Q: Any other advice you can give to young artists and photographers?

A: If you have any integrity, don’t lose it. You don’t have to do anything but make your work.

Q: Why did you get a degree in sculpture?

A: Even though I was in the photography department at RISD, I always made objects and installations. I never really showed a straight photograph until my exhibition in late 2009. I continued doing sculpture, performance, installation, and ephemeral works when I first moved to New York. For grad school, I had only one requirement—that I not have to leave New York. I didn’t want a summer camp experience. I wanted to keep my job and apartment and life outside of grad school. Columbia was a good fit for me, and I applied under the rubric of “Sculpture and New Genres,” which made more sense for my work. I would have never gotten into a straight photo program with my work.

Q: The other photographer we’re featuring in this issue, Anthony Goicolea, also studied sculpture in addition to photography. Your work is of course very different, but how has sculpture benefited your approach to photography?

A: Actually, when I first saw Anthony’s work, I was at a random Miami art fair (pre-Basel) in 1999. It was at the RARE gallery booth. I became quite obsessed with his work and got all of my classmates interested in him too. It was the early days of websites, and Anthony had a website. So even though he didn’t have a catalogue or slides in the slide library, we could see his work. As a side-note: for most of my youth and education, we only had access to artists work via catalogues in the library, major art magazines, and slides our teachers showed us. It’s very different now. Anyhow, I emailed Anthony and we met somewhere close to the music venue Irving Plaza, near 14th Street. I think I was trying to convince him to hire me as an assistant after I graduated.

Back to your original question: I guess the best way to describe my relationship to both sculpture and photography is to say that when I see an image on a screen, I see the computer hardware, and the space where it’s installed, and how people interact with it as well.

Q: When are you at the early stages of a project, do you already know 100 percent how your photos will look like? Or does the creative process serve as kind of guide, letting you tweak your ideas along the way?

A: I rarely know what form my work will take. I often try things in different ways, as photos, sculptures, videos, prints, etc. I usually start with a few notions, like some source images, or a relationship, or a feeling, or in the case of my current show [at the Rachel Uffner Gallery] some literature. Then the work comes out of a lot of trial and error and a lot of staring at the wall.

Q: Please discuss your creative process for making photos like “Rodney,” “United Artist,” and “Stage (Gilda).”

A: I’ll start with “United Artist,” because that was the first of the three, and the process was fairly different. I was working on some small color studies for a show at the now defunct Guild and Greyshkul Gallery, in SoHo. I had this black and white picture of Mary Pickford in a striped apron on a stool. I chose the picture for three reasons. One, because of who Pickford was, a female comic and co-founder (with Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks) of the United Artists motion picture studios. Two, because she was wearing stripes, and I was working with stripes, because of their multifaceted associations with pajamas, prisoners’ clothing, and fairs. And, three, because she was sitting on a stool, and I had been working for a while with stools as a form. I used Photoshop to tone the photograph red, and then I gave her yellow ‘rouge’ because I was working with yellow for eggs. This all sounds neither here nor there, but this is the process.

For “Rodney” and “Stage (Gilda)" the process started with the source image as well, in the case of Rodney, it’s from the record cover for “Rappin’ Rodney.” I tried to make him look like a Vietnam Vet. In the Gilda picture, it was the first one I made that wasn’t a face-only portrait. It’s a full figure, with a stage and audience. It was from a YouTube clip, so I was trying something new, more of which you see in my current show. The rest of the process was the same: I printed out the pictures small on an inkjet printer, added water on the floor or on another structure, waited for it to dry, and then I photographed the “prop” using a scanner. Then I edited the files in Photoshop. They were all printed using light exposed to sensitive paper like traditional photographs.
Q: Are there any rules you follow or advice you can give with regard to incorporating humor into your work?

A: I actually don’t think my work is funny. I think it’s pretty sad. I don’t think work that is trying to be funny, or that is only trying to get a laugh is the best approach. Much good humor hits you in the gut and points to kinds of failures or inadequacies.

Q: Is procrastination an enemy or a friend?

A: For me, a frenemy: it’s a friend because I’m fairly intimate with procrastination as a mechanism, and it’s an enemy because in general I think procrastination as an avoidance of heavy lifting is not so good.

Q: Are you involved in writing your own press releases and other related material?

A: I try my best not to be. I don’t think it’s my job and I hate to be the one that might tell someone how to ‘read’ my work. I hate most press releases, because I think they are overwrought and used as a crutch; but I also see their point. That being said, I usually get to preview and make suggestions about these kinds of things when it comes to my own shows.

Q: Do you collaborate with curators for your exhibits?

A: Yes, I do. It’s different in each case. Some curators have a specific piece in mind for their show, and some may commission new work. Especially in group shows, curators contextualize your works among other works, and that is invaluable.

Q: What’s the best or smartest thing you did for your career?

A: I try not to do things for my career. On my cynical days, I would say the smartest thing I did for my career was pay – and continue to pay – for fancy higher education. And I gained access to certain connections that way.

Q: What current artists – in any field – do you find the most fascinating or groundbreaking?

A: This could be a list of hundreds, but artists who I don’t know personally but have been interested in recently include Oliver Laric, Frances Stark, and Mai-Thu Perret.

Q: What are you working on right now?

A: I’m continuing to work in the veins represented in my current exhibition – including smaller c-prints to expand the constellation of image inundation on a wall, more acetate works, and more Plexiglas works.

Q: Is there an artistic field that you have not yet tried but would like to?

A: I could see myself working on a stage production at some point.

Q: Who are your biggest influences?

A: My friends. I have a constant dialogue about work, life, literature, and the world with my friends. Many friends have been with me throughout my entire career, so it’s easy to talk shorthand with them. Of my friends, my husband is the most honest as well as removed – since he doesn’t make art – and his perspective is invaluable.

Interviewed and Edited by Dmitry Kiper
SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011 “Sara Greenberger Rafferty”, The Suburban, Oak Park, IL

2010 “In Residence”, Eli Marsh Gallery, Fayerweather Hall, Amherst College, Amherst, MA

2009 “Tears”, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY

2009 “BANANAS”, The Kitchen, New York, NY, curated by Matthew Lyons

2009 “SGR”: Recent Photos and Videos, Eli Marsh Gallery, Fayerweather Hall, Amherst College, Amherst, MA

2006 “De/Feat and Drawings”, Sandroni Rey Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2006 “Sara Greenberger Rafferty”, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY