

PDN'S 30 2015

Our Choice of
**New and Emerging
Photographers**
to Watch

Erin O'Keefe



AGE: 52

BORN: Bronxville, New York

RESIDES: New York City

EDUCATION: Cornell University, Columbia University

WEBSITE: erinokeefe.com

EXHIBITIONS: Pioneer Works; Frameshift Denny Gallery; Gallery 339

AWARDS: Camera Club Photography Competition; Humble Arts Foundation 31 Women in Art

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: "Time! I feel an enormous sense of urgency about getting to the studio, or out to look at things, trying to always move forward in some way."



ERIN O'KEEFE's more than two decades of experience as a licensed architect, professor of architecture and sculptor influence her photography, which explores how the camera "translates a three-dimensional subject into a two-dimensional image." As she builds still life objects in her studio at home, "I am trying to anticipate the way the camera will see it, to capitalize on the distortion in some way."

O'Keefe had long been intrigued by photography, but had little experience. In 2010, during her sabbatical from teaching, she decided to take courses at the International Center of Photography in New York City. "I didn't know anybody or anything. I didn't know the difference between a TIFF and a JPEG," she says,

but her teachers Wendy Richmond, Phil Toledano and Amy Stein were "hugely generous and supportive," and she enjoyed the community of students.

As she gained the technical skills to achieve her vision, she began seeing her architectural training "as a bonus, rather than something to overcome." Her process of building objects and photographing them is "fluid and reactive." For one series, she photographed still-life setups, printed the images, and incorporated the prints into new still lifes, confusing the sense of perspective even further.

O'Keefe attended portfolio reviews and submitted to juried exhibitions to get her work in front of curators; her inclusion in a Humble Arts Foundation show gave her the confidence to pitch every photo blog she could find. A photographer she met at one show recommended her for another that opens this spring. "It seems as though one connection or opportunity leads to the next one in a pretty organic way."

She left her academic job in 2013 to devote herself solely to photography. "It was a terrifying decision, but one that I have not regretted for a minute," she says. "The single-mindedness has been exhilarating."

—HOLLY STUART HUGHES