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Callie Lipkin

By Louisa J. Curtis



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First of all, I would like to thank Barbara Goldman for inviting me to write for the PhotoServe Surveillance section and I look forward to bringing you some of my contemplations, conversations and insights in the ChatterCorner each month. This month we bring you, Chicago-based photographer [Callie Lipkin](#) who, for the third year in a row, will be hosting her annual "burlesque" party this spring. What began as a reward and a jolly good reason to celebrate, completion and renovations to her new studio, has turned into a major happening and a "hot" annual ticket in the Windy City! So who gets invited - pretty much anyone who has ever worked with her, including models, stylists, assistants, art buyers and clients alike. And of course, there will be burlesque dancers performing throughout the evening, along with some other surprise Vaudevillian acts. A couple of last year's performers included a woman who danced with snakes and another who can apparently work up to 35 Hula Hoops and strip at the same time! Impressive!

And why burlesque, you might ask? Well, one of Callie's long-time make-up artists is also a burlesque dancer, and as the friendship evolved Callie began shooting burlesque. She admits, *"Once I did the 1st shoot, I was totally hooked and there was no turning back! A recurring theme in my work and in my life is challenging traditional gender roles - I am endlessly fascinated with the differences between men and women, why we are different and burlesque is a very profound metaphor for me personally around this issue."* One of Callie's photographic passions is to develop intimacy with her subjects, and by shooting the same group of women over a period of time, it has built a certain level of trust, so the work gets better and better. The models are now so comfortable with her that they give her more each time they work together. This is one of the reasons I encourage photographers to shoot personal work. It not only feeds the soul, but it can also lead you to places and people you might not have expected or anticipated in the first place. And for Callie, the burlesque is not just a literal documentation of these women and what they do, it is a metaphor for how she feels about women, and how they are viewed and treated in our society. This personal project has allowed her to express the more serious side of her thought process, yet still maintaining and expressing herself in a style that is full of joyful charm and wit.

For this year's party, Callie stepped it up a notch by producing and shooting a "video invite" which, not surprisingly, received almost 30 RSVP's within the first few hours of being sent out! And, as a testament to both her personality and professionalism, when Callie put out the call for extras to be a part of the video invitation, there was no shortage of willing volunteers. People love to work with her, and for good reason. Sure, they know it's a personal project and they won't get paid for their time, but they also know they will have lots of fun and better still, they will be a part of some great imagery. One of my photographer friends and I always joke about how "production is simply a matter of food and chairs" so as long as you feed people, take good care of them and show your appreciation for their contribution (no matter how small) they will deliver for you. Callie says, *"My appreciation of the subjects defines everything about my shoots - I make sure their time is not wasted, make sure they are fed and happy. That is the only way for me to get genuine moments so I do everything I can to make sure they are taken care of. I am endlessly amazed at people's generosity in helping make my personal work possible."*

I was first introduced to Callie Lipkin a couple of years ago when she hired me to prepare some mailing lists for her through Agency Access and we did some consulting together. We had never actually met but we had a great rapport and I always enjoyed our sessions. I say we never met, but as fate would have it, while I was in the process of preparing this article, Callie contacted me last-minute to say she and her husband Robert would be in New York for three days. We talked non-stop and laughed our way through the entire meal. Her youthful looks can be deceiving though and mask a more serious and mature photographer who has already been in business for 10 years now and is no longer that "new kid on the block."

When I interviewed her, I asked her to give me three words that best describe her creative style - and she gave me *"intellectual"* *"compassionate"* and *"energetic"* - all very fitting once you start to know both her and her work. Intellectual because Callie uses photography to explore her bold, numerous and never-ending ideas which help to shape herself both as an artist and as a person - Compassionate because Callie truly cares about the human condition and admires anyone who goes against the status quo in order to exact change in society - Energetic because she is just that, full of energy!

I asked Callie how her early years as a photojournalist have helped her advertising career and she said, *"My days as a photojournalist taught me everything about people and making pictures and time management. I never worked with models, people were always donating their time to be in a story or let me take their picture so I learned to be extremely sensitive and grateful to my subjects... I can't say enough about the photojournalism experience. Myself and my camera is all I had for many years and I witnessed all kinds of peak moments in peoples lives - babies being born, championship titles being won, political victory and defeat, cancer survivors, people who have had their homes destroyed by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires, extreme poverty and illness. Not much fazes me when things go wrong on advertising shoots; chances are I have seen worse situations."*

Callie is certainly a class act with a delightful sense of humor and an infectious energy. One look at her Web site and you can see the personality oozing from the images. And that's what you want - you want your personality to come through the work. There is a levity and movement evident in Callie's work, no matter whom she is photographing and her commercial and corporate work contains the same vitality and zest for life as can be seen in her personal burlesque imagery. Though less risque we still feel the fun and energy from the more commercial lifestyle imagery she captures for her clients.

Some months back, Callie called me for a consultation to talk about a large estimate she was preparing. She felt pretty secure with her numbers so what we discussed was how to approach the bidding process, what kinds of questions to ask and how to ask them. They say there is no such thing as a stupid question, and I believe it is possible to find a way to ask questions that demonstrate you are thinking intelligently, as opposed to thinking that you are simply sounding stupid. Callie and her husband had produced large shoots before but not on this scale, and for multiple cities, so she needed to show she was thinking about a variety of scenarios and could confidently offer the client different options and think on her feet. And, as a Pisces (which rules the feet), Callie is certainly someone who thinks on her feet, especially when it comes to her work, and drawing upon her photojournalism training, which gives her the ability to problem solve on the spot.

Sometimes consulting isn't always about the images and the Web site; instead it might simply require listening, and some common-sense thinking and feedback, or maybe some supportive handholding. We talked about what to do if she was awarded the job and we joked that if she did get it, I would be expecting some fabulous thank-you gift! And true to her word, when she did indeed land the AT&T job, she contacted me right away and a very nice bottle of champagne and a box of Godiva chocolates were promptly delivered to my doorstep. Like I said before, she's a class act.

And finally, when asked, *"If I was handing you an Oscar for Photography, who would you be thanking in your acceptance speech?"* Callie responded, *"My husband, first and foremost, who works with me full time and gets dragged into all kinds of insane situations with very little compensation. Also, everyone I have ever worked with, all my crews and talent, great clients... my work is not created solely by me; it is only possible through the trust of all these people who are willing to come help make my visions come to life. Without them my photos would just be well lit empty spaces."* To see more of Callie Lipkin's work, go to www.callielipkin.com.

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