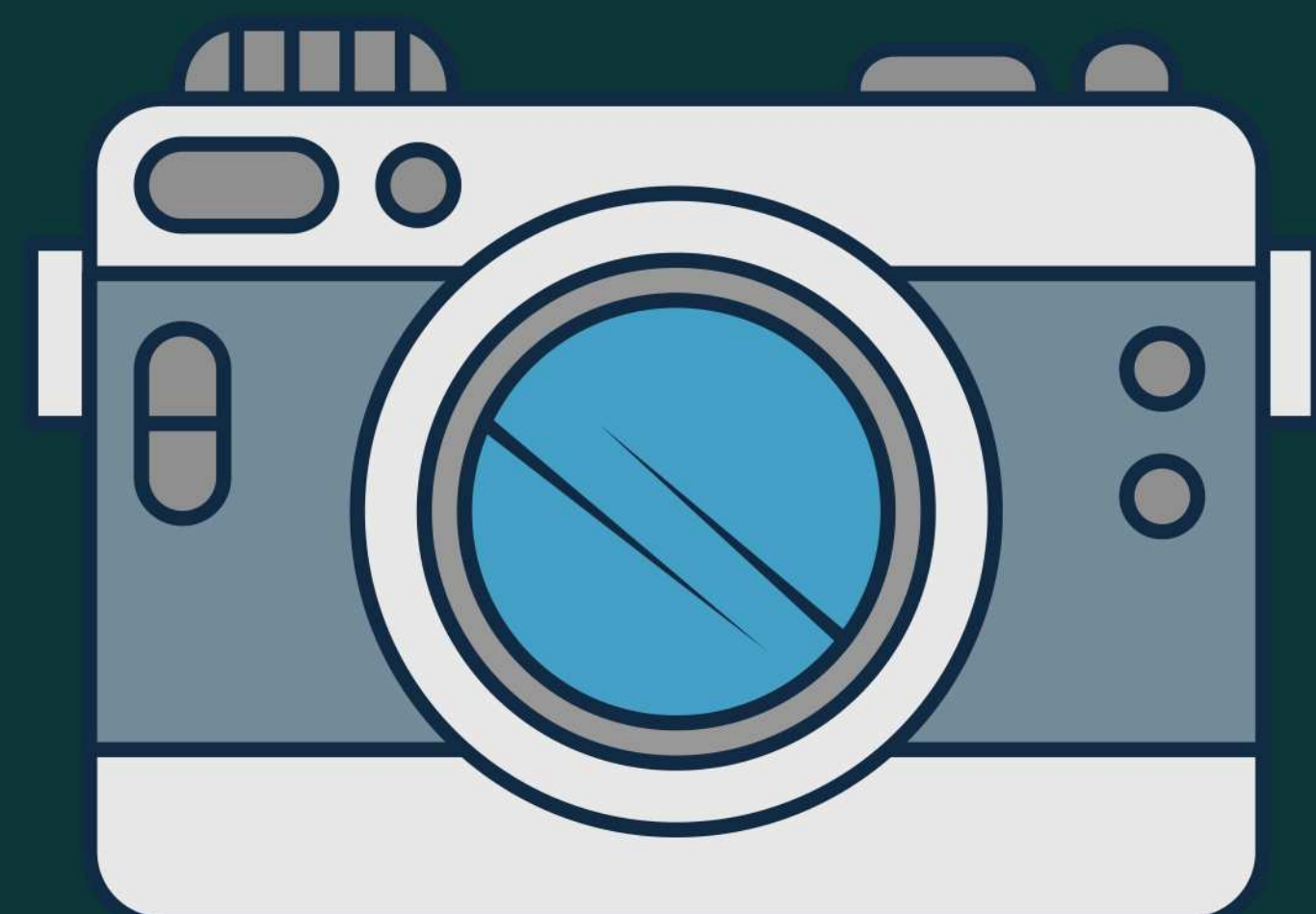# Artists and Identity: Spaces in Toronto through the lens of Photography

People, place, and production of art at the Hart House Camera Club

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Introduction

Working with student photographers at the Hart House Camera Club at the University of Toronto, this independent sociocultural anthropology research hones in on what it means to be a photographer in an artistic community by focusing on identity and placemaking.

