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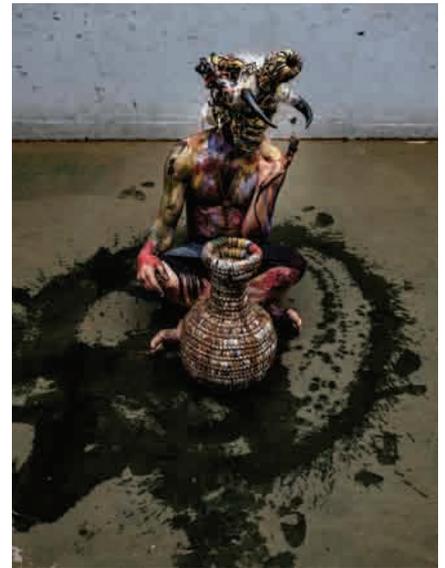
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# Analect Rituals

## Interview with Lucien Shapiro

by Sarah Elise Abramson



/lucien.shapiro



@lucien Shapiro

I've never had the pleasure of meeting Los Angeles-based artist Lucien Shapiro in person, but each time I've spoken with him, he seems to be in a different part of the world. One could deduce that he is an explorer at heart, and after examining what he creates one could also figure that he is actively questioning the world around him. Like any authentic artist, Shapiro gets fixated on particular and increasingly tedious tasks and motions that have worked their way into his art. He combines film with performance art and tours the world screening his most recent body of work to then be accompanied by a performance piece that ties in with the film.

Shapiro recently man-birthed a weighty three-part short film titled *Analect Rituals* that looks as if it were filmed in some sort of magical land where nature still rules. He stars in the film, always adorned in one of his florid and convoluted masks. The things Shapiro makes are nothing short of magnificent. *Analect Rituals* is a perfect coming together of each side of his multifaceted talents and the crafts he's been studying for years.

**Tell us a bit about yourself. Where do you come from? What's your background as an artist? What do you enjoy?**

I was born in Santa Rosa, California, and was bright blue. *Umbilical cord's wrapped around my neck / I'm seein' my death and I ain't even took my first step*, says Christopher Wallace. I graduated with a BFA in sculpture from the Academy of Art in San Francisco in 2003. I lived there for quite a few years, and interspersed times of living in NYC, the woods and being nomadic. I have been creating sculpture for all of that time, and am excited about the

growth and challenges it always provides. I enjoy drilling holes in bottle caps, collecting street diamonds, meditating, wandering, good food, long studio days, music of all genres, love and investigating myself and other human beings, of course.

**What's your driving force behind all of what you do and create?**

My neurotic need to create, question and push forward. I am obsessed with creating work, which in turn helps me to heal or discover more about myself. After each project is complete I'm ready to start again.

This is my addiction: the repetitive processes of building and learning. Lately I have been getting extremely personal and vulnerable with my work, and using it in hopes to challenge others to do the same. This is another driving force and connection with viewers from the new performance aspect of my work. I believe the masks and all my work for that matter are channeled from past experiences, lives, etc. I realized recently that the pieces make themselves; I never know exactly how they will look or precisely what they will be used for until they are done.

**Can you talk a little about your latest video project, *Analect Rituals*?**

This film is a collaborative project using a basic idea of see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil from the ancient writings of Confucius. This was the intention behind the masks and objects I made and used in the film. It was shot and collaboratively directed by Shaun Roberts, and the film was scored by Edison (Nic DeMatteo). The project just came together seamlessly, and I can't thank them enough. The focal idea in this day and age, for myself included, is that humans are very detached from each other. We do not listen, we do not speak honestly and we see people as they are on the outside, forming judgment before we see who they really are on the inside. The plot of the film is to remove the senses one at a time, search for an object representing voice, sound and sight, bring the objects back to a central place, and



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**1**  
*Darkness is Light and Light Hides in Darkness; Darkness is Light Mask*, bottle caps, wire epoxy, sculpting putty, acrylic paint and smoky quartz, 28 x 20 x 6", and *Light Hides in Darkness Mask*, bottle caps, nails, wire string, thread, quartz, selenite, celestite, zeolite, sculpting putty, resin and epoxy, 18½ x 24 x 5". Photo by Reymundo Perez III.

