

Genna Sellers
SP 22 Residency Summary
02/01/22

I imagine many earlier Group 1 students began their residencies feeling as overwhelmed and lost as I did. Compared to other art discussed, my work felt devoid of meaning and direction.

Somewhere along the line, a student from a more advanced cohort gave the suggestion to just “make your art, and figure out what it means later.” After reading, “*Bullshit Makes the Art Grow Profounder*” that makes sense.

At the end of the residency, a photographer friend of mine asked, “Are you an artist yet?”

So how does one wind up ten full days of residency experiences into one coherent train of thought? While I might fail, I will at least try. I will focus primarily on the discussions, recommendations, and thoughts as they relate to my current and future practice.

Several people recommended I study photographer Andreas Gursky. Gursky’s architectural work often includes patterns, forced perspective, flatness, and multiple exposures; stitched together.

When I compared his interior image of the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta to mine, which I included in my MFA submission portfolio, his approach became more clear. Apparently, to compare one’s work at my stage of education to a “master’s” work is gauche. However, contemplating these two images together opens up my imagination to new possibilities.



Andreas Gursky, *Atlanta* (1996).

Photographer Candida Hofer's name was mentioned several times once as well. Hofer shoots her work with an 8x10 camera which I found impressive; unfortunately, some technical issues exist with lighting in several of her images. Letting go of the latter, I can appreciate the sense of control and power generated by her frequent use of symmetry punctuated with a central vanishing point.



Candida Hofer, *Hermitage St. Petersburg VIII.*, 2014.

A third, often mentioned photographer, was James Casebere. Casebere creates architectural minimalist models, then dramatically lights them to tell a story. His work viewed online was interesting, but for me, fell short of the enthusiasm exuded by those who recommended him. At my favorite used bookstore, I found a hardbound copy of *James Casebere, Works 1975-2010*. In this volume, I found images that Google did not include. For me, the impact of the printed page was greater than the LCD screen of my computer. While I am not sure I want to build architectural models; I will keep his minimalist approach in mind as I explore the concept of “reality” this semester.



James Casebere, Blue House on Water #2, 2019.



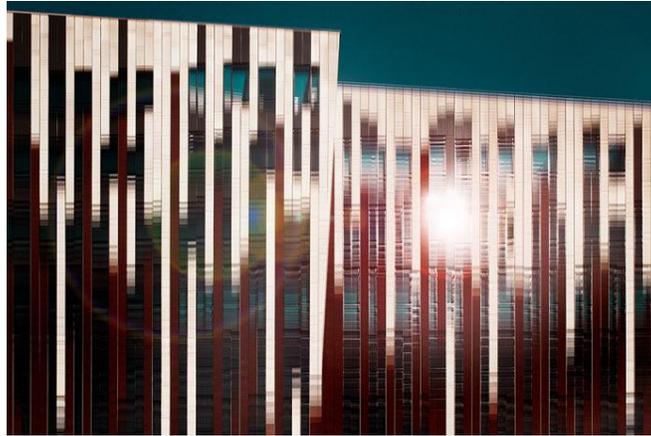
Side note. Elements of James Casebere's work reminds me of this still from the South Korean movie *Il Mar*, which also causes the viewer to question reality.

After I met with Peter Rostovsky, a non-advisor faculty member, I noticed a trend had emerged. His recommendations included Gursky and Carsten Witte. Another image in my submission portfolio reminded me of one of Witte's. I wonder if my family tree includes a German branch?



Carsten Witte, from *NYC Fractal* collection.

Witte “deconstructs” architectural photography, taking it to a level I have yet to explore, but am looking forward to experimenting with soon.



Carsten Witte, *Countless Layers of Deconstruction*.

Several people suggested I study still-life painters since I had mentioned an interest in photographic still-life. Jan Avigkos, another non-advisor faculty member, recommended Janet Fish, whose modern still-life paintings often include reflected light, multiple recurring shapes, and vibrant colors.



Janet Fish, *Goldfish Fantasy, September*.

