

Artist Statement

The Cinema of the Mind

I was first introduced to the photographic work of Cindy Sherman sometime in 2009 as an undergraduate studying fine art photography at the University of Wisconsin. It was specifically her images from *Untitled Film Stills* that struck a particular chord with me. Her work illustrated the connection between the two mediums in a way I'd never really seen before. Her images suggested a deep sense of theatricality played out in a highly conceptual way. The title of the series suggested they were a piece of something cinematic, yet they remained highly ambiguous in their meaning and firmly planted within the realm of photography. Despite the organic symbiosis of the two mediums, they were quite different, and Sherman had captured something important with this series that required exploration.

As often happens with introductions, I experienced a kind of artistic cross-pollination. Sherman's work led me back to the beginning of early photography, to masters like Henry Peach Robinson and Julia Margaret Cameron, and the magic of Pictorialism. Their images had a sense of movement to them, predating the commercial cinema by decades, imbued with a kind of timelessness and theatricality layered with imagination.

I began to experiment through posing and staging purposeful, cinematic "scenes" that would allude to a story occurring in front of my camera, emulating the ideas the Pictorialists had shown in their work, but pushing things a bit further by experimenting with the relationships between color, black & white photography and cinematic concepts.

For me, photography was never about capturing a moment of truth; I don't think either medium (photography or the cinema) was ever meant to be, and the more we swear that they are, the further away we move from any real resemblances of it.

Storytelling as an art form however, is a kind of magic humans have been practicing since the dawn of time. And it has always been about embellishing and constructing a unique reality from the storyteller's point of view. Photographs, be it portraits, landscapes or even (photographic) journalism, is just a wordless way of telling those stories. With the storyteller adding a piece of themselves, their truths, their experiences, drawn from the well of their life experiences. Audiences of the Cinema have always openly embraced this idea, but audiences of photography, unfortunately, have struggled with it.

As I began to tell these stories with my camera, my use of Film noir themes seemed like a logical direction to explore. A lifelong cinephile, Film noir, has always been a genre I could connect with: misunderstood, rich with layers of tragedy, complexity and mystery and as timeless as the Cinema itself.

The more I started to explore the visuals through my photography, the more I began to *hear* the stories in my head. I started writing them down. Not whole stories with a beginning and an end, just parts of them. Sometimes the pictures in my head drove the stories, sometimes it worked in reverse. And as my work evolved, so did the importance of keeping the focus on the *act* of storytelling versus the story itself. During this exploration, when I achieved some answers, more questions arose.

How could I relate still photographs to a state of visual symbiosis with a moving cinema? At some point, it became more important for me to create something *about* film that wasn't entirely *made* of film. Could sound be a bridge to that cinematic experience? I started recording actors reciting the dialogue I wrote, and like Sherman, often using my own voice, borrowing elements of old-time radio drama, and asking how does an audio experience ultimately add or subtract from the images?

Through the actions presented in the photographs and their marriage to a soundscape, a kind of movement is suggested in the theater of the viewer's mind. And this opens up all kinds of exciting questions about the Cinema and its relationship to Photography. Why is movement so important in the context of Cinema? Why can't photographs move and still be photographs? What if photographs could speak, how would it change the way you interact with them? Ultimately my exploration and experimentation brought me back full circle to the important (and arguably inseparable) relationship between photography and the cinema, the latter not being able to exist without the former. At least for now as we know them.