

A Conversation with Brandon Foushee, Senior Photography Major at Pratt

Interview by Caroline Cramer

(This transcript has been condensed for clarity)



“The Internal Space”, courtesy of Brandon’s website

Caroline: I was wondering, how would you define research in terms of your creative process?

Brandon: Gotcha. That's a good question. I feel like I need to research just for myself because I think defining research, especially for when creating work, will forever be changing....I feel like I'm calling from a lot of different things. I feel inspiration is also part of research because that's the thing that at least for me, like sometimes really just being there, the drive with making work instead of thinking about work. It's weird. I find that doing research helps me have a perspective where I can now use that specific perspective or the way that I'm seeing the photographs.

C: Yeah. I agree. I agree. I think sometimes it's kind of like subconscious, like once you see something that is really inspiring, everything starts to connect.

Q: Do you like or dislike the idea of conducting research for artmaking?

B: Yeah. Um, I guess it depends...I enjoy what I read. I enjoy talking to other people. Some research can be tedious. (Sometimes) what you thought the research was gonna inform you about is actually informing you about something else, differing from your initial idea

C: Q: What is your creative process typically like? Do you have a similar workflow each time, or does it depend on the project?

B: At least within my photography... I feel like one series sparks an idea for the next period. I guess my workflow really is just about what is the thing that I had just reflected on and how's that gonna inform what I'm doing now? I'm sure the things that I'm doing now within a couple of years, it'll be a totally different workflow, you know?

C: Yeah. I totally get that. For me as well, I started making one project last semester and started looking into really crazy abstractions. Then I changed my project completely. Now I'm somehow back on the same path of abstraction.

B: Yeah. It's weird how it works sometimes...an idea that was trying to get executed and maybe it just wasn't the time for the thing to get executed, but it was an idea that was always there.



“The Internal Space”, courtesy of Brandon’s website

C: With the “Internal Spaces” project, you speak about both interacting and observing your subjects and participating while photographing.

Q: How do you approach your subjects before or during a shoot? Are there things that you do or say to make them feel comfortable so you can capture them authentically?

B: Um, that's actually, I keep on saying that they're all amazing questions. I feel like I need to confirm myself on this. The images that I've made of other people... are all either friends or family of mine. It doesn't feel like commercial photography. Those kinds of things scare me because I'm not good at directing. For “Internal Spaces”, I’m making images of my friends... I just want to hang out.

I think it's also a matter of like, finding out like your comfort level. What does it mean for me to be behind the camera? I was really thinking about moral ethics and that sort of thing...the power dynamics, just between the subject and

photographer. Everyday that I'm in the zone with photographing, or thinking about photographic work it's getting more prominent. I think really, that's the way in which to approach photographing people so it comes out super authentic.

C: Q: How did the pandemic change your creative process? If there were hurdles, either physical or mental ones, what were they like and how did you overcome them?

B: Yeah. In the beginning, when things are starting to go in lockdown, like last March, I was also moving into my current apartment. I didn't really have access to the same friends that I was photographing for that series, it was really just me and my roommates. Before we put in all of our furniture, I noticed that we have west facing windows. With all the lights off, it casts like crazy



“The Internal Space”

images on the wall... I was like, okay, let me try to make as many photographs as I can of this, because those images are aging as the time would go. Also, I thought it was a good metaphor for that self reflective aspect I was trying to get at with photographing people...internal spaces as reflective or meditative. That's how the work started changing, definitely went a little bit more abstract in that sense. Coming back to school, I'd seen that things are more online. This is the first time I'd been seeing people trying to make shows or put out zines or things like that. It felt like somehow the photo community was more accessible. That move to the online format instead of, “I'm sorry, I can't make your lecture out in California, or overseas”. A lot more things like that had been popping up, so it felt like a good outreach of trying to connect with the community during times when you actually can't connect with anybody physically.

C: For your “Forever Caring” outdoor installation piece (on Myrtle Ave), first of all, that's super cool. **Q: What was that process like from conception to installation?**



“Forever Caring” Installation, courtesy of Brandon’s Instagram @fooshphotos

B: I had seen I posted a thing online on an Instagram page, that there's like an open call for a slot like for that specific windows base in and that was like in collaboration with or in a partnership with the Myrtle Avenue partnership. At the time, I hadn't known that. I thought that they were just doing this for February, specifically a Black History Month oriented work. I knew the aspect ratio was gonna be kind of crazy, just across four walls. So I was like, you know, I'm actually just going to fully make a collage just for this. So I sent it and then I think early January, they got back to me saying that they were putting my stuff there.

I just never navigated a work of that caliber before. I definitely had never put out something in a public display at all. And then this is when I really figured out that it was a part of something bigger, like a whole Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn

partnership. I believe there were nine other businesses that had that work, or window displays. I only really found that after the fact, but yeah, it was cool.

C: You were saying that you never really put up work of that caliber, and that segues into another question I have, about professional advice because I think that's something a lot of us struggle with.

Q: What advice would you give to photographers who are struggling to get their work out there and don't know where to begin?

B: Yeah, I think you start small, or I'll start with this, use the people around you to your advantage. Abilities and location and all that are cool resources. But the real amazing resources are actually the people that you interact with and that you have access to. Like, it would be cool to do like a 20 minute studio visit, over zoom. I feel like horizontally building is good. Reaching out to people, eventually, will probably lead back to them reaching out to you.

