"Catcher of Nature, Jeri Eisenberg" *Rfotofolio,* Fine Art Photography Blog, April 23, 2015.

Rfotofolio is pleased to share the work of Jeri Eisenberg, whose work and craft we have enjoyed for many years.

Would you please tell us a little about yourself?

I grew up in the metro NY area, but spent virtually all of my adult life to date in upstate NY, in rural or exurban environments. For the last 25 years, I've lived on 18 acres of land in a home surrounded by third generation woods, not terribly far from the Hudson River. My father made his living as a commercial artist; my mom was a teacher. After college, I went directly to law school and practiced law for 15 years. It was not a good emotional fit, and I finally heeded my husband's suggestion that I take a break. I never looked back.

How did you get started in photography?

I first did darkroom work during high school. My father worked in graphic arts studios in the advertising world as a photo retoucher (pre Photoshop days), so photography was always around me while growing up. I took a course or two during college, but didn't become serious about photography till I quit lawyering. I went back for community college courses to re-introduce myself to the wet darkroom, then started showing locally and working as an adjunct at a local college. I ultimately went back for my MFA at the age of 50.

Which photographers and other artists' work do you admire?

I have a theory that, as with music, the visual styles that you come of age with resonate in a special way for you, notwithstanding how many other styles and approaches you come to appreciate. In terms of my visual sensibilities, I came of age with the late modernists. I don't think I'll ever escape the thrall of Harry Callahan or Mark Rothko. Nor would I want to.

Would you share with us an image (not your own) that has stayed with you over time?

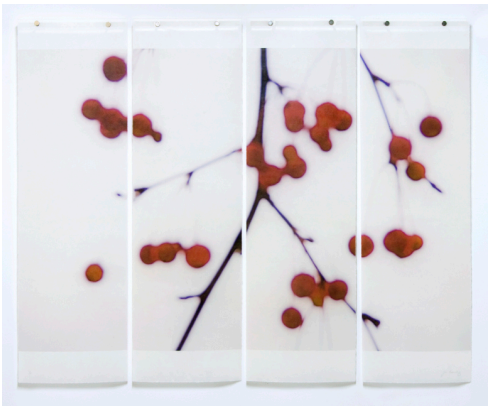
This 1950 image of Callahan's from Chicago:

CHICAGO, 1950 © ESTATE OF HARRY CALLAHAN

If no one saw your work, would you still create it?

Absolutely; it answers a need from within.
Please tell us about your process and what the perfect day for you might be.
For my "Sojourn in Season" series – my most exhibited work – the process is really very simple. I shoot with a defocused lens or oversized pinhole (pretty much the former now that I'm shooting digitally). I process the images in Photoshop (usually fairly minimally), and print on my desktop Epson on long panels of Japanese Kozo paper. Finally, I infuse the paper with wax by pulling it over a hot pancake griddle while painting on encaustic medium that is kept molten in a crock-pot. This makes the paper, and the image, very translucent.
It may say a lot about me that I don't wish for perfect days, and even have a hard time envisioning what that might be. I look for good days with periods of perfection, and I'm lucky to have a lot of those. Those times include walking on a trail in the woods, in an arboretum or in a city park with a high overcast sky in October or May with a camera in hand. Or a sunny day without a camera in hand. It also includes watching a newly shot SD card downloading to I-Photo, which provides the same excitement and anticipation that I use to get watching a contact sheet or work print rise in a tray of Dektol. And, it includes waxing new work with the doors and windows wide open (heat or AC off) and not freezing or sweating as I pull a stack of printed Kozo panels over my griddle. Those things don't happen together, and I wouldn't want them to. Throw any one of them, or a train ride along the Hudson River on a soft silver day before a day of gallery going in NYC, together with the coffee my husband brings me in the morning (he's an early riser, I'm not), a phone call or visit from my kids, and a glass of wine or two in the evening, and I'm pretty darn happy. That's what I strive for.

CRABAPPLE, NO.4 © JERI EISENBERG



WINTER BERRIES © JERI EISENBERG

How did you get started in encaustic work?

I first started working with encaustic back in the late 1990s. I was making Van Dyke Brown photograms of discarded x-rays and desiccated plant material. I started using wax to incorporate some of the plant material directly onto the surface of the prints. For the next couple of years, wax played very little role in the series I worked on. But when I started the "Sojourn in Seasons" series, I wanted a way to allow luminance to come from within the images themselves, which the wax does beautifully. I also wanted to allow the work to be exhibited as objects, floating free off the wall rather than in frames behind glass or plexi. Waxing achieved these objectives as well. It was a perfect match as it gave the work a more organic feel, while at the same time protecting it and giving the paper more substance.

