



Inside look: Photographers turn their cameras toward home for virtual exhibition



Derrick Waller's photos from home. Courtesy of the artist.

Photographer Derrick Waller has spent the last several months on the streets of downtown Charlottesville, capturing the raised fists and interlocked arms of the local Black Lives Matter movement. But from July 17 to August 21, viewers can glimpse a different side of Waller and other Charlottesville photographers in Second Street Gallery's "Snaps From My Home" virtual exhibition.

In this setting, Waller's photographs recede from documenting the general state of America's streets, offering instead, a private glimpse into his daily life: gloved hands sifting through the weeds in his garden; the panting smiles of two golden retrievers in the backseat of his car; and the curve of his pregnant wife's belly as she reclines on their couch.

"You see his work in the streets," says Second Street's Executive Director and Chief Curator Kristen Chiacchia. "You don't think about him at home with his family and in this more intimate, private space."

Chiacchia and contributing artist Stacey Evans co-curated the gallery's fourth online- only show in order to dig into that unseen part of a photographer's life. Earlier this spring, they put out a call for Charlottesvilleans to explore what has become very familiar to them over the last few months: the inside of their own homes.

Many of the gallery's photographs work to find beauty in the mundane. Sally Wansboro Eppstein captures her kitchen shelves, zeroing in on a half-empty bottle of soy sauce and a stack of ready-made ramen. As even

the simplest parts of our lives can't escape a touch of the pandemic, neither can Eppstein's photos; the artist writes that ramen with a splash of soy, her "COVID obsession," became a staple for her when lockdown forced her to spend more time at home.

The exhibition captures both the peaceful highs and the stifling lows of isolation. With Cary Oliva's brightly saturated shots of leafy houseplants, the artist delights in the extra time in her cozy home. In Emily Whiting's harsh vignettes of broken eggshells and empty cups, she grapples with coming to terms with the loss of her mother while confined to her house.

Few collections paint a clearer narrative than Isaac Russell's—a shot of a tiger figurine pacing across a ledge followed by the flash of a police car driving by the window. Next, the camera pans to the face of the photographer. The headlights' harsh glow washes over his face as it morphs into two familiar expressions: one slack in despondence, the other twisted into a soundless scream of frustration.

"It makes me think of when I go to the zoo and there's this tiger that paces back and forth, this sensation of being trapped," Evans says. "... And then at the end you have him turning the camera on himself and expressing two very different kinds of feelings. That, I think, really does speak to the quarantine and to this particular time."

This show could be curated at any time. In fact, it's based on a 1990 exhibition by David Hockney, featuring 40 photographs of his home taken on his new digital camera. But as Russell's submission shows, this summer 2020 iteration is unique. Each of the objects photographed—a roll of toilet paper, a bottle of perfume, a container of disinfectant—reflect a distinct period in the photographers' lives.

"Some of us have been home, social distancing and quarantining, since maybe March," Chiacchia says. "This assignment really forced everyone to really take another look at the objects and the environment that they're surrounded by every day, and maybe look at it in a new way and start to appreciate some of the nuances of home and the space that they maybe would have missed."

The simplicity of the assignment exemplifies a principle that Evans has long espoused: Good photographers don't need an exotic subject. They can make an interesting image in their own backyard.

"That's always stuck with me," Evans says. "You don't need to go to the highest mountain to make a good image. There are plenty of things that you can find in your home."

Second Street Gallery is hoping to reopen for in-person exhibitions with its annual "Teeny Tiny Trifecta" show, which features works of art that are 10 inches or smaller, on Saturday, September 5. Viewings will be by appointment only, and the gallery will limit the number of patrons. But Chiacchia believes that this summer's shows are just the beginning of Second Street's virtual galleries.

"I do plan to continue to, in addition to having the exhibitions in the gallery space, have everything also online so that people can keep returning to the exhibition to see it," she says. "And also, so we can expand our reach just beyond Charlottesville and who is actually able to physically come into the gallery space."

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