Questions for Matthew Holler from Mark Ormond – Exhibition Curator   November 2016

MO: At what age did photography begin to interest you?

MH: When I was about 9 or 10 I would grab my parent's 35mm and run off with it, finally my mom saw potential and bought me my own camera to work with. I photographed birds, landscapes, a lot of things in nature interested me. It wasn't until my senior year of high school that I became interested in fashion and portraiture. I loved photographing my friends in fashion or narrative situations. My art teacher at the time never considered photography to be a true art form so he didn't support it. I think it made me try harder to prove that it could be.

MO: When did you first consider it as a career?

MH: This is silly, but watching America's Next Top Model in high school (which was so popular then) was incredibly inspiring. It made me realize that this thing I really enjoyed had an entire industry behind it full of artists and creatives. From there, I started researching commercial fashion photographers that were shooting advertisements for some of my favorite brands like Dolce & Gabbana, Versace, Balmain, Burberry. Mostly European designers that had an exotic flair to their advertising.

MO: When you can choose whatever you want what draws you to your subject matter?

MH: Typically when I'm working on a personal project I'm influenced by a particular model or location. Sometimes even a garment or piece of jewelry. From there I form my team with hair/makeup artists, fashion stylists, etc. I ask them to weigh in and we collaborate on all aspects moving forward.

MO: What do you try to achieve in your fashion photography?

MH: I try to make my fashion work as convincing as possible. I want my audience to feel like they are part of the action. I tend to create a character for my subject, a narrative for them to walk into. My subjects are a subtle femme fatale, usually strong women that have an air of sophistication. I think that can be very empowering for the viewer.

MO: How do you approach portrait photography?

MH: My portrait work is something that evolved from fashion experiences. So I tend to handle them in a similar way. I believe that portraits should be an accurate depiction of the subject, but maybe something a little more grand. Though I sometimes photograph a subject in their environment, I really enjoy bringing them into the studio. There's something psychological about taking someone out of their environment, out of any physical context, and placing them in a box. I ask a series of questions about them. "Where are you from?" "What do you do?" I try to find a passion point. That can be anything from their career to a new puppy. Trust is a huge component in a digital era. Everyone wants to make sure they say the right things, look the right way, knowing your image represents your brand. Once you can solidify their trust, they open up to you in some really beautiful ways.

MO: What are some of the challenges of product photography?

MH: Metallics! Especially rounded metallics. They are the bane of the technical process. Outside of that, product work can be really fun! I always joke "…and they don't talk back!" However I don't shoot product in a traditional sense. I tend to steer toward product stories or narratives. A collection of items that represent a particular person or personality. Sometime's I draw inspiration from artists like Mapplethorpe or Manray and photograph items such as handbags, shoes or flowers as if they are fine art. Literally putting them on a pedestal. There's a bit of irony in taking an every day object out of the real world and giving it it's own spotlight.

MO: Please describe your process.

MH: My process varies depending on the project. It may start with an idea, a location, an item, or a human subject. Then I build a team of artists to work with me. If there's a client involved, I discuss that with the client and follow their guidelines. After the shoot is completed, I narrow down the thousands of images we shot to a smaller batch and send those off to the client for the final say. From there, I handle the post work and retouching and send them to the client for final approval. Once approved, then printed, the team takes the pleasure in sharing them on social media!

MO: How has it evolved since you left Ringling?

MH: My work has definitely becoming more cohesive and polished. My characters have taken on some similar personalities, and the South Florida warmth can be seen in almost all of my work. When I started out, I wanted my photos to be more European in style; Dark, more creative. But working in Florida, my style became warm and bright and glossy. Something that my New York clients are also very fond of.

MO: Describe the most important aspects that define a successful photograph for you.

MH: I think a successful photograph is comprised of the same things most successful art is. It should have a strong composition, careful attention to line and form, color and space. A successful story or collection of work should be cohesive. For my work, I think fly-away hairs and any distractions on the skin, garment or background should be handled in post to make the image as clean as possible. It's about escaping reality, and that's what perfection can be.

MO: What was the most important thing you learned at Ringling?

MH: This is a difficult question to answer because there wasn't just one important thing that I learned. I learned a variety of things that, together, contributed to how I work today. When I was studying at Ringling, they still had the Core program which allowed me to experience other majors. I had the opportunity to work with both digital aspects and physical things. Figure drawing taught me anatomy, so I could retouch properly. Art history gave me compositions and references that I use daily in my work. The collaboration and friendships that I made with my

professors in the photo department was probably the most rewarding experience though. Their critiques made me think about the shallow direction of my aesthetically charged work in ways that I never had before. I started implementing narrative's at that point which really made my style grow.

MO: Where do you see yourself in ten years?

MH: My goal for the next ten years is to keep growing and building on what I've created as a business. I would hope for bigger clients, better known talent and subjects, a more international following and international clients. Most importantly, I want my work and my style to grow and become stronger. So there really isn't a ten year mark that I can see myself at. I think photography is one of those fields with constant learning and improvements to be made in all aspects of the career.