



# Perla Antoniak

INTERVIEWED BY AMY BAUGHER

WEB: [WEB.MAC.COM/P.ANTONIAK](http://WEB.MAC.COM/P.ANTONIAK)

## How did you get started with photography?

Ever since I was young, I found myself thumbing through magazines, ripping out photos that caught my eye. I have always been drawn to color, beauty, and people. I especially love faces. The one thing that impresses me the most is the ability to catch an expression so intense, it changes your own.

I always thought photography was for photographers. I assumed I would be the one forever looking at photos, not taking them. I knew nothing about cameras. In fact, I used disposable ones until college.

As part of the requirements for my art degree, I was forced to take an Intro to Photography class where we strictly shot black and white film and developed it ourselves. I was scared stiff. My dad lent me his old '69 Minolta. It looked like a lead dinosaur. Basically, I learned how to load the film, took my first shot, and the rest is history.

## Did you have a goal in mind when you first got started?

I remember a photography exhibit at one of the museums at the National Mall. There was a section on photos from twentieth century American history. Forever ingrained in my mind was this photo of a young American soldier. He was a Marine private fighting in the jungles of Da Nang, Vietnam. He looked like he was about fourteen years old, and the expression in his frightened eyes almost told the whole story of the war. I remember thinking, "I wish I could take photos like that."

## You work with both traditional means of photography and digital photography. Do you prefer one over the other?

My first class in photography involved working strictly with black and white film, and I'm so thankful that I started out this way. I always was a

little weary of photos that had been digitized and photoshopped and I thought it made someone less of a photographer. In the film class, I learned that everything you can do on a computer, you can do with film. In fact, computer programs are designed based on the original effects that have been used in both the shooting and developing process. It is really amazing and it opened a whole new world to me. I enjoy working in both media. However, until I am able to get my own darkroom someday, I'll be working primarily with digital.

**What sort of post-processing do you like to do on your images?**

Typically when I snap a shot, the photo is finished. Every now and again I fix the coloring or contrast for publishing or if I feel it would give the onlooker the same sensation I had when I was there in real life.

**What are your favorite types of shots—subject, time of day, etc.?**

By far, I get the most invigorated and inspired when shooting in a foreign setting. I love exploring new people, patterns, and colors. Typically I shoot outside, and I only shoot at sunup and sunset. I have been to many amazing places during high noon, but rarely bring my camera. Lighting is everything, and when it floods your subject, all interest is lost.

**How do you see the gospel influencing both your artwork and you as an artist?**

I love this thing we have called life. It is a gift. God is the master artist and his creations are his art. Picasso once said: "Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we





teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children.”

**Do you have any advice for someone who wants to do what you do?**

Don't be scared. Some people will have natural talent and their ease with the camera will drive you crazy. If you truly desire something and put in the work, miracles beyond your imagination will occur. Stop looking at photos and start taking them. In the words of Nike, “Just do it.”

**What do you consider your greatest achievements in your career to date?**

One thing that never ceases to amaze me in this world is a beautiful piece of workmanship. For centuries, people have used their hands to create objects of unmatched repute. In a constantly changing world, I feel the need to aid in the perpetuation and preservation of these precious works.

For my final BFA project I spent several months in India doing field research on the arts and handicrafts of Tamil Nadu, India. I spent my days with native artisans who taught me their craft as I documented my time with them through photography. I worked with weavers, doll makers, painters, jewelers, lei makers, and many other artists. For the culmination of my project I created a book entitled *Kalai & Kaithiran* with an exposé of my experience and displayed its pages as a part of my senior exhibit at BYU–Hawaii.

One of the greatest experiences I have had happened when I met a Sikh couple touring Honolulu the same week of my art show. I invited them up to the North Shore to come and see this show. To my surprise, they did come and were thoroughly impressed with the work I had done and the beauty in

which their homeland was portrayed. It was such a joy to watch them as they walked by the pages of the book, reading every word and gazing at every picture. My project came full circle when the wife walked by the page of kolams (intricate designs placed at the home, drawn by filling one hand with rice flour and delicately drawing beautiful patterns on the ground to protect the family from evil), thought back on her childhood in India and said, with tears in her eyes, “My mother used to do this.”



### What's next for you?

I am currently looking at graduate programs that would support my desire to perpetuate and promote native arts and crafts. My desire is to become acquainted with artisans worldwide and create a web of international contacts available to anyone who may want to buy, sell, preserve, or simply learn about native arts.

In the future, I would love to work for a museum or magazine as their arts photographer. It would be so amazing to be a part of something I deem so important and so fun at the same time. I want to be the one on the other end when the phone rings and someone says, "We need an exposé on the Masai and their beadwork. Perla, you're our girl! Your flight leaves for Nairobi in the morning..." ■

