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INTERVIEW: OLIVIA LOCHER
FIGHTING THE LAW



It is a crazy world we live in and many people believe the only way to stay sane is to hold up a mirror and laugh. Young American photographer Olivia Locher is one of them. She is not afraid to use the word “sarcastic” to describe such personal work as “I Fought the Law and How To”.

Olivia, you’re originally from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Could you help us picture that?
Johnstown is a small rustbelt town about 67 miles east of Pittsburgh. It’s the type of place where everyone seems to know everything about each other’s families. When I was growing up, Johnstown had a really strong “do it yourself” scene. There were a lot of local concerts and art shows being arranged by young people. Unfortunately, those creative days ended for Johnstown around the time I went to art school. But it was an inspiring place to grow up.

In 2013, you graduated from the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in NYC, where you still live. What are the main things SVA taught you?

SVA was incredible because of the professors I selected throughout my four years as a student. I really enjoyed having conversations and developing my work with their guidance and critiques. The two professors I admired the most were Billy Sullivan and

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Jessica Craig-Martin. SVA was also great because it was kind of a free for all. If you produce a lot of honest work, I found you could create whatever you'd like there.

Did you always want to be a photographer? Is yours a classic tale of receiving a camera on your fifth birthday, working at the school paper etc etc etc? Or has your creative path been a little different?

My story was a bit more unique. I didn't start taking photos until somewhere around the age of 16. I got a Myspace account and quickly wanted to have the coolest profile photos. Of course I made all using a really unfortunate beta webcam. But they were still very bizarre. I had a Livejournal account where I posted these photos. One day I received a FedEx delivery containing a Nikkormat FT2 and several lenses. I later found out it was sent from a man in his sixties, who was a follower of my blog-life. Strange enough, that's how I got into shooting subjects other than myself.

What cameras do you currently work with?

I'm pretty simple when it comes to gear. I use a Canon Mark II 5D. Sometimes, when I'm feeling ambitious, I'll use a 4x5 camera and color film. When I was in school I was shooting mostly with a 4x5. My entry to commercial photography was my introduction to the digital age due to everyone's demanding turn-around times and desire to see things in real time.

You describe your approach as being "sarcastic". That's an unusual term in photography or art these days. The terms mostly heard are "ironic" or the even softer "tongue in cheek". Why sarcastic?

I like dealing with absurdities in my practice. I am constantly inspired by the ironic and mundane nature that life often deals us. My concepts often mock and are a critique of certain rituals or simple things that we do on a daily basis. This sarcasm is especially present in my How To series.

I love your How To series. In some of the images you play a lot with words. You are an image-maker, yet you seem to have certain affinity for language.

I really enjoy playing with words and captioning. I Fought the Law is also heavily based around play on words. I really enjoy reading, especially poetry, so I imagine that things I'm absorbing subconsciously inspire my work.

I Fought the Law is amazing. I could not believe they were (once) for real! But I assume most of the laws you mention are no longer enforced?

The most interesting and hair pulling experience of this project was finding the origins and truth behind these laws. My first interest in them came from a friend telling me about how it's illegal to have an ice-cream cone in your back pocket. My publisher had a

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fact checker who tirelessly found information on them all. He found that several of them remain on the statute books, yet the majority were at one point removed. Others never became laws, although they came close! And a few of them are complete myths. I became fascinated by how often bold statements could be appropriated, lost in translation, easily believed, and even taken as fact.

One of my favorites is the Texas law that stipulates children cannot have unusual haircuts. Made me wonder: does that mean grown-ups can have them? And, who is to decide? Would there be a state coiffeurs commission that decrees what can and cannot be done? My fact checker found that this law is attributed to Mesquite in Texas but was removed from the books. It was a law in the past, to uphold the community's standards of decency, and only applied to juveniles. Luckily there's nothing like that enforced anymore.

A difficult question (I find) but what generally inspires you?

New York City inspires me because of how much content there is to take in. It's an amazing city, because any artist you'd have a desire to see generally shows with very little wait time. One of my favorite things to do is make a huge list of current shows in Chelsea and spend the entire day paralyzing myself with work. I also watch at least one film per day. I love overwhelming myself with content.

You seem to have more and more commissioned work lately. Do you enjoy doing that too?

I love working on commissions because it's a totally different approach from making my personal work. With my singular projects I work alone with the subject and often my brother assisting. I serve as the photographer, stylist, etc. etc. On commissions I get the opportunity to work with so many wonderful people and form a team. It's really amazing to observe everyone's unique vision for a concept to come together. It's really magical and always very inspiring.

What photography show or book in 2016 really blew your mind?

Taryn Simon's Paperwork and the Will of Capital at Gagosian Gallery was the photography show that really haunted me in 2016. The concept and execution of the series really blew me away. The book showcasing this work is also absolutely stunning.

If you weren't a photographer, what would you like to be?

If photography never found me I'd like to imagine myself as a very bad poet or musician.

What project(s) are you currently working on?

The art book for I Fought the Law just went to print. For the next several months I am going to be busy printing the work for an exhibition to accompany the book release. I am

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also continuing my series How To, and many other things. I like to work on a lot of things at once!