Objective

- What role does art play in the lives of student photographers?
- How does photography affect or create identity, and how do space, place, and surroundings influence it?
- How do photographers adapt, embrace, or reject "Toronto"?
- How does identity and background play a role in one's photography?

Photo by: Jacob

"Being an artist, not just photography, that's all I want to be. I don't want to be anything else" – Masoud Riyazati

Methodology

- Ethnographic Interviews
- Participant observation
- Photovoice method

5 interviews, 7 observation events. Interviewees were asked to bring 3 of their photos, and discuss during the interview. This revealed a lot of hidden information by giving the participant the lead.

At the end of the research, there will be a collective online visual showcase, exhibiting the work of the photographers.

Key Questions

Photo by: Fozi

1. What is your interest in photography? Why do you choose to do it?
2. What do you think people (friends, family, fellow members) around you think of your photography? How do you tell?
3. Do you think your identity and background personally affect your relation to photography? How or how not?
4. Do you think Toronto is a good city for photographers?
5. How do you manage your interest in photography amidst school, work, and other responsibilities?
6. Do you feel like you are within a photography community? How does that affect your interest in photography?
7. Would you say you are well supported in your interest in photography? How or how not?
8. What do you hope to get out of your photography in the future?
9. To you, what does it mean to be an artist/photographer?

Analysis

Interviews and Photovoice

- Creating interviewee profiles
- Keywords and themes
- 3 important quotes
- Highlighting information related to research question
- Creating a table with responses to all questions

