

Deborah Samuel, Canada

“Photography is the use of light as a conduit to revealing realities.”

By Chris Schmidtke

New technologies and media have enabled people to stay in contact with one another and to share ideas in an unprecedented way during the present pandemic. They are also an outlet for creatives. The sheer mass of people entangled in this ever-expanding dance means that one can only experience a tiny fraction of all the work that is out there.

Although I had not known Deborah Samuel or her work before, in the short time we have been in contact she has captivated me with her way of photographing her environment. But let us start with some basic information about her.



DOG.Twyla Rose.II



DOG.Eve.II

The basics

Deborah has lived in cities including Toronto, New York, London, and Los Angeles, but also spent time in New Mexico and currently resides in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada. She has done work on landscapes, portraits, animals, abstracts — really anything that lets her tell a visual story. She started out doing commissions, but has gravitated in recent years towards fine art photography, where she can more freely express her thoughts.

I think it was the Hungarian-born photographer and painter László Moholy-Nagy who said, “The illiterate of the future will be the person ignorant of the use of the camera as well as the pen.” It has become fashionable in 2020 to call oneself a storyteller (especially in the realm of social media), while a large portion of those individuals do not actually have much of a story to tell. However, looking at Deborah’s photographs, I quickly realized that I am not merely looking at images, and these were no happy accidents. There was something more to them — a story.



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She is not after the literal representations of subjects, but more interested in the themes and questions she is pursuing through the visual medium. Nonetheless, she is very much aware of the forms within her frames, which can be observed in her series on dogs. Long before the square format became popular in the online community through apps like Instagram, she used her Hasselblad's 6x6 frame to play with abstraction and negative space to create a great composition leading to a kind of rhythm.

Like many fine art photographers, Deborah likes to produce series of works rather than a single image. "I am interested in telling a story – the various facets of an underlying question are expressed in a theme which needs a body of work to express the various levels of thought behind it."

She has no fixed timeline for her personal projects, though. She shot the series "Artifact" in just a few weeks, but her work with dogs has continued for 20 years. For other projects, she doesn't even see an end point.



FASHION.Zapata.5

The tools

It seems Deborah picks instruments for creating her photographs like she picks her projects: if it feels right and if it can capture what she is trying to show and tell, she will use it. Thus, her tools range from the classic Hasselblad loaded with a roll of Kodak TriX to an iPhone— and even a scanner.

"I use whatever instrument suits the question that I'm exploring. All methods of capturing imagery are legitimate in the expression of photographic art."

This is something more photographers could focus on (pardon the pun): question your methods and analyze what you actually want to accomplish, don't confine yourself to certain equipment. Freeing yourself up to look at new ways of making images takes emphasis away from the hardware and puts it on what's really important: the body of work and the idea one wants to convey.

For her series on animals, her medium of choice has been her analog Hasselblad, as it gives her consistent image quality, and TriX can be processed to get the look she is after.



VENUS PASSAGE.Backbone

Also, because of her familiarity with the system she can concentrate on the moment and the subject and not be distracted by the intricacies of today's high-end systems with their countless possibilities. I guess it also shows that when you have been using film for over 40 years, you develop a deep understanding of the medium and it becomes second nature to you. This, in turn, lets you capture your vision more freely.

Like many analog photographers, Deborah loves the feeling of the camera and the film which is something which cannot be reproduced by any digital system.

This type of photography can sensitize you to all the different stages that are necessary to create actual physical images, from exposing the film to the final print. This, in essence, leads to a different appreciation of photography.

On Reality

One of the things that makes Deborah's work interesting is the fact that she uses film in her professional work. I asked her what she thought of the current renaissance of film photography and whether the analog lifestyle fulfills the desire within people to surround themselves with real things as opposed to the



PASSING.Root.Peony.3

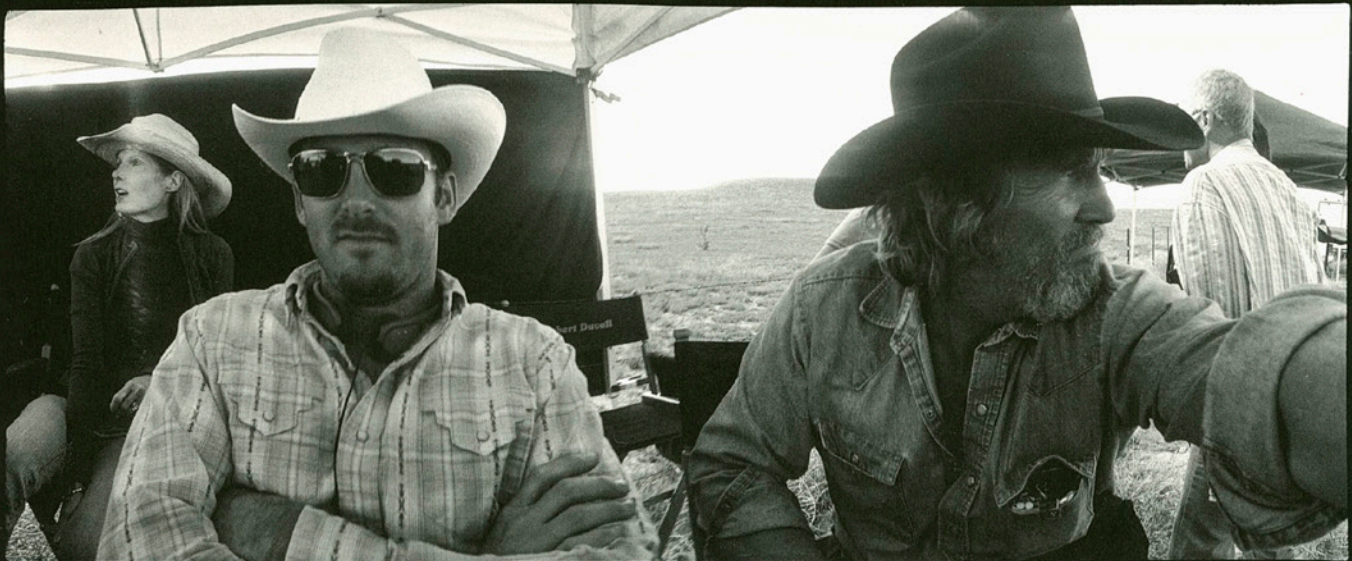
intangible digital counterpart, be it vinyl records, real books, or film photography.

She picked up on the word "real" and wondered how our sense of reality is actually tempered by our experiences in life. As a viewer, you feel that she as the photographer is in the frame, with her thoughts and her experiences. How you react to any of her images is completely up to you. You might be awestruck by her sublime landscape photographs from 'Elementals' or amused by the noses and faces of the dogs she photographed. But no matter which one it is, you definitely feel something.

In the end, this is something many photographers are after – creating images with several layers for the viewers to explore and to reach them on an emotional level. Photographers want to create their own version of reality to express their thoughts and ideas through this visual medium. And the more the photographer puts himself within the frame, the more interesting it gets.

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