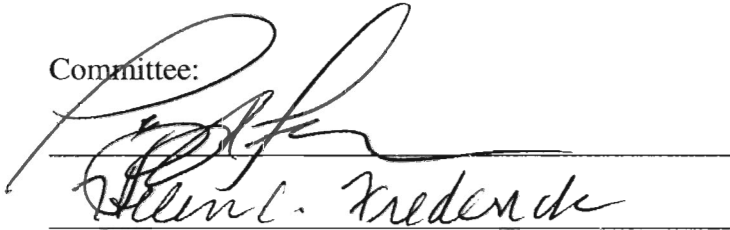


FIGHTING SPIRIT

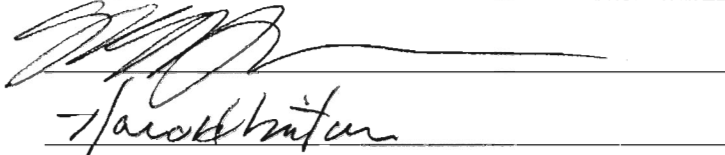
by

Jillian Pichocki
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Art and Visual Technology

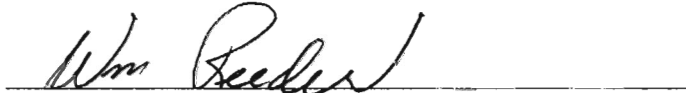
Committee:


Robert C. Fredericks

Director


Harold Britton

Department Chairperson


Wm. Beeder

Dean, College of Visual and
Performing Arts

Date: 12/06/07

Fall Semester 2007
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Fighting Spirit

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University.

By

Jillian Pichocki
Bachelor of Arts in Integrative Studies
George Mason University, 2003

Director: Peggy Feerick, Associate Professor
Department of Art and Visual Technology

Fall Semester 2007
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have to thank Kurt Allen for his help and support during this process. The effort he put into my thesis show is what made it possible. Special thanks to my family for supporting me and encouraging me to finish strong. To my friends, colleagues, professors, and the others who helped along the way-- the guidance you have provided is what kept me going and I will carry with me always. Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

FIGHTING SPIRIT

Jillian Pichocki, MFA

George Mason University, 2007

Thesis Director: Professor Peggy Feerick

FIGHTING SPIRIT is the title of a thesis exhibition by Jillian Pichocki. It is a photographic series of large and medium-scale silver gelatin prints which focuses on the aging process of men engaged in the sport of boxing. In the past five decades, the socially accepted roles of men and women have changed. Whereas men often provided the sole source of income for the family; women served as the homemaker, maintaining the house, raising the children, and providing nourishment.

The inspiration for this series stemmed from the relationship with my late grandfather who passed away in 1997. He was 79 when he died and it was his vitality and determination to remain self-sufficient that instilled my sense of compassion towards elderly men. I never met my grandmothers (both died from cancer when I was young) and therefore never witnessed, first hand, the physical affects of the aging process on a woman. Senior years can be difficult for many reasons. However, by pairing the fragility of age with the machismo associated with boxing allowed me to examine,

metaphorically, the strength that exists within. More specifically, for the men of this series who once radiated strength and independence. This work renewed their perspective on life, as well as demonstrate, what it means to have a “fighting spirit.”

My thesis will explain the journey that led to choosing to work with this subject matter. It will also explain the influences and technical processes involved with the photographic medium used.

Introduction

The headline read “Hatton Shocked by Corrales Death.” Underneath, an image appeared of Diego Corrales’ face, and suddenly a strong sense of grief overcame me. For three years his name and career has become a familiar note in my research and a strong influence on this project.

The former light, and junior-lightweight, World Boxing Champion Diego Corrales (Figure 4) was killed in a motorcycle accident in Las Vegas on May 7, 2007. At age 29, he was recognized most notably for defeating Mexico’s Jose Luis Castillo in 2005. The effect this news story had on me is evidence of how this project has changed my sensitivities towards the sport in the last few years.

The caption referred to another professional boxer, Ricky Hatton, who was preparing for his own match against Castillo. Hatton, in expressing his sadness, decided to pay tribute to his colleague by dedicating his upcoming match to him. He called Corrales a “fighter’s fighter”, referencing a man with a spirit, talent and skill recognizable to the average spectator (“Hatton” 1).

Corrales had tremendous resolve; boxing was more than a sport to him, it was a way of life. The boxer’s determination to succeed and push forward is what led me to select the imagery of the sport in conjunction with aging men. The metaphorical value of the sport could be applied in relation to the effects of aging.

I have studied various techniques and subject matter in photography for over eight years, but it is the study of portraiture that has always resided in me. The constantly changing human form is an intriguing subject in photography. The ability to capture a subject at a specific moment in time, for a specific purpose, is the reason we take pictures. The subject is portrayed via the photographer's intent, which also leads to a variety of representations both social and personal.

Robert Adams, a writer for "Aperture" explains: "At our best and most fortunate we make pictures because of what stands in front of the camera, to honor what is greater and more interesting than we are. We never accomplish this perfectly, though in return we are given something perfect--a sense of inclusion. Our subject thus redefines us, and is part of the biography by which we want to be known" (Adams 179).

The fall of 2004 was my first semester in the graduate program at George Mason University in photography. During this year, arduous discussion and thoughts soon turned to our thesis show, which was to complete our degree. I began thinking about concepts and areas to explore. Initial project topics were inspired by fashion/editorial photography. Annie Liebowitz, a photographer known for her skilled sets and cinematographic productions, is an artist whose technical ability was something I aspired to. Seeking improvement in lighting and production has always been an interest of mine, which I never fully grasped as an undergrad. I spent a lot of time experimenting with hot lights and natural sunlight, but I was eager to use professional equipment such as strobes that could be used in a more controlled environment. My early graduate study provided the opportunity to set all sights on improvement--both technically and aesthetically.

The direction of my project unfolded rapidly when I met a man named Joe in my dentist office. His tall, lanky frame immediately peaked my interest along with his curious black eye. I tried to imagine how a man, who appeared to be in his seventies, got such a bruise. For a moment, there was a sense of concern as I thought a relative or care worker might have beaten him. I overheard him say to the receptionist that he had gotten a little “too fresh” at a bar with some women. After the laughing subsided, he explained that he had tripped on his patio and required stitches to close up the rather large gash.

Sitting nearby in the waiting room, I began to converse with Joe. While talking, an idea came to mind. I could pose Joe as a boxer, shirtless, with a glove held up next to his face. I thought to myself, “Would people believe he was an actual boxer?” The contrast of this brutal sport with the frailty of the aging body was interesting because I felt it to be a fresh approach, and would create a powerful portrait, perhaps shocking to some viewers. I made the decision to ask Joe if he would pose for me and to my surprise he agreed.

The images from the session with Joe were like nothing I had ever taken before. Joe was willing to pose shirtless for the majority of them, revealing the effects age had on his frail body. In one of the images, the bones of his vertebrae protrude from his back around the visibly sagging skin (Fig. 1-3); however, the look on his face is one of fierceness and determination as he looks off to the side with his fists clenched. Neither of us knew then where these images might lead.

Joe exhibited an ability to take life as it came, while still maintaining a positive outlook on life. This early photo shoot with Joe was the beginning of my series, which

would examine a variety of elderly men dealing with the aging process. “Fighting Spirit” is a metaphor for the fighter that exists in all of us, but more significantly for the men who face the realities of growing old.

Boxing is a sport that has been represented in multiple artistic mediums including film, paintings, and even Japanese anime. Witnessing the re-birth of the sport while working on this series helped to direct me in crafting each image.

In order to create an authentic “boxing” look and feel, I spent hours watching movies and HBO matches. These provided me visual means towards gaining an understanding of the rules and technical aspects. It was interesting to learn the evolution of the sport in this century. For example, boxing is not promoted among young boys anymore like it was years 50 years ago.

