

Words & Pictures

Mutterhood profiles one writer or photographer in each issue to peek into the creative process and find out what influences and inspires them. Our first artist is photographer:

Jody Magrady



Describe the type of work you do.

I don't use manipulation in my photography, either in the darkroom or with the computer. When I did darkroom work exclusively, I mostly worked in black and white. Currently the digital work is mostly color. I rarely do portraits, but enjoy doing street photography, which involves making photos in public places, of people one does not know and who often do not know they are being photographed.

I am especially attracted to marks, patterns and colors made when elements and nature interact. Most of the projects I am currently working on address this and have fairly abstract elements, while still suggesting a narrative, either fictional or actual.

What is your background?

I am the oldest of five children and was raised in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. I've lived in cities, suburbs, small towns and on a 180-acre farm. I got my first Brownie camera in third grade and really never stopped making photographs.

I came to Chicago right out of college (Valparaiso University) and began work at an insurance company, learning Information Systems analysis on the job. As an adult I searched for a creative outlet, but soon learned I preferred being on the viewfinder side of the camera. I got a Canon AE-1 and took leisure classes on how to use it, then night classes at Columbia College Chicago. I eventually earned my MFA in photography from the University of Illinois at Chicago. While there, I began studying photography and was lucky enough to have bosses who supported my studies.

Once I retired from the insurance company, I supported myself doing part-time systems consulting and also began teaching photography at the Evanston Art Center, The Art Center in Highland Park, and eventually at Columbia College Chicago. In 2008 I retired from all



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paying jobs, but continued hanging with my adult ed students, who I then and now consider friends and critics.

When I started making photos, everything was darkroom-based and I have a full darkroom at home. Today, I mostly use the digital darkroom: a Canon D-SLR, Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 4, Adobe Photoshop CS6, and an Epson printer.

I count myself lucky to have both a computer systems and photography background.

Who would have thought the two paths would merge someday?

What does a typical work day look like?

I don't have a typical day, but may have a typical week. If it is winter, I usually work on photos I have already made. If it is warm out, I may go out shooting. (I also plan my vacations around shooting.) If I have a show coming up, I am reviewing, editing, printing, matting and framing. As long as the image can be printed on 13" x 19" paper, I don't outsource any part of the process. Then there is the concomitant writing: titling work, artist statement, etc. It is sometimes hard to switch

from the visual to verbal work and back.

Like most jobs, my workday is influenced by the highest priority. I do try to have both a short-range and a long-range plan, stay organized and keep from being overwhelmed.

What is your creative process?

I feel I am as much a teacher as an artist. One of my desires has always been to facilitate the creative process in adults through photography. I even wrote about it in my master's thesis. I hope I can pass on as much as I receive.

When I was teaching, I was lucky enough to have two very accomplished Adult Ed groups. Since retiring, I meet with them generally each week, now as peers and friends. I am grateful I have them for mutual critiques, support, encouragement and prodding. My work would not be as strong, nor would I work as hard, without their input.

I am still a student, too. I take classes, look at photographs, read books, go to lectures and visit museums



“As an infant, my mom would put my carriage under trees for listening and looking”

and galleries just to keep absorbing, learning and thinking. Chicago is a great city for a photography student!

What else inspires you? Any favorite places or books?

For peace and serenity, I love being in the woods, especially in the Appalachian Mountains where I grew up. There is nothing more calming to me than the smell of rich earth, with the wind soughing in the high tree branches and the birds providing treble notes.

My favorite city? Paris Je t'aime! I bring my heart, my

“I’m interested in capturing my feelings about what I see (funny, poignant, heart-soaring) and bringing this back to share with others.”

camera and my curiosity. I take away inspiration and a soaring happiness from the walks, museums, cathedrals, parks, flea markets and even the creative graffiti. It is a photographer’s dream.

Describe your latest project.

One of my lifetime projects is photographing trees. As an infant, my mom would put my carriage under trees for listening and looking, and tree was one of my first words. Several years ago, I had a show at Woman Gallery, called “Soul Tree”.

I am also working on two long-term series, which I am going to hold close for a while longer.

If you weren’t taking photos now, what would you like to be doing?

I would still be making photographs, but traveling the country in a camper van and volunteering at national parks.

Resolutions, yes or no? Any you’d like to share?

Yes! My 2012 resolution was the word generous (with time, friendship, myself, money and treating as much as I can given my fixed income). I feel I did well on that; as I look back, it seems it is integrated now.

The year before, my resolution was to give up swearing, unless I stub my toe or am very scared. I allow myself to have one slip a day, note it, and make sure that was it. I don’t swear that much now, I have managed that too.

*Photography is visual dialogue.
Between the artist’s private and public selves.
Between the artist and viewer.*

*Resulting in a dialogue
Between the viewer’s public and private selves.*

*Setting up a path for dialogue
From the viewer to the artist.*

To heal the pain of separation.

--Jody Magrady



Jody Magrady is a Chicago-based photographer and teacher. Her creative influences include:

Photographers:

[Garry Winogrand](#)

[Lee Friedlander](#)

[Joe Jachna](#)

[Holly Roberts](#)

[Sally Mann](#)

[Art Sinsabaugh](#)

[Ralph Gibson](#)

[Stephen Shore](#)

[Henri Cartier-Bresson](#)

Visual artists:

[Annette Messager](#) -
contemporary French
multi-media artist

[Emily Carr](#) -
painter

[June Wayne](#) -
printmaker & tapestry designer