

Dek Unu Magazine

Solo Exhibitions of Fine
Photoart Portfolios

January, 2019

Featured Artist

Jordan McAfee

"Shane"

Cover "Socks and Mask in Lower East Side"
All images © [Jordan McAfee](#)



Dek Unu Magazine

Eleven

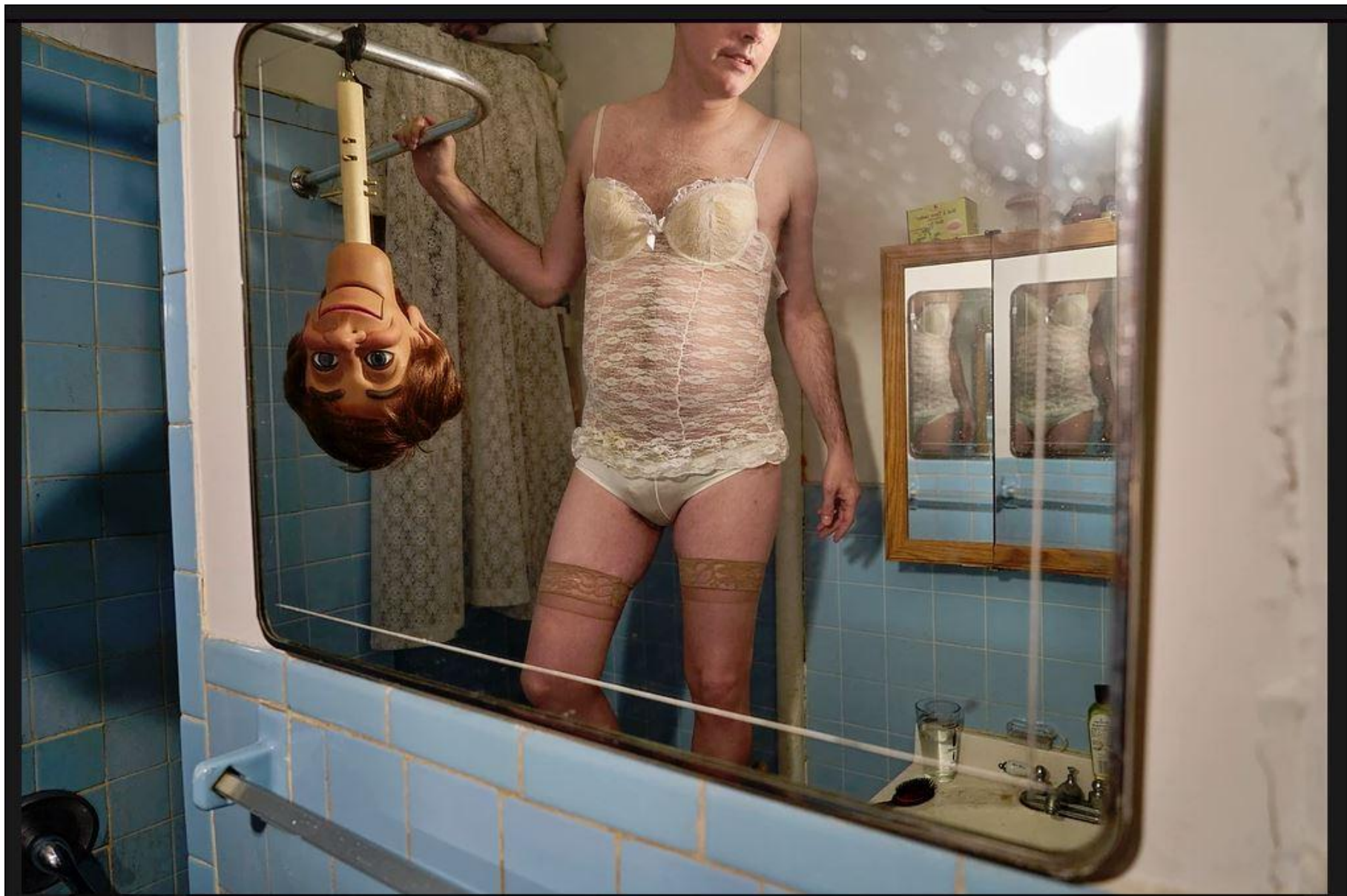
This is **Dek Unu Magazine**. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven Images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues each year.

