary methods for sharing ABAR processes (Barone & Eisner, 2012). These platforms not only showcase final artworks but also provide a window into the creative journey, incorporating sketches, drafts, and preparatory notes to document the research comprehensively (Leavy, 2015). For example, a theatre performance might include a post-show discussion, allowing audiences to engage with both the outcomes and the process (Finley, 2008). Digital platforms have become integral to sharing ABAR processes, broadening accessibility and engagement (Leavy, 2015).

3.4 Data Collection

Art-based action research involves collecting and documenting diverse data, like notes, personal observations, sketches, and photos, to support development. The process ensures systematic reflection and alignment with research goals while capturing key moments for research and exhibitions (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). Film, video, and diverse forms of digital and electronic imagery represent comparatively recent methods for presenting research findings (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In 2018, I began collecting visual and technical research data through the Silent Rebellion project, fighting against injustice where I used long-exposure photography techniques in a project. The project also provided me with valuable technical experience in data collection, which not only supported my research but also inspired me to pursue further artistic photography projects.

Face-to-face interviews provide the opportunity to create rapport and collect both verbal and nonverbal data. Considering issues of access, space, privacy, and comfort can help the interview go smoothly (Tracy, 2020). Conducting interviews can yield valuable information with unique insights that quantitative methods may not capture. However, successful interviewing requires careful planning, practice, and the meticulous preservation of data to safeguard participants and their information (Stofer, 2019). During my first year at the University of Lapland, I worked on '*Sustainability Portraits*', a project where students used photography and discussions to explore their connection to the Arctic (Jokela, Berliner, et al., 2024). They used the long exposure technique to capture deeper, more reflective images, expressing their emotions, identities, and community ties. I also captured a couple of photos to visualise my perception of Arctic Identity, where I figured out some data from the photos and photo properties for my research. Besides, the feedback and thoughts of the youth students helped to get some additional data. It was a meaningful experience that amplified youth voices

and strengthened their connection to the Arctic. Photovoice is a specific practice that merges photography with participatory methods. Some refer to this as a method for conducting arts-based action research (Chilton & Leavy, 2014).

Finally, to collect data for this research, I also spoke with different people working in photography and co-contributors to hear their personal experiences with racism. These conversations helped me understand the emotional and social effects of racism on a deeper level. For the visual part, I experimented with long-exposure photography, testing different lighting and techniques to capture the complexity of the issue combining research, personal stories, and creative experimentation gave me a well-rounded understanding of racism to shape the project. I developed the theme of racism through long-exposure photography techniques, using this visual approach to capture the complex and often unseen dynamics of racial discrimination. The exhibition effectively engaged the audience, stimulating a range of emotional and intellectual responses, figure 28. Most of the audience wrote their comments anonymously, and the comments collected from the exhibition's 'Comment Jar' provided valuable insights into the audience's engagement with the artwork, figure 29. This theme was crucial as it provided a comprehensive overview of the long-exposure photography process, drawing from my personal experience. By sharing my firsthand knowledge, this theme not only highlighted the technical aspects of setting up and executing a long exposure shot, such as choosing the right shutter speed and equipment but also emphasised the creative potential it offers. The goal was to make the technique more accessible and relatable for anyone interested in exploring this captivating form of photography.

3.5 Narrative Analysis in Action

Narrative analysis is a powerful qualitative research method that focuses on understanding how individuals construct and communicate meaning through stories, narrative analysis is a method for interpreting the stories that people tell, recognising how they impose order on their experiences and how these stories shape identity and social realities (Allen, 2017; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2007). This analysis is particularly relevant for this study, as long exposure photography itself can be seen as a form of visual storytelling that communicates deeply personal and social narratives. In the context of this research, narrative analysis provides a structured approach to examining the lived experiences and reflective processes implanted in

the ‘Jigsaw Puzzle in Action’ model of long-exposure photography (Phoenix, 2013). This model emphasises stages such as ‘Spark’, ‘Sandbox’, and ‘Expression’, which involve creativity, experimentation, and collaboration (Riessman, 2008). Each stage contributes to the creation of photographic works that address the lived experiences of marginalised groups and highlight issues such as systemic racism. Thus, narrative enabled me to spot the frequent pattern of how participants articulate themselves for a connection between the technical process and the emotional-social impact.

One of the strengths of narrative analysis I found is that it is particularly well-suited for interdisciplinary studies like the one I conducted. Narrative analysis attempts to explain how and why a given outcome occurred by reflection linking earlier events in a coherent account that focuses on human purpose, choice, and context (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analysis allowed me to explore how participants constructed and made sense of their experiences through stories. I was able to combine personal reflections, participant interviews, and visual interpretations of long-exposure photographs to understand how participants narrated their experiences and the meanings they attached to them. For example, during the ‘Sandbox’ stage, the participant who played with shutter speed and light was able to express how the technical changes in his photography symbolised broader themes, like how discrimination is experienced in today’s world. Rather than just identifying specific themes, I focused on how these reflections were woven together in their stories. It was fascinating to see how the participants shared their emotions and experiences through their narratives. These personal stories revealed deeper layers of meaning, such as how they viewed photography as a tool for social justice, or how long-exposure photography captured emotional layers that were hard to convey with other methods.

From the point of view described above, narrative analysis is an appropriate and efficient methodology for serving this research by offering wideness and depth for the required analysis of technical and social dimensions in long-exposure photography. It is a recursive process in which the researcher switches back and forth between the data and an emerging plot so that the resulting story is consonant with the data but also reveals a coherent, explanatory order (Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach thus enabled me to identify and interpret emerging data; these data, in turn, identify how photography can be expected to serve as a tool in activism and social justice.

4. PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the path of this research evolution from a simple start with DIY lenses in 2013 to complex explorations of conceptual photography. It shares the technical process of capturing shots—from mobile phone snapshots to self-portraits, mastering light painting, long exposure, and producing personal and social messages. The chapter reveals how experimentation with camera settings, ambient light, and makeshift props shaped projects like ‘The Silent Rebellion’, ‘Sustainability Portraits’ and ‘Shadows of Racism’. Through reflective analysis, I analyse technical challenges and creative breakthroughs, highlighting the contribution of timing, exposure, and composition in transforming everyday scenes into visual narratives. This analytical record captures the synthesis of technical proficiency with emotional expression, highlighting the transformative power of photography as a personal journey and a medium for addressing complex themes such as racism. Ultimately, every experiment further deepened my commitment to capturing the interplay of art, imagination, light and emotion.

- Light, Time, Curiosity

My journey with photography began in 2013, in the most unexpected way—by crafting DIY lenses from old, discarded cameras to enhance my smartphone photography. I still remember the moment my neighbour handed me a vintage YASHICA reel camera. That single act kindled a spark in me—a curiosity regarding lenses, and cameras, and created magic with light. Photography then moved out of a leisure activity for me and became a form of passion to cherish. Since I did not have a specific subject to focus on, I primarily enjoyed taking photographs of whatever I found around me. Gradually, I began learning the fundamentals of photography through insights shared by experienced photographers on various blog sites. Although I did not have access to professional cameras, I gained basic photography knowledge from various bloggers. For example, I learned about concepts such as the ‘golden hour’ and ‘framing,’ which I applied to my mobile photography to capture random photos. I learned we capture light to create images, and achieving high-quality photos requires precise timing. This process is based on the principles of optics and light sensitivity. The camera's lens focuses light onto a sensor (or film in traditional cameras), and the amount of light captured depends on settings such as shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. Proper timing ensures the right exposure, preventing images from being too bright or too dark. I learned that these advancements in

photography have been driven by curiosity, which also helped me understand how light can be controlled to capture perfect photos.



Figure 4 Twilight Landscape (Md Faysal Amin, 2013)

I captured this photograph (Figure 4: Twilight Landscape) in 2013 using my mobile phone, which continues to inspire my passion for photography. The image captures a twilight landscape with remarkable precision, showcasing a nearly symmetrical reflection on the lake. This composition highlights the beauty of natural symmetry and the serene atmosphere of the scene, reinforcing my commitment to exploring and refining my photographic skills.

Before being admitted to my undergraduate university, I had not engaged in any conceptual photography. During my undergraduate years, I had a chance to explore deeper, both in terms of the technical and aesthetic aspects of photography. Through The Photography & Digital Image Lab course, I refined my photography skills in greater detail. Completing various assignments helped me develop steadier hands for capturing images. Additionally, the course's individual and group photography tasks inspired and enhanced my creative approach to photography. During that period, I began developing an interest in conceptual photography,

focusing primarily on self-portraiture. My goal was to enhance the creativity of my own photographs by exploring new artistic approaches and techniques.



Figure 5 Two Mirrors (Md Faysal Amin, 2018)

This photograph (Figure 5) reflects the themes of identity, duality, and introspection. The act of holding my photo in front of my face created a visual merge of two identities, the interplay between inner and outer self-existence. It suggests that who I am might change based on how others see me, the people I connect with, or even the different sides of myself. The black-and-white added extra depth to this photograph and focus on the essential parts of the concept. This is not just a portrait of my face but of change, of the inconstancy of who I am in different contexts. This is a portrait of a complex self, an openness for interpretation, for change, for depths of personal being not visible on my face.

As I continued, I grew increasingly interested in conceptual photography. I began incorporating various elements to enhance the relevance of the message, themes or central idea, ensuring that these elements align more closely with the main concept. I do not go out of my way to gather props for my visualisations; however, I do make use of whatever's easily available and does not cost me anything. I find that using simple, everyday items often adds a personal touch and keeps things simple. In some cases, I even modify these everyday props to suit my photographs, giving them a unique twist while keeping things practical and accessible.



Figure 6 Warrior (Md Faysal Amin, 2018)

In Figure 6, I have used a screwdriver and a knife to symbolise the concept of a societal warrior who stands against evil forces. I also used a water bottle that I cut the top part and attached in front of the camera to get more depth in the photo. While these tools may not be sufficient to overcome the powerful forces of evil and injustice, the courage reflected in the warrior's eyes is stronger than any weapon. The skeleton mask represents inner strength and determination, symbolising the readiness to confront injustice at any time and place. This image reflects the idea that inner resolve and moral strength can be more powerful than physical tools when fighting for justice.

As I continued, I started using long-exposure techniques in self-portraits to develop more dynamic theme. I found an exciting draw in extending time in one frame, trapping motion, controlling light, and revealing information which is not observable to the naked eye. I started freezing as much time as possible in a single frame to see how it looked. I experimented with myself initially instead of going into the main theme, and this helped me to think thoroughly before I started any concepts. Even though capturing time or freezing moments in self-portrait photography seems to be more complicated, however, with the help of modern camera features it has become much easier, for example using times or a remote controller to control the shutter button and definitely a tripod to get sharp photo.



Figure 7 Self-Conversation (Md Faysal Amin, 2018)

In Figure 7, I captured this photo where I focused on developing self-portrait photography using the long exposure photography technique. It is always preferable to make an independent attempt first, as this fosters self-reliance, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the subject. This photo represents my self-identity, reflecting an internal dialogue and the effort to prevent any potential negative traits from developing within me. In this stage, I learned some crucial elements while taking long exposure photography, for instance, lighting which is highly important cause it might change the whole plot. To me, it is not about capturing a shot, it is about making it a story, a narrative, a work of art. Long-exposure, in particular, allows me to take photographs of a nearly dream-like quality, utilising motion and light in a way which is evocative of emotion and of meaning. I see each photograph as a canvas in which atmosphere, space, and time meld together to make a one-off, something for interpretation. Unlike verbal narrative, in which one tends to visualise one's own perception of a scenario, concept photographs challenge observers to interpret for themselves, everyone sees something else, creating a hidden meaning with the photograph. Over the years, I have realised that photographing whatever subject is in front of your lens is not about photographing; it is about experimenting, testing, and bringing your most elusive, most abstract conceptions into being. It is a journey of continuous discovery that continues to challenge and drive me every single day.

