

# In Conversation

with the

## Koordinator of Krap

BY JAY HEUMAN



*Cemetery Arches, Inkjet print, Woca (overlapping) (2007)*

SANDRA CARRION IS PROUD OF HER DESIGNATION. SHE HAS EARNED IT BY COORDINATING THE NATIONAL KRAPPY KAMERA® COMPETITION FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS. THE COMPETITION IS OPEN TO ANY IMAGE TAKEN WITH TOY OR PLASTIC CAMERAS (DIANAS, HOLGAS, PINHOLES, ETC.), WHEREAS IMAGES TAKEN WITH MORE TECHNICALLY-ADVANCED CAMERAS, LIKE POINT-AND-SHOOT AND DISPOSABLES, ARE NOT ALLOWED.

INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMPETITION SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, OVERSHADOW HER WORK AS A PHOTOGRAPHER, WITH BOTH TECHNICALLY-ADVANCED AND LOW-FIDELITY PHOTOGRAPHIC MEANS AND METHODS. SHE SEES WORKING IN BOTH AS A COMPLEMENT AND CHALLENGE. HIGH-TECH CAMERAS CAN CAPTURE COLOR, CONTRAST, AND CONTOUR FLAWLESSLY; HOWEVER, THE RESULTS FROM LOW FIDELITY PHOTOGRAPHY EMBRACE CHANCE AND EXACT CONSIDERATION OF YOUR EQUIPMENT, AS THERE IS NO HIGH-TECH SAFETY NET.

HERE'S WHAT SHE HAD TO SAY, IN CONVERSATION WITH JAY HEUMAN.



*Norman, Sepia toned silver print, Ansco Pix panoramic (1995)*

**Jay Heuman (JH):** What is your earliest memory of photography, what captured your imagination? And tell us about your first camera.

**Sandra Carrion (SC):** My earliest memory was when I was about 10. My father bought a Kodak Retina camera with a bunch of extras. I thought this was great. I complained so much about wanting my own that he shut me up with a small Kodak camera, though I haven't a clue as to the name of the model. On a family vacation, I was permitted one roll of film per day. I usually shot it off in the car before 10 am and got really bad prints back when we returned home. But it was so much fun!

**JH:** Where and with whom did you study?

**SC:** I took a Basic Photography course my second year of college. I hated it so much that, at the end of the course, I threw everything away. I went on to teach high school art in a public school district on Long Island. Five years later, my sister gave me a Canon AE-1 for Christmas. Adelphi University's spring semester was about to begin, so I registered for another Basic Photo I class. This time I found my way. I loved it. My teacher, Hugh McElroy, was so inspiring that I declared myself a photographer at the end of the semester. I took two more courses with him and enjoyed every second.

Upon graduating from Adelphi, I changed teaching positions. I was teaching photography to high school students in New Hyde Park Memorial High School. I became chairperson of the department and coordinator of art for the District. I retired last year after 32 years of public school teaching. I credit the students for providing much of my inspiration for my personal work. They have no fear and no respect for rules, so together we discovered many interesting ways of making images with very bad equipment.

**JH:** Beyond your teacher Hugh McElroy, and your students, did you look to any photographers from the past for inspiration?

**SC:** Julia Margaret Cameron. I fell in love with her work and who she was. I could look at her images forever and always find something new. I love the blemishes and scratches on the prints and the painterly quality she was able to achieve. Also, the fact that she worked from home with her "stuff" is something I strongly relate to, and I admire her imagination and sense of composition.

**JH:** What are your thoughts about traditional photographic techniques, digital processes, and the increased attention given to low-fidelity photography?

**SC:** Since I am a teacher of photography, I am aware of "what's going on" in the digital world. I own a new Mac, Epson 4800 printer, and a Canon 5D with several lenses. I also have Hasselblad, Leica, Canon, and Nikon film cameras with a wall of accessories... I still love film. BUT, when I really need to revisit my photography roots, I go for my Diana, Holga, or pinhole cameras. Again, this goes back to style and making something out of nothing. Knowing how to use light is my main ingredient for creating images. There's something extra in the images created with low-tech equipment. It cannot be duplicated with high-end film cameras, and Photoshop cannot rescue you.

