



# optical illusion

Mikael Kennedy  
photographer  
founder+ director of interrupt art productions

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Born in Randolph, Vermont. Currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.  
Age 27  
A born photographer, Kennedy was recently part of the Photographic Resource Center's 30th Anniversary Exhibition: 'Photography Now and the Next 30 years'

When did you first realize you wanted to pursue art as a way of life?

I'm glad you refer to art as a way of life. I remember when I was younger I always thought of myself as an artist, but I feel like there comes a point where you have to make a choice to throw yourself into it; to let it completely take you over. For me it was in the past few years where I realized I wasn't ever really going to be able to live a normal life, so I chose this one. Lately the term artist has become more important in discussing my photography because the way cameras are so prevalent these days everyone can be a 'photographer.' You begin to think of yourself and your work in different ways. I like to think that I am more of a storyteller. I think what separates the artists from the hobbyist is the ability to carry a vision with your images. To create something that becomes more than just a beautiful picture, isn't that what all art is? The attempt or act of making ordinary things divine or holy, something more?

Were people supportive of your vision to pursue this life?

No one ever really told me not to. My mom used to call me every now and then to tell me I should go to or have gone to business school. But she also gave me my first camera so I figured maybe that makes it about even. Now people are incredibly supportive, I think that might have to do with the fact that I have cleaned up my act a little. I am probably making better decisions these days in my wanderings, not showing up with stories of selling my blood to buy food or film. Maybe it's just that I turned those stories into something. I tend to put myself in situations or circumstances that are not necessarily the smartest or safest things. I used to call those stories scars or burns, and as long as I could turn them into something more than just a moment in life or a memory then it was worth the trouble it caused.



Jessica Wilbanks, Chester, NJ 2005

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Tell me about your pursuit of art.

I have been on and off the road since 1998. I spent a lot of time living on an island ten miles off the coast of New Hampshire working odd jobs for a resort. I sometimes attribute those days out there in the sea as to when I started to go crazy, that was a fear of mine for a long time, that I was losing it. Now it doesn't scare me so much, it kind of keeps me going. Since I left Vermont it has been a lot of travel, living in places for short periods of time but never really feeling settled. I dropped out of college a few times before I actually finished. I traveled with a group of artists for many years; all of us in houses together in Seattle, Boston, and on an island off the coast of New Hampshire. The photographs from those years became *Still, Not Dead*, the book that 9:37 helped me publish. After that was all finished I randomly moved to Belgrade, Serbia for a few months, and then after that moved right to NYC where I am now. During this whole time I was setting up café shows and doing some small gallery work with my photography, but the majority of it ended up being published online.

Michael Powsner, Ira, VT 2006



In 1998 I started interrupt art productions which has become a large part of the work I do. Interrupt is a web based hub for artists. A community that I saw developing and wanted to help cultivate. I was working and traveling with all these artists who used all different mediums and it made sense to me that we should all be linked together.

I started building web galleries for these artists I had met and whose work I liked. I did that for several years and more and more artists started to ask me to join. Recently I have begun setting up shows in New York City for these artists which has been a really cool experience to bring these people together for a physical event.

What other work are you involved with?

Right now I work in the fashion industry. It gives me enough time to work on my own stuff and still be able to afford to live in the city. It is also interesting to see someone use photography in a similar but entirely different manner than I do, and in the end I learn a lot watching how they shoot and light their sets.

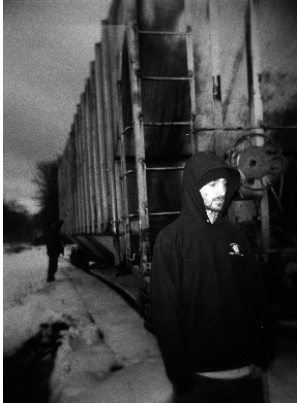
Do you feel as though you are succeeding in following your vision?

I don't really know what counts as success, I think some people think I am more successful than I feel I am. It is all relative to who you are and what you want out of this. I would like to find a way for these visions to sustain me. If I can figure out a way to travel and shoot what I want and not to have to work for anyone else ever again I will be happy. Of course I know kids who are doing that now, riding trains around the country with cameras doing what they want all the time. Maybe they are my idea of successful because they have completely let go of all societal expectations and are living art.

What are some of the themes you have intentionally been working with?

