



## Separate But Together: Clarissa Bonet & Natalie Krick on Collaboration

*By Christina Nafziger*

Collaboration can prove to be difficult in any arena, as it usually involves transforming your original idea to mesh better with your collaborator's vision so that everyone has a say in the end result. This back and forth can especially be challenging when it comes to something like art, a process that is often emotional and personal.

In a time when social distancing is defining every aspect of life, artists Natalie Krick and Clarissa Bonet are taking this opportunity to create new work together—while separate. Natalie Krick lives in Seattle, while Clarissa Bonet lives across the country in Chicago. Despite the barriers, these artists have taken advantage of technology like Zoom to exchange ideas, while also utilizing old-school methods such as physical mailing to share what they're working on.





Natalie Krick's photographic portraits exhibit saturated, glossy colors that give the work a feel that combines surreal imagery with fashion editorials. In the works included in her recent exhibition *Rhymes of Confusion* at SF Camerawork in San Francisco, Natalie photographs members of her family and turns the notion of the "family portrait" on its head. Her photos are not attempting to document the family member's likeness, but instead capture the nuances of their relationships to each other. Natalie says, "Photography manuals provide instructions on how to take good pictures. Rules for the technical aspects of the camera, rules for composition, rules for when photographs should be made - on holidays, weddings, graduations, birthdays, etc. Traditionally a family photograph would strive to produce a faithful representation of a loved one ... right? I photograph my family, but I am trying to do the opposite of that ... twisting together the layers of truth and artifice by playing with who is in front of the camera and physically layering photographs together." Her portraits continue to challenge the cultural and social roles of photography and pushes it into new territory.

Clarissa Bonet also challenges the boundaries of photography, but in a way that manipulates space and light. In her series *City Space*, people are shown on city streets often transformed by the shadows cast by the buildings that surround them, changed by the walls that close them within the space. These works cleverly reveal the contradictory feeling of being alone in a crowd as well as the anxiety of feeling isolated in a place that is full of people: the urban city. Interested in interpreting the pedestrian experience in the urban landscape, Clarissa explains, "Making a photograph that references an experience, rather than illustrating an action, can be a challenge; they are very different things. So I utilize the tools of photography, such as light and shadow, color, and camera angle, to heighten the mundane and to access the psychological tension of the pedestrian experience."

Both photographers draw motivation from each other's similarities and differences to push themselves and their work during the collaboration. Their finished piece will be part of the exhibition "Photography & \_\_\_\_\_" at Catherine Edelman Gallery in Chicago, a show that will feature unique works created by over 30 pairs of artists.

In the spirit of teamwork and community, Natalie and Clarissa share with us their experiences virtually collaborating thousands of miles apart, while offering tips on how to navigate your own collaboration.







*Can you tell us about your practice as photographers and the type of work you strive to create?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** For the past 10 years my work has focused on the pedestrian experience of the urban space. I draw upon personal observations to create images that deconstruct the urban experience, looking at scale, pedestrianism, anonymity, public space, and anxiety. I'm interested in highlighting the small yet significant moments of life at the city's center.

**Natalie Krick:** My relationship with photography has been on the rocks for the past few years, but I've been working through my issues and now we're much happier together. Recently I've been trying to push against the limitations of the medium and the limitations I have imposed on myself. One of the elements that has remained consistent - I am striving to complicate visual pleasure - by making work that is alluring but not simply easy on the eyes.

*Before the world went into shut down and everyone began working from home, what were you working on?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Right as the lockdown order went into place, I was finishing up some new work along with a book mock-up and was about to start shooting for my City Space project again. I make the majority of my work spring through fall, when the weather is friendlier to working outside. Unfortunately, everything shut down just as the weather was getting to that stage. Working from home, I have not had access to my normal subject matter and have had to put a hold on many of the images I was planning to make. But I am trying to make the most of the situation, and have been using the time I've had outside of the collaboration I'm doing with Natalie to experiment with new avenues of making and new subject matter.

**Natalie Krick:** I was in an experimental phase and still am. I've been making new images and playing with how they will take shape - how they will become objects. I feel very lucky that I can mostly work from home, but I also have been working in the studio (while practicing social distancing of course) a few days a week.

*What inspired you to collaborate with each other? Do you feel there is any overlap in your work conceptually or aesthetically?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Natalie and I are good friends. We went to graduate school together and have kept in touch over the years, even though we live across country from each other now. Before the collaboration, we would connect every few months via Skype or Zoom, to share new work, and / or get feedback on exhibition layouts, book sequencing, artists statements, etc. During these sessions, we often talk about the medium of photography itself, and its limitations. We share similar ideas about the medium and had talked about doing a collaboration for years, but we were always busy with our own work.

