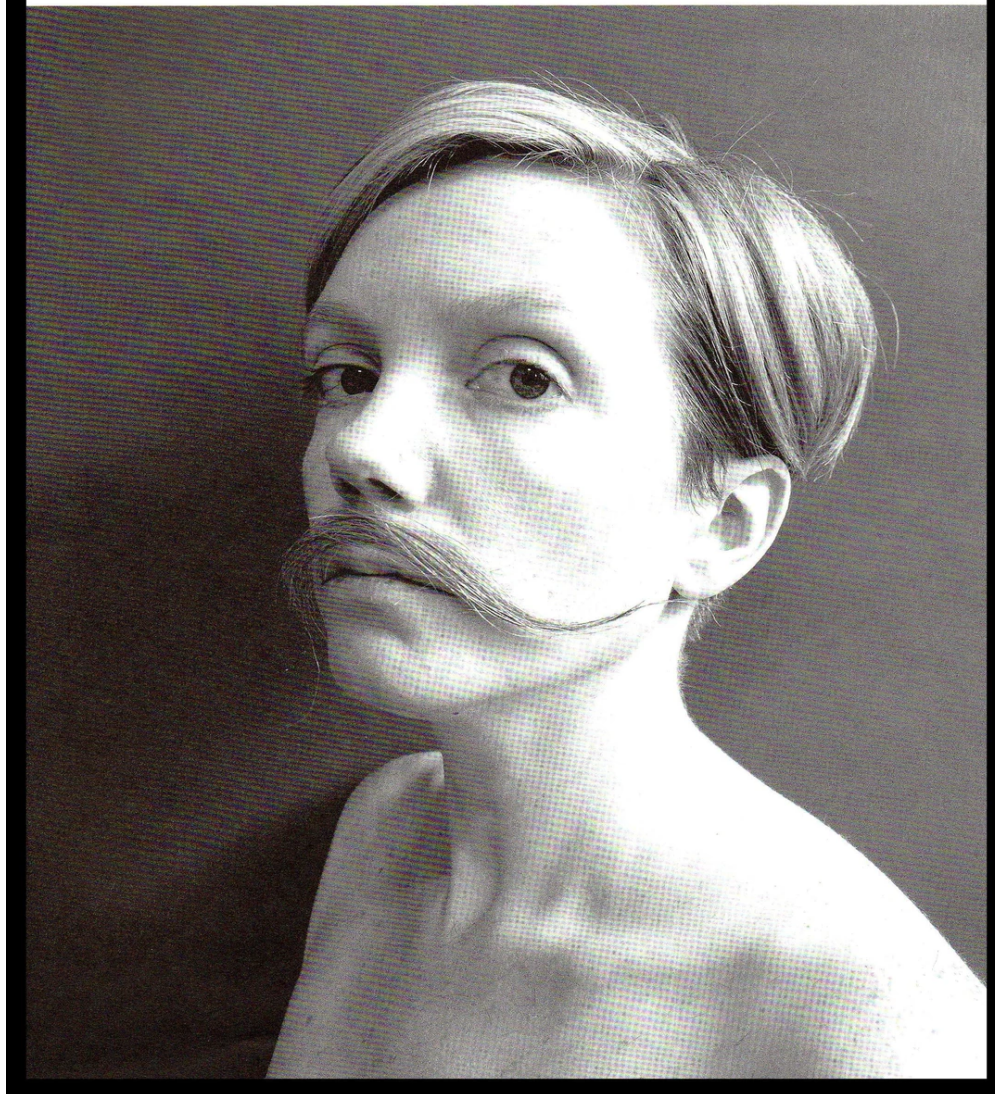




SHOTS

ISSUE NO. 139 : SPRING 2018 : SELF-PORTRAITS



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FEATURES:

Artist Interview: Andre Wagner

Emerging Photographer: Diana Nicholette Jeon

Artist Spotlight : Russell Joslin

EMERGING PHOTOGRAPHER: **Diana Nicholette Jeon** ↪

-Interview by Douglas Beasley



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Volume II. #4: The Wind and the Sky, Volume I. #3: The Snow and the Watcher, Volume II. #3: The Sea and the Forest, Volume II. #2: The Girl and the Hotel

All images © Diana Nicholette Jeon

Diana is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Honolulu, Hawaii. She has had quite a busy year so far with numerous features, exhibits and publications featuring her work. Diana finds unique ways of presenting her photography, which I thought SHOTS readers would appreciate. The photos we chose for this issue were placed inside of Altoids tins, giving them a very unusual, yet because of their small size, very intimate feel.

