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**DAZED**

THE WEIRDEST LAWS IN AMERICA, PHOTOGRAPHED  
By Miss Rosen, August 31, 2017



*Hey, do you know it's illegal to have an ice cream cone in your back pocket in Alabama?" The question, posed by a friend during a photoshoot, kept echoing in Olivia Locher's mind for months. Eventually, she hit up the Internet to check it out for herself, only to discover that this law, made during the nineteenth century, extended to the states of Kentucky and Georgia as well. Word on the street had it that thieves pulled this stunt in order to lure horses away, then plead innocent by claiming, "I didn't steal him. He followed me!"*

*Ahh, those crafty Southerners – what will they think of next? Locher launched an investigation, delving into the criminal codes across the United States, digging up the dirt for *I Fought the Law: Photographs by Olivia Locher of the Strangest Laws from Each of the 50 States*, a new book releasing from Chronicle on September 5, which will also be exhibited at Steven Kasher Gallery, New York, from September 14 through October 21, 2017.*

*Although many people would like to believe that laws are written to uphold moral, ethical principles, this is patently untrue. In many cases, they are written to reflect the biases of those who once wielded the power to write the rules. The USA, being a nation dedicated to states' rights, has any number of bizarre, quirky, obscure laws on the books that few know about – as well as a host of urban legends that have captivated the public's imagination.*

*For *I Fought the Law*, Locher compiled her favourite flagrant criminal codes and staged a series of charming photo shoots that embrace peculiar peccadillos from Arizona's law against having more than two dildos in the house to Ohio, where it was once illegal to disrobe in front of a portrait of a man. Locher speaks with us about creating a tongue-in-chic portrait of the American outlaw.*

*"In Hawaii, where it was illegal to place a coin in your ear... I realised that drug dealers would put a quarter in their ear (so) people on the streets would know that they were carrying drugs. Making it illegal tried to cut back on drug selling and distribution" – Olivia Locher*

**I Fought the Law is filled with gems. How did you decide which laws qualified as “the strangest”?**

Olivia Locher: I made a big list of different laws and thought about how they would be executed. There are some laws that are really interesting but not totally photogenic. I was thinking which laws would translate well into my studio practice and which one of my friends would look good modeling for which image.

**That makes sense. Are there any laws that “got away,” like, you wish could shoot this but you just couldn’t execute it?**

Olivia Locher: Actually, it’s really funny. One of them is, “It’s illegal to graffiti a cow.” I’ve been a lifelong vegetarian and an animal rights activist, and I found the safest way to paint up a cow with very safe beauty products that would just colour the hair and wash out but I couldn’t bring myself to do it.

I have a lot of friends who have farms and it would have been so easy to lure a cow into a makeshift studio situation but I couldn’t picture myself actually applying the paint and shooting it. I thought of the image living in the world and how people would view it and it definitely would fall into animal abuse.

**I get that. If you took the photo, it might give people ideas. When you were looking into the laws and thinking about how to shoot them, did any of them inspire you to look into the back story?**

Olivia Locher: Yes, I worked with a fact checker because there are websites online that will list all of these laws but there’s no historical information anywhere. I was also using these books from the 70s that were published by Scholastic but they were in the same situation.

Working with a fact checker was helping me break everything down and realise what the story was telling me, when the law was created, when it was revoked, if it’s still active, or if it was an urban legend.

**I’m so happy you did that. It’s so basic but in this world that we’re living, fact checking has become a necessity. As you began to put these things together, did you see any relationship between the laws and the communities they represented?**

Olivia Locher: While I was doing the research, I found some of the laws were specific to their region, like in Hawaii, where it was illegal to place a coin in your ear. What I realised is that drug dealers would put a quarter in their ear that way people on the streets would know that they were carrying drugs. Making it illegal tried to cut back on drug selling and distribution.

