

Under the lens, everyday objects turn surreal

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Abstract photographer Carter Magar peers through her camera lens to adjust the manual focus. Like a curious alchemist, she is surrounded by open Chinese takeout sauce packets, watered down acrylic paints, food dye and dish soap. Magar transforms this unusual potion of liquids into psychedelic swirls of color and texture.

"I enjoy photographing everyday things and turning them into something really uncommon," shares Magar.

At just 18 years old, Magar debuts her abstract photography at Photofest 2018, which can be viewed at the Artport Gallery through Jan. 14. Curated by the Council on Culture & Arts for the Art in Public Places Program, this year's exhibition features fine art photographs by forty local artists. Magar is ecstatic for the opportunity to continue building her career as a photographer and artist.

Her grandfather was her first inspiration as he specialized in caricatures and made her homemade coloring book pages. In school Magar was always an avid drawer, painter, and sculptor, and says it was photographing her 3D work that got her into the medium. At SAIL High School she was eager to deepen her studies with the support of her parents and teachers. Her mentors at school encouraged her to push the envelope and Magar soon fell in love with darkroom photography.

"It was such a unique experience to work with film in a digital age and it was something that pushed me and kept me going because it was so new to me," says Magar.

After graduating from SAIL, Magar pursued commercial photography at Lively Technical Center. There, she became immersed in learning every inch of her camera and getting hands-on experience working with different techniques. However, a shift slowly began to occur and Magar found she wasn't as passionate about taking portraits or photographing in a studio environment as she was taking fine arts photos.

Magar will enroll at Tallahassee Community College in January with sights set on becoming an art teacher or art therapist. She's focused now on abstract images and finds that she can never get close enough to her subject. The furthest she's gone for a shot placed her upside-down and hanging out of a tree with her camera nearly touching the surface of a lake. Another project that explored nightmarish images taught her an important lesson about photographing in public spaces.

"I had my boyfriend put on a gold mask, cover himself in a sheet, and get into a bush," describes Magar. "This poor woman came running by with her



Endoplasmic, one of Carter Magar's photos. PHOTOS BY CARTER MAGAR

If you go

What: Photofest 2018

When: 8 a.m.-11:30 p.m. Daily through Jan. 14

Where: The Artport Gallery, 3300 Capital Circle SW

Cost: Free

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

dog and was so alarmed. I carry a little sign now that says photographing in progress and to get people's attention and explain what is going on."

Magar admits that some of her best work is done while buried in seemingly random objects. While the untrained eye sees clutter, she sees magic in the everyday and will flip her perspective to find something new or interesting in something as simple as a plastic water bottle.

Growing up, her mother worked with stained glass, and subsequently the family's garage would be filled with geometric glass shards in boxes. Seeing the light catch these shards inspired Magar's glass composites where she takes shadows of light bulbs and other translucent objects to create surreal images. Her studio is a treasure trove of found and used supplies.

"I have a lot of paintbrushes that have paint dried on them or that are stained by ink, bottles full of pencils and erasers, and jars that I've thrown items in over time," says Magar.

A childhood fascination with watching ink disperse into water has given way to her current series of photographs. Magar enjoys watching organic

lines form in water as she takes a blotter and mixes colors and dyes. The water pieces happen in the blink of an eye, with Magar only having a few seconds to capture these ethereal images.

Her hard work is rewarded in post-production when she finds a hidden gem. After culling through thousands of images, Magar begins her three-step process of selecting and editing the diamonds in the rough.

The finished product is printed on glossy paper to give added depth and body to the work. Her chosen Photofest photograph, "Flagella" was specially comprised of acrylic paint, duck sauce, oil, food dye, and egg.

"It's something that just looking at it you wouldn't know that," says Magar, who chooses to name the works in this series after organic matter. "I name the pieces after different cells, plants or parts of the human body since they tend to mimic these things when I compare them side by side in anatomy books."

Exhibiting her artwork is just one source of excitement for Magar. Additionally, she's interested in the feedback she'll receive from the Tallahassee community and wants viewers to find a sense of wonderment in figuring out each image.

In 10 years' time, Magar hopes to be creating another type of wonder by giving her own students the same support she is thankful to have received. As an arts educator or therapist, she hopes to provide resources and safe spaces for expression, as well as instill life-long lessons.

Magar's biggest lesson as of now is trusting in the creative process as she stares intently at an ink drop blooming underwater.

"Being flexible with the outcome is some of the best advice I can give an art-



Carter Magar, 18, debuts her abstract photography at Photofest 2018, which can be viewed at the Artport Gallery through Jan. 14.



"Flagella" is composed of acrylic paint, duck sauce, oil, food dye, and egg.

ist," says Magar. "It can get very tiring going in to get something that you have set in your mind, shooting it three or four different times and not getting what you want. You have to be open to letting that vision change a bit, but to not give up on it though it might look a little different."

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).