Dek Unu publishes the work of a new photoartist in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured alone and in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at **Dek Unu**, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

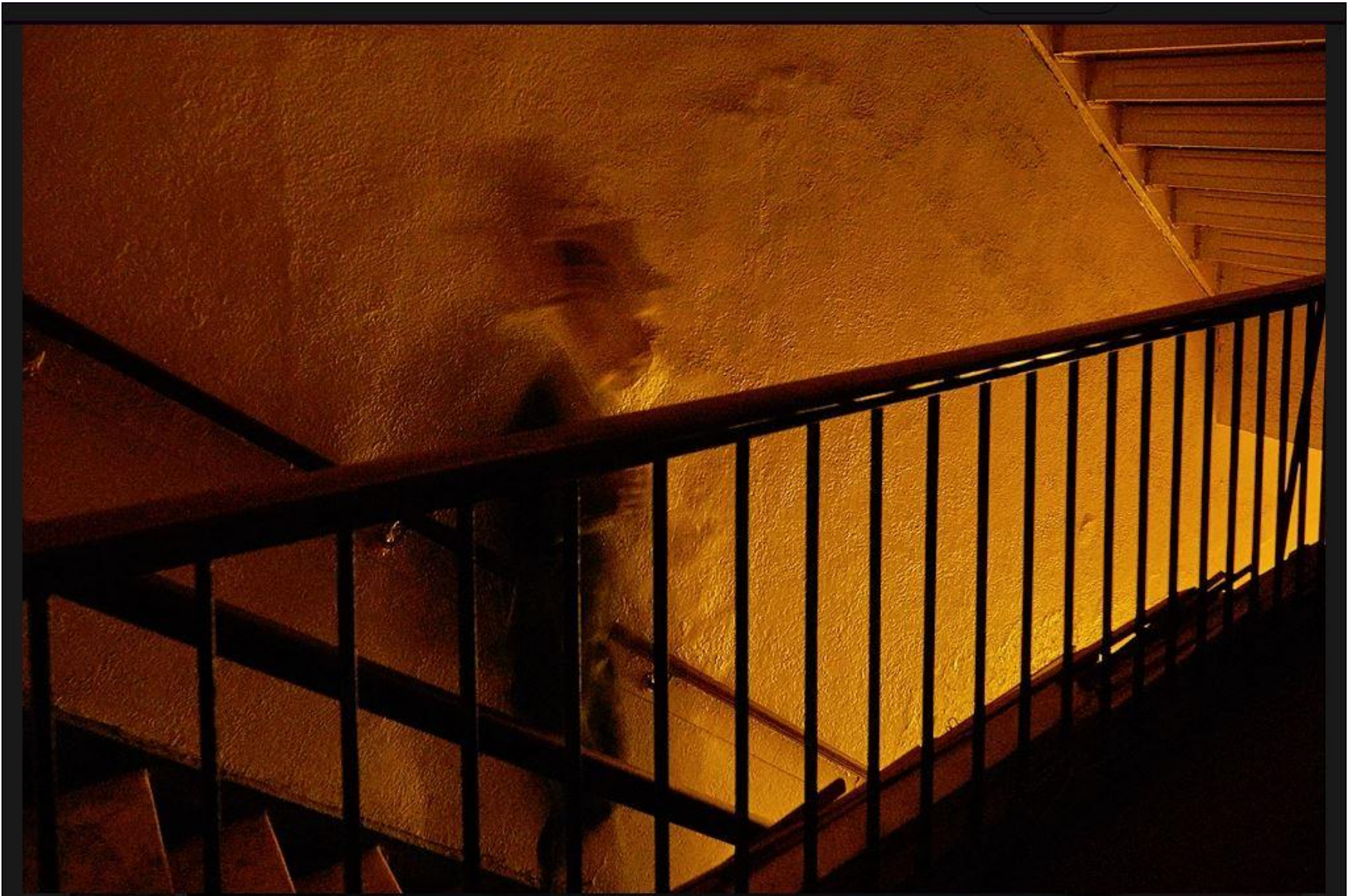
Dek Unu seeks challenging, complex work that focuses and intensifies perception from artists who demonstrate accomplished technical craft and mature aesthetic vision.

This Month

Narrative portraits by photo-artist Jordan McAfee are January's feature. The work is a creative collaboration between McAfee and performance artist, Shane, who stage their stories in unlikely but evocative spaces - rooftops, abandoned buildings, biker bars. These are atmospheric and allusive works, often dark, sometimes comic, about loneliness, gender, identity, the fluidity of transformation and the tragedy of the human condition.