Observations

- Focusing on key moments from all observation notes
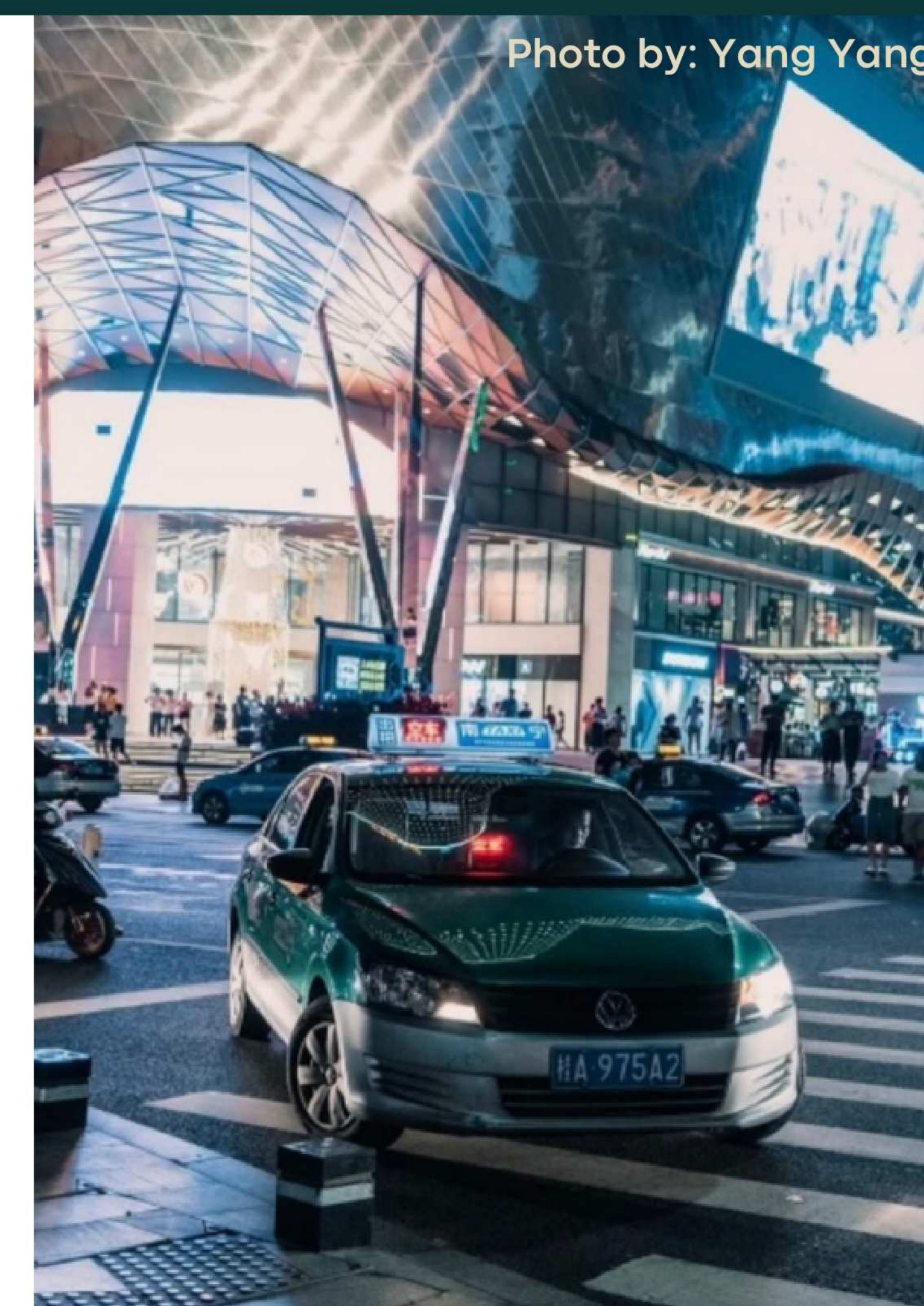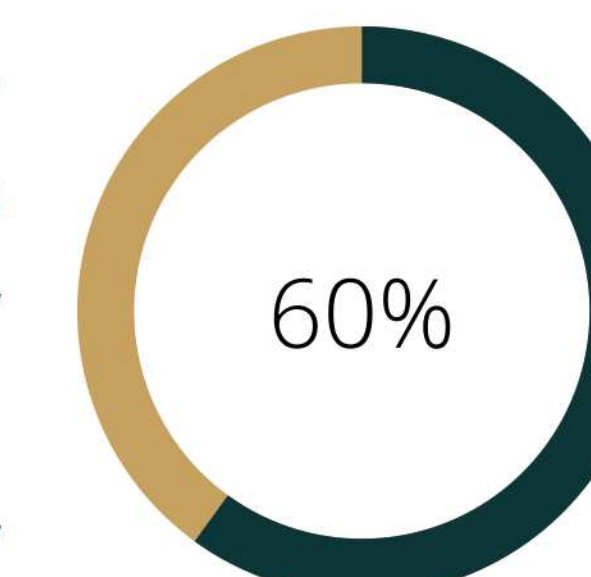- Elaborating and connecting with research question and interviews

Photo by: Yang Yang

3/5 interviewees felt like they had a community — 60%

4 male, 1 female interviewee
Gendered divide?

Do you think your identity and background personally affect your relation to photography?

Each Participant had a different response to this question:

- Privilege
- Loneliness and emotional self
- Internet culture
- Migration experience as mature student
- Lack of political activism as ethnically "white"

Ongoing results

3 Key findings

Photos by: Fozi

Socioeconomic Status
Technicalities and access to equipment
Access to resources and people
Knowledge production
Finances and privelege

Inspiration vs. Influence
Intersectionality, identity, and upbringing
"I don't care what other people think" vs. "I love attention"
Subjectivity, criticism, and judgement - "good photo"
Age, experience, and authencity
"I don't consider myself a photographer"

Self (re)presentation

Lack of community
Support from family, friends, and institutions
Communication, collaboration, and openness
Relational to other artistic discipline
Family background
Migration and movement
Skill level divide

Community

More detail discovered through a creative, inclusive approach rather than only "classic" anthropological research methods

Anthropological knowledge beyond academia through visual anthropology

Photo by: Madeleine

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All photo credits to the respective interviewees.