



copyright Robin Schwartz

September 2008

Robin Schwartz - Amelia's World: Animal Affinity

Epiphanies come in strange moments. Seeing Robin Schwartz's photographs of her young daughter, Amelia, posing with various animals I realise what makes some photographs great is not how the photographs are made or what the subject matter depicts but the sense of love and passion shown by the photographer through their photographs. You can see it in their expressions. Schwartz isn't just presenting us with photos of Amelia in her animal kingdom, she is showing us her love for them and their world. I hope one day the roles are reversed and Amelia can photograph Robin with her animal friends. Completing the circle.

UNseen Magazine has a very small, selective audience, and you've had your work featured in national and international books and magazines. I would consider you as an established artist. How important is it for you to have your work in the spotlight and how do you choose which publications to pursue. Are you particularly selective in where you want your work to be seen?

It is interesting reading your perspective. I feel pretty under the radar and not established at all. I don't feel that I can be selective at all, just grateful.

I am really glad to be represented in NYC by [Point of View Gallery](#). I owe a great deal to [Tim Barber](#), who has included me in his [book series](#) published by Aperture. Tim and the Aperture book has given me more confidence and momentum. I have no other plans than to focus more on my photography. So much of my time is devoted to my university teaching job and of course to my daughter.

I sense a strong teaching component in your work through witnessing Amelia's familiarity with animals. I noticed as Amelia grows, so does the size of the animals she interacts with. At a time of mass extinction and climate change do you feel any pressure to make work that speaks for that cause?

I work at being a good, kind, teacher. Teaching is my job. Teaching is what I do to make a living, and I want to leave that part of me at work. I do not want to put my views on others, debate, explain. Most people are pretty set in their ways and it is exhausting.

The older I get, the less I want to convince anyone of anything, I prefer to listen these days. I want to get better at listening. I want to learn from others and expand my views. My husband [Robert is an artist](#) as well.

Early on, I photographed strays and feral dog packs, thinking I could make a difference. I donated the work when I could. In my work I am trying to show our connections with animals, to show we are similar. We all have feelings. We are all connected.

Amelia's World is for me and Amelia. Amelia is whom I can make a difference for, to be there for my daughter. Time is quite fleeting, and I feel like I have squandered it.

In what way do you feel you have squandered it? What would you have done more of?

I would like spent more time with my family, made sure they were my priority and done many things differently. Spending less time on my various jobs for money. That is a constant regret. I sacrificed a lot for work. Too sad to go into.

You said you wanted to "learn from others". Who have you learnt from recently?

I am learning to be less judgmental and to stop categorizing work. This is quite gratifying. I hope to pass this on in my teachings and teach differently. It would be nice not to have to grade, if students did not work for a grade or the threat of a grade.

Robert's work is amazing. I've never seen anything like it. So much patience.

Robert's work is very complicated, all those multiple views, from different angles and time. Some views can be from our dog.

Do you think most artists are naive to expect to be able to live comfortably solely from selling their art?

I am not good at business. I cannot afford to be a fulltime artist. I think having a business sense is what it takes to survive in any field, having confidence, having a hard shell. I don't have those essential qualities.

Are you a vegetarian?

I have been a vegetarian on and off since I was very young. I grew up near a sheep slaughter house. A neighbor used to take me to pet the sheep. When I figured it out, I still can't eat sheep to this day. I have eaten some meats over the years but I have never touched raw meat and have never made a hamburger.

My daughter just became a vegetarian. We visited the [Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary](#) in New York, Amelia bonded with a blind chicken - and, of all the animals she has been around - Coco, the office chicken, put it all together for her.

When I taught at night, my husband and Amelia would have meat Mondays - they would eat lambchops, with me out of the house. It seems those days are over. I am pretty proud of Amelia and feel sorry for my husband, Robert who has to live with a house full of vegetarians. Amelia is really into spicy foods, Indian, Mexican. We are in NYC eating out all the time.

I accompanied my husband on his Fulbright Scholarship to Mexico, where we met indigenous Huichol Indians to trade art techniques. I did not eat meat, and Robert was concerned I would offend people we stayed with, who offered us food. When Robert got ill, they slaughtered a chicken for him, a real free range chicken. I showed a book of photos of my work, monkeys, dogs and they understood and were not offended when I said I did not eat my friends.

How do you handle the difficulties of directing/orchestration Amelia and the animals? How much planning do you do?

As with photographing the primates, who were not professional models, I do not have that much control over the animals in my shoots. I have to go with the flow. What I do try to control is the light I shoot under. Unfortunately there are too many sunny days.

I am trying to change how I shoot Amelia, to let her be who she is. Amelia feels that this photo project is ours. Recently we tried not to bring Amelia to an opening, as she did not like them. She was particularly difficult at my husband's openings, stopping him from talking to people, making him stay by the food. So we thought it would be easier for us all if we got babysitter for my recent solo show. We were surprised when Amelia wanted to go but it was her argument that got me. She said, "What if you worked really hard on something, and then you were not allowed to go to celebrate what you worked on." I had thought Amelia wanted to quit the project, too much pressure and attention. But she loves visiting all the animals. Without the photography there would be no reason to get in to those animal situations. It was a kangaroo named Mouse that turned her around.

As far as directing goes, I do request a turn of the head, but everything is so serendipitous. I just feel lucky when something comes out.

As this was being compiled Robin sent me an update on Amelia. "Sunday night Amelia gave up being a vegetarian. She did it all summer and may do it again, but she went back"... Kids huh.

>> www.robinschwartz.net