Parents are more comfortable with sports that cause less bodily harm, such as baseball and soccer; even though the “overall risk of injury in amateur boxing is actually lower than in some other collision sports such as football, rugby, and ice hockey” (AAP 1). This statement was taken from an article written by the American Academy of Pediatrics. While they feel other contact sports are more dangerous than boxing, they do not encourage it among young children because of the potential brain damage it could cause. Studies have been conducted showing that even within amateur fighting the boxers are still at risk for “acquiring cognitive abnormalities and/or focal neurologic deficits” (AAP 1). Times have changed and there is no need for boys to prove their masculinity through fighting and it has become a sport reserved for those who seek it out.

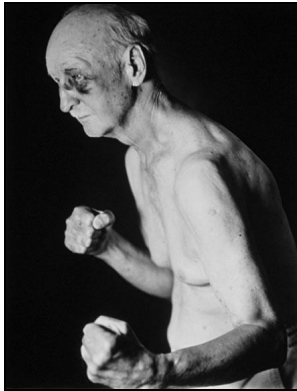


Figure 1: Joe image #1.

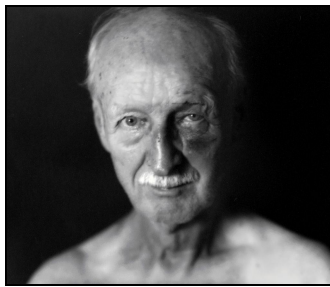


Figure 2: Joe image #2.

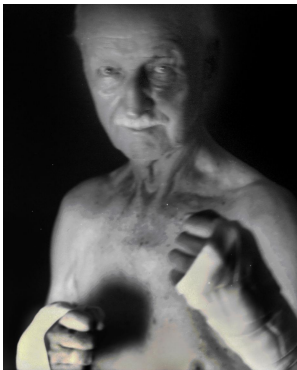


Figure 3: Joe image #3.



Figure 4: Diego Corrales 1977-2007
(Photo by Nick Ut, AP)

Boxing and the Arts: Its Impact on Popular Culture

Once I honed in on boxing, I realized that there was a growing interest in the sport, expressed via movies and television. *Million Dollar Baby*, *Rocky Balboa*, and *Cinderella Man* were all successful movies. Hillary Swank received an Oscar for her performance as a female boxer in *Million Dollar Baby*, showing the mainstream interest in the sport and the powerful emotions that exist within. Generations who did not grow up with the original *Rocky* were given an opportunity to familiarize themselves with this legendary character.

One of the recurring themes in these films is the exemplary heart and soul that is involved in becoming a champion. These men (and women) spend hour upon hour training, attempting to make a career for themselves and hopefully become heroes of some sort. All of these films possess this similar theme, which is why they were all influential in my photographic approach to the sport.

The more I watched these films and documentaries, the more I began to respect boxing as a way of life. This was something I wanted to appear in my images. I wanted the men to become boxers and to take on characters, much like the actors were doing in these films.

Studying the technical elements of the sport and applying them to my images was necessary in making the photographs convincing enough to where people might assume

they were real boxers. The goal was to have the viewer initially shocked by the strange combination of subject matter. “Would people believe he was a boxer?” is the question that lingered. I hoped they would dig deeper into the images and wonder if these men were really boxers. In return, the men might be taken more seriously because of the persona they embodied. People would start to study their physical attributes and wonder how someone at that age could endure such fierce trauma often associated with the sport. They might even settle on the notion that they were all former boxers who were re-living their glory days.

The purpose was to get the viewer to look at the men and see each of them as individuals, to appreciate what they have been through and to see aging in a more positive light. The scars and sagging skin tell stories that create a sense of self-worth, dignity and wisdom. They have earned their wrinkles through the challenges they have already overcome and the ones they are still dealing with.

Another movie that served as inspiration was *Raging Bull*, directed by Martin Scorsese. This grim tale is the true story of Jake La Mota, a famous boxer in the 1950s, who is most notoriously known for his mob affiliations. The 50’s were a dark time for boxing because the sport was connected with the mob and thus became corrupt; fights were frequently rigged for gambling purposes.

The film captures this dark side by showing how Jake turns to alcohol to relieve the pressures he was facing from the mob. His family becomes his outlet for anger and his initial love for the sport becomes tainted. It illustrates how an even stronger will is needed to avoid the temptations that come with success. Its cinematic qualities (it is

filmed in black and white, with a gritty texture) were appealing. I also chose to work in black and white because of the nostalgia associated with this traditional medium. The grey tones create a sense of timelessness that is reminiscent of photos from the early 20th century.

To ground myself visually, I began looking at the work of photographers that had created the style I hoped to mimic. Irving Penn's work serves as a great study. I began looking at his work mid-way through the series. I was at a point where I needed the inspiration of a traditional photographer who had a style that I could emulate and bring new life to my work.

American, born in 1917, Penn specialized in fashion photography and portraiture. His use of light to capture his subjects creates a fictitious world that only they inhabit.

In 2005, a collection of his platinum prints was on exhibit at the National Gallery of Art. Platinum, or a platinotype, is a photographic process, which originated around 1900 (Lenman 504). The primary characteristics are an overall grey tonality and a matte texture on the surface of the paper. It gave his images a beautiful texture that left a lasting impression. Two of the images that I favored the most are shown in Figures 5 and 6. The image in Figure 5 was striking to me because her gaze into the camera overpowers her frail physique. With her tiny frame she exudes strength and poise with her stance.

The second image (Figure 6) stood out due to the positioning of the subjects. In this portrait of the New York Ballet Society, Penn places the woman in the corner, while three men sit around her. The simplicity of the corner setting draws the viewer into the

image and ultimately leads to the angelic face of the ballerina. The lighting in both images is soft and even. They are incredibly textured, even in the backdrops used.

From the 1940s through the 50s, the photographic medium changed as a result of current events. World War II was taking place, which caused a lot of tension and fear among the American people. During this time, boxing played a significant role in bringing pride to a nation at war.

During the 1940s, heavyweight Joe Louis (aka the “brown bomber”) became an icon of hope, especially after his fight with German born Max Schmeling. Louis, an African-American; and Schmeling, a friend of Hitler’s, referred to as an example of Aryan superiority, made boxing a political centerpiece. For a rare moment in sports history, an entire nation united in hopes that Louis could defeat all that Hitler represented. Because of the on-going rivalry between the two (Schmenling had knocked out Louis two years before) this second match in 1938 drew 70,000 fans to Yankee Stadium in New York. Louis won with a second-round knock out (Andre 130).

This fight boosted morale among the American people and created a sense of unity and hope. Americans projected their feelings of anger and fear about the war onto Schmeling (who represented the Hitler Reich), and because of this, Louis became a widely recognized athlete and a hero for his swift knockout.

Watching actual footage of this match proved to be motivational in my own struggles during this project. Mid-way through I was growing tired of working with the series and it was through learning about the history of the sport and becoming a part of this historical event that re-ignited the spark to finish. Hearing the crowd cheer and

experiencing that excitement through the footage was what kept the significance of using boxing in my pictures interesting. It continued to be something my colleagues and fellow photographers had not seen in this medium before. Boxing by itself has been the focus of many artists as well as portraits of aging men. The combination of the two was something special and that is ultimately what led me to pursuing the completion of the body of work.



Figure 5: “Woman with Roses” (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn in Lafaurie Dress), Paris, 1950.

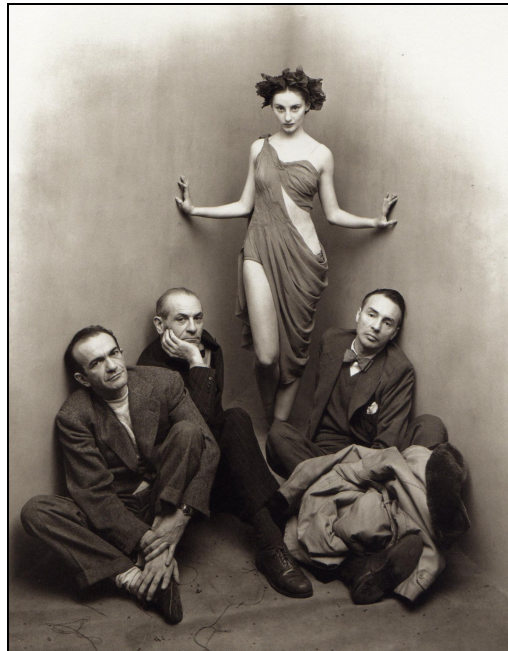


Figure 6: “Ballet Society”, New York, 1948.