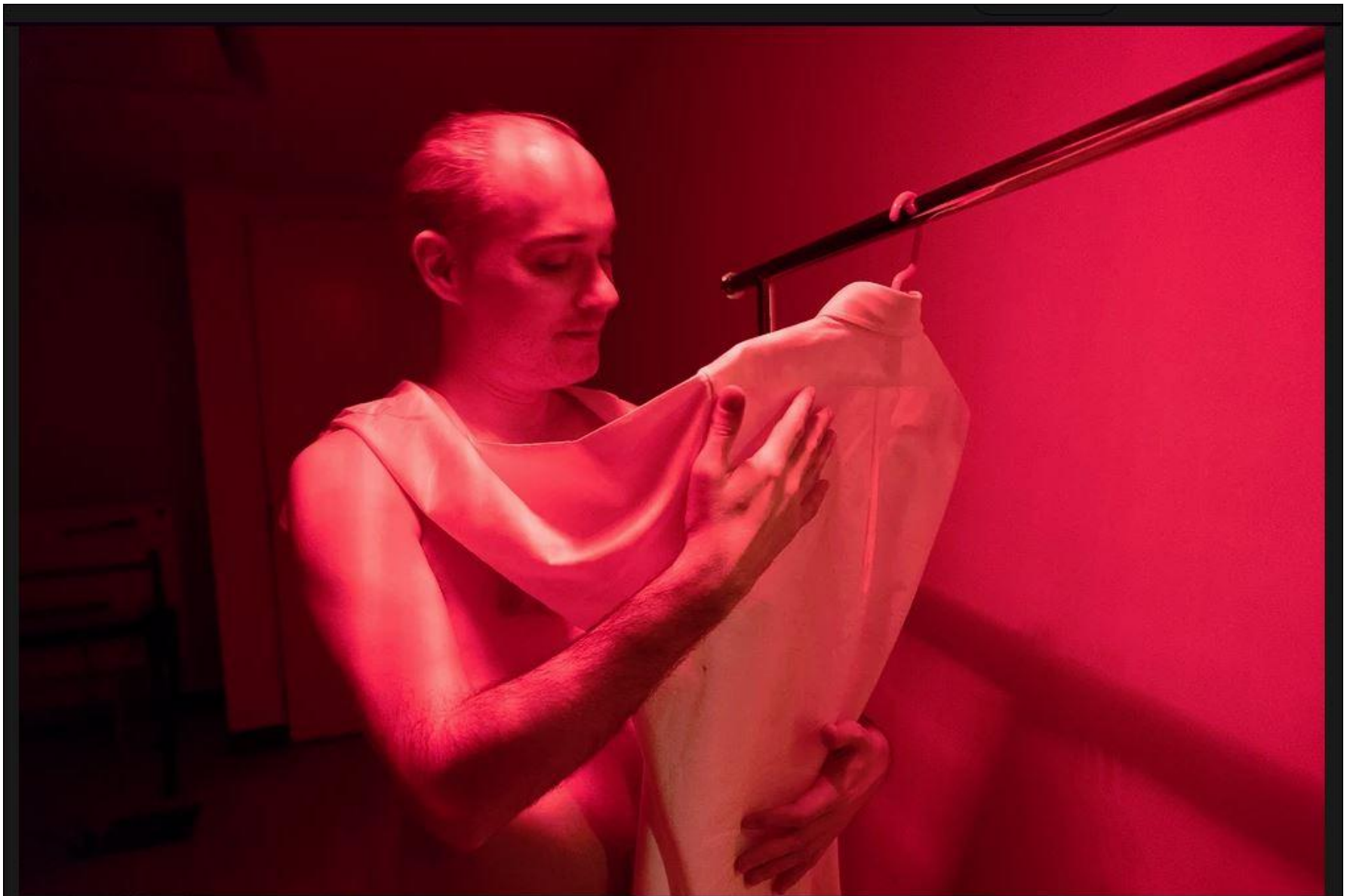
Preparing in the Upper East Side



Downstairs in Lower East Side



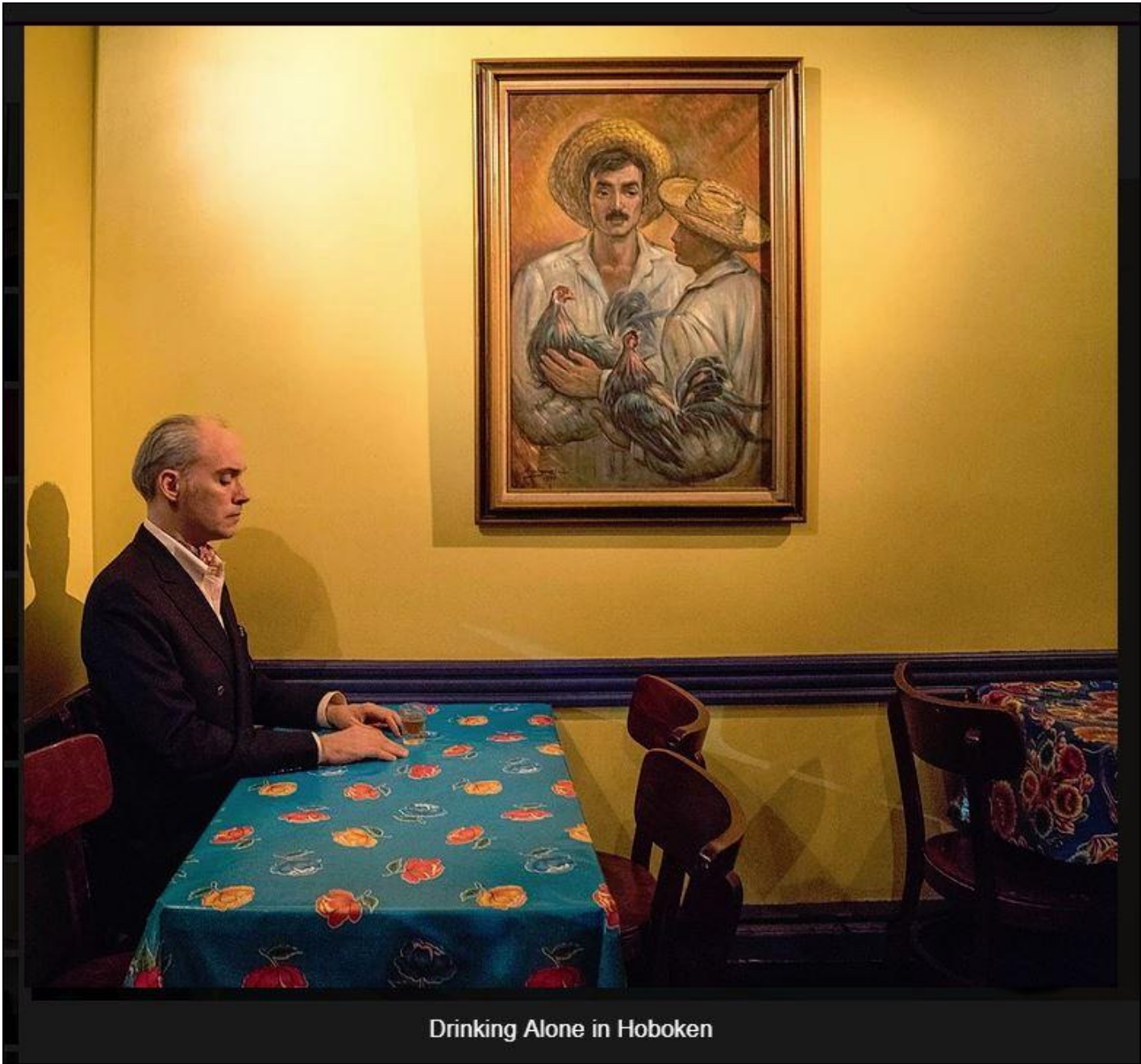
Exploring in the Lower East Side



Love in the Garment District