Most of the laws are related to the place. For example, in California, where you were not allowed to ride a bicycle in swimming pools, relates back to a time where children and teenagers were breaking into empty swimming pools to BMX ride and skateboard.

**I was particularly struck by the one in South Carolina: No, you cannot go fishing with dynamite.**

Olivia Locher: That’s a big problem. It’s illegal in a bunch of places. The actual term for it is “blast fishing.” People would set off dynamite and all of the fish would float to the top – but what it does is kill the entire ecosystem.

**That made me think, “This is a very American law right here” because who would come up with something so destructive, especially for a sport that’s so peaceful and known to be meditative.**

Olivia Locher: I know. Here’s the thing: how lazy it is. You just go in and you’re fishing in a matter of seconds and you’re done.

**The laws are a very intriguing way of exploring the American character. Like in Indiana, it’s illegal to be sexually aroused in public. I love the way you photographed that! It could be creepy but you made it funny, charming, and endearing. I loved reading about your interest in Warhol as your work evokes many aspects of his style: the straightforward iconography, the bold, bright colors and strong graphics. Did any of his work come to mind as you were making these photos?**

Olivia Locher: I grew up going to the Warhol Museum and he was the only real art history knowledge I had before going to art school in New York. His stuff always sort of haunts me and I feel like my practice is a bit Warholian, like the Indiana image is just my brother hanging out with a banana in his pants. It’s sort of like a happening in itself, making the photos.

The image of New Hampshire, where you’re not allowed to tap your feet in time to the music, is a direct reference to a Warhol piece, “Dance Diagram (Fox Trot: ‘The Lady Tuck-In Turn-Man’)” made in 1962. It’s one of my favorite Warhol pieces: it’s an image of all of these shoes instructing you how to dance.

**Ohh I love that piece! Once I had Warhol in mind, it really closed the loop for me. What was your favourite law to stage?**

Olivia Locher: I loved shooting the little girl who looks like David Bowie (“Texas: It is illegal for children to have unusual haircuts.”) Her mother is in theatre and they reside in my hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She was only five years old at the time but I think because her family has such a strong theatre background she really transformed herself.

Her mum painted her face up, and I got this mullet wig and we tried to cut it the best we could. When it came time to shoot that image, we showed her a picture of David Bowie from Aladdin Sane and she completely copied it with her face. It was really cool to watch someone so young transform in that kind of way and have that kind of awareness of the camera. She’s actually in three of the pictures; she’s all of the little children in the book. She’s also the little girl getting a perm and defacing the flag.

**That’s so cool because I didn’t recognise her in the other ones. What was the most challenging law to conceptualise and execute?**

Olivia Locher: The hardest one was Idaho (“It is illegal to be nude outdoors, even on private property.”) I was really interested in getting the tan line to look real. I was body painting myself and seeing what worked until it came time to try it on someone. My friend was so sweet to let me paint her up. She came over to my studio one day and let me spray her with leg makeup. We just hung out and drank wine and body painted her for as long as it took. Then we set it up and shot it – but the whole process of what would look natural took me so long.

**Did you find any of the laws to be shocking or objectionable?**

Olivia Locher: I feel like for the most part, they are all pretty outdated and pretty random but some of them have a serious side like the Massachusetts image is social important (“Photographing up-skirt photos can be considered a crime.”).

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I think it's shocking that that's not common sense in people's mind. It's really a problem in major urban cities, this Peeping Tom situation that happens.

**I remember when that became a thing, thinking, you need that so you can prosecute people. It is common sense but without a law, these people are like, "Well, I didn't break the law."**

Olivia Locher: Yeah, it's crazy. It was a big issue in Tokyo and then it started making its way to American cities. At the time the law was written, it also said it's illegal to take pictures of other people taking pictures of people taking up-skirt photos. I thought that was interesting because it's a crime to take a picture of a crime happening.

**My last question: have you ever knowingly broken these laws yourself.**

Olivia Locher: Yeah, actually... (redacted).