The Decision to Photograph Older Men

Often while working on this series, my colleagues asked, “Why are you doing a series on aging men?” and “Why don’t you want to look at how age affects women?” The answer to me was clear due to my personal connection to the subject matter.

Both of my grandmothers died of cancer before I was born. My paternal grandfather lived with us from his wife’s death on and was the only elderly figure in my life (Fig. 7-8). Unfortunately, I never knew my mother’s father, due to his suicide when I was five.

There is a sense of sadness associated with that loss because I never had the opportunity to know him. However, it also is a reflection of someone who could not deal with the challenges of aging-- a main theme of my project.

Although it hurt that I never knew these three grandparents, the relationship I had with my sole grandfather made up for it. He came from a family of nine children and was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1918 to Polish immigrants. He was one of the eldest children and became the sibling that was responsible for looking after the others. I always admired his background because of how his family had to work through the tough times and enjoyed listening to stories about his life and experiences. He passed away when I was a sophomore in high school at the age of 79. Since then there have been fewer occasions for me to reflect and celebrate our cherished relationship. He was a

sweet and gentle man who enjoyed his independence. He was an industrious father that held three jobs to support his family when my father was young.

He was always an influence on this project because of his determination to remain self-sufficient up until his final days. Heavyweight world champion Joe Frazier says in the introduction to his book *Box Like the Pros*, that boxing “kept me in condition and made me want to live” (Frazier xiv). There is a strong connection between the sport and the notion of growing older. Like in boxing, aging is a fight to take care of yourself in order to overcome new physical limitations.

Death is definitely an aspect of this series, but it is how the men have chosen to face their realities that sends a positive message. The men in this series have endured immense tragedy and struggle, but they press on because they want to.

It is a scientific fact that women outlive men. Before researching for this project, I thought this was a myth, but I came across some interesting numbers regarding the topic on the “Scientific American” statistics page. An article from 2004 states that there is a gap of 6.7 years in the life expectancy of men and women in the United States. The numbers only increased in other countries, with Russia boasting the largest gap at 12 years (Baierl 1).

This led me to question why this occurs and how does it affect my topic. I was interested in finding out if men faced more debilitating illnesses than women which lead to an earlier death. All resources cited similar reasons for the gap, a common one being men generally do not take care of themselves. Whether it is through their eating habits or excessive forms of alcohol or tobacco products, they generally do long lasting damage to

the body that shortens life expectancy. Men are more involved with manual labor that brings a lot of physical stress as well as exposure to hazardous materials (Baierl 1).

Finding this information was important to my research because it helped me understand the disadvantages men have while aging.

The appeal of working with older men was that they know, as well the rest of society, that their time has passed. They are not asked to lift heavy boxes let alone fend off predators. Unfortunately, the elderly are often targets of such predators because of the generalization that they are defenseless.

Over the summer “The Today Show” featured a segment telling the story of a 72-year-old Michigan man who was able to deter a young delinquent from trying to steal his wallet in a convenient store. This was a media spectacle because it was so unexpected. The man became a hero to fellow elders and proved that virility exists no matter how old a man is.

Culture certainly shapes how Americans view the elderly. Many Asian cultures are very respectful towards their elders and practice traditions that reflect this. For example, it is a Korean custom for the children to provide housing for their in-laws once they are married. In America it seems that nursing homes are the most convenient option. However, having grown up with my grandfather, I was able to appreciate and learn about his generation. The stories of people who have lived before my time is invaluable and this is what I wanted to capture in my photographs. My sitters have lived fascinating lives and I felt privileged to hear their stories and photograph them. To create

an image that represents their stories brought a sort of immortality to these men; the images are something to be passed on to future generations.

Martin Chambi is another photographer whose work shed light on a group of people who were culturally unrecognized. A portrait photographer, born in Peru in 1891, he traveled throughout the country and eventually settled in Cusco. There he opened his own photo studio. While the majority of his business was focused on photographing portraits and weddings for the upper class, he always viewed himself as part of the working class. While that provided financial support, personal interest led to him documenting the indigenous people of his native land to exemplify the pride he had in his culture and the riches of tradition. Traveling across country on a donkey with a large format camera, his early work documenting the architectural structures of Peru was created using glass plate negatives.

He was a photographer whose use of black and white portraiture changed the face of his country and became a symbol of pride. He used his work to draw attention to the indigenous people of Peru and show their significance in a time when photography was reserved for the upper class. To possess a professional portrait indicated wealth and social status. Chambi felt compassion and empathy for the struggling maids and caretakers who catered to the wealthy patrons he was photographing.

Last summer I was in Peru for a photographic workshop. We were shown Martin Chambi's work at a gallery in the heart of Cusco (Figure 10). The images were large-scale, digitally restored, printed images of the late photographer's work. The size and quality was impressive especially due to the amount of detail in each one.

The images of people and their lifestyle bring you into his culture. One feels the deep connections he had with the people and is given an insider's glimpse into extraordinary personal moments. One of his most famous images is of Miquel Quispe (Figure 9). This image is from the Martin Chambi website and the caption describes Quispe as, "A local personality that the artist invited to his studio with a special rendering of natural light, and, above all, with an essential element in the Andean culture, the Coca leaf. Miguel Quispe was a defender of its use and of the ancestral customs with which it was associated" ("Chambi" PAP).

Chambi was part of the indigenous Peruvian arts movement in the 1920s that occurred after Spain's reshaping of his homeland. It was a time of sadness among the people because their cherished landscapes were being altered. Another event that changed his love for photography was the devastating earthquake that hit Cusco in 1950. Once the beautiful landscapes had been destroyed or altered by the Europeans his inspiration seems to have been destroyed as well (Lenman 112).

Although his career was cut short, his work captures the spirit and vitality for life the indigenous people of his generation possessed. Chambi's passion to document that spirit is similar to what I tried to acquire.

The main difference between our work is Chambi captures the subjects in their natural environment. Even though many of his images were photographed in his studio, the subjects were taken as they were off the street for documentation. My images took time to find the subjects and they have a more posed feel using a black backdrop. There is an intentional disconnect from trying to decipher a time period because no other

information is provided in the background of my images. Chambi's work, outside the studio, glorified the beautiful landscapes in which his subjects inhabited.

Our styles and motives are different but there is a common thread of urgency in documenting the subjects in both our images. In my series I am trying to record a generation that will inevitably grow older and face more debilitating health issues, among the possibility of death.

There is a connection felt between Chambi and the subject. I could feel his appreciation and admiration for the sitters and is the same relationship I had with my subjects.

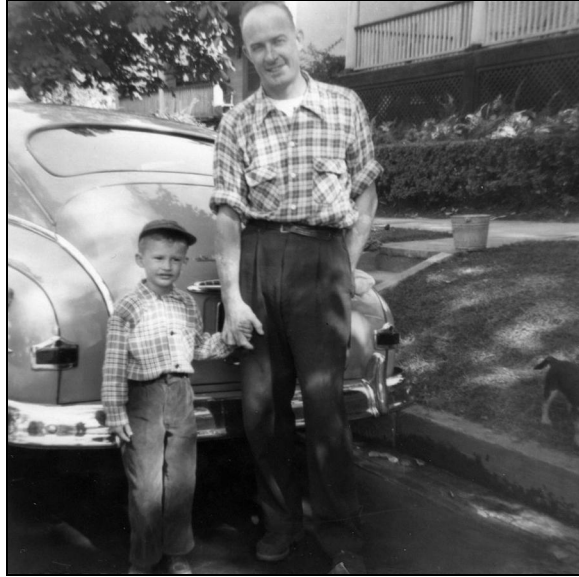


Figure 7: Henry Pichocki Sr. with Jr. (my father).



Figure 8: (L-R) My maternal grandfather, my mother, my paternal grandfather.



