

Jeremy Chandler Big Picture Statement



When I first moved to Tampa three years ago, from a north Florida college town, I found the city to be an amorphous mixture of communities. The city had no clear boundaries or borders and seemed to cover a vast area while having no definitive center. However, as I acclimated, I became delighted by its social and cultural diversity. I found a fascinating mix of cultures; very different from any other city I had lived in. Still as I traveled through town, I could not help but feel disconnected from the other residents. One of the unfortunate consequences of living in a city where it is necessary to drive everywhere is there are few opportunities to interact with other members of the community. My commission for the Big Picture Project became my chance to explore the city in more personal way. I used the project as the catalyst to meet groups of people within the community and show how they chose to define themselves through social interactions or forms of recreation. My project documents the people I encountered during this investigation throughout the year and creates a visual record of their interests and activities.

I make portraits because it is an intimate mode of representation that allows me to speak to a broader notion of place. Furthermore, the portraits are informed by the environmental context my subjects inhabit. My images celebrate the individual and their experience as parts of the larger community. I work with a large format camera that is cumbersome and takes a great deal of time to set up. We live in an era where the proliferation of technology creates an environment that is saturated with photographs. In such an environment, my 4x5 view camera appears awkward and antiquated. I am only capable of taking one picture at a time and the steps of loading film, taking light readings and bringing my subject into focus, contribute to making mine a prolonged process. However, this slow process allows me to become more deeply connected to the subject. The act of taking a picture seems almost ritualistic and lends a sense of importance to the event, creating a more personal experience for my subjects and myself.

As a point departure, I began photographing the people I encountered during my everyday travels near my home. However, I discovered many other communities and places I viewed as unique subsets of the broader culture. I photographed golfers, net-fisherman, wrestlers, derby girls, pirates, and a myriad of others who represent a wide range of particular interests, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many subjects, such as the Gaparilla pirates, have a well-known historical connection to the city. Still others have a more obscure (although no less significant) relationship to Tampa. I believe that this variation creates an interesting juxtaposition between the familiar figures and those that are the more hidden from view. Yet, these are only a few of the micro-communities that exist within the city; depicting small slices of the rich cultural and social makeup of Tampa.

As this work quite literally belongs to the people of the city, my goal is to create a tender and enchanting series of images that future generations will view as an uncommon glimpse of the past. Furthermore, this series of photographs represents some of the unique aspects of the lives and activities of the city's residents in a direct manner that had not yet been accomplished by the Laureate program. Ultimately, my hope is that these pictures will speak to the socially eclectic nature of our community while also serving as extraordinary and unexpected additions to the existing collection.