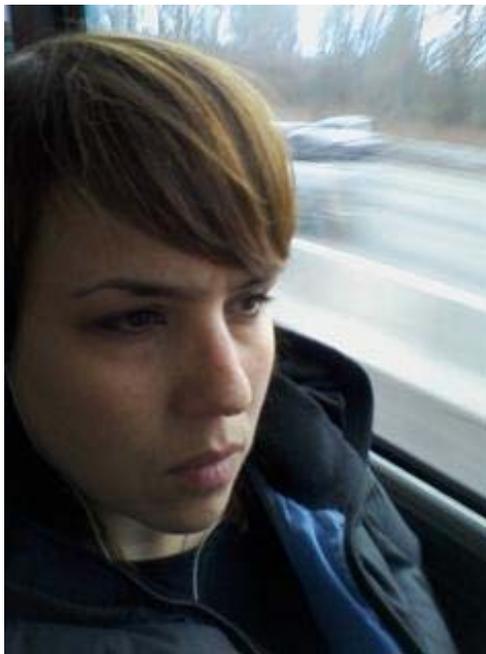


Interview with Abigail Feldman on her recent video project *The Year of the Correspondent*

by Vianna Renaud

After recently stumbling across the website of renowned photographer Abigail Feldman, I was not only intrigued by her photography but that of her video entitled *The Year of the Correspondent*. Premiered in New York City earlier this year, I was intrigued to find out more about her inspirations and experiences with working in video as well as her future projects for her work.



Vianna: So your film recently had its New York City debut at the Eye Am Filmmakers Screen at the Anthology Film Archives. Tell me more about the event.

Abigail: Eye Am is a film series started and curated by my friend Victoria Kereszi which is to showcase women film makers. Normally she has this series on a public access TV channel in NYC. She is a film-maker herself.

Vianna: How did you get involved?

Abigail: I got involved because I know Victoria through her sister who is a great photographer and former classmate at Bard College. I saw her at one of her sister's openings and she told me about this amazing women's film series that she shows on the public access channel, MNN. I mentioned I had made a video, one thing led to another, and she told me she wanted it in her festival. I was floored.

Vianna: What is it about?

Abigail: The video is from 2004 and was originally for a class project. Back in 2003, I had written letters to my friend, Phillip Robertson, a war correspondent, at the brink of the Iraq War. I decided to revisit our correspondence and make a sort of visual diary...a kind of distraction to the anxiety I was constantly being flooded with during that year. What impresses me now, in looking back, is how relevant the work still is 4 years later.

Vianna: What do you think about the series?

Abigail: I think Victoria's series is amazing....she is so passionate about representing women in film. This was the first live screening in New York City. Film Anthology Archives just asked her to do a quarterly series on woman film makers.

Vianna: How was your experience working with film for the first time?

Abigail: Excruciating, but it worked out. It was hard because I usually do not work in a straight line in terms of narrative. Then there is the whole image moving thing...I am used to making the moving world quiet and still; I do love the whole sound element though.

Vianna: So, based on your experience, could you see yourself working with the medium again?

Abigail: Yes...I could work in it again, for sure.

Vianna: What were some of your inspirations for your film, apart from the letters?

Abigail: The war, life around me, New York City, my friends, my own photos, details of daily life, etc.

Vianna: Tell me about your photography and the future...

Abigail: Well, I am in the process of evolving. I spent the past few years working on a project about the homes of friends and family; how they live, how home affects us in terms of memory, what we need to bring along with us to make us comfortable, feel secure. It definitely taps into many of the same ideas I presented in my video; how the banality of everyday life keeps us going, and surprises us, makes our lives in some way. Not sure if you have noticed, being based outside the US but since 9-11, there have been more and more home stores and home catalogs, and magazines.

Vianna: Perhaps, I haven't really noticed. Why do you think there has been this change?

Abigail: I think that people need to connect with something they understand on a basic human level. War is inconceivable; terrorism as well. Everything that is going on around us is chaos. So, when we come home, hopefully, that chaos dissipates.

Vianna: Do you think there's been a new focus on voyeurism, through the media, news, etc. that people are now starting to incorporate unconsciously into their lives?

Abigail: Yes. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, etc; everyone has access to everyone else. Everyone is twittering and blogging and putting photos of themselves all over the place. So, why leave your house? Why connect with something real?

Vianna: So, once again, the focus is on the home and we are turning it into a social network and outlet. Do you see this craze on social networking as positive or negative? Or is it more a question of balance?

Abigail: Hmmmm...definitely balance.

Vianna: And, do you think this 'new' trend has affected the arts?

Abigail: Probably, it affects everyone.

Vianna: Do you see it amidst your art circle?

Abigail: Somehow Facebook comes into conversation every time I speak to anyone. I have to say I, myself, love it. I love to watch people. I think everyone loves to see themselves, to make that connection, even if it is virtual. In a way, it is total distraction from everything else in our lives. Or at least that is how I see it.

Vianna: Do you think that the relationships are different than what you have face to face?

Abigail: That is how I deal with it; yes.

Vianna: Do you think they are any less real? Or important?

Abigail: That depends. Sometimes I have these amazing chats with people and sometimes I connect with how people are feeling. I have reconnected with people from my past....like way back....kind of scary. It almost unifies things, relationships. Having said that, I treat every relationship individually. Look at what we are doing now; you are in the UK, I am in the USA, and we are having a real conversation.

Vianna: Do you think that perhaps, times have changed, from in the past? And that, now, with everyone moving all over the place, this new trend, one can somehow still stay connected to their roots somehow?

Abigail: Yes, totally; I would feel lost without it. At the same time, I have always felt kind of rootless.

Vianna: And how this itself makes everything 'ok'?

Abigail: Yes, comfort in the masses.

Vianna: Comfort in the masses; maybe something for your next video or art project. In any case, we can't wait to see more.

For more information on the series: <http://eyeamvideo.blogspot.com/>. To see Ms. Feldman's video and photography, visit www.abigailfeldman.com.

