

# 2011/12 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Young Photographer's Alliance Award



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Photography  
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Like most artists my work is deeply connected to my personal life. I started pursuing photography after a year spent struggling with depression. My initial motivation to take photos came from a desire to document the beauty of my life to make me want to live it. Having a camera in my hand gave my life a sense of validity that nothing else ever has.

I have always been interested in the idea of activism through art. I think the first time it manifested itself in my work was when I was capturing the economic injustice I found in my daily life through Street Photography. Later I began to focus on the way women think and feel about their own bodies and sexuality as part of my commitment to social justice. The older I was the more frustrated I became with most of the depictions of female sexuality in our society and the fact they were largely created by men. I have made it a point to document the reality of women I know and the struggles that permeate their lives. I felt a responsibility to capture desire and longing from a feminine perspective in an honest way. I find it empowering especially as a woman to photograph women as they really are as opposed to perpetuating sterilized and airbrushed images of who we think we should be. I realized at this point my role as artist has a sense of responsibility for the images I create and how they make other



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people view their world. I have an opportunity as a creator to challenge aspects of our society I do not agree with and offer an alternative.

During my last year at Cleveland State University I was sexually assaulted by someone I considered a close friend. This experience left me with emotional and physical wounds and through trying to recovery from it I found a deeper sense of direction in my work. Instead of trying to forget what had happened to me I wanted to share with people exactly how that experience made me feel and ultimately hoped to spark conversation about an issue most people would prefer not to discuss. I feel a sense of responsibility to speak out about what happened to me and let other people who struggled with similar things know they are not alone. I based my senior project on the plot of the film Roxanna where a woman is shown in a variety of sexual situations that ultimately leads her down a road of insanity and loneliness and ends with her tearing herself apart. I identified with the title character and decided to make a series that followed the story while explicitly referencing my own experiences that have traumatized me. I felt I had the opportunity to take these experiences that could have defined my life and redefined them in my art. I see myself going on to educate others and help them find their voice the same way photography has helped me find mine. I want to return to Cleveland and work as an educator and start my own non-profit organization.