When Catherine Edelman Gallery reached out to me about contributing to their summer show about collaborations, I knew right away I wanted to do something with Natalie. It was our chance to finally work together. Aesthetically, we both have very defined visual style, and utilize the language of photography, such as color and light, in explicit yet different ways.

**Natalie Krick:** Clarissa and I have been talking about collaborating FOR YEARS. I feel excited that we are finally getting around to it. I think our work overlaps in different ways. Our aesthetics are quite different but also similar in the way that we both work in a deliberate and stylized manner.

*“We both utilize many methods of image making and choose the one that best fits with our ideas.”*

*Can you tell us a bit about what you two are working on together (or, if it is too early to say, the direction it is going)?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Over the past few months, Natalie and I have been passing imagery back and forth. Each time we alter the image in at least one way: by cutting, collaging, digital manipulation, re-photographing, etc. We are interested in blurring the line between our own distinct visual voice as well as the constraints of the medium. Through our individual work, we both have encountered pushback about the way we construct imagery. We both utilize many methods of image making and choose the one that best fits with our ideas. We don't like to be confined to a narrow idea of what photography is. For me, it's malleable and messy and can be so many different things. So we are using this collaboration to challenge the viewer to consider both what they are looking at and what the medium of photography is and can do.

**Natalie Krick:** I can't speak for Clarissa, but I think we are both fueled by frustrations about photography. Our many conversations about what a photograph is and how photographs are perceived has influenced our collaboration. I think of this as a time for play--for branching out and trying something new. We have been sending photographs back and forth (online and in the mail). We alter and re-photograph the pictures before we pass them back. It's still really early but I am drawn to the layering of our images. In the flattened image, it becomes impossible to tease apart my photographs from hers.

*What has been your experience collaborating with another artist remotely? Do you think anything has been lost and/or gained from not being able to work with each other in person?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Before Covid-19, Natalie was coming to Chicago so we could work together on the project. As that is not an option now, we share the work we are doing independently as best we can. We've used many platforms to connect: email, zoom, Instagram, texting, and by phone--yes, that old fashioned way (haha). We've sent each other inspiring images on Instagram. We email each other essays and work-in-progress images. For feedback, we text each other images while we are working. Having the technology to connect with each other has been critical to the collaboration. Without it, this process would be much more challenging. For the past few weeks we have been sending each other images that we work on independently, then send back after adding to them each time. This back and forth method of working was developed because of the distance between us.

**Natalie Krick:** Clarissa and I live in different cities - she's in Chicago and I'm in Seattle. We've been sharing new work over Skype for years. Originally we had talked about making something together, physically. I thought I would make a trip out to Chicago. With the pandemic, we had no other choice but to collaborate remotely. I like this way of collaborating because we each have time to work on our own and it's nice to have that space.





*For many artists, the act of creating is often done alone in their studio—making art can be a very isolating experience. Do you find this to be true? How do you stay connected to the art community, especially during these times?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Yes and no. I work in a variety of different ways but I would say overall, I don't make my work in isolation, but rather on the streets. Sometimes surrounded by strangers and other times with a small crew of people who are working with me to create an image. I do spend a lot of time behind the computer editing or in the studio printing, which can be isolating at times. But I'm a bit of an introvert, so I'm ok with a little isolation. One of the reasons I stayed in Chicago after graduate school is the strong art community present and public programming available. I stay connected by going to openings, lectures, etc. There is always something to do in the city, although at the moment everything has been put on hold. It's been nice that content has been moving more online, so I still hold on to a sense of the community from a distance.

**Natalie Krick:** No! I am an introvert so being alone in the studio does not feel lonely or isolating - it's wonderful! Right now I'm really missing all my friends and family that I can't see and honestly zoom just doesn't cut it. Working with Clarissa on this project has helped us stay consistently connected which has been really nice.

*What tips can you offer those that desire to collaborate with another artist?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** Give yourself time to experiment and be open to working outside your normal working practice. Through the collaboration, Natalie has encouraged and challenged me to make work outside of my normal image-making parameters, to challenge the photographic object and boundaries of the frame by cutting, physically collaging, and re-photographing images. Prior to this project, I most likely would not have gone down this route. I've manipulated imagery in the computer or in-camera but not physically, which has been somewhat freeing.

**Natalie Krick:** I think it's helpful to approach a collaboration with an open mind and a sense of play.

*Do you have anything coming up that you'd like to share? How can someone engage with your art virtually right now?*

**Clarissa Bonet:** For anyone who is interested in learning more about my work, you can watch a recent studio visit I did with the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago for their series, Behind the Lens. You can find the episode on MoCP's website: [www.moep.org](http://www.moep.org).

**Natalie Krick:** Instagram! [@nattynattynatnatnat](https://www.instagram.com/nattynattynatnatnat)

