

Artist's statement

I began a personal project to explore the process of photographing people. I photographed and interviewed 24 diverse Washingtonians three times over the course of one year. Over the year people had babies, got divorced, fell in love, bought houses, wrote poetry, closed their business, had business success, and unexpectedly everyone experienced September 11th in a city deeply affected by the tragedy. These photographs and interviews are an objective view of what was happening in the lives of these people living in Washington, DC before, and after, September 11th - a facet to the project I could never have imagined when I started.

My main interest in documenting people is to capture identity - a vision of self that is objective and truthful. But, how to do it? Is there a "right" way? How does photographic technique and stylistic approach affect photographic vision? To begin to find answers to my questions I studied the photographic elements that influence the creation of a portrait; the stylistic approach, photographic technique and what the subject expresses in their own words.

Each subject was photographed with three different stylistic approaches. The first style was an environmental portrait taken during the Spring/Summer of 2001 and focused on their identity, emotions, and expressions. The second style was a commercial portrait taken in the winter of 2001-2002 and focused on how September 11th affected the subject.

The last style was a photojournalistic portrait taken in the Spring/Summer of 2002 and focused on their activity. By comparing the different stylistic approaches a viewer might come to understand how these approaches influence a portrait.

Secondly, each stylistic approach had a consistent photographic technique implemented during each shoot. The environmental portrait was taken with black and white film, available light, and a medium format camera with a normal lens. The commercial portrait was taken with color slides, strobe lights, and a medium format camera with a portrait lens. The photojournalistic portrait was taken with color slide or print film, on-camera flash, and a 35mm camera. By comparing different photographic technique a viewer might come to understand how technique influences a portrait.

Before or during each shoot, I interviewed the subject. The interviews provided me with information about each subject, their opinions on certain matters and values by which they live. I recorded the interviews on audiotape, and edited them drawing on the actual words spoken by the subjects. I found this important because what a person expresses is yet another window to their self. This is as a valid clue to their identity as would be the photographic image I create from my point of view.

This project offers a compelling way to illustrate a comparison of photographic techniques and stylistic approaches in the documentary process. As importantly, the project is a fascinating documentation of ordinary people living through an extraordinary year in which, in addition to the universal problems of relationships and careers, these 24 Americans, along with the rest of the nation, faced the threat of additional terrorist attacks.