There are certain people or groups of people that keep showing up in my work. I have been photographing one couple, Mandy and David Lamb, for almost 8 years now. I also photograph my younger brother a lot. He and I spent a lot of time traveling and living together over the past years and

Austin Kennedy, Bethel, VT 2006



Jennifer Myers, Chester, NJ 2005



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The Charles River, Boston, MA 2004



Jon Horowitz, Star Island, NH 2003



he looks like a darker version of me. When I would tell a story I would often use his image to represent my place. Now that I think about it, it's kind of a weird thing to do, because he was a character in those stories as well, so maybe I was simply morphing us together, thinking of taking the best of both of us to make one. Sometimes I get confused and think that he and I were twins. That doesn't make any sense, does it?

Do you feel a social responsibility in doing your work?

Herman Hesse once wrote that 'the only true path a man had in life was to find the way to himself.' I think that makes the most sense to me out of everything I have ever been told. The world is a pretty fucked up place right now, but I don't think that you can force someone to change by protest or coercion. To me self revolutionary theory is more interesting than anything else. When I was working on *Still, Not Dead* I spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of life the story portrayed and I hoped that people would be inspired by that life to choose a path separate from the one that they were being bred into. I think I referred to it once as a blueprint for a life lived, or of value.

Do the stories you tell through your art reflect your personal life or local stories?

They are all the same thing to me. How you choose to live your life is just as important as what you create, sometimes it is more interesting. When I go back and study the artists that came before me of course I am drawn to their work at first, but what really interests me is the daily activities. What their lives were like, what their houses looked like, what they did when they went out at night.

How does your work relate to the current state of our culture?

I would kind of like to think not at all. I would like to think that it is in opposition to our current culture, which most of the time I just find myself sadly shaking my head at. It all seems so hollow and empty.

How did you get involved with 9:37?

In 1996 I was at an Avail show at Club Toast in Burlington, VT and I took this picture of a young curly haired kid crawling on top of everyone trying to reach the microphone to sing along during the show. I didn't think much of it, but years later in college I was working on a zine (which would eventually become interrupt art productions,) with Joe Shafer and he saw that picture and freaked out. It was a picture of one of his best friends from Rutland, Vermont; Mike Powsner. I feel like from there our worlds just kind of came together. I would go to parties at Joe's place and there was always this steady stream of Vermont kids coming down and crashing on his floor. I got to know the 9:37 crew bit by bit. We would skate around at night taking pictures or go hiking out in the woods. I left a lot to travel and would sometimes hit those kids up for places to stay as I wandered around the country. When I returned from one of my trips I had this project called 'Kids, Life Sucks' that 9:37 showed at the Massive in 2001. Then I left, travelled some more and came back with *Still, Not Dead* which showed at the Massive in 2005. Joe of 9:37 has always kind of looked out for me in a weird way, letting me sleep in his closet for months on end when I am broke, or loaning me some cash to help me put out a project that I have been working on. Since moving to New York City, 9:37 and interrupt have started working a lot closer together, helping promote each others projects.

What does 9:37 mean to you?

Mostly it is the Five Town Massive. It is great to have a bunch of artists return home or come visit from all over and invade small town Vermont. I look forward to wandering down main street and running into a bunch of crazy kids, or sitting in the one bar in town when the sun sets, people huddled together around emptied glasses planning the next take over. These things just get me excited to be alive and working on projects.

What has been your contribution to 9:37?

Not sure if this qualifies as my contribution to 9:37 or 9:37's contribution to my work, but a few years ago 9:37 helped me publish my

first book of photography. I was pretty broke at the time and trying to pull it all together on my own and they jumped in and offered to help out. That was pretty cool of them, and I think they were psyched to be part of the project and have it be a collaborative release between interrupt and 9:37.

What does it mean to you that you and the 9:37 collective came from Vermont?

I like that we are all country kids, I think that gives us a good foundation to build from. I like the fact that I didn't have a television for most of my childhood, and spent every day outside, it does good things for your

development. I think cities in the most part are really unhealthy places and I am glad that I grew up closer to nature. I know that growing up I couldn't wait to leave, which is why I think it's great what 9:37 does with the Massive; going back and sharing something with the communities we came from, giving the kids who might feel trapped like we did something to be inspired by. To show that you can do something besides become a burn out, which I think a lot of the artists we know walk that line for awhile before making something productive with their time.



Mikael's work can be viewed online at the following sites:  
[mikaelkennedy.com](http://mikaelkennedy.com)  
[mikaelkennedy.blogspot.com](http://mikaelkennedy.blogspot.com)  
[downorout.blogspot.com](http://downorout.blogspot.com)  
[interruptart.com](http://interruptart.com)

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