

# CULTURE

JOIE DE VIVRE

LES ARTISTES

## the cover-up

Lafayette artist Nicole Touchet's nude portraits shine a spotlight on emotional duality

BY WILLIAM KALEC  
PORTRAIT BY ROMERO & ROMERO

"Any painting is more of experimentation with what you can do next. So it was just me exploring what I thought was beautiful at the time — to create something that I could find beautiful."

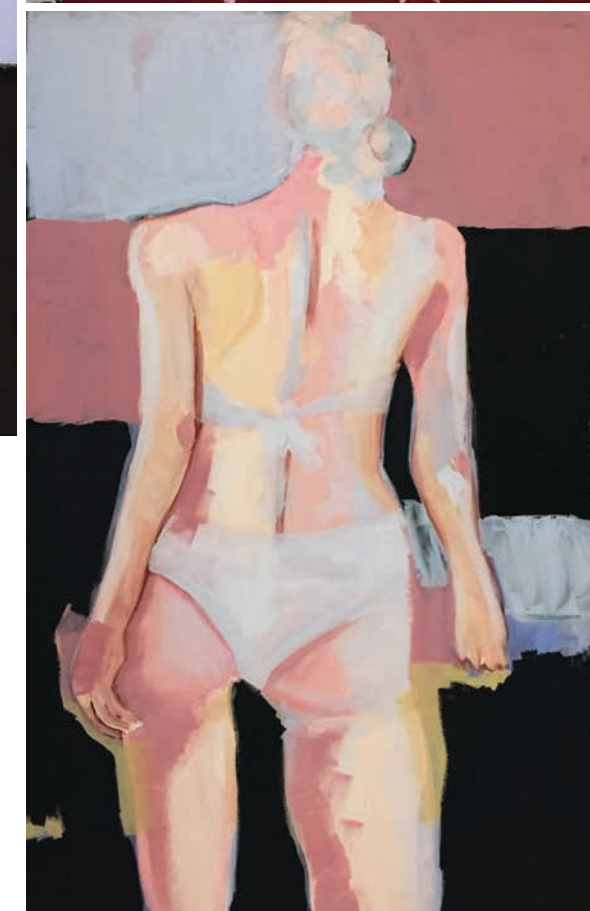
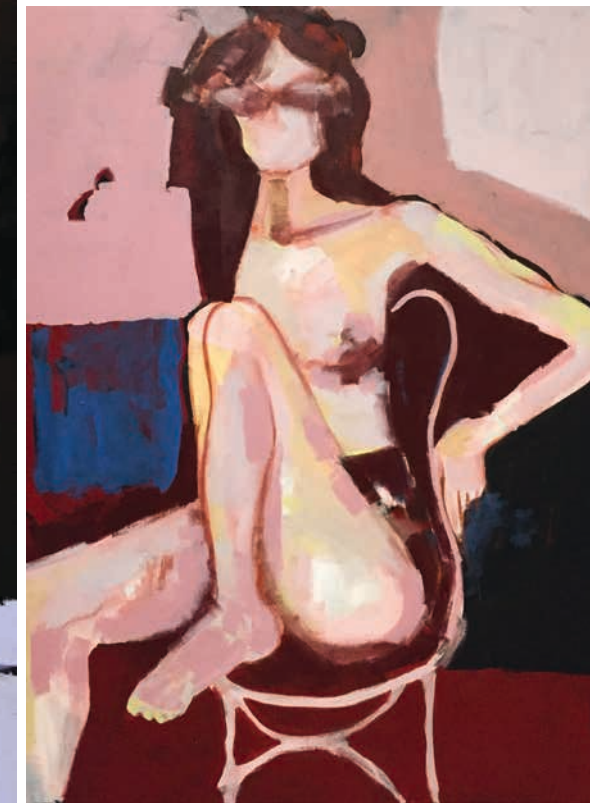
**ABOUT A YEAR AGO DURING** the winter, Nicole Touchet (then-owner of Galerie Touchet on the downtown corner of Vermilion and Jefferson) stopped for some sightseeing in Arizona en route to a friend's wedding in San Diego. Prior to putting foot-to-gas for this ambitious, monotonous and wind-turbine-filled road trip, Touchet hung a few nude portraits (faceless, abstract nude portraits) for that month's Art Walk. Though the clothes-free figures in the paintings were visible from the main building lobby, they certainly weren't prominently displayed.

