

I Am . . .

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Morean Arts Center

719 Central Ave

St. Petersburg, FL 33701

D. Dominick Lombardi, Curator

I Am...

I Am.. is a group exhibition of photographic 'portraits' that reveal the relative uselessness or ineffectiveness of a multitude of visual cues that lead to errant prejudice. There are important issues such as race, religion and gender - then there is the way we see or define ourselves in terms of purpose or passion.

How does one express their individuality when verbalizing a self-characterization? How different can one look when being categorized through a preconceived idea of what would 'normally' be expected relative to an occupation or a hobby?

I Am.. proposes to reveal, through the lens of a multitude of photographers from various locations, what is possible in the growing dispersion and development of individuals in our global community.

West Kentucky-based Michelle Burdine's *Lisa* is an intimate portrait of *Semi-Truck Engineer* with a passion for *Photography*. This subject, who is softly back-lit through the cover of mid summer foliage, is striking in color and beauty - a stark contrast to what one might immediately think of when pondering the trucker's world. Knowing her story, we now see a person who has pursued a unique path specifically based on her own distinctive skills.



Lisa

Muron



Beacon, NY/St. Petersburg, FL-based Rieko Fujinami sees *Muron*, the Tarot Card-Reading Fortune-Teller who prefers *Living in Isolation on a Mountaintop*, as a fascinating example of public versus private persona. Taken in her homeland of Japan, Fujinami's voyeuristic version of portraiture allows us to share a very intimate moment that is quite possibly, purposefully public. With that, we understand that there is a message here, a projection that would not have been as easily and safely sent out a generation or two ago.

Bronx-based Liz Guarracino's *Sunday Ray* is as much about staging as it is portraiture. By imposing dramatic lighting in a mysterious, underground-type setting and assuming a super-hero pose, this *Swim Instructor* with a passion for *Performance* is transformed into something like a MMA fighter, while the bronze tones overall give the subject a sort of statuesque appearance.



Sunday Ray

Victor



Manhattanite Joyce Hatta offers this exhibition's two mystery guests, Victor and Victoria (yes, those are their actual names). Exhibition visitors will be hard pressed to guess their familiar or not so ordinary lives and styles, as there are no obvious cues to those answers. Set in what can best be described as pensive moments that project distance and diversion, I suspect all will be surprised by what they will discover about their own powers of preconception, in these most compelling expressions of the every day.

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Victoria

Christopher



The Brooklyn-based Andrew Heikkila finds the former Floridian, Christopher, as he ponders his two contrasting worlds of Lineman and Singer/Songwriter. We can't help but wonder what he is thinking with the arresting sun raking across his strikingly pensive figure. Inevitably, we will come to understand that resolutions and rhymes most often emerge in the quietest of moments when we are between our most defining worlds.

Keryn Huang's two portraits are a study in contrast. One, Shoanan, is of her father who proudly presents his past in the form of an old family photo. Here we see an Engineer who takes great pleasure in Creating Fusion Cuisine, as he passes through a narrow transitional space in Taipei, Taiwan, that artfully manages our gaze. It is also important to note that this is a perfect example of the use of time in the representation of an individual, and how that element creates a more complete portrait not just of a person, but of a life well lived.



Shoanan



Merritt

Merritt, on the other hand, who sees himself as a "Jack of all Trades", finds Gardening a most alluring passion in his home state of Colorado. One wonders here, who might beg to differ as his trusted companion nestles shyly into his welcoming arms. Perhaps gardening is something they both delight in when it comes down to the sowing and the reaping. Either way, it's hard to imagine one of these two going anywhere without the other.

California-based Scott Johnston is the most prolific in the genre of the *I Am...* From the start, I was amazed by his interpretation of the aim of this exhibition as each of his offerings really opened my eyes. Cheree, who left Paris as a child with her family when the Germans occupied France, Teaches Ballet to Children ages 3-5, and sees her two dogs Jelly Bean and Tosca as her great passion. Her face, framed by a wide brimmed hat and accented by a glistening necklace, she is placed in a very casual, albeit contrasting setting shows the photographer's great ability for creating a compelling narrative.



Cheree



Dave

Dave, an Electrical Engineering Technologist who loves to Bake, is seen here pensively observing something in the distance - a particular moment in time when he is most content to be lost in thought. As a result, his form becomes both monumental and serene as the rest of his surroundings slowly fade away in waves of subtle sights and sounds.

The photograph of Paul, who is a Cremation Coordinator and avid History Buff, is one of this exhibition's most striking images. Knowing Paul has lived at the cemetery where the crematorium is for the past 33 years makes it easy to understand his voracious appetite for, and his love of the past. It is also easy to see that that knowledge has deepened and enriched his soul while his rugged appearance adds layers of texture to his presence.



