

*“Keeping Art Alive in a Changing World”*  
*How one professor is teaching an early form of photography to a new generation*  
By Emery Carangio



Photograph by Joseph Della Valle

Professor Joseph Della Valle is an Adjunct Assistant Teaching Professor in the School of Arts and Humanities at UNE. The class he teaches, black and white film photography, is an old school art form that is losing popularity due to advancements in technology.

Della Valle was first introduced to photography at the age of 10. His mother had gotten injured and his older sister, an art student at the University of Maine, was left in charge of him for the summer. Della Valle’s sister was in a summer photography course at the time, and her professor allowed her to bring him along, but only if he participated.

“Seeing that first print come up in the developer, I was hooked.” Della Valle said.



Photograph by Joseph Della Valle

After his passion for photography was ignited by chance, Della Valle went on to obtain an art degree at the Maine College of Art. The same professor he met at 10 was head of the photography program there, and he continues to be a mentor in Della Valle's life today.

The art form Della Valle teaches has been around since the early 1800s. Since then there have been a multitude of advancements. With the emergence of the digital camera, film began to be considered a "dying art". This, however, did not steer Della Valle away from traditional black and white film photography.

"It's very tactile, and there's a classic look to it." says Della Valle.

Outside of the classroom, Della Valle stays involved in photography in many ways. His work has been exhibited regionally as well as being put on display in the UNE collection in Portland.

“It isn’t as much about selling as it is making.” says Della Valle. “I have to make.”

Della Valle also runs Safelight Studio, a community dark room located in Portland. He continues to teach outside of UNE by instructing workshops and refresher courses at his studio.



Photograph by Joseph Della Valle

The process of developing film is a tedious one that can be easily affected by many variables. Using too much of a chemical or not mixing the solutions correctly can ruin the photos the artist has spent so much time on. In his class, Della Valle makes sure his students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to ensure images come out well.

“Before this class, I had no clue how film worked,” says sophomore Giovanna Pallozzi. “And now I’m making prints that I am very proud of.”

Della Valle has been teaching for over 20 years, so he is familiar with being questioned on his choice to teach film photography specifically. He believes that digital photography takes away some of the creative components.

Della Valle says that “Film is about previsualization, you have to know your craft.”



Photograph by Joseph Della Valle

With the Maine Alzheimer's Association, Della Valle and other photographers came together to form Mind Eye Mentors Maine, a group focused on teaching photography to those struggling with dementia and Alzheimer's. Creativity is believed to help slow the progress of these diseases.

“We saw them blossom.” Della Valle says. “It was hard, but you would see a smile come across their face.”

While film photography is certainly not as popular as it used to be, Della Valle hopes that teaching this art form to a new generation will help keep it alive. He believes that everyone is creative and art should be a part of everyone's life in some way.

“No matter what you do, whether you're a doctor or lawyer or a nurse, everyone needs an outlet.” says Della Valle.