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A conversation with Lisa Reddig - October 2006.

M: *When did you decide photography was going to be your medium of choice?*

LR: I started in college as an engineer major because I couldn't think of anything else. After 1 year of that I decided it wasn't for me. So the beginning of my second year I took a bunch of different things to see what I wanted to do. One of those classes was beginning photography. And I just loved it right off the bat. It just seemed to be a perfect fit. So I changed to Fine Arts and never looked back.

M: *Pinhole cameras seem to be your primary form of expression-why choose this instrument?*

LR: Like all of photography, pinhole cameras seem like magic to me. So simple and basic, a dark box, a piece of aluminum foil, some film, some chemicals, and you have a photographic image of the world. I am drawn to processes, and building the image-making tool by hand makes me feel more involved in the overall photography process.

M: *The project **Accumulation** is interesting on several levels; it marks a departure in terms of subject matter (and scale) from series like **Republique**, **Sake** and ultimately a more ambitious project like **Origami**. **Accumulation** as an installation has a distinctive 3-d physical presence-it touches on the notion of recycling, is evocative of the artistic tradition of *objets trouvés*, and is displayed as a pun on grocery store merchandising. Overall the installation has a distinctive Pop Art flavor- it is very colorful in an All American food packaging advertisement way. Can you comment?*

LR: **Accumulation** could have easily been called **Obsession**. It so engrossed my life for an entire year that I was happy to be done with it. Everyday had the potential of unknowingly buying another product that came in a box that had to be made in to a camera. It is really amazing how little we think about each individual item we buy. Even as the year progressed I rarely thought about the items I purchases, I only noticed it when I got it home or even when I was about to discard it.



LR: Another departure from my previous projects was the importance of the pinhole camera itself. Each project always has one camera that I use, and then retire after I have finished with those images. That camera is not part of the final piece. It is merely a tool that was used to make the negatives. But with **Accumulation** the image-making tool is an integral part of the final piece.

Accumulation is one of those pieces that can be looked at in individual parts, but then I finally had to step back and put all the boxes and the photographs together in one display. I was blown away. I had stopped looking at the individual trees and I saw the whole forest. It is really amazing. And definitely a departure from the intimate quiet pieces I usually make. It is much more revealing of myself, what I put into my body is now displayed on a wall for anyone to see. All of it can be taken very light heartedly, silly packaging, taped up cardboard boxes. But at the same time in comments on so many things, like you said. It can be looked at in so many different ways. For me the most meaningful part is the documentation of a year of my life. One whole year of consumption. I am not the same person I was when I bought those things, but at least I have this visual, 3 dimensional diary of that year.

 In all your projects you create both the art and the instrument which will create it. I understand you make your own paper as well as your own storage boxes. Essentially you attempt to control every aspect of the artistic world you create. Yet as a result of your medium of choice—the pinhole camera—inevitably something is left to chance and the photographs are testament to a distorted view of the environment or object/subject. How would you interpret your work?

LR: My work is about having hands on control of the image making process. Allowing for chance to play a strong role in the process, because as a human I am not 100% consistent. But at the same time using my eye, my aesthetic inclinations and my experiences to focus that chance in the direction that I am interested in. Like a lot of photography it involves editing. You take chances and see what you get, then decide what you like and how you want to use that to make a whole body of work. I like to be involved in as much of the process myself as I can because that way, if there are variances, it is because of me. Those distortions and chance effects are directly related to my actions.



***M** **Sake** and **Origami** are works preoccupied with perception of nature and urban landscape, each on a different scale. How did you choose –so to speak-how large to go ?*

LR: The size of the **Sake** prints are determined by the negative size, and the negative size is determined by the size of the box I used for the camera. That box allowed for 3 1/4" x 4 1/4" inch negatives. My homemade papermaking process is at a small scale now, 5" x 7", so that is the size of paper I use to print the **Sake**. Sometimes it is very freeing to have some parts of the process predetermined by what I have at hand and what I can do myself.

Origami, on the other hand, was a very deliberate choice to print 40" x 50". The images are so much about the wide angle and distortion of these very small folded paper pieces in front of much larger landscapes. The large prints do 2 things. First they bring the landscape up to a more realistic size. And in the process bring the origami figures up to an outrageous size. It makes the small figures large and looming. The distortions of the camera are multiplied. I feel that this causes them to be much more visually in your face, more disturbing.

***M** **Republique** and **Sake** both very intimate works, shot from your home in Bay Ridge, were created using the Gum Bichromate process and laid on hand-made rice-paper-can you explain your choice of treatment of the photographs?*

LR: This comes around to my relationship with sunlight. Photography is about using light to alter the state of chemicals on a piece of paper or film. For **Republique** and **Sake** sunlight is my only light source for the negatives. And with Gum Bichromate, I also use the sunlight to expose the paper. Because I am using sunlight, instead of an UV light-box, I am causing more chance and variation as well. I am printing the **Sake** on rice paper because that is the traditional paper used to make Sumi-e ink paintings in China and Japan. These images have a very loose relation to that old style. The box is also from Sake cups, so that ties in to the Japanese influence.



 *How has living in New York affected your choice of subject matter?*

LR: I originally started doing photography in Arizona, a very sunny place. After moving to New York I noticed the lack of sunlight and the different qualities it had. I try to find that sunlight and use it as much as I can. **Republique** is about the shapes the sun makes in my bedroom. During the wintertime the sun is much lower in the sky and it comes raking in my south facing windows. I love watching the shapes it makes as it falls across the objects and the floor of my room.

My small at home darkroom and studio has also made me do small pieces. Generally, because I am working in a restricted space, I like to keep my prints in scale with that space. My space is intimate and my work is intimate. **Origami** and **Accumulation** don't quite fit this mold. But because they involve color prints much of the work was done in a darkroom outside of my space. But with any of my Gum Bichromates or Cyanotypes I keep them scaled down.

 *What is the next project?*

LR: I am still working on **Sake**, I don't feel like I have done all I can with the subject. I hope to start making more images and prints for that as the winter progresses. I also have a Cyanotype project I am working on. **Texas** (another project) was photographed at a family reunion in Dallas in 2004. With a Polaroid camera converted to pinhole I took extremely close up photographs of my relative's facial features. I used film that gives not only a positive Polaroid but also a negative. I have been printing these with the Cyanotype process. And I have been preparing to make the paper for them. The paper will be cotton rag made from clothes my mom and I have discarded.

And I am afraid to say I do have a few digital projects I am working on. These are only in the very early stages. After all of the physical effort of **Accumulation** and **Origami** I want to relax a little and try to do very simple digital images. It is a new medium that I am trying to feel out. I need to see how I want to make it my own. How do I fit it in to my process and aesthetic.

 *Thank you Ms. Reddig.*

