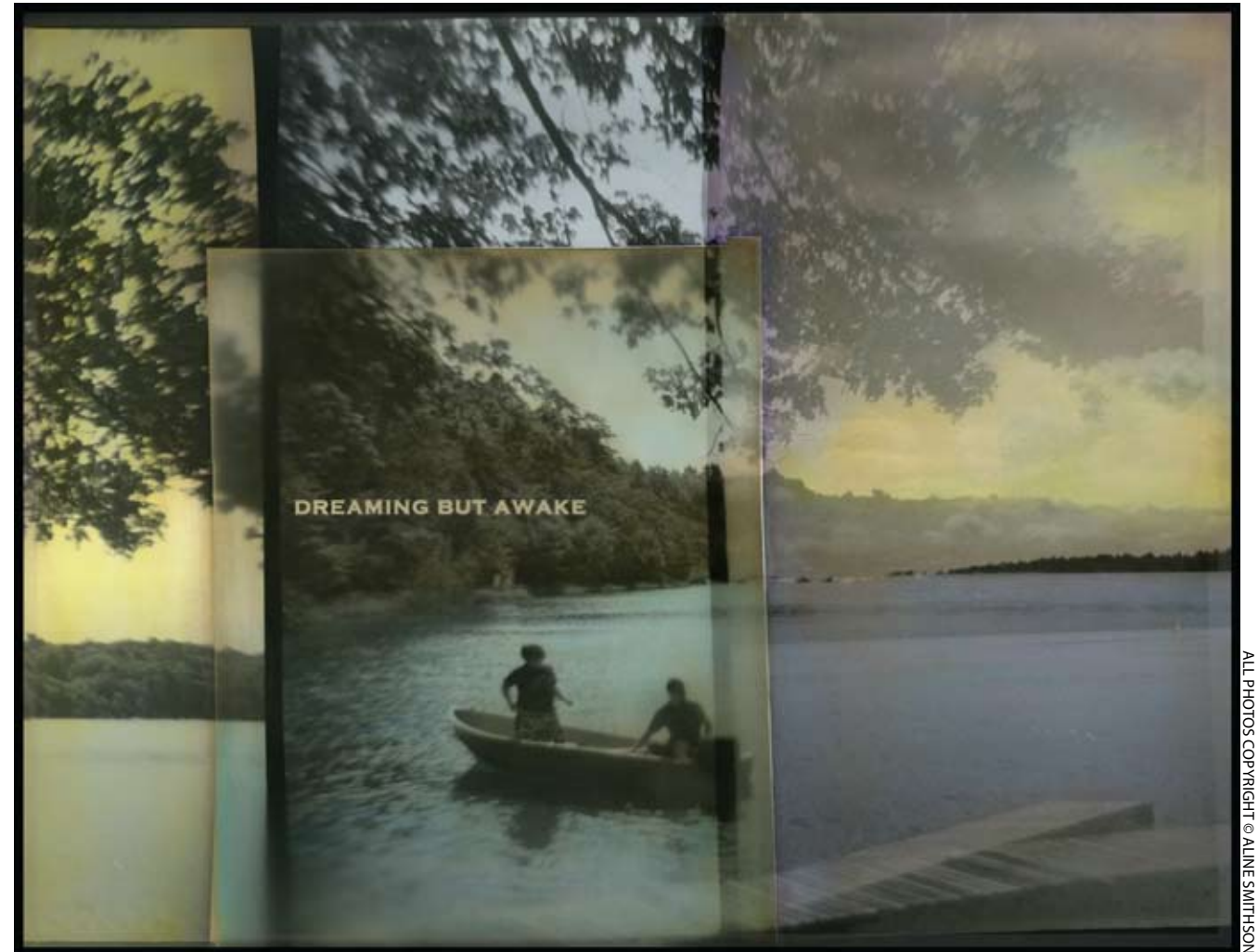


aline smithson  
SHE'S SO By Jennifer Chen



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UNUSUAL



I first met Aline Smithson at a Julia Dean silent auction in Los Angeles, featuring photography greats such as David Hume Kennerly, Mary Ellen Mark, Douglas Kirkland and Greg Gorman. Aline had a beautiful print up for auction, which she told me was a painted portrait of her daughter. She had taken the original black-and-white

image and hand-painted over it—not in Photoshop, but with an actual paintbrush.

Her love of Japanese hand-painted photographs inspired her to create her own. She shares, “With hand painting, you have to print on a certain matte paper that will allow the paint adhere to the surface.” With her painting background, Aline moves

pretty quickly and can finish one hand-painted image in about half a day.

We discussed the images on display and eventually she told me about her blog (<http://lenscratch.blogspot.com>) that features a new photographer daily. Recently *Source Photographic Review* named Aline’s blog as one of the 10 photography-related blogs photographers should be reading.

Aline launched the blog in February 2007, and 512 posts (and counting) later, she has connected with photographers all around the world. Aline admits the blog is a “huge time suck” for her, but says, “the rewards outweigh the negatives.” Since the inception of her daily photo blog, a female photographer she featured landed a photo book. Aline originally started the blog about her own work, but after a month she was tired of talking about herself. So she started featuring photographers she found interesting, and built a readership from there. Some photographers contact her to be featured, but most of the time Aline finds the photographers herself. “I do a fair amount of research before I do a post on them.” Aline’s posts aren’t just basic facts, but show a breadth of the photographer’s work and information about the featured images. Every day is a new photographer—a new look at the world.

