

Photographer Statement

Born guilty, with our first breath, we are raised to pay the bills and drive (a line from one of my early poems). So, what could be more fitting than to start a series while commuting to and from Burbank to the J. Paul Getty Museum everyday?

In December of 2007, I was grateful to be invited by my photographer friend Helen K. Garber to participate in a group project to document Southern California, with approximately fifty other photographers. The project started at midnight 2008. Each photographer was assigned to photograph his/her neighborhood. I wanted very badly to participate but was having difficulty figuring out how I was going to work this into my already busy schedule of juggling a full time job and my personal art photography projects. Then the idea came to me: I would capture a series during my two-hour-a-day commute to and from work. Especially in Los Angeles, it is fascinating to think about the thousands of people passing by me every day on the same roads, but to different destinations, each in their own capsulated world. Helen was keen on the idea and officially assigned my documentation area from Burbank to Brentwood.

The beginning of 2008 was about photographing what people were doing in their cars. I also explored various alternative means of transportation. I was enjoying this addition to my day and the curiosity of where this was taking me. Then in April of 2008, I woke up one morning, and my neck looked swollen. I went to the doctor, and she discovered a lump in my neck. Suddenly, I was spending my summer incorporating doctors' visits. In August of 2008, my entire thyroid was removed, because a nodule the size of a golf ball was found. Also, cells were found in the biopsy that could have developed into cancer but luckily did not. I mention this because it affected my outlook on life greatly, and everything that was my life changed. I remember coming home after my surgery and finding out I was going to be all right. I was sitting on my bed in a bit of a daze. I could barely hold my head up, and I was thinking *now what?* It was as if I were commuting through my own life, and everything had stopped. Then I saw my camera on the blanket box and picked it up. I had been knocked off track, and seeing my camera reminded me that I wanted to leave my mark on the world by showing others what I see, and who we are as human beings.

After I recovered, the first thing I did was look at what I had already captured. I noticed I had been photographing people in a basic portrait sense. I was capturing their facial expressions, or what they may be feeling, or (in hindsight) what *I* was feeling looking at them. Now, I also wanted to capture the relationship we have with ourselves from and in our cars (or own worlds). Too, I wanted to show things I saw from *my* car window as it framed the street. I found myself exploring topics that interested me: obsessive beauty regimens, stories of romance, electronic device use, stages of life, and various ways people adapt to the state of the economy. Sometimes it was just about finding something humorous and being able to laugh at the silliness that goes on.

It is important to mention that I set some ground rules for myself. After all, Oprah Winfrey was having people sign a "No Phone Zone Pledge" to stop texting and cell phoning while driving. (From what I see, it is an epidemic.) At the same time, there were the new California hands-free laws coming to fruition too. I needed a digital camera with lens stabilization, set on auto focus, and was not to put the camera to my eye while moving. I needed more knowledge, so I took a night class at Art Center College of Design, on transitioning from traditional photography to digital. Further, I would only shoot while crawling up to 5 miles per hour bumper to bumper, or if I had come to a complete stop. Most importantly, while moving, I must keep my eyes looking forward and have one hand on the wheel at all times. I was so serious about this, I traded in my standard Saturn for an automatic Hyundai, and so shifting was one less thing.

Just this year, while I continued to capture and started editing for printing, I suddenly began to see another dimension to my series: window reflections and motion, and how the juxtaposition of those things added to the emotional "other world" aspect of the series. I started seeing a relationship to my last project, the bus stop series "Life Stop 217," where I was also intrigued with reflections and windows as a vortex to more meaning. For example, someone starts to yawn. We think a person is yawning, but if captured at the right moment as the yawn begins, it could look like a scream. Hazy smoky window reflections and patterns over that add energy—like smoke, or flames. Or, someone looking dreamy waiting at a stoplight may have reflections looking like clouds over their head. Also, I am finding in the emotions of others, my own sympathies are reflected, which makes me feel less alone out there on the roads. I am connected for a brief moment to life through people. In a sense, I get to preserve other people's lives, as well as my own through the images.

Needless to say, this series has branched off on its own into something else. This exhibition is a mere sampling of thousands of images, edited down to approximately thirty. Any one of these images could branch off into a series of its own. For now, I will keep capturing for some years, for I am just getting into the meat of it.

- Lillian Wilson
August, 2010

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FROM THE CAR August 30 – October 8, 2010

Lillian Elaine Wilson

Reception: September 16, 2010 6-8 PM

Gallery Hours: Monday through Friday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, & by appt. Admission is free.

The Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography of The University of La Verne will present *From the Car*, a solo exhibition of photography by Los Angeles area based photographer Lillian Elaine Wilson.

Since Wilson's well-received black and white *Commuting* series appeared in 2008, her focus has evolved. In this new body of work, Wilson has utilized the parameters of her daily commute as a means of gathering and investigating subjects for her pictures. From behind the driver's wheel, she captures views of others who are unguarded, thus revealing personal stories. Wilson's views offer an unexpectedly human treatment of the often stressful and mundane routine of car travel. Framed by angles of side windows and windshields, these photographs become narrative fragments featuring people pulled from an impersonal bustling environment and given singular identities in their capsulated worlds.



Lillian Elaine Wilson received her Bachelor of Arts from Purdue University. In Los Angeles she has held such positions as The Kodak Professional Account Executive of Greater Los Angeles; the Technical Film Sales Supervisor at Calumet Photographic, Hollywood; and the Assistant Producer to Celebrity and Beauty Photographer, Charles William Bush; and then spent four years working in the Stock Imagery industry. Since 2005, she works for The J. Paul Getty Museum; there she is the Senior Staff Assistant to the Manager of Imaging Services. Additionally, in 2010, she was promoted to an Imaging Technician for an on-going project to digitally capture the museum's photographs collection.

Contour Photos (NYC) a part of Media Vast/ Getty Images, and Viewville represent Wilson's photography. Her art photographs have been published with; Autumn House Press, Barnwood Press, BkMk Press, B&W Magazine, The Dallas Observer, The Flying Island, Focus Fine Art Photography Magazine, Getty Publications, Helicon Nine Editions, Hot Water Press, The Long Beach Museum Foundation Report, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., Melcher Media Inc., The Pennsylvania Lawyer Magazine, Psychology Today Magazine, University of Arkansas Press, and Writers' Forum.