

# AMERICAN CONNECTION

Having taken the Photo LA fair by storm, **Douglas Marshall** talks to Susan Burnstine about his newly established agency's roster of photo-based artists, his recalibrated approach to traditional art fairs and why local is the future.

susanburnstine.com

In the face of Covid-19 and social unrest across the United States, February 2020 seems like a lifetime ago. During that simpler, more hopeful time, I attended the annual photography fair Photo LA at Barker Hanger. While I enjoyed spending time at a number of exceptionally curated booths from well-known galleries, it was Douglas Marshall's newly established venture, Marshall Contemporary, that most impressed me.

Marshall's superbly curated booth featured three artists:

Canadian fine art photographer Jakob de Boer, Spanish duo Albarrán Cabrera, and German multimedia artist Judith Stenneken. While each artist is exceptional in their own right, together they formed a compelling conversation that reached beyond both technical and philosophical boundaries. Unquestionably, his booth was the standout of the year.

Marshall's original roster of six artists had been friends, all of whom he felt were creating innovative work. While many galleries rely on large rosters

of artists that can appeal to a variety of buyers, he opted to tightly curate his roster. 'I'd like it to stay a tight group of represented artists, a team as I refer to it, who know each other, but certainly the roster will grow to provide different visions in the field and hopefully expand outside of just photo-based artists, as I follow many 3D and works-on-paper artists as well,' he says.

Marshall initially gained experience in exhibiting photography while working for the Peter Fetterman Gallery

from 2012-2017 where he became the acting director during his final three years. After departing amicably in the autumn of 2017, he travelled to Germany to work with curatorial friend Ira Stehmann in what he describes as a quasi-sabbatical and personal journey to study German photography.

In late 2017, Marshall returned to Los Angeles with a plan to create a new contemporary platform and he explored this idea while helping run a space for the Paris-based



Where Ravens Cry 27, 2016 by Jakob de Boer © Jakob de Boer



© Albarrán Cabrera

The Mouth of Krishna #99, 1999 by Albarrán Cabrera



© Judith Stenneken

Illuminate Naturally in Darkness #16, 2011 by Judith Stenneken

Galerie XII. 'This was a great learning experience but I ultimately decided to pursue my own vision for a programme, Marshall Contemporary, shortly thereafter,' he says. 'With the support of my artists and colleagues, I finally overcame the notion that you have to be wealthy to operate a gallery. Maybe in the traditional sense that is true, but I chose to believe passion and vision were paramount to bankroll.'

**W**hen Marshall Contemporary was first established in 2018, he began social media and website development mostly as an outlet for creative and curatorial musings on contemporary fine art photography. 'Pop-ups and fair presentations developed as originally planned in 2019 before everything was put on hold and re-calibrated in early 2020 amid the pandemic.'

Prior to Covid-19, Marshall was among the growing voices that felt its possible brick-and-mortar programs were no longer

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viable or necessary any more, especially for those who were starting from a non-existent budget. 'Fairs seemed to be the dominant marketing force so I had planned to invest in them, interspersed with pop-ups in LA. Now, it appears the market will likely shift to local markets, about which I feel newly optimistic,' he says. 'The art fair circuit had gotten out of

control and was brutally exhausting for small staffed galleries, and expensive for galleries who couldn't afford to do them while also feeling you couldn't afford not to do them. While I hope they continue in some format, as international travel is a huge perk of the job, I would rather cultivate a local community of artists and collectors in the long run.'



The Mouth of Krishna #752, 2013 by Albarrán Cabrera © Albarrán Cabrera

Marshall was scheduled to exhibit at the inaugural year of Paris Photo New York and the Seattle Art Fair, but both were cancelled in light of Covid-19. 'This was, of course, a huge disappointment in the early launch stages of the gallery, but held in perspective of the larger health crisis and those whom it most seriously affected,' he says. But he quickly turned this lemon experience into lemonade. 'This quiet period gave me time to develop digital initiatives, focus on building out the website, growing the roster and re-think the business plan towards a more locally focused, but necessarily dynamic and innovative, model.'

Going forward, Marshall plans to host small events and private in-home salons as he seeks a permanent space. While everyone in the gallery world is searching for new avenues and directions, I for one am excited to watch how Marshall develops his exciting new approach to photography galleries.

marshallcontemporary.com