

AdrianSolo@320.mp3

[00:00:00] Welcome to the West Lobby Speaker series and our art series. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the gaggle and wangel people of the coronation and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging for this art series. We have asked three local artists to choose an item for the art book collection and talk about their choice and how it relates to their practice. This is the second podcast in the series and is related directly to be our book collection at Marrickville Library. Barrelful Library holds an impressive and historic art book collection, ranging from indigenous art to the Impressionists and beyond. Adrian Koc is an award winning portrait and documentary photographer and has worked for major advertising agencies and magazines worldwide for the last 25 years. Adrian, while shooting digitally, has also focused on a process called web plate collodion photography invented in the late 50s. What fascinates him is a challenge of a process. Today, Adrian will speak about his choice of book art and photography by Aaron Sharf.

[00:01:09] Adrian, can you tell us a little bit about your practice and your interests?

[00:01:15] I'm going to. I've been there for about 30 years, I kind of started off back in the days of Phil and processing and I actually started off in the darkroom. And then I became an assistant to photographers in New York and London. And then I became a photographer for myself and the commercial photographer for about 15 who up until Neroni I shoot commercially some advertising in magazines. But about four or five years ago I started looking into alternative practices and I picked up on what's called a WePay process, which is a very odd process that was invented in nineteen fifty one and it goes right back to the early, early days of photography and so I've been pretty much doing that for the last four or five years, probably about 70 percent of my work now is that and that's working on shitting on using all cameras, our lenses and shooting photographs directly onto bits of tin or bits of glass.

[00:02:11] Yeah, I think, you know, your work with the wet plate photography are really amazing. It's very beautiful pieces. Look at your website. And I saw that the library, as you know, we have a very large art collection. What drove you to select your title?

[00:02:26] Well, you do have a massive collection of books, but you don't have a big selection of photography in the collection.

[00:02:33] So I'd hope to find a book about the website process because I'm always researching the process either online or looking for books to buy. There isn't much out there. So the book that I did pick up is actually a book about art photography and which is really, really interesting. And there is a small portion in there about how photography started and quite, quite detailed about the Medicare types and how it all began, really.

[00:02:59] Also, I'm aware that you've worked with many authors and you have photographed authors of a city. What is festival? What is it about authors and their work that catches your eye about in 2007?

[00:03:12] I think it was I. I mean, I've been seeing the fatal happening every year for years, and I always wondered to myself why nothing was being done with these people who came into town for two weeks and then all of this would come into Sydney. Apart from saying if, you know, reportage shots in the newspapers, there's no there's nothing nothing that I could see that was being done with them. So I approached the festival and said, look, you know, can I photograph all this during the festival so I won't charge a fee. I just want to a room or I can be. And what is them during the day? And I'll take a portrait. And I ducked in there for a while until 2007, pretty much I shot everything on film, which is quite nice.

[00:03:53] A war suit had my camera on a tripod and this had a window and a backdrop. So these audience would come in not knowing what to expect, probably expecting something with a massive lens and, you know, thirty five million bucks.

[00:04:10] And there I was in a suit and I made them sit down and I took a portrait using a large format camera, which is great because it was really slow and I got to chat to them. You know, they usually put in the book along. I didn't photograph them with a book with just a head and shoulders portrait pretty much.

[00:04:26] But I got to talk to them, to talk to them about their book. And more often than not, I would buy the book, you know, after the post person, first of all, because it's always nice to read something where, you know, the person has written it. And I find the

authors a very quiet, shy people know they're not they're not actors, so everything is done usually, but that they were by themselves in a room or whatever, and and they're not great at publicity. So I found over the years that they come in and see me, I take a portrait and then quite often I get a call maybe a year later or six months later asking for a copy of the picture that they could decide for themselves or for book cover of a book jacket. So it's really nice.

[00:05:07] So how do they react towards you when you first got there? Did they know that you were coming to take their photo?

[00:05:12] No idea. I mean, I just went through the festival and said, just let them know there's a free portrait for them. They want it.

[00:05:18] I put up some I put up on the website some examples of what I was going to do and contacts the public publicists.

[00:05:24] And of course, once I found it, it was free. They all came in.

[00:05:29] And what about archiving those photos of it archived anyway?

[00:05:32] I've got them all I've got I've got all the negatives. And actually, for the last two years or three years, I've actually been doing the portraits using website.

[00:05:40] So I've been taking my little portable mobile darkroom down to the festival.

[00:05:44] They basically, again, I create a studio situation where they come and they sit down. I take a portrait, I run now, I process the play in my darkroom. I run back out and show it to them. And that's been really nice, quite special.

[00:05:56] Can you talk a little bit about that portable studio?