- The Silent Rebellion

'The Silent Rebellion' tells the story of a young boy who finds the courage to speak out against the wrongs he sees around him, hoping to spark change and lift his community. This project was one of my first personal adventures in photography, a chance to play around with all the techniques I had been dying to try. I used long exposure and light painting to make the photos stand out and create a contrast between the subject and objects which pops the theme and main concept. Every detail was carefully planned before the main photography session, for instance using the non-harmful laser light to paint over the body and making sure that does not interrupt others as we were outside. My model was one of my friends, someone just as excited about photography and experimenting as I was, which made it even more fun. I took a bunch of trial-and-error shots, figuring things out as we went, before jumping into visualising the main theme. Finally, I shot the series of photographs in the middle of the night, sometime in March 2018 on my apartment's rooftop, pouring my heart into capturing something meaningful.

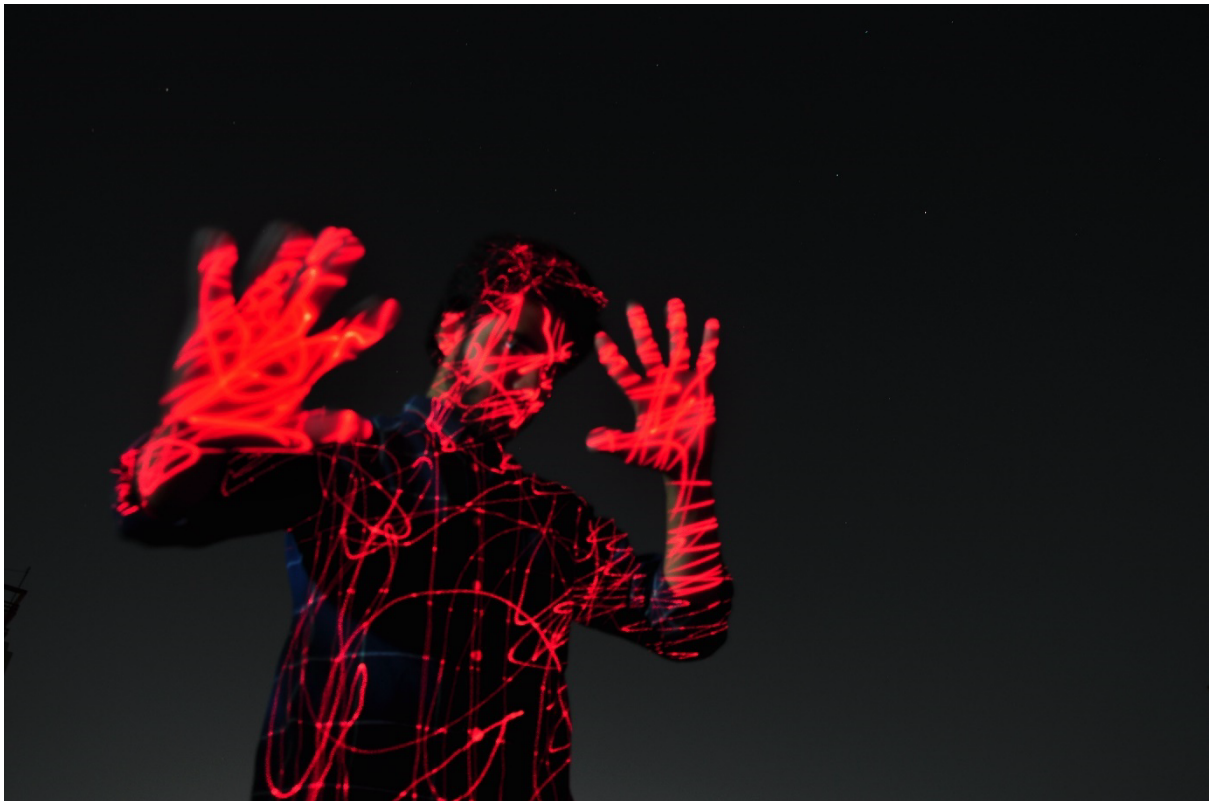


Figure 8 The Silent Rebellion (Md Faysal Amin, 2018)

I chose to do this project under the open sky in the middle of the night to add a more abstract feel to the photos, make the artworks more narrative and relevant to the theme. The faces were intentionally blurred, and I used lights to emphasize the theme of silent rebellion. A young boy,

eager to contribute to society, can make a meaningful impact even at a young age. The poses, combined with laser painting, made the photos dynamic and reinforced the theme. In figure 8, I have used ISO 100 which is lowest ISO of body of the Nikon D90, aperture f7.1 which is widely opened to let in more of lights in the sensor, however, I tried for getting in of lights slowly in the sensor so I can perform light painting which is done using laser light. I have taken this shot by exposing for 30 seconds in an attempt of getting a lot of light and visualise my ideas in this piece of work. With the help of tripod, I managed to make the camera stable in an attempt of getting sharper images and avoiding unwanted blurriness. Being in a static position is quite challenging, and my friend tried his best to stay like a statue which helped maximum in getting this result. For this artwork, the background was left blank since I tried for my viewers to see of the figure which tells a powerful story of being a silent rebellion. Since the red colour represents rebellion, sacrifice, energy, joy and courage is the reason I have used it, and it, on the other hand, made a powerful difference between the execution of the theme and the separating of the background.



Figure 9 The Silent Rebellion (Md Faysal Amin, 2018)

In Figure 9, I used ISO 100, the lowest ISO setting on the Nikon D90, along with an aperture of f/7.1 to allow more light into the sensor. However, I wanted the light to enter slowly so I could perform light painting using a laser. For this artwork, I followed a similar setting and

technique as in Figure 8. However, this time, I chose not to use a blank background because I wanted to explore different visualisations while keeping the same concept. The body's position in this piece symbolises a supernatural force standing against injustice in society. To enhance this idea, I included a subtle cityscape in the background which added relevance and dynamism to the image. Bringing the idea, and theme of the silent rebellion to visualisation was challenging. The model had to remain completely still in one position for 30 seconds during the long exposure, which was not an easy task. At the same time, I had to paint the story using laser light, visually convey the power of a silent voice, and create an abstract effect within that short timeframe. Despite the difficulties, the result exceeded my expectations, proving that careful planning truly pays off.

Photo Properties:

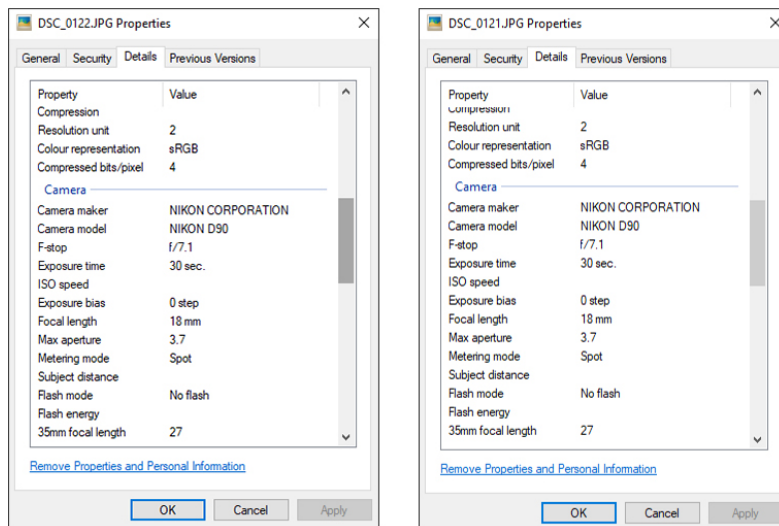


Figure 10 Photo Properties of Figure 9, 10 (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

All the photographs were taken in low light situations using long exposure, manual focus, and an ISO of 100. I had a limitation capturing not more than 30 seconds through the Nikon D90 camera without using any remote controller. As I had some fundamental knowledge about photography. I wanted to get sharper photos without doing less post-production, and to get these photos I captured 30 seconds of light in total in a single shoot, where I used an aperture of F7.1 which was widely open to capture lights slowly and get sharp photos. The aperture size controlled both the amount of light and the focus. The iso was 100 to keep the noise lowest as much as possible. The lens that I used for these photographs was Nikkor 18-105mm f3.5-f5.6, however, I used an 18mm ($18\text{mm} \times 1.5 = 27\text{mm}$ full sensor equivalent) focal length as I wanted a wide view for the final result. I used the red non-harmful laser light to paint over the model as the meaning of red colour means anger, aggression, and war.

- Sustainability Portraits

Sustainability Portraits is a project rooted in the concept of New Genre Arctic Art (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024). This artistic framework provides the background for the Sustainability Portraits collaboration, emphasising contemporary, socially engaged art in the Arctic (Jokela et al., 2024). Jokela et al., 2024 said, this concept builds on Suzanne Lacy's idea of a 'new genre public art', which involves participatory and political art events that connect with the public (Jokela, Manninen, et al., 2024; Lacy, 1995). AAE takes this further by using art to tackle climate change challenges and promote cultural resilience in Arctic communities (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024). It encourages collaboration between artists, educators, and local people to create a shared vision of a sustainable future (Jokela et al., 2024). The initiative seeks to use diverse artistic methods, including photography, handcrafted objects, and digital media, to explore identity, culture, and environmental relationships in Arctic communities (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). For Sustainability Portraits, this background provided a creative context to explore identity, eco-cultures, and social responsibility through art, empowering young people and strengthening Arctic communities (Jokela et al., 2024).

I started working on this project at the University in the first year of my master's and gradually I started developing my theme for my master's research. The Sustainability Portraits project was an inclusive project conducted in Rovaniemi, Lapland, during Spring 2024 under the AEA (New Genre Art Education in the Arctic) project. The project engaged students at a study level in preparatory schooling in thinking about their Arctic identity as well as about their relationship with the environment through photographs. Having some elements of sustainability, community as well as creativity, the project engaged students in thinking critically about the environment as well as in acquiring innovative, creative, technical as well as social competence. The project served as a facilitator between social studies as well as art studies with a concentration on the requirement that is essential in terms of listening to youth regarding experiencing life in the Arctic and issues regarding sustainability.

The methodology of the project bridged practical, hands-on work with theoretical studies and the students went through a series of guided workshops that introduced them to basic aspects of photography, including camera functions, composition, and basic editing. The sessions covered brainstorming, portrait assignments, Arctic identity discussions, long exposure and light painting photography assessments.

