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North Carolina street photographers convening on Facebook

By Michael J. Solender

PUBLISHED IN: ARTS ALIVE

When we see a homeless guy on the street, or a cool car or a musician, most of us may pause for a moment and then just walk on by. But there are some fellow Charlotteans who are stopping – and jumping into action.

They're photo-anthropologists, chronicling life on the street.

Jonathan Webber, a legal proofreader for an uptown Charlotte law firm, began sharing his work online almost two years ago with other street photography enthusiasts and formed the Facebook group [North Carolina Street Photography](http://www.facebook.com/NorthCarolinaStreetPhotography) shortly after that.

The goal of the group is to share work, ideas and commentary on an area of photography and subject matter that carries its own type of aesthetic and beauty. More than 150 members from across the state – including Greensboro, Hendersonville, Asheville and Raleigh – have joined and share their photos online. With no cost to join and no requirements other than an interest in street photography, the membership includes professional portraitists, photo-journalists, wedding photographers and those simply interested in admiring the work that gets posted online.

“I think of street photography as the meeting of the lens and subject for an instant in an urban setting,” said Webber, 46, who lives in east Charlotte. “There is a sense of candidness or illumination that is in the essence of good street photographs. For me, it’s a sense of reality.”

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North Carolina Street Photography:
[www.facebook.com/North Carolina Street Photography](http://www.facebook.com/NorthCarolinaStreetPhotography).

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Photographer Mert Jones, 35, of Charlotte's Cotswold neighborhood has been a member of the group since its inception.

"I love the opportunity to share work with others and find out what is behind their process," said Jones. "Shooting in the street is paying attention to what's going on all around you and noticing actions or settings that others may not even pay attention to. Great Street photographs are not scripted, they simply happen."

Webber said daily "perambulations" get him away from the all-too-often catered lunches at work, which saw him gain 15 pounds, and out searching for just the right shot. He can be seen most days at lunchtime, camera slung low over his shoulder on the hunt for candid shots that tell a story and speak to a moment in time that might otherwise become lost.

One favorite shot of Webber's is a collaboration he did with his late father, Robert, a man who made his living as a photographer and Webber's mentor and source of inspiration.

In a photo titled "The pink girl" a child, no more than 3 years old, stands inside a giant sculpture/fountain depicting three otherworldly sea creatures, out of the water and perched on their tails, towering 12 feet over the little girl. The photo, except for the little girl, is in black and white. The girl wears a bright pink coat and points upward in awe at one of the stone fish capturing her attention.

The popular sculpture, "Fish Fountain" by Carolyn Braaksma, is housed on The Green on South Tryon Street uptown, and the image is one of innocence, joy and delight.

Supporting The Light Factory

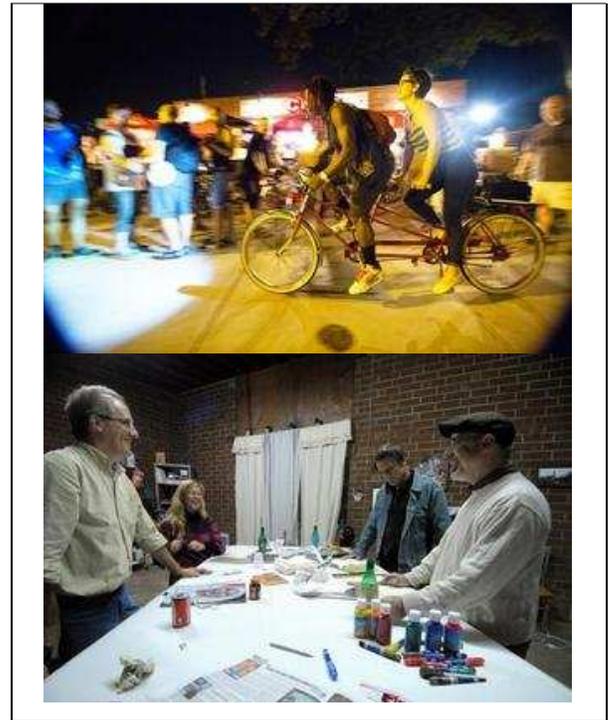
Many members of the group overlap with Charlotte's re-emerging Light Factory, the struggling museum, resource center and community advocate for photography. Recent online discussion has led to face-to-face gatherings of the street photography group that floated the idea of developing a coffee-table book of street photography with the proceeds going to support The Light Factory.

"They are enthusiastic about supporting the project," said Christina Welsh, 45, a professional photographer and member of The Light Factory and the North Carolina Street Photography Facebook group.

Webber said the project has begun to pick up steam, with more than a dozen photographers reaching out to him with submissions or inquiries.

Webber said he hopes to have submissions by late spring. "We're hopeful we'll be able to begin production then and have available for the holidays at year end, that's our plan."

Welsh said she finds beauty in street photographs that represent a "purer side" of our environment. "I look at buildings that may be in decay," said Welsh, "not from a negative standpoint but in trying to capture an element that may be overlooked or something that might be missed."



Some of Welsh’s most striking photographs feature street people who collect scrap metal in abandoned shopping carts. The photos capture an element of struggle as her subjects are looking to sell the scrap as perhaps their primary source of income. There is grittiness and direct realism found in her work, a quality Welsh refers to as anything but “composed.”

“There is beauty even in darkness,” said Welsh. “When the photos are authentic, they definitely pique my interest.”



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