



JRB ART AT THE ELMS

Paseo Arts District

INTERVIEW WITH JULIE MAGUIRE



Julie Maguire



Joy Reed Belt

JRB: Julie, I am so pleased that you agreed to curate JRB Art at The Elms' upcoming Exhibition, "Photograph and Place: Fragments of the World." For that show you have selected the work of four different photographers: Brett Weston, Catherine Adams, Christa Blackwood and Allen Birnbach. The aesthetic of these photographers are very different and yet you have found a commonalities in them, which is what a curator does. Since curating is such a specialized field, why don't you tell us a little about your career.

JULIE: I really started doing curatorial work at UBS (formerly Union Bank of Switzerland and Paine Webber). That would have been in 2005, so 15 years.

JRB: How did you prepare to become a curator?

JULIE: I went to James Madison University in Virginia for my B.A. I was a theatre major and art history minor. While at Citibank I got my MA at Hunter College in New York in Art History.

JRB: Was your first job with UMB or Bank of America? Tell us a little about those jobs.

JULIE: My first job was with Citibank Art Advisory Service. I worked there for eight years as a registrar. As a registrar I learned about art insurance, conservation, shipping and installation. We used to visit clients home to do inspections of art work that was collateral for loans. We would find artwork stored in showers in bathrooms (that weren't in use, but still). We would also ask people to take paintings down from fireplaces. We would also get called to clients homes when accidents had happened. We saw antique chairs that were split in two pieces, paintings with holes poked completely through them. We also found door knobs that had been slammed into artwork behind doors. That job was really an eye opener about how much could go wrong with artwork.

I left Citibank and went to work as the curator for the US at the United Bank of Switzerland, UBS. They had acquired the Paine Webber art collection, which had been collected by Don Maron. Maron was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art(MOMA) until he passed away a couple of years ago. It was here that I began putting together collections of work on the client facing and executive floors. The bank also had a show that opened at MoMA and traveled to Australia, London and Japan. I traveled with the artwork as a courier, which was a completely new experience. I was with the crates as they were packed on pallets in the warehouses on airport grounds. I then rode out to the tarmac and watched the work be packed into the cargo holds of commercial and cargo planes. I rode on tractor trailers with the artwork to the different museums and supervised while everything was unpacked. It was a lot of travel, but there was a fair amount of down time between the artwork arriving and waiting for it to be unpacked and installed. We also published several catalogs while I was at UBS which was an opportunity to write about art works. We also were acquiring works from artists like Alfredo Jaar and Doug Aitkin, although these were from fairly young contemporary artists as the budgets were not huge.



Brett Weston, "Yucca Valley, California," 1953, Silver Gelatin Print, Vintage, 8 x 10 in., POR



Brett Weston, "Desert Landscape, New Mexico," 1971, Silver Gelatin Print, Vintage, 7 5/8 x 9 1/2 in., POR

JRB: Currently, you are a Curator for a Private Collector. How and why did that happen?

JULIE: While I thoroughly enjoyed my work at UBS, the position began to shift more and more to Zurich, Switzerland. I was already traveling there four times a year for two weeks at a time, but I did not want to move to Zurich, so I stated looking for another position. In 2008 I began working for Christian Keesee. I found the job through a friend that had an arts recruiting/search firm agency. The job description was really focused on the photography aspect of the job, which I didn't feel I had a lot of experience with, but after I met Chris it became clear that he was also really interested in an art advisor, which I was more comfortable with. However, my title is Director of the Brett Weston Archives.

JRB: What do you find meaningful about Brett Weston's work?

JULIE: Overtime I had learned a lot about Brett Weston's work and twentieth century photography. The thing that I really learned from his work is the importance of the artist's eye. He was taking photographs of subjects that many of the other straight photographers were taking, but he had a way of cropping with the camera that brought out something unseen by other artists. Also, his use of light and dark in an image could transform it from something fairly pedestrian to a work with high drama.



Brett Weston, "Nevada Desert," c. 1980s, Silver Gelatin Print, Vintage, 11 x 14 in., POR



Brett Weston, "Desert Landscape," c. 1970s, Silver Gelatin Print, Vintage, 10 5/8 x 12 3/4 in., POR

JRB: This all sounds so interesting. What does your current job entail?

JULIE: As Director of the Archive we mount exhibition of his work in conjunction with other institutions and galleries. My biggest duty is arranging for groups of Brett's work to be donated to museums, government agencies and universities throughout the United States and abroad. We have also begun an initiative to place Brett's work in larger corporations and other commercial entities.

JRB: I am going to ask you a question that I have been asking a lot lately. What makes a work of art great?

JULIE: This is a tough question. To me a great work of art is something I can't forget. Whether that is because I love it or hate it. If I can't stop thinking about it, I think that means it has surpassed something that is purely decorative or utilitarian (which artwork can be). The first time I saw a Francis Bacon, I thought it was disgusting. It looked like a monster from a nightmare. After I had told about the tenth person how ugly it was, and how much I hated it, I realized that it had changed me as a person forever. I still remember the orange background and the teeth of that artwork. When I see it now at Tate Britain it brings a smile to my face and is a personal favorite.



Francis Bacon, "Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion," 1962, Triptych Oil Painting, 6 ft 6.0 in x 4 ft 9.0 in

JRB: What is your favorite great work of art? Why do you think it is great?

JULIE: Arguably the Bacon could be thought of as my favorite, but I think my favorite work is "The Kiss" by Gustav Klimt. I know this is probably a lot of people's favorite as it is on millions of t-shirts, mugs and tote bags, but it was the image that sparked my interest in art. I couldn't get over the colors, the emotion, the texture (that you can even see on a reproduction). I have never seen that painting in person, but when I finally saw a Klimt painting (a portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer) I couldn't believe the shimmer of the gold, and the flatness of the pattern, and the emotion in her eyes. I still get emotional when I see Klimt's in person, and one of my goals is to go to Vienna to see his work in the government buildings.



Gustav Klimt, "The Kiss (Lovers)," 1907-1908, Oil and Gold Leaf on Canvas, 70 in x 70 in

JRB: Have you always loved art? Did you grow up in a family of art lovers? How did you get into art?

JULIE: So I grew up in household with two military parents. We did have paintings in the house, but they were of airplanes and a couple of landscapes. We never went to art museums. I was probably in about 4th grade before I visited an art museum with school. However, I was lucky enough to grow up outside of DC, and as a young teenager of 13 or 14 we would travel into the city where we could go to the museum for free. That is where I saw a poster of The Kiss. I used to love to visit the National Gallery. The Calder hanging in the East Wing felt like mine. I think the opportunity to visit great works over and over again really helped foster a love of art. The way you viewed those works changed over time. When I moved to New York I was shocked that art museum charged entrance fees. It made me realize how lucky I was to have had unlimited access.

JRB: This has been great. Thank You! We are looking forward to the show you have curated for our Gallery.

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