

AMERICAN CONNECTION

susanburnstine.com

While in Central Park one evening, **Sandy Alpert** happened upon hundreds of people doing the tango. The intimacy of it fascinated and challenged her and she knew she had to explore it in pictures. Susan Burnstine reports.



All images © Sandy Alpert

While attending Fotofest in Houston last spring, I had the good fortune to meet New York City based photographer Sandy Alpert, whose timeless, seductive photographs of tango dancers capture deeply intimate moments between strangers.

Perhaps what's most interesting about this series is that through the act of creating such emotionally raw images, Alpert experienced an emotional catharsis which allowed her to explore her own fear and longing for intimacy.

Alpert worked as a singer-songwriter for 20 years, but she always had a great love for photography. She lived in Los

Angeles where she wrote what she refers to as 'formula songs' for five years, but burned out and lost her passion for songwriting. It was during that time that she yearned for a new creative outlet then turned to photography and took a black & white photography class at the International Center for Photography in 1993. As she needed to make a living, she accepted a corporate job and spent weekends shooting or printing in the darkroom.

In 1996 Alpert began shooting her first personal series, *Ghosts Who Now Dance*, as a means to express her feelings of isolation, anger and loss in a healthy way rather than turning it inward on herself. She took a break from the series following 9/11 since

she felt New York had changed significantly. She admits that she felt the series was just too close to her, so she left it unrealised until she revisited the work in 2009.

'As I began to reflect upon those images,' she says, 'I was able to see a sense of grace where there was once anger. I saw fluidity. I saw a silent rhythm. I saw ghosts who now dance. The realisation of that work was, in itself, an act of forgiveness. Forgiveness of others and of myself.'

During the summer of 2013 Alpert and a friend took a walk through Central Park on a hot Saturday night and became enchanted by tango music in the distance. They walked toward the music and happened upon a milonga beneath a statue of

William Shakespeare where she saw hundreds of people doing the tango.

She recalls, 'I was fascinated by the angles and lines and forms created by the dancers' arms and legs and bodies, lit only by the street lamps that line the paths and the soft glow of moonlight.'

As the night wore on, Alpert approached one of the men and asked him if he could explain why he tangoed. He responded, 'To hold a woman. Just to hold a woman.' It was then that Alpert realised many of the dancers didn't know one another and that realisation compelled her to understand how they'd allow themselves to be touched, embraced and adored by a stranger.



She says, 'This soon led me to question my own feelings about intimacy – my fear of it, my longing for it.' And that question subsequently made her then question why she ran from intimacy when it was within reach.

Alpert has continued to photograph dancers throughout New York City and Buenos Aires since that night in 2013. Initially, she shot all her tango images with the Nikon N90s she purchased in 1995. But now she uses a Nikon F100, which she bought to replace her N90s when it broke during a trip to Argentina. Her film of choice is Ilford Delta 3200 and she frequently shoots it at ISO 5000 when the lighting is dim.

Alpert's exhibition prints are exquisite silver gelatin prints, on Ilford Multigrade FB Classic Matt paper, and selenium toned. She develops the prints in Dektol 1:1 and uses a combination of handheld manipulation techniques, which makes each print unique.

Currently, Alpert continues to work on her tango series, which she's entitled *The Vertical Expression of Horizontal Desire*, and she expects it may take another year or two before it's complete. When people ask her how she'll know when the series

is finished, she responds, 'When I'm able to tango, I'll know it's done.' This month her work is featured in a two-person show

with Arthur Griffin at the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, Massachusetts. sandyalpert.com

EXHIBITIONS
USA

BRONX

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

Until 25 September

Art AIDS America

Features Robert Mapplethorpe, Annie Leibovitz and more

bronxmuseum.org

BROOKLYN

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Until 8 January, 2017

Who Shot Sports: A Photographic History, 1843 to the Present

Features Richard Avedon, David Burnett, Rich Clarkson and more

brooklynmuseum.org

DENVER

DENVER ART MUSEUM

Until 8 January

On Desert Time: Timothy H O'Sullivan and William H Bell

denverartmuseum.org

NORFOLK

CHRYSLER MUSEUM OF ART

Until 30 October

Women and the Civil Rights Movement

Features Declan Haun, Ernest Withers and more

chrysler.org

PORTLAND

BLUE SKY GALLERY

Until 31 September

Jose Diniz: Selected Works and Danila Tkachenko: Escape

blueskygallery.com

SANTA FE

VERVE GALLERY

OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Until 26 November

Louviere & Vanessa Thomas Kellner

vervegallery.com

WASHINGTON DC

ARTHUR SACKLER GALLERY

AT THE SMITHSONIAN'S MUSEUM OF ASIAN ART

Until 18 September

Ahmed Mater: Symbolic Cities

asia.si.edu