



Springs Invitational Art Stories: Kat O'Neill - A Photographer's Tale

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by Kat O'Neill

"A Photographer's Tale" by [Kat O'Neill](#) was written on the occasion of her art being selected for the 2017 Springs Invitational Art Exhibition.

I often think about the boardroom of Kodak back in the late 1800s when someone said, "How the hell do we sell this thing?" George Eastman coined the slogan on the spot: "You press the button, we do the rest." That was in 1892. And it worked marvelously as a launch. But the "Kodak moment" campaign years later pulled at the heartstrings of the world. If you didn't capture the moment, what kind of person were you? What kind of mother, lover, friend? Guilt has always been the ultimate motivator.

But guilt is not what motivates me. I take a camera—a Nikon not a Kodak—everywhere I go, much to the collective moan of everyone in my company. Often I hear, "Why can't you just enjoy the moment, why do you need to capture it?"

Why? Because being in the moment is wonderful but being able to look back at the moment with an interpretive, reflective and, often, surprised eye, is just about the greatest gift of this modern age. Excluding, of course, every Apple product, sushi and a few other things. Just ask the Dalai Lama.

I come from a dramatic writing background. I loved creating for the stage. Hearing people laugh till they cried at my words was beyond compare. During my years as a creative director, I had one man write me to say that my commercial had brought his mother out of a vegetative state. There he was doing the dishes when all of sudden he heard his mother laugh for the first time in five years. That was a special letter to receive and the fact that he took the time to write it and get it to me was a beautiful display of humanity.

Though there are no words in photography, what fascinates me are the stories within the images. Sometimes I personify the pieces and try to see what they are telling me. Other times I force my imagination on them. So far I have received no complaints.

I started out shooting industrial images and sunsets. I could not get enough. I snuck into construction sites, crane graveyards; rust on a dumpster was beauty to me. I soon added graffiti, which I always saw as an art form even as Giuliani's task force was whitewashing 24/7.

I like to put images together to create a narrative and I have recently begun adding layers and acrylic. I use archival inks infused into metal because I love its simplicity, longevity, versatility and allure. I have an outdoor gallery of metal photographs that change with the ebb and flow of light. Watching that journey of rhythm makes me feel alive and grateful.

When Teri reached out to me to see my studio for consideration in the Invitational I told her my studio is smaller than any house on Lily Pond's broom closet and I share it with a geriatric half dwarf bunny rabbit that will not stop shedding hair balls that seem to be too light to ever land. And she replied, "Perfect." After looking through my portfolios, Teri said: "I want to show what no one would expect from Kat O'Neill." Those words resonated with me because, honestly, I had not thought of my work in that way. I feel I am an eclectic artist, not defined by one look. I am intrigued by myriad catalysts, both masculine and feminine, and, still and perhaps forever, feel that life is too short to limit the buffet.

I am going to tell a little story about each of the final selections for the Invitational. And you will have to check out Ashawagh Hall in August to see which one Teri picked. I leave you with three historical words to live and, hopefully, create by: capture the moment.



"La Fleur de Jacqueline" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

It flowered but once. The day my dearest friend Jackie died. Never planted, it just appeared. And the next day it was gone. That was four years ago. I still look for it every day.



"Familia" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

Did they come together by design or chance? And does it even matter? Even with the swarms of summer somehow there is always enough room on the beaches for all to find a slice of delight against the backdrop of a stunning sunset. There is something quite magical about that.



"Pleasure to Meet You" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

Walking in the Northwest Woods last summer I watched two dragonflies soar back and forth as if in some kind of dance, until I realized that it must have been a lover's quarrel as one flew away and the other landed on this broken branch. He let me get close for a second and then he was gone, back to 60mph in search of forgiveness.



"Silence is Golden" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

I came across this on the lower east side of Manhattan. It is a stencil type of graffiti similar to what the infamous Banksy creates, one filled with messages about Christianity and its effect on America. The words on the gun—silentium est aureum—are Latin for "silence is golden." On the cross is a dollar sign. The eye of providence is on her chest with the triangle representing the image of Christian Trinity. Her robe is covered with stars and, most importantly, her finger is on the trigger. No need for interpretation here.



"Last Chance to Enjoy the View" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

Heading to Sammy's Beach to look for shells with my son in the off season a few years back and imagine our joy when we arrived to find this beautiful pipeline. It rose out from the horizon like it was on a mission to take in all the beauty and mystery it could before it was submerged, never to be heard from again. We went back to see it for several days. My son cried the day we showed up and it was gone. A part of me did, too.



"White Can Be Beautiful" by Kat O'Neill. Courtesy of the artist.

The intricacy, fragility and fleeting beauty of a flower is much like life. Stop and smell the roses but don't forget to take in all the rest.

Kat O'Neill is an award-winning photographer, mixed media artist, fiction writer, playwright and a co-director/partner of The White Room Gallery in Bridgehampton. Her art has been exhibition regionally and has been featured in numerous publications including *The New York Times*. An award-winning playwright, she has been an artist in residence at Workhouse, Looking Glass and Avalon Repertory theatres in NYC. Most recently, she wrote and directed a night of short plays presented at Guild Hall. Her fiction has been published by the East Hampton Star.

Kat O'Neill is also an award-winning SVP/Partner/Creative Director/Writer at several global and boutique advertising agencies. To see more of her fine art, visit www.katoneillgallery.com.



Kat O'Neill takes a rare selfie. Courtesy of the artist.

[The 2017 Springs Invitational Art Exhibition](#) presents art by around 114 artists with work selected by Invitational curator Teri Kennedy. The show will be on view from August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall in East Hampton, N.Y. Presented by the Springs Improvement Society (SIS), the exhibition is a benefit for SIS which maintains and manages Ashawagh Hall.

The "Springs Invitational Art Stories Series" was arranged by Teri Kennedy as a way to reveal the stories behind some of the art on view, presented from the point of view of the exhibiting artist or artists. The next segment reveals how a love for a horse inspired [Jerry Schwabe](#) to create an enduring sculpture as tribute. To read the introduction for the Springs Invitational Art Stories Series, click [here](#).

BASIC FACTS: The Springs Invitational will be held August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall. An Opening Reception will take place Friday, August 4 from 5 to 8 p.m. The Curator's Tour of the Invitational takes place on Sunday, August 13 from 11 a.m. to noon. Ashawagh Hall is located at 780 Springs Fireplace Rd, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.ashawagh-hall.org.

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