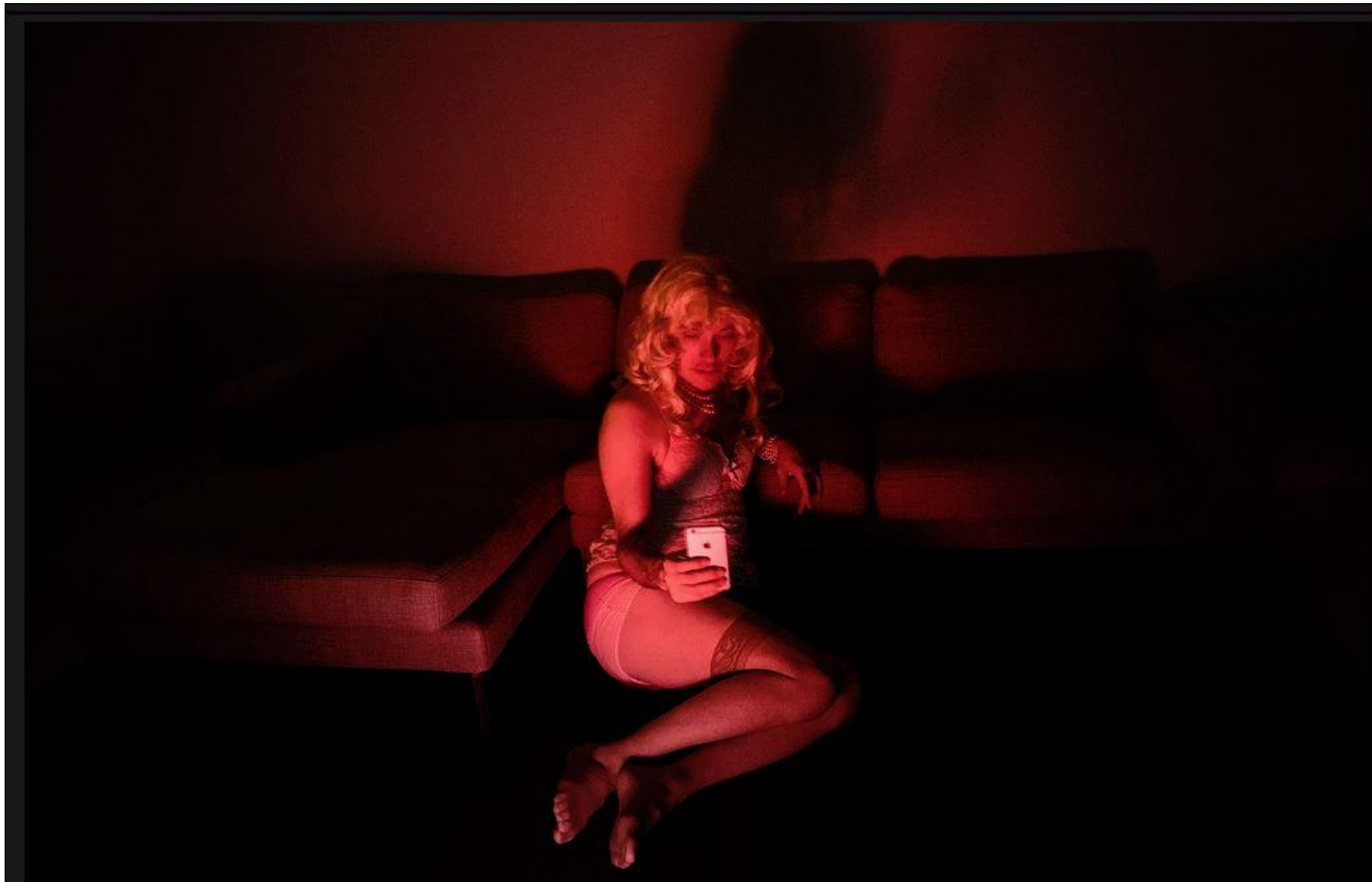
Paper Silhouette - Lower East Side



Drinking Alone in Hoboken



Shaving in the Upper East Side



Red Selfie in Hell's Kitchen

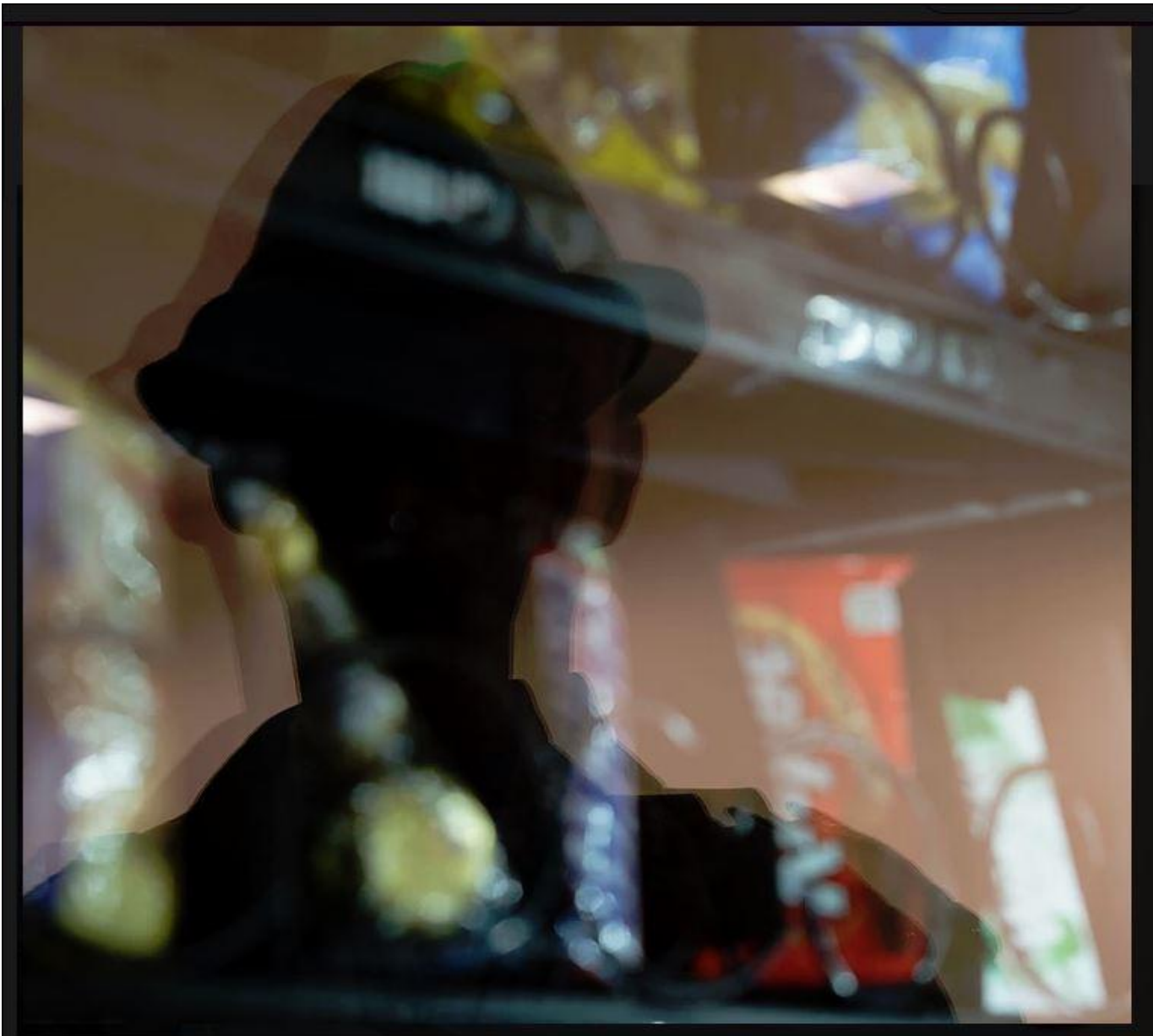




Socks & Mask in Lower East Side



Waiting in the Lower East Side



Reflecting in Hell's Kitchen

Artist Interview - Jordan McAfee

Welcome, Jordan. Your collaboration with Shane has produced remarkable art!

