

TILT / SHIFT

CAROL SAWYER



TILT

CAROL SAWYER

Photography is, for me, a kind of theatrical space. The edges of an image are very much like the Proscenium arch in a theatre – a window into a world that resembles the real world in many ways, but is in fact, a fiction. I have appeared in a lot of my own photographs, but I don't think of them as self-portraits. I shoot myself (!) partly because I am readily available, but also because I am trying to figure something out about how I understand images through a process of identification and projection.

Photographs, film and video are great vehicles for interrogating ideas related to truth and history, in part because lens-based media can look so compellingly "real"; the aura of the index/ pencil of nature/ impartial record still clings to them, despite their unreliability.



I like to remind the viewer that the space of an image is a fiction by inserting frames within frames – at times, literally with a proscenium arch or by compositing an image with footage shot from multiple angles. There is a particular pleasure created by knowingly participating in a fiction – a kind of doubling, by placing the viewer both inside and outside of a narrative.

The participation of both the author and the reader (or in this case, viewer) are necessary for fiction's success – the viewer has to be willing to play with me for my work to, well, work. I am interested in the different ways I can invite the viewer in through the pleasure of storytelling, visual seduction or humour.

I shoot myself (!) partly because I am readily available, but also because I am trying to figure something out about how I understand images through a process of identification and projection.



In the movie *Celine and Julie vont en bateau*, (directed by Jacques Rivette in 1974 in collaboration with actresses Dominique Balourier and Juliet Berto), the two heroines rescue a little girl from a 'film within the film,' in which she is seemingly being poisoned by two femme fatales vying for attention from the little girl's father. The way out of this tired patriarchal narrative is discovered through invention, imagination, friendship, and storytelling. With the aid of magic candy, the two heroines enter and exit the narrative, subvert the patriarchal plot and safely extract the little girl.

This film was very much on my mind when I was completing my MFA at SFU in the late 1990s. At the time I was frequently asked what were the historical precedents for my interdisciplinary practice, so I began researching early 20th century women avant-garde performers: singers Emmy Hennings and Alice Prin (Kiki of Montparnasse), dancer/puppeteer Sophie Taeuber-Arp, pianist Gabrielle Buffet-



This film was very much on my mind when I was completing my MFA at SFU in the late 1990s. At the time I was frequently asked what were the historical precedents for my interdisciplinary practice, so I began researching early 20th century women avant-garde performers: singers Emmy Hennings and Alice Prin (Kiki of Montparnasse), dancer/puppeteer Sophie Taeuber-Arp, pianist Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Claude Cahun. Information on these women was scarce then, and it was much easier to find photographs of them.



While in Kelowna, Brettschneider was befriended by artist, opera singer and teacher Nellie Duke. A British expatriate, Nellie had followed a Canadian soldier back to Canada in 1919. When she arrived in Calgary Nellie discovered that he was already married, so she continued west to Kelowna where she used her dowry to buy a piece of land. Over the course of many years she built this little Tudor-style house, virtually single-handedly.

For my upcoming show at the Koffler I am researching the work of real women who lived in the Toronto area in the 1940's – 1950's, whose creative practices may not be well known outside their immediate family or community.

IMAGES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Carol Sawyer, Proscenium, 2009, Single channel video, 28:22.

Carol Sawyer, *Magician's Assistant and Magician at rest*, 2009, Colour photograph.

Carol Sawyer, *Woman ponders Sophie Tauber-Arp, Oskar Schlemmer interjects*, 2014, Colour photograph.

Carol Sawyer, *Natalie Brettschneider performs "Oval Matt", Paris c.1920*, Silver gelatin print.

Carol Sawyer, *Natalie Brettschneider performs Nellie Duke's house shake, Kelowna, B.C. 1939*, Archival inkjet print from original negative.