

Zoe Stoller
Olivia Locher Fought the Law

I Fought the Law
By Olivia Locher
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Did you know that in Alabama it is illegal to have an ice cream cone in your back pocket at all times?

Or that in Missouri it is illegal to deface a milk carton?

These unusual state laws – and 48 others from the rest of the United States – serve as the inspiration for photographer Olivia Locher’s first book publication, *I Fought the Law*, in which she visually enacts exactly what these laws are forbidding her to do.

Granted, as Locher writes in her introduction, not all of the laws she photographs are actually currently real: “Several of them remain on the statute books, the majority of them were at one point removed, others never became laws (but came close!), and a few of them are complete myths.” However, much like her conceptual images, these laws, real or not, serve to represent something bigger. As Locher writes, “I became fascinated by how often bold statements could be appropriated, lost in translation, easily believed, and taken as fact.”¹ It seems as if many members of today’s America are driven by ideas that have little validation, and people ignore the actual laws on the books, and so I believe Locher’s September 2017 release of this book – and questioning of the facts – came at the perfect time.

The book, which has a bright pink cover and dons Locher’s response to the Alabama law, consists of an introduction from Locher (describing the creation and evolution of this series), a foreword from poet Kenneth Goldsmith (historically contextualizing the fighting of laws), an interview with Locher conducted by Eric Shiner (delving deeper into Locher’s influences and practices), and then fifty spreads that each include one line of text – the law Locher is referencing, in black typewriter font, with the state name itself capitalized, underlined, and in color – and one photograph – or “concept,” as Locher calls it – that illustrates the law, often in a satirical manner.

For the Alabama no-ice-cream-in-your-back-pocket law – perhaps Locher’s most well-known fighting-the-law image – she photographs a woman standing with her back to the camera against a pastel purple background, wearing a white t-shirt tucked into white shorts, and holding a pink, rainbow-sprinkle ice cream cone in her back right pocket, which has begun to drip down the pocket of the shorts. In the text on the left side of the spread, the word “Alabama” is a mildly dark purple, reminiscent of the ice cream and the photo’s background. I guess perhaps there is a

¹ Olivia Locher, *I Fought the Law*, Introduction.

reason to follow this law – if only to not stain your nice white shorts – but Locher fights it anyway.

For the Missouri no-defacing-a-milk-carton law, Locher photographs a red, half pint, homogenized vitamin D milk carton with four pencils – one red, one blue, one light green, and one dark green – poking into the carton at different angles, with a hand appearing from the upper left corner of the image, sticking into the milk carton a fifth pencil – a regular yellow graphite No. 2. The carton is placed against a faded charcoal-esque background, on a light beige wooden floor, sitting in a pool of its own milk, which is pouring out of its sides from the pencil holes. The word “Missouri” on the left side of this spread is a darker orange, a cross between the yellow No. 2 pencil and the red homogenized milk carton. Once again, Locher has fought this law.

And this continues for the rest of the laws, each spread placed in alphabetical order and displaying a wide range of colors, people, and themes. Sometimes the photos and text exist on separate pages of the spread, or sometimes the photo bleeds from one page to the next. Either way, it is clear that every choice is stylistic and intentional, as I have come to expect from Locher’s very talented mind.

I first met Locher last spring in New York City (which is her current place of residence) on a class field trip with Kenneth Goldsmith. When we were discussing her work, I learned why Locher calls these shoots “concepts” – because the ideas just *come* to her, inspired by language.

For example, Goldsmith was asking her about her thought process for a photograph based on the law “In Indiana it is illegal for a man to be sexually aroused in public.” Her photograph depicts a man in a black, long-sleeve shirt tucked into black and white pinstripe pants, who is standing horizontal to the camera, with his right hand in his pocket and his penis fully erect. The unique part of the image, however, is that, as the man stands against a pale violet background, there is also a navy blue circle right around the “focal point” of the image. This circle adds a new level of visual intrigue and engagement, and when Goldsmith asked Locher why she put that circle there, she said she just *knew* to do that.

Locher, who was previously mainly known for her commercial and fashion photography, has had images featured in locations such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *W* magazine, *Interview* magazine, and *Vice* magazine. With *I Fought the Law*, it is clear that her creativity and imagination were working in full gear, and it is a delight to engage with such a talented artist through these concepts.