Transformations Playlist 30 Aug 2016

Title wall

1. We’re creating a dialogue: Wilkins, Behrends, and Boutwell, 3m 1s

The fabric of what really makes Nashville this creative place that everybody’s moving to. I mean 85-100 people a day are not moving here to go to lower Broadway. All of those people, 35000 people a year or whatever the number is this year, they’re coming here because of the reputation Nashville has for its creative communities, and that’s everything from music, photography, food, alcohol, crafts, arts, the local independent businesses. There’s this ingrained appreciation or has been the 14 years I’ve lived here that we come here to appreciate what Nashvillians and Nashville the city has to offer. And these people in the book I think better define Nashville and all the different unique elements of Nashville that do exist in every other city. But if we’re going to have such a magnifying glass on Nashville, then all the people in the book, without them Nashville literally would not be what it is.

Everybody is self employed or self made, that’s kind of how the book ties together in a way, just like the people who picked it up by the bootstraps, ...made it work, you know Lily was looking for inspiration in her own freelance career by talking to these people, by hiring us. And so there is a spirit, an entrepreneurial spirit, a creative spirit, an artist spirit that is part of each of these stories, bound into this one story.

Each one of these folks that I did, they have a way, we have a choice in life to either let uncomfortable or negative things bring us down. And at the end of the day that can make you bitter. Or, you can push forward, push past that, and at the end of the day that makes you seasoned. Wiser. So that kind of optimism, is a take away for all of us. That’s very inspiring. And so given that, when I think about how our city’s changing, It’s fun to be living in the It City. And its fun to be living in the city where so many want to come. At the same time, people are worried that Nashville’s just going to become superficial, basically, because that could happen quite easily. These are people’s lives, this is where families have lived for generations and we don’t want to forget that. And so I think what choice to do we have? Well, tap into the heart of the city. What really matters to folks. And that’s what I love about this collaborative show, because all of us, together, we’re tapping into the work of each other, this is what matters to us as artists. And combined we’re all creating a dialogue that’s bigger than us as individuals.

Gallery corner

2. Line up with someone like Lily: Andrea Behrends,
Normally I wouldn’t say yes to a project like this, this much time for so little money, etc. etc. But that’s the point of being, when you’re freelance, you can give your time to these projects, line up with someone like Lily and then, when you’re lucky enough to be with artists like Joshua, Dani, and Brett then it’s just better.

You know in the book the experience of looking at the image and having the words right there is much different than just walking up to the portrait itself, so that will be interesting.

But I do think this photography is strong enough to stand alone. But can also go and touch the book.

3. Everybody’s getting to see my learning process: Brett Warren, 1m 56s

Lily and I would show up to their space and honestly I would try my hardest to be just the most honest with what I was seeing and not try to change it, because that’s my normal inclination, yeah let’s get in there, and set dress. And let’s tell a story. When I knew it was my job and my duty with the book to make sure I was telling the story of the person. And I admire, I’m the biggest fan of every other photographer in this book, so it was interesting to try and photograph in a way that felt like it was consistent with the other artists as well.

Everybody’s getting to see my learning process in this book, cause I learned so much about taking honest portraiture of people. I think I was very, I was a little nervous when I committed to the project because it was out of my wheelhouse, but it was something I was really interested in learning, and Joshua and Andrea and Danielle they all make such iconic images of people in their spaces, and I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could also play around in that world and see what my perspective was. As every subject went on and on, I got a little more confident and learned a little bit more about what that looks like for me. And I would say even on this side of the project now that after its been completed for several years now it’s been interesting to see how its bled over into my other work. This past year I’ve barely got my lights out cause I love shooting in the natural light. So its been pretty fascinating to see how the process of me learning and shooting things in a more natural way has affected my more fantastical work. And it has a more natural vibe as well. Its just been really well-rounded.

Maybe in the past I had sort of just placed my views of someone on top of them for the portrait, and I learned you could kind of look around and gather little bits about people from what they’re telling you, what they’re saying. Our job on these sets for the book was to quickly assemble that and make it happen on the fly so it was a pretty quick, creative exercise with each person which was super fun.

