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Contemporary Visual Arts, Indianapolis

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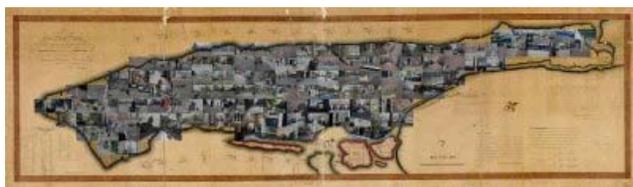
Interview: Flounder Lee

Flounder Lee

Artist

Assistant Professor of Photography, Herron School of Art

Website: www.photoflounder.com



1- Can you tell us a bit about yourself? Where do you come from? How did you come to be named Flounder?

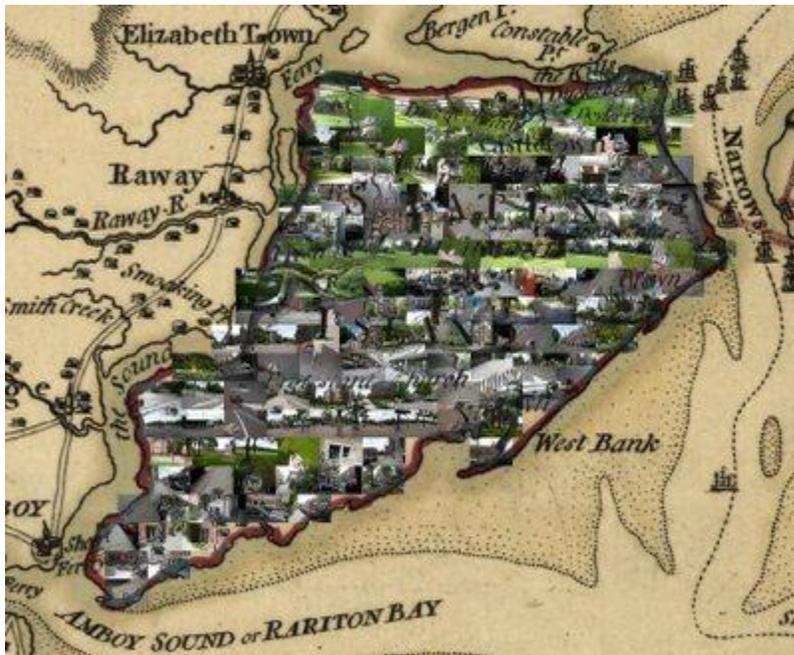
I grew up on a farm in Alabama. I started out school in aerospace engineering but didn't like it so I moved to Florida and dropped into art somehow. I got my BFA from the University of Florida. I moved to LA and got my MFA from Cal State Long Beach. Well I can't say much about the name except it has to do with a bar in the swamp named the Secret Snail Society.

2- How would you describe your art and artistic practice?

Well that short stint in engineering really affects my art. My work for several years now has used mapping and other pseudo-scientific methodology. The body of work I've been in since arriving in Indianapolis revolves around the interactions between Amer-Indians and the US government as well as other post-colonialist issues. I am also working on a project about the school districts in Marion County for a show at the Harrison in March. All this use a mapping process that removes a lot of the control from my hands so that I am stating facts instead of opinion.

3- What role does aesthetics play in your work and how might you balance aesthetics against the process and research involved in your work?

Aesthetics do play a role, but a minor one. Given the choice I pick maps that are more detailed. The way I overlay the photos is also an aesthetic choice. What I won't do is sacrifice research integrity for aesthetics. For example, I set spots to shoot before I go out and once in the field there might be a much better vista 100 yards away but I stick with the preset location instead. But if I wasn't concerned at all about the visual elements, I would go into writing or music.



4- How would you like your audience to experience the work and how important is it that they comprehend the research and information offered up within the work? Is it important to for the audience to "read" your word? Deconstruct it?

