

fact into art

You may know Kristen and Jeff Turick of Artifact Documentaries for their handcrafted wedding documentaries and vintage Super 8 wedding films. But now, nearly 6 years into the business, the pair has admittedly lost their “wedding mojo” and found something they find more meaningful. Today, Artifact is shifting focus to what Kristen calls “documentary stories that will allow us to explore a broader variety of human emotions.”

Think Chicago Public Radio’s slice-of-life program *This American Life* with Ira Glass. The “simple, beautiful, powerful stories that are told both visually and verbally,” as Kristen describes the TV version that aired for 2 years, resonate with the Turicks.

Photographer Nancy Rexroth’s dreamlike *Iowa* series of photographs also left an indelible imprint on Kristen, whose formative years were spent studying and experimenting with photography. Rexroth’s “memory snippets,” as Kristen thinks of them, were captured using the kitschy Diana camera, a 1960s plastic novelty camera whose light leaks, cheap plastic lens, and lo-fi capabilities were ironically embraced by avant-garde photographers of the decade such as Rexroth for the blurry, soft-focused images they produced.

The 2,000 or so photographs Rexroth captured for the series from 1970 to 1976 “transcend what’s portrayed and allow you to sort of jump in and relive that experience as if you’re there,” giving the photos an “ethereal” quality, says Kristen, who by no coincidence uses the same adjective to describe Super 8 footage. “I have always loved the look of Super 8, especially because it just has this other-worldly, ethereal quality that captures a memory and allows you to relive it in more of a dreamlike state.”

Never having been a video production enthusiast per se, Kristen’s interest in motion picture making wasn’t piqued until she discovered Super 8, which she uses to portray a “visual poetry of sorts.”

WANDERING INTO WEDDINGS

In the spring of 2005, with a brand-new baby at home and a lull in work for Jeff, an award-winning director of photography (DP), the Turicks decided to pick up some

ARTIFACT DOCUMENTARIES



Documentarians Kristen and Jeff Turick
www.artifactdocumentaries.com

extra cash producing what they had expected would be “decent” wedding videos. “Jeff would shoot, and I figured I could edit, having taken a semester of analog video production at CCS,” she says, referring to Detroit’s Center for Creative Studies, where 7 years earlier she had earned her B.F.A. with a focus in fine art photography.

When the Turicks shot their first wedding that May, they tried out an old Yashica Super 8 camera that Kristen had plucked from a pile of gadgets at a thrift store, not knowing whether it was operational. “I didn’t know if it worked but I did know that I loved the vibe of Super 8 and felt that it could really add something wonderfully nostalgic to our documentaries.” They mixed in the footage with that initial wedding video and continued the practice with successive weddings.

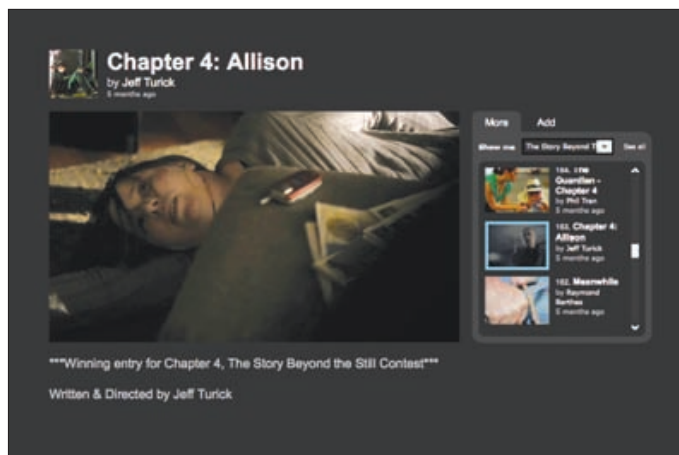
The idea they had was for Artifact’s wedding work to simply be an extension of Jeff’s career in corporate and commercial production work. But it quickly took on a life of its own. Kristen felt overwhelmed, but she recognized that they were offering something special, beyond “decent.” Admittedly, “Our wedding films had a pretty distinctive feel to them.”

But something important was missing. There they were, by now mid-decade, shooting weddings, even though that was never technically part of the plan. “It was never really on my radar,” remembers Kristen. “Weddings kind of just happened.”

And wedding videos might have been enough if Kristen had been able to produce what she envisioned they should be while remaining profitable. “I always had this romanticized vision that I could make a living doing highly custom, highly edited films that really told an engaging story about the wedding day and its



A still from one of the Turicks' Super 8-shot wedding documentaries



Allison, Jeff Turick's winning Story Behind the Still entry

participants. I always wanted to make the story of the wedding a lot deeper than I think most people would really prefer for a wedding film." For example, she wanted to explore more serious topics within the bride and groom's back stories. She longed to dig into "who these people really are, what they are going through, the ups and downs, and so forth."

Her approach turned out to be a little too nichey, and by then, she says, "I had kind of lost my wedding mojo, to be honest. Jeff had long lost his." Luckily, this year presented the perfect opportunity to make a change. Jeff's DP work shifted into high gear, allowing them to step back and focus on stories that really speak to them as filmmakers. Although Artifact is no longer shooting weddings, "The goal is still to produce films

that have a similar Artifact flair," Kristen assures. She's excited about the direction the company is taking and the broader range of emotions she and Jeff will be exploring. "But that's not to say that we wouldn't shoot another wedding again if it was within a larger context," she adds.

NEW STORIES TO TELL

Their debut project as the new-and-improved Artifact Documentaries is a short on Nancy Rexroth's *Iowa* series. Currently in preproduction, they will begin shooting next spring. The short will be the first part of a feature documentary to include additional artists and is slated to be shot over the next 2–3 years.

A second film in the pipeline is a documentary on a new psychological treatment technique offered by a therapist in San Francisco. The Turicks plan to follow several victims of severe psychological distress and track their progress under the therapist's care.

In the meantime, the duo remains open to whatever story or person they find themselves drawn to and inspired to share, whether through film or another medium. Jeff has found new inspiration in narrative filmmaking, and he is busy honing his directorial, lighting, and editing skills and collaborating with colleagues such as Explorer of Light Vincent Laforet, whose *Reverie* short appeared online in late 2008 and helped kick off the DSLR craze in the filmmaking world.

The Turicks found a unique outlet for their storytelling (as well as Kristen's acting) talents recently with *The Story Behind the Still*, a user-generated HD filmmaking contest sponsored by Canon and hosted by Vimeo. Laforet created a short film called *The Cabbie*, and he invited contestants to create subsequent chapters in the story, using DSLR-shot video and stills, based on the final still image of

the previous chapter. Jeff's entry was selected as the winner for Chapter 4.

Along with other winners, the Turicks were working on the project's final chapter at press time. Now that their son is 5, Kristen finally feels like she has the time to reacquaint herself with painting, still photography, and other media to create new and different artifacts. Undaunted by a goal of making pieces that are as "close to perfect" as possible, and with wedding films checked off the list, the Turicks are just getting started.

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