**JH:** Do you have a favorite among your "krappy kameras"?

**SC:** My favorite is always the camera I'm using at the moment. Right now it's my Dianas; I have four. One has a single shot and a b setting, one is sharper, there are also a Banner that only has a b setting and a Dorics that is very blurry. I also like using out-of-date film. I love the surprise of getting an image from film that is 10 years expired. But, I also love my Holgaroid, Woca, and assortment of pinhole jobs! My latest pinhole transformation is a rubber clown head. It took two hours to coat the inside with electrical tape. The pinhole is in his eye, which can be replaced almost like a lens cap... I was amazed at how well it worked.



*Showers, Inkjet print, Woca (overlapping) (2007)*

**JH:** Which aspect of photography intrigues you the most – the subject, the style, or the technical?

**SC:** Definitely the style. Working with so many students has taught me to never dismiss a subject due to its ‘overdone-ness’. Having an understanding of your equipment is necessary for making ‘it’ work for you. Having expensive new equipment is completely unnecessary for making intriguing images.

**JH:** To this point, do you feel you have trodden a direct or winding path as a photographer? What direction is your photography moving in now?

**SC:** I think I’ve been winding. I try not to eliminate or dismiss something completely. I often revisit old concepts and go back to basics when I get stuck.

Right now I’m integrating low-fidelity equipment with high-end digital processes. I’ve been working with homemade pinhole, Holga and Diana cameras to create the image. I then scan or re-photograph the image digitally and print out on the Epson 4800 printer. I do not manipulate or change the original intent of the image in Photoshop. I tweak it some, but no more than I would do in a wet darkroom. I’ve also been generating digital negatives to print out via cyanotype or palladium processes.

**JH:** Let’s change our focus for a moment to the National Krappy Kamera® Competition. Would you describe your initial

conception for the competition, and was it intended as an annual competition?

**SC:** The concept was born at the Soho Photo Gallery (www.sohophoto.com) in New York during a reception. One of the members, Allan Schill, was exhibiting works made using a pinhole camera. As the evening progressed, a third member, Alan Bassett, joined us. We all admitted to preferring our junky cameras to our high-end stuff, and I proposed we organize an exhibit opportunity for other gallery members. That was 15 years ago, and we’ve held the members’ Krappy Kamera exhibition every year.

The name was just something I always used to distinguish between my ‘good’ and ‘not-so-good’ cameras. I added the Ks to make it funnier. We received so much publicity that it sort of took off on its own. People from all over started to call me asking how they could be involved. So 10 years ago, Mary Ann Lynch and I organized the first National Krappy Kamera® Competition. We worked on it together for about 3 years. She moved on, and I continued as the Koordinator of Krap... my present position in the gallery.

**JH:** How many entries are there, on average, for the competition? Could you mention a few of the more exotic and faraway locales represented in the mix?

**SC:** The entries have been increasing yearly, due to the Internet and word of mouth. Last year we received about

250 entries. Forty-two states were represented, and the entries were mostly from California and New York, though we had two entries from Alaska.

I always receive requests from other countries, but as of now we just can’t deal with customs and foreign monies. If people have a contact in the US, we accept their work. But the contact person has to do all of the in-between work and communications.

**JH:** Would you step us through the timeline, from the call for entries to the opening reception?

**SC:** In July, we finalize the judge and contact sponsors. In August, we design and print the prospectus. In September, we mail the “Kall for Krap” notice for listings, post the prospectus on our website (www.sohophoto.com), and search for additional web sites to post the competition. Through October and November, we wait...

By early December, we are biting our nails because we have so few entries, but during the last week in December, the floodgates open. All of the entries come in at once. In early January, the judging takes place, after which we notify winners and non-winners. We then create the winners database, order invitations, send press releases. We keep in touch with winners by e-mail about the show’s progress. By February, framed winning work is sent to me. We unpack and catalog everything. In March, we hang the show and plan the reception where we meet hundreds of people, including many of the winners.



*Sphinx, Silver print, Diana (2001)*



*Feet in Fountain, Silver print, Diana (2001)*



*Pears, Inkjet print, Holga with Polaroid back (2006)*

JH: Have there been any changes or additions to the format since its beginning?

SC: Last year we started something new. We hung every print that was submitted... over 1400! We called it the 'Krappy Kollage', but next year it will become the 'Salon de Refuse'. We saved all of the work and will build a Lucite® container to hold each year's losing pictures. We – Jeff Smith, Sarah Corbin and I – felt the entries were so amazing that they all had to be seen. [Note: Jeff and Sarah have been helping Sandra for the past three years.]

