



Kevin J. Mellis, *Portraits Not Yet Taken* (Installation View), 2015

Wet plate collodion photography, 24 x 24" x 3 mm black glass squares. MFA thesis exhibition, *My Extended Family*, University of Calgary, 2015. Personal collection of the artist.



Kevin J. Mellis, *Portraits Not Yet Taken* (Detail), 2015

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Artist Statement

After graduating from the Vancouver Institute of Media Arts in March 2012, as a Canadian, large format photographer and visual artist, I started creating photographs as an art form. I learned photography using a digital camera. More recently, I have shifted to an analog process (using exclusively, a large format view camera). All of my work is created in black and white film and with the wet plate collodion process (See photos One and Two, for examples). I use this historical medium because it allows me to drastically slow down the artistic process, and furthermore, it promotes more comprehensive artistic research. My motivation stems from a profound need to connect more deeply with the process and subjects. My artistic intention is to create images, predominately portraits and landscapes, which evoke a deep sense of emotionality and timeless sensibility.

My artistic work is heavily influenced by my concurrent profession as, a medical social worker, on the critical care team, at the Foothills Hospital in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. I work with individuals and their respective families who are often in crises. The crises stem from sudden and unexpected illnesses and physical traumas (eg. car accidents, shootings, and stabbings). Sadly, such incidences lead frequently, to severe injury or death. I have been a witness to thousands of deaths since 2007 when I first started working on the trauma team at the Hospital. I support each family member through such major life changing moments.

My visual art reflects the considerable artistic influences of great master photographers, such as, Sally Mann, Keith Carter and Sebastião Salgado. All of whom create works that are highly introspective. In turn, as a visual artist, I seek to create images that engage the viewer. My work offers time and space for reflection, contemplation, and solitude.

In *Portraits Not Yet Taken*, I mounted ten separate large pieces of 24 x 24" black squares on the wall in a straight horizontal line, parallel to the ground, separated by approximately 20". By placing three separate portraits on the left, with the senior elder being at the front, and then placing seven pieces of glass without portraits to the right, I deliberately, drew attention not only to the portraits themselves, but as importantly, to their absences. The power of the representational portraits are unmistakable. Ironically, that power, seems to resonate far more, when the portraits are missing. Simply put, not having a number of portraits on the wall, not only draws the viewer's attention to the portrait itself, but as importantly, it highlights the materiality of the substrate of the portraits---the black glass. The black glass is quite reflective. It allows viewers to see a moving reflection of themselves. The empty glass plates are representative also, of the portrait work that I still need to do as an artist.