

60-SECOND EXPOSURE

Contemporary artist **Diana Nicholette Jeon** talks to Tracy Calder about taking risks, being mistaken for an entertainment critic and the importance of believing in yourself and your ideas.

What does photography mean to you?

I can't answer that question all that well, and it doesn't bother me that I can't. Simply this: I like it. It allows me to say something I want to communicate with my art.

Describe your style in three words.

Eclectic, forlorn, content-driven.

What is your favourite photographic book?

Transformational Imagemaking: Handmade Photography Since 1960 by Robert Hirsch.

Tell us about a photographic opportunity you have missed.

Missing deadlines for a show I wanted to enter, not having yet applied for a Guggenheim [Fellowship], not finishing the application for a residency I would've liked to get... to name a few.

Tell us your favourite photographic quote.

'Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary.'

– Cecil Beaton

What's the biggest risk you have taken as a photographer?

Almost all of my work is a risk in some way. I change what I do to suit the idea, which many people think is unwise. For me, however, the interaction between concept, content and media is crucial.

Name one item (aside from a camera) that every photographer should own.

It's not an item, but it is something I feel every photographer or artist should have. It's a strong sense of who they are as an artist and why

they're making what they make.

Tools, to me, are icing on the cake. You might be surprised at what you can do with a lack of tools, but it's not surprising when someone who doesn't understand why they do what they do fails to make work that inspires.

Who would you most like to collaborate with?

Doug and Mike Starn, because I love the aesthetic they cultivate (messy, torn, taped etc), as well as their willingness to push boundaries. Aline Smithson, because her work is beautiful and personal. Ann Hamilton, because she makes the most fabulous installations. Process is an integral part of her work (as it is for mine), and she seamlessly crosses different media. Lynn Yamamoto, because she makes installations about issues dear to my heart. And Enrique Martinez Celaya. When I heard him speak when I

was an undergrad, he made me sit up and say, 'Aha, bingo' when he talked about the importance of media as an integral part of his work. That lecture changed my view of art and how I go about making it.

What is your worst photographic habit?

Not organising and correctly cataloguing images soon after shooting – it always leaves me hunting around for the image I want.

Tell us one thing most people don't know about you.

I used to live and work in the Silicon Valley. My then boyfriend and I attended a Jay Leno show at a comedy club in the East Bay Area of San Francisco. When we joined the line to get in, the person checking off names pulled us out of line and ushered us to the front row centre seats. Jay played to us all night, interacting with me several times, but avoiding everyone else at the same table. We couldn't figure out what had caused our great fortune, so my boyfriend asked about it on the way out. The door person looked at me and said, 'Aren't you the entertainment critic for the San José paper?' Someone had obviously made an error. Jay and his management must have been disappointed that the critic, who probably didn't have great seats, never wrote up the show.

What has been your most embarrassing moment as a photographer?

I think most of my embarrassing moments are in my personal life, not my work life. If I had to say something, I would say making a poor impression due to typos when submitting a professional application.

What would you say to your younger self?

Don't worry about not going

to art school directly from high school – you have nothing to say as an artist yet. When the time is right for you, you will find your pathway back to art and make whatever mark you are meant to make because you will have lived enough to have things you want to talk about via the work.

Who would join you in your ultimate camera club (dead or alive)?

Personally, I don't believe in the concept of camera clubs. It's been my experience that the gatekeepers focus too much on gear and mastery of traditional formal aspects than creativity and content/concept. I feel they kill creativity before it starts. Sorry if this offends anyone – I know that some people might have had a more positive experience than me.

Which exhibition could you have spent a month in?

It's not a photography exhibition, but I saw Ann Hamilton's 'at hand' the day it was closing at the Hirschhorn Museum in Washington DC in 2004. It was an incredible experience.

What single thing would improve your photography?

Having stronger technical skills would, of course, be great. I can make Photoshop (or any app) do what I want, but I am not a 'technical' photographer in the traditional sense. I have always cared more about ideas and their expression than the mechanics of photography and gear.

The worst thing about being a professional photographer is...

I've never carried out any commercial or 'for hire' work. I've always been an artist working with lens-based and mixed media, making what I want. So, while I am a professional, I consider myself to be an artist. I don't know what challenges 'professional' photographers face in the course of their day, but I imagine some are very unpleasant.

Diana Nicholette Jeon is an award-winning contemporary artist who lives and works in Honolulu. Her work has been shown in both solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally. Diana has an MFA from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and writes a weekly column called 'Poignant Pics' for One Twelve Publications. Diana has been featured in LensCulture, Diffusion, SHOTS Magazine and the Art Photo Index, among others.

■ To see more, visit diananicholettejeon.com and Instagram @diananicholettejeon.



The Cloud and the Hope



The Sinking and the Fear



The Suspicion and the Lie