At the reception in March 2007, one of the winners came to me and said "You know, I'm so proud to have been chosen to be in this exhibition. The gallery is so beautiful and the work is awesome. BUT, the better show is upstairs," meaning the 'Krappy Kollage'. In fact many of the losers came to the gallery throughout the month to take their picture with their non-winning entry.

JH: What kinds of 'success stories' have come out of the competition?

SC: This year a public radio station in Los Angeles did a special on shooting with Krappy Kameras. They selected Martin Gee, one of the winners, and went on a shoot with Holga Cameras in hand. It aired on the Weekend America segment ([http://weekendamerica.publicradio.org/programs/2007/03/24/krappy\\_kameras\\_take\\_.html](http://weekendamerica.publicradio.org/programs/2007/03/24/krappy_kameras_take_.html)). Also, Camera Arts magazine published all of the entries on their website ([http://www.cameraarts.com/2007\\_web\\_extras/CA58-krappy.php](http://www.cameraarts.com/2007_web_extras/CA58-krappy.php)).

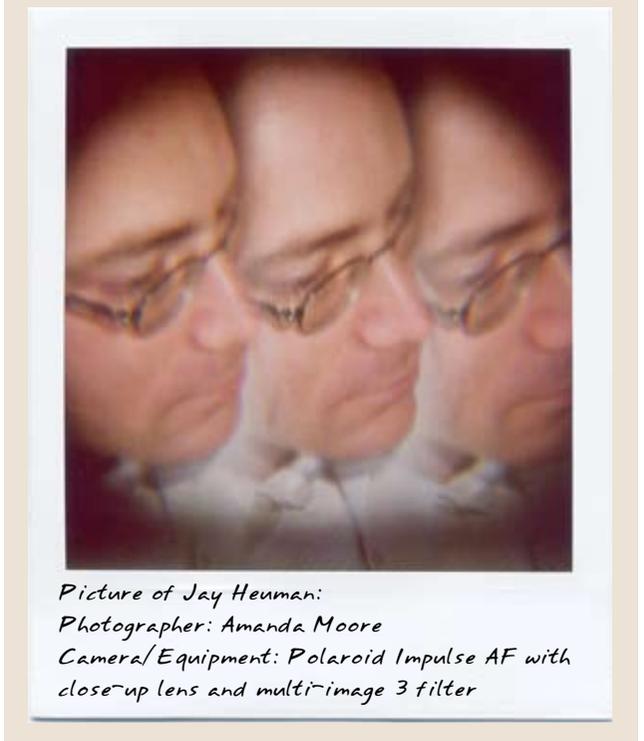
JH: Would you share 'words of wisdom' for aspiring participants in the National Krappy Kamera® Competition?

SC: As I look through the entries, both winning and non-winning, the common thread goes back to strong imagery and clean presentation. By 'clean' I mean nothing fluffy or extraneous. The image should speak for itself. I am constantly asked if the quality of the print is important. Yes, quality counts. How you present yourself marks the difference between someone with one lucky shot or true artists demonstrating their voice. It's the National Krappy Kamera® Competition, not the krappy print show. Also, judges are people with personal preferences. One judge may award you first place while the same print may be dismissed from the competition by a different judge. Don't be dismayed with a rejection. Use it to keep yourself fresh and keep re-inventing yourself until you, and only you, are happy.

JH: In closing, what advice would you provide someone who develops an interest in low-fidelity photography on where to start?

SC: Learn your craft. I can't say it enough. It's great to stumble onto something by chance but if you really don't understand the way photography works, it's nearly impossible to duplicate it. Also, do a lot of looking at photography and other visual arts. All types. It's so important to have a clear idea of what you want your images to look like. You can't do that unless you've done your homework, by visiting museums and galleries. Viewing on the Internet is OK for starters, but plan on standing in front of an image and looking very closely at all the details first hand. Finally, practice your craft daily. Even if you only shoot one image per day, make sure your eye gets into a view finder and your finger presses a shutter. Stay organized and learn how to edit your work. Just because you took the picture doesn't mean it's good. Be critical and be fussy with your own work. Never settle. 📷

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*Picture of Jay Heuman:  
Photographer: Amanda Moore  
Camera/Equipment: Polaroid Impulse AF with  
close-up lens and multi-image 3 filter*