

Meet an Artist Monday: Donn Delson

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Donn Delson is an aerial photographer with the eye of a painter and the heart of an adventurer. His large-format prints capture the scale and perspective of his view from the helicopter without doors that serves as his airborne studio. But it's his dashing sense of wonder that animates the process of making the familiar world into a strange and magical sight, tricking the mind and delighting the eye. A series of new works open May 9 at Axiom Contemporary in Santa Monica.

L.A. WEEKLY: When did you first know you were an artist?

DONN DELSON: Photography has been a lifelong passion. I've always been drawn to images that convey a sense of symmetry, evoke balance and visual harmony. Much of my work takes on an abstract quality. I've been an artist since my first Brownie camera at age 10, some 60 years ago. The past five years, I've had the time to devote myself fully to the exploration of my artistic endeavors.

What is the short answer to what your work is about?

Large scale aerial imagery shot from "doors-off" helicopters at 500-10,000 feet offering the viewer a unique perspective on the world from above, and one that is often not what it appears to be at first glance.

What would you be doing if you weren't an artist?

I also have a passion for writing, and am currently revising my novel which spans six decades from WWI to the mid-1960's, built around the tempestuous relationship between a grandfather and his teenage grandson.

Donn Delson, "Xylophones"; Credit: Courtesy of the artist

Did you go to art school? Why/why not?

Art school was never a consideration. I received my MBA from Pepperdine University in 1979. I have been a serial entrepreneur for the past forty years of my working life. In 2010, I successfully exited my last business, an entertainment merchandising company that I founded in 2000. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to focus on my photography and my writing, both of which I find incredibly satisfying.

Why do you live and work in L.A.?

I came to Los Angeles in 1976 from Philadelphia to work in marketing at 20th Century Fox, and was responsible for U.S. and Canadian advertising for the original Star Wars and Return of the Jedi films, as well as other movies like Alien, and The Rose. The majority of my entrepreneurial career has revolved around the entertainment industry. My wife and I moved here initially for career opportunities and have enjoyed living and working here ever since.

When was your first show?

My first show was in Los Angeles in 2015 at the TAG Gallery in Bergamot Station. Since then, there have been continuous opportunities to show my work worldwide.

When/where is your next show?

My new show entitled, “Points of View” featuring sixteen large-scale images opens at [Axiom Contemporary](#), 2801 Main St., Santa Monica, May 9–June 16. The opening reception is [Thursday, May 9 from 6-9 pm at Axiom](#).

I’ll also be exhibiting my work and giving a talk about it to the Board of Directors and Trustees of the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico at a symposium there early in May.

Donn Delson, “Fan Dance”; Credit: Courtesy of the artist

What artist living or dead would you most like to show with?

One of my artistic inspirations is Piet Mondrian. I try to realize a painterly perspective in my aerial photography. Mondrian’s abstract style and simple geometric elements inform my work.

Do you listen to music while you work? If so, what?

Since my early teens, I’ve always worked best listening to music I love. Helicopter work is a bit different in its demands and restrictions. The noise decibel level in the helicopter is extremely high. Noise cancelling headphones make it possible to concentrate and to communicate with the pilot as to altitude, direction, etc. Unfortunately music would not be conducive to communication in that environment. Of course, when I’m doing pre-flight research or post, I love being surrounded by music. Progressive rock to classical, depending on the task at hand, and I tend to crank it up.

Donn Delson, “Painter's Palette”; Credit: Courtesy of the artist

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