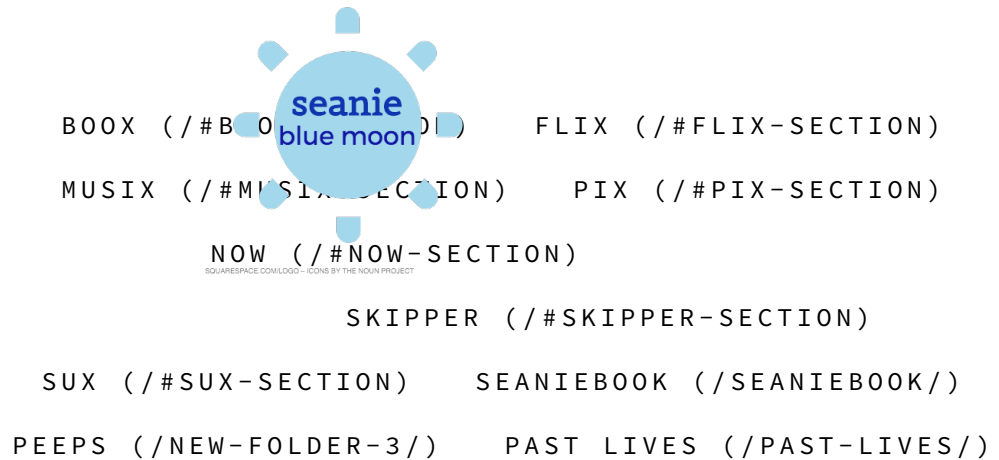


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SUERAYA SHAHEEN TALKS

October 1, 2012

BLUE: We've known each other for 20 years. The first thing that I am interested in about you is how is photography treating you? Do you feel

that you're becoming more knowledgeable about the act of photographing? How do you feel about photography itself, the practice?

SUERAYA: I tried to stay away from digital as much as I could but then it was sort of like there was nowhere to go. I was in the corner. I had to surrender. You know you could not do it. And then by the time I sort of said, "Okay, I'll do it," the quality was already there. I'm glad I just didn't sort of jump right into it. I think the first camera was like one megapixel, do you remember? Or 2.7?

BLUE: At 3.2 I thought I was really up there! My God! Eight megapixels! I was over the moon with my Sony R1 in 2005!



by Sueraya Shaheen

SUERAYA: But it was a dream in a way because I never had a good time in the darkroom. As much as I pretended I loved being in the dark with

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I never had a good time in the darkroom. As much as I pretended I loved being in the dark with all that magic going on, it was a lie. I just liked listening to music in the dark and not having to be in a classroom.

– Sueraya, about the old days

SUERAYASHAHEEN
PHOTOGRAPHY

all that magic going on, it was a lie. I just liked listening to music in the dark and not having to be in a classroom. But I do not know what I was doing in there and I would think everything was okay until I took (the photo) out into the light, maybe took it out to soon, and be messed up. Or have a little spot on it. And that would annoy me, that little spot, and I had to go do it all over again. I just do not have the patience for it.

By the time I embraced digital, I had all these tools like photoshop. That's what I meant when I said "2.7." Photoshop, version 2.7. If there was a dot, I could get rid of it in a second. And if I wanted to go black and white, I didn't have to go in the darkroom. I do not have to buy black and white film and make sure it's metered differently.

BLUE: Although you would spend just as much time in front of the computer screen.

SUERAYA: Eventually, yes! Eventually it became complicated again. Now you have Lightroom. Now it's very difficult and actually I'm going back to when I was getting people to print for me, except now I'm asking them to prepare my files for me. But again you've got to find somebody who knows exactly what you want, like what we were saying about printing.

BLUE: Do you find yourself photographing more now that you're completely within the digital realm?



SUERAYA: Yes I'm more in control. I don't buy film. I don't need to wait for an hour (to develop) at places like One Hour Photo.

BLUE: Or if you went to Chrome or National Geographic it took days. You know if you brought it in that afternoon you could get it the next day by 2 pm, but you still had to wait.

SUERAYA: Now you don't even need a light meter. You just point and shoot.

Blue: But that is always good for you, the whole fact that you do the point and shoot. Because you are really good at getting yourself in situations. And that's what photography is about. Yes, there's some very interesting fine art photography that people do that can be complex and complicated with lighting, or staging, or creating compositions, which I like to do. But you have to get yourself in life's social situations: those little girls that you took pictures of on the dirt road, the pictures of kids that you took in places like Lebanon and Syria, India. They are fantastic! They had so much joy of the moment in them. Not just "joie de vivre" but "joie de moment." You were in those places at a precise moment.

And so the camera is still just as handy as it ever was for you, accompanying you into those moments and places. I guess that is my question for you: Do you find yourself seeking out those moments as much as you used to? Where you would put yourself in an interesting place and interesting situation to take a picture?



Sueraya at work + play



Irina Bjorklund & Peter Fox, Santa Monica

SUERAYA: As much as I can. It's just this little thing that you can take with you and I think I enjoy the moment more. I remember I went on a trip on a boat, and kept taking pictures and my friends were just like, "Can you just relax, you know, and enjoy it?" They said, "Can you just switch off?"

BLUE: We've only been together for a couple of hours today. But you've taken 30 or 40 pictures. Usually I'm the one that's in your shoes, the one that's shooting the camera when I'm talking to other people. And you're always shooting, even if you have to do it on that little phone, you're going to still take that picture. You're always framing what you see.

SUERAYA: It's a malady. But it's a happy kind of thing.

BLUE: So you take a lot of pictures. What do you do with them all?

SUERAYA: The same thing I used to do with my pictures: I put them in boxes. I used to put them in these black boxes and file them away. Now I just put them on hard drives in virtual folders. I loved hearing what you said about it's time to stop moving around, taking pictures, doing what you do, and just go back and edit everything. My time has come to do that. Go back and see. Go back and re-examine. I mean people do that with their lives, with their thoughts, their dreams, but I guess us, as visual people or . . . I don't even know what to call ourselves.

BLUE: Visual artists?

SUERAYA: We need to go back . . . You know, I hesitate myself to call an artist. That's your job or somebody else's to use that word --

BLUE: No, no, no . . . I hate that word.

SUERAYA: We are a species.

BLUE: I hate that word because of the other people that use it. I'm like, "What? You're an artist? If that's what you are, I'm not going to call myself that."

SUERAYA: Our time has come, Sean. I mean we're both on the same page. Let's go back and see what we did, and then bring it out again because it's current, it's part of who we are.