



'Damaged'  
photos raise  
interesting  
questions

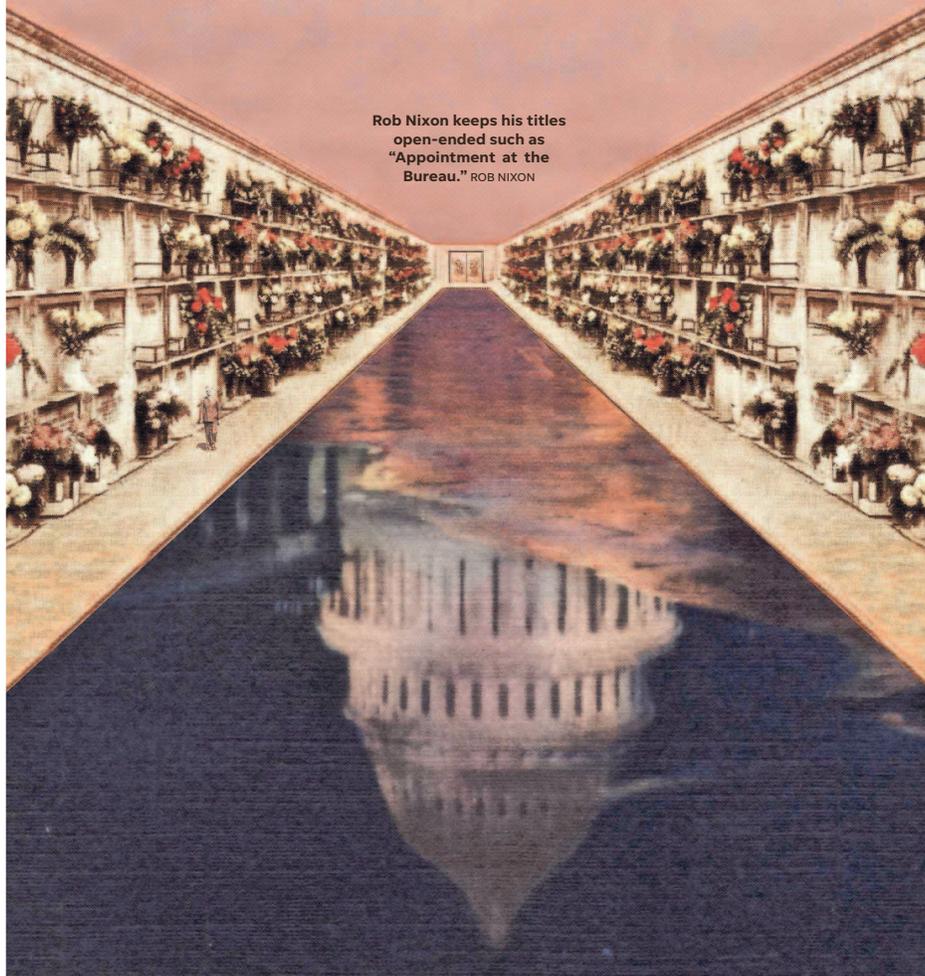
# HIDDEN *gems*

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

Rob Nixon does not consider himself strictly a photographer. He prefers interpreter, manipulator, meddler, or re-imaginer of images. Nixon is both a playwright and digital photography composer, finding narrative in written and visual realms. Regardless if he is working with his original photographs or other source material, he is always looking for "hidden gems."

"A lot of my plays have been fascinated with why we tell the stories we do and how we use these stories to make sense of our lives and the world around us," says Nixon. "If there's a connection between my writing and my photographs it is that. What is this that is trying to be said and why is somebody telling this particular story in this particular way?"

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Rob Nixon keeps his titles  
open-ended such as  
"Appointment at the  
Bureau." ROB NIXON

## Nixon

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Recently, Nixon believes his photography is coming full circle as he is working with Polaroid pictures he took as a teenager. The Polaroid was Nixon's first camera.

This series "Damaged" uses photos from his late mother's albums and emphasizes the imperfections of the aged media. Nixon's composition, "Husband's Friend From Work" will be shown as a part of this year's Photofest at the Artport Gallery through Jan. 13.

"The damage on the Polaroid brought out different colors and textures as I started working with it which I found really compelling," says Nixon, who manipulates the evidence of fingerprints and writing that have altered the photos to add dimension. "When I took these photos, my mother used to write on the back of them. Some of the writing has come through onto the front of the photo and they look like strange hieroglyphics."

