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# The Moments



## Between the Moments

A portrait of the photographer  
as a storyteller

PROFILE Cig Harvey  
by Joshua Bodwell  
Photography Darren Setlow

**I**n the kitchen of her circa 1840 farmhouse, Cig Harvey sits with her back to the window. A shaft of winter afternoon sunlight pours over her, and the brightness makes a thin halo around her dark hair. Two cups of tea cool on the cluttered kitchen table. A tiny, bright taxidermy bird pokes its head from a child's lunchbox. Harvey reaches up, pulls her hair to one side, and with a clear-eyed precision she utters "fragility" in response to a question about the central theme of her photography.

This kitchen scene feels as though it could almost be one of Harvey's photographs. It is not an occasion or a big event, it is simply one of the millions of "in-between" moments that make up a life. Harvey and her camera have been recording

Above: *The Hope Chest, Rockport, Maine, 2007* © Cig Harvey

these moments for the past decade in captivating self-portraits, pictures that are heartbreaking, heroic, surreal, and droll.

The prolific 34-year-old English native landed in Maine ten years ago, drawn by the Maine Photographic Workshops in Rockland. Today, Harvey is a beloved and respected teacher at the Workshops, as well as a full-time professor at the Art Institute of Boston. Her photography is on display in museums around the country and represented by galleries in New York City, Aspen, and Houston, and her commercial clients include Kate Spade, Bloomingdale's, Martha Stewart, and Ralph Lauren. "It's been 99 percent hard work, and one percent talent," Harvey says humbly of her success. Though she has possessed a single-minded passion for photography since she was a precocious 12-year-old, even a cursory glance at Harvey's art reveals that these percentages are way off.

Harvey's self-portraits are stunningly composed representations of the human condition. They feel timeless and, as she points out, ripe with fragility. Harvey regularly appears barefoot and dressed in a bright, 1950s-era vintage dress. Her body is often shown in parts, cropped by the picture's frame. In nearly every photo, she holds herself with the composure of a dancer, whether she is standing alone at the end of a dock, sitting at the counter of an empty diner, or perched at the bow of a rowboat. Harvey's images are sensuous and familiar, but they are also vaguely unsettling. "I am drawn to photograph the times in our lives when we are insecure about the future," she says. "I use photography to legitimize these in-between moments of struggle, uncertainty, and doubt."

The underlying tension is palpable in many of her photos, which seem to suggest that an unspoken story is being told. "Every photograph is *about* something, not just of something," Harvey insists. "If I don't have the story, I'm not interested. The story is first and foremost." She builds her photos from journal pages covered not in sketches but in words. "Nouns are really

important," she says with a smile. Harvey jots down a word such as "love," then fills the page with details and ideas and terms she associates with the concept—some universal, others personal. "I try to make photographs that are not just something to look at, but something to be *read*," she says.

When asked if "make photographs" is part of her native-English vernacular, Harvey explains, "I just think that 'taking,' 'shooting,' 'snapping'—all these words that are usually used for photographs—are such nasty words. I construct my photographs. I *make* them." Given that each work is so carefully planned and executed, it is a testament to Harvey's talents that her photos still feel so spontaneous.

Harvey routinely conceives her photos in series, and she graces these



**"If a photograph doesn't have soul,  
I'm not interested in it."  
Cig Harvey on her 'failed' photos**



**Harvey rented this 1962 Chevy pickup to use in the photo-shoot for a book cover (above). She loved the truck so much, she never brought it back.**

**While Harvey's self-portraits require an arsenal of self-timers, she has been working with the same camera since 1999 (below). "I'm not an equipment-whore," she quips. Most importantly, Harvey is married to her camera and single lens because she must know its abilities and limitations inside and out.**

**Spring is in the air: Cig Harvey bounds through the backyard of her Rockport farmhouse (next).**



## PROFILE Cig Harvey



### WHERE TO FIND CIG IN MAINE:

Carver Hill Gallery  
264 Meadow Street  
Rockport, Maine  
207-236-0745  
carverhillgallery.com

thematically linked portfolios with enigmatic titles such as *An Archaeology of Distraction* and *Eyes Like Disappointed Lemons*. In her series *The Impossible Tasks*, Harvey seems to have cast herself in the title role of a modern-day Alice in Wonderland—she scales a bright white wall that stretches into the sky; stands in the middle of an immense field with a small red watering can; cuts the lawn with scissors; and stares up at a massive and seemingly unmovable green door. Each endeavor seems too monumental to even consider undertaking—yet Harvey does, and she does so alone. “All photography is tied to subject, so

what you choose to photograph is very telling about you,” Harvey professes.

In person, her hands wrapped around a cup of tea with the sun waning behind her, Cig Harvey is both everything and nothing of what you would expect the woman in her photos to be. She is smart, curious, and humble; at no time does she reveal a side that is slump-shouldered or forlorn. In fact, Harvey laughs a lot, and when she does her eyes sparkle. Though she has long said her photographs are “unashamedly declarations of beauty and faith in life,” these days, in particular, Harvey

## PROFILE Cig Harvey

has a lot to be happy for.

With a satisfying teaching career and skyrocketing professional career already in place, Harvey bought her little farmhouse this past summer and married her sweetheart, the filmmaker Doug Stadley. The couple splits their time between Boston during the week and Maine on the weekends, where they are slowly restoring their old house. It is a domestic bliss that Harvey is not only embracing but reflecting in her new work.

Harvey's latest portfolio, *You Look at Me Like an Emergency*, is a departure for the artist, and represents her creating art within a new cocoon of love and security. Unlike her self-portraits, the new pictures are not so much constructed as they are exploratory; they are investigations of Harvey's relationships with the people around her. "There is a life being lived and I am in it. A life that is fascinating in its flaws, doubts, and elations," she says. "These pictures show me that life can be as magical as fiction."

Outside, the sun has sunk lower yet. Harvey's hair looks jet black in the pale light reflecting off the snow. The cups of tea are empty. It is a fragile, in-between moment waiting to be captured. **MH+D**



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