



COMMITMENT TO SARCASM: OLIVIA LOCHER

By Leah Constantine, April 18, 2016



Olivia Locher is a photographer currently based in New York. Originally from Pennsylvania, her practices took her to the School of Visual Arts where she received her BFA in 2013. Her works use imagery to depict thoughtful narratives on social and cultural practices. Locher curates scenes using props, models, and digital manipulation that are inspired by her interest in art and fashion to create depictions of ideas that are charged with humor and irony.

Locher's most recent and popular series titled "I Fought the Law" portrays laws from each of the 50 states, humorously trivial in their nature, and ironically portrays them in the acts of breaking those laws. Other projects like "How To" borrow ideas from menial human tasks and challenges them to be thought of in unique ways. Locher is also an active photographer for many fields of fashion including clothing lines, magazines, and New York Fashion Week. See more of her work by following her instagram.

When did your relationship with photography begin and how has it become part of your artistic narrative?

I grew up in a town called Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It's a rather small rustbelt town that is about 67 miles East of Pittsburgh. When I was growing up there was a strong do it yourself scene happening. I was really lucky to catch it because it only lasted for about a decade. There were weekly concerts and so many other creative things to get immersed with. My older brother, Brandon introduced me to this world and I quickly met several people who were really passionate about creativity. My interests were heavily based

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around fashion, so I started trying to mimic what I saw in magazines with my friends as the subject. I remember subscribing to W when I was 14 and becoming so inspired. I was homeschooled for a large portion of high school and was lucky to have a family that didn't stop me from daydreaming. Most of my days were occupied by spending time at the local DIY venue, 709 Railroad Street, and hanging out with people much older than I was. When I graduated high school I decided to attend art school in NYC at SVA. From there my relationship with photography really blossomed and came into realization.

Was your relationship with photography inspired by other artists? Which artists interested you in photography, and how did they influence your thinking and practice?

When I first started out I was taking a lot of self portraits. I didn't look at much photography except for what I was seeing in magazines. When I entered SVA I quickly became obsessed with art history and would find myself falling down so many deep rabbit holes researching artists. Today I find myself most influenced by filmmakers. I tend to watch a film once per day, sometimes more. Key figures for me include, Matthew Barney, and Alejandro Jodorowsky. I also get inspired seeing work presented in galleries and museums.

Would you say there are any types of films you align with in particular that you would say influence your work? I get a very Wes Anderson vibe from looking at your images, but that is also just my opinion!

I align more with experimental avant-garde films. I especially admire Chantal Akerman's work, also Kenneth Anger. I intake and enjoy a lot of mainstream cinema but wouldn't say it directly inspires my work. Mainstream directors I gravitate towards include, Gus Van Sant, Stanley Kubrick, Lars Von Trier, John Cassavetes, etc.

How did your studies while at SVA influence your photography?

SVA for me was about a lot of experimenting. I feel like I found my voice and language somewhere in my junior year. It was wonderful having a community of wonderful professors and support.

You live in New York and must observe the importance of visual narratives quite often through media and advertising. Have any of these images inspired or influenced your work?

I find myself very inspired by mid-century advertising. My whole life is actually overwhelmed by mid-century objects and clothing. I'm interested in taking elements of the 60s and meshing them with modern times and pop culture. Andy Warhol is also obviously a huge influence.

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As you mention Andy Warhol and mid-century advertising, do you also reflect influences of pop art in your work? I see similarities in your use of color and imagery — would you agree?

Yeah, I think it's very important to segregate the concept to make it as loud as possible. Reflecting pop art elements helps me to achieve this.

What sort of research practices do you follow when approaching new ideas?

Most of my individual images stem from standalone concepts and I let the original idea guide my process. I have a firm belief that if an idea pops up on three separate occasions it must be a good one. My large, now finished project "I Fought the Law" was a bit of a different practice because it involved a lot of historical research. It is a 50 image series where I photographed strange and outdated laws from America. Researching the origins of some of the laws felt like a never-ending sinkhole. I found some of them were once removed from the books, other's became close to becoming laws but never passed. For the viewer I leave the historical information ambiguous but for my own well-being I needed to research.

Once you have that "good idea," how do you know it is a successful one? Are you able to gage that by the outcome of your images, or by the outcome of viewership?

I gage it's successful by fully believing in and trusting the idea. I hang out with my ideas for a long time, leaving very little room for chance in production since the idea is already fully realized. I'm never positive if my ideas are universally successful but they are successes for myself.

Your photographs capture humor in displays of visual interpretations and narratives. How do you construct these scenes, and what challenges do you face in collecting the found objects that are shared in your images?

Sometimes it seems as though my practice is 75% about finding props and models to meet my concepts requirements. I always work from my home so my apartment is often filled with bizarre objects. Since my ideas are very premeditated once I source everything the process feels pretty effortless. The challenges always arise in preproduction.

What role does the viewer have in constructing the narrative in your work?

I find comfort in having my original intent and concept leave my control once a viewer finds it. I'm happy for people to build their own narrative and experience with the work.

How have you seen technological advances in photography enhancing the viewership of your work, and how have you embraced these advances?

I love how easy it is to connect with people these days. I feel as though Instagram has completely replaced my printed portfolio and website. More and more when I'm

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approached for commissions I learn photo editors discover my work most frequently from Instagram. I really love that platform for seeing work because it also allows a peak into someone's life and personal taste. I've recently started casting subjects from Instagram model calls.