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St. Louis

Now on View: Kat Reynolds' "Ask Her How She's Doing" at beverly

Stefene Russell / March 8, 2016



Katherine Simone Reynolds

Kat Reynolds' photographs somehow manage to feel mysterious, approachable, adventurous, friendly, magical, melancholic, and warm all at once. They speak in a multitude of languages. Some feel completely of the moment; others feel like they are documenting another time, or even another parallel universe, as if she had traveled through time and space with her trusty N65 in tow. Mostly, she is deeply curious about

people, and curious about the world—and it shows in her work.

Last Saturday, her first solo show, *Ask Her How She's Doing*, opened at beverly; we spoke to her by email about her work as a whole, and the new exhibit in particular.

You studied dance at Webster. When did you begin working with photography? How does modern dance inform what you do as a visual artist?

I began working on photography in a curious manner while studying abroad in Vienna, Austria my senior year of college and ever since I have been trying to figure out how to correlate the two in my work. I love both of these art forms for different reasons, but I mainly enjoy what they both teach me about people. People are different when being put on a stage or in front of a camera, and that's what keeps me attached to them.

Speaking of which – can you talk about the experience of photographing dancers at the ImPulsTanz festival in Vienna?

Describing my experience working for ImPulsTanz was a marathon at a sprinter's pace. I've never worked so hard in my life, between shooting events starting at 2 a.m., to working with crazy talented artists in world renown museums; I've never held onto my resilience so tightly. It was an amazing opportunity that I will forever cherish.

Your work also has a very narrative element to it—your website describes your practice as conceptual storytelling through portrait and architectural photography. Can you talk a bit about the stories you are hoping to tell?

Lately, I've been looking back on my past work and realize my infatuation with "the hidden agenda" or the innards of the subjects' emotional state. I enjoy intimacy, even from a distance and I believe my work lends itself more to melancholy. Since my work evolves a lot depending on my state of mind (anxious, confident, depressed) I don't really know what kind of stories I'm hoping to tell.

It seems like the experiences in Vienna were a partial inspiration for SOFTen, which explores black male sensuality. The whole process of creating those portraits seems steeped in not just movement, but ritual.

Can you talk about this process of creating an environment that mimics the sort of mood you are striving to capture in the photographs?

Environment is a big part of my process, I like raw spaces that I can build on in some type of way. Whether I'm constructing a backdrop or utilizing a prop found in the space, the need for the proper energy is very important. Definitely a make or break for me.

It strikes me that both the NOVA salon project and the project with Sarah Stallmann might have had a similar spirit to it, where there was a lot of preparation and ritual (specifically connected to styling/beauty) which in turn informed the mood of the photographs. Can you talk a bit about those experiences?

These shoots were definitely a new way of working for me at the time, since I never really did fashion photography before then. It created more pressure for me to get the right shot in order to showcase the talent each of component of the shoot, which I love. Pressure means you care, and compassion is essential when working with other artists.

Can you talk a bit about "The Divide" at Blank Space, and how visitors responded and interacted with the work in that exhibition?

This was my first time showing work to an audience outside of dance, and I thank the lovely women of The Clothesline for an incredible way to start my career. "The Divide" is a look at the two lives living on either side of the Delmar divide from a socio-economic view. Using multiple exposures to showcase the difference of housing one life lives north of Delmar to the latter on the southern side. Saint Louis has been a divided city since the get, it was structured that way with gated communities and redlining to keep the poor black people out and opening the gates for the white and affluent. And they reside just blocks away from one another.

The title of your show at Beverly is Ask Her How She's Doing. Can you talk a little bit about how the title relates to the work in the show?

Ask Her How She's Doing deals with black female depression and touches on the superwoman complex. Instead of asking a black woman how we are doing, there is this assumption of we are incapable of feeling anything because "we are so strong." This show is to create more awareness regarding mental health in the black community and creating a safe place for black women to remember that their feelings are valid and they are deserving of happiness. This show is extremely personal for me, having battled with depression as well as suffering from anxiety for years. I've learned a lot about myself by talking about my problems with people who I've found emotional refuge in, which I never really understood until I couldn't internalize any more.

Can you talk a little bit about the images in the show?

All of the images were taken a year ago, when I decided to go out and ask black women on the street how they were doing that day. All images are film

portraits that I shot on my N65, my love if only I could afford to shoot film all the time, LOL. Some of the images are from shoots I organized with women I met over the Internet, and one image is of a dear friend of mine. Different age ranges, different levels of emotion, but all black women that hadn't been asked how they were doing that day by someone who wanted to know how their mental state was.

Anything else you would like to say about the show, or your work?

I am extremely proud of myself, this is my first solo gallery show and I want to share this day with every single person that believed I could do this. Fort Gondo was the first gallery that I emailed to show my work in about three years ago when I started out with photography, not really understanding how these things work, LOL. And now 3 years later, I'm having a solo show here and it's such an amazing feeling. I met Cole Lu at the closing reception of her solo show at Gondo about a year and a half ago, and now she's curating Ask Her How She's Doing. It's all kinda surreal, I knew I'd do this just not with such personal work. I'm honored to be able to be vulnerable in the space, it's a blessing.