

NAME Susan Burnstine

'I'm a fine art and commercial photographer living in Los Angeles'



What is your crazy camera?

The images in my current series *On Waking Dreams* and *Instinct* are shot on film with homemade medium format cameras and homemade lenses. These cameras are primarily made out of plastic, rubber, moulded plastic, a few vintage camera parts and random household objects including string, photo tape, garbage bags, Velcro, parts of toys and children's science kits along with various materials I happen upon in hobby shops and hardware stores.

Where did you buy its components?

I have approximately 20 homemade cameras. Most have cost me less than \$40 in parts and a few have cost nothing since they were created from random, found parts – or parts of toys I've 'acquired' from unsuspecting children.



What did you do to modify it?

Many of my cameras are 100% homemade, rather than butchered or modified. But I do have a few vintage cameras I've modified and attached homemade plastic lenses to. I also created a partially homemade box camera modified into an SLR with the help of some parts from a vintage camera.

What sort of film does it take?

120 film. My favourite is Ilford FP4 Plus.

What are its quirks?

Where do I start? There's only one f-stop in my homemade lenses and most of my cameras rely on a few basic shutter speeds that are frequently inconsistent. There's a lot of guessing at the correct exposure, which makes the entire process highly intuitive. And each camera has a nickname that has something to do with the way it looks and sounds. This camera's nickname is 'Hooker' after blues legend John Lee Hooker. The camera earned this name because the advance knob and shutter have a creaky, droning, melodic noise that sounds like John Lee Hooker singing one of his 'mauh, mauh, mauh' choruses.

What sort of compositions work?

Moody, evocative, emotive, dreamy, metaphoric and even some quirky, entertaining images.

And what doesn't?

Anything intended to be in sharp focus. f/64 devotees would not be happy with one of my homemade contraptions.

What have you learned about photography from using it?

I've learned more about photography by using these cameras than I did with any 'ready made' camera before them. These cameras force you to think more about fundamentals and controlling basic camera functions due to their extensive limitations. In turn, these same limitations force you to trust your instincts more.

Any strange comments from Joe Public?

What I usually hear is, 'What the hell is that thing...? Looks like one of those box cameras, but not... what the hell is it?' I guess the strangest comment was, 'Why can't I see the capture on the back of the camera after you snap the picture?'

What advice would you give to someone who's tempted to use a camera like this?

Always carry a roll of photo tape, Velcro and a tube of epoxy or ducco cement for emergencies – they happen often. If you don't enjoy making modifications, fixing broken pieces on your camera every time you use it or if you are lacking in patience, skip the homemade route and opt for a nice Hasselblad.

