

Eva Kolenko

An Extraordinary



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Eye for Detail

By Jennifer Chen



Eye-catching images and bold color are signature elements of Eva Kolenko's work. In the June/July 2008 issue of *AfterCapture*, we featured Jim Wood, the chairman of the photographic department at San Francisco's Academy of Art University (AAU). Wood discussed a student project that involved only the word "shoes," and students were left to interpret; Eva had taken many of the shoe shots featured. The editors of *AfterCapture* were impressed and sought out more of her work on her website.

After graduating AAU in 2005, Eva links her success today in magazine, editorial and fashion back to her roots in school. Eva comments, "I got a lot out of the department. Jim Wood definitely pointed me in the [way] of starting my career. He was always pushing me. He hooked me up with my reps, Sharpe + Associates." She continues, "I walked out of school with a finished portfolio. It was great."

Clicking through her website, www.evakolenko.com, it is clear that the 26-year-old imagemaker has an extraordinary eye for detail. Image after image is crisp, alive with color and full of quirky charm. You can't help but be drawn into her work.

One series called "Nano," created for *OnEarth* magazine, showcases Eva's talent in making simple objects visually stimulating and evocative. The concept of the article was nanotechnology [the science of building functional systems on a subatomic level], in particular how silver is used both in nanotechnology and in packaging and products. Eva shares, "The idea was to do something fun and conceptual to go along with the scientific reports." Working with the magazine's art director who culled together a list of items that use nanotechnology, Eva sketched up a few ideas. She says, "They thought my ideas

Both pages: This diptych was shot with a 4 x 5 camera on color negative film. It was a personal project, part of a still life series.

would work perfectly so it went from there as a collaborative effort." The image of the silver-covered strawberry (pg. 68) was chosen as the magazine's cover image. And her "Nano Mouth" image—a model showing off her shiny silver teeth—accompanied the front pages of the article, along with more silver-coated products.

While her images appear flawlessly designed and well executed, creating them takes almost eight to nine hours per image. Eva explains, "I spend a lot of time tweaking very individual things and making color palettes happen so my images are pleasing. I direct the viewer's eye where I want it to go." Eva continues, "So I do test print after test print, just like someone would do in a darkroom. I just do it digitally."

A good example of how much work and effort Eva puts into her images is one in which a businesswoman in an orange vest, stands precariously on the edge of a cliff, clutching her briefcase (pg. 68). The image is an outtake from her shoot with *Fast Company* magazine for an article about the most dangerous job in business—being a chief marketing officer.

The outtake is a composite of many different images. Eva's first challenge was to find the location, which she finally found in Marin, CA. Then she shot various sized rocks. In the final image, the businesswoman is standing on one rock composited from four different rocks—one pointy, one skinny, another with a flat top and one for texture. The back splash of waves was taken from a series of wave photos, while the front splash is another wave from that series. Eva shares, "The sky was also shot separately. Then we went into the studio and shot the talent." The incredulous expression on the businesswoman took simple directing since Eva purposely chose a model who had a bit of an acting background.



Another example of Eva's creative techniques and forward-thinking style are her diptychs, which are part pop art and part comic strip. One of her diptychs, "Sprinkles" (pg. 68), which was chosen as a cover for *Adbusters*, demonstrates her meticulous attention to detail. The image, taken on 4x5 color negative film, features a model with sprinkle-covered lips and fingers in one panel, while in the second panel there is a facedown splattered cupcake. Of her process, Eva says, "I got as many sprinkles to affix to her lips and fingers. Once I scanned it and got it into Photoshop, I became a maniac about detail and Clone stamped new sprinkles." She continues, "After I got as many sprinkles as I wanted on there, I went in and individually painted each one." She laughs, "I don't even know how many hours I spent on that."

A diptych that captures the quirky humor of Eva's style is called "Fallen Noodles" (above), from a self-assigned personal project. In the left panel, an ordinary guy eats from a Chinese food takeout container and on the right panel, a soy sauce packet is splayed out on the pavement, sauce oozing out like blood. The image, like "Sprinkles," also captures Eva's ability to draw her viewer's eyes towards the center. "I see arrows in images," Eva says, "and I always want the arrows to point inwards. So the soy sauce is going in. His eyes are going in. That's how I arrange diptychs."