Touchet got an email from the property owner. The gist? Take down the paintings.

"It's just a surreal moment where you're looking at the







majesty of the Grand Canyon, and people are telling you you need to cover up your art at your own gallery,” Touchet says through several laughs. “It’s just, ‘What?!?’ It’s one of those profound, random moments in your life that you remember.

“I was extremely infuriated,” Touchet says later. “I was offended both personally and as an artist. I look at that painting and it’s very soft and easy to

look at and very not-in-your-face, so I didn’t understand why they weren’t seeing what I actually created. I got really worked up, and all these ideas (about what to do) started brewing for when I got back. Thankfully, I had another week of vacation, so I had time to think and re-evaluate the situation before I acted, which was good.”

Though she calmed down, Touchet certainly didn’t get quiet.



"I ended up finding my activist heart in my existing work," says Touchet, whose activist past also includes being vocal about the animal-food culture in the United States.

Since then Touchet continues to wave the flag against the stigma attached to perceived-risque forms of art or displays of art in the South. On April 23, 2016, Touchet produced a real-life art installation that meandered throughout Festival International featuring women who had their bodies painted in "defiance against the societal norms of covering your breasts in public."

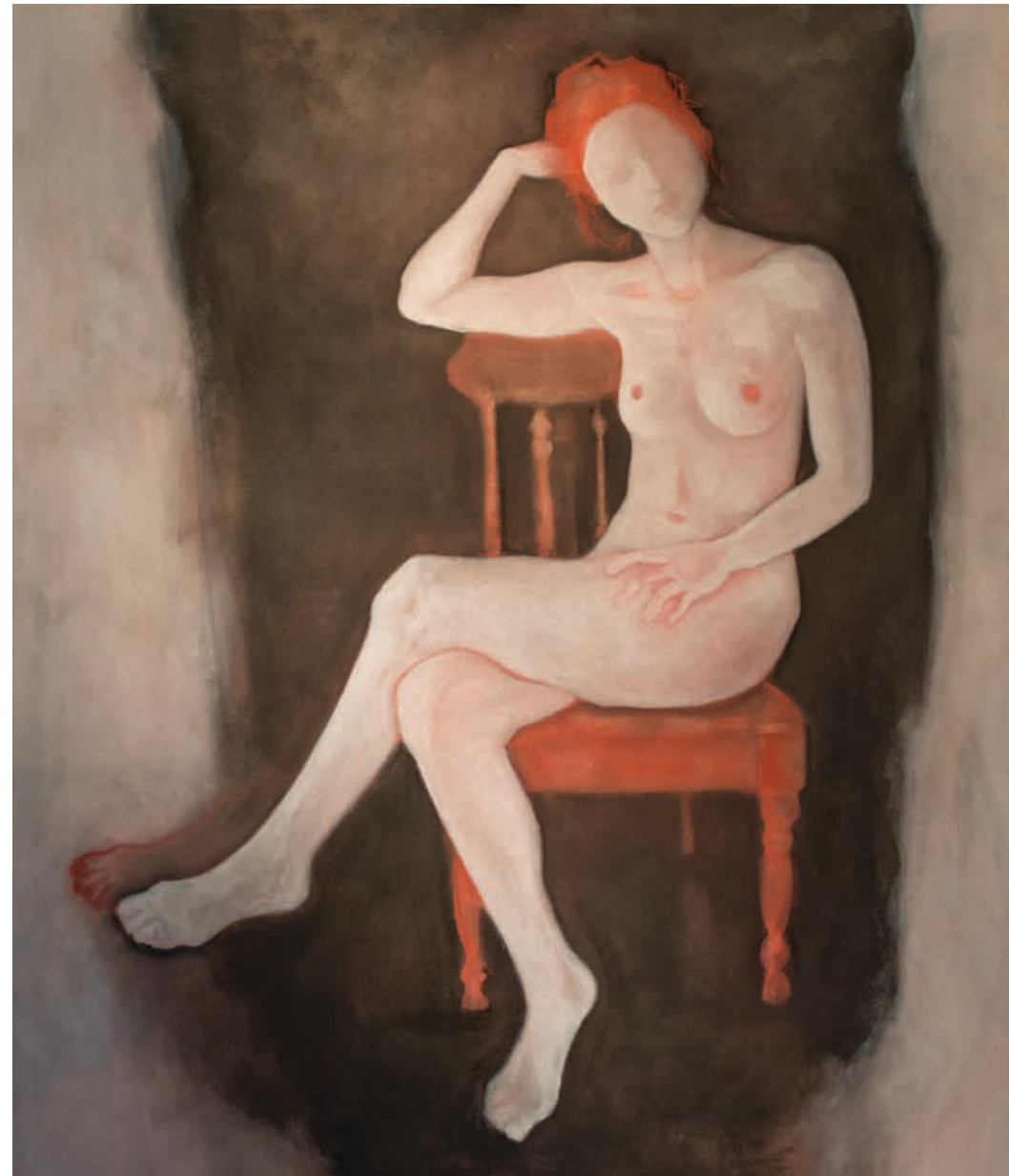
In January 2017, Touchet and Brittany Boudreaux of Gallery 333 organized an artistic rally called Femme Puissance, at which activists were encouraged to paint a 10-foot tall set of bra and panties constructed out of blank canvas.