**2**  
*Fear Ritual for Self; Fear is the Mind Killers Mask (Animus est timor regionis larva)*, metal wire, bull horns, gemstones, rope, pyramid studs, acrylic, sculpting putty, yarn, bottle caps and glue, 20½ x 13½ x 15", and *Relinquishing Metus Vessel*, bottle caps, glass, metal wire, studs, glue and resin, 19½ x 11½ x 11". Photo by Shaun Roberts. Model Minka Sicklinger.

**3**  
*Hear No Mask*, street diamonds, sculpting putty, resin, bottle caps, epoxy, metal, pyramid studs and acrylic paint, 56 x 19 x 19". Photo by Randy Dodson.

**4**  
*Speak No Mask*, street diamonds, sculpting putty, resin, bottle caps, metal, pyramid studs and acrylic paint, 54 x 19 x 18". Photo by Randy Dodson.

slowly build a totem, which represents the need for us all to be a little more aware. The film centers on the importance of using these gifts we are given and also how important and heightened the other senses can become when one is not available.

**What have you been doing? How have you been spending your days as of late?**

For the last seven months I have been touring with a project called *A Fool's Journey, A Fear Collection Ritual Project*. This project entails screening *Analect Rituals* first, followed by a ceremony where I build a small installation and the audience members are encouraged to enter the space I have created. This space is surrounded by light, as I circle them and carry with me light in the form of a 25-pound vessel filled with candles, wearing the light collector mask, which is also covered in candles. The participants have the opportunity to write a fear or something they are processing within themselves and place this inside the *Fear Relinquishing Vessel*. I then take the vessel to the next city, where more fears are added. I am challenging people to really look at themselves, and this ritual allows them to face darkness and try to get through it so the world can maybe be a tiny bit better and brighter. I believe if we are willing to do the work on ourselves, we can be better people, and in return, as a whole, we will slowly correct the fucked up shit that this world is

made of. I started in San Francisco, traveled to NYC and back, visiting around 30 American cities, and am now writing to you from the middle of France for the European leg of the project/tour. This project will conclude in November, when I will be burning all the fears at a final ceremony.

**What are some of your favorite materials to use when constructing these masks?**

**Why use these particular materials?**

I primarily use bottle caps, street diamonds (glass collected from the streets from burglaries to cars, and no I don't break into cars, but it's left some interesting conversations if the owner returns to the car and I'm sweeping up outside their vehicle), pyramid studs and small plastic bags. These are the main materials I use, but you can find other objects included in my masks. I was attracted to bottle caps for the shape because I believe everything comes back full circle. I use street diamonds to represent turning a loss or negative experience into growth and shine. Pyramid studs are a common item from the punk movement and taps directly into an inspirational part of our culture. Small plastic bags represent addiction, which ties into the long process of my creations.

**What do masks represent to you?**

They have slowly...transformed. I have

been making them for about four to five years now, and they started as a protection or a direct correlation to heartbreak that involved some dishonesty, and so the masks were born. Most of us wear masks in many situations, and now I am searching for truth through the masks, using them as objects to guide myself towards our internal truths. The masks are now becoming a huge role in the film and ritual ideas, which usually entail a mask and an object being used to create something I want or need in my life, i.e., mating ritual, light collector (seeing light through dark times), fear relinquishing, etc.

**Name a few key people or things that inspire you.**

This list could be 667 pages long, but: music, cities, country, waters, crystals, travel, romance, moons, all my friends that push through and never stop their passions, if I name names I'm going to leave someone out and I hate that, you know who you are. As for artists I don't know yet, or dead, Sterling Ruby, Thomas Houseago, Lee Bontecou, Eva Hesse, Aaron Curry, Mark Bradford, Alexander McQueen, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Nicole Eisenman, Antoni Tàpies, Sheila Hicks, and so many more.

**Contact at**

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*Sarah Elise Abramson is a contemporary fine art photographer based in San Pedro, California—a mysterious post-industrial enclave whose offbeat countercultural history and proliferation of unusual sights, sounds and citizens is tailor-made for Abramson's obsession with everyday surrealism. In both her own photography and in her curatorial and editorial approach to exhibition projects and independent publications, her emphasis is on discovering the eccentric beauty in the things most people overlook. Found objects, hidden messages, secrets of the universe that hide in plain sight—throughout her studies at Parsons The New School for Design and Brooks Institute of Photography, and later at LaChapelle Studios, her work has evolved from finding to intuitively creating original daydreams and shared cosmologies.*