

L.A. Story: Megan 'Pictoretaker' Thompson makes her mark in the music industry

BY SEPP JANNOTTA



Megan Thompson '08 hangs out with rock stars in Los Angeles. Photographs them actually.

It wasn't long after finishing at MSU that Thompson packed up her life, photography degree in hand, and moved to L.A. It was a journey that started with a coffee shop conversation. Thompson said it went something like this:

"I asked this friend if he was moving to L.A. with the annual exodus of MSU (Film and Photography School) kids. He said, 'no, are you?' I said, 'no, I think I'm going to try out Nashville.' He said, 'well, do you want to try L.A. and be roommates?'"

That was the crossroads that put her on track for a successful career photographing alternative rock bands. Sure, on the way there was some couch surfing, a few more barista and bartending gigs. Now Thompson, who started off studying equestrian science at a small school in Missouri, then graphic design and film at MSU before

settling on her ultimate major, has a steady income as a professional photographer. Her work has been published in numerous well-known national magazines—*Spin*, *Photo District News*, *People* and *Rolling Stone*, to name a few.

She's photographed Blink 182's reunion, gone along for the Warped Tour and photographed Southern California's epic Coachella Festival. Hopeless Records, an independent record label, gave her a staff job where her title is "content creator" (something she admits she had to look at her business card to remember). Does she shoot stills, yes; video work and post-production, no problem.

People who knew her at MSU probably won't be surprised to hear that she's shooting promotional, candid and concert photos and videos of bands. That's what she did as her hobby while she was getting her degree in fine art photography.

"It's funny, a film major didn't work out partly because I convinced myself that music and band videography wasn't a real job," Thompson said. "Now, 12 years later,

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I have the dream job I made up for myself at 19 years old."

If the world she entered professionally was a little unconventional, that has suited her. Her email and social media presence offer her name as Megan "Pictoretaker" Thompson. Creativity is well-accepted currency in the music world, especially in the quirky realm of start-up bands and alternative rock where Thompson got her start and feels most at home.



Thompson's images (above, left to right): singer/songwriter/producer Ryan Adams; actor, stand-up comedian, screenwriter, author, and director B.