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Photo exhibit of an artist discovering sense of self

"I AM HERE" at Hudson gallery

By Tim Kane Updated 1:11 pm, Wednesday, April 5, 2017

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Sasha Sicurella Photo credit: Rachael Kerner

It is often a twisting, unpredictable journey to an artist's first solo exhibition. For Sasha Sicurella, this especially rings true. It's been 15 years since she graduated with an MFA from New York University where, by the end, she

was spending as much time in the school's counseling office than in the studio. She was struggling with a sense of herself as an artist and had just about had it with it all.

So at her opening of "I AM HERE" Saturday at 46 Green Street Studios in Hudson is not only a tantalizing exhibit of photographs, but a resolution to her identity as an artist, a coming-to-terms with the artist and the public. Creativity is a very personal thing shared with many others, often a balance between perfectionism and acceptance; your own vision versus the collective conscious of viewers, which can be a rather harsh experience.

For Sicurella, the passage to personal expression has been on the road less traveled. The time spent counseling triggered a transition to arts education that led to a position at Art Omi in Columbia County and eventually the founding of a global nonprofit called I Am International. The path has taken her to 20 countries, logging more than 160,000 miles in a decade.

"I AM" uses photography to stimulate the artistic impulse for the world's poorest children, to expand their sense of individuality. For 22,500 self-portrait clicks, Sicurella stood behind the young artists in support, shying away from the process herself. Until now.

More Information

If you go

Sasha Sicurella: "I AM HERE"

Where: 46 Green Street Studios, 46 Green St., Hudson.

When: Exhibit open through April 30.

Info: Free;
<http://46greenstreetstudios.com> or
518-303-6446

Along the way, she was taking photos on the side documenting her travels, waiting for the artist inside to emerge. We caught up with Sicurella recently to chat about the exhibit and other things. This interview was compiled from in-person discussions and email correspondence:

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Q: So, as a creative person, you found yourself at the tail end of your MFA program and not feeling the most creative about your art as you searched for an identity. What was going on?

A: For me, the art making process seemed inherently selfish, and I had difficulty justifying, or even understanding, the meaning of success as an artist. This feeling, compounded by the struggle to search for my own sense of identity as a young adult, steered me away from the art world. In retrospect, I still had a creative impulse, but was looking for an alternative to the solitary artist/gallery relationship.

Q: The exhibit marks a coming out for you at an artistic level. Is there one event that has triggered the artist in you to re-emerge or has it been a slow evolution over time?

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A: It wasn't until recently that I realized I have always been making art, but just not allowing myself to acknowledge it. Spending the last seven years helping others to make self-portraits created just enough distraction from myself to allow my work to start to develop. Now, I have the ability to, much more intentionally, step out of the "project frame," switch perspectives, and participate in my own artistic moments.

Q: What specifically is it about arts education that led to you finding your identity?

A: Teaching is an art in itself, one that insists on your ability to adapt and improvise, to find human connections with your students, and to use those connections to inspire some kind of creative expression. It is an art of gentle guidance, of strong encouragement, and of knowing when to let go of your own rules. With practice, I found success, a kind that I could see and believe in. Over time, and without really knowing it, this helped to shape my own identity.

Q: You've seen some of the poorest places on Earth, which must be, at some point, emotionally draining. What motivates you to keep doing it?

A: Otherness is an interesting thing, and something I continue to learn about it through my experiences. In poorness I have seen resourcefulness, in marginalization I have seen resilience, and in "uncivilized" populations I have seen thriving, highly functioning communities. Witnessing this is motivation in itself.

Q: Many of the photos in the exhibit capture moments of vulnerability from its subjects, suggesting a universality of basic feelings. Is this your aim? Do you look for these moments, or are they "found"?

A: My process borrows from the photojournalist, the historian, and the educator. I want to comment on issues, preserve moments in time and offer meaningful creative experiences. When I am with the people I am photographing, there is collaboration, mutual respect, and the sense that we are making something together. When guards are down and feelings are authentic, the moments are easily found.

Tim Kane is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

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