

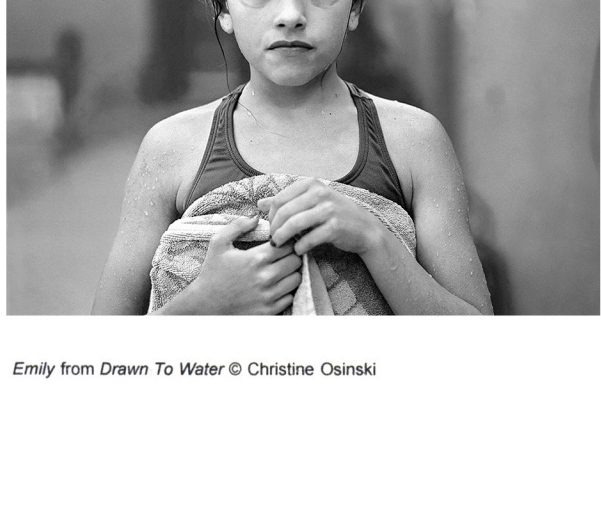


Joanne from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski

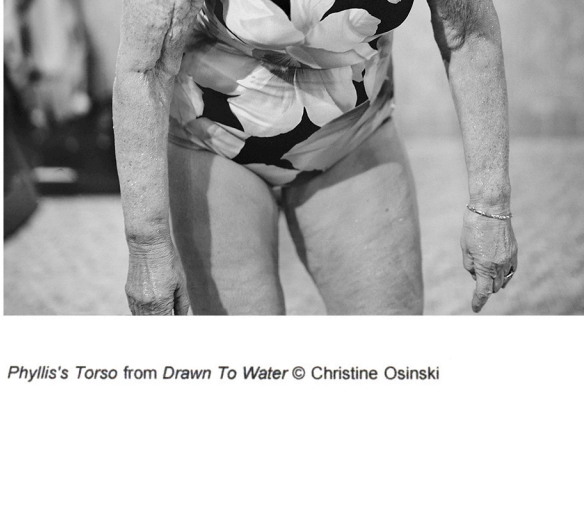
Nymphoto: Tell us a little about yourself.

Christine Osinski: My method of working as a photographer has always involved not drawing attention to myself, so I'm not in the habit of talking about myself much. My quietness has served my work, but perhaps it's not always a good thing. In 1982 I invited Helen Levitt to speak at a school at which I was teaching and she was so wonderful in so many ways and I felt a certain kinship with her---that she was able to take all those incredible photographs because she let herself blend in. I am flattered to be giving this interview, but it's also a little weird.

That being said, I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a working class neighborhood. Most of my uncles worked in the same factory. I grew up in a brick bungalow almost identical to and geographically close to the one that Michelle Obama grew up in. Although I haven't lived in Chicago since my early twenties, my experiences of the harshness and toughness of working class Chicago continue to inform my choices and my work. I think that geography is a force that most people overlook. After completing my undergraduate education at The Art Institute of Chicago, I moved to the East Coast to pursue graduate work at Yale. Walker Evans was still connected to the university and I was very fortunate to spend some time with him. It was an eye opening experience to say the least. After graduate school I lived in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania for a couple of years and then moved to New York City. I have continued to live in or around New York City ever since.



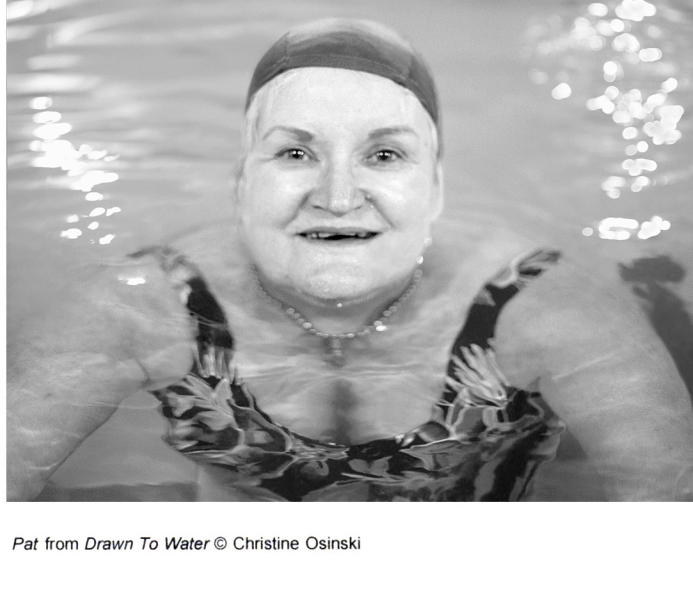
Emily from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