"I've always been very stubborn, so backing down wasn't really an option," Touchet says, rewinding back to the nude-painting dust-up from a year ago. "If people are going to retaliate, then I'm just going to push back. It's just in my blood. The fight wasn't over, so why back down?"

Initially, Touchet's family covered the paintings while she was out of town, but did show their disapproval by posting a "Censored By Management" sign in the exhibition space window. When Touchet returned, she and a friend cut out overgrown paper-doll clothes for the nude women in the paintings, doing so over a bottle of wine and a lot of laughs.

"I mean, I had toys like that when I was a kid, too — the little fold-over flap," Touchet says. "It was my adult version of that, so that they'd be made presentable for the public."

By this time, Touchet's story gained some traction. The Lafayette alternative



newsweekly interviewed the artist and included portions of the back-and-forth email exchange between the artist and property owner, along with the verbatim clauses in the lease agreement. The clauses did not specifically prohibit such displays. In support of Touchet, the local Lafayette art community — particularly the Kelli Kaufman Studio & Gallery, Cajun Spice Gallery, Theatre 810, Gallery 333 and The Vertical Barre — put on a side Nude Art Walk in conjunction with the regular April 2016 Art Walk.

"The community really rallied around me in the right way," Touchet says. "I just loved that it opened up the dialogue for Lafayette — that this was really an issue and people weren't aware of it in their own community. It was beautiful. They turned it into an informative, productive type of way to combat something like that."

Citing the art of Egon Schiele, Willem de Kooning and Gustav Klimt, Touchet says she has no intentions to stop painting nudes, though much of her recent focus has been consumed with organizing exhibits and event planning.

"The most profound subject matter I came across was the female body," Touchet says. "It's just such a loaded image. I feel like you can say so much with just the placement of an arm or a leg, the gaze of the woman in the work. It just seems stronger — if I can channel the use of this image I could push the work further. It gives you a more profound voice." ◀



To learn more about Nicole Touchet and her work, visit [nicoletouchet.com](http://nicoletouchet.com)



**WE ARE LAFAYETTE AND ITS WHERE LAFAYETTE COMES TO RELAX, LISTEN TO GREAT MUSIC AND HANG OUT WITH FRIENDS!**

Enjoy great live music  
Come hang out in our new pool and lounge room after work or a ball game  
Or come hang out on our patio under the big oak tree and listen to easy listening music  
We are open for everyone and its FOR EVERYONE TO ENJOY

1919 Kaliste Saloom Rd Suite 303 • Plenty of Free Parking • Open: Wed-Fri 4pm-2am, Sat 6pm-2am  
**Happy Hour: Wed-Fri 4-7pm cocktail specials and 1/2 price house wine**




