

Sour Times



These black and white photographic portraits were taken with the current state of the sheltering in place in mind. With in-person classes ending for the rest of the spring semester and online teaching commencing from this quarantine, the world is in a crisis, with apocalyptic overtones, due to the outbreak of the virus known as COVID-19. It's difficult to feel creative while life has been "put on pause". However, let us keep in mind that some of the most groundbreaking art was created following/during outbreaks of: Black Plague in the 14th century; the Spanish Flu, SARS, and AIDS. With the Black Plague came the creation of pieces like "Triumph of Death" by Pieter Bruegel or the etching Doctor Schnabel von Rom. The Spanish Flu affected British writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) whose iconic character Mrs. Dalloway was an influenza survivor. Similarly, the Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch (1863-1944) when he created *Self Portrait After the Spanish Flu*, a flurry of dark and thick lines depicts the despair inflicted by the illness. The global pandemic, eventually known as

AIDS, dominated the predominantly gay artistic and creative communities of New York City, in the 1980s. Much of the art created by artists, such as Keith Haring (1958-1990) and Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) was in response to those challenging times, as the city was one of the epicenters.

My project, Sour Times, similarly underscores an unprecedented time for our global population and our planet. What does this mean?

Being quarantined, for me, is a process that is both surreal and strange, not typical, and certainly not ideal. However, the tools at my disposal shaped and inspired the project itself. With my interest in portrait photography, and with a brother and sister on lockdown, I decided that they would be my subjects for my exploration, in portraiture. The challenge was to think “outside of the box”, to create anything other than the conventional calm and collected portrait, chaos seemed more interesting. Equipped with a bag full of sour candy from a seemingly previous life at university, they were each given one to eat while standing in front of a backdrop (created with a blanket suspended from the basement ceiling). They were yanked from their bedrooms and away from their schoolwork with no warning ahead of time to prepare for their close-ups; similarly to the way they were yanked away from their studies at university. Their portraits were quickly captured using a Canon EOS Rebel T5 camera. The goal of the work being to display the sudden uncomfortable and uncertain emotions of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic features their exaggerated, twisted, and sometimes pained expressions.

Three portraits each were chosen to be displayed in the project. They’ve been placed in an tryptic grid of portraits in differing formations reinforcing the emotions displayed on their faces. Each portrait coinciding with its sibling’s seemingly parallel expression. Even during a time of isolation, there are overarching and universal feelings amongst the masses; fear, loneliness, uncomfortably, unknowingness. Out of the numerous photos taken, the ones displayed in the final project all keep their eyes closed in a seemingly defiant look of unwillingness or unwanting to acknowledge the current state of the world. It takes less of a toll on a person if they limit their news intake and virus updates for the day. The future is uncertain.

Their shared contorted faces correspond to the emotions brought about by the pandemic. Scrunched faces visualize the extreme and distressing reality of the “new normal”. Grinning expressions appear gleeful and display the absurdity of the current state of the world - it seems out of place and inappropriate. A final look of pain represents the hurt that so many people are feeling at this time. Whether it be through losing a loved one to the pandemic, losing a long-awaited graduation day, losing a business, or losing a job. Their expressions represent a sense of mourning that the world currently resides in.

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