

GUARDIAN

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN



Q&A with Jessamyn Lovell

By Sarah Han

CITY Richmond, Calif.

AGE 29

EDUCATION California College of the Arts, MFA in Photography, May 2001;
Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), BFA in Photography, May 1999

AWARDS Review Santa Fe Scholarship Award, Santa Fe Center of Photography,
2005; Artist in Residence at Light Work, Syracuse, NY, 2004

SFBG "Catastrophe, Crisis, and Other Family Traditions" features photographs of your family in rural New York. What do you want to show people about your family?

JESSAMYN LOVELL I hope people can see beyond their own life circumstances to the everyday life my family deals with. It's not the kind of life represented in the media in any real way. Certain people have such resilience and an ability to survive tragedies and catastrophes, from large- to small-scale. I hope visitors to the show see the strength in each [family member] as well as the connection we all share.

SFBG What does your family think of the photos?

JL My whole family — especially my mother — has been very supportive of my project and genuinely understands why I'm driven to make and show the work. It's my version of our story, but I include their words and collaborate with them to get a fuller sense of the stories and histories, even as they unfold. My sister Allsun has said that she is proud that I've taken our experiences and turned them into something positive.

SFBG Do you see yourself in the images you take of your hometown, or are you separate from this now? Does New York seem like home anymore?

JL That's a question I ask myself often, actually. I do see the entire body of work as a mirror of sorts.

When I first began shooting this project, it was not meant to be a project at all. It was more of a personal diary, a way for me to deal with the catastrophic events that were taking place while I was studying at RIT. When I submitted the work as a portfolio to MFA programs, it became a project.

I had this idea in my head that it would be a pretty straightforward documentary study of the way in which my family lived, not necessarily who they were as people. In the beginning I was also, subconsciously (and maybe consciously), trying to show this separation between those people and me. This is particularly evident in the earlier photographs where I did not include nearly as many self-portraits and the distance was colder — more from an outsider's perspective.

As I've continued the project over the last nine years, though, I've discovered more about me in the images than I have about anything else. Now I see the work is about myself, my connection to my family, and the distance between the two places that I call home.

SFBG People seem to move to SF to get away from reality. Do you feel like your family's home represents reality?

JL It really does represent another reality for me. In a way, I feel like I am part of two different worlds. SFBG

CATASTROPHE, CRISIS, AND OTHER FAMILY TRADITIONS

Through June 13

In Color 2

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