What challenges do you face as an artist?

I'm slow and deliberative in most things, but that turns out to be both good and bad for the type of work I do. I'm not very good at juggling, and I'm somewhat resistant to change. The latter two are not good qualities in an artist, or for life in general.

Is there one thing that you wish people would stop doing when it comes to the creative process or in the art world?

I'd like to see a whole lot less art-speak, and a little less irony in the art world. I think beauty can have a restorative effect, and that this notion is too often, and too readily, dismissed. And, I don't think beauty should always be a handmaiden to another purpose, which seems to be the prevailing ethos.

If you could go out and shoot or spend the day with another photographer living or passed who would it be?

I have a hard time imagining myself purposefully setting off with another photographer to shoot. I'm usually by myself when I'm shooting, or with my husband, with him walking, waiting, walking, waiting, and waiting some more. But, I'd love to have a chat, somehow, with Imogen Cunningham. I think she'd be a hoot!

How do you view this time in the history of photography?

I think it's a wonderfully exciting time – there are more approaches to using light to create imagery than ever before. Finding what best expresses your individual voice and way of looking at the world may seem daunting, but certainly there is greater opportunity to do so than ever before. And I think we've finally gotten past the 'can photography be art' phase, thankfully.

UNDER THE NORWAY MAPLE, NO2-2 © JERI EISENBERG

How do you overcome a creative block?

I've been working on my "Sojourn in Seasons" series for almost 10 years now. I don't think I've suffered from a creative block during this time – more that I've been unwilling to leave the series behind yet. I've worked on other things intermittently that use similar, but slightly different approaches, yet I keep returning to the waxed Kozo images of trees and plant forms. I get great pleasure from looking – at art, at the natural world, at aspects of the man-made world. And so I have a growing list of other subject matter and approaches that I'd like to address. I don't foresee being at a loss for imagery once I decide I'm done with a "Sojourn in Seasons".

Would you like to share a story about one of your images?

There is a back-story to my "Sojourn in Seasons" series. I was given an artist's grant to turn unused storefront spaces in a small upstate city into camera obscura. I was using mural paper on stands inside the spaces to capture street scenes. I utilized larger than appropriate apertures just to let in enough light to see where I wanted to set up the stands. It was the out of focus, dancing light abstracts formed by the city curbside trees that caught my attention however. I ended up quickly completing the project I had gotten the grant for, using appropriately sized apertures and focused images, and then went on to start the beginnings of my current series.
I turned my sunroom at home into a camera obscura to capture unfocused abstractions of the woods around my house on mural paper. Then I started using 5×7 RC paper in handmade pinhole cameras that I went into the woods with. Next I made pinholes for my 35mm camera and captured unfocused images of the woods on B&W film. I started scanning the wet darkroom work prints, and printing larger, digitally on fine art papers, vellum, mylar and fabrics. I moved on to color film and film scanning, then to using a defocused lens and ultimately to digital capture.
This evolution of the series to its current format was happening over a timeframe in which my father was loosing both clarity in his sight due to mini strokes and his memory due to dementia. It became clear to me that the work I was producing was very close to what he then could perceive and hold on to: images that fade in and out of recognizable form. The work straddles the line between the concrete and the abstract, the real and the remembered. The series took on a greater meaning for me and became metaphorical; it echoes the ephemeral nature of all life.

How does your art affect the way you see the world?

Without question, my artwork has made me more sensitive to seeing beauty in the world around me. And that alone is reason to continue.
Where can we see your work, and would you like to share any upcoming projects?
Thanks to a visit from my son last year, I've finally joined the 21st century and have much of my work up on my own website, jerieisenberg.com. My work can also be seen on the websites of a number of galleries that represent me. I just delivered over a dozen brand new images (not yet on my website) to my gallery in Chelsea, Markel Fine Arts. I'll also be having solo shows this May in Houston at Catherine Couturier Gallery, and this September in Jackson Hole at Diehl Gallery. And I expect

that a couple of pieces from a brand new series with imagery of Koi will be heading out to one of my galleries shortly.

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Thank you Jeri for sharing your work and your words we look forward to sharing more of your work.