FOR YOUR NEXT PARTY OR EVENT SEND INQUIRIES TO [INFO@THEGROUSEROOM.COM](mailto:info@thegrouseroom.com)  
**THEGROUSEROOM.COM**  
[FACEBOOK.COM/THEGROUSEROOM](https://www.facebook.com/thegrouseroom)

## BANNERS

# 2017 CULTURAL SEASON

music | performance | film | lecture

**Broaden your mind, learn something new, and experience unique events with Banners at McNeese in Lake Charles.**

**Tickets and Memberships on Sale Now!**

**THE WEDDING CREW**  
Tues, April 4 | 8pm  
Ochsner Movie Theater

**ACROBATS OF CIRQUE TROUJARI**  
Fri, April 7 | 7pm | Burton Coliseum

**MYSTIC RAIN: THE LINGERING WORLD**  
Thurs, April 15 | 8pm | Hibernia Theater/Lake

**FREE STATE OF JONES**  
Sat, April 22 | 8pm | Ochsner Movie Theater

**EXTREMELY LONG UNDERSTANDING SERIAL & MASS MURDER**  
Tues, April 25 | 7pm  
Tribco Theatre McNeese

**TENPO LIBRE**  
Thurs, April 27 | 7pm  
Rosa Hart Theatre  
Lake Charles Civic Center

[banners.org](http://banners.org)

## EXPLORE

the CAJUN COAST!

**BAYOU TECHE BLACK BEAR FESTIVAL**  
April 21-22 | Downtown Franklin | This festival in charming downtown Franklin features educational seminars, Cub Club children's activities, field trips, an art sale and exhibit, arts & crafts, food, music and more.

**BAYOU TECHE WOODEN BOAT SHOW** | April 21-22  
Downtown Franklin along the Bayou Teche  
View over 50 antique and new wooden boats on display, plus enjoy fireworks over the beautiful Bayou Teche.

**ROAD TO 3RD STREET SONGWRITERS FESTIVAL & RETREAT**  
April 6-9 | Morgan City | Listen to some of the best songwriters in the country or join us for the songwriter's conference and retreat for tips and inspiration for writing songs.

**RHYTHMS ON THE RIVER** | April 21, 28, May 5, 12, 19, 26, June 2, 9, 16 |  
Downtown Morgan City  
Spring brings our live music series Friday evenings from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Front Street in historic downtown Morgan City.

**CAJUN COAST**  
(800) 254-2931 • [www.cajuncoast.com](http://www.cajuncoast.com)



# CULTURE

JOIE DE VIVRE

LES ARTISTES

## greetings and salutations

Lafayette native  
Cayla Zeek's  
illustrations go  
big for Festival  
International

BY WILLIAM KALEC  
PORTRAIT BY ROMERO &  
ROMERO

Cayla was a  
2010 scholarship  
winner in the  
annual George  
Rodrigue  
Foundation of the  
Arts Art contest.



### THIS IS HARSH, BUT TRUE:

Cayla Zeek's career goals — to this point in time, anyway — have been a complete failure.

"I was going to be a veterinarian or Robin Hood," says the 25-year-old Lafayette native.

Zeek is neither. Nope, she's a visual artist, a designer and a former teacher at Ascension Episcopal school. Zeek left the teaching post at the end of the year to focus more on "Mattea's Hand," her self-started and budding stationery and greeting card business. She also was also official artist of the 2017 Festival International after creating a poster of a brown pelican that has flags of other regions both on its feathers and extending from its body.

Festival organizers gave Zeek a VIP Pass for the extended weekend celebration, which blew her mind. A VIP pass? For her? It was her first, and like most firsts, she'll never forget it. At the time, Zeek wasn't quite sure what the pass was for, but







suspected it meant she got to “use the nice bathrooms.”

So no, it’s no Robin Hood, but even Zeek admits this whole art thing is a pretty cool consolation prize.

“It still doesn’t feel real,” Zeek says of the Festival International honor. “It’s not real to me. Making that poster, I was almost having a panic attack, because I’m putting this out there, and I’ve never done this before, and so many people are going to see this and this represents something so big. I scrapped what I had and started from scratch the day before it was due — re-did it all. But I was much happier with the way it turned out. I felt a sense of relief: OK, what I’m putting out there not only represents everything this festival is about, but it represents me.”

