

DON/DEAN

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Elle Perez

Elle Perez is an artist who recently received her BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art.



Is sex a weight on artworks? Do you ever find yourself burdened by your sexuality?

Burdened? No, but sometimes I do have to work through my own attraction to a person I am photographing. I easily fall in love with anyone who sits for me, which is both a blessing and a fault. This attraction is not dependent on how a person looks, but rather the conversations we have and the connection that we make through the lens.

There are many clear paths (both literally and figuratively) in the pictures, but few clear beginnings or endings. What does this mean to you?



For a while now I have been striving to make more ambiguous pictures, images that doesn't give all their secrets away so easily. I've given up (at least for right now) on making 'true' photographs and have started to allow myself to be open to the other narratives an image might tell. No photograph I ever make will accurately express the experiences that I have had (perhaps the feelings of the event or moment, but never the moment itself) so I am not concerned with a clear entry for a narrative. People approach images with their own history and subjectivity, so having loosely defined endings and beginnings allow people to enter the work in their own way, which I really like.

Does gender still exist when you're alone?

Yes, it does, definitely. In some ways, more so, because you only experience your version of it, without anyone else projecting any assumptions on you.



Is there a neutral space with in your photographs?

When making portraits, I use the background as neutral space to draw attention to the details of people's faces, their eyes, the way they hold an expression, the subtle small things that show up on our faces from just living.

How does photographing figures in the woods affect how viewers perceive your subjects?

The setting often comes across as idyllic, which is funny to me since the reality of the 'land' is almost anything but idyllic. Cities are actually seem more idyllic to me. The 'land' is full of biting insects, summer thunderstorms, poisonous foliage, and it forces me to reconcile with my body in ways that I can often ignore in city or domestic settings. All of the barriers between inside and outside space are trespassed in both directions. This parallels our ideas of our bodies, in a way. We often think of our bodies, or bodies, in simplified and idealistic ways, but the reality is more like stretch marks, chronic pains, and scars.

What in the end is the sum of all of your photographs?

Sometimes I am so grateful to be a photographer because I have this ability to create an archive of my experience here on earth. This artist compulsion, for all its broke-ass financial toil and mental struggle, allows me to really think about and experience my life. No day feels lost, and having the photographs gives me the receipts in terms of thinking about where I have been and



where I am going. I love experiencing other people's photographs - my grandmother is our family archivist and just holding those photographs, from my family's immigration from Puerto Rico, their first years in new york city, apartments, now deceased children, old family pets, all these images make me feel more connected to my family and our collective history. I like to imagine that my photographs will do that for those in our family who are yet to come.

Ask yourself a question and respond.

Where to next?

I'm working toward moving to Santurce, Puerto Rico. I recently spent two months there and have fallen in love with the place. My father lived in Santurce in the 70's and i have family there, so it's a place that has a lot of history for me, and the potential for a lot of new photographs. And the best food I've ever had in my entire life.