Sculpture
4. That which isn’t obvious: Carolyn Boutwell, 50s

I love pulling out that which isn’t obvious at first. And all human beings, we learn, every human being wears a mask. We have to, that’s just how we work together in culture and society. I try to look behind that mask to see the person that the people, that are closest to them in their lives see that same human being. I’m more interested in the human being, much like the way you look at someone whom you really care about, who you really connect with. And that’s what I try to see, and that’s not always obvious at first, and especially if I don’t know the person super duper well and they haven’t been a part of my life, I wouldn’t know that. So I have to have a process I use in order to be able to see the real them.

5. They make a beeline to me: Carolyn Boutwell, 1m 19s

Really, I am an artist that likes to work in private, I tend not to like to do my work in front of other people I just need that quiet time, private time. But when I sculpt live I have discovered that people are fascinated by that process and it draws them in. For example, I did Oktoberfest a couple of years ago, and it’s fascinating to watch people, you know they’re walking down the street in their Oktoberfest, festival mood doing their thing with whoever they’re with and then they see me sculpting live and it’s like it changes them, and they make a beeline for me. They’re like wow that’s so cool, we’ve never seen someone work live in this classical style which is something folks don’t get to see. And talk about bringing someone out of their shell, it’s just like amazing to me and I’m just doing something I do all the time. And so I’m like wow it really touches people, it gives them something and it gives me something to see their reaction. It’s something I can really share. And I feel like I get more out of it than they do because I’m loving that, I’m giving that to them. And I’ve just discovered it’s a real enjoyable process.

Gallery wall

6. I get that person, I believe that person: Joshua Black Wilkins, 1m 38s

Kenny Vaughn I’ve known since, I first met him when I was 21, years before I even moved here. He is a world class and known around the world for his guitar playing, and he would never tell you that. But if you mention Kenny Vaughn, whether it’s something he’s producing or I got Kenny Vaughn to play on my record or Kenny Vaughn’s gonna play with me at the Radio Café or whatever it is, it’s instantly like, ohhhh, this I have to see. But he’s an exceptionally humble and hard working and very honest person, and I always gravitate towards and try to create, try to take honest portraits of people. And it doesn’t matter what medium whether it’s digital or film. If I have the opportunity to use a camera and make a portrait of someone, I want it to be, at least feel, but certainly be honest and for someone to look at that person and go like, I get that person, I believe...
that person, or I want to know what that person does. And so Kenny Vaughn certainly was that way.

7. Peeling those Polaroids: Joshua Black Wilkins, 2m 45s

So these are all large format Polaroids, professional Polaroids which are all gone now, but just like 10 years, 20 years and 30 years ago, professional Polaroids, they were used on photo shoots, they were your tests, you test the lights and you test the composition, you test the exposure, shoot more and more Polaroids and you go this is it, stop right here, write all the technical stuff on the back, send it to the lab, and just shoot film.

But just like most people I loved peeling those Polaroids and you immediately look at it and you’re like oh, this is what its going to look like! The same thing we do with digital cameras now, you look at the back and you’re like ooh this is great. But there’s a physical, tangible thing.

But when I pulled that polaroid in Chancellor’s house, laid it out on the table, and I pulled it like this and I look at it and put it right down, I’m like, I knew, this is what I’m going for, this is the photograph. And he freaked out and Lily freaked out and its just like, cool.

But I knew when I pulled that one Polaroid which was color, that my mission was complete, that what I had sought out to create when I saw him and shook his hand and we started shooting, this is what I’m trying to do. […]

There’s almost always one photograph, whether everyone else likes it or not, there’s always one photograph that’s like, this is all I need to remember from that day. If I accomplish anything it’s this one shot. And they’re typically not what becomes album covers, or magazine covers, or anything else. But it’s just something where like, this is what I accomplished. This moment of honesty and its right there, it took only a 30th of a second to make.