Shane and I first met nearly ten years ago when I photographed one of his performances where he hypnotizes a rubber chicken. His work was subsequently profiled in the New York Times and he has spent the past several years traveling the world performing and entertaining, and the image with the rubber chicken has been at the center of his promotional material that whole time. Since then, we always try to meet whenever our schedules overlap in New York and try to shoot once or twice a year.

How do you create a scene? Is there a method?

Scene creation really is a product of the location and our interaction. To begin, I find an interesting location. I'll walk around looking for an area with interesting light. Then I'll check it for distractions (unnecessary objects that would detract from the shot) and remove them. Shane selects wardrobe. We might share certain images and concepts that inspire us before the shoot, but we don't try to recreate them. We try not to over-plan or restrict ourselves. We have planned specific shoots in the past, but I don't enjoy it as much because it reminds me of working in commercial photography. And interestingly, on a heavily-planned shoot, I'll often end up getting only one or two good shots. But if we just play and bounce around, I find I get a lot more good shots. During the shoot, I'll give him pose suggestions but most of the time Shane is totally in character and I focus on composition. He moves (or poses), and I shoot. Shane is such a good performer that he can go into his own world posing and I can focus on the technical aspects.

How do you tell when an idea or an image is "done?"

After I've gotten what I can from a pose, I use an external monitor to check that series for lighting, composition and color, as well as to double check for any distractions, and I know I'm done when there are at least a couple images that work for me, when those three elements, light, composition, and color, all come together.

You mentioned commercial photography. Your career path has been roundabout.

That's true but photography has always been constant. I was a business major at Syracuse University but also participated in the Light Work Learning Community and won an award there. Then after working in commercial photography production for several years, I went to get a master's degree in science at Columbia University in New York and was published in their art magazine. After I finished the master's, I went to medical school. But first I had to take the prerequisite courses so I was taking physiology and organic chemistry and preparing to take the MCAT. Studying was so intense that some people would laminate notes and post them inside their shower for review. I never did that though I seriously considered it. I was feeling really empty studying in a windowless library all day and night, and I decided I needed a creative outlet so I took a course with Amy Arbus at the International Center for Photography.

At ICP I was an administrative assistant to the Chair for Photojournalism, after which I was hired full-time at the Ralph Lauren photo studio with RR Donnelley. At the Ralph Lauren



©Jordan McAfee



photo studio, I started out in the equipment room and worked my way up through several promotions to become a producer. Since I had a degree in finance, they hired me thinking that I wouldn't want to get on set, and that was true at the time. But over time, I grew more and more interested in shooting, so they let me use the studio (and expensive cameras) at night. That was a lot of fun, and I learned a lot with that hands-on experience. Eventually I left the full-time staff producer role to become a freelance digital technician and video producer.

Good training but commercial photography eventually bummed you out?

E-commerce fashion photography is a high-volume grind. Great light and no distractions, it's true. It's all white background photography. We had massive production values for shooting home decor items, or underwear, or an expensive dog carrier but it wasn't at all fulfilling. Maybe too much control and too little chaos? There's no thrill finding a serendipitous location, none of the joy of figuring out a workaround for imperfect light or set. After those long days, the last thing I wanted to do was plan a shoot so if I did pick up a camera it was for some street photography.

These images are beautiful but a little edgy, Have you encountered resistance to your work?

I started this photo series as an escape from studying and as an extracurricular resume builder for my application to medical school. I thought "Hey, I'm making some pictures and they're good" and that was kind of the end of it. But when I actually put some work together, everyone told me "You cannot let any medical school see this work." That's the strongest resistance I've gotten so far.



© Jordan McAfee

Oh, and when we recently started a new series, I found a barn I was interested in renting. When I approached the owner initially, she was fine with us shooting there but wanted to know exactly what the shots were going to be and put them in a contract. The location had an Instagram profile and one of their posted images was a woman in her underwear in the window of the barn—so I told them that were going to recreate the same image using Shane as the model. They immediately shot back "that doesn't work for us" because they were worried about their barn's "reputation." So I guess we've encountered a double-standard.

Do you remember the first "decent" photo you made? One that set up your interest in photography?

I think my first decent photograph was one I took of a broken down truck that had been weathered for years. I was in high school and I won the photography award with it. I had a really good photo teacher who asked me to take 100 photos a week on a film camera. Every Friday I'd show him my stuff and he would just say try again, get closer. He was not a guy who handed out compliments. Eventually though he asked me to exhibit my work in the school. I think that's what encouraged me to stick with it.

Digital? Analog? Both? Hardware? Software?

I learned on 35mm film and then switched to digital later on. I sometimes shoot medium format on a Mamiya 6 for fun but not for the project with Shane. I used a Sony A7RII for a lot of it. Because I was completely relying on available light, I would use the fastest glass I could afford but sometimes I would still need a tripod. I developed a workflow that would let me process RAWs in *Capture One* but I would use *Lightroom* to cull and organize images. I sometimes would shoot tethered to a MacBook with *Capture One* but I've since switched to a 5-inch FocusHD monitor mounted onto the camera.





© Jordan McAfee

Your image, “Preparing in the Upper East Side” is a riot. What can you tell us about it?