DOUGLAS BEASLEY: What was your introduction to fine-art based photography?

DIANA NICHOLETTE JEON: I don't know if I ever had something as formal as an introduction. My dad had attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He was an extremely talented metal sculptor who could take a flat sheet of copper, and make it into an exact 3-d likeness of any given person. Although he did not practice as an artist during my lifetime, he maintained his lifelong love of all things art. He would take my sister and me to the museum several times a year. He subscribed to the photography magazines of his day, of course, Life, too. (Who didn't?) He used to use his camera to take pictures of family, but he was usually going for a more arty shot, and I used to listen to him describe to other adults why he shot something as he looked through the negatives and prints that came back from FotoMat. So, I think it was just something that was always there, like air and breathing.

How and why did you start exploring alternative processes?

I had always wanted to do them, and when I was in grad school at UMBC from 2003-06 I got the chance to learn from Chris Peregoy, who was on my thesis committee and is a master, literally, of all things photo. I learned to modify cameras, which gave me the courage to attach lenses to my iPhone in the current day. I learned to make digital negatives, and to do Cyano, Van Dyke and Salt, plus some things like a motion film made entirely of liquid light work. Now, without a studio or a darkroom, my explorations here are left to wax, mixed-media, and transfers.

How did you come across the idea of using Altoid tins for your tintypes? Did it take a while to achieve success printing them?

This might seem dumb, but I started working with them because I was mad at the restrictions one show was putting on work. I felt like they were saying, "Work MUST be matted with X borders in a frame and it must be a high-quality frame, hence we would like to suggest you use such and such place," got me upset. Because first, not everyone can afford the top of the line framing, and second, because not all works fit into a traditional presentation. So, I set out one night to make something that would not. The tins emerged as a venue because they spoke to the ideas of how people collect memories. I wasn't very confident about this work, but it got a great reception overnight, when Paula Tognarelli asked to put one in the Griffin for the new Artist Book Initiative. Most feedback on these has been positive, though some reviewers from Critical Mass felt they were too close to others working with tins. Personally, I disagree, because my reason for using wax and tins was specifically tied to the ideas of dreams and memories. But there it was. I will continue using tins as I build this series out more. For other work, I would use them only if they fit the ideas of the content. I am, however, really interested in the mana of materials, so will continue to explore ideas in alternative presentation for projects as it suits any given one.

What are your artistic fears?

My greatest one was always that my work would never get any attention, that it would not make it into any important collections. A few years back, that changed when the State of Hawaii bought two of my works from a local juried exhibition. What's funny is that it took me another year and a half to realize, "You have met your goal! Your goal was to have your work live somewhere where other people would see it, beyond your lifetime. You did it! Everything, and I mean *everything* else beyond this, is gravy on that. Just keep going."

Has living in Hawaii influenced your photography? If so, how?

Yes. The colors here affect my outlook, sometimes I embrace them and sometimes I choose to negate them entirely, so as not to look so "postcard-y." But also, I think sometimes it has just been affected by the cultural values here, too. Ways of looking at culture by locals is different than someone from the mainland looks at the same issues. That comes out in the work, both in the look and the ideas.

How do you keep developing and growing as an artist?

Usually I look at a LOT of work, and I do both online videos on techniques, and online classes or videos on ideas. Laura Valenti's classes have been helpful to me, because they are concept-based rather than content, she is willing to give tough feedback if you ask for it and are ready for it, and her classes are very affordable. Living in HI is expensive, so there are financial barriers that keep me from attending many of the openings to meet people that way, or taking classes with people where the cost is out of my budget and the venue does not offer financial aid.

Anything else I should ask you but haven't?

Yes. What would I tell my younger self? And I would say, "You keep going, keep making. The teacher arrives when the student is ready. The student gets ready by doing. That perseverance and belief in yourself will be your greatest asset." ■

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