Figure 9: “Miguel Quispe, Native Leader, Cusco, 1935”
5x7 Glass Plate (Photo courtesy of www.martinchambi.com).



Figure 10: Image of the Martin Chambi exhibit in Cusco, Peru.

Searching for a Male Muse

Finding subjects for this series proved increasingly intriguing and rewarding. It was hard to predict each man's reaction when asked to model, and the first time in which the success of the project was dependant upon the participation of people. This was unfamiliar territory since most of my prior work dealt with acquaintances not strangers. Approaching strangers and asking them to help with such a personal project was certainly challenging. Not only would they be donating their time, but they would also need to be willing to pose shirtless.

After photographing Joe (Appendix B: Figure 41), I felt finding other men like him would be hard, since he was a man of unique kindness. I initially carried a Polaroid ize camera in my purse to photograph men who interested me. I became a model scout whenever I left the house. At the time, I was working at "Fuller and D'Albert," a camera store in Fairfax. It has been there since the early 1970s, and many of the customers are older photography professionals and amateurs. This was incredibly fortuitous since the majority of these customers were men in their late sixties and older!

Even though the harvest was plentiful, it was still difficult to approach strangers. Never in my photographic career have I felt more uncomfortable asking for a favor. A common scenario associated with photography is the older male approaching the younger female and asking her to be his nude model. At Fuller and D'Albert, I worked in the

photographic lab and often processed these “portraits.” On numerous occasions, I witnessed the work of men who would take these awkward pictures of females for their own voyeuristic pleasure. Understanding first hand my own discomfort with how men objectified women affected my own personal approach to my male subjects.

In my studio sitting, the gender roles obviously reversed. I became the voyeur looking for a “muse”. I was looking to older men for the inspiration in my images. While there was no sexual motivation, there needed to be some attraction.

A contemporary photographer who focuses on the idea of gender gaze is Jessie Mann, daughter of the famous Sally Mann. Sally is important because of her work using large format cameras and historical photographic techniques. However, it was Jessie who became a huge influence towards my understanding the project.

This concept of being the object of inspiration was unfamiliar to me prior to this project, but after viewing Jessie’s collaboration with New York photographer Len Prince, I became more intrigued. Their series entitled “Self-Possessed” consisted of about 20 images of Jessie as the model. In each shot, she takes on a different character, much like contemporary photographer Cindy Sherman, by paying homage to her own influences and dressing like them.

The work was done using an 8x10 large format camera with black and white film. When I viewed this series in person, I noticed an instant similarity to what I was trying to do, because of her interest in “character” photography. This is what peaked my interest in trying to contact her.

I was keen to hear her impression of my work, since she was one of the only contemporary photographers I truly connected with. We discussed my project over the phone and her immediate comment was that there was a sadness about it, much like in her own images. She said, “Looking at the faces of these men who are trying to act intimidating could not mask the emotion behind their eyes” (“Mann” Interview). She explained the reality is obvious in their faces, and they know they are not what they represent. The boxer character is false, and they are aware of it as is the audience.

Jessie felt this sense of heartbreak in the faces of the men. Her joint show expressed similar emotions of sadness. In each of the images, she is shown with a serious face, that is part of the character being portrayed. However, there is an overall mood being depicted of self-awareness that is not necessarily positive.

Prior to our discussion she e-mailed me an essay she had written in preparations for a talk she gave at the Art Institute of Chicago on the 8th of March, 2007. The title of it was “The Sculpting the Mind,” and reading it would help me understand the meaning behind her images and relate it back to what I was trying to do with my work.

In the essay she deals with the “myth” behind photography. There is a control over what the artist is creating and the environment in which he/she creates. Mann says:

“So as we mature as social organisms, and as organic societies, we first tell myths as truths, we then acknowledge and examine the process of, our myth making (thus Jung and the analytic era), and then we assert the primacy of the myth, as again, a greater truth, by giving ourselves, our ideas of being,

our unique consciousness, to the myth- through art. Then the myth itself, self aware and conscious of its casting, also becomes a player on the stage of consciousness.” (“Sculpting” 4)

She creates a “myth” of a character. The shows title, “Self-Possessed”, is a statement of self-awareness. Jessie is aware of the viewer and is in control of the image she is representing. She cites three key components in a piece of art as: the artist, the subject, and the viewer. The viewer interacts with the pieces as much as the other two if not more. The images portray parts of Jessie that might not actually exist, but are incorporated into her art.

Mann references Georgia O’Keefe, as an example, and the sessions with her lover Alfred Stieglitz. Jessie feels there is an aura about O’Keefe; she looks directly into the camera. She is fully aware of how she is positioned and knows there is a possibility someone other than her and the photographer will view the images from their intimate interactions.

The relationship between the subject and viewer is just as important in my work. Asking men to portray a boxer had a purpose beyond creating an interesting image. It was also to create a “character” for each man and to make the viewer think about the implications of those characters. These characters question the truth of the image and beg the viewer to explore myth.

In Mann’s work she indirectly reveals a lot about herself. She uses guises to unveil truth. All of her works are “Untitled” because they allude to other works which

inspire her. She explained that she does not want to tie them down with an immediate reference. She chooses to leave her work open for interpretation. In Figures 11-13, the images appear timeless. The “Untitled” pieces, Figures 12 and 13, are reminiscent of the Pictorialist movement in photography which emulated the styles of classic paintings. There is a sense of simplicity while maintaining the complexity involved with the technical elements of composing the imagery.

Figure 11 seems more contemporary, and moves ahead in time to the 1950’s. The dress evokes mental pictures of Marilyn Monroe. The image also differs from the other two in that she holds the cable release in the shot. This could be a reference to Cindy Sherman’s work whose self-portraits reflect a similar style. In some images, Mann uses the cable release as a prop, while in others she is actually taking the photograph. It is not clear what role she is playing in this image, and the viewer is to interpret it.

This is an example of the myth behind photography. A character can be created and portrayed with enough credibility to delude the audience of its truth. I wanted the viewers looking at my work to study the images and ask themselves questions about what they were witnessing. This concept is what led me to connecting with Mann’s work.

We also agreed when a subject is in unnatural surroundings, he/she is most vulnerable. I felt the subjects in my work changed as soon as they removed their shirts and were bare chested. They were empowered by the persona of the boxer; they felt vibrant and would even shadow box, trying to imagine what it would be like to be that individual.

Towards the end of my discussion with Jessie I asked her the impressions she had of contemporary photography. She explained that within photography lies artists who specialize in different genres. People gravitate towards the styles that interest them and they perfect it. The general impression I got from her was to do whatever inspires you.

My conversation with Jessie Mann allowed me to realize how much I enjoyed portraiture and how I should continue exploring it. Fred Ritchin relays a similar feeling when he says,

“Photography’s relationship with reality is as tenuous as that of any other medium. We are used to regarding the photograph, particularly in the journalistic or documentary context, as a powerful indicator that in its easy comprehension is innocent both of deception and the intent to deceive. Yet photography, despite its apparent simplicity, constitutes a rich and variegated language, capable, like other languages, of subtlety, ambiguity, revelation, and distortion.” (Ritchin 1)

My series portrays a photographic myth. The men involved are not, nor have they ever been (with the exception of one), boxers. It is a character persona that was used to convey a greater meaning: to portray the “fighting spirit” that still exists in aging men. Photography became a tool to capture this experience. This medium is what brought these men and myself together, and for a brief moment, these strangers were taken out of their natural environment and became fictitious boxers, in hopes of leading an audience to believe its authenticity.

The men, who appear to be frail and delicate, combined with the brutality of boxing, create an intriguing spectacle. The viewer (hopefully) wants to know more about these men and who they really are. In order to make this idea work, it was critical to find the men to portray great characters, characters who were in essence based on them. The men would have to be secure enough to expose themselves. They would be willing to take their shirts off, but more importantly, they had to let their guards down and reveal their true characters in the images.

It took time to meet people and get to know them in order to establish the right relationship. Towards the end of completing the series there were certain images that I knew I needed to make a more finalized body of work. I began using strobes with my 4x5 camera because my confidence in expanding upon the technical side was growing. I knew I needed at least one or two more subjects before I could begin production for the thesis show.