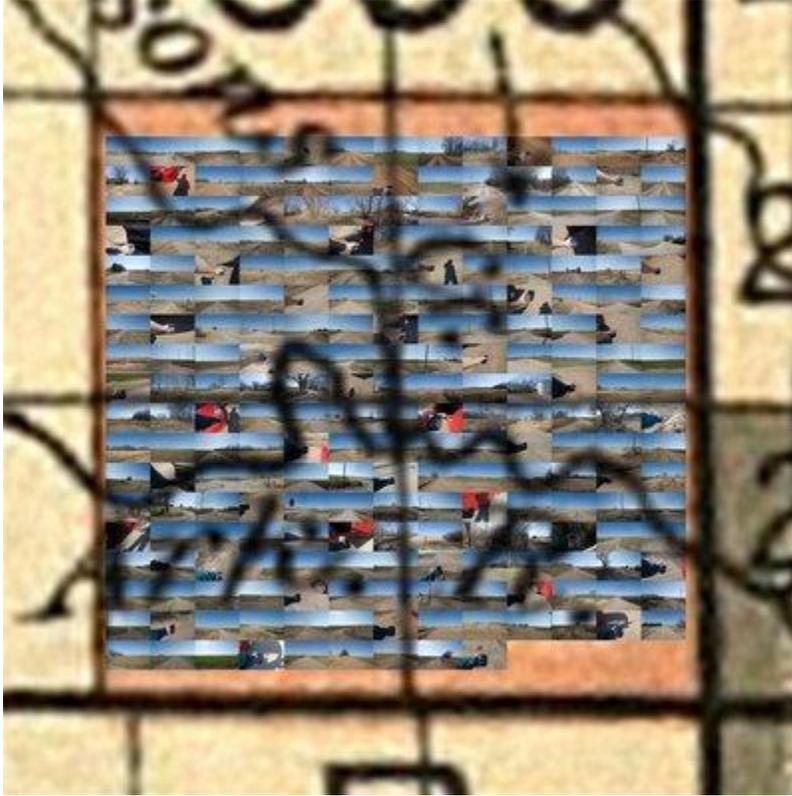
I would like people to want to find out more. I don't give away all the information right up front. I might have an artist statement that covers some additional info but then I leave the onus on the people to keep looking. I am still thinking about this method though, I have considered making information sheets that people could take home, but I think they would be just links to more resources. I don't want to preach at people, at least not in the art. I am fine with people deconstructing my work, but I want people to question some preconceived notions. In my recent work that questioning is about the history of the Americas and how that history is taught in schools.

5- What would you say is the difference between the role of the scientist/historian/researcher to that of the artist and how might the artist bring new and possibly meaningful insight to the collected information?

For one thing, I don't have to be objective. I tell my students they do not need to worry about "truth" in art. Truth is subjective. Facts are facts and those are the domain of the scientists. I might use facts in my work but I'm not seeking hard facts. I use pseudoscience. I am not too concerned if my measurements are off by a bit or if I miss something in my investigations. To a researcher the details are much more important. I am more concerned with the bigger picture. I want to raise as many questions as I answer.

6- You are working as an art professor currently, does this impact your work in any notable ways?

I would think so, I am constantly looking into art for slide lectures and am exposed to artists that I would probably never see otherwise.



7- Aside from what most of us consider an artists studio practice, what other activities do you find you have to keep up with in order to maintain your career as an artist? Do you send out packets? Apply to residencies? Keep contact with galleries, collectors, curators?

I try to keep in touch with people as much as possible. I always keep my friends and contacts in mind when curating shows or just hearing about opportunities they'd be good for. My undergrad was super competitive which instilled some good work ethic but my graduate experience was based around building a community of sharing. I also apply to shows that I find online mostly. I am somewhat selective about what I apply to, I will rarely pay a "submission fee." There are enough shows that don't have them. Anyone reading this can feel free to give me a show, residency, grant, etc. Ha!

8- If there was one question you could avoid ever being asked about your work, what would that be and is this a question you are usually asked?

Maybe "how long did it take?", I can't answer that but do get asked sometimes. Or from photographers, "What kind of camera do you use?" then usually followed by

surprise that I am shooting with a prosumer camera, but when your individual photos are being printed so small it doesn't really matter.

9- Though you have only been in Indy for a relatively short period, having seen what you have of the local arts community, what changes or improvements would you most like to see take place and might you have any ideas of how this may be implemented?

When I first moved here, I commented on how nice it was that there was good funding and support here. Now that Indy has cut funding by a lot and Indiana is soon to follow, I might have to eat my words. It'd be nice if the funding would stay at or close to current levels. Even during the Great Depression, the federal government employed many artists. I also would like to see more gallery complexes, even if it is just a street with a few galleries. Not sure how to accomplish either of those goals.

10- What advice, tip or words of wisdom would you impart on your students, other artists or those reading this interview?

Except for the cliches of "work hard" and "don't burn bridges", I would say build a community around yourself. Be happy for someone else if they get a show that you told them about, maybe they'll return the favor some day. And don't hole up in the studio, doesn't matter at all if you are the next Picasso if you don't get out and let people know. You have to be your own PR firm.



Image Titles (from top to bottom):

- 1- Manhattan in Amsterdam
- 2- Staten Island in Amsterdam
- 3- 606 (Oklahoma/Tonkawa)
- 4- 505 (Oklahoma/Quapaw)

Posted by Scott at [12:09 PM](#) _

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