

Diana Cheren Nygren is a fine art photographer from Boston, Massachusetts. Her work explores the visual character of place defined through physical environment, color, light and weather, its implications for our experience of the world, and what place reveals about the culture around it.

Diana was trained as an art historian with a focus on Modern and Contemporary Art, and the relationship of artistic production to its socio-political context. Her emphasis on abstract composition in her photographic work, as well as her subject matter, reflects this training.

Beginning when I was a little girl, my family spent every summer on Cape Cod. The outer cape quickly became the destination of choice. My parents loved the relative quiet and tranquility, the unspoiled nature. We were asked, constantly it seemed, to look at nature, to admire nature, to wonder at the beauty of the dunes. Even once I was a teenager, this made no sense to me. I couldn't imagine anything more boring. As we got older, trips to Europe were peppered by similar, futile, encouragement from my parents to take in the landscape. I loved cities. When I began to study photography, I was drawn to portrait and street photographers. My first photographer crush was Diane Arbus. In assignments for photography classes, I indulged in naval gazing self-portraits, inspired by Cindy Sherman, or I took to the streets of Boston trying to catch candid shots of its inhabitants. I had little use for settings without people and the bustle of urban and communal life.

Portraiture was a fairly logical next step, and I'm still happy to take portraits on commission. But as I have gotten older, two shifts have taken place. Perhaps most significantly, I have finally come to understand my parents' obsession with the beauty of landscape. Our trips now to Cape Cod are filled with hours in which I photograph dunes, marsh grass, sunlight on houses, the water and the sky. Even at home in the city, I am want to shoot clouds more often than buildings. I have also grown oddly uncomfortable with portrait photography, at least in the context of my photography as an art form. Many ancient cultures believed that a photograph could steal your soul. While I wouldn't quite put it in those terms, I think there is something to that fear. The best portraits are indeed those which somehow capture the soul. Although I enjoy taking those pictures, I feel that at the end of the day, they belong to the photograph's subject and not to me. I will admit, I am still tempted to share photographs of my own children. The idea that I am taking liberty in sharing their souls is tempered a little by the suspicion that the pictures capture less their souls and more my own heart.

I love an unpopulated landscape or a sky filled with nothing but light and color. Yet many of what I would consider my landscape images do include human figures. I have come to realize that they are, none the less, rarely photographs of those people. Certainly not portraits. They contain none of their subjects souls. The people generally stand in for archetypes that speak to the general human condition or various typical behaviors. And my pictures of the urban environment generally show it as a backdrop, a detail, or an abstraction, rather than a living, moving being. Curiously, I believe that both my landscape photographs and the urban ones are portraits. Portraits not of individuals, but of cities and locations, remarkable for their distinct character. The message in photography is to slow down and appreciate that character, to take it in thoughtfully, to wonder at the beauty of the dunes and how dramatically they capture light.