

Thomas Scharenborg

Art Autobiography

When I was 11 years old my aunt Mary, who was a professional portrait photographer, gave me my first camera: a *Honeywell Spotmatic* 35mm film camera. She explained to me:

“Today our goal is to learn ways to see the light of the world from a new perspective!”

The first roll of film I ever shot was out at the Trail of Tears State Park in Cape Girardeau, Missouri where I learned how to shoot Kodachrome 64 slide film. I learned how to imagine a geometric frame around my desired image, and how to consider the elements within a scene, and how their composition would fit the space. I was taught about how to adjust the exposure with a goal to enrich color saturation in landscape photos. This was one of the advantages of beginning photography with Kodachrome; when the image received too much light, it would become “thin”. I began to understand that too much *or* not enough light on the film were both detrimental to achieving a beautiful image. There was a delicate balance to working with light. In hindsight, I realize I was also given a lesson in abstract expression, and how to identify good compositions that make the photograph intriguing, in terms of recognizing line, form, shape, and texture. After that experience I was very quickly introduced to the world of professional portraiture and would assist my aunt when she would be taking pictures of people for their senior high school portrait, and for couples who were engaged to be married. My aunt Eleanor (everyone called her “Sweetie”) was also a professional photographer, and she helped me work through her resources from the New York Institute of Photography Master Course in Professional Photography while I was a teenager. We began working in Sweetie’s darkroom, with black-and-white developing and printing processes, to learn how to bring light into a camera and finish with an enlargement or

print. I also worked with my uncle Everett, who worked at the local newspaper (The Southeast Missourian) where I learned how to work with color negative films.

During high school I signed up to take every newspaper, yearbook, and journalism course which was available. I was involved in production of the newspaper and yearbook for all four years of high school. Our Senior yearbook was awarded as a top-ten publication through the University of Missouri-Columbia (Mizzou) Department of Journalism Highschool design competition in 1989. I ultimately went to college at Mizzou to pursue a degree in Optical Physics. At this point in my life, I was so inspired by photography, and had the opportunity to take so many photos, that I began to question the science behind the art-- and how the film in particular was really registering the light, to record the image. Obtaining the degree helped my mind go full circle: from abstract expression to the science of the image.

While attending college, I worked at Columbia Photo & Video, where I became the lab manager. I worked directing a staff of approximately 20 designers and photographers. We offered full service professional photographic laboratory products and processes to the mid Missouri region. This was a meaningful time in my career because I had to learn about other professionals' preferences, in terms of composition, theme, and style-- which in turn gave me an opportunity to develop my own sense of style within the medium, and my personal artwork.

I began teaching Photography with Columbia photo, the MSA-GPC craft studio at Mizzou, Access Arts school of service, and William Jewell University. This helped me gain confidence in my work and ability. I was able to collaborate with fellow artists, participate in exhibitions, and dive deeper in the themes and stories captured in my work. I was honored to be invited as a juror for the photo competition at the Boone County Fair during that time as well. This was a humbling moment in that I realized my opinion was respected, and it also challenged me to

continue to work hard at learning how to express myself through my photographic images in new ways. I specifically recall some of the photos submitted were reflections of objects as seen through a mirrored surface. This was a concept I had explored previously, but it seemed more intriguing to see how another person takes those pictures and talks about the energy they perceive in the reflection. We can see many aspects of the world around us, portrayed in terms of their point of view; yet we seem to gravitate towards that shared/ similar point of view, from a unique vantage point, to create a moment of peace and contemplation within the serenity of the scene.

With this theme/thesis in mind, I began integrating those concepts into my art, and was also fortunate to get paid to photograph the national balloon races event for Canon Camera Corporation. It was an awe-inspiring gig! It helped me feel successful with my artistic endeavors. I continued to work as a professional photographer working with portraiture, weddings, events, sports photography, aerial photography, commercial photography, and occasional exhibitions of my abstract work. I collaborated with an artist during this time to create a series of abstract expression images entitled "Emergence". We explored the question of how to represent humanity as we enter and exit the reality of life & awareness, during 21 stages of our psychological existence. I feel like I wanted to just bring this experience up because it was meaningful to me-- and it did help me reflect on the question of: "What is Art?" and about artistic expression... what art means to you, as opposed to what it means to the viewer of your work; it is the hope of conveying your thoughts through images, instead of words, to share a common feeling or idea.

I continued my full-time work in the photo industry and became a National Director of Photography for a private dance-arts, performing arts, and martial arts schools photography

service company. We managed all image – based services for over 75 clients from across the U.S. I enjoyed my time with this company, but I also realized that traveling constantly wasn't my thing, and realized after about 3 1/2 years of it, I needed to stay settled down in one place, to be happy. I settled in Rocheport, Missouri and began working as a full-time staff photographer with Mizzou. I took photos mostly for the recreation services department, as well as with the department of Art and Archaeology. I am currently on retainer with M.U. as an event photographer. Today, I can reflect on those beautiful moments of capturing inspiring scenes through photography. (Especially my experiences from New York, and the photographs of the Statue of Liberty... and seeing the Christo & Jeanne-Claude installation work of *The Gates* in Central Park in 2005.) I have also considered how to define “Art” based on inspiration that I get from visiting museums, and how much I loved visiting in particular: the Ontario, Canada MOMA, the Chicago MOMA, the National Gallery of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., and the MIHO Museum in Shigaraki, Japan. These places have all been meaningful to me by considering that art will evoke a response from the viewer. You may enjoy the emotion derived from the experience, or you may not... but you will always walk away from powerful artwork having felt something...

Growing up immersed in a photographic family, and working full-time with photography jobs for over 30 years, has helped to establish my foundations and perception of visual art. The goal and hope in taking this course is to use that foundation to help guide students towards the arts, and to help them learn artistic methods to effectively express themselves to others. I want to leave the space better than when I found it; share what I have learned with the next generation; and pay it forward!

I currently live and work with my wife Yukari Kashihara, who has a M.F.A. in Ceramics and Art History from the University of Missouri-Columbia. We own and operate a full-time fine art gallery in Rocheport, Missouri ([www.shirahaze.com](http://www.shirahaze.com)) where we both continue to create one-of-a-kind fine art in 2-D & 3-D. I am currently working on an exhibition of images which celebrate the Spirit of Japan in our Modern World.