

Frame Of Mind



“Like no other camera it really suits my personality ... it was a wonderful discovery after all.”

Jamestown Native Photographer Awarded Burchfield Penney Art Center Residency

BY DUSTEN RADER
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The lens of a camera is akin to that of the eye, capturing moments one at a time, so that they may be immortalized and enjoyed by those who dare to look.

Jamestown native Janelle Lynch, who is an internationally recognized photographer, was recently selected for a residency with the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo.

According to Lynch, the residency, which begins in spring, will provide her with the opportunity to study and create work associated with watercolorist Charles Burchfield.

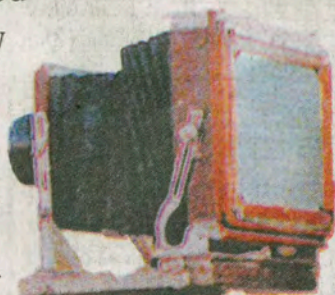
Although Lynch grew up in Jamestown, she was drawn away because she knew that there was a whole world waiting for her to explore and experience. While attending Jamestown High School, which she graduated from in 1987, she was a photographer for the school newspaper. She also studied foreign languages, such as French and Spanish, with a distinct intention of going abroad, she said.

“There was a whole lot else in the world that I wanted to get to know,” said Lynch.

But, Lynch’s exposure to photography occurred at a much younger age than high school. She recalls that her grandfather was an amateur photographer and that he collected camera equipment. So, photography was very much a part of her life at home because she lived with her grandfather, James “Jim” Cusimano, grandmother, Josephine Nicosia Cusimano, and her mother, Antoinette Lynch.

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Pictured at top is Janelle Lynch’s photo entitled “Josephine,” from the series “Akna,” 2006. “Akna” was the first body of work by Lynch which was directly influenced by watercolorist Charles Burchfield. At right, is a picture taken by Allison Blumenthal of Lynch with her 8x10 camera that she utilized for the “Akna” set from 2006, and that she continues to use today. In the background is the cover of Lynch’s first book of photographs, “Los Jardines de Mexico,” Radius Books, 2011.



Photographer

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"He was always present, and so was his camera," said Lynch. "He also worked in a darkroom in Germany during the Second World War as a technician, so he brought that experience back home with him, but he really just took family pictures."

Lynch also recalls her grandfather working with a woman named Mrs. Siegfried, who was a portrait photographer that had a studio on Third and Main Street. Mrs. Siegfried photographed Lynch several times when she was young. Lynch said that one of her earliest memories, from when she was 3, was Mrs. Siegfried being under the cloth of her 4-by-5 large-format camera. Coincidentally, in her adult life, Lynch utilized a 4-by-5 large-format camera for a number of sets before upgrading to the 8-by-10 large-format Deardorff that she now uses to capture moments in time.

"It is a camera that Stephen Shore, one of my most important teachers, had been encouraging me to use since I graduate school," said Lynch. "I'm not a very technically oriented person and so I was frankly intimidated by it. But, I finally dared to begin using it in 2006, and it's the perfect fit for me after all. Like no other camera it really suits my personality

in that because of its size, weight and fragility, and the cost of the film, it really insists on a very methodical, thoughtful, detailed approach. And, that, to a degree, defines my personality and how I approach my writing and life in general. So, it was a wonderful discovery after all."

When Jim passed away, he left behind all of his camera equipment, and Lynch found it in a leather suitcase when she was 7.

"It was all very secretive and I didn't share with anyone that I had found it," said Lynch. "I recall not knowing that I needed film. So, I was just trying to use the apparatus to take pictures, and that exploration didn't last very long. But, then my mother bought me my first camera when I was 10. It was a Kodak disc camera. The film was on a disc format and it rotated with each frame, and I used it at home to take pictures of family mostly. Curiously, they were my first pictures, and they were portraits, not ever of the landscape, which is all that I photograph now, and I don't photograph people now."

According to Lynch, during the process of earning her MSA from 1997-99, she decided to stop photographing people for professional work. Rather than photographing people, Lynch uses other subject matter in her pictures to

represent humanity.

"In a more recent series from Spain, 'Riu Llobregat,' there are electrical poles and I used those to represent people," said Lynch.

In Lynch's "Donde Andaba" series from 2005, resilience and perseverance are represented by small plants growing through cracks in man-made landscapes.