[00:05:59] The problem with photography is that you have to have a darkroom nearby. So what you do is you go into the darkroom, you get your piece of glass or aluminium, tin, whatever you're going to use it on. You pour your camp was onto the plate that then goes into the back of the back of the camera. You expose it and then you run back into

the darkroom and develop that plate. And it's all going to be done while that plate is still kind of wet or tacky, because once it dries out, there's no image, which is why it's called the wet process. Prior to the caravan, I just moved out of my studio, which is great, but it meant I was quite limited to what I could do. So what I did was I went off in the middle of nineteen fifty five.

[00:06:37] Wouldn't caravan so beautiful, beautiful shape, and I basically turn it into a doctrine, which means I can kind of go anywhere I want to now and take portraits used in that process.

[00:06:48] It's quite amazing, really.

[00:06:49] How long does it take to make a picture? Oh, yeah. Well, I just actually I've just got back from three weeks.

[00:06:56] I ran around the Central Tablelands of New South Wales. I was up in a place called Gulgong and in Portland. And Hilland has don't put us out there and landscapes.

[00:07:04] And I basically do one portrait per hour. So by the time they come in, sit down, introduce themselves to me, I have a chat, I sit them down, I impose the image, I then leave them, leave them there for five minutes while I go at the darkroom and make a play, come out, take the picture back into the darkroom, develop it, come out, and then I show them the image.

[00:07:25] So about about one, I can go quicker, but I like I like about one per hour, which is quite nice. Yeah.

[00:07:32] I mean compared to digital where you can shoot, you know, 5000 per hour, it's really nice. And I'm not looking at screens all day too, which is another advantage. Mhm.

[00:07:42] And do you teach photography.

[00:07:44] Yeah I do, I do workshops with a whiplash process and oh I can do any analogue as well, but mostly the wordplay is what I teach these days.

[00:07:53] Well it's a very old process. 1851 one is when it was invented. Yeah.

[00:08:00] So speaking of you, Adrian, it seems to me that you're more interested in process rather than concept. Is that do you think that's right?

[00:08:08] Well, I again, I like with digital of the digital was quite, you know, when it first came in. It's what the client wants. They can see everything straight away. But for me, I kind of photography and lost its magic. I love getting I love being a doctor and I love getting my hands dirty. And I love knowing, not knowing what's going to happen. And also I love being very, very exact in the way I work. So with where you've got to be really accurate and know exactly what you're doing and know what the chemicals are doing. And also just the what you get by using a large format camera. And what the process does is just really beautiful. What you can't mimic on digital or even on film, they say that's such a beautiful process.

[00:08:50] When you see a bit of silver on a bit of glass or a bit of turn, it's it's it's it's quite a lovely it's almost like a painting in a way. No, it's not looking anything on the screen. It's not flat anymore because it has its own life to it and again, over the last 200 years. So that's that's another thing I love about the fact that knowing that it's going to get picked up somewhere in 200 plus years. And again, I wonder who that was or what was covid-19 or what led you to that?

[00:09:17] What led you to being so attracted to that process?

[00:09:21] But what about digital? Really, digital has doesn't hold any surprises for me. I mean, it's great for commercial work to what clients want to see. But, you know, it wasn't making me get out of bed every morning when it does that. And also we're Wepa. I'm always learning. It's such a tricky process now. The weather's warmer today than tomorrow and it'll be it'll change something somewhere along the lines. Yeah. If it's one more. Is there anything that's what I miss most about digital. You get to a point with digital where it's all the same.

[00:09:50] You talked a little bit about your time as a photographer. Such a long time you've been working in that field. What drives you as an artist and what would you say to any young artist starting out?

[00:10:01] If you love it, just go for it. I think. I think if you're good at it, if you if you really enjoy what you do, you'll be good at it, you know, because it makes you get up in the morning. I told my kids to not necessarily not. But just in life, you know, if you enjoy something and I'm looking for a career, then just chase that thing that you enjoy. Don't do a job just because it's good money. You know, do a job because you love it.

[00:10:23] You're passionate. Yeah. That doesn't matter what it is, whether it's sport or whether it's photography or whether you enjoy music or whatever, you know, designing. I think if you enjoy what you do, you you will just be better at it than the bloke who doesn't particularly love it.

[00:10:36] So as a child growing up, did you have a passion for photography?

[00:10:41] No, I kind of developed that when I went when I left home, when I was about 20, when I was travelling, I kind of just sort of picked up a camera, started taking pictures and then thought, I kind of like I like this. Maybe there's a way I could make a living out of it. It just through perseverance and knocking on doors and assisting. I ended up being a photographer. Really? By chance. Really?