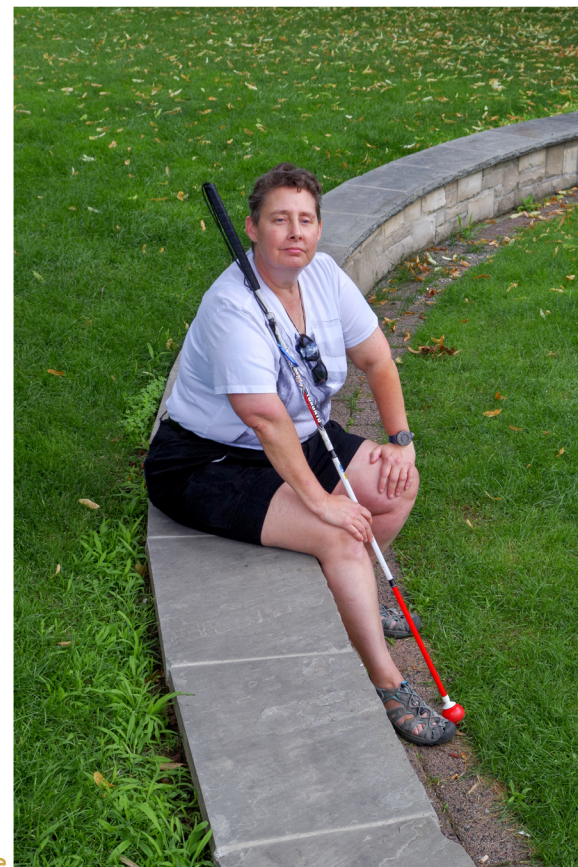
Paul



Alexander

Alexander's smile is quite contagious. When you see this Economics Teacher, a person who has a passion for Social Equality, you can only imagine a complex, and perhaps occasionally pained mind struggling to make sense of the current day's complex socio-economic issues. This persona of complexity is skillfully amplified by Scott Johnson's placement of the subject in one of the most benign settings one can imagine.

Sue, a CNIB Ambassador and Jeweler with a passion for Archery is one of the more eye-opening individuals since she had a stroke 7 years ago, which resulted in her blindness. What really comes through most in her portrait is stability and delight for the day, while the simplicity of the setting once again, highlights the import of the subject. With both Sue and Alexander, we see the creative use of an arching form that both anchors and presents the subject.



Sue



Genya

The New York City resident, formerly from Warsaw, Poland, **Janusz Kawa** focuses on **Genya**. Born in Kyiv, this **Psychotherapist** with an eye and ear for **Poetry** is one of the more haunting images in the exhibition. And like poetry, where words take on a more aesthetic quality, each 'element' in this portrait flows in and out of light and focus in rhythmic waves of perception. As a result, the viewer can sense a mind filled with complex, complementary thoughts and washes of fascinating scenarios just moments after publishing a book of her poetry in New York City.

Based in Rhode Island, **Lora Amenta Lombardi** positions **Pedro**, a **Sales Associate** currently **Studying Computer Science and Cyber Security** with a passion for **Technology**, in a setting dominated by weighty geometric forms. Here the looming kitchen cabinets abruptly define the space, while they also seem to cradle the subject who appears distant and lost in thought. An odd combination of the solid and the yielding; yet the posture and presence of Pedro is the lingering image in this curious duet.



Pedro



Rieko

Rieko, by native Floridian Dale Leifeste, is a distinctive portrait of a Power Tool Loving, Visual Artist. A study of contrasts in both atmosphere and mood, this photograph, which was taken in Japan, subtly suggests conflicting thought processes. And like Édouard Manet's, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882), what is on the mind of the subject is not necessarily what is assumed in the setting, but is ultimately hinted at in her expression. Artists never stop working, they are always looking and thinking and inevitably finding.

Francesca Menghini from The Hague, Netherlands, offers two subjects with two slightly different approaches. In *Sven*, the Shop Assistant and Collector of Horror Stuff in Rotterdam, we see is a stunning portrait that is punctuated by a wide array of tactile elements that immediately pull you right into the composition. Like the beginning of play or a slice-of-life movie, the depth and complexity of this character will keep you fully engaged.



Sven



Veronica

With Veronica, the Actuary and Collector of Phone Cards in Berlin, Germany, we also see that same sense of engagement, yet here, the gaze of the subject, despite its directness, seems more fleeting. Perhaps it is the slight turn of her head that suggests interest in the person seated to her left. Nonetheless, in both instances, there is an undeniable connection between the subject and the viewer. And that connection will linger long after we stop looking at the photograph.

Originally from the Dominican Republic, the current Brooklyn-based photographer Alex Nuñez Caba captures Christian, a Toy Designer with an eagerness for Game Nights. As one of the few works in the exhibition with a nod to the socio-cultural, this work presents the individual as a symbol for others who import culture - a representation of success with little or no repression, and one that is especially needed in this time of the great divide. Set against a soft backdrop of voluminous vines, Christian leaves us with a very tangible and timeless feeling of pride and patience.



Christian



Angelique

Angelique, a Dental Hygienist with a penchant for Medieval History and Monuments, is the subject of Trong Gia Nguyen's photograph. Trong Gia Nguyen, traveling from Brussels to the Netherlands, finds Angelique set against a backdrop of two of the most prevalent and picturesque modes of distinctly Dutch transportation - the boat and bicycle. Here, the subject seems to moderate a multitude of narratives powerfully triggered by the jacket design, while the suggestion of action abounds in this most mesmerizing moment.