TIME FRAMES

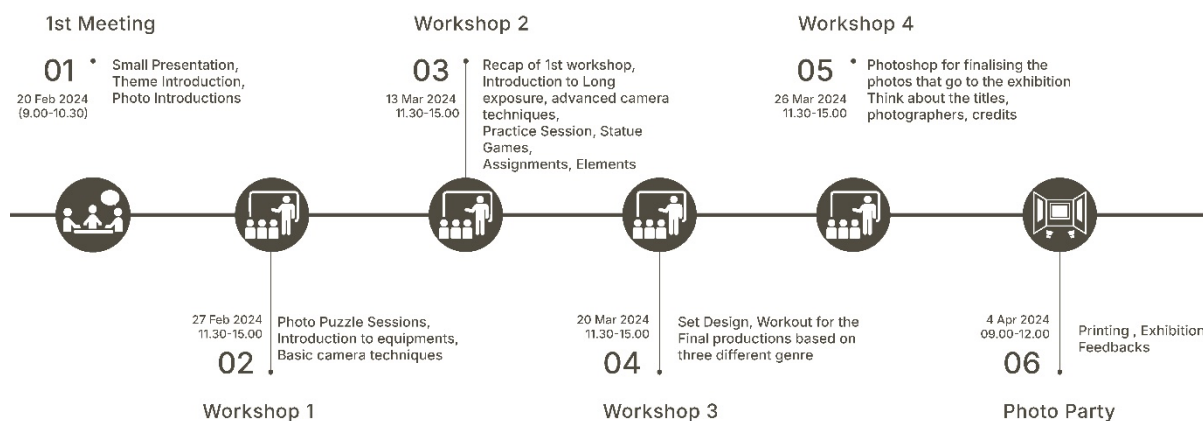


Figure 11 Project Timeline (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

Timeline keeps everyone on track with what is to be achieved and by whom, by which date, making it simple for teams to coordinate work and meet deadlines, which is essential for project success. To accommodate students' schedules, we proposed a series of six days. The first day is a 'First Meeting', days two through five as a 'First to Fourth Workshop Day', and the final as a 'Photo Party'. Each workshop involved a series of sessions with short breaks in between to give students a break for refreshment and as well as to keep them on track.

First Meeting: We started the project with the introduction of the theme, and technique display, followed by a photo introduction activity. Students made choices about images that resonated with them and told us why they picked them, they said because of beauty, a feeling of attachment, or aesthetics. We took a tour of Rovaniemi in images, and most of them replied, 'It is dark, quiet colours in winter looking so different from the bright, lively shades of summer'. We also played portrait games where most of the students considered both traditional as well as non-realistic portraits. The discussions evoked nature as a key feature in both seasons. The workshop was interactive, thoughtful, and innovative.

Workshop 1: We stuck to our schedule plan and had three exercises and a lecture in between. The first one, 'Photo Puzzle and Talking About Pictures', where the students were in three groups. It was surprising how some quiet students had much to say, while some took time to be engaged. Then, we had the second exercise, 'Camera Introductions'. As some students were highly excited, they took photos enthusiastically and without guidance, while in some instances, we had to offer them much guidance and encouragement for them to click pictures. Some of them told us that they had used the camera for fun. We had the third activity, 'Portrait Missions'. The same pattern of engagement came out, but we had to change the group members

so that they communicate with each other while doing the assignment. In the end, Inka attempted to have the students share their experience in photographing and managing the use of the camera, but some students had difficulties speaking in front of the whole class.



Figure 12 Some Portraits by the Students (2024)

These examples represent three distinct groups, each with unique perceptions and ways of thinking where the youths possessed a diverse range of imaginations, not bound to a single idea but instead floating on a sea of endless curiosity.

Workshop 2: We began with a recap of the first workshop, focusing on camera settings which was followed by a warm-up activity that tied into the workshop, where we visited exhibitions in the University basement. We then delivered a brief lecture on long-exposure, light painting and double-exposure techniques using example photos. The session included workstations, each session lasted 30 minutes, where students rotated between different focus areas: Inka worked light painting technique, I shared the long exposure photography technique, and Ville introduced the practical technique of double exposure photography. We repeated the same activities as the previous session but rotated the groups, therefore, they had a chance to practice all techniques. After a break, we conducted a ‘Statue Play’ exercise involving 3-4 different settings. Students built these settings by posing together and exploring themes related to the Arctic. While most students participated including Heide, who was their teacher, some students were hesitant and opted out after a few poses, and one student did not participate at all. Ville and Inka instructed them, and I took these wonderful photos. The photos were taken of these statues, those photos represent the aurora borealis, midnight sun, polar nights, bears, reindeer, and so on.



Figure 13 Arctic Identity (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 13, I captured this photograph where students posed as bears and reindeer and the aurora borealis was visualised with light painting. To create this artwork from my experience of less than a year in Rovaniemi I tried to observe the weather, the nature and the movement of this beautiful place. Then I implemented my imagination blending with my photography skills I made this beautiful photograph which represents the ‘Arctic Identity’ from my view.



Figure 14 Arctic Identity (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 14, I tried to visualise the ‘Arctic Identity’ from my perspective where I visualised the aurora borealis using lights red light painting, the midnight sun that you can see in the middle and darkness around the photo which represents the polar night of Rovaniemi. Ville and Inka along with the students helped to capture this beautiful photography artwork by giving different poses.

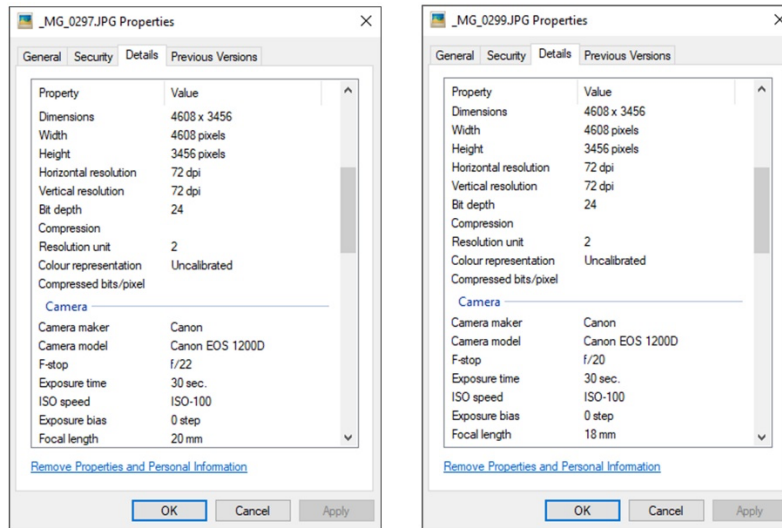


Figure 15 Properties of Figure 13 and 14 (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

I have taken these pictures using a Canon EOS 1200D camera and a basic kit lens of f3.5-5.6/18-55mm. In each photograph, I took 30 seconds for each to have enough time to turn my imagination to photograph using lights and poses of different candidates. The aperture of f22 for the first photograph and f20 for the second photograph helped me capture lights gradually on the camera sensor without bumping the ISO to keep photos spotless and I focussed manually to keep photos sharp and dynamic. A simple tripod helped me to stabilise the photos. Even though it was complex, the youth candidates, Vill and Inka tried their best in being in one place for me to come up with these visualisations. My best attempt was to create a depth between subject and object using lights and the light is also symbolic of the Arctic Identity.

Workshop 3: We started with a recap of techniques and reviewed photos for 15 minutes. This was followed by a brief presentation on exhibition/project information related to Norway and Rovaniemi, which lasted 5-10 minutes. We then conducted a warm-up exercise called ‘Item Chats’, where students paired up to share their thoughts about an item. The exercise encouraged students to think of many ways to use the item in a photo. Afterwards, we began making idea papers through rough drawing and sketching for 15 minutes. Students then took their portraits in groups, both with and without an item, for 10-20 minutes. Participants proceeded to take

photos based on their ideas, with other students helping to design the environments using lights, objects, and flashlights.



Figure 16 Working for Final Portraits (Tea Tuiskuvaara, 2024)

The students had the opportunity to take their photos with their favourite items based on their concepts. Ville and I assisted and guided the students to avoid technical errors with the equipment, while Inka experimented with other students' concepts, exploring the use of different light sources.

Workshop 4: The session started with a presentation regarding basic editing in Adobe Photoshop. Due to technical issues, the guest users were unable to access Photoshop, however, we were able to log in using our user ID on multiple computers and thereby proceed with the session without any issues. There was also a short presentation on deciding the captions/titles for their photos. Later, the student selected their photo and did some basic editing in Photoshop before the photos were forwarded for printing. The team members provided individual advice based on personal preferences on how best to use the program and encouraged students to edit as much as possible. Then, the previous activities continued, and Ville introduced photograph printout opportunities to the students and discussed suitable photo sizes for indoor exhibitions. The majority of the students utilised this time to finish photo editing sessions in post-production.

Photo Party:

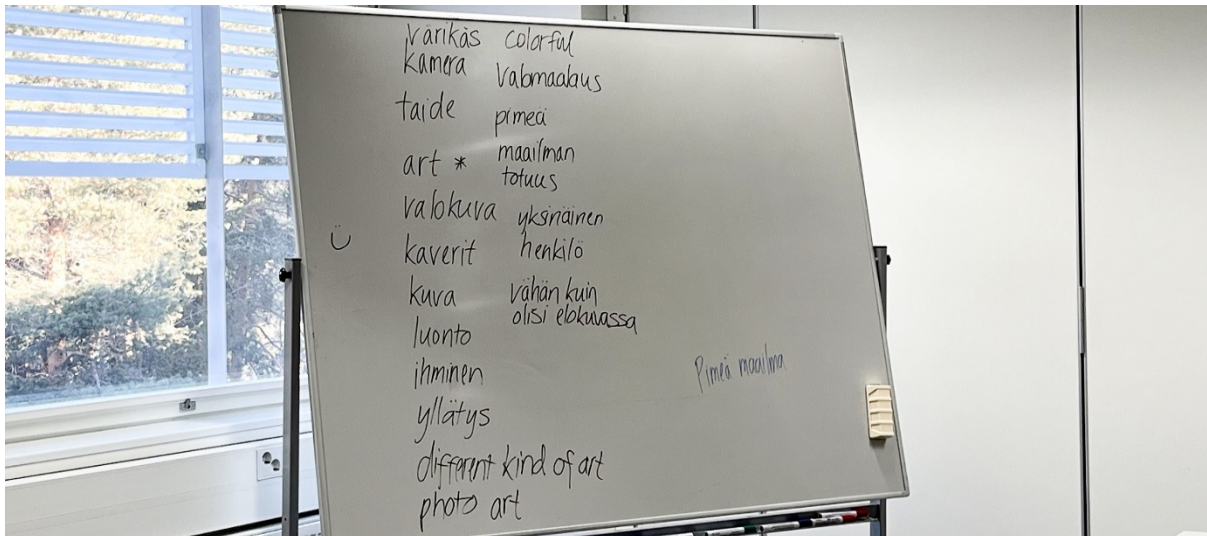


Figure 17 Exhibition Name Brainstorming (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

Today we started with a reflection writing exercise in which they recorded words summarising their experience in the workshop. The exercise fostered different imaginations and insights, and the words were written down on a whiteboard then came up with a name for the temporary exhibition and had a voting for their favourite words to form a creative name for it. After careful consideration, 'Pimeä maailma/Dark World' was settled as the name for the exhibition. The students could use this time later to write down captions and short descriptions for their final photos.