Phyllis's Torso from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



Pat, Rita and Phyllis from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



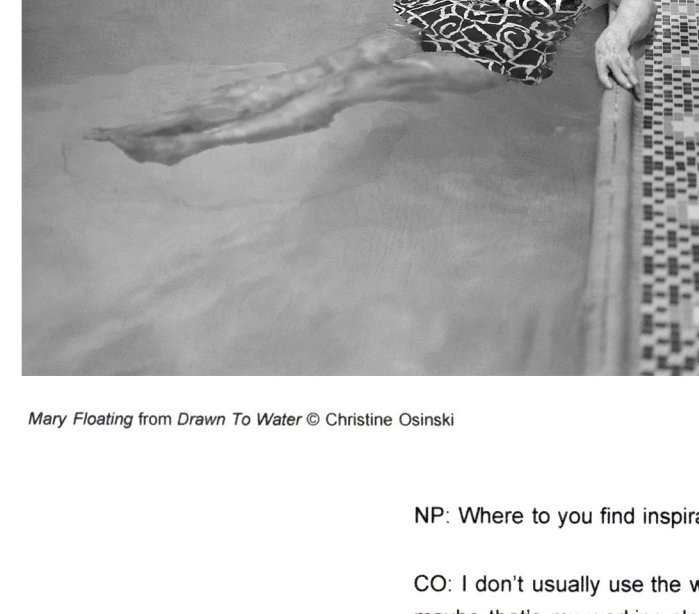
Pat from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



Lillian from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski

NP: How did you discover photography?

CO: During my time in undergraduate school I mostly took painting, drawing and printmaking classes. Although I did study photography as well, it wasn't until my last semester in school that I really discovered how photography worked for me. It was spring and I had just moved into a new apartment in a new neighborhood. I was feeling very isolated from working alone in the studio at school and having just moved, I decided to explore my new neighborhood. As you know there is something so magical about late afternoon spring light and it was so wonderful to be outside rather than alone in a studio. I found that with a camera, I was so much more adventurous. The camera became a transitional object for me---a way to navigate the world.



Mary Floating from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski

NP: Where do you find inspiration?

CO: I don't usually use the word "inspiration". It sounds too ethereal for my taste; maybe that's my working class background showing itself. I prefer to think about influences and traditions as shaping my work much more than inspiration. I believe that influences come from some cockamamie places and quirky things in addition to one's biography and other artists' works within the pantheon of art history. The times we live in are interesting and every individual has a very interesting personal story, but art is something different. The problem for the artist, as I see it, is to make one's work much more interesting than one's life and that is no easy task. How do you breathe life into your work? That's the ongoing challenge, no matter what you point the camera at. How to get your work to speak and not just sit there is quite an endeavor. I believe that you have to really like something or identify with it in order to take the time to shape it into something.



Fiona and Kerry from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



Iffy from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski



Barbara with Legs from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski

NP: How did this project come about?

CO: In the 1980s, I moved to Staten Island after losing my Manhattan loft to a real estate developer. Staten Island was another planet from Manhattan, but there were pictures which I was familiar. Photographically for me, it was a gold mine. There were pictures everywhere I looked. Shortly after moving there, I saw this funny picture in the newspaper along with an article announcing a performance by a local synchronized swimming group. It was a picture of about six various sized legs jutting out of the water at different angles. So I went to the performance and the following fall I began to photograph the swimmers during their classes and practices. They only met on Wednesday nights and only from about October through April. The first eight months I photographed, I got nothing. It was a very difficult situation. The humidity eventually rusted out a brand new camera, the light was horrible and the swimmers who were in class practicing routines seemed always to be swimming away from me just when I would get ready to photograph. It took a very long while for all of us to become comfortable with one another and with the camera. I photographed this swimming group for twenty years. This was a very good project for me because I was able to continue while having two children and I kept returning even after I moved away from Staten Island. It was a wonderful environment to see so many female body types moving in and out of water in an attempt to swim harmoniously, a society of girls and women who created a gliding, floating world for themselves.



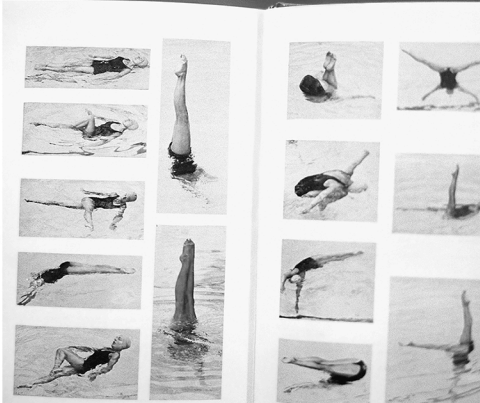
Girls in Locker room from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski

NP: How has teaching influenced your work?

CO: Teaching, if you do it well, takes a great deal of time. Outside of class, I spend a lot of time thinking about my students and their works and dig through my files for materials that might help them. Teaching affects my life a great deal, but apart from the time spent on teaching, I don't know that it really affects my work. Experiencing all the youthful, crazy energy that students have is life affirming and infectious. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the courage of young people in choosing art as their life's path. To choose the visual arts is to choose a certain type of orientation with the world and it is not easy.

NP: What's next?

CO: One way or another, a lot of my work seems to be connected with water. In addition to bringing DRAWN TO WATER to closure, I have another long range project going. For the last ten years I have been photographing New York City's Archipelago. There are about thirty-eight islands and island communities within the five boroughs. Many of these urban outposts can only be accessed by boat. It gets to be expensive so I often have to apply for funding. The project involves notions about travel, exploration, historical narrative and myth as well as descriptions of what these islands look like. The passage of time, the psychology of islands and water are important components in this work as is the role of women in exploration. I tend to work on projects over long periods of time. In addition to the island project I am in the process of testing out other disparate ideas hoping that they will visually become something of merit.



Swim Book from Drawn To Water © Christine Osinski