Aline was surrounded by images long before she started her blog. Her dad had a darkroom, and her uncle shot travel photography for *Westways* magazine. After she left college, she worked in an art gallery in

New York, but became disenchanted. Afterward she worked with top designers as an editor in the fashion world for over 10 years. She never considered photography until after moving to Los Angeles with her husband and starting a family. She took one photography class and the teacher told her she should show her work. Aline comments, “I never looked back. I showed my first piece in 1998.”

Her portfolio *Unreal/Reality* may seem like simple black-and-white shots of cit-

ies around the United States, but after further investigation, the towns are made up of Legos. Aline, who always totes a toy camera with her wherever she goes, visited Legoland in Carlsbad, CA, with her children and started shooting there. “I liked what I got and went again. Soon, the kids didn’t want to go any more so I went by myself. I felt that the images worked with a toy camera because if you see the buildings in person, you can tell they are Legos because of the color.”

One glance at her portfolio, *In Case of Rain*, and the viewer catches a day in the life of a child pre-iPhones, Internet and tweeting. Aline shares, “I’m of the generation that has a foot in both worlds. When I was a fashion editor, we didn’t have computers, but my children were born and raised on computers. So during a summer vacation by the lake, if they weren’t in the lake, they were on the computer.”

A stack of records, old children’s books, paper dolls, stacks of *Life* magazines be-





come icons of a past generation when a rainy day meant playing with tangible objects rather than clicking on endless links online. Aline laments, “I see it as a big issue because we’re losing so much in this generation. For instance, the ability to write letters. When I was in my 20s and I went to Europe, I sent my parents letters, and when I got older they gave me those letters. But when my children traveled Europe, they sent me emails. Their generation will document their lives more than any other generation using Facebook, but those images don’t live forever.” She continues, “How do we pass digital images onto future generations? Will the technology in the future sustain the same shelf life as using film? This series opened up the door to so much conversation.”

While Aline has no formal training in photography, she loves teaching classes at Julia Dean Workshops in Venice, CA. Aline says, “I get back so much and there’s nothing as exciting as seeing someone reaching their potential.” She first taught classes in taking images with toy cameras and then later approached Julia about a need for a class on how to market fine art imagery. “Sometimes photographers come to class and don’t have a point of view. I help them

by giving them tools to create work that might be able to be placed in the fine art market. I teach them how to submit to shows, package their work and give them a sense of community.” In January 2011, Aline, along with Julia Dean, Mark Berndt and Frank W. Ockenfels, will be traveling to Antigua, Guatemala, to teach photography workshops. Aline’s class will focus on teaching photographers how to make fine art images as they travel. She comments, “So many people come back with 3000 images and nowhere to put them.” Her class titled, “Shooting with Intent: The Fine Art Approach,” will work to combat that 3000-image problem.

Fine art photography combines her love of fashion, painting and imagery into one. Her

future photo projects speak to Aline’s quest for searching for images that continually surprise and amaze her. Her current project centers on photographing 7-year-old girls wearing old lady hats from the 1950s with different floral backgrounds. Why the exact age of 7? Aline comments, “Seven is the age where they are still innocent, but are just on the verge of growing up a little bit. By 8 or 9, they are already more savvy and self-aware. I found that 7 is a magical age when they are still innocent.”

In addition to that current project, Aline has been curating several shows. As a member of the photo arts council through the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, she has been co-curating for the photo arts council members. She says, “A lot of my time lately has been promoting other people’s work.”

While she has been spending time curating, promoting and blogging about other photographers’ work, she is focused on creating a new style for herself. “I’m trying to move toward a more modern feel by shooting all color. I just finished a series of diptychs that have an essence of my earlier work but feels more contemporary.” She continues to search for the quirky and humorous in her images while retaining a sense of poignancy at the same time. “I like open-ended images. I love images that go with book covers or short stories. When I was starting out, I looked to make images that allowed the viewer to find a personal association. If images are too specific, it’s hard to feel a connection to them. I allow viewers to bring their own memories and experiences to my work.”

View Aline’s work at [www.alinesmithson.com](http://www.alinesmithson.com).



*Jennifer Chen is the former features editor for both Rangefinder and AfterCapture magazines as well as the former editor of the WPPi Monthly Newsletter. She has written for Everyday with Rachael Ray, Natural Health, Bust, VegNews, and Audrey. She is currently working on her first young adult novel. She blogs at [www.typecraftwriter.com](http://www.typecraftwriter.com).*

### Aline’s Camera Bag

**Jennifer Chen:** I read in your artist’s statement that you use a twin-lens Rolleiflex, a Hasselblad, the Diana plastic camera, and the Holga plastic camera. Why those specific cameras?

**Aline Smithson:** I just bought another film camera, the Mayima 7II. I also use a Wide-lux on occasion. Everything I use is really old. When I travel, I always bring toy cameras. I haven’t made the switch over to digital. I love shooting medium format and don’t have the funds to buy a digital Hasselblad. I also find that because shooting film is so expensive (about a dollar an image), I’m not going to shoot thousands of images. It forces you to slow down and assess what you’re looking at.