

FotoFocus Symposium on Photography, Feminism

The free all-day symposium at Memorial Hall on Saturday is called "Second Century: Photography, Feminism, Politics."

STEVE ROSEN - OCT 4, 2017 11 AM



Tabitha Soren PHOTO: PROVIDED

FotoFocus, the nonprofit organization that promotes deep appreciation of photography, has a free all-day symposium at Memorial Hall on Saturday called *Second Century: Photography, Feminism, Politics*. In describing the event, Kevin Moore — the group's artistic director and curator — said via email that the current "intensely politicized moment goes beyond feminism; it's a lingering

(seemingly increasing) polarization that was exacerbated by the 2016 election, after which the populace seems to be on the brink of civil war regarding the future on all issues, be they social, environmental, fiscal, international. Even scientific data has been questioned and politicized.”

So with that as a premise, this should be a lively and insightful event. FotoFocus has lined up many local and national speakers for panel discussions and individual conversations. The panels include: “Still They Persist, with FemFour,” which has assembled an archive of material from this year’s Women’s March; “Gender and Imaging in the Online Realm;” “Women of Latin American Film;” and “Woman with a Camera.”

The discussions are “Comment by Aruna D’Souza: Photography in an Intersectional Field” and a closing keynote conversation with photographers Tabitha Soren and Justine Kurland called “Shooting America.” Both have had their work presented in museums and books.

If Soren’s name seems familiar beyond the world of art photography, it’s because in the 1980s she was involved with MTV’s groundbreaking Choose or Lose effort to register young people to vote. She went on to news coverage at MTV and broadcast networks. But while studying at Stanford University under a John S. Knight Journalism Fellowship, she became interested in art photography and learned the technical aspects of it.

“I had this lovely relationship with my audience at MTV News, because I was same age and had a certain commonality there in terms of our interests,” Soren says by phone from San Francisco. “So asking my questions felt like pursuing my own passions.

“Then I started working at NBC and *The Today Show*, and I worked at a newsmagazine with Katy Couric and Tom Brokaw, and they all had bigger audiences. As a result, the work gets very watered down. I just felt there was no edge there. It was just too mainstream. I felt like the more successful I got, the more interesting tangential ideas and gray areas were left on the cutting-room floor.”

At Stanford, she thought about switching her focus to making journalistic documentaries. “But when I dipped a toe in that world, I saw how much my director and producer friends spent fundraising,” she says. “And then to have even these A-list

PBS directors take their work to film festivals and have nine people see it, when I had had 80 million viewers, I couldn't wrap my head around that.

"I felt if I was going to have nobody looking at my work, I might as well be in the art world and do something purely coming from my heart. It could still seek out a certain amount of truth, but more of an emotional truth than a hard facts."

She feels she's mostly been inclined to seek out projects that attempt to capture or conjure an emotional state, such as her photography series *Running* and *Panic Beach*, which features powerful waves off coastlines around the world. But her most extensive work to date is an exception to that — *Fantasy Life: Baseball and the American Dream* (published this year as a book) followed the minor league baseball picks of the Oakland A's from 2003 until recently. It will be at Pittsburgh's Silver Eye Center for Photography beginning Dec. 1.

"The entire time I was shooting it, I was thinking about these players having a second act," Soren says. "I knew in my head most of them weren't going to make it to the Major Leagues. But after the book came out, I was doing interviews with the players and they said, 'Tabitha was working on her second act, too.' At the time, that hadn't occurred to me. I didn't realize we were working on parallel things, working toward establishing ourselves in a different arena."

SECOND CENTURY: PHOTOGRAPHY, FEMINISM, POLITICS starts at 9:45 a.m. Saturday at Memorial Hall, 1225 Elm St., Over-the-Rhine. Admission is free. More info: fotofocussymposium.org.