Tampa, Florida resident Renato Rampolla shares his portrait of Marie. A rugged representation of a life lived largely outdoors; Marie brings the wonders of Native American Hand Crafted Jewelry to all that come her way. Working largely along the roadsides of Arizona, her passion and occupation are one in the same, as her unwavering joy and love for Making and Moving Native American Jewelry becomes immediately clear the moment you cross paths. Every wrinkle, like the rings of a tree, marks the years spent bathed in the relentless rays of the sun, as each and every connection made through the passage of her handiwork is a most moving cultural exchange for all involved.



Marie



Valerio

Claudia Rolando offers her two subjects as photographed in Italy. Initially, either individual will bring to mind a rather complex level of savvy street wisdom. Valerio, a Mathematician with a love of Sports, has his face partially veiled by a puff of recently expelled smoke. Wearing a somewhat imposing stare that seems to be both confrontational and knowing, there is that sense of the daydreamer caught in a transitional space. Set in a place that seems to be between two destinations, Rolando artfully moves the viewer's thoughts to be in sync with Valerio's mind-set.

On the other hand, Elisabetta, an Engineer who loves Gardening, seems less 'in place' but still somehow connected to her environment if only in color. As if about to speak, Elisabetta wants us to know of her peacefulness, how she manages her time, and the fact that she has built her life her way. Moreover, having the strong graffiti mural in the background forms a symbolic, albeit out-of-focus contrast to her more earthy life style.



Elisabetta



Jaleel

Giuseppe Santagata offers two subjects as he optimizes natural light, texture, composition and emotional content. *Jaleel* is a young man who is Studying International Relations and loves Basketball. What is most commanding about this portrait is the subject's eyes, which clearly set a somber and seductive mood. All in all, a striking image any way you look at it.

Eun-Kyung is a Farmer who very much looks forward to watching Television at the end of the day. In this instance the eyes play a lesser role - as pattern, posture and empowerment play a key function. I suspect it is best not to mess with *Eun-Kyung* and just enjoy what she has to offer in the way of opinion and wisdom.



Eun-Kyung



Kateri

Howie Stier's two subjects have distinct narrative qualities that are prompted by the placement of the subject in the picture plane, and the choice of backgrounds. Kateri, who is a Graphic Designer with a passion for Screen Printing, is finding a most peaceful moment in Los Angeles. The strength of her presence as contrasted by the rather sparsely populated background, and the connections made by the overall color scheme of the scene is both striking and soothing.

In Gary, an Entrepreneur and Sales Executive who loves to attend Art Openings, we see something of a surprise. In this instance, the wall behind him, which is in need of some TLC, his Mr. Natural appearance and the subtle way in which the whole narrative comes together is quite a contrast to what one might think of when considering his livelihood.



Gary



Jeff

Also from California, come the portraits by Jill Thayer. With Jeff, another Entrepreneur who is a big time Donut Sampler in Paso Robles, CA, there comes a bit of whimsy, while the unconventional placement of the figure, whose bicycle is partially out of picture plane, plays nicely against the row of cars in the distance - cars that seem to be urging the subject's imminent exit.

Don, on the other hand, who is an Award Winning Hair Stylist and an all around Bon Vivant, seems more interested in what is out of the picture plane than who else is in the car as he awaits the beginning of the 4th of July, Cambria, CA, festivities. With both subjects, the narrative continues well beyond what the photographer is offering, which in turn, increases our curiosity and conjecture.



Don



Kaori

The Queens-based transplanted Ukrainian, Roman Turovsky, offers two subjects. The portrait of Kaori, a Graphic Designer and World Wide Marathon Runner, projects no insight into her occupation or passion. Dressed in traditional Japanese garb, and set in a space that has contrasting diagonals and a bit of the Film Noir genre going on, Kaori quickly draws us into the moment that reads more like a scene from an obscure foreign film than a portrait.

The image of Robin, the Reporter with a Taste for Adventure, has more of a dream-like feel, as if we are looking at that space between reality and remembrance. Instead of wondering about the subject, we get lost in the details, such as the delicate gestures of the fingers, the focus that goes in and out in the background, and the ghostly transitions of various light and dark shapes in the foreground add a bit of whimsy to the narrative.



Robin



Garrett

Patrick Winfield's long-range image view of *Garrett*, a *Tour Operator* who is also a *Vintage Car Enthusiast*, stares steadily behind him in the crosswalk of a New York City street. The vignette here is one of contrast as no two directions coincide, including the one-way signs that beg our attention in the top left. In contrast, the overwhelming weightiness of the building in the background is the much-needed anchors in this criss-cross of considered courses.

Many thanks to *Amanda Cooper*, Curator of Exhibitions and the *Morean Arts Center* for providing just the right space for this exhibition; for the help of the all the staff for installing and publicizing the exhibition, and for Executive Director *Howayda Affan* and the *Board* for approving funding for the production of this exhibition's posters.