

Your website has the heading "Pop Surrealism." Please define that term.

The term "pop surrealism" was coined by The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum for its 1998 exhibit of the same name. The exhibit featured work by over seventy artists, including Gregory Crewdson, Mariko Mori, Ashley Bickerton, Art Spiegelman, Tony Oursler, and Cindy Sherman, and was memorialized in the 1999 book of the same name.

Surrealism mines dreams and the unconscious, while popular culture is concerned with surface and commonplaces. This art practice often has a sense of humor – sometimes the humor is colourful, joyful, and sometimes dark, mischievous and sarcastic. This lean towards Pop Surrealism has altered my visual language which is defined by narratives, use of symbolism, dark humor and subversive messaging. My work analyzes the human condition, interpreting new and clichéd notions of beauty, gender, sex and religion through the lens of pop culture.

How has your photography evolved over time?

In 2013 I celebrated 20 years in photography with a retrospective exhibition titled "XX". In my early twenties I travelled to dangerous and war torn areas. I wanted to be a NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC or LIFE photographer. After some time and considerable contemplation I discovered that this life involved a solitude and constant relocation that was not suited for my personality. I returned home met my husband Jonas and got married. I got a job as staff photographer on a weekly newspaper and began concentrating on editorial portraiture . I went on to photograph spreads for every Canadian publication and was assigned work from American and European newspaper and magazines. Simultaneously I would shoot commercial projects with advertising agencies in Vancouver and collaborated with art directors abroad. I worked many weekends and evenings covering events. I also had several personal projects on the go. I spent years photographing gamblers and regulars at the racetrack in Vancouver, I exhibited Trackrecord in the iconic Pendulum building. My process was the portraiture expressed through the study of people within various social organization. I titled my method Photoanthropology,

I photographed non stop in my twenties and early thirties. My success in the commercial realm afforded me to experiment with my own ideas and create personal work. At 35 I became a mother and began to explore subjects and concepts that interested me.

The shift from commercial to fine art happened in 2007 when I began to work on Fallen Princesses. The series was inspired by my daughter Jordan at age 3, her discovery of Disney Princesses while at the same time my mother was confronting Breast Cancer. I began to compose the concepts and photograph each pieces with particular attention to makeup, costume and location. It took me over two years to complete the Fallen Princesses series. I continued to work throughout my pregnant with my second daughter Zoe. Just after giving birth I had my first solo exhibition in 2009.

Fallen Princesses:

Fallen Princesses creates metaphor out of the myths of fairy tales, forcing the viewer to contemplate real life: failed dreams, obesity, addiction, obesity, Cancer, the extinction of indigenous culture pollution, war and the fallacy of chasing eternal youth. By embracing the textures and colors created by Walt Disney, which built a multi-billion dollar empire exploiting these fairy tales, Fallen Princesses exposed the consumerism that has negated the morality of these ancient parables. It also begged the question, "How do we define the concept of 'good' and how do we live a 'good' life?"

My second large scale project was more ambitious than anything that I had created in the past and was to be shot all on a constructed set. In The Dollhouse, 2012 - a ten piece sequential narrative that plays out in a life sized dollhouse and a video that documents the making of process.

This effort required a sizable crew that involved a makeup team, costumers, set builders, decorators, furniture refurbishing, assistants and a digital team I was working with a tiny budget so my concern was finding talented people to participate. Luckily Fallen Princesses was a great success online and had gone 'Viral' in 2009. The project was widely published and created much conversation.

This exposure helped with recruiting crew that needed experience in production, photography and all elements of set building, and were willing to work for credit.

In The Dollhouse:

This time, I have taken on one of the most powerful symbols of Western culture: Barbie, the idealized woman. More than any other childhood construct, Barbie represents the concept that 'Beauty is Power' and necessary to attain happiness. However, when Ken, Barbie's handsome but emasculated partner, expresses his individuality and finds his authenticity, the value of beauty as an apex trait is exposed as cheap and plastic as the dolls themselves.

