

Diana Cheren Nygren

📅 January 31, 2021 📍 Photographers

Diana Cheren Nygren's portfolio *When the Trees are Gone* was selected by juror Paula Tognarelli for the [2020 Rfotofolio Selections](#). We are pleased to share her work.

"I chose *When the Trees are Gone* because of its imaginative nature. The word that comes to mind when I look at these photographs is "bellwether". Absurdity is in the wind in these photographs and isn't it though?" *Paula Tognarelli*

Would you please tell us about yourself?

I have worn many hats over the course of my adult life. I met my husband when we were both graduate students studying Art History. My specialty was soviet art in the 1920s and 30s. After spending a number of years away from work focussing on my children, I designed and launched a line of children's clothing. Now that my children are older, I have been able to shift my attention to fine art photography.

Where did you get your photographic training?

When I was 16 I spent the summer living with family friends in Florence, Italy. I got a Pentax K-1000 camera just before the trip. The husband was an amateur photographer and that summer he taught me the basic properties of film photography. After college, while working my first real job, I spent my free time taking workshops and in the darkroom at the New England School of Photography.

Who has had an influence on your creative process?

As an art historian, my creative vision has been influenced by many artists. But when I decided to try to develop my fine art photography practice, the greatest influence on my process was a writer friend. I took my cues from her in terms of setting up a framework workshops, mentors, critique groups, and reviews, which guided my work. Since then, I have found the Atelier class offered by the Griffin Museum to be the greatest resource in terms of sparking my creative thinking and pushing my practice in new directions.

Please tell us about an image (not your own) that has stayed with you over time.

There are a number of images that have made an impression on me and stayed with me, but the first gallery show I saw which truly blew me away was [Edward Burtynsky's Quarries](#) series. I can still picture those photographs vividly.

What image of yours would you say taught you an important lesson.

I think the image "Bottled Water" is the strongest image in the "When the Trees Are Gone" series, and perhaps my strongest work to date. Analyzing the ways that image comes together (through, among other things, color, structure, and narrative) has begun to give me insight into what makes a truly successful image as opposed to just a good picture.

Please tell us about the work you submitted to the Rfotofolio Call.

The work I submitted to the Rfotofolio Call was a project called "When the Trees Are Gone". I developed this project last fall and winter within the context of the Atelier class at the Griffin Museum of Photography. It is an exploration of the impacts of climate change through composited images from three earlier series. The project uses figures extracted from beach images, recess as city dwellers searching for moments of relief in a world shaped by climate change, and the struggle to find a balance between an environment in crisis and manmade structures. The series has an apocalyptic tone, but hopefully also a humorous one. At its core is an optimism that with continued innovative urban planning, we can begin to address this conflict.

I showed a couple of the images last February, but the Atelier show which included 8 of the images had just been hung at the museum when the country shut down.

The timing of this project was opportune, however, in relation to the pandemic. With this work, I began to develop an artistic language, with which I use my photographs to tell stories, that has been at the heart of the work I've produced over the last year.

What part of image-making do you find the most rewarding?

For me, the most rewarding moments are when I first print out an image, and then when I first see it framed. Nothing beats turning an image into something concrete and tangible.

How do you work through times when nothing seems to work?

When nothing seems to work, I tend to shift gears and start on something completely different. I usually have a number of projects going at once. If I hit a wall with one, I focus on another. I continually attend workshops and lectures, and usually something will come along that allows me to go back to the stuck project with fresh eyes.

What tools have you found essential in the making of your work?

I resisted for a long time, but I have finally surrendered completely to Photoshop and Lightroom. I love taking pictures, but what distinguishes much of my work is how I play with and combine those images after I have downloaded them to my computer.

Is there something in photography that you would like to try in the future?

I would like to try handpainting photographs. I made an initial stab at it which didn't go very well. I've been exploring workshops. I'll definitely need some help in order to master it.

How does your art affect the way you see the world?

Photography has definitely led me to look at the world more closely, and often in a more abstract way. Even when I don't have a camera with me, I am constantly seeing things around me as possible photographs. And the result is a constant sense of awe and wonder. More than anything else, the sky and clouds constantly take my breath away.

How has the pandemic influenced your work methods ?

I have gone out little since the beginning of the pandemic, so I have been forced to find new subjects to photograph and work with within the walls of my home. That has meant more compositing work and scanning old items, still lifes, and working with miniatures, none of which had been central to my practice. Underlying this shift, is an increased emphasis on constructing a photograph rather than discovering it in the world. This shift has me beginning to experiment more - with mixed media, types of paper, layering work, three dimensionality.



Mars Invasion © Diana Cheren Nygren

What's on the horizon?

It has been an incredibly productive year for me in terms of photography, but also a draining one. It is hard to envision where I will go with my work once life returns to normal. But I suspect that the ways my practice has changed will have interesting ramifications for how I photograph and use photography when I head out into the world as well. I also have two local shows coming up.

I am incredibly excited not only to share physical work on the walls again, but to be able to attend the shows and see my work and that of my friends and colleagues in person. I haven't done that since last March!

Thank you Diana.

To learn more about the work of Diana Cheren Nygren please visit her site at [Diana Cheren Nygren](#).