

Amy Blakemore WITH Libbie Masterson: Meticulous Worker/Masses of Stuff



below:
Libbie Masterson
Cameras, 2013



Amy Blakemore has been working in photography for over three decades. She received a BS in Psychology and a BA in Art from Drury College (now Drury University), Springfield, Missouri, and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin. A former Core Fellow (1985-87) at the Glassell School of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, she has continued to teach there for some twenty-eight years. Blakemore's photographs have been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Seattle Art Museum and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, in addition to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, as part of the Whitney Biennial's *Day for Night* in 2006. Blakemore is the recipient of an Artadia Grant, three artist awards from CACH (now Houston Arts Alliance), the Dallas Museum of Art's Dozier Travel Grant and the Anne Giles Kimbrough award and is a past HCP Fellowship Recipient. Blakemore is represented by Inman Gallery in Houston.

Libbie Masterson earned a BFA from the California College of Arts. She is a photographer, sculptor, set designer, jewelry designer and perpetual student of Blakemore. She is also Curator at HCP. Masterson has exhibited in the *Perspectives* series at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, and received the HAA Individual Artist Grant, as well as the Dora Maar Fellowship from the MFAH. She is represented by the Catherine Couturier Gallery in Houston.

Libbie and Amy meet up for an interview, and Libbie has brought questions on flash cards, which Amy draws randomly, one at a time.

Libbie Masterson: Pick one.

CARD 1

Amy Blakemore: "What do you want your work..." I can't read this "...to leave people with?" Impression?

LM: When I am working, I think about the experience or the effect that I would like to have on people. Do you have an idea?

AB: I never think about that. I just make it for myself.

LM: What are you bringing out for yourself?

AB: I'm not telling.

LM: You're not telling?

AB: No. What meaning I have from an image is going to be different from what viewers see. So people can take away what they want. What they respond to is based on their experiences that they bring to the work. I once gave a photo to a friend – she had requested a particular image and I couldn't work out why she wanted a photo that seemed so menacing to me. I asked her about that and she had no idea what I was talking about – that we couldn't be talking about the same image. She saw the image that I thought was so menacing as being funny and very playful.

CARD 2

AB: God, your handwriting.

LM: Well, that's because of your eyes. I'll read it: "Could you try digital? How about the trend towards old formats and toy cameras? Staying? Fad?"

AB: I appreciate it because it helps film sales. I mean, I'm not against digital – I just don't have the patience to sit at a computer. It isn't any fun or at all interesting enough to keep me from getting distracted. But color printing isn't much fun either, unless it's a new image that I haven't printed.



or if I am still trying to work out the problems. I use a drum and jobo processor with color RA-4 chemistry. It can often be extremely tedious and time consuming but, that said, I do not want to quit the darkroom or film. There is still so much more to learn – plus I've spent almost forty years at this. Working in digital just isn't for me though I do scan negatives I am interested in so that I can see them better. To me, making the print is an integral part of the whole process. Black and white is fun. It's more like taking the picture and printing, not the printing a series again, like I've done. That's really it for me.

LM: So it's really the time at the computer that you don't like about digital.

AB: Well, and because I can't see what's happening. I want to know what's happening. I don't necessarily want everything to come out perfectly. It's like someone else is designing the program and I am just pushing the buttons. There is a physicality to working in the darkroom that I definitely enjoy. The other thing is, it would be such a mess trying to find stuff, like organizing it. That would be very difficult for me.

opposite:
Amy Blakemore, *Plaster*, 2012
Chromogenic print, ed 10
Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery

below:
Amy Blakemore, *Switch*, 2012
Chromogenic print, ed 10
Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery

“Everything is chaotic.
Except my prints.
They are meticulous.”



LM: Oh, on the computer – it is hard.

AB: Well, I mean, my negatives are... actually, I know where they are for the most part. There's no system. Well, there's sort of a system, but the computer... hmm, no. I want stuff in my hands. I want to handle it. I want to see it.

CARD 3

"Who are your heroes? Who are the photographers at the top of your list?"

AB: I consider Mike Dickey and Tom Parker personal heroes. They were my professors at Drury College, and I would not be here today if it were not for them. August Sander, Diane Arbus and Wil Michels will always be on my list. Recently, I have been excited by and looking at Vivian Maier and Ray Metzker.