I thought of my subjects as male muses. A muse, as defined in art history, is usually a female being who inspires one to create based on her physical beauty. I was drawn not only to their physicality, but to their age and personality. My “muses” had to have a spark within that would generate an image of an aging male possessing a “fighting spirit.”

There are three men who stand out among the others as being my personal favorites. Gene (Appendix B: Figure 40) was a little younger than my ideal age range, but his personality was perfect for the shoot. He is the father of a friend of mine and because of his years of smoking and heavy drinking, the lines on his face reveal this

abusive lifestyle. He is outspoken, curses heavily, but underneath all this is a sweet soul suffering from dementia and depression. He took the work seriously and made it enjoyable at the same time. He created his own idea of what a boxer should look like and I went with it. This collaborative effort inspired me to experiment with the lighting and expand upon ideas I initially brought.

Kenny (Appendix B: Figure 52) was the second man who was a challenge of my own confidence. I randomly met him at an Ace Hardware store near my house. He is approximately six feet tall and rail thin. Of African-American descent he is in his mid-fifties (again younger than intended), however his physical appeal caught my eye. He had a lively sense of humor and at first graciously declined my request. It took numerous attempts to convince him that the shots would be professional and respectful.

Once Kenny agreed to the shoot, I found out later he was subjected to ridicule growing up because of his thin frame. He was self-conscious of his body and therefore agreed to be photographed only if I focused on his face. This worked out perfectly because his face was informative in itself of his difficult history. His images revealed a sadness and sense of discomfort with the fact that I was so closely focused on his physical attributes.

It was a delicate shoot, but once it was finished I felt a sense of relief and accomplishment that was unfamiliar to me. It took a lot of energy in order to prove myself trustworthy to a complete stranger. The image I chose for the show is one of my favorites as he expresses both a seriousness and a joy, revealed by the twinkle in his eye.

The last man I photographed was Shaun (Appendix B: Figure 56). Originally from England, he is a local artist and was the liveliest of the sitters. I photographed him at a gym in Springfield in order to work inside an actual boxing ring. When I met Shaun, his sense of humor and enthusiasm sparked the idea of placing him inside the ring as if he was facing an opponent.

He immediately agreed and the photo shoot was incredible. He showed up to the gym with two photographer friends. They became my assistants, giving me much needed feedback when it came to setting up my strobes and camera. It was a great session because I felt comfortable working in this environment with other artists and taking the time to get the right image with all the components in place. The images at the end of this chapter (Fig. 14-17) are from this shoot working with Shaun. This experience altered my approach to doing whatever it takes to get the right picture. I knew the image of him in the ring would be a great addition to the series and it took finding the right man and the right location to get it.



Figure 11: Mansfield - Plate #57 NYC 2004
Jessie Mann "Self Possessed" Photographed by Len Prince



Figure 12: Odalisque - Plate #88 Virginia 2005
Jessie Mann "Self Possessed" Photographed by Len Prince



Figure 13: The Countessa - Plate# 9 NYC 2005
Jessie Mann "Self Possessed" Photographed by Len Prince



Figure 14: Working with Shaun in the gym. On the left is Steve O'Toole and myself.
(Photo by Rob Matthews.)



Figure 15: Shaun resting.

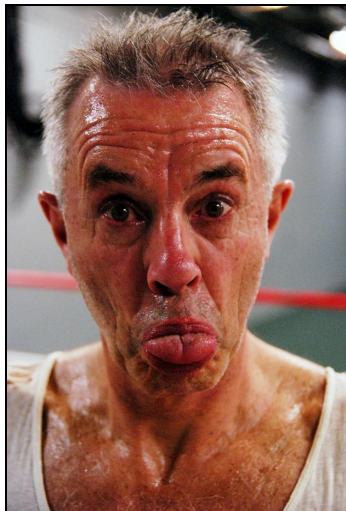


Figure 16: Shaun being playful.

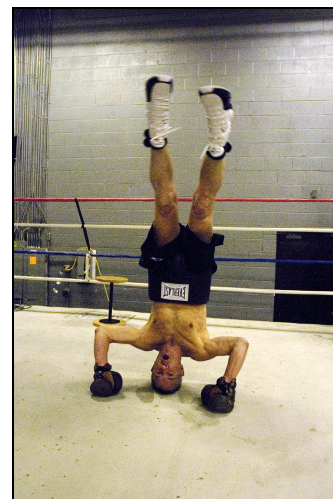


Figure 17: Shaun doing a head-stand.

Production for the “Fighting Spirit” Thesis Show

Plans for occupying the Fine Arts Gallery meant I would need to create large-scale images. In order to create an immediate impact and capture interest, I examined what my most realistic option was. My initial concept of actually working in a darkroom with mural prints was something I tried to avoid because of the immense amount of work required, not to mention the cost of supplies. I also was hesitant to do this because all of this work would require the help of someone other than myself. I did not want to be forced to depend on others to complete something this large and important. So instead, I considered having the pictures digitally printed by a professional lab in the Washington area.

After doing research on labs that produced large-scale images, I realized that the cost would be tremendous for the number of images needed to fill up the gallery. The total would easily top \$3000 just for prints (not including the frames). These images would not even be as large as I had originally envisioned them. I wanted them to be at least 4x5 feet to create the feel and impact. Plus, such a large space could easily swallow up the 16x20 inch images that I already had printed and framed. Large mural prints would create an environment for the viewers to fully engage with the images. They would be easier to see from further back and would assist to capture the attention of people walking by the gallery, and hopefully bring them in to take a closer look.

There were many other factors involved in the total price of materials; the biggest one was the frames required for a professional presentation. During the fall semester of 2006, I visited Govinda Gallery in Georgetown to see “Punk Love” by Susie J. Horgan (Figure 18). This was a highly influential show given that the images were silver gelatin (hand printed), and two of them were large-scale prints. Seeing a mural print in person (since I was questioning whether this was an option for me) proved to be a turning point; I saw the value and quality of printing by hand and the size did not compare to anything I had considered doing. The tonality was rich and the texture was something that would be hard to replicate digitally.

The next step was a consultation with Kurt Allen, a close friend of mine as well as a spiritual/artistic mentor for over four years. Allen, an artist himself, has recently decided to pursue a simpler lifestyle working as a carpenter. His advice helped make the final decision of mural printing and with his commitment to help, my roll of photographic paper was ordered.

The next phase was deciding upon where the printing would take place. The graduate darkroom at George Mason was too small and the undergrad darkroom would be too busy. I would have to work late at night and worry about the condition of the prints, vulnerable to heavy student traffic. After some brainstorming, a plan emerged to construct a working, wet darkroom in the basement of my parent’s house. Since it is an unfinished basement, there was plenty of room and a safe environment to work.

With this plan in mind, I borrowed a Beseler 4x5 enlarger from George Mason, which enabled me to turn the condenser head (part of the photographic enlarger used for

printing images) perpendicular to the paper, that would be mounted vertically onto a piece of foam core held up by two lighting stands.

The process of printing on silver gelatin photographic paper requires a few crucial elements: the foremost being a light-safe environment so the paper can be handled without fogging (when photographic paper is improperly exposed to light and can not be used). Also, the handling of the paper was critical because it was costly and took three weeks to arrive. Every move had to be carefully planned since the paper was limited, and I needed enough for eight images.

Although this process would be rewarding, it meant twice the work time I originally calculated in order to meet my April exhibition deadline.

After setting up the makeshift darkroom (Fig. 19-22), construction began on setting up troughs to develop the paper after exposure. Another necessary part of processing the paper was a water rinse. Due to the size and delicacy of the paper, it would be best if the sheets could lie flat in the water to ensure proper cleaning of the print. My solution was to purchase an inflatable swimming pool with a large surface area to wash the prints in.

To fill the pool, a garden hose was run through a window into the basement. Although a bit complicated at times, it somehow managed to work. To circulate the water, a small fish tank pump sufficed to push the water through a small tube into a drain. This step was important to flush out the water that was mixing with the chemistry coming off the prints and provide room for fresh water.