Staying true to herself has been Zeek’s signature throughout her still-young art career. Her visual art pieces feature a mixed media layering technique of watercolor, pen, charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas. Subject matter varies from nudes to playful trips through nature or stories from children’s literature. A 2015

▼  
**POSTER PANIC**

Being named the 2017 Official artist of Festival International was both a source of pride and panic for Lafayette’s Cayla Zeek. A festivalgoer for years, she was floored by the honor but at the same time fretted about living up to the high standards of posters past. So, with about 24 hours left until deadline, Zeek scrapped poster version 1.0 and created the current poster from scratch. The final product features a brown pelican with international flags emblazoned on its feathers and extending beyond its body. Even now, months after the circle-your-calendar event, Zeek says the Festival distinction “doesn’t feel real.”



26-30 AVRIL • 2017  
31<sup>e</sup>  
*Festival International de Louisiane*  
LAFAYETTE • LOUISIANE

*Cayla Zeek*





graduate of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Zeek's work has hung in shows and galleries throughout the state.

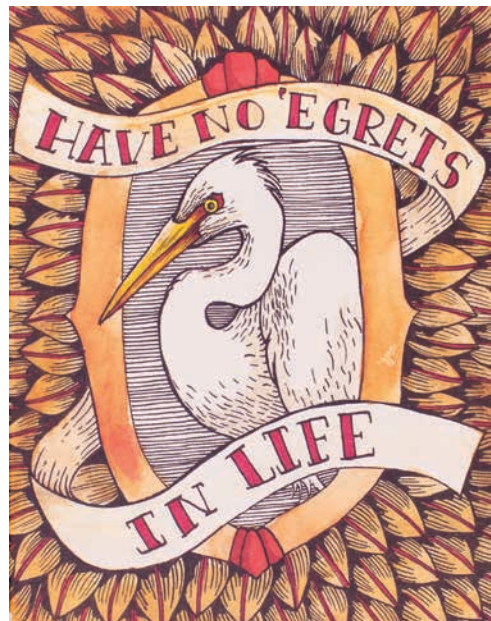
"Whatever I create is going to draw a reaction, but I'm not trying to force a reaction," Zeek says. "Much of what I do is what I enjoy looking at. I enjoy the way it feels to sit down for eight hours, or however long, and just get engrossed in the painting. It's not a search for shock value, but more it's an expression of something I was going through at the time."

Zeek's venture into greeting cards — which she's now doing full-time — also sprung from an expression of something she was going through at the time. Specifically, boredom. As a cashier at Red Arrow Workshop, Zeek doodled drawings of birds accompanied with bird-related puns during slow periods. The puns were things like, "Have No Egrets," and "Hard of Herrin" and "You Pelican Do It." Apparently, the store owners thought they were clever enough to convince Zeek to make a few cards to sell in the store, at the monthly Art Walk, and outside of a downtown bar called The Green Room.

Soon a handful of designs turned into more than 100 designs. A few cards at Red Arrow turned into cards on shelves in stores across the country, including two designs recently picked up by Trader Joe's. Zeek attended her first industry event, and convention goes at the National Stationery Show in New York were curious about the work of the "Louisiana girl" whose booth — one of about 2,000 — was way back in the "boondocks."

"Honestly, the best thing I could have done is not know anything about (making greeting cards)," Zeek says. "Because my cards didn't look like anyone