Shane's apartment looks like a theatrical warehouse that crashed into a library, and the bathroom was so full of clothes, linens, and toiletries that it took over an hour to empty it so it would be distraction free. Once we had "a blank canvas" and began shooting in the bathroom, I wanted to add another, contrasting, visual element. Shane is also a ventriloquist so I knew he had a dummy head somewhere.

“Silhouette in the Lower East Side” is a fan favorite here. The distortion makes the figure look extra-terrestrial. How did this image happen?

The paper was taped to the window in an abandoned building. I asked Shane to take it down to allow in the natural light, and, as he was taking it down, I realized it would make a great shot, so I told him to just hold it up. We got really lucky with the light in that place.



© Jordan McAfee



Your color and your compositions are very accomplished. Is there training in drawing and painting in your background?

I've got no training in painting or drawing. It's interesting that you compliment my color and compositions, because I feel it's a weak spot for me, and I'm looking to learn more about color theory. I find that when painters turn to photography, the results can be incredible.

While at ICP, I had access to their wonderful printing facilities and met a lot of very talented photographers from around the world. I remember sitting in their photo book library for hours just looking at images.

This portfolio is part of a book project that you and Shane have been working on for the past 10 years.

Right now the book is in draft form. I created it as part of Amy Arbus's ICP course *The Narrative Portrait*. I chose to study the tension between chaos and control in human life for my narrative theme, and working on the series, a specific theme emerged of how much we try to control our appearance to the outside world and how that conflicts with or affects our real selves.

At one point during the shooting, we drafted another actor to take part, thinking that would present more storytelling possibilities, but it didn't really work. Also, Shane is an incurable camera hog.

I'd like to get the book ready for release and find a publisher. In the meantime, Shane and I are going to Japan this spring to photograph there. Lot of good locations, but there's this one place called Cat Island where there are so many cats that they outnumber the humans. Shane wants to "get them high on catnip" and serve them "body sushi".



© Jordan McAfee

Anyone who's been helpful, past or present, who deserves a shout out?

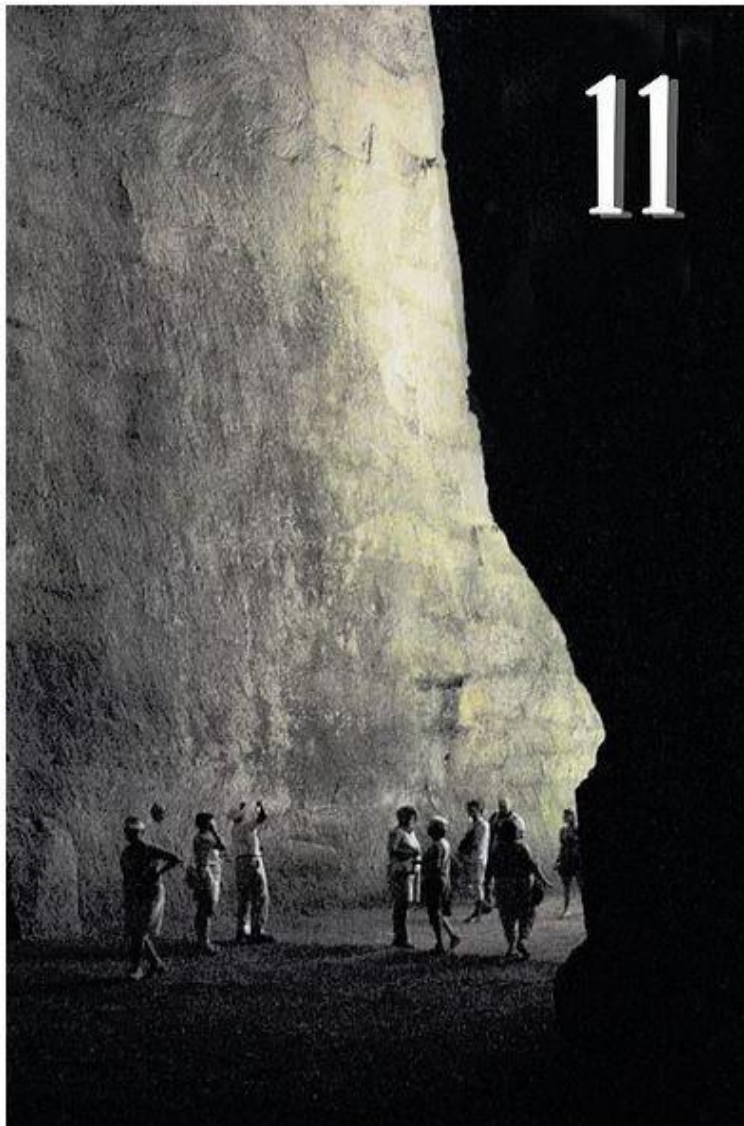
I think of my high school photography teacher Mr. Brown and my instructors at ICP like Joel Meyerowitz, Mary Ellen Mark, and especially Amy Arbus. Although I worked on the production side professionally, I fought pursuing photography. I was preparing for a career in medicine, and was using photography as a sideline, a kind of extracurricular to make me more appealing to schools. And I got in. But I realized I was miserable. So I took some aptitude and career tests, and they all suggested that I was best cut out to become a singer... or a photographer. Amy Arbus had told me that, too (photography not singing), so I'm giving it a go.