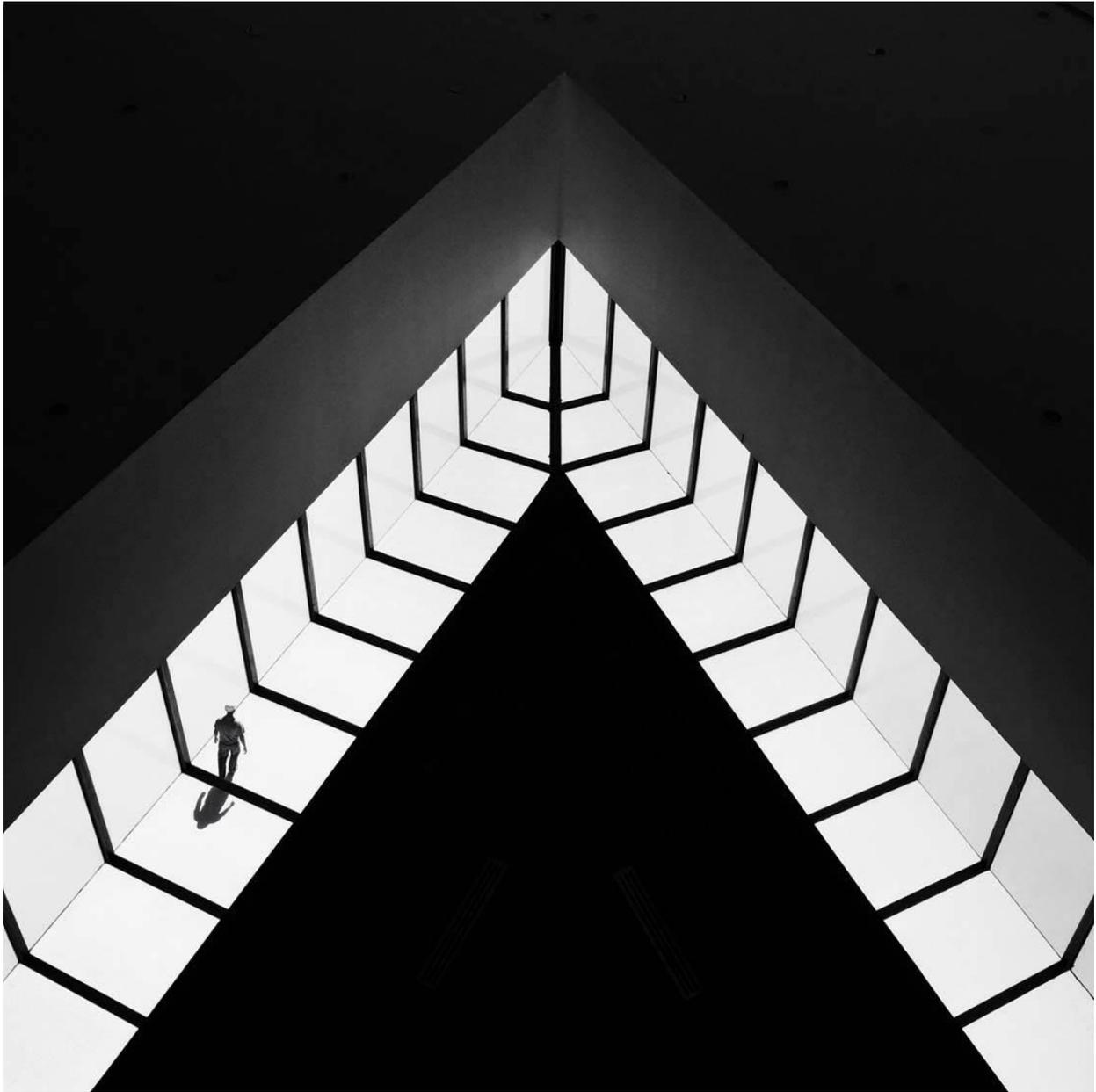
Avigkos also told me I needed to learn more about the history of photography. She told me that in the same, slightly exasperated tone of voice my sister used when she told me I needed a thesaurus. In my defense, I am horrible with names and am much more likely to remember an image, long before I recall a name. While it was a little embarrassing, given my background, I knew she was right. Now I own a used copy of the book Avigkos recommended, *A New History of Photography*. In addition, I purchased *A World History of Photography: 5th Edition* to replace my 1st Edition from photography school.

The critique Elizabeth Lindy, a graduating student prepared, went above and beyond my expectations. Lindy reviewed my Lesley portfolio link, researched photographers and other artists, and prepared overall comments that will be helpful when I write my next Artist's Statement. A couple of days later, she emailed a pdf, which included links for several artists that were new to me. One photographer she suggested, Jeanette Hagglund from Sweden, who has a marvelous eye for shape, color, and movement in terms of architecture.



Jeanette Hagglund, from the set *Temptations*.

Another photographer Elizabeth highlighted was Jose Luis Saez, who specializes in highly graphic black and white iPhone photography, often exploring the concepts of loneliness and solitude.



Jose Luis Saez, *Title Unknown*.

Upon completion of the SP22 residency, I have a treasure trove full of inspiration to propel me forward. Initially, most had encouraged me to continue on the path of producing “fantastical” architectural photography, because if it isn’t broken, why fix it? Instead, I hope to stretch my practice, to go back to the photo studio and interact directly with objects to build a story; as opposed to working on location with immovable structures built by others, to tell a story. Many understood this and helped to brainstorm ideas for studio work to explore concepts of reality.

My plan for the studio component this semester would not be complete without including suggestions made by the photographer who will be my Artist Mentor. His name is Paul Lee, a professor of photography at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Prior to our introductory Zoom meeting, he examined not only MFA submission portfolio, Lee thoroughly reviewed my website. During our discussion, he said that my portrait work was strong and that I should look at photographers David Hilliard and Deana Lawson.



David Hilliard, *Into Another Skin*, 2012.

David Hilliard’s approach to storytelling is interesting. Hilliard presents a single scene as three separately photographed components captured at different points in time. This forces the viewer to contemplate each individual image as well as the overall story.



Bober and Saira Soori, 2017



Saira Soori, 2017

Deana Lawson, from her Photobook, Deana Lawson.

When I viewed Deana Lawson's work, I felt torn. I have read, *The Many Problems with Deana Lawson's Photographs*, written by Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw. Shaw is an African American female art historian, who brings up several good points. I have a couple of questions to add to her thoughts.

The accompanying text for Lawson's exhibition *Centropy*, states: "the everyday is transfigured into the uncanny and the magnificent..." When Lawson's images include a fully unclothed person, why is the person usually female? This disparity isn't uncanny or magnificent.

Per Lawson's biography on the Rhona Hoffman Gallery website, "Careful attention is given to lighting and pose, both formal constructs used to transform and intensify representations of power and liberation through the personal and intimate space." Why do so many of Lawson's images have the subject(s) placed in a corner? What is powerful or liberating about being trapped in a corner? Especially for women?

Given my Artist Mentor suggested I look at these photographers, my plan is to include portraiture that reflects on the concept of reality into the mix of my other projects.

Am I an artist yet? Only time will tell.