Color is a key factor in all of Eva's work. Many people viewing her imagery comment on her unique color palette—bold and striking, but never over-the-top. Eva shares, "A lot of my style comes through

Above: The portrait half of this image was shot with a Hasselblad on color negative film, and the soy sauce was shot 35mm. This was also shot for my portfolio.

Below: This is a pretty major composite. Essentially everything was shot completely separate and put together in post. The room was not a set, it was built in post and all the art on the walls where separate portraits I shot, all with my Canon EOS 5D.

in post, through my techniques. I change oranges to yellows or purples to greens." Her process to completing an image involves, "circling everything on my prints that I think are a bit off, changing those then doing another print." While Eva is careful not to overwork any of her prints, she finally concedes when she feels—after careful examination—that there is nothing else she would add to make the photo better.

The culmination of Eva's detail-





orientated work is in an image in which she created a room that doesn't actually exist. The image was done as a promotion for the Oakland, CA-based band, Neveragain. Their album, titled *The Great Betrayal*, is a mix Eva describes as, "electronic and dark rock." The haunting quality of the music combined with electronics inspired Eva to create a scene that could be period yet modern. Granted complete creative freedom by the band, Eva set to work on individual portraits of the band members. The portrait of band member Paul leaning with an ear pressed against the wall illustrates the modern/period combination. Says Eva, "There are a lot of things in that image that could be period but then there are the modern boots and the electrical outlet. I really wanted to mix up modern details to make sure we were still in the present."

After completing the band's individual portraits, Eva worked on a group photo. Typical band group shots feature guys standing around together and Neveragain wanted to avoid that cliché and requested not to be shot together. That said, Eva discovered during the shoot that the individual band members were "great on their own." She shares, "So I broke them up to create a little story between them all." The resulting image displays each band member in their own gold-framed portrait on a red velvet wall



Far left: This was an assignment for Fast Company magazine. I used my Canon EOS 5D to shoot all the parts. There are a lot of bits and pieces to this shot but in general the woman was shot in studio and the rest was at a beach in Marin, CA. The sky was shot on another day as well.

Above: This diptych was shot with a 4x5 camera on color negative film. It was a personal project; part of a still life series.

Left: This image was part of a cover story for OnEarth magazine. I also shot this digitally with my Canon EOS 5D in studio. It was all shot in camera, but I did do a lot of heavy retouching to get everything to look just right, especially in the silvers.



with a transparent figure of a girl floating passed their portraits (pg. 66). The ghostly girl took several different transparencies and overlays. Eva comments, "I used a ton of different layers. Then I painted in a lot of white around her and painted overlays over those layers. With the red background, it was hard to gauge the transparency. You can see the front part of her torso where there's lots of white, and it's definitely less transparent than the sides of her. I wanted her to have enough definition." As mentioned, the room is non-existent and actually a creation from many composites. Each piece was shot separately—the wallpaper, rug, radio, band portraits, frames,

even the paint on the ghostly girl's fingers (which in fact are Eva's hands). The floor is Eva's own living room floor. She says, "My living room is not that big so I had to shoot it in pieces and distort the perspective." Though the final shot is made up of several pictures, Eva wants the image to "be believable. I don't want it to feel like I'm using too many tricks."

A shooter with quite the eye for color and detail, Eva's career is blossoming and growing since her days at AAU. Her ties to the school are still alive. After telling Eva that her work was discovered in the recently published Jim Wood article, she proudly shares, "Even after school, he's helping my career years later." Clearly, Wood saw, as many others have, that Eva's photographic vision is boundless; full of a myriad of colors and stand-out style. CC

Jennifer Chen is the associate editor for both Rangefinder and AfterCapture magazines. She has written for Bust, Everyday with Rachael Ray, Audrey and is a theatre critic for the online publication Edge.