

SLEEK

SPECIAL FEATURES

Lorena Lohr, explorer of all things wild



The night is when all these wild things are most present: Interview with photographer Lorena Lohr
By Sophia Satchell-Baeza

Walking into the Rochelle school, a large and high-ceilinged cluster of Victorian buildings in the centre of London's Shoreditch, you might be forgiven for finding it an unusual location for Lorena Lohr's first photo show. With a singular eye for the lonely or unusual areas of deep or trashy Americana, the New York-based, London-bred photographer carries a roving camera and a strong sense of the power of the fleeting moment. We might be far away from a world of faded diners and soft-focus sand dunes, but Lohr's camera takes a closer look or an unusual framing of an image we think we know. This is border-town America, but it could just as easily be a long night in East London.

Photographer and painter Lohr is no stranger to travel. Two of her self-published photo-books, "Palm Desert" (2011) and "Desert Sands" (2012), document her rambling journeys through the Southwest, West Coast and Gulf of Mexico, hitching on the Arizona highway to reach a Texan-

Mexican border town and taking photos of palms, plastic chairs and neon signs. Ocean Views is a bi-monthly photo zine sent in the post from her place in Brooklyn – an intimate yet minimal collection of fleeting moments, a slender scrapbook of places. The streets at night come alive in glimpses of a person's frame, the half-empty glasses of ridiculous cocktails, a tacky shop sign beckoning you in. Whether documenting a long night in Broadway for London-based magazine Hot and Cool or painting in oils her particular vision of the American desert, Lorena Lohr can make a strong image out of anything. We spoke to her about travelling, self-publishing, and her love of des(s)erts.

When did you start taking photos?

I was a teenage girl and wanted to record what happened in a sensational teenage way. But instead of the pictures of people the views of the rooms were good.

What are your favourite things to photograph? I like how you focus on things in pairs, on cups, on creamy desserts, table legs, lone chairs...

I don't know why I'm attracted to these things (apart from the creamy desserts). I enjoy seeing repeated motifs especially when travelling through areas of the USA and looking at palm trees and cocktail signs. These motifs connect to empty space and there's a sense of exoticism and dreaminess despite how much emptiness there is around too. Maybe not table legs so much but I do think lone chairs and certain kinds of drinks. I guess it's because I think about being alone in the night a lot, and I've spent a lot of time riding the bus and walking around, waiting for the bus on layovers and getting to know people and hearing their extreme stories. The night is when all these wild things are most present.

There's a hint of sadness in all these useless or worn out objects.

There's some degree of sadness in everything, but I'm not out to express that in the photos.

What do you look for when you photograph something? Do you give it a story in your head or hope the person looking will inject their own life into it?

I don't have any preconceived ideas, and no I never want to tell a story. It's possible to think of things as images or sensations and not through words. I don't think about the way other people will look at the photos. It's not my place to point out anything or explain myself. I just continue to make more images.

You paint too, what do you prefer?

I make quite technical oil paintings which require a lot of study and decision-making. I prefer to not to think of the meaning or effect of what I'm doing. I might prefer painting later, but sometimes I can be as free to make a really quick drawing as taking a photo.

There are lots of photos of empty landscapes – can you tell me a bit more about the places you've photographed and where you'd like to go next?

I will take a photo anywhere, but I think America's the best place. Green landscapes are really boring most times. I don't like the shade of green that grass has unless it's dry. I'd like to spend more time in the desert in Arizona and live there for a while. And I'd like to go to the Midwest and into the north, to see more empty landscapes.

Can you tell us a bit more about your publications? What is it about self-publishing that you like so much?

I've been putting out a printed photo zine called "Ocean Views" for the last 6 months which I mail out to my subscribers every fortnight, and made two larger books of the time in the Southwest, West Coast and Gulf of Mexico. I dislike formality and self-promotion, but to see physical prints on paper, the sense of collecting and passing around is very good. Most of my books I've given

out to friends, but I've sold a few to some good bookstores and that's nice too. To have a stapled paperback which most times has lipstick stains amongst some luxe monographs.

www.lorenalohr.com

Mr. Hare Presents: Lorena Lohr

From Tuesday 10th December, 6.30pm – 8.30pm

Club Row at Rochelle School, Arnold Circus, London E2 7ES