Figure 18 Exhibition at the University of Lapland (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

After that, the team members assisted students in cutting their printed photos, considering options such as border or borderless formats. Subsequently, the photos and caption information pages were attached to the glass of the University Hallway using double-sided tape. During this time, students enjoyed snacks such as coffee, cookies, and fruit. Then they walked around the exhibition, engaged in conversations with each other and left comments using sticky notes

next to their photos. The culmination of their efforts resulted in an impressive temporary exhibition which was enjoyable to explore.

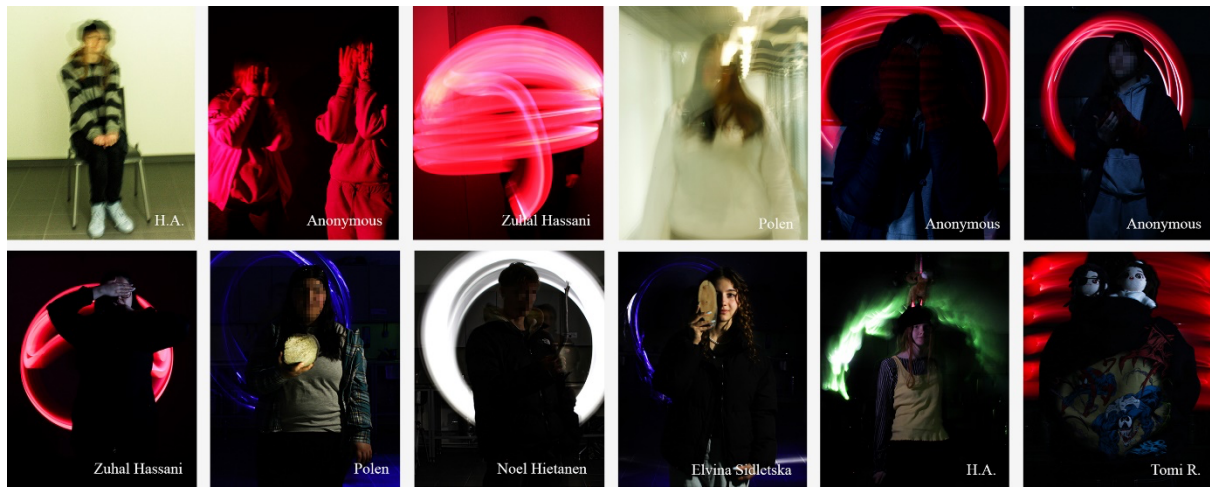


Figure 19 Final Portraits of the Youth Students (2024)

Figure 19, These are the final portraits, some being in multiple photos. The photos taken are based on self-expression, a better understanding of Arctic identities, Arctic objects, and inner expression. Several students decided to represent themselves in different poses, and they were taken based on advanced photography techniques. The majority of the students chose to represent identities based on arctic-themed objects that had personal significance to them. The act of representation is characteristic of the strong connection human beings have towards some things or notions, reflecting complexity in personal identity construction.

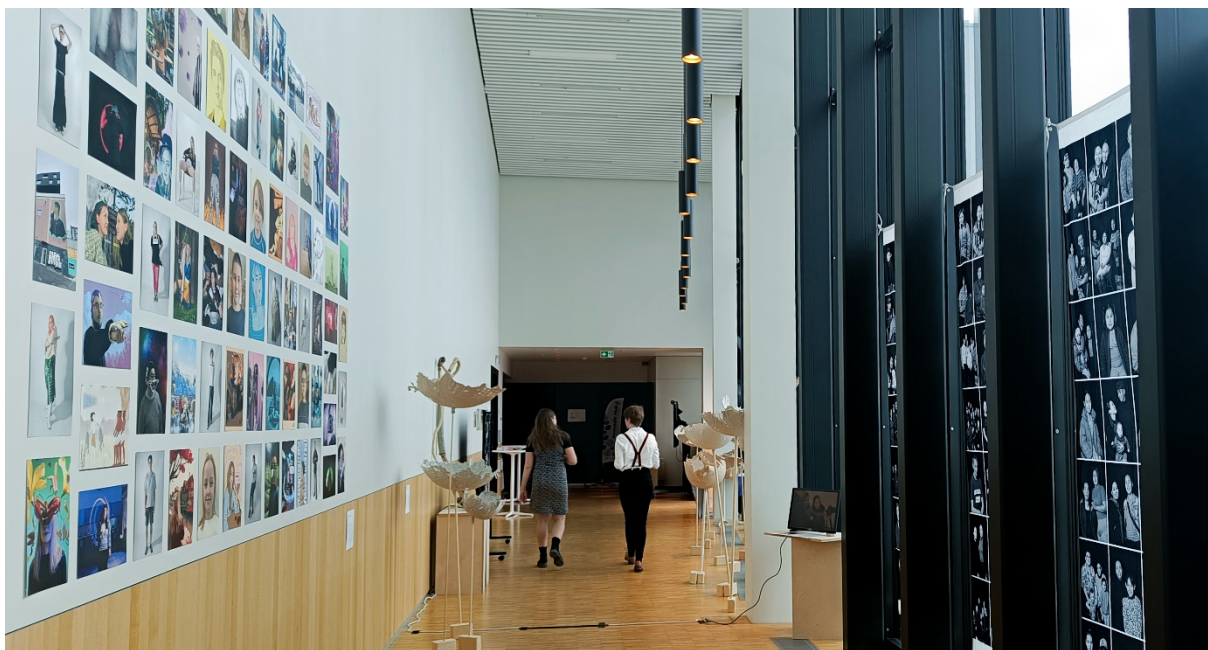


Figure 20 Bodø Exhibition, Norway (Annamari Manninen, 2024)

Figure 20, The exhibition was a part of the Arctic Congress in Bodø, Norway from 29th May until 3rd June. The place was the Concert Hall Stormen in Bodø, which was the main congress venue. The Conference was huge (nearly 1000 participants), connecting 3 conferences: the International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS) XI, UArctic Congress 2024, and High North Dialogue 2024. The Sustainable portraits connected photos from 6 different workshops: 1 in Greenland (black and white portraits + video) and colour portraits from 2 workshops in Umeå, 1 Norway, 2 in Rovaniemi. All of them had a different approach to portraits, of children or young people. The collective artwork of all the portraits was the biggest work in the exhibition and was eye-catching.

Feedback from the students also indicated that the project had an inspiring effect both on personal and creative development. Students enjoyed the safe environment created by the workshops, wherein they could play around with self-expression without any kind of judgment. Many found the photography exercises, especially light painting, and editing interesting and inspiring. The Sustainability Portraits project served as an excellent case study for future collaborative art education projects in Arctic society. The project indicates the potential of interdisciplinary work that unifies identity, consciousness, and art. By inspiring creative work and personal reflection, projects like the ‘Sustainability Portraits’ facilitate the construction of Arctic youth identity while developing social and environmental consciousness. Finally, this is one of the most organised projects I have done so far. Throughout this project, I have learned numerous things while sharing my knowledge with the youth students.

- Shadows of Racism (Main Artistic Part of this Research)

Visualising Racism through the Moments of Motion and Concept was not a piece of cake that had come true in single planning. It required extensive planning and several meetings before taking each step forward. This theme was too complex and sensitive to work on, however, I tried my best to visualise Racism considering ethical considerations. Previous projects, ‘*The Silent Rebellion*’ and ‘*Sustainability Portraits*’, significantly supported this artistic part to work on specific themes in depth. Prior experience always provides a valuable advantage for new projects. Initially, I intended to work with multi-collaborators on the Visualising Racism theme to get different productions. However, due to time constraints, I revised the plan and focused on my creative concepts discussing with the artistic part team members and performers.

Pre-Project Discussion:

I met Inka Matilainen, an art education student at the University of Lapland. In their studies, Inka has been particularly interested in the connections between media and art education, as well as the impact of artistic activities on people's relationship with nature. Since we developed a strong bond while working together on the ‘Sustainability Portraits’ project, I shared my thoughts, research plan, and artistic ideas with Inka. We had a wonderful afternoon discussion in the ‘F Wing’ at the University of Lapland, exploring various possibilities for visualising my concept and addressing potential challenges. Inka enthusiastically agreed to take on the role of a model for the Visualising Racism theme without hesitation, as they have a deep passion for engaging in creative artistic practices of this nature.

Secondly, I met Hugo Gutiérrez, who is a Mexican visual communicator born in Mexico City. From 1997 to 2018, he worked at Margen Rojo SC, specializing in Art, Image, Culture, and Technology, designing exhibitions in renowned national and international venues, including the Museum of Anthropology (CDMX), Vasconcelos Library (CDMX), and Expo Lisboa 98' (Portugal). We met at the Rovaniemi City Centre, where I shared my comprehensive plan for the artistic parts. I also presented my previous works as he was interested in collaborating with me for the artistic part of this research. Hugo has a distinctive approach to photography. When I shared the theme of visualising Racism, he found it interesting and shared it might be challenging to visualise then he expressed enthusiasm about working on this theme in the field, as it promised both complexity and artistic exploration. However, I we had to cancel the

collaboration for this project due to time constraints. Despite this, we met a few times to experiment with photography skills, particularly long exposure and we also have plans to work on experimental photography together in the future.

Finally, I met Ville Lahtinen at his house. He studied photography at the vocational level in Jyväskylä and is currently a student of art education at the University of Lapland. His own interests vary from different forms of art to body control and photography which is always present alongside his interests and life. As an educator, Ville aims to establish a supportive environment for trying and experimenting. We have discussed the artistic parts of this research where I shared my central plans for visualising the racism theme. Ville expressed great enthusiasm about doing the photography part, as he loves to do experimental approaches.

I brought all my camera equipment to Ville's house to make a comprehensive plan for the workshop dedicated to the visual production of racism-themed photographs. At some point, Ville offered me his house as a part of the workshop venue, as we needed a dark room or a place that could be transformed into a dark studio room. We discussed potential challenges and briefly discussed the design of a set within one of his rooms. Ultimately, we figured out the possible dates for the workshop. Initially, we planned for 28th October 2024 for this workshop, However, if the outcomes did not meet our expectations, we intended to schedule an additional session to ensure better results. Finally, I informed Inka and Ville to work on the 28th of October 2024 at Ville's House for the workshop.

Introduction & Discussion (Main workshop day):

Amin Md Faysal: Photographer and Researcher

Ville Lahtinen: Photography Contributor

Inka Matilainen: Performer

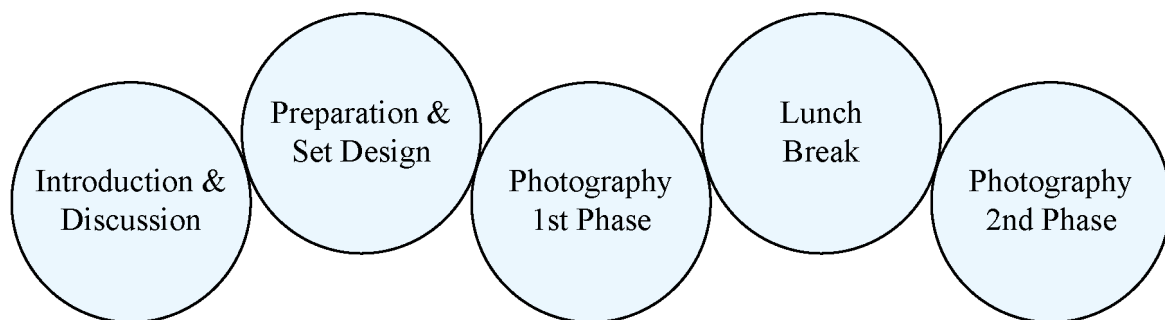


Figure 21 Workshop Day Task List (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

On this workshop day, we started our session at Ville's house in the morning between 10.00-10.30 and ended our session in the evening around 17.30-18.00. We went through a planned task list that we needed to meet all the expectations on that day.