8. Following my curiosity (Stephanie Pruitt sculpture): Carolyn Boutwell, 1m 23s

Stephanie, is such a connector. I saw that as being one of her strengths. She’s very nurturing and she does so much, she has this great ability to be able to take, to see things from things that aren’t obvious as well. She’s able to look at something that might not have potential and give it potential. I love that. She also steps into the business, technical, academic world, so she combines right brain and left brain. She’s very holistic that way. I admire that about her. She’s very optimistic. She has the hard of a child, like what’s next, what can I do, what can I do to bring people together, to bring process together. And I found that fascinating. So her piece has to do with her looking at, “what’s next?” She has this wide childlike look on her face. She’s so
beautiful and fascinating she was a delight to sculpt and I just really enjoyed ... and her hair is kind of wild so it’s kind of free, carefree, and I loved giving it that action and life. And the way her head is turned she wants to spin off the pedestal like she’s coming alive, like what’s the next thing to conquer and bring together? And what can I do for other people?

9. Come look, see what it’s like, 1m 36s

I don’t think that I would get the same thing with other, if I was doing it any way. The process of actually taking one single picture is slightly longer, the camera the whole process of it, I don’t think I can really get it the same way.

People always, if they haven’t seen one before, even if people know what it is they get excited to see someone still using a large format camera. Linus actually had me shoot portraits of his daughters and at a different time. He wanted to have pictures of them in the same way. And then when I was shooting them I showed them how to use the camera and stuff, and let them sit under the dark cloth with me as I shot, each of the girls so they could kindof see how it worked. And adults, the same thing. People take pictures of the camera as soon as I take it out. They want me with the camera. And I’m always like come look, see what its like. Cause a lot of people have never looked through a camera like that before, they don’t even understand how I have to look at it and how I have to make my brain work to know how to use it.

It’s the same with on of the other cameras that Andrea uses, the Hasabladd, so even though I’m looking at it right side up, the left and right are backwards. So again it’s like getting used to doing something, like training your brain. It’s like something that most people don’t ever really experience. They’re like its upside down and backwards? How does that work?

10. It’s slightly nerve-wracking: Danielle Atkins, 1, 50s

You can still buy film, there are only a couple companies that make it, and you can buy expired polaroid if you can find it. Polaroid-polaroid is really hard to come by.

I use I actually have to send my film to a lab in Rochester in New York, because no one here develops that size film. When I moved down here four years ago and I shoot 4x5 and there was one lab and I called them to find out their pricing and they’re like oh no, we don’t do 4x5 anymore and I was like oh, what am I gonna do? And I was like, I guess I’ll send my film back to my lab in New York. And so I started doing that. But then my lab got bought out by another lab and they merged and I didn’t really feel comfortable. So I found this really small lab in Rochester and the guy that owns it is great, and I feel totally comfortable sending my film to New York and getting it back.
It’s like terrifying in a way. Because I have no control over it, which I have a problem with to begin with [laughs]. But it’s slightly nerve-wracking. I’ve gotten used to it now after four years. I feel pretty comfortable. But I take extra security measures, I put everything in plastic bags and then another plastic bag. Because if the film gets wet before it’s developed it’s ruined. And I just insure it. So if something happens at least I am compensated so I can re-shoot something. Which would be a bummer. [knocks on wood] But that’s never happened. But it’s slightly, it’s nerve-wracking.

11. I actually get very close: Danielle Atkins, 1m 29s
I get really close to them [laughs] with the actual camera. I actually get very close to people. So I’ll usually start a little more pulled back, and then I’m like, okay, now I’m gonna get in your face. And I get really close to them. [laughs] Cause it’s great, you’re never gonna stand that close to someone’s face. Ones I really love is where I fill the entire frame with their face. And then I’m very close to them [laughs]. Usually it starts a little bit of giggling. Cause they don’t realize, I’m like okay I’m gonna get really close to you, and then it’s like, I’m like 6 inches, a foot away from their face and they’re like oh you weren’t joking, you are in my face!

