This e-newsletter is circulated by the Brown Arts Initiative to showcase the upcoming varied cultural activities sponsored by Brown University taking place on or near campus, and provide a glimpse into some of the artists featured. In addition to the BAI, programs are organized by departments, centers, institutes and other units at Brown in ways that engage the arts as a pathway to knowledge.

**Interview with Sophie Schwartz '17**

Anne Bergeron and Sophia LaCava-Bohanan of the Brown Arts Initiative sat down with Sophie Schwartz '17 on a sunny summer morning to talk about her senior thesis exhibition that was on view in the Atrium Gallery of the Granoff Center for the Creative Arts for the past three months. We Do The Rest is Schwartz's interpretation and reclamation of a project conceived by her recently deceased father when he was in graduate school. Here's what she wrote about the piece:

“In the 1970’s when photography was first being seriously accepted into the academic and art historical cannon, over 200 photographers, editors, critics and curators were anonymously sent plastic Diana cameras from We Do The Rest. Each camera included instructions to make and return 16 images to the sender, with the promise of an anticipated exhibition. Many responded. The result: an extensive archive of letters, cameras and photographs, which provide an amusing and insightful snapshot of the experimental climate of the photographic community at this time. We Do The Rest: A Photographic Survey was first exhibited at Ohio University by its organizer, Mark Schwartz, in 1979 as his MFA thesis. After his passing in 2014, Mark’s daughter, Sophie Schwartz, has uncovered and advanced the project, recontextualizing and continuing We Do The Rest almost 40 years later as her Brown University honors thesis.”
BAI: You just graduated from Brown with a concentration in Modern Culture and Media. And you’re staying in Providence for a while to work on some art projects. But take us back a few years ago and tell us why you decided to go to school here.

SS: When I was looking at schools, I wanted a place where I could study both art and traditional academic subjects and have them be informed by one another. What initially drew me to Brown was the relationship between the University and RISD, and the ability to cross-register. Starting in my sophomore year, I took a class at RISD almost every semester, which I enjoyed. I ended up hitting it off with [RISD photography professor] Steve Smith and his class made me fall in love with large format photography. I had a similar experience with [Brown adjunct professor] Lara Henderson in her book arts class. I feel lucky having had access to a number of departments and resources, and building relationships with mentors, which relates to my dad. He always spoke about how he studied with great people and made lifelong relationships with professors and others, and that’s what I always wanted at a university.

BAI: What inspired you to undertake this project?

SS: After my dad passed away in 2014 a lot of my creative practice was about making things to cope with
helpful to me. Around the first anniversary of his death, I was going through my parents’ attic and found these big boxes labeled, “We Do The Rest.” I vaguely remembered my dad talking about the project and letting me play with one of the Diana cameras. I discovered the boxes around the same time I was starting to think about a thesis and wanting to work on a long-term project. I thought this would be a good opportunity to do my dad’s project justice while focusing on something that spoke to my heart. I didn’t know then how big the undertaking would be!

BAI: What’s a Diana camera?

SS: A Diana camera is an inexpensive, plastic, medium format film camera. They were made in China [in the 1960’s and 70’s], and at the time they were $1.00 or $2.00 a piece. They were prone to light leaks, but the cheap construction and imprecise nature of the lens produced some interesting effects and images. In the 70’s, some art schools were introducing the Diana cameras in classes, but it wasn’t used everywhere.

BAI: Thanks for that sidebar tutorial. Let’s return to your story. Tell us what your discovered in your parents’ attic.

SS: The first box I found held the prints and these are included in the exhibition. Other boxes contained the negatives, contact sheets and all the correspondence with the photographers, which was really fun to go through and construct a narrative exploring my dad’s role in the project. There was also a box with the cameras that had been returned after being used.

I knew I was going back to school in the fall and couldn’t bring everything with me to Providence, so I spent most of the summer [of 2016] digitally scanning the files to curate from. Once at school, I only took one academic class per semester in my senior year because I wanted to focus on the project. When I returned home for Thanksgiving, I was able to spend additional time with the physical objects and the archive. I found on my dad’s computer [a document outlining] his future plans for the project, which was to create an exhibition, a book and a movie. This made me feel like I was…[working in sync] with his intention and gave me the courage to keep going.

"It ended up being a project about memory."

Then I was faced with some big questions: How am I going to find my voice in this project? How do I, as an artist and his daughter, change the project to be contemporary to 2017? I began by reaching out [via email] to [the 120 photographers] who participated in the original project. I asked all if they remembered it and most didn’t. When I received replies [to my initial inquiries], I sent each their [respective] contact sheets and that’s when the stories began to spill. I talked to each person and recorded the phone conversations. It ended up being a project about memory – where they were at the time, what they were thinking and who surrounded them.
relationship with my dad. I loved my conversation with Emmett Gowin, who was my father’s photography professor at Princeton. He talked about my dad being a “bold photographer” and reinforced my understanding of him. It was nice hearing that there was mutual respect between teacher and student. It was hard to have those conversations, but also rewarding.

The conversations with the other photographers were also great, and [turned out to be] nostalgic for them. Many are older and retired, in their 60’s and 70’s, and they had lots of time for me. Nancy Rexroth was very funny. She had no idea what I was talking about when I first reached out to her, but later she remembered the entire project. She normally used a Diana camera in her work and she recalled that she approached “We Do The Rest” as an experiment. She remembered not liking the photos she took, but she appreciated the opportunity [to take some risks].

The coolest relationship I forged was with Richard Misrach. At first he vaguely remembered the project, but after I sent his contact sheet he became very interested and wanted to talk. He also asked for high resolution scans so he could make prints of the work. I was in California earlier this summer and was able to meet with him in his studio in Emeryville, where most of his pictures were taken. It was meaningful and empowering…to have an adult conversation with an established photographer whose work I admired.

BAI: Did you accomplish what you set out to do with this project?

SS: My initial goal had been to do an exhibition, but as an MCM concentrator I wasn’t sure where or how to get started. Most MCM students do films for their thesis projects. I approached BAI staff – I knew about the Granoff Center because I had taken classes here. I was told I needed to submit a proposal with a
have done it without their help.

**BAI:** What kind of support did you need and what were you provided with?

**SS:** First, I needed space to work. I needed a room where I could work and leave my things, and I was fortunate to be assigned a project studio at the Granoff Center – I now know how rare that is. Then I needed an exhibition venue and the BAI offered the Atrium Gallery. I had to think through all of the physical components of the exhibition – the hardware, the materials, where to find supplies, etc. The BAI staff believed in me and I was always happy to be working with them at the Granoff. The project was bigger than me, but I felt like I had my dad on my shoulder and I didn’t want to let anyone down.

**BAI:** You completed your senior thesis show to positive reviews, you graduated – what’s next?

**SS:** I’d like to have the work shown in Cleveland where I’m from. I think there are a lot of people at home who will find this relevant, especially people who knew my father. I’m also interested in producing a catalogue of the work, and I’d like to archive all the materials and scan all the negatives.

I wasn’t expecting the emotional impact this work would have on other people. It was nice to produce an exhibition that a lot of people could encounter, even in passing, and it made the work all the more worthwhile to be able to share it with others.
We Do The Rest was on view May 4–July 21, 2017 in the Atrium Gallery of the Granoff Center for the Creative Arts at Brown University. More information about the project can be found on Schwartz’s website here.

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