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**Interior Personas**

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The Author
Bryce Harper

I

I graduated from the University of Kentucky in December of 2003, completing the requirements for the Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree with an emphasis in Photography and Digital Imaging. While there, I was on the Dean’s List from the fall semester of 2002 to fall 2003. I have also recently been accepted to Virginia Commonwealth University, where I plan to complete my Masters of Fine Arts Degree in photography.

While pursuing my BFA, I spent many hours in the lab with professors and peers working to perfect my images and concepts. Overall I have taken four classes with Ruth Adams ranging from slightly advanced black and white photography to advanced non-traditional methods in photography. Professor Adams was always one to push me and urge me to try different things. She encouraged me to be open with my first series of self portraiture and allowed me to feel more comfortable putting myself out there for everyone to see. She has also been a great friend to me and was always there to just hang out or get a quick lunch (especially where you can’t understand the menu).

My work was exhibited at the Barnhart Gallery in a solo exiting show entitled Interior Personas. Selected images were also shown in the Tuska Gallery of Contemporary Art in an exhibition arranged by El Anatsui, a visiting artist from Africa. Some were also shown in “What Matters? Art Matters,” a show to benefit the United Way at the O. A. Singletary Center for the Arts in the President’s Room.

I enjoy reading the New Yorker, writing, and exercising in my spare time. I work for the University Press of Kentucky as an assistant in the marketing department. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to work with authors, research new books, and be a part of the publishing process.

Mentor:
Ruth Adams,
Assistant Professor, Department of Art

It has been said that every time a photographer makes a photograph he or she is making a self-portrait. With this body of work, Bryce has brilliantly illustrated this statement. What started as a simple exercise in taking pictures of a face, grew into a deep exploration of self through images, first of just Bryce and then of those close to him. The images that made up Bryce’s Bachelor of Fine Arts exhibition, Interior Personas, range from traditional Black and White photographs to multi-layered digital composites. But, the consistent theme through all of the work is using the external portrait to convey an internal message about the subject. Images of Bryce, his family and friends, and text that convey his and their emotions and feelings, blend to create a composite of Bryce himself. It takes a courageous artist to bare his or her soul through images in a way that keeps an audience’s interest, and Bryce has succeeded in doing just that.

Abstract

With this body of work, I attempted to truly get inside the human persona. People tend to wear a mask that they feel best represents what they think everyone wants them to be. They tend to hide or brush away important aspects of their personality in fear of persecution or rejection from others. I started with myself, looking inside to reconsider my own beliefs and how I portray myself to society. The combination of that photographic self-discovery and written journal entries came together in a series of self portraits that I felt were a true representation of who I really was at that point of my life. I then moved on to other people, mostly my peers, trying to get a similar result using their own ideas as a model for my work. I did this using straight or traditional photography sometimes in combination with digital techniques to meld the information together into a cohesive image. One main aspect that I tried to incorporate was the use of text in my work. I incorporated journal entries, my own personal reaction to the images, and ideas gathered from interviews with my subjects into the images to create a complete idea.

Interior Personas

For over a year and a half I have been exploring myself, my thoughts, and my emotions through film and photography. Many of the themes in my self-portraiture deal with expressing myself in ways that people normally do not see — letting parts of myself out that I usually keep guarded and confined. I have touched on the effect that I have on society, as well as the effect it has on me. I am also very interested in how people interact with each other, be they long-time friends or total strangers. Dealing with these themes in my life has been very therapeutic, allowing me to get issues and ideas out into the open and expressing something from inside me that rarely gets out.

More recently, I have expanded this theme, attempting to capture the hidden, intimate facets of other people. To involve myself more deeply with my subjects, I have attempted to explore the aspects of others that made them uncomfortable.
or burdened. I then tried to portray my own interpretations of those aspects through my photographs. I worked with my subjects closely and talked with them about things that most people do not want to address: the faults or weaknesses they see in their own lives. I then took their words and incorporated them back into my work. I used photography to capture the image of the person and then digitally combined the photograph with their words to produce a complete image. In yet another phase of this project, I allowed others to take part in the creation of my art. I produced images from the ideas and perceptions that I already had about them and then allowed them to react to that image directly by physically writing on the print. This work then becomes a culmination of both art and artist, which allows the subject to also have a personal connection to my work.

More recently, while considering graduate school, my mind became a mishmash of concerns, worries, ideas, and excitement. With so much school and work in my life the past few years, I never really slowed down long enough to think about what I truly wanted to do. I love my work, and I love being able to react and interact with my subjects through my images. Portraiture has always been a major component of my work, and I have always seen my portraits as more than a mere image. I enjoy the conversations and personal connections I form with my subjects — these conversations allow my portraits to transcend the mere surface of my subjects’ physical characteristics, to expose their intimate qualities. I had not realized until recently, though, that I might be able to make that same connection through teaching — connecting with the students and helping them with their own work. Teaching will give me both the opportunity to connect with people and to continue my work.
graduate school will allow me to obtain the degree required to teach, while also giving me the opportunity to focus and refine my own work. I still think there is a lot of room for me to grow in my work and I definitely have a lot more to say through my art. I have just been accepted to the Photography and Film Department of Virginia Commonwealth University and will begin my graduate studies there in the fall. I think that graduate school will give me the chance to enhance my work and will push me to find more of myself.

More images can be seen in the on-line version of the journal at www.uky.edu/kaleidoscope/fall2004.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people who allowed this work to finally come together. First I would like to thank my professors for all the attention that I required through this process we call art making. Ruth Adams has constantly pushed me to be open and honest about my work and to not be afraid to put it all out there. Dennis “Bones” Carpenter was always very strict when it came to content in our work, making sure that not only did we have a visually pleasing image, but enough sound concept behind the work to make it worth doing. Heather Freeman actually introduced me to the idea of digital work and helped me learn the techniques necessary to pull it all together. I would also have never made it if not for my family. At all times they were there to support me, even when they had no idea exactly what I was doing in art school. Finally, I would like to thank my sister Cassey. She somehow seemed to be a test subject for almost every one of my crazy new ideas that never seemed to work out right the first few times. Thank you for always being so patient.