But then it’s like, set the camera, tell them, you know, relax, get ready. And then I always have people just take a breath, and relax, because people sometimes forget to breathe when they’re having their picture taken. Even with a more simple camera. So I always have people breathe, and it really helps kind of relax them. So that usually it’s like a little bit of uncomfortable laughter, but then just a breath and it then it kindof breaks, and then they can focus on the lens cause it’s very close. And then I try to move quickly [laughs].

Back Hall

12. I’m maybe the most odd fit for this book: Brett Warren, 56s
I’m maybe the most odd fit for this book, the photographer. Because most of my normal work is kind of fantastical and I’m taking people out of their normal settings and I’m putting them in my setting and saying what I want to say about them. And a lot of times we’ll collaborate together and figure out what that is. But in this book it was such a challenge to tell their story in their own story of way, that’s true to the artist that we’re talking about.

I kind of wanted to do something, when I heard about the exhibit, where I would show a little more of myself than I did in the book, even. So the picture of Derek through the glass, that to me is a slightly more fantastical way of looking at him. And there’s a little bit of fantasy over the image and it’s a little less straightforward.
It was interesting because he was talking about even the view behind his house and how lovely it was and peaceful and to me it was an interesting way to abstract that over his face and let it be a dream. Which was fun.

13. I was trying to meet him there, through the photo: Brett Warren, 1m 20s

We connected, but not a lot of words were exchanged between the two of us. And not for any reason, I think we were both there just to do our job and maybe slightly timid, but it was pretty fantastic seeing him almost in his little cathedral. Cause I know that’s his special place, at safe house. The chair was just so beautiful and the light was surrounding him and he had those kind eyes and it just felt very kind and calm and so I think that’s why he was totally putting that out there and I was trying to meet him there and show that through the photo. Which is a pretty special thing.

I love religious iconography, and any time I can put someone in their cathedral or their special space, or their sacred place as some people will call it, we were in his studio, and that to me I knew was very intentional, he built that space for him to exist in. So I wanted to show him right in the center surrounded by light, it was all natural light I think with one small light in the corner. I don’t remember if I had it on or not, I can look at the picture and tell you. But almost seated on like a little throne.

14. How the portrait gets to the wall: Andrea Behrends, 1m 38s

It was really hard to pick because I love each of the portraits for different reasons and then there’s the decisions of male-female, white background, environment, trying to give you a mix of both. The environment of Manuel was just really compelling, Cali DeVane is just a badass and I respect her, and photographing her, even though she is so laid back and approachable, I was just like, when you respect someone you just really want the portrait to portray that person well, obviously, you don’t want to take bad pictures of people. And then Jesse Baylin she’s like, photographing her on white made sense to me, like keeping it light, you don’t need an environment with her because it’s really about her.

Buddy Jackson, I mean, there’s a painting of his behind him that the light is half and half, and I got lucky enough to have that lighting on him, to so I got to imitate his work on that portrait of him. That stuff only happens once in awhile. You can look for it, you can force it, but when you just find it, when it just is there, and you’re like oh, obvious choice made, sit here, bless this light, bless this portrait.

It’s just, each one has its own thing. So those are, there’s this process of elimination almost, with how the portrait gets to the wall.
15. Get real with me in your eyes: Andrea Behrends, 1m 8s

Photography is a medium, teaching yoga is a medium. I am communicating to you, so that you will communicate to me.

I’m asking the people I’m taking portraits of to not only look inside, but then let me look inside and just get real with me in your eyes if you can, can you bring that to your eyes. And I don’t always ask them that point blank, some people don’t have that language, but that is what I’m doing. Or where the personality is so large that I just, I take the same view as everybody else cause that’s what I can have.

I think you see something in Jessie’s eyes even though she’s not looking into my lens. Susan is laughing and that’s what I want to show of that. Manuel is working and that’s I want to show of that. Buddy has that language. Buddy gave me what he wanted to give me. And in that exchange, of two artists younger, older, you know, there is very much an “alright kid, let’s do this thing. I know what I’m gonna portray.” You know?