Despite Ville and Inka being informed of the main theme, we began the session with an introduction where we talked about visualising racism through motion and conceptual photography. They provided me with their written consent to publish conversation and visuals (Photographs) in my research. Since our theme was Racism, before going into the main workshop activities, we discussed racism. This conversation allowed us to deepen our understanding of racism, enabling us to establish a stronger connection with the subject, which in turn contributed to more meaningful creative productions.

Discussion topics included:

- I. What are your thoughts on racism?
- II. Have you ever experienced a situation involving racism?
- III. In your opinion, how does being a victim of racism affect a person? Do you think it can lead to trauma?
- IV. Do you believe racism can be effectively conveyed through photography?

One of us shared, '*Racism should be condemned in every situation*', this statement raised many questions, at least in my mind. The first question must be: why? Perhaps humanity is not as advanced as we sometimes think or believe. If we draw a line from a sincere person, such as a child's innocent ability to recognise differences, to the most malicious, destructive, and angry discrimination that harms entire communities, we can see that humans are capable of racism, it exists within us. But why does a fully developed adult not set a boundary for themselves, a line they refuse to cross?

In terms of facing real-life racism situations, one shared '*I have witnessed and experienced several situations. Sometimes people have criticised my words, sometimes unfairly, but sometimes rightly so. Those days, my social media feeds were filled with people ranting about various issues. I have intervened in certain situations, but unfortunately, there have also been times when failed to act, hopefully, due to my lack of knowledge or skills rather than indifference. I belong to some minorities and have experienced prejudice, but thankfully, I have*

avoided the worst situations personally'. Another of us shared, *'I felt like some people were biased in a way that made it seem as though they considered everything objectively, but in reality, they did not'*.

We discussed how victims of racism may go through trauma, which can also lead to bitterness and hate. We discussed how victims of racism may experience trauma, which can lead to bitterness and resentment. When someone faces discrimination, they may struggle to live the way they lived earlier. It disrupts their focus and compels them to stay on the situation they suffered, potentially altering the course of their lives.

Finally, we explored the idea of visualising racism through photography. Although this is a complex theme, we agreed that it can be effectively captured through specialised photography techniques, conceptual approaches, performances, expressions, costumes, carefully designed sets, lighting, motion, and, of course, the appropriate equipment. We discussed what kinds of roles a racist play, how victims try to protect them, how they go through trauma, and how a bystander enjoys the scenario and remains silent. Since racism is a social problem, we also considered ethical considerations ensuring nothing harms anyone or anything.

Preparation and Set Design:

In the beginning, Inka tried different costumes that Inka had brought from home, along with some props. After trying different outfits, we figured out two outfits that were most suitable for that performance based on portraying different roles. Subsequently, we moved everything from the room and prepared the set. For one performance, we utilised a plain warm light grey wall as a backdrop, while for the other, we combined a couch, a mirror, and a light blanket.

So that we had natural light sources and artificial lights for achieving perfect composition. Given my budget constraints, we arranged our best to use whatever we had available in that place and prioritised our skills and creativity instead of relying on designing the set with expensive pieces of equipment and props. Finally, I positioned the camera using a very basic camera tripod to ensure stability of the camera.

Equipment and Camera Settings Used:

Camera: Sony A7c II,

Lens: 28-70mm f/3.5-5.6,

Tripod: Yunteng 691

Total photos: 83 (Including trial and error shoots)

First Session 27 photos

Second Session: 56 photos

Aperture: f3.5-f13

Shutter Speed/Exposure time: 4 seconds-30 seconds

ISO Speed: 50

First Photography Phase:

In the first session, I had taken 27 photos in total including trial and error shoots. In this session, I decided to keep the background flat considering Ville's opinion, as we planned to visualise racism through several conceptual ideas. I then explained the idea to Inka to give different poses in front of the plain wall. We refined my initial ideas by discussing with Ville and Inka to ensure the photographs become more relevant, conceptual, live, motion, stimulating, evoking and narrative by using our highest level of creativity.

Ville and I took turns demonstrating the poses in front of the wall to help Inka achieve the best expressions and possible results. This sounds straightforward, however, playing multiple roles within a few seconds and switching the expression accordingly was super complicated. Inka, however, performed as if Inka was a professional performer, where Inka was into the character for the whole time which helped us to get the diverse characters from a single performer.

Afterwards, we primarily worked with the natural light source, which was streaming in through the window. We adjusted the intensity of natural light by moving the window curtains and we gave priority to the natural light sources the most to make the photos dreamy, dramatic, expressive atmosphere, and rich colour variation that would evoke emotion and stimulate the audience. To ensure stability, I used the self-timer function on the camera which allows the camera extra time for the tripod to stable. Even the slightest camera movement can cause blurriness in the photographs which would require additional time for correction.



Figure 22 Shadows of Racism 1 (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 22, the settings used were: Aperture: f8, Shutter Speed/Exposure time 15 seconds, and ISO Speed 50. In this photograph, Inka played two distinct roles. On the left, Inka portrayed a racist, with body gestures, expressions and actions fitted accurately. The photograph itself tells a story, which might vary depending on the audience. On the right, Inka performed the role of a silent victim! Despite the victim trying to get rid of facing racists, the racists are visible everywhere. The dreamy background lights, contrasts along with shadows and Inka's expressive performance made this photograph flawless execution within the theme of Visualizing Racism. Manual focus was used to ensure the photo was focused, and the photo was captured in near-total dark conditions.

I used a smaller aperture of f8 to get the lights into the camera sensor gradually so that we could visualise the whole story in a single photo. Giving direction in the dark room condition was also difficult because the performer was supposed to change the expression, position, style, gesture, and posture within a few moments despite the limited visibility. During the initial few seconds of the exposure, Inka had to play the role of the victim where Inka remained still for approximately 5-7 seconds to get a sharper photo and minimise motion blur. Secondly, after giving directions to move Inka to the second position, Inka had to play the role of a Racist which is on the left side for the rest of the moments, where Inka had to move their body and

use hand gestures to create the impression of motion and effectively become the racist character.

As the photo was exposed for 15 seconds, it was challenging for Inka to perform two roles within that timeframe in the darkroom. Since Inka was not a professional performer, it became even more complicated for us to visualise. However, Inka was adaptive to the concept of visualising racism and the characters they were required to portray. Inka handled everything with remarkable accuracy, demonstrating a high level of professionalism despite having challenges. This was the final photograph I was able to capture after several trial-and-error attempts. Ville assisted me by giving a second opinion on framing and visualising the stories with concept and motion movement. After successfully capturing this expressive photo, I decided to take on a more complex challenge where Inka will be playing three roles instead of two. Although this seemed more demanding, however, our well-structured plan enabled us to accomplish it.



Figure 23 Shadows of Racism 2 (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 23, the following camera settings were used: Aperture: f13, Shutter Speed/Exposure time: 20 seconds and ISO Speed: 50. To achieve the expected lighting, we adjusted the window curtains accordingly. I had to use more smaller aperture and longer exposure to sufficient light

to enhance the sharpness of the visuals. In this photograph, Inka played three distinct roles. On the left, Inka portrayed a racist, using fitting body gestures, expressions, and actions similar to those in the previous photo. In the centre, Inka played a silent victim role gripping their right hand with their left hand, representing their helplessness and fear which is visible in Inka's facial expression. Despite the victim's trying to avoid encountering racists, they exit everywhere. On the right, Inka played an additional role that of a bystander. A bystander is someone who is present at an event or situation but does not take part in it. In the social context, a bystander may witness something happening, such as an accident, conflict, or injustice, but remain passive rather than taking action. Inka effectively conveyed this character, with the use of a sleeping mask and a detached facial expression further emphasizing the indifferent nature of bystanders. Inka effectively portrayed this character where the use of a sleeping mask and a facial expression that further emphasises the indifferent behaviours of the bystanders.

Since the photo had a 20-second exposure, capturing all three roles in a single frame within a darkroom setting was significantly challenging. Since Inka was not a professional performer, visualising and executing the concept required extra effort. Nevertheless, Inka quickly grasped the idea of portraying racism and adapted each character with remarkable precision which was needed to play. Despite the difficulties, Inka managed everything while playing the roles with impressive accuracy. Ville supported me by offering a second opinion on framing and how to bring the stories to life through concept and motion. After numerous trial-and-error shots, I successfully captured this photograph.

Lunch Break:

We had our lunch break for approximately 50 minutes. During this time, we had an opportunity to refresh our minds so that we could concentrate better on the next phase. Before arriving at Ville's house, I had brought some premade pizza recipes so that we could have lunch there. Ville assisted in preparing the pizza with those premade recipes, while I transferred the photos onto my MacBook to review the captured photos. This helped us organise a bit more effective plan for the second photography phase. Then we reviewed the photographs, we had our lunch and then proceeded to the second phase.

Second Photography Phase:

In the second session, I captured a total of 56 photographs, including trial-and-error shots. We designed the set using a couch, mirror, light blanket, and table lamp to represent racism, but

with a slightly different approach. I explained my ideas to Inka, enabling them to pose on the couch and in front of the mirror, creating shadow effects that symbolise racism and enhance the emotional depth of the photographs. Ville, Inka, and I discussed and refined my ideas to ensure the photographs were more relevant, conceptual, dynamic, emotional, and narrative-driven. Although it may seem simple, switching between multiple roles and changing expressions within seconds was quite challenging. We experimented with both artificial and natural light sources, using the window to cast shadows. By adjusting the curtains, we controlled the intensity of natural light to achieve the desired photograph. This session primarily focused on lighting and storytelling within the photographs, aiming to create a dreamy, dramatic, and expressive atmosphere with rich colour variations that helped evoke emotions and deeply engage the audience.



Figure 24 Shadows of Racism 3 (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 24, Aperture: f11, Shutter Speed/Exposure time: 20 sec, ISO Speed: 50 setting were used. As earlier we discussed when someone experiences racism, they may go through trauma, which can lead to feelings of bitterness and hate. This can alter the way individuals live their lives, making it distinctly different from before. It affects their focus and keeps their mind trapped in the painful experiences they have gone through. I intended to visualise these narratives within a single frame, which Ville and Inka appreciated and found to experiment

with as well. For this photograph, Inka had to change the costume and perform on the couch. I aimed to visualise a traumatised victim through the character lying down on the couch appearing normal but already lost their feelings. Additionally, I visualised the painful experiences and unavoidable memories with the character sitting on the couch. The mirror in the back symbolises the feelings of emptiness and assumed hatred within the pure soul of the victims. The blurred motion and obscured face represent the loss of emotions, feelings, painful experiences, bitter memories and a mind trapped in suffering.

I exposed this photo for 20 seconds using a smaller aperture of f11. Visualising this idea was highly complex, and we had to go through several trials and errors. Portraying those roles in such brief moments was particularly challenging for Inka, especially while sitting on the couch and moving the head slowly to encase the exact photo that we wanted —one that conveys the loss of emotions, feelings, pain and haunting memories.



Figure 25 Shadows of Racism 4 (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

In Figure 25, the following camera settings were used: Aperture: f/3.5, Shutter Speed/Exposure Time: 13 sec, ISO Speed: 50. To capture this photograph, Inka had to wear the previous costume. I used slightly less exposure compared to the previous photos, as we had sufficient light from the table lamp and window. Additionally, I used a bit bigger aperture. In this artwork,

I sought to visualise the fear experienced by victims and the discrimination and mistreatment by racists. On the left side, Inka depicted the role of the victim, where body movement and facial expression express fear. The way Inka is positioned on the wall suggests an attempt to escape. The mirror was kept there intentionally to reflect the emptiness and helplessness during the situation when a victim goes through but gets nothing but anxiety. On the right side, Inka played another role in the aggressive attitude of racism to symbolise cruelty. The spotlight was intentionally directed at the racist figure to emphasise this behaviour. Creating this visual representation was different from the previous photos as this symbolised the aggression of racism and fear of the victim using the spotlight, which was created by the natural light source that was coming through the window.

Properties of the photos:

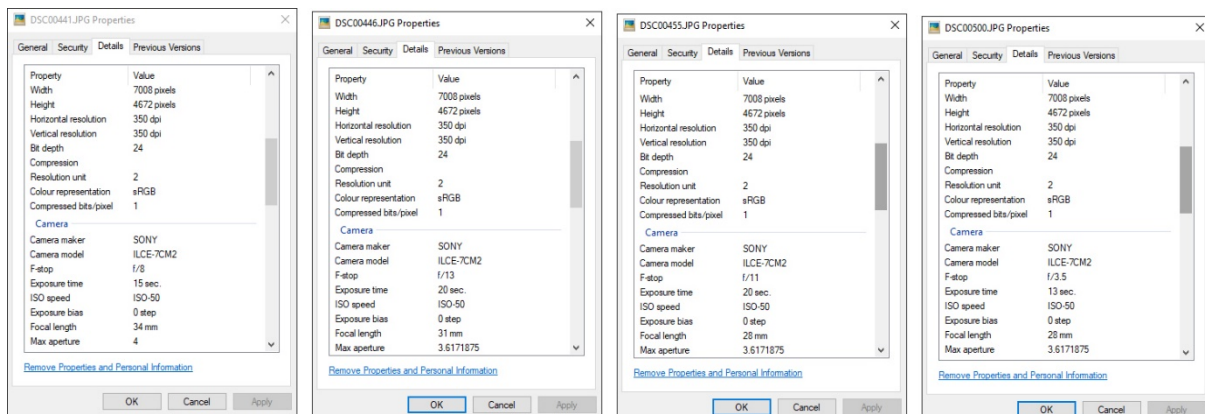


Figure 26 Photo Properties of Figure 22, 23, 24 and 25 (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

The photographs were all taken in low light using long exposure, manual focus, and an ISO of 50. The size of the aperture determined both the amount of light entering the camera sensor and the depth of field. Figure 22 used the aperture size f/8 and 15-second exposure to capture Inka in the act of portraying the racist and the victim and controlled the movement to attain contrast between the stationary and the in-motion. Figure 23 used the aperture size f/13 and longer 20-second exposure to capture Inka in the acts of playing the racist, victim, and bystander, and adjusting the drapes to attain light. Figure 24 used the aperture size f/11 and 20-second exposure to represent the trauma in racism and used the use of the blurring in the movement and the use of the reflection to increase the emotion in the trauma. Figure 25 used the aperture size f/3.5 and 13-second exposure and used the use of available light from the window and the use of the lamp to represent the victim's fear and the aggressiveness of the racist. All the artworks used a different combination of light, exposure, and movement to capture the different facets and effects of racism.

To sum up, all the photographs were captured in near-total darkness using a long exposure and manual focus, requiring careful planning and execution. Inka expressed multiple roles in each photo, embodying different aspects of racism, from victimhood to aggression and passive involvement. Ville contributed by providing second opinions on framing and storytelling, ensuring the visual narratives were effectively conveyed. These photographs effectively visualised racism through powerful storytelling, expressions, and Inka's body language. The use of long exposure allowed multiple roles to exist within a single frame, creating a layered and thought-provoking narrative despite the technical and performance challenges. The final results captured the emotional depth and complexities of racism with precision and impact.

Post-processing:

Post-processing is one of the crucial stages in photography before publishing or sharing the photos with the public. In my opinion, during this editing stage, we must edit the photographs very carefully considering original recognition of the photo. The primary purpose of editing in photography is to refine the visuals and correct some minor imperfections, if present. Giving priority of basic adjustments and corrections is the purpose of post-processing of photographs, and avoiding manipulation helps to preserve the original recognition of a photograph. I edited the majority of the photographs to ensure they were ready to go for print and public publication. My editing process primarily involves basic colour adjustments, cropping and resizing the photos. Whenever I edit photos, I consciously avoid doing excessive manipulation on the photo because it might change the visual stories of photographs and misrepresent the original context of the photographs. Despite having many software, I opted for Adobe Photoshop as I consider it the best photo editing software available till now. Adobe Lightroom software, which is also Adobe product and does the photo editing job effectively, therefore, it also can be an option.

- Artistic Part Exhibition: Shadows of Racism, Arctic Identity, and The Silent Rebellion: Stories Told Through Long Exposure Photography

The preparation for the exhibition began at the initial stage of my research, where I planned to integrate the artistic part into the research. This exhibition represents the culmination of years of passion and curiosity. From experimenting with DIY camera lenses in 2013 to learning long-exposure techniques as a student at the University of Lapland, I have always been captivated by the potential of photography to convey stories. I have always felt that photography allows us to see beyond the obvious. It is never just about capturing a moment but uncovering what lies beneath the surface. Through long-exposure photography, I have found a way to visualise stories and concepts that are tough to present verbally.

My classmate, Andrew, and I submitted an application to secure the Gallery Kilo at the University of Lapland for our group exhibition. In November 2024, we received confirmation to exhibit our artistic work from 28 January to 20 February 2025. As this research follows an art-based action research approach, and I have three distinct projects, I aimed to exhibit two photos from each project. Consequently, I decided to present the photos of the previous projects on smaller frames while enlarging the artistic project that focuses on visualising racism since this is the central concept and theme for this research. Then, I started developing the gallery layout for my exhibition.

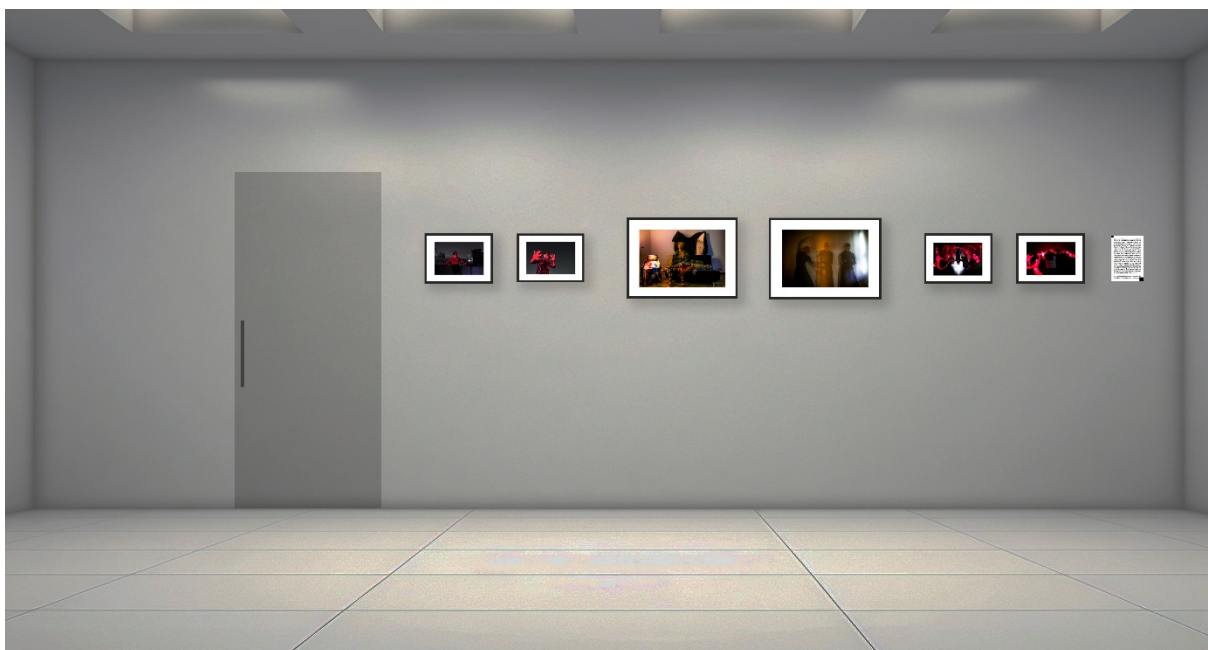


Figure 27 Exhibition Layout Design (Md Faysal Amin, 2024)

Even though designing and developing this gallery layout took me a long, in the long run, it significantly helped me with the photo position, ratio and overall aesthetic of the gallery room. I obtained the printed photos from the University, where Michael Marnin Jacobs, a photographer and University teacher of photography, generously dedicated his valuable time and offered insightful suggestions. During my time with Michael, I gained the fundamental printing process of the university. While the photos were being printed, we engaged in various discussions related to photography such as the lifestyle of our home country and Finland, as well as our experiences in Finland. After receiving all the printed photos in December 2024, I eagerly awaited the day when I could exhibit the printed photographs on the gallery wall.

A press was released on the University of Lapland's website with the name '*A Group Exhibition Exploring Racism, Heritage, and Connection*' where The University of Lapland was hosting an art exhibition by two students, Amin Md. Faysal and Ekhafe Andrew. Their works explore important topics like racism, cultural heritage, and human connections. Faysal's photography captured emotions and social issues using light and movement, making people think about racism in a new way. Andrew's design mixes African traditions with modern styles, showing how culture and time can come together. The exhibition was open from January 28 to February 20, 2025, at Galleria Kilo in Rovaniemi. Visitors can see the artworks on weekdays, the gallery is closed on weekends and public holidays. Then, I installed the photos in the Gallery Kilo using different tools where Ville assisted me in aligning the photographs and shared a second opinion on the overall presentation.



Figure 28 Exhibition at the Gallery Kilo (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

Jar of Perspectives:

This exhibition was not just a showcase of photographs—it is a deeply personal and conceptual exploration of racism, seen through the lens of long-exposure photography. With a unique approach that captures motion and light over time, I created visuals that are both stunning and stimulating. By capturing motion and abstraction, I tried to push the boundaries of traditional photography, transforming it into a medium for activism and introspection. I hope that these photographs start conversations that words sometimes fail to express. Racism is a complex and multifaceted issue, and long-exposure photography allowed me to express its nuances—layers of emotion, motion, and moments—while leaving space for personal interpretation. This exhibition was about using art as a means to connect, question, and inspire meaningful action.