I premiered the Dollhouse in 2012 and this series too found an international audience and garnished discussions about current beauty standards, the complexity of marriage and importance of authenticity.

I began to receive invitations to show and talk about my work at photo and art festivals. In 2012 I was awarded the Arte Laguna prize and travelled to India on a residency.

In 2013 I opened my studio XX, located in Vancouver. I decided to focus completely on producing my independent large scale projects and specifically my next series, Gods Of Suburbia. I received my first Canada Council grant to help support this massive initiative.

This series, more complex and contemplative, has taken me two years to complete. With Gods I have taken a personal and professional leap. It is a critical exploration of established and fringe religions.

Gods of Suburbia offers an iconoclastic interpretation of how ancient belief systems fit with technology, science and secularism, the three main pillars of modernity.

I am very pleased that my work is subject to many written academic essays, dissertations, and mentioned in various literature. The projects are studied and taught in art schools, photography programs, Gender and feminist courses.

In 2014 I was awarded the Prix Virginia overall prize and was invited to Paris to show my work in a solo exhibition.

This year I will show in Columbia, Taiwan and Cannes, France.

You can see the complete XX exhibition on my web site.

<http://dinagoldstein.com/xx-retrospective/>

What interests you in the storytelling aspect of photography?

Storytelling has always been central in all of my work past and present.

Documentary photography allowed me to create and share the stories of Palestinians in Gaza, gamblers at the racetrack, East Indian blueberry farmers in B.C, Dog Show dogs, Bodybuilding State championships and teenagers dirty dancing at a Bar Mitzvah.

Editorial Photography meant working with a writer and photo editor on a specific story, this had me out on location with reduced gear and 1 assistant. Here there was great freedom to create using these limited resources.

From those long cold/hot days out with my camera on the streets of various cities I've learned that spontaneity and a lack of control are sources of inspiration.

Collaborating with art directors to create quick visual messaging, in a form of an advertising, has informed my current work both technically and creatively.

Photography as an art form transcends cultural borders and has the ability for quick communication. Within one frame or a series I attempt to create a narrative that relays as much information as a book or movie. This is always my challenge.

Sometimes the message is delivered quickly and makes an instant impression and other times the image requires further research and deeper involvement.

My current photography practice examines pop culture within modern society and asks "how do we define the concept of 'good' and how do we live a 'good' life?"

By utilizing recognizable/ iconic figures Disney Princesses, Barbie and Ken, and images of Gods, I attempt to bring attention and to inspire insight to the human condition.

I am thrilled that my visual storytelling has been recognized for its 'metaphorical and ironical messages' and in turn has sparked much conversation and written commentary from academics, editors and bloggers around the world. The work welcomes interpretation and discussion.

What are your sources of inspiration? How do you move the personal to the commercial?

I started out most inspired by woman like Diane Arbus , Margaret Bourke White and Dorteia Lang who were pioneers in my industry. Similar to their direction I was driven to create images of people that were intimate and revealing.

Much of my most recognized work has been inspired by my two daughters Jordan,9 and Zoe,5. As a mother of two daughters I have seen first hand the effects of 'outside influences' on young female minds. Fallen Princesses series was born out of deep personal pain that made me question and explore the 'happily ever after' motif we are spoon fed since childhood. In The Dollhouse, a continuation of similar themes, and an exploration of beauty standards and the unattainable notion 'perfect'.

Now that my girls are growing up and asking the more difficult questions; about GOD, belief and tradition.

With Gods of Suburbia, partly inspired by my residency in India 2012, I look at how complex iconography affects the way that people envision their personal god? I question whether humankind needs religion to make us 'good' and 'moral'? and I utilize religious characters in modernity to question if religion is an anachronism.

Religion is not the most popular topic at a get together because people hold what **they** believe to be sacred and holy; and this is not up for debate. To have an open conversation about how the universe began, who created the universe, what happens after death is mostly taboo and for good reason, there are too many different opinions and beliefs. I would like to participate in a rational conversation about dogma in modernity.

