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Blueprints: Portraits of Lived-in Homes

Joana P Cardozo explains her unique way of creating portraits by using everyday objects in homes. Nilofer Khan explores her intricate process and her vision.

How would you define your home? Or rather, how does your living space define you? To answer this, Joana P Cardozo began creating very intricate photographs. Taking an unconventional view of portraying people through their living spaces in her series titled *Blueprints*, Cardozo goes into a veritable journey of discovering her characters. These images are like elaborate stories that only deal with

the present. You can only piece together what might happen next or what happened in the past, almost like putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

Developing Vision with Practise

A few years ago, Joana came to New York from São Paulo, as a visiting attorney. She realised that the best way to know the city was by photographing it. As luck would have it, the International Center

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for Photography (ICP) was close to her workplace, and soon, she enrolled there. However, when the time came to go back home, she began to have second thoughts. "When I was at the ICP, even though I was tired from my long day at work, I didn't want the class to end. I felt so involved in the discussions. It was then that I realised that I wanted to take up photography seriously, and by that I mean full-time," she says.

Later, she joined the one-year-long intensive course at the institute, once again, where she took to further refining her skills and vision. "I began to see photography quite differently then, This opportunity inspired me to go beyond eternalising a moment, and instead, work towards creating something that didn't exist before," she states.

When Objects Tell Stories

Coincidentally, while she was working on a project, Joana noticed the distinct shadow of a tulip vase created by the harsh light of the projector that she was working with. To experiment further, she brought in other objects in front of it and photographed them. "I didn't want to shoot the objects themselves because they don't matter, just the way the appearance of a person doesn't really matter. I am more concerned with what lies within, the underlying meaning," she says.

However, when she showed the prints to her mentors at ICP, she realised that something was missing. "The objects weren't strong, separately. What linked them together was the space they were in—my apartment. Hence, the floor plan

Blueprint 28—
Koslovs, 2018.

became the base,” she said. Shot in 2015, this ‘self-portrait’ became the first image of the ongoing series, *Blueprints*. “What we don’t realise is that our homes say a lot about our personalities, and I want to convey that. This is a map of someone’s personality,” she says.

Every Minute Detail Counts

Since then, Joana has photographed 26 different subjects in eight cities across America, Brazil, and Indonesia. These *Blueprints* are of friends, people she met, and even people she did not meet. For instance, she made a portrait of a