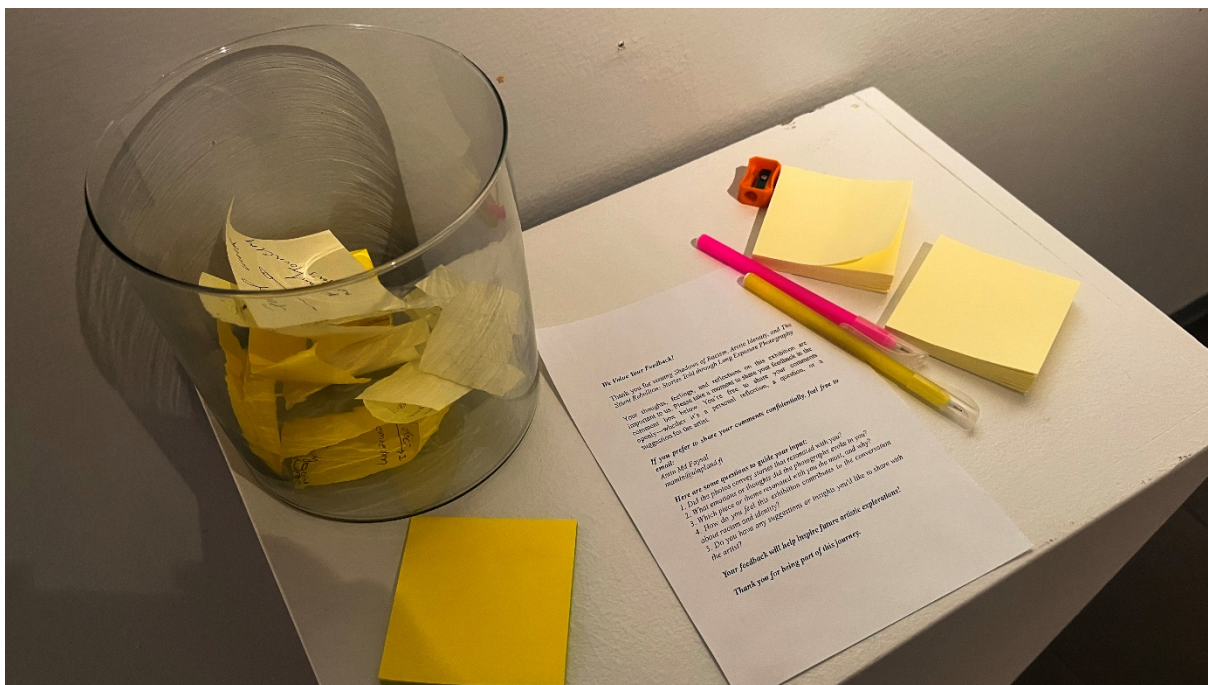


Figure 29 Comments Jar (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

A comment Jar was kept in a wooden box along with some empty notes, pens, and instructions for commenting on my exhibition. This helped me to receive an honest opinion and observation which allowed me to analyse the overall thoughts of the different types of audiences. Here are the questions to guide the audience's input:

- I. Did the photos convey stories that resonated with you?
- II. What emotions or thoughts did the photographs evoke in you?
- III. Which piece or theme resonated with you the most, and why?

- IV. How do you feel this exhibition contributes to the conversation about racism and identity?
- V. Do you have any suggestions or insights you'd like to share with the artist?

Most of the audience wrote their comments anonymously. The exhibition effectively engaged the audience, stimulating a range of emotional and intellectual responses. The comments collected from the exhibition's Comment Jar provided valuable insights into the audience's engagement with the artwork, revealing how the themes of racism, identity, and emotional expression were perceived. Analysing these responses allowed me a deeper understanding of the impact of visual storytelling in contemporary photography.

Artistic and Visual Strengths: A significant portion of the feedback emphasised the technical and aesthetic quality of the photographs. Statements such as 'A very unique take towards racism using visually stunning modern photography techniques' and 'Your captured art is extraordinary, outstanding' highlight the audience's appreciation for the artistic execution of the work. Additionally, one viewer pointed out the strength of composition in a particular piece ('4th photo from the left is a particularly strong, great composition. Keep pushing it'), suggesting that the formal elements of the images contributed to their effectiveness in storytelling.

Interpretation and Emotional Response: The exhibition evoked strong emotional reactions, with some viewers clearly identifying feelings of anxiety, connection, and exhaustion:

- I. Anxiety & Uncertainty: 'Yes. Anxiety. The future right. Very well. Very nice work'!
- II. Stress & Mental Struggle: 'Unstable people mind, stressful life of people, tired with things'.
- III. Love & Connection: 'Yes, especially the photo No. 2 from the door is a feeling of love & connection'.

This suggests that while the exhibition was centred around racism and identity, it also resonated with broader themes such as psychological, social themes, and personal connection.

Multiple Interpretations and Subjective Engagement: Interestingly, some audience members interpreted the images beyond the intended themes of racism and identity. One comment noted that while some photographs conveyed their message ('The two left photos capture the idea behind it in a way that is understandable and readable'), others evoked thoughts

related to ‘mental illness or alcoholism’. This suggests that the artwork allowed for multiple layers of interpretation, shaped by the personal experiences and perspectives of the viewers. The response ‘It looks like all of the moments convey the theme of these paintings’ reinforces that the visual cohesion of the exhibition was effective, though the variation in interpretations suggests a diversity in audience perception.

Engagement with Racism and Identity: One comment directly references the core themes of your exhibition, stating: ‘The photos with red lines on the body feel like marks of being different’. This suggests that at least some viewers recognised and engaged with the visual metaphors you used to address racism and identity. However, the phrase ‘Insanely Great’ (translated from Finnish as ‘Sairaan hienoja’, meaning ‘insanely great’ but also potentially ambiguous) could indicate either deep emotional engagement or fatigue with discussions surrounding racism, reflecting the varied ways audiences process these topics. While most responses were positive, there were fewer critical comments or suggestions for improvement. However, one viewer noted that some images were particularly effective in communicating the message ‘The two left photos capture the idea behind it in a way that is understandable and readable’, implying that clarity in storytelling varied across different pieces.

To sum up, the audience's feedback indicates that the exhibition successfully sparked emotional and intellectual engagement, offering a unique perspective on racism and identity. The comments suggest that while the artwork effectively conveys its message, its impact extends beyond racism alone, touching on broader psychological and social issues such as mental health, connection, and observational struggles.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter presents how long-exposure photography can be utilised in portraying racial discrimination effectively, demonstrating its potential in visualising complex social stories through dynamic photographs. The study explains that this method enhances storytelling through the creation of layered photographs that bend empathy and stimulate critical thought, answering the research questions on its narrative potential and technical process to the best extent. It adds to existing literature through its focus on how motion photography surpasses static photography in documenting the concept of racism, replacing the role of art in driving social change. However, limitations in terms of a small sample size and subjective methods show that the findings lack generalizability. In its prospect, the chapter suggests possibilities for future research in areas such as gender inequality and offers practical advice to amateur photographers to spread powerful messages through long-exposure photography.

5.1 Implication of the Results

The primary contribution of this research lies in the demonstration of how long exposure photography, as a conceptual and art-based action research methodology, can be utilised to portray social issues and the involved processes in a manner that traditional static photography may not achieve. The findings uncover that the deliberate use of motion and time, fundamental to long exposure techniques, creates a dynamic narrative that captures the obscure and abstract, layered nature of racial discrimination. This process enables the representation of brief emotions and subtle light and shadow shifts that are complex factors of racism.

In my study, I explored how changing shutter speeds and utilising ambient light can evoke a higher sense of empathy and urgency. The blurred and layered photographs force viewers to engage actively with the content, prompting introspection and critical debate. Through this I have confirmed that concept-based motion photography is not only an aesthetic innovation but also a viable means of social commentary. The finding challenges conventional approaches that often rely on static photography to document social injustices and supports the perception that dynamic visuals can offer deeper emotional and conceptual insights (Rogers, 2018).

Besides, the research has applications in the field of visual activism. The ability of long-exposure photography to capture motion moments and convey a sense of movement aligns with

theories that argue the transformative power of art in inspiring social change. The research demonstrates how considering time and movement in a single frame can represent the current and continuous struggle against racism, hence serving as an innovative method for public engagement and advocacy. The research thus contributes to a growing body of evidence that emphasises the role of creative practices in challenging societal norms and activating communities for social justice.

5.2 Linking Findings to Research Questions

The study guided two primary research questions: *(i) Can concept-based motion photographs convey stories, messages, and emotions more effectively than static photos?* and *(ii) What are the processes involved in capturing motion photography?* The findings propose strong answers to these questions.

For the first question, the research reveals that long-exposure photography significantly enhances the storytelling potential of photographs. The dynamic interplay of light and motion creates a textured visual narrative that evokes complex ideas more powerfully than static photographs. For example, photographs employing long exposure techniques were capable of revealing nuances in the portrayal of racial tensions, such as the interplay between blurred figures and stark backgrounds that traditional photography might miss. This capacity to capture multiple layers of meaning in a single shot suggests that long-exposure photography is particularly effective in conveying emotions and abstract concepts (Faris-Belt, 2011; Simon, 2010).

The study's iterative approach, from initial technical experimentation to reflective artistic practice provided valuable insights into the process of capturing motion photography. Detailed documentation of the creative journey, from the 'Spark' of initial interest through the more advanced phase of execution and exhibition, demonstrates the sophistication of in this technique. The process analysis not only described the steps for setting up long exposure shots but also highlighted the need for a flexible, reflective methodology that integrates technical, creative, and social considerations. Thus, the research sufficiently addressed the second question by mapping out a replicable model for future investigations into motion-based visual storytelling.

5.3 Comparison with Existing Literature

One of the central aims of this research was to place its findings in the broader scholarly literature on social justice, photography, and visual narrative. Previous studies have often focused on static images as the primary medium for documenting and commenting on social injustices (Liu, 2022; Snyder & Allen, 1975). While these works emphasise photography's potential for documenting reality and capturing events, they typically overlook the potential of dynamic approaches to enrich narrative complexity. In contrast, this study builds upon and contributes to the literature by highlighting the unique strengths of long-exposure photography. For instance, as Faris-Belt and Simon refer to the possibility of blurred imagery and conceptual framing to invoke emotional responses, this study demonstrates how these aspects can be especially utilised to represent the complicated nature of racism (Faris-Belt, 2011; Simon, 2010). The dynamic layering of photographs in long-exposure photography is shown to provide an expanded visual vocabulary that enables viewers to perceive both explicit and subtle signs of racial injustice. In doing so, the study challenges traditional beliefs about photographic objectivity and supports interpretive, activist-oriented approach to visual storytelling strategies.

This study aligned and showed through the visualising racism and exhibition that the conceptual photography is an art that uses visual metaphors, symbolism, and narrative to convey abstract ideas, emotions, or societal problems and transforms traditional photography into a means for deeper introspection and more effective messaging (Agarwal, 2023; Cotton, 2010; Ezzat, 2022). Storytelling through photography is a rich and sophisticated art form beyond mere taking photos, evoking powerful feelings and engaging the viewer with subjects on a deep and personal level (Alan, 2024). Using composition, lighting tell stories beyond words, merge subjective and objective truth, and issue commentaries on identity, memory, and the human condition (Sigurðardóttir, 2020; Harrison, 2002). Even though still photographs lack the fluidity of film, the open-to-interpretation nature of photographs allows the viewer to engage actively with the photograph, making photography a unique and powerful medium for visual narrative (Baetens, 2009).

