

Erin Antognoli's Holga Photography

by Jacqueline M. Duda

The juxtaposition of subjects in Germantown photographer Erin Antognoli's Holga photos communicates a complex visual message. The various subjects—city streets, skies, buildings, trash, dolls, people—appear as semi-distorted vignettes separated from one other by a thin layer of reality. The connection between the subjects is what's so intriguing—it launches the “story” of the photo.

A Holga camera operates in a manner that's very much like when the film in an old camera fails to advance all the way. Holga photos aren't digital or computer enhanced; the meshing of the two images is a mechanical process that occurs within the camera itself.

But mechanical processes aside, it's the artistic sensibility that creates such interesting results.

InSight: Was it always your plan to become a photographer?

Antognoli: I took lots of art classes as a child. I did realistic drawings at first, but didn't delve into photography until ninth grade when I was working for the student section of our school newspaper. The paper provided the film. I just needed a camera. My parents, who had never let me borrow their camera before, lent me their “point and shoot.” Hearing from

Erin Antognoli

others that I had talent, I continued working with the paper through high school and eventually majored in photojournalism in college. I also taught photography at the Connelly School of the Holy Child in Potomac. I draw and paint occasionally too; it's something I really enjoy.

InSight: Why Holga photography?

Antognoli: It's nice to get back to basics. I started as a photojournalist and went back to art school in Georgia to get my master's. Other students were taking Holga photos with these special little cameras and I was curious, so I tried it. At first, I wasn't interested. Then my husband, who is also a photographer, and I moved to



PHOTO BY ANDREW CLEAVENGER

Artists Among Us

Germantown in 2001. I had to go to DC for an artist meeting and, rather than take one of the expensive, high-tech work cameras that I use for portraits and weddings, I took the Holga instead. The Holga is cheap. While waiting at the Metro near Chinatown, I started taking pictures of the arch. Suddenly, there seemed to be more to this town.

InSight: What's the meaning behind your Holga collection?

Antognoli: My approach is completely different from the one I take with traditional photography. Because I overlap images by not advancing the film all the way to the next frame, I'm looking for relationships, shapes, and textures. I have to know how big or small, whether to move far away or get in close. It's like drawing. I put the pieces together instead of seeing the entire image in the viewfinder. DC is very different from where I grew up (in New Castle, Pennsylvania) or Ohio and Georgia (where Antognoli attended college). Initially, I had a disconnect with the environment. The Holga photos show how I feel being here. DC had a very corporate feeling that wasn't as organic as the places I lived before. But I had to look deeper. It's not a soulless place: There's character and depth here. I love taking pictures



Cranes

of the storefronts, graffiti and sidewalks. Even trash, because it has shape and texture. If the image is smooth, I'm not interested. I look at details rather than landscapes or monuments. The little things and details are what tell the story. I look around and figure out how I want to compose the images to tell the story.

InSight: What kind of equipment do you use?

Antognoli: The Holga camera is an inexpensive plastic camera that costs between \$15 and \$20. You wind the film yourself. It has minimal settings and very few controls: two apertures, a bulb setting and that's about it. It's very low-tech; less is more.

InSight: Where do you hope to go next?

Antognoli: My online exhibition of the bike photo caught the attention of

a gentleman who runs a gallery in Louisiana. He's very interested in exhibiting my work. I've done group exhibits. I try to do at least four each year. My goal is to have a solo exhibition one day.

InSight: Any advice for fledgling photographers?

Antognoli: Take lots of photos! Don't be afraid to get out there and actually do it. I required my students to shoot at least one roll each week. They'd shoot an entire roll of film of one object from different angles. Students who really worked at it were the most successful. And network, talk to as many photographers as you can. Get together and socialize, make contacts. There's no magic bullet to all this, you have to work hard.



7th Street Bike

To view Antognoli's work, go to www.halophoto.com. For Holgas, move the cursor across the bottom circles and click on "artwork." Select "Holgas." For up-to-the-minute exhibit and photo updates, check out Antognoli's blog at www.halophoto.blogspot.com.