[00:11:02] That's amazing. So you inspired basically.

[00:11:05] Yeah, it is kind of canthe travelling and taking pictures and then showing my pictures to people and then saying, oh, you got to, you have a good eye, nice composition. It's kind of went on from there really.

[00:11:15] So what is a good I.

[00:11:17] Well I think competition really for me a good photograph is good composition. It's whether you see it happening before it happens or whether you compose it in front of you. To me, that's always a good photograph. If it works upside down, it's a good picture as I work in the library.

[00:11:34] I need to ask you at the moment. covid, what are you reading or listening or watching election in America?

[00:11:44] Ok, yes, I'm reading books on I'm reading a lot of old books on photography about replied looking for old recipes for the stuff I use to make a plate of several recipes out there listening to music.

[00:11:58] I listen to music all the time and it's pretty much my own music that I've had since I was 17. So it was always all records and tapes which I converted onto my iPod. There's all music but great music and actually now some of my son's music. My son's a bit of a isn't a hip hop and stuff, but occasionally I'll hear something of his guitar. He sent me that because.

[00:12:21] Is particularly the old hip hop from the 80s is great reading, meaning a lot of movies, reading books about it. If I can. About cooking those guys, when I first came over movies in the U.S., a lot of them, I'm watching that.

[00:12:37] So no fiction. Mostly nonfiction.

[00:12:39] Yeah, mostly nonfiction. Yeah, yeah. I do like Rebus though. Read when it comes out, I'm always get a you read this book, Adrian, the book that you have read.

[00:12:49] Can you tell us more about that.

[00:12:51] So the book was called Out of Photography by a guy called Aaron Shaw.

[00:12:55] And it was quite interesting because it was spoke about how once when photography was invented, how it affected the art world and did things like demography. There were photo painting was a huge thing, and especially portrait miniaturist who painted small, small paintings and photography, basically got rid of that and that work. A lot of the portrait, miniature interests were the first artist to embrace the daguerreotype, either to work as a photographer or to use it within their work. Also, many of them found new occupation in coloring photographs. And the funny thing with the art journal reported in nineteen fifty seven that portrait photography had become so popular to a

public nuisance I found quite funny and it kind of posed was invented. You know, when you see the paper with a hand on the face as if that's a mood that was actually done to study the fighting among exposures for photography. But I didn't 70s that was generally known that that no painter of the day would attempt to paint a portrait without having a good photograph of the sitter.

[00:14:03] So prior to that, it was all done, you know, over days and days and days like in real life. And also the invention of photography went on to have a huge influence on how painters painted in particularly the Impressionists, like they gave in my name, where you started to use movement and they put in their paintings and reportage feelings like street photography and composition to how they started cutting off people's legs and and and perspective was use force that they started foreshortening images, by the way, lens would use it. So yeah, I find that really interesting through this book, which I didn't realize at the time. And we look at those paintings, you can see how they use what a lens does in there in the compositions.

[00:14:41] That's really interesting. I think maybe we should be getting more books on photography. I think if you have any suggestions, let us know and we can actually buy them, you know?

[00:14:51] Yeah, there's lots of books out there. But again, this is a great collection. You have like a particularly painting.

[00:14:56] It's a really great collection of really blown away by the music, by the the library is my first time I went there, like I said before, and I think it's fantastic. Yeah.

[00:15:05] Excellent. When you spoke about the portraits, you know, photography in the eighteen hundreds they will always stage when they.

[00:15:14] Yeah, yeah. Pretty much died because they were slow exposures to photography. So people used to put it in their flash equipment like I do, and everything was done with daylight or with hot lights. So an explosion would have been about four or five seconds, which is why if you look at those photographs, no one smiles. No, it's because they can't hold a smile for six seconds. So it's hard not to smile and laugh at them. You can't see they've got a brace behind the heads that don't move. That kind of

held the position. Really. Wow. So unfortunately, that generation is like a really cool generation, but they weren't. They're just normal people that tend not to smile. It's fascinating.

[00:15:52] And the funny the funny thing is with me, I find even though people can smile these days because I use flash, people tend not to know what it is, but people just know it's one it's only one plate, one image, so that people just tend to be themselves. I find quite interesting given given the option I have to smile or not smile and I tend not to be interesting.

[00:16:15] Thank you so much, Adrian Adrian Cooke photography is located in Liotard. If you would like to see Adrian or pay a visit, please visit his website. Adrian Cooke Photography dot com. Thank you so much for listening. And please come and visit Marichal Library to explore the amazing art book collection and also our online resources. And don't forget to look out for upcoming digital content for the NSW Library, Watson and social media channels. Thank you.