Furthermore, this study supports existing research promoting the utilisation of art in social transformation. By documenting the iterative process of creative experimentation and reflective practice, reinforces the idea that the artistic process itself can serve as a valuable source of data and insight. Through its integration of digital storytelling processes and

participatory strategies, it also corroborates contemporary theories of visual activism that situate creative expression as a catalyst for political and social change (Young, 2021). In particular, the participatory nature of the project, where audiences and subjects were invited to interpret and deliberate on the photographs, aligned the principles of art-based action research and highlighted the importance of dialogue in facilitating community empowerment. Consequently, this research not only supports but also extends the theoretical framework that positions art as a dynamic medium for social commentary and community engagement.

5.4 Adding Action to the Jigsaw Puzzle Board

Since I started experimenting with photography in 2013, gradually it became my habit to take up a complex social issue and work on it. Previous projects ‘Silent Rebellion’, ‘Sustainability Portraits’ and ‘Shadows of Racism’ motivated me so much that I am unwilling to look back, hence I am planning to extend my research second phase by adding more action so that I can drive my research to the next phase where I will be adding more components to work on more complex social issues. These projects have not only strengthened my artistic vision but also reinforced my commitment to addressing pressing societal concerns through photography. My goal is not only to document social issues but to spark dialogue, raise awareness, and inspire action. Through this extension, I hope to challenge myself further, pushing the boundaries of photography as a tool for social change.

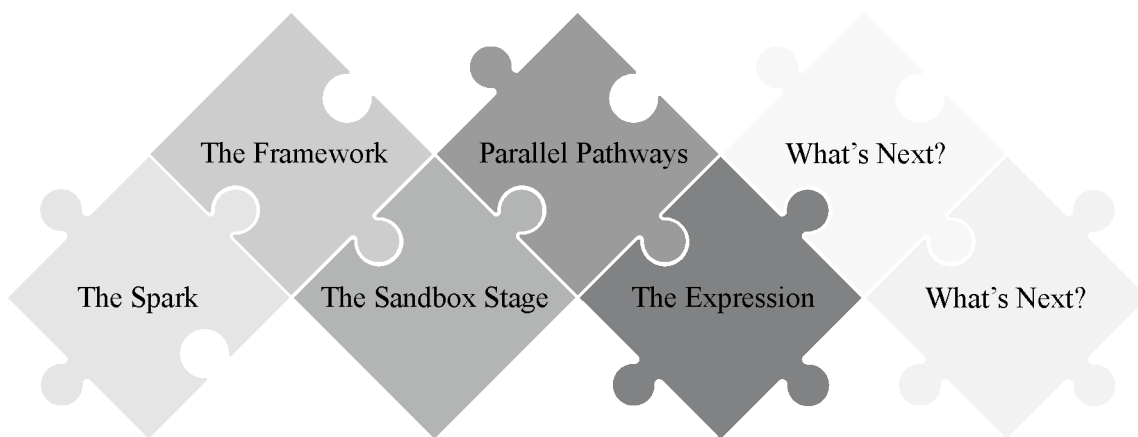


Figure 30 Future Research Plan (Md Faysal Amin, 2025)

This research model suggests the need for further investigation, which may extend the scope of my current research significantly. The ‘What’s Next’ jigsaw puzzle pieces indicate that the puzzle pieces are prepared to engage in more actions. Currently, I have a ‘Gender Inequality’

theme in mind to conduct more research in the future. Although this is a complex social issue, with proper planning, this model will guide me to the roadmap for research in the future.

5.5 Guidance for the Experimental Amateur Photographer

Photographers seeking to learn from my procedure can gain valuable insights into how creativity and technical precision convey visual messages. I utilised a mixture of technical and artistic strategies to address the complex subject theme of racism. The long exposure photography technique helped me to capture more than one role such as racist, victim, and bystander from a single performer. By experimenting with shutter speeds, I was able to create a layered narrative that combined concept and motion. By adjusting the aperture and focusing manually, I ensured sharpness on key details while minimising noise with a low ISO setting. This was crucial for maintaining control over the depth of field and light exposure. Lighting played a significant role as well. I combined natural light with artificial sources to experiment with the mood and atmosphere, such as using window light to create spotlight-specific elements in the ‘Shadows of Racism’ theme. This approach helped evoke various emotional tones in the scene. I also focused on set design, using simple, everyday objects to create powerful imagery on a budget. A minimalist approach transformed a basic room into a storytelling environment, showing that creativity does not need expensive props.

For those looking to implement these techniques, I suggest starting with a simple theme and concept first. Use manual camera settings, tripod, and versatile lens, experimenting with settings like aperture, shutter speed, ISO and light source. Directing performers is another important part of the process, clear instructions allow the model to quickly switch between emotional roles. Photographers can practice this by rehearsing specific poses tied to their theme to capture the emotional transitions effectively. Collaboration is essential in enhancing work or fine-tuning frames, lighting, and performance by considering second opinions. I recommend collaborating with peers to gain fresh perspectives and enhance the storyline. Direct your subject through planned poses, take a second opinion and repeat until you achieve the expected results.

To outline, my approach emphasises the importance of balancing technical skills with creative vision. By combining thoughtful planning, experimentation, and collaboration, beginner photographers can create expressive photographs that convey deep and meaningful stories.

6. CONCLUSION

This study is presented to discover how long-exposure photography can be utilised to make visible the invisible presence of racism, transforming the ordinary into powerful visual narratives. This research has illustrated photography is beyond technical skill by engaging an art-based action research methodology, it is an art of storytelling and a catalyst for social change. From experimenting with DIY lenses to mastering long-exposure techniques, my journey has become a constant learning and creative discovery process. The research demonstrates that long-exposure photography significantly enhances the narrative potential of photographs. The photographs are not just pieces of art but symbols of the often hidden and complex layers of racial injustice that invite audiences to a deeper reflection on the realities of discrimination. The research reveals that long-exposure photography offers a unique perspective that traditional methods often miss. By capturing movement and layering moments in time, this technique creates a dialogue between what is seen and what is felt, and each image becomes a silent narrative that speaks louder than the voice.

One major artistic culmination of the research was the exhibition '*A Group Exhibition Exploring Racism, Heritage and Connection*', held in Gallery Kilo, University of Lapland, between January 28 and February 20, 2025. The exhibition was not just a reflective setting but a discussion forum where the audience had the opportunity to experience firsthand my artistic and conceptual depth in the study. Displayed Photographs that employed long exposure techniques were capable of revealing nuances in the portrayal of racism and overlooked by conventional photography. The audiences feedback reaction to the artwork and the interpretation of the themes of racism, identity, and emotional representation. The exhibition effectively engaged the audience and evoked diverse emotional and intellectual responses and provided a greater understanding of the power of visual narrative in contemporary photography.

Capturing the moments of motion and concept in photography requires a balance of technical skill and artistic imagination. The main steps involve employing long exposure methods to record multiple actions or characters in a single photograph, setting camera parameters such as shutter speed, aperture, and ISO for definition and depth control, and choosing lighting carefully to create various emotional undertones. Set design and co-operation with the models add further depth to the narrative so the theme and emotional changes are communicated

effectively. The technique stresses the need to balance technical proficiency with artistic experimentation to create expressive and significant photographs with a strong narrative value. In my own practice, I have shown the way these methods are able to reconfigure complex themes, such as racism, into powerful visual narratives.

One of the key limitations was the small and geographically constrained sample size. Conducting the research in a confined environment may have restricted the variety of perceptions of racial experiences and visual representation. While the findings have key implications for the use of long-exposure techniques in portraying racism, they may not fully reflect the broader scope of artistic practice and social narrative across different communities. Besides, the challenge of finding participants who were hesitant to share sensitive personal experiences of racial discrimination. Additionally, the subjectivity is potentially introduced by the application of an iterative and highly experimental art-based action research methodology employed in this research.

While this methodology strengthens analysis through the provision of detailed contextualised insights, it also generates challenges in replicability and generalisability. Moreover, the short period of the research project limited the ability to study the long-term impact of the visual interventions. Future research would be improved by longer research periods in order to establish the sustainability and evolving impact of long-exposure photography on audience perceptions and social attitudes. By merging technical exploration with creative expression, long-exposure photography stands as a compelling medium for social commentary and activism. I hope that this study not only adds a fresh perspective to the discourse on racism but also inspires others to explore the intersection of art, technology, and social justice.

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8. APPENDICES

8.1 Thesis Timeline

Date	Activity
<i>March-June 2024</i>	Topic selection, finding relevant topics to my interests
<i>June 2024</i>	Research plan, make a suitable research plan to meet the schedules without draining the interest
<i>July- September 2024</i>	Introduction, literature review and equipment collection for the photography workshop
<i>October-December 2024</i>	Methodology, data collection
<i>January 2025</i>	Artistic part exhibition, data analysis
<i>February 2025</i>	Polishing the writing phase
<i>March-April 2025</i>	Feedback, revision and finalising the thesis

8.2 Consent Form for the Artistic Project

INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Introduction:

The project, titled “*Visualizing Racism through Obscured Moments in Motion and Concept: A Conceptual Exploration and Process Using Long Exposure Photography*,” is an independent research study focusing on the role of motion photography in visual storytelling, particularly as it pertains to social issues like racism. This research aims to explore how obscured moments captured through motion photography can serve as a powerful narrative tool to highlight racial injustice and provoke critical thinking and reflection.

While this study will address racism as a social issue, its primary focus is on the process of motion photography itself—specifically, the techniques used to make visual narratives more expressive and impactful. By emphasizing the artistic methods and expressive potential of motion photography, this research will shed light on how photography can go beyond ordinary representation to create dynamic, stimulating imagery.

You have been invited to participate in this study led by *Amin Mä Fayssal*, Master’s Degree student, Sustainable Art & Design, from the University of Lapland, Finland. The information below outlines the study’s objectives and procedures. Please read this carefully and feel free to ask questions before deciding to participate.

The study aims to:

- Explore the power of photography in visual storytelling and how motion photography techniques can bring obscured moments to life.
- Identify and analyze obscured moments that convey deeper narratives related to racial injustice.
- Examine the significance of visual storytelling in raising awareness and understanding of social issues.
- Visualize racism through motion photography, exploring how imagery can make implicit bias and discrimination more visible.
- Encourage critical thinking and reflection on issues of race and social justice among viewers.
- Develop creative practices for visualizing complex social issues, contributing to the field of visual arts and activism.

What Participation Involves:

If you agree to participate, you will be involved in various activities associated with long exposure photography, which may include capturing, performing, creating, sharing, or discussing photographic works that depict social issues, with a specific focus on racism. This participation may take place in person or through digital means, depending on your location and preference.

Risks and Discomforts:

The participation in this study poses minimal risk and should not cause inconvenience or harm. However, if you feel any emotional discomfort while participating, especially when discussing sensitive topics, you may pause or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality Voluntary Participation:

Your identity and any personal information you provide will remain confidential, and all data collected during the study will be stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. In any publication resulting from this research, personal identifiers will not be disclosed without your explicit consent. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any point without any negative consequences.

Consent Statement:

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided above and consent to participate in this research. You agree to allow any collected data to be used for academic research and publication purposes, provided that all personal identifiers remain confidential.

Participant’s Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher’s Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This consent form ensures that participants understand the purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study. If you have any questions concerning your participation, you may contact: Amin Mä Fayssal | 3344071912 | ayad@lapland.fi@gmail.com

8.3 Feedback from Participants (Sustainability Portrait Project)