"My work is about the landscape, the environment, the life cycle, remembrance and it's about me and my life experiences and concerns," said Lynch. "I think ultimately the reason I am able to find it, see it, capture it and convey it is because it is also something that defines me. It is those very qualities that made me want to leave home and go explore the world in the first place. That very ingrained need in me to continue to grow, pursue and struggle is something that drew me to the Mexican culture. I lived there for three years, and I made those 'Donde Andaba' pictures at the end of my stay. It's something that I found in the spirit of many people there in the developing world. They face many challenges; and I made that work partially because of my own life experience, but also because I was so inspired by some of the relationships that I formed there, and that tenacious

spirit that I identified in that culture. This interest in the life cycle is based on early life experiences related to loss, realizing that there is a continuity, that there is loss, but then there is rebirth and life to be celebrated, enjoyed and embraced."

BURCHFIELD RESIDENCY

Lynch was selected for the Burchfield Penney residency by Anthony Bannon, director of Burchfield Penney Art Center, after writing a five-page proposal entitled "Spiritual Kinship: A Year with Charles Burchfield." In the proposal Lynch offered the following three questions for her written investigation: "What is the essence of our respective reverence for nature and of our relationship to light?"; "Why do we tend to imbue our subjects with anthropomorphic qualities rather than depict people?"; and "What explains our vehemence about protecting our creative freedom?"

"There is a sense of mutuality in terms of our interests and concerns," said Lynch. "It's a very lonely endeavor sometimes, so when I discovered his work I felt really for the first time that I wasn't alone as an artist with my vision, my interests, cares and concerns — in particular this very profound reverence for the natural world."

As a watercolorist, Burchfield embodied a celebratory aspect that allowed him to capture the natural world in a manner that Lynch said she feels as well. Also, his attention to light is something she finds unusual and is something that she shares with him. And, further, she identifies with his desire to protect his pure vision of art.

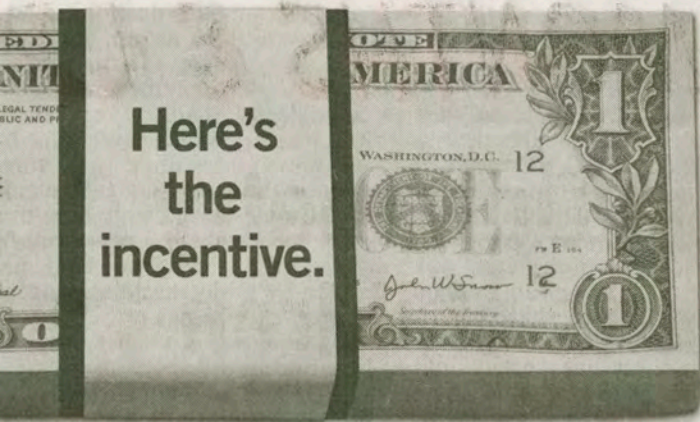
"In reading his journals I came to understand that early on he felt a very strong need to defend his vision — his creative freedom," said Lynch. "Early in his career he went to New York City, and although he was quite commercially successful, he did not buy into the art-world scene; rather he decided to reject it to preserve his pure vision as an artist. That is something I have struggled quite a lot with; as a younger emerging artist, how do I remain true to myself and at the same time become a part of this art-world that I want to be a part of, and I need to be a part of, if I'm going to make a living? Ultimately, his work and writings have enabled me to further embrace my own unique vision, regardless of the trends of the art-world, and a real need to believe in myself, in my vision and pursue it."

Watercolor and photography may be two separate mediums, and Burchfield's medium allowed for certain techniques that cannot be reproduced with photography, but Lynch said her work reflects his watercolor via metaphor. One technique she utilizes is apparent in the "Akna" series, which was the first body of work she did that was directly influenced by Burchfield.

"There might be some limitations with photography, but I don't feel it. I find other ways to photograph the subject matter," said Lynch. "With the 'Akna' series I employed a technique primarily used in portraiture, shallow depth of field, to photograph tree stumps as if they were portraits. There is a species of plant life called epiphytes and those semi-dead tree stumps are acting as a structural host to this new life. Epiphytes aren't parasitic, they just need a stable structure to attach themselves to, and they grow from there off the rainwater in the air. So, these stumps are acting as hosts to support this new life. So, I anthropomorphized the tree stumps through photography and named them after people in my life who served a similar nurturing role. I named two of them after my grandparents, Josephine, my grandmother, and Jim, my grandfather."

For more information visit www.janellelynch.net or burchfieldpenney.org.

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