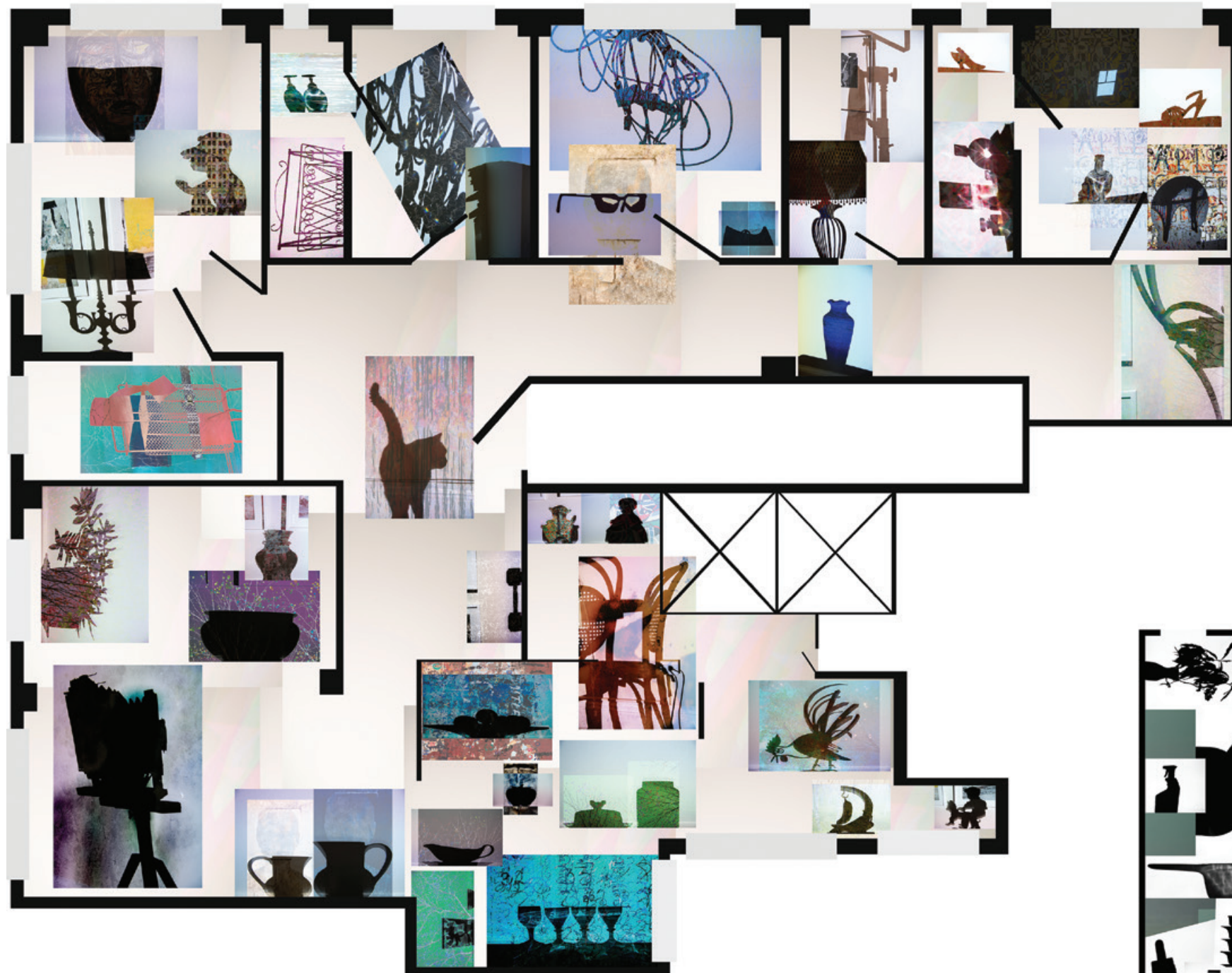
deceased person, and in one case, a fictional character. “I would go to my subject’s home or any space they consider their home. In the case of the fictional character and the deceased person, I didn’t photograph real shadows of objects. Instead, I used imagery from the internet and painted the objects black,” she says.

Throughout the series, these portraits become Joana’s interpretation of her subjects. In some cases, she even uses colours and patterns in the background of the shadows as well. “The colour is a result of their space. For instance, one subject had over 15,000 books in his house. ▶

📍 *Blueprint 02—Roy, 2015.*



📍 *Blueprint 26—Casa Rosa Amarela, 2018.*



➤ **Blueprint 22—**
Reinfelds, 2018.

So, I compiled the pictures of the book covers to create the backdrop," she explains.

Light and framing are two essential components in her pictures. If not the projector, she would make do with a flashlight or natural light to create the shadows. She uses a Hasselblad, the Nikon D750 or the D850, and a 24–70mm lens, and this gives her enough flexibility to compose her images. After this, she would proceed to design the floor plan digitally in Photoshop, and place the objects where she found them.

These portraits are fragments of reality, but they also leave room for imagination and interpretation. It's like a visual diary of the person. You gradually piece together who they are by mere observations. The top angle also gives one the feeling that they are waiting for the drama to unfold. "I believe that everyone is essentially the same and differences are external manifestations. Therein lies the joy and mystery of mapping blueprints of their lives," she states.



➤ **Blueprint 10—**
Self-Portrait, 2017.



➤ **Blueprint 25—**
Mom, 2018.

➔ **Blueprint 04—**
Carolina, 2015.

Finding Inspiration

We often look at the works of other photographers and artists working with the visual medium, for inspiration. However, inspiration can come from anywhere—music, poetry, literature, or even from people who have nothing to do with art. These are ideas worth exploring. The images derived from non-visual influences may be very different from the norm. At times, they may not be appreciated by a larger audience, but this does not matter. You need to be your own judge and jury, and your own worst critic.



Joana P Cardozo's work has been exhibited worldwide, including the Rencontres d'Arles, Klompching Gallery, International Center of Photography, and Filter Space, amongst others. She is represented by Foto Relevance in Houston. You can find her work on www.jpcardozo.com, as well as @joana_p_cardozo_ on Instagram.