We wish you the best. Where can we find you in the future?

Web: www.jordanmcafee.com

Instagram: [jordan.mcafee.photo](https://www.instagram.com/jordan.mcafee.photo)





Submit

How to submit:

(Submission Period: First of each month to 20th of each month)

Send 11 images as file attachments to a **single** e-mail to:

dekunomag [at] gmail [dot] com

E-mail subject Line = Artist's name - Title of Project

Web-resolution .jpg only (1024 pixels on the longest side). No watermarks.

Message must include:

1. Attached files named exactly as follows:

- Image sequence number (plus)
- Artist's last name (plus)
- Underscore (plus)
- Image_title (separate words with underscore)

Example: If your name is Edvard Munch, the first two files in your list of attached files would be named:

01Munch_The_Scream.jpg

02Munch_Self-Portrait_with_Cigarette.jpg

(etc.)

2. 1st person bio/cv. Mention anything you believe is important or interesting about you and your practice. Issue and interview are in English, written facility is necessary.
3. Artist's statement: Describe the submitted portfolio's origins, aims, themes, etc. in personal, accessible terms.
4. When you are selected, **Dek Unu** will contact you to develop the interview via exchange of emails.

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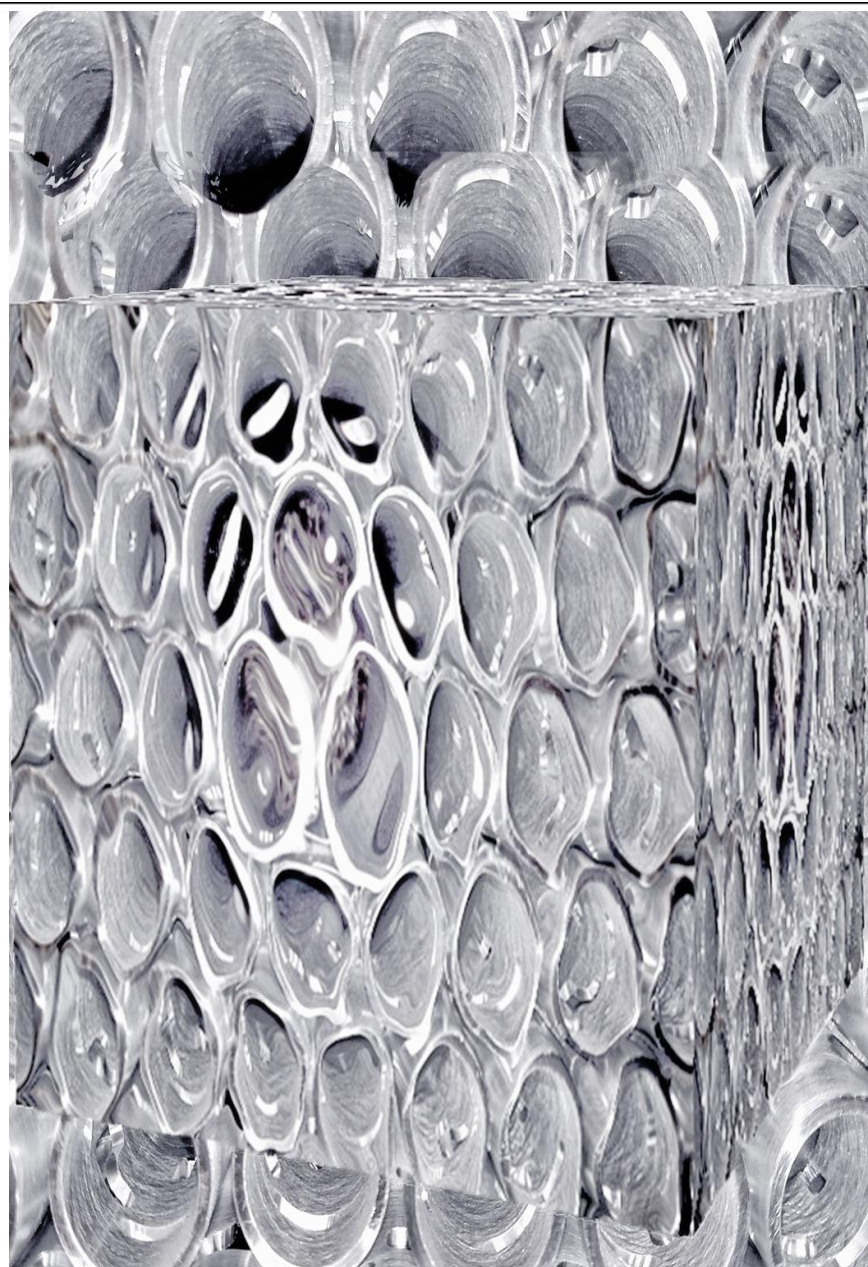
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