I rarely shoot commercial gigs these days. Most jobs today are generic and conservative. Also budgets have been slashed and the commercial shooter is interchangeable. If I can collaborate with a creative, and incorporate my brand of irony and methodology within a commercial platform, than I am open to accepting assignments that I find exciting.

Do you have any mentors?

I have been fortunate to know and work with some very talented creatives in Vancouver. The photo editors and writers that believed in my work and gave me my first magazine assignments were crucial for my career. Other artist friends who were/are generous with advice, support and constructive criticism. My husband Jonas, a photographer turned film maker, has guided me professionally and personally throughout our 22 years together. He built me my first soft box (out of wood) ! He is very knowledgeable, wise and helpful with technical issues/ strategies etc. Most recently I look to women who have been able to find a good balance between home and work, finding time for inspiration creation and personal success.

What is the process you take to develop an image, and series? What emphasis do you put on story boarding, location scouting, casting, costumes, make up, set design, and directing? Are you involved in all these elements?

My initial ideas are mostly instinctual, and inspired for a subconscious place. When I see potential in an idea I take the time to study and review the subject. When I make the decision to move ahead with a project I introduce the idea to Jonas or another trusted friend and stay open to constructive criticism. Making a decision to proceed is a huge commitment, as my projects take upwards of 2 years to complete, and I don't release the images individually.

I try to come up with rough concepts for each piece before the start of production. I want a clear 'big picture' so I can continue with a vivid vision with a semi practical budget. My first priority is to find the right person to portray the lead character of the piece. This process can happen quickly or may take months or even years. I tend to do a lot of street casting and/or work with local actors and performers. The circumstances are always different but somehow seem to work out at the end. I am working with tiny budgets and each time have to find a way to bring people on board and get them excited about something that doesn't exist yet. Sometimes I loosely draw out my concepts or work with a story board artist (as I did for In The Dollhouse). I assemble my crew and consult with my creative team, that is made up of makeup & hair artists, costumers and prop builders. Many of the costumes and props are fabricated by local craftsman and artists.

I methodically scout out locations, as these will become permanent backdrops for my conceptualized scenarios. There is usually a lot of red tape that has to be dealt with in preparation, (all this keeps the studio interns busy on the computer and phones).

Many of my set ups involve elaborate sets with crews largely made-up of photography and art students, as well as volunteers from all walks of life.

To prepare for the shoots I shift focus to the tiny details. The collection of furniture and knick knacks, which I hand pick, play an important role in the telling of the story.

Prior to the shoot day I meet with the actors to discuss character and give them some clear direction.

I usually photograph 2 images over a weekend. I revue the shoot and the files and make decisions for post adjustments. I may have to reshoot or add an element that will help shape and complete the image.

I work with a dynamo post team, that despite my limited budgets and huge ambitions, can make anything possible!

** JUDY If you have specific questions in regards to any of my series/ pieces please let me know.

Many of your projects involve images that challenge people to look closely and consider what they know, to question and perhaps reconsider what seems very familiar in many aspects of their culture and daily lives, from religion to commercial enterprises, such as Disney and well-known toys.

What advice do you have for photographers who are interesting in storytelling?

What is wonderful about storytelling within photography is that individual artistic style and point of view has so much variation and therefor the final product of each piece is distinctive. You often hear that 'everything has been done'!!! I disagree with this statement. How is this possible when no two works of art are identical? Yes you have those that are inspired and create similar works to other artists, but even in this case the piece remains unique to the creator. There will be many levels of execution, but finely crafted art will be eventually recognized.

Within my work I attempt to convey my opinions in the form of social critic expressed through the medium of photography. My challenge is to make my grandiose ideas come to life within very limited resources. For me it's not worth picking up my camera unless everything is in place. I know that my efforts, along with all the hard work of every creative involved, is a waste if the vision is distorted and the organization is poor. Try to commit to a story worth telling- educate yourself about the subject - stay consistent within the body of work.