

In A New Light: Rediscovering Photo Center NW

by CLAIRE REINER on Jun 11, 2013 · 12:12 pm

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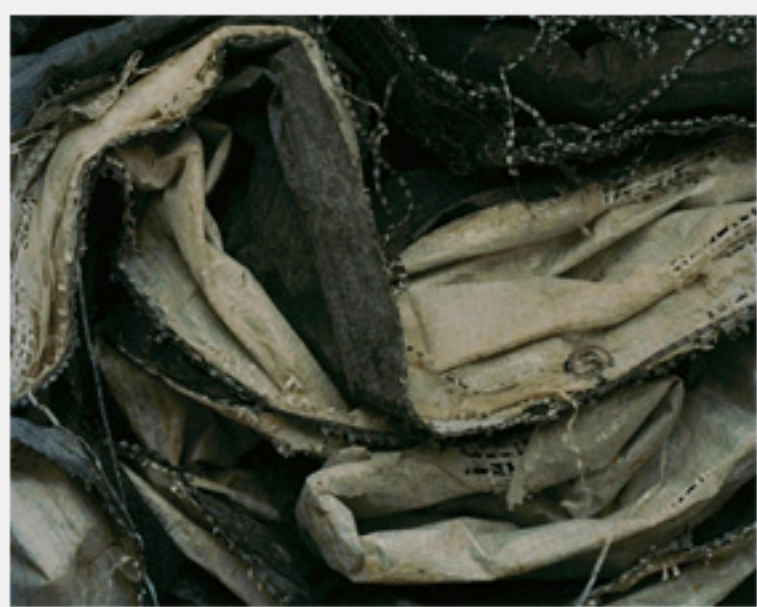
Photography by Dan Hawkins, part of Photo Center NW's Thesis Exhibition

Photo Center Northwest has been a staple in the Seattle and national photographic arts scene for over twenty years. This year, the Photo Center will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of its incorporation as a non-profit and its twelfth year on Capitol Hill. The institution began as a photography school with just a small gallery, but it has grown into a fully accredited school with a strong partnership with Seattle University.

By combining a photography school and gallery, Photo Center NW introduces students and visitors to renowned photographers with international exposure and experience, cultivating local budding artists within a larger community. There are artist lectures associated with every event and the openings to some exhibitions offer an immersive experience to visitors. One memorable example was a solo exhibition of work by Henry Horenstein, whose opening reception included burlesque performance, referencing the Boston-based photographer's subject matter.

Despite its positive reputation in the national photographic arts and gallery community, Photo Center NW has remained somewhat under the radar of many local art enthusiasts and patrons. Visitors from other cities have referred to it as "an undiscovered gem." The non-profit is actively seeking to help locals discover the work being shown in its gallery space. This is in turn re-shaping the gallery's direction as they seek to communicate to a larger audience.

One voice that is steering this pursuit is Michelle Dunn Marsh, Photo Center NW's new director. Marsh has worked as a curator, administrator, publisher and educator. This gives her an understanding of all aspects of the photography industry, and her extensive experience with workshops and education motivates to raise the profile of the conversation that the center is fostering—especially regarding education itself. While she is not an "image maker," Michelle Marsh believes in the "power of the viewer." This idea speaks to the duality of the Photo Center as both gallery and education space. Beyond Marsh's business and professional background, her personal history has been shaped by the Pacific Northwest. Born and raised in Puyallup, and then educated in New York, Marsh has Northwest roots with a broader world experience and perspective—a sense of cross-pollination.



Photography by Chris Letcher

Photo Center NW is one of the few places on the West Coast solely dedicated to the medium of photography. Their latest show, *The Thesis Exhibition*, speaks to Photo Center NW's unique position as an educative and gallery space. It features distinctive work by graduates of the Photo Center's three-year program: Dan Hawkins, Chris Letcher and Patrick Names. Dan Hawkins' use of water from the captured location to develop his images speaks to the concept of site specificity that has been evident in his collaborations with other artists, including [Saint Genet](#). Patrick Names' intimate work redefines self-documentation by capturing keepsakes and notes obscuring the artist himself. Chris Letcher's work delves into detailed glimpses of objects that are often overlooked, creating images that tend toward abstraction.

While it is a challenging time for all education and non-profit programs in the U.S., Photo Center NW stands out as a progressive institution. The medium of photography, as it is quite young, allows a sense of innovation and freedom embraced by Photo Center NW. Marketing director Rafael Soldi states, "For that reason and as technology advances we are still seeing a lot of innovation in the medium and this is driving what artists are doing... Now we are seeing many photographers leaving the traditional frame and stretching the notion of lens-based art by incorporating moving images, creating photographic sculptures and installations, and embracing lo-fi approaches." This perspective speaks to the trajectory of photography locally and the ultimate goal of Photo Center NW, as it both educates and promotes local talent in a robust arts community through the union of emerging and established artists.

Photo Center NW is located across from the Seattle University campus, at 900 12th Ave. The Thesis Exhibition is on display in the gallery until July 15.



Photography by Patrick Names

Tags: Art Photography, Arts Education, Capitol Hill, Chris Letcher, Dan Hawkins, Michelle Marsh, Patrick Names, PCNW, Photo Center NW, Photography, Rafael Soldi, Visual Arts