

The Camera Club of New York

Lisa Walsh is a New York-based photographer and member here at BAXTER ST at CCNY. Recently we sat down with her to ask a few questions about her latest project and what being a BAXTER ST member has meant for her. To see some of Lisa's work, check out her website at: <http://www.lisawalshphotography.com/> Interview by Keturah Davis.

Keturah Davis: Thanks for coming, Lisa! I took a look at your website and I love your photographs!

Lisa Walsh: Thank you, Keturah!

KD: So what are you working on now; are you continuing with the projects that you have online or something else?

LW: A couple of my projects, Morocco and Contemplation are ongoing. Feminine Form, which was the first proper series I exhibited, is a good example of my work but less an ongoing project. I spent a year photographing Feminine Form on film, and then another year printing and exhibiting it. It's a subject that is very much of passion of mine, so at some point I'll go back to it. At the moment, I am working on a project which is a little bit of a departure from the series you'll find on my website. It is more of a documentary project called Gary in Ruins, referring to Gary, Indiana. My goal is to document the situation there from my perspective through fine art eyes- trying to show an eerie beauty while provoking contemplation. I originally became interested in this project through my son who is teaching there. With the benefit of his stories and sharing his first hand experience, the project became even more compelling. I am also originally from the Chicago area and have known of Gary but never visited. I think the whole thing resonates with me for that reason, too.

KD: Do you stay in Gary when you shoot there?

LW: No, I stay in Chicago and Gary is just half an hour south. It is very easy by car but almost inaccessible by public transport-most buses and trains simply don't stop there. Gary was built in the early 1900s when US Steel decided to put manufacturing capacity there. Beautiful civic buildings, churches, theaters, stations and banks lined its grand avenues. The main strip, Broadway, was a busy retail hub. But with the transition from labor intensive manufacturing to machine automation and the recessions of the 70's and 80's, jobs were lost and so too was the dream. Gary was unable to attract new industry and job creation, so unemployment has soared and the lucky ones left. The ones who weren't so lucky have really just been trapped there-life is very hard and much of Gary, left to crumble, now lies in ruins.

KD: Right, like Detroit...

LW: Somewhat, but on a smaller scale.

KD: How has it been accessing the area and the community? Have you faced any challenges?

LW: Yes, on a couple of occasions, random people have appeared (even out of the bushes in one case, which can be intimidating!) and want to know just what I am doing. There is such a feeling of being where you shouldn't be down there that it is easy to read people's reactions as threatening. Ultimately, I have learned that they are just curious and understandably so. I try to make light of what I am doing. It's an intense place to shoot so I always go accompanied by my son and for just a few hours at a time.

KD: Interesting! I'll be so curious to see your images. Are you planning on a show soon, or a book?

LW: Well, that's the idea! I would like to exhibit it but I have another 6 months or so of work on the project. I am hoping to bring it all together by early 2016. There is more to shoot and also people I'd like to interview. I think that will add an interesting perspective and assist with the whole narrative of the project.

KD: Very cool. I noticed that your previous work is all shot on film, which is amazing. Love that. Are you shooting this project on film as well?

LW: Yes. I've only ever shot professionally on film; it's a passion of mine. I love film and I love to print so I spend a lot of time in the dark room! I am lucky to be able to work at ICP where the facilities are fantastic. It is also lucky to still have access to a good variety of museum grade archival paper.

KD: It's getting more expensive too, I imagine.

LW: Exactly. Shooting on film is both expensive and an enormous challenge. When I am in Morocco, for example, and there shooting for two weeks, you just never know whether you've captured an image as hoped or got your exposure right. Until I have returned and processed 30 or so rolls of negs, it isn't clear what I have got or not. But that is one of the challenges of film that I love. And in the end, if I have got it right, then the gelatin silver print can be magical.

KD: I've noticed that too, film has certain magic to it that you don't get with digital. Out of curiosity, how long have you been a member at BAXTER ST?

LW: I originally became an overseas member about 5 years while I was living and working in London and France. I would come to New York and spend a month a couple of times a year, so I started looking for somewhere to print and discovered the Camera Club of New York (CCNY). At the time they were on 37th St with great darkroom facilities, so I would print there and attend lectures and openings when I was in NYC. Now, of course, CCNY has transitioned into BAXTER ST and I think what they are doing is great as is the community. Although we have lost the darkrooms in the move downtown, we have a fantastic agreement with ICP to use their facilities.

KD: Oh, that was going to be my last question, about the community here!

LW: BAXTER ST is dynamic and doing great things for photographers and all aspects of photography. It has helped me to integrate into the NYC photography community, since I moved here full time two years, and is interesting not just as a photographer but also in a broader

photography-related sense; fundraising for non-profits for example.

KD: Awesome. That's so great!! Well, sadly, I guess that's all we have time for now - thanks so much for chatting, Lisa!!

LW: No problem!