Nixon enjoys creating a sense of mystery around his compositions, whether it is in the subject's expression or the peripheral elements that become heightened through his digital manipulations. A self-taught photographer, he earned his degree in English and has worked for numerous communications offices and publications throughout his career. As a result of Nixon's daily work demands, he began learning graphic imaging software like Photoshop and Illustrator.

It wasn't long before working with the software became a part of his leisure time as Nixon toyed with his own photographs. In 2010, a curator invited him to have a solo exhibition during the Atlanta Celebrates Photography Festival. Nixon says he began collaging regularly after the success of that first show, entering his work around the world and selling to interested buyers.

For Nixon, writing and photography are inextricably linked in his process. When he first started making pieces, he would write a paragraph and then challenge himself to create an image that was just as detailed.

He takes a bird's eye view on making work, and will often ruminate on the construction of stories both in words and images as his main source of inspiration. In this regard, he is heavily influenced by Italian author Italo Calvino and the book, "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler," for how it examines storytelling on a macro and micro scale.

"As a storyteller, you pick certain aspects of conflict, character, setting, and subtext and you pull them together into a narrative," says Nixon. "We think of photography as putting a photo down and capturing reality, but photographers actually pick and choose these things as well to tell stories in their photos."

Nixon looks deeply into each photo to see what the story behind the story might be. Sometimes a gesture or expression sparks his interest and leads to something fruitful. Other times he works for hours but comes up with a dead end. Nixon is invested in the process rather than the product, and focuses his energy on following intuition. He might take 12 extra steps in his software to achieve a look, but it is the journey and promise of the unexpected that motivates him forward.

Nixon's work tends to incorporate cultural or historical references. He prefers to keep his titles open ended however, so that the viewer can insert their own thoughts. Such is the case with his work "Appointment at the Bureau" which juxtaposes the U.S. Capitol in a reflecting pool with a mausoleum and a drone flying a filing cabinet overhead.



Rob Nixon's "Husband's Friend From Work" will be shown as a part of this year's Photofest at the Artport Gallery through Jan. 13. ROB NIXON

### If you go

**What:** Photofest 2019

**When:** Opening Reception 6 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 15, exhibit on display through Jan. 13

**Where:** Artport Gallery, 3300 Capital Circle SW

**Cost:** Free and open to the public

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit <http://coca.tallahasseearts.org/art-in-public-places/artport-gallery>.

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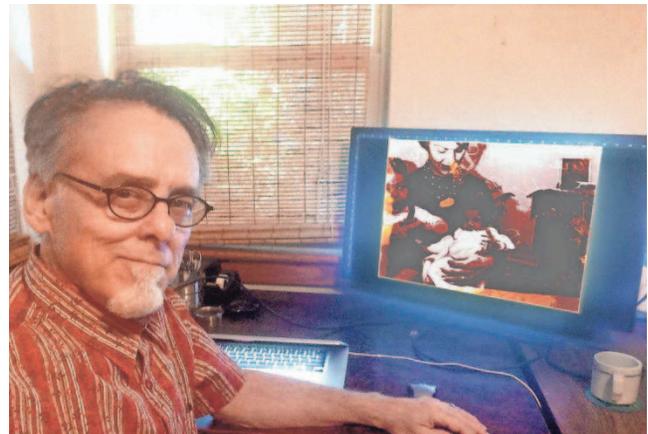
**Rob Nixon**  
storyteller

Another work called "We Don't Belong Here" combines vintage postcards with old photographs. Nixon has jokingly deemed it his "unwanted child" as it hasn't been accepted into any exhibitions, though it is one of his favorites.

He is looking forward to viewers' reactions to his "Damaged" series piece in Photofest this year. The exhibit is curated by COCA for the Art in Public Places program on behalf of the City of Tallahassee. This was a competitive year with 200 works submitted, and will be Nixon's second Photofest exhibition. A public reception will be held on Nov. 15 with an awards announcement at 6:30. Instead of visitors walking away with answers, Nixon hopes to provoke questions.

"I want people to be sucked into the photo, intrigued and wanting to know more," says Nixon. "The questions are more interesting to me than the answers because our questions are what define us more."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*



Rob Nixon is working with Polaroid pictures he took as a teenager for this year's Photofest at the Artport Gallery. ROB NIXON

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