C: I want to talk about some of the collaborations you've done, because I really liked them a lot. Especially the "Just Things" collaboration that you did with your friend John. He's a painter, right? First of all, I love the cool darkroom painting collage- I'm really into mixed media and film. I'm just really eager to learn how to manipulate things in the darkroom. So I was so fascinated by that work.



Work from "Just Things", courtesy of @fooshphotos

Q: How did the process of working with someone from a completely different discipline come about? What was that like? Were there like challenges? Just what was that process like working with a painter?

B: Yeah, it's funny. Because like me and John are very much like this [crossing his front and middle fingers]. Yeah, but there are definitely challenges for sure. I feel like I sometimes had to corral him in, but then sometimes he had to break me out of my shell, you know.

I think if there's a common goal- the cool part is that you're coming from very much different avenues. And so like, the conversations that are happening, they're inspired with so much different stuff. We came to the work with the hope to just really experiment- like how far a technique and a process and like a concept of like, two different historically clashing genres (could be pushed). I mean because we were friends, both of us are super open with talking to each other. We really embraced the trial and error situation.

C: That's awesome. Yeah, I'm, I'm so fascinated by the darkroom.

B: I feel that like I started in the darkroom-my high school had a darkroom. So it's nice to go back to being hands on. And I think that's where I was, like, really figuring that I can also be a painter and also be a photographer. Those ideas are really like, honestly, just snowballing. We were in the process of like, there's no bad idea- we're gonna really, like, throw everything to the wall, see what sticks and just go from there.

C: Were you starting with photos and then like, manipulating them and painting on them? Were you putting paintings in darkroom chemicals? Where did you kind of start?

B: I guess, with our concept we had really just thought about...what does a photograph look like? A painting? How can we make it neither like a painting

and neither like a photograph? We were really trying to focus on the blending I printed like an inkjet and John be like, “okay, just paint on it and then I'll get back to you”. Okay, how can I make photographic paintings, that's where a lot of the darkroom stuff (came into play). We had found out about this one thing called liquid light, which if you put it onto a fabric or anything really, it'll make it light sensitive.

C: Yeah. I mean, you have to have trust- it only works if you trust each other. Okay, so I just have a few broader questions.

Q: Can you recall a specific project that really frustrated you, either in terms of, you know, production or conceptualization. What did you do- Did you learn anything from it?

B: That's a hard one....

C: Maybe something you couldn't get right or something that just wasn't clicking with people during crit that kind of made you want to stop doing it...

B: Yeah, so like, I feel like there's like a push and pull of like, formal qualities of your image.... And then also, your concept slash idea. Sometimes those mismatch, and I guess, when you recognize a mismatch, then...I'm actually just like....let me try to tweak this, let me limit the variables that I have. Let me just step away, make something that I know that I can make, that makes me happy, whether that's even making art at the moment. The particular time that happened to me, going into winter break...like, look at the work, but don't-

C: I don't, I don't look at it the whole time. I just shut my brain off.

B: Yeah, that's good, that's good.

They're times when I wish somebody tapped me on the back of the shoulder- like Brandon, just chill, right? I think that's super key. When I find myself the most frustrated...I feel like I might have to make things a little bit more obvious or not. I forget that the viewer can definitely interpret the work, yeah, definitely

don't underestimate the viewer. I find it helpful, for me at least, to think about somebody next to me 24/7 while making the work... that's probably the most ideal viewer. For people in crit, I'm like.... "I really do appreciate what you're saying, but I realize that the work isn't intended directly for you." It can still resonate with you, but sometimes, taking things in crit with a grain of salt is very key.

C: It's a lot to absorb. Sometimes it doesn't really help you pick a direction and you have to choose a few things that you want to apply.

Q: In what ways has your approach to photography and art making changed since entering Pratt?

B: Yeah, um, I think maybe, I feel like I'm now a little bit more aware and cautious of how I'm making images or how I'm presenting images and presenting the art that I'm making. That's something that I sort of grew to learn for sure. I'm still growing to learn.

C: Okay, last one. I don't want to freak you out.

Q: Do you feel prepared to leave Pratt? Do you have an idea of what kind of work you want to do once you graduate? Do you think it's gonna be different from what you're doing now?

B: I'm like....hm... [laughs]

C: I'm trying to brace myself. So I need to know how you feel.

B: I feel Okay, now, emphasis on *now*.

It's weird because with the pandemic, everything is changed. It kind of just blew by- I blinked and it probably happened. I think what I'm going to be doing now is working part time at a gallery in New York. I'm signing a lease in New York, so I'll be in New York at the very least. As far as my work goes...I realized that my

work is probably a little bit bigger than I intended. Somebody told me that the work that you put out is really just an iteration of the things that you make, everything always builds on top. I'm still gonna keep making the work that I've been doing. Ideally, I really want to make a photo book at the end of the year, that's a goal for me.

C: Great! Well, I don't want to keep you for too long, but thank you so much. This was just fun to talk and hear about your process! Pratt needs to encourage this more because it is just so helpful.

To see more of Brandon's work, visit his website.

<https://www.brandonfoushee.com>