It was an intense process that required trial and error. Once a rhythm was established, things began to progress. The next step to consider was the framing of the images. Since they are densely black in the background, black frames would have been too overwhelming. A suggestion by one of my committee members, Helen Frederick, led to considering the use of white frames instead.

The other benefit of Kurt's help with the printing was his woodcutting experience. He agreed to construct the frames for the eight images (Fig. 23-24). This process was also time consuming and required much patience. Working with large-scale prints meant careful planning had to be conducted to ensure flatness of the prints while hanging on the gallery walls.

Towards the end of the printing stage, we ran out of paper. Even though my intention was to have eight images printed, the eighth image I was trying to re-print was not up to the standards set by others. This led to ultimately having to use seven large-scale images.

Upon evaluating the gallery floor plan there would be too much empty wall space if I only hung the seven images. So I began going through all of the prints I had created over the past two years and found additional images that could be used. Even though they were only 16x20 inches in size and significantly smaller than the larger images, they could be arranged to create a smooth series and assist towards a more intimate space in the gallery. The large images would capture the viewer's attention and create a bold statement, while the smaller images would provide additional information about the series and allow the viewer to approach them in closer proximity.

Production continued up until the morning of the installation date. It was an intense time because one week prior to hanging I considered postponing the show. The framing was taking longer than expected and things did not seem to be falling into place. We were having a difficult time keeping the images flat underneath the Plexiglas and building the frames from scratch was a challenging process due to the large-scale of the images. The main concern was their stability once they were hung in the gallery. After many late nights of much effort and determination we constructed all seven frames that were satisfactory and sturdy enough to be hung.

Once the images were transported to the gallery and arranged in their proper placement, things came together. I was very pleased with the end result and was able to focus on how the images were being received by visitors. I let out an immense sigh of release. I was able to move forward with the show and not have to postpone it any longer.



Figure 18: Camera phone picture of
Susie J. Horgan's "Punk Love", c. 1980.



Figure 19: Basement.

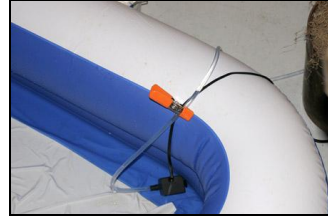


Figure 20: Water pump.



Figure 21: Developing troughs.

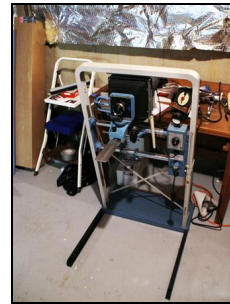


Figure 22: Englarger.

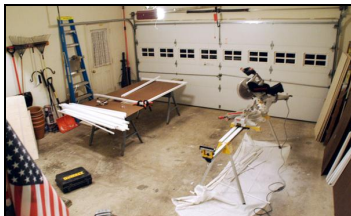


Figure 23: Constructing frames.



Figure 24: Kurt Allen framing.

Conclusion

The reception for the show took place on Sunday April 22, 2007. This was the first time the models saw their photographed images completed. It would turn out to be very rewarding considering all the hard work involved.

Gene, John, Richard and Shaun were the men who were able to attend the reception. I was not prepared for the instant bond that occurred between these men. They hugged and took photos together; they became celebrities in their own right and were greeted by the visitors that recognized them in the images.

Considering how this show almost did not happen a week prior, things turned out successfully. The men whom I was given an opportunity to know, will be forever a part of my life. This project was a gift and has shaped how I view myself as an artist. The personal connection involved in taking someone's portrait is why I have such a passion for photography. This tool connects me with "the other" and provides an opportunity that otherwise might not exist.

To exemplify a "fighting spirit" is to do whatever it takes to reach one's goal. It was a lesson I had to take to heart in order to achieve success in this project. Finding subjects for this series has given me the confidence in myself as an artist to overcome the insecurities I once had. The process of putting together this group of images and

deciding to print large-scale was something I would not have envisioned completing at the beginning of this program, but it proved to be right for the project.



Figure 25: Gene with his photograph.



Figure 26: Shaun and his family.



Figure 27: Gene, myself, and Shaun (taking the photo).



Figure 28: Richard meeting Shaun's mother.



Figure 29: Shaun and Gene.



Figure 30: Slideshow of the “behind -the-scenes” pictures of Shaun.



Figure 31: Gene and Shaun.



Figure 32: Reception in the Fine Arts Gallery.



Figure 33: John and myself.



Figure 34: Little boy viewing "Gene".
(Photo by Alexey Tolchinsky.)

Appendix A: Documentation of “Fighting Spirit”



Figure 35: Fine Arts Gallery



Figure 36: Alternate view of the gallery.



Figure 37: Guestbook near my statement.



Figure 38: Vintage gloves used in some of the images.



Figure 39: Rear wall.

Appendix B: Image Details

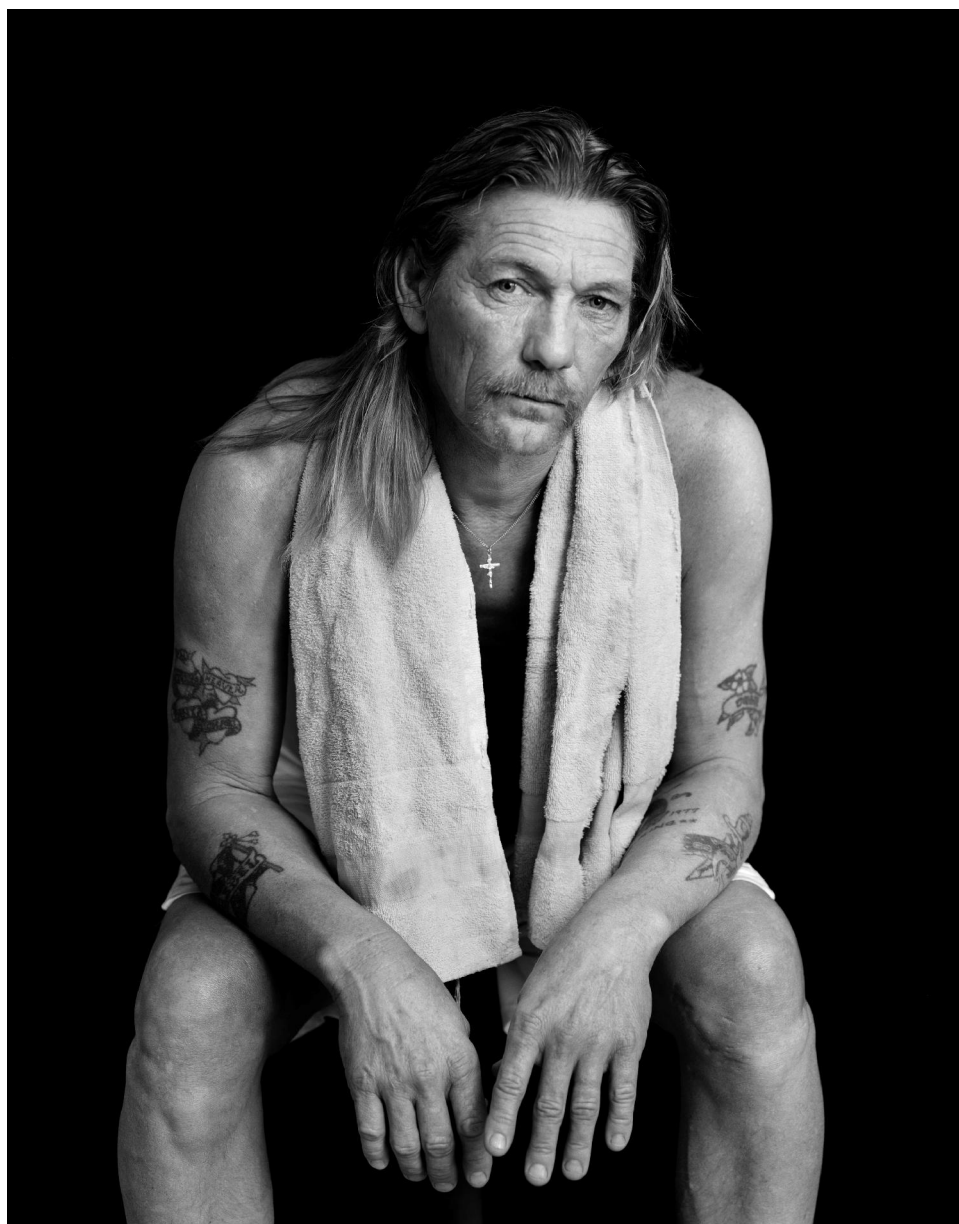


Figure 40: “Gene”, 2007.



