

AMERICAN GRAFFITI: A TALK WITH STREET PHOTOGRAPHER CHARLENE WEISLER City walls as canvas by Leona Beasley



It can be said that prehistoric humans first created graffiti art on the wall of caves; that desire, even urgency to communicate, and to share ideas still lives in our DNA. Graffiti Art has morphed into today's "Street Art." By and large this outsider art has lived well "outside" the institutionalized art establishments of universities, galleries and museums. But the trained and exceptional eye can capture the sheer grace, and vast beauty of this art done hastily, and in the shadows of night. Such is the eye and art of Charlene Weisler's photography. On a cool spring morning we talk via phone about street art, photography, and the evolution of both genres.

How did you get into art/photography?

"I graduated from The Music and Art High School and majored in art in college. My grandfather was a professional photographer, and at the tender age of five I began to take photos. "When I got my first digital camera in 2000, it was really liberating because I could experiment with different techniques and not waste film. Then Street Art was all over the city. By the end of '03 I realized what I was seeing one day wasn't around the next day." "Then I started to photograph the Street Art in a couple of major ways. First to establish it being there, point and shoot. Then I realized after it began to erode and degrade it became something else, and after others put their work on top it became something new."

Street Art is in every Metropolitan city, but Charlene differentiates herself in the timing of her photographs. She sees her work as "photomontages," modern archaeological artifacts, photographed just at the point of being destroyed, either by weather, erosion, time, or other people's manipulations. Mostly these days, Street Art disappears because of developments and gentrification.

Is there a message (conscious or not) you make with your photography?

"I'm so passionate about Street Art, I guess there is a part of me that wants to reinforce that what we have here is valuable, and is worth noticing if not persevering. What some might call blight others see art. And I'm absolutely sure what we are seeing is the next art movement. You see Cubism and Impressionism, I see Street Art as an Art Movement. And I love that can contribute to reinforce that." Charlene thinks of an example. "Look at Shepard Fairey who created that wonderful poster of Obama. He burst on the scene with the notoriety of copyright and all, but now he is coming into his own, for the art he produces, and he's a Street Artist."

Street Art is both outsider and outlaw art, but like the cave drawings, it represents a place in time and history. Maybe in the future we will establish venues both inside and outdoors for the enterprise of Street Art and the artists that create it for all people.

Artist Charlene Weisler will be at the Tappan Z Gallery from 5-10 pm on May 21 for Third Fridays in Tarrytown. The Tappan Z Gallery is located at 51 Main Street. You can reach Charlene Weisler at www.CharleneWeisler.com and <http://tinyurl.com/charleneweisler>. You can connect to Tappan Z Gallery at <http://www.tappanzgallery.com/> <mailto:tpzgallery@gmail.com>