CARD 4

"Moving from super-personal, intimate portraits to portraits (almost) without the people included – Progression? Series? Story?"

AB: There is a mixture of portraits in my work as a whole, but not exclusively. The newer work is somewhat different. Well, one thing is, I'm using a different camera. The Robot, which is 35mm and has a lens I can try to focus, f-stops, etc. It's a real camera that shoots 35mm square format. I can do things I can't do with the Diana – so that has changed things. (The images) are still like a diary to me. I don't want to work in a series, necessarily, though I think sometimes I should. I might get something finished. I think they all go together, but they are not a series, necessarily – not an obvious one.

below:
Libbie Masterson
Desk, 2013

LM: Is that part of keeping those personal records for yourself – so you are not really considering the effect they are having on the viewer?

AB: I mean, I don't take them for anyone else.

LM: Well, your vision is kind of unusual.

AB: What do you mean by that? I need new glasses? I really do. I can't see anything.

LM: Well, when you take your glasses off and look at a print, you can see the tiniest little speck.

AB: I was wearing glasses at age 5. I am grossly nearsighted. I don't think that's changed much in the past 20 years. It's like a camera being way out of focus. If I didn't know you were sitting there, I wouldn't know who you were. You would have to be right here (pointing to nose).

LM: That's phenomenal.

AB: Well, you aren't used to it. I'm used to looking at stuff like this and when I go to museums, I like to get up really close, so I can see – and then they yell at me to get away from the art.

CARD 5

"Environment. You are a meticulous worker, yet you have masses of stuff everywhere."

AB: I am a collector. Yes, I am meticulous, and that is probably the only place in my life that I am. Everything is chaotic. Except my prints. They are meticulous.



“I think they all go together, but they are not a series, necessarily – not an obvious one.”

LM: Do you sleep?

AB: I have a sleeping disorder. Sleep apnea. Sometimes, I rest upstairs in my studio. I don't get enough rest at home.

LM: Why?

AB: Because that's where the cat lives. Patty Miller. That's the cat.

LM: Patty, the (negative) carrier in the darkroom? You named all the negative carriers in the darkroom after your cats?

AB: And other people's animals, too.

LM: Is Patty the one that goes on walks with the dog walker?

AB: No, that's Ruthie, the feral cat. But she's not so feral now. She goes out walking with me, too. So all my "collections" are in the house. I have a lot of nice stuff; you just can't see it. My environment is extremely noisy.

LM: Loud?

AB: Visually loud. It's really loud with all the stuff. That might be why I don't like being in the house.

CARD 6

"You printed your own prints for your show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston – decisions on that?"

AB: I made all new prints for the show, so they could turn up the lights.

LM: But they already had some of these prints in their collection?

AB: Yes, I totally reprinted every single one of them. I knew it would be dim, and I couldn't see all the details. I needed to see them better. I had seen a show in NYC and it was so dark. I decided that if I owned all the prints then I could tell them that I wanted the lights up high. Someone told me that it was the brightest show they ever had at the MFAH. The MFAH now has all of that exhibition in its collection.

LM: Where do you want to go from here after having a major museum show? I mean, you don't really promote your work to people.

AB: Now there is expectation. I would rather stumble over it than me throw it out there. It is quiet work.

LM: So what do you want?

AB: I want to figure out a system of organization that works for me – that would be very helpful.

LM: I asked your gallery for an artist statement and they didn't really have one.

AB: I have a statement somewhere.

LM: Well, if you haven't written one in 5 years, that's probably why they don't use it. Maybe you need to write a new one?

AB: Nothing has changed. It's just different.

LM: It was sort of blurry, romantic, foggy, unfocused, illusional. Now it's clear, very focused. It was centered on one person, now there are scenes with no person at all. This color is more subdued. This is what made me think of your vision.

AB: The intent to me doesn't feel any different. (Changing cameras) allows me to go inside, it does open up a whole different area, though.

LM: Indoors, you mean?

AB: Yes, and I can get closer now.

LM: Can you see better?

AB: It's really hard to focus the Robot camera – its small rangefinder. I was nervous to show the Robot stuff. It was brand new, and I didn't get it yet. I didn't know if it was good or not. Using the Diana, I just can't expect anything to come out. There is no guarantee. That's the bargain you make when you are shooting with a camera like that. With the Robot, there is still user error.

LM: Did changing the camera change your intentions?

AB: No, it just opened up the options. 