Figure 41: “Joe”, 2004.



Figure 42: “Claude”, 2005.

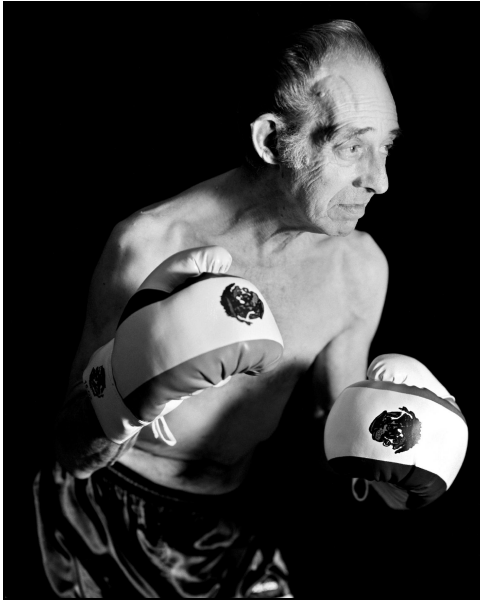


Figure 43: "Robert", 2005.

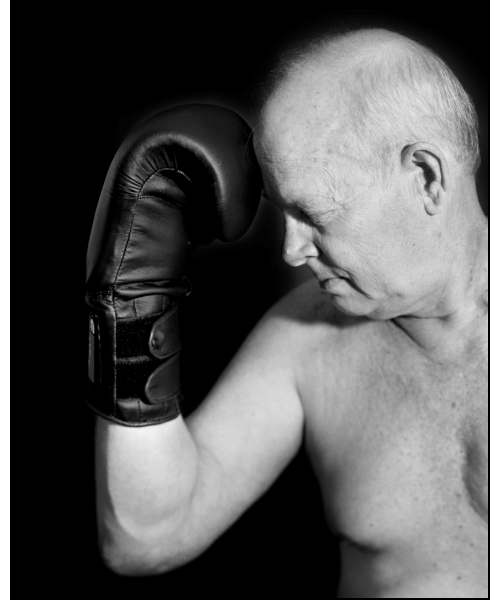


Figure 44: "King", 2005.



Figure 45: "Dwight", 2004.



Figure 46: "Ringside", 2005.

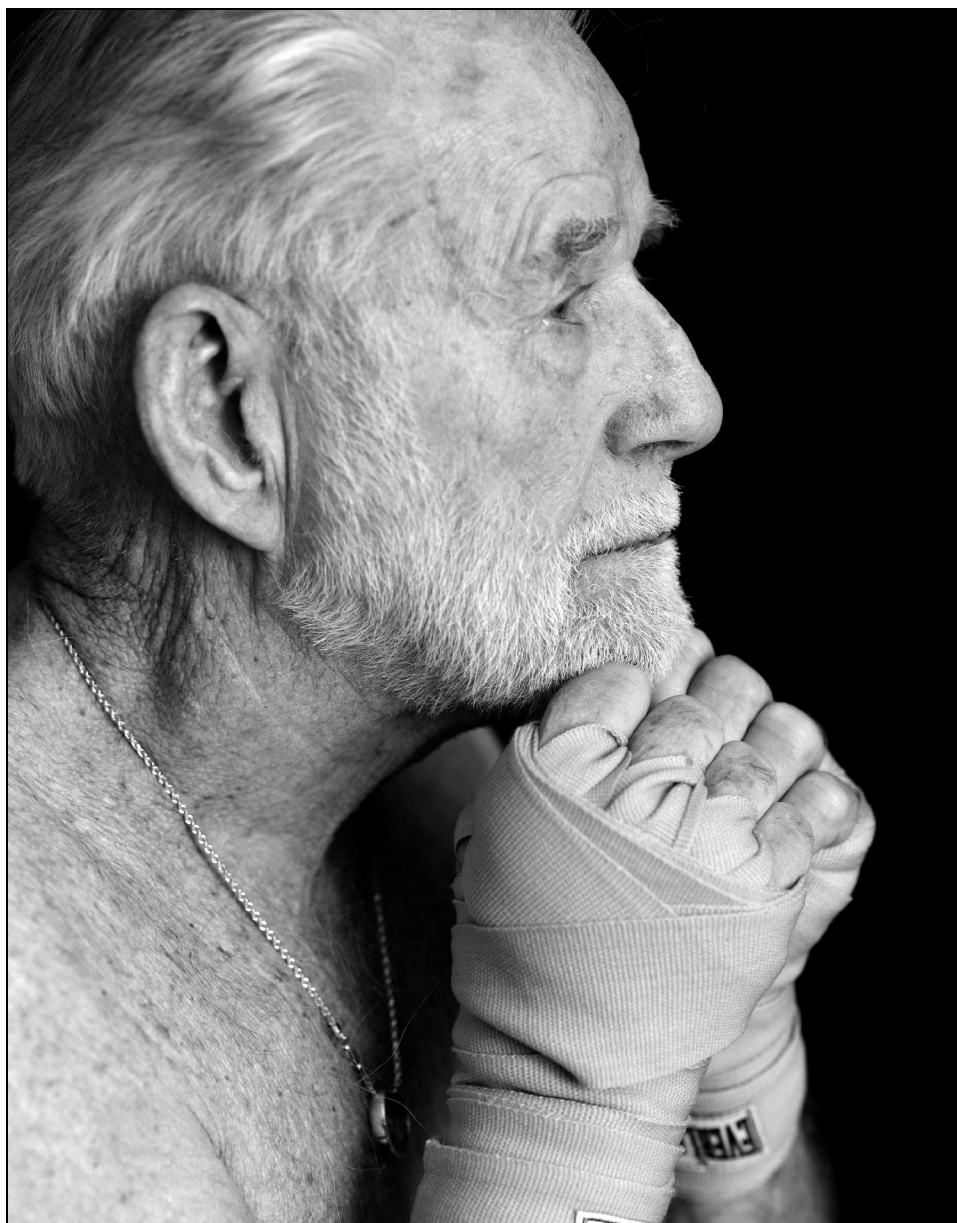


Figure 47: "Richard", 2007.

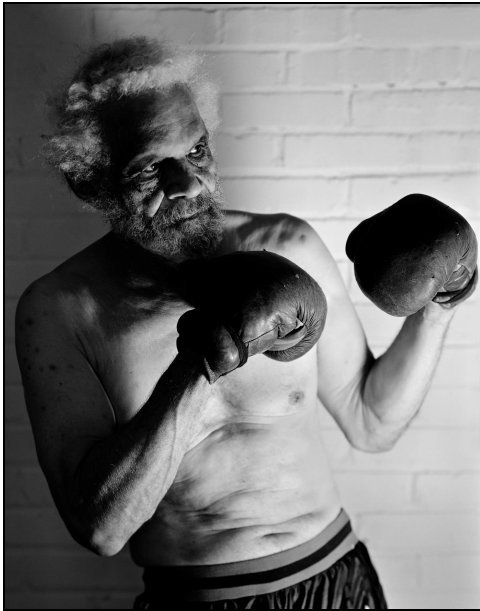


Figure 48: "John", 2006.

