

**Kindred: Recent Photographs by Noelle McCleaf**  
**October 16 through December 14, 2018**

Mark Ormond talks with Noelle McCleaf about her work and her upcoming exhibition at in the Basch Gallery at Ringling College of Art and Design

*MO: What or who inspires your work?*

NMcC: The strongest sources of inspiration for my work are memory and ancestry, storytelling, and the landscape.

My first long term project, *Convergence*, involved creating photographs from childhood narratives. I wrote flash fictions that were derived from the turbulent transition from child to adult, and elements of those fictions were transformed into photographs.

After *Convergence*, I began photographing with my mother in the landscape of South Florida. During this time I was still living in Minnesota, so we would meet and recall past experiences, share family stories, and make images together in the landscape. The color in my work became much more saturated, the light was drastically different, and family artifacts become part of the story. This series became *A Bee in Her Bonnet*, a story of a mother and daughter reuniting and reminiscing (sometimes quirkily so) within the southern landscape.

After *A Bee in Her Bonnet* I wanted to focus on a different relationship, and the closest relationship that I was very interested in documenting was my mother and her best friend (*Evie Lou and Laura Jane*). They are both amazing storytellers who share a strong connection to each other and to the natural world—two things that I am very inspired by (female relationships and ecology.)

*MO: What specifically excited or motivates you about the two bodies of work in this exhibition that will be on view at Ringling College October 12<sup>th</sup> through December 14<sup>th</sup>?*

NMcC: Seeing your work in a finalized format like an exhibition helps you grow as an artist and consider where you've come from and where your work is going.

I began working on *Evie Lou and Laura Jane* five years ago, and I'm still thinking about how the work would be best shown, edited and sequenced. It's an ongoing process that helps you navigate how you will approach future projects.

I'm also always interested to see how the work will be viewed and interpreted by the audience. You never know when someone will notice something in one of your images that will alter your point of view.

*MO: In the exhibition visitors are going to be able to read excerpts of a conversation between your mother and her friend who are subjects of your photographs. Would you please talk about the relationship between Evie Lou and Laura Jane?*

NMcC: Evie Lou is my mother, and Laura Jane is her best friend. Evie Lou is a healer, a spiritualist, and a survivalist. Laura Jane is a medical intuitive and a hospice nurse from the Blackfoot tribe. They share a common passion of service to the Earth and they represent strong and confident women in their older age. The text in the exhibition will include excerpts from interviews I conducted containing their personal philosophies.

*MO: Your images are so rich in material both natural and man-made. Could you briefly discuss your process in setting up a shoot?*

NMcC: Some of my images are constructed and some are found. In *A Bee in Her Bonnet* I was doing a lot of staging and constructing scenes to create a narrative. In *Evie Lou and Laura Jane* it is a mix of the two. Sometimes things are photographed as they are, and other times they are recreated from a story or idea. I often sketch out thumbnails or make notes of pictures I want to create. Sometimes the images are similar to my original idea, and sometimes they are totally different. However, I do find it important to brainstorm beforehand, as this helps more ideas come to the surface. Interviews and/or stories can also aid in developing ideas for images.

*MO: How did you come up with the format of your work...the scale and the dimensions?*

NMcC: Most of my work for large-scale projects is shot on medium format film and scanned on an Imacon scanner. I still shoot with film because I enjoy the quality of the film—the grain, the color, and the sharpness of the lens. The prints are then output on an inkjet printer. I prefer exhibiting the images larger to show the high quality of the film negative.

*MO: How do you see the role of the viewer in your work?*

NMcC: I find that speaking with viewers and having your work critiqued by others is an integral part of an artist's growth. Viewers will see things that you may have never noticed, recommend other artists to look at, share books to read, or share personal stories that your images may remind them of.

*MO: What do you desire the visitor to walk away with?*

NMcC: I would like viewers to be inspired by the stories in my photographs, and be compelled to listen to the stories of the women in their lives—to share them, to record them, and to remember them.