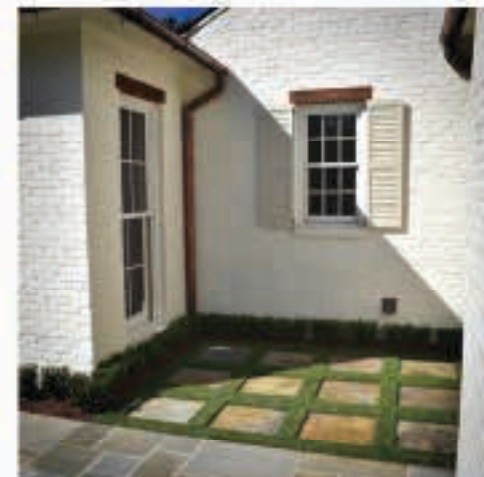
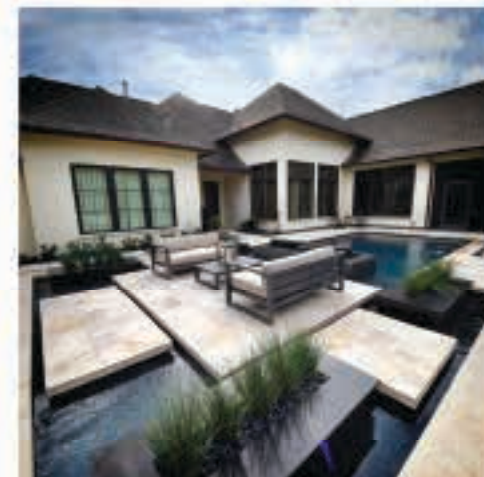
else's — all hand-illustrated, lots of line details and water-colored. It was so bizarre that it was actually eye-catching, even though I was in the back corner. I don't know everything about the industry and I'm making mistakes every two seconds. I don't really know what makes a good greeting-card designer. I'm just going with it and the hard work and passion is what fuels it.

"All the work I do for the greeting cards and in that design or illustration, I really do enjoy it and it's super creative and fun, but it doesn't really have the emotional intensity or sort of research my visual art or paintings have," Zeek says, later. "I don't have any pressure to try and sell those to make a living. Really, I have to do it for myself, so I can express myself since I'm not always capable of verbally communicating that."

Though grateful for all her early success, Zeek is learning to push aside anxiety and fear that she's experienced from having too much good fortune too soon.

"This is just crazy," Zeek says through a nervous/excited laugh. "I'm just headed into another unknown territory where it's like, 'What am I doing?' I don't really know the standard of how fast things should be happening in your life, so I'm just kind of living. I sometimes worry, is this the peak of my career? And I have to keep reminding myself to stop it. That's like a teenager worrying about high school being the best years of their life. They're not."

"I'm making an effort to try and embrace living in the moment," Zeek says. "My entire life I've been reflecting on the past or looking toward the future. I need to not worry about that. But if I could, just enjoy this day now." ◀





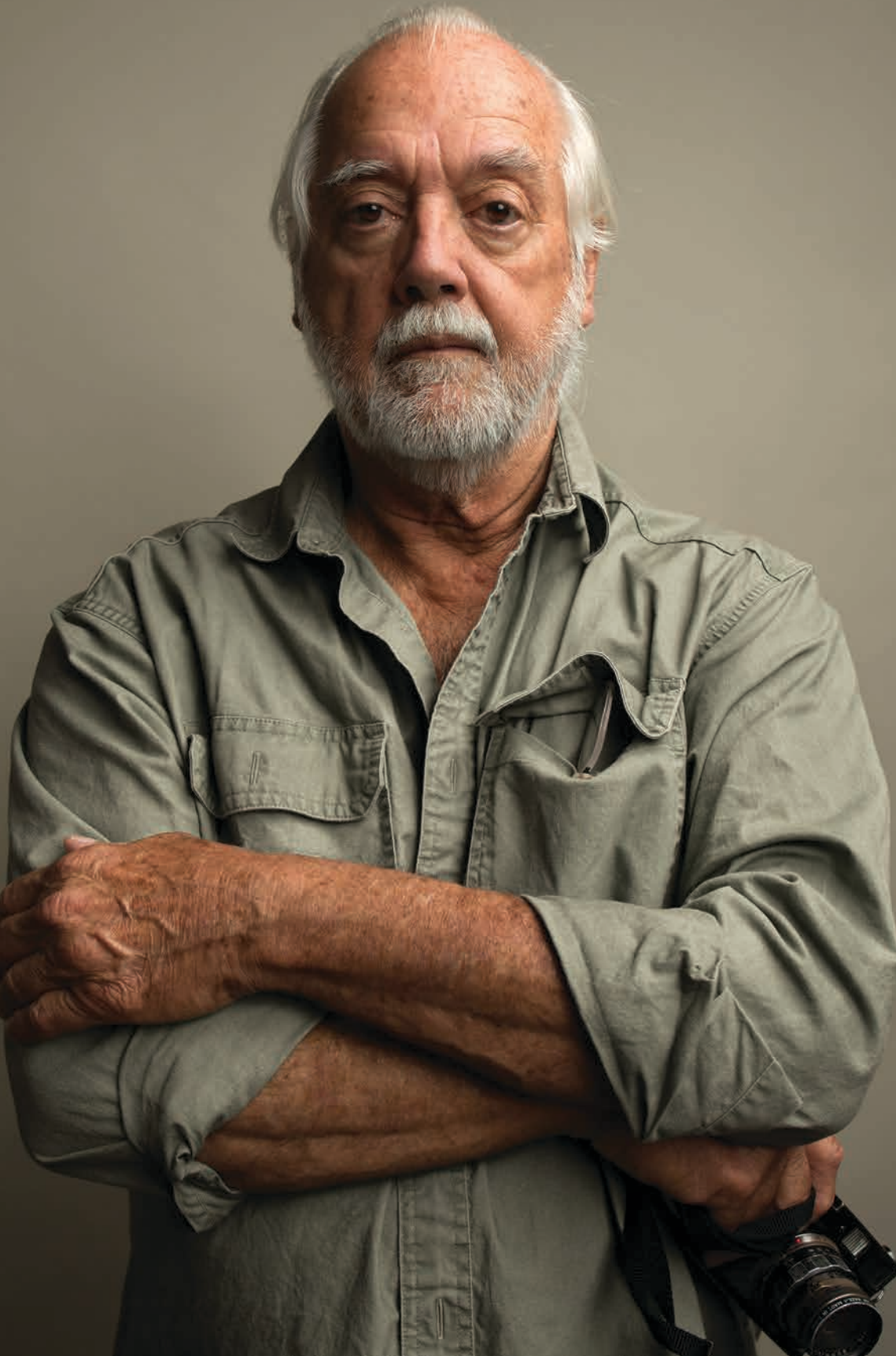
---

# CULTURE

---

JOIE DE VIVRE

---



LES ARTISTES

## the man behind the mask

Abbeville  
photographer Leo  
Touchet shares tales  
from the road at  
Acadiana Center for  
the Arts exhibit

BY WILLIAM KALEC  
PORTRAIT BY ROMERO &  
ROMERO

**THOUGH IT MAY SOUND** trite, the camera offered Leo Touchet a window to the world that stretched far beyond the farms and two-lane roads of Abbeville, a small town now and an even smaller town during Touchet's formative years. Through a viewfinder Touchet saw a child dressed in tattered clothes inside a Honduran schoolhouse peeking over the shoulder of his classmate for a homework answer; two representatives of different generations sitting side-by-side on a Rockefeller Center bench; and an elderly couple staring at their racing forms at the old Evangeline Downs back in 1973.



Together, these pictures represented three images from Touchet's portfolio selected from a pool of 500,000, all taken between 1965 and 1994, and displayed this summer at the ACA exhibit "Leo Touchet: People Among Us." For two months, friends and museum curators went through Touchet's expansive catalog, narrowing down candidates until there were 34 images, to cover four walls.

"However, a number of those they left out were some of my favorites, so I slyly put them back in," Touchet says.

As captivating as those exhibit images are, reducing Touchet's camera to nothing more than his "ticket" is a bit generic and unjust. The seasoned photographer, reflecting on a 40-year career and upcoming second act inspired by Sir Elton John's recent photo acquisition, now understands that for him the camera was cover for a shy, introverted young man, allowing time for the eccentric storyteller within to blossom.

"In a sense, the camera became like a mask for me," Touchet says. "Using the camera, and having it between me and whatever I was looking at, I had a mask on. That's kind of the way I felt about it. I was always aware that there was more out there beyond what I grew up around, but I would have never seen it without a camera. But not because I couldn't go there, but because I wouldn't have had, I guess, the confidence to do it without the camera."

The story of how Touchet became a photographer hints at the romanticism of a bygone era, before everyone carried cameras around in their pocket and when photo captions didn't include hashtags. In 1964, Touchet was a disillusioned employee at an industrial design firm on Park Avenue in Manhattan. One day, he went to the Museum of Modern Art and paid particular attention to a photography exhibit.

"That was on a Sunday," Touchet says. "On Monday I went out and bought a camera."

From there, Touchet met the photo editors of *LIFE Magazine* — the photographer's Carnegie Hall back then



— through a guy he became friends with at a bar (true story). That chance encounter led to a plum gig photographing in Vietnam for UNICEF, making him one of about two dozen capturing the infant moments of the struggle between the split nations.

In 1972, Touchet met his idol, French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who actually criticized him for mirroring his style.

"Well, I learned from your stuff," Touchet responded to the Frenchman. "That's what happens."

Cartier-Bresson smiled, then later suggested Touchet return home and capture images of his own Cajun people. Touchet followed the advice, which is why much of his photo catalog looks so familiar to Acadians.

Throughout the years, Touchet's images — a few of which he captured despite having a gun to his head and a knife at his neck — appeared in *LIFE*, *TIME*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Fortune*, *The Boston Globe* and *U.S. News & World Report*. Ultimately, when







programs like Microsoft Corbis crushed the economic viability of Touchet's decade-long hustle, he put down the camera and started a woodworking practice in the later 1990s and early 2000s.

"The thing about it is, your own eyes can always see more than the camera allows you to see," Touchet says. "And when I put it down for a while, I put photography out of my mind, because if I kept it there it'd be somewhat depressing. I concentrated on other things, because I knew I couldn't make a living [on photography] anymore. But I never lost the urge to photograph."

The now grizzled camera vet is getting back into the swing of things recently, capturing images while vacationing in the Olympic Peninsula of Northwest Washington.

"What I miss — yeah sure, the travel — but it's mostly the unknown," Touchet says. "That's what I missed. Everywhere you turn, it's something new. Whereas, when you're say wood-working, you're in one place, seeing the same things even if you're still creating."

"Pictures are everywhere, that's the easy part," Touchet says.

"I looked at the world in a whole different way once I got that camera," Touchet says. "Before, I just wanted to go see places. Now, with the camera, I wanted to go places and do things." ◀



**ORLEANS BALLROOM**  
**CELEBRATES 200 YEARS**

Be a part of history  
and book your event today.

**855-798-6642**

**The New Orleans Hotel Collection**

**SPLENDIDLY ORIGINAL HOTELS IN AMERICA'S FAVORITE CITY!**

THE WHITNEY HOTEL • THE JUNG HOTEL & RESIDENCES  
 CROWNE PLAZA • HOTEL LE MARAIS • HOTEL MAZARIN  
 DAUPHINE ORLEANS • BOURBON ORLEANS

[WWW.FRENCHQUARTERWEDDINGS.COM](http://WWW.FRENCHQUARTERWEDDINGS.COM)

**STASH** HOTEL REWARDS® **AAA**

**Abbeville General Primary Care Medical Homes**

*In Our Home, it's all about YOU!*  
 We care for you when you are well,  
 and we are there for you when you are ill

\*Covington Location: All First Coast Healthcare Certified  
 \*Abbeville - 892-0630 • \*Maurice - 858-9448 • Erath 937-5944  
 \*Open Saturdays

**Primary Care...Close to Home!**

Call today for  
YOUR appointment

Visit [www.abbgen.net](http://www.abbgen.net)

**Abbeville GENERAL**

118 N. Hospital Drive • Abbeville • \*AC is an equal opportunity provider and employer

**Professional Arts Pharmacy**  
 Prescription Compounding Specialist

- TOPICAL SINUS THERAPY
- TOPICAL PAIN MGMT
- TOPICAL SKIN INJECTION
- HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY
- SPECIALTY MEDICATIONS

**PCAB ACCREDITED  
 INSURANCE ACCEPTED  
 FREE LOCAL DELIVERY**

128 CURRAN LANE, LAFAYETTE, LA 70506  
 337-991-0101 M-F 8:00 - 5:30PM  
[WWW.PROFESSIONALARTS.COM](http://WWW.PROFESSIONALARTS.COM)