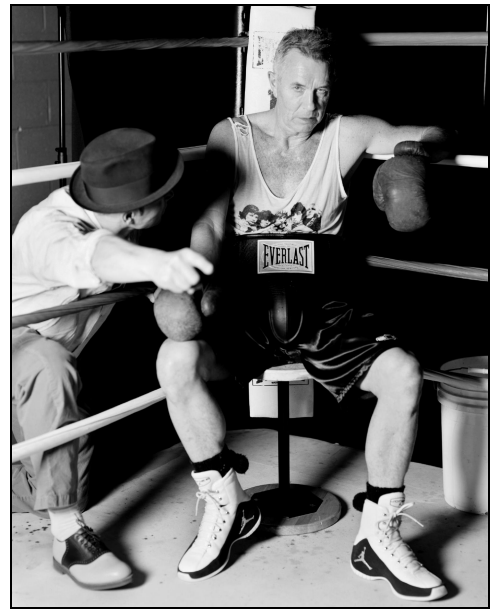


Figure 49: "British Invasion", 2007.

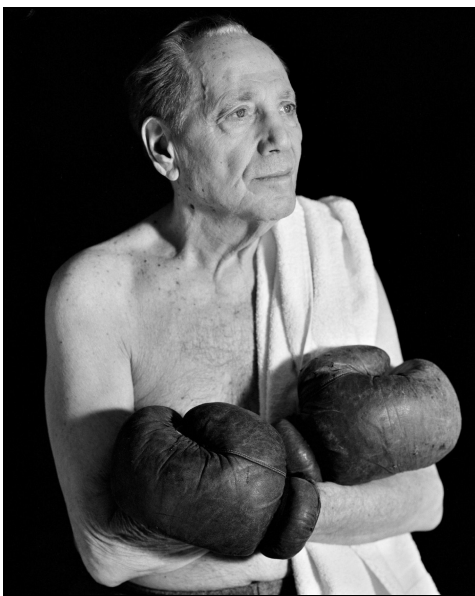


Figure 50: "Doc", 2006.

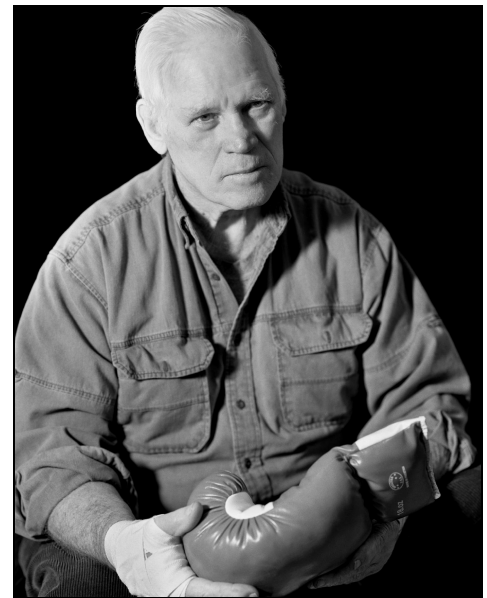


Figure 51: "Champ Keathley", 2006.



Figure 52: “Uncle Kenny”, 2007.

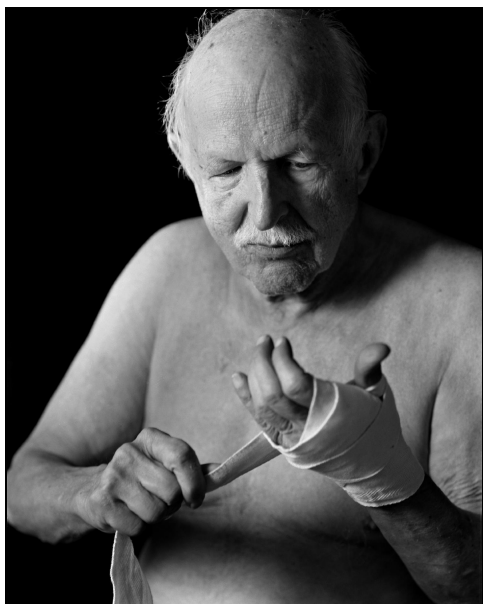


Figure 53: "Chester", 2005.

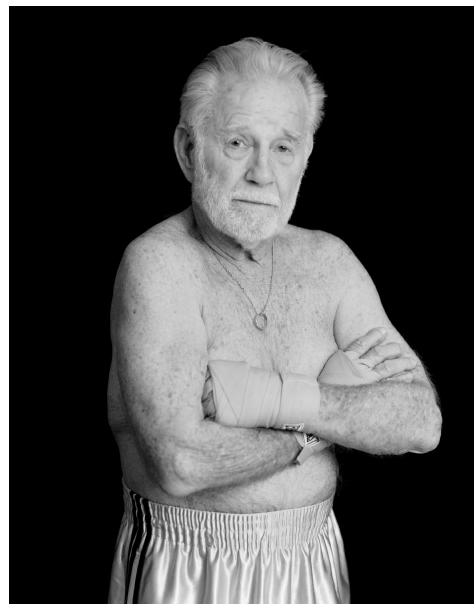


Figure 54: "Mr. Turner", 2007.

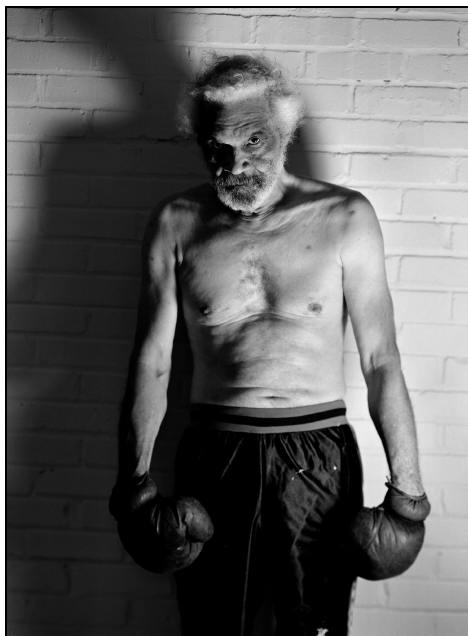


Figure 55: "Bring It On", 2006.



Figure 56: "Shaun", 2007.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Rocky Balboa. Dir. Sylvester Stallone. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Milo Ventimiglia, and Antonio Tarver. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 2006.

“72-year-old former Marine, fighting off a pick-pocket.” The Today Show. Host Matt Lauer. NBC. 27 June. 2007.

Final Acknowledgement: Remembering Jim Tingstrum

I would like to pay tribute to an acquaintance of mine who was not able to participate in this series, despite numerous efforts. Jim Tingstrum was a photographer in the Washington area who was in the business for over twenty years. He died on June 14th, 2007 from emphysema at the age of 72. Many attempts were made to set up a time to photograph him, but his health rapidly declined and it never happened. While his body was slowly giving in to the illness, his personality and enthusiasm for life were still present until his last moments. He is a part of this series in his own way and I felt it necessary to include his image here.

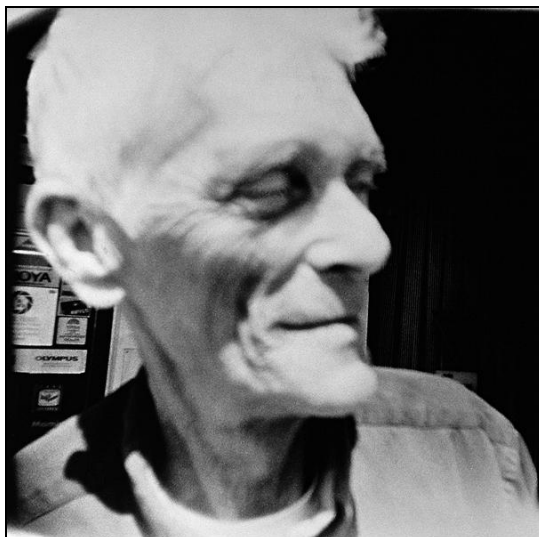


Figure 57: Jim Tingstrum

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jillian E. Pichocki was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1981 and is an American Citizen. She attended Paul VI High School in Fairfax, VA, graduating in 1999. She left the Catholic Church in 2003 and became a born-again Christian the following year. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in digital art and animation from George Mason University in 2004. Photography has always been her primary interest, which led her to pursue graduate school. She completed her Master of Fine Arts degree from George Mason University in the fall of 2007. She majored in Art and Visual Technology with a concentration in photography. She currently works and resides as a freelance photographer and web developer in northern Virginia.