Blake Fitch is an accomplished fine art photographer known for her beautifully composed images. In this interview, she shares her insights and advice on the process of becoming a fine art photographer. She emphasizes that becoming an artist isn’t like joining an exclusive club; you don’t need a fancy pedigree or Ivy League diploma. What you do need is talent, drive, and a little bit of luck. Though Blake has earned impressive degrees (bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Pratt Institute, photographic studies at the Art Institute of Chicago and a master’s degree in arts administration from Boston University), it’s not what’s made her a fine artist.

Blake explains that people from many different backgrounds can pursue fine art photography. She points out that not having a fine art degree or background doesn’t have to be a barrier. Blake has had students who were architects, accountants, young moms, and even one who was a dentist and now has a successful photography career. Blake herself has exhibited her work nationally and internationally, and has received recognition on her CV. Her work has been collected by museums such as the George Eastman House of Photography and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Blake’s own work has been exhibited at theGriﬃn Museum of Photography in Winchester, Massachusetts. With her desire to nurture budding artists and to demystify the art world, she’s perfectly suited to pass along her wisdom through her limited series of workshops.

We caught up with Blake to find out about her own artistic process, and glean some insights on points of entry into the fine art world.
Did you always want to be more fine artist than strictly a commercial photographer? Being a fine artist and professional photographer are in some ways one and the same, depending on your process. During my childhood in North Carolina, my mom always encouraged me to follow the path that I was most passionate about. In my case, it's always been photography, and in our family, a camera was always around. In high school, I became more serious, and that led to my application to Pratt, a fine arts school. Fine art just became a part of my identity.

But you did go on to also work in arts management? How did that affect your work? Working in a small photography museum outside Boston, I had the opportunity to learn both sides of the industry. It helped me understand the decision-making process behind what works well and selecting the right work for the museum. It certainly helped me understand that you can't take things personally when your work is rejected. Making hard decisions in that role and also being an artist trying to get your own work out there, you quickly establish a thick skin. You realize it's about perseverance and staying true to your own vision.

Can you share a little of your creative process? I tend to do projects that go on for a number of years, and it's sometimes hard to know when to end one. It's an organic process that comes from my varied interests. I'm usually inspired by what's happening or has happened in my own life. I draw inspiration from my family, my kids. I have this project called "Dress Rehearsal" about princess culture, drawn from my daughter and a phase she was going through; I have longstanding interests in girlhood and women's issues. In terms of how I work, I had the princess project in my mind, and would go out and scout locations, identify a subject, go do the shoot, and then edit through for the top 10 images. I made work prints of those and lived with them for a while — literally put them up on the wall so I can see them every day. I get that down to the one or two best and then keep going. The photographs aren't always perfect in the beginning stages, but they do represent my vision. After a while, you start to see a pattern and make connections that evolve into a cohesive body of work.

How do you guide your students in finding and nurturing their own photographic identity? For me, that comes with time. Style, vision and eye are all fine-tuned over time and they actually find you. Number one is to make images and let your eye evolve. It's important to try out things you're motivated by and experiment, because that's a wonderful part of the creative process. Then you have to think about how you want to be perceived and what you want to accomplish. It's helpful to think through the idea of success and your vision for yourself as a photographer, what that looks like today, and then 3 to 5 years down the road. Ultimately, the aim is to make good, solid work that is thought through, while remaining passionate and true to your vision. And, too, to avoid getting too caught up in what other people think, because it can paralyze you. Take it in, take what you need, then keep moving forward.

Is the fine art industry really as scary as it sounds? How do you demystify it? It can be intimidating, no doubt about it. But it's not like you're knocking on the door of a blue-chip gallery on your first day out there. You have to work your way up the ladder like everybody else. Start local and build from there, and learn along the way. Everyone's path to success is unique, and careers can get started in offbeat places. Even a coffee shop can lead to greatness.

5 TIPS FOR BREAKING INTO THE WORLD OF FINE ART

Wondering where to start? Blake offers these tips for getting past the uncertainty.

1. Commit to making work that you are passionate about and proud to share.

2. Create a portfolio that is a thematically unified and stylistically cohesive body of work that represents your vision. Take the time to practice presenting that portfolio of images to your peers.

3. Be brave and put yourself out there by submitting to calls for entry and photography competitions. When you feel ready, consider attending a portfolio review, an excellent way to make connections, get feedback, and find potential opportunities to show your work.

4. Establish a marketing plan and attend events that offer networking opportunities. Consider joining your local and national photography organizations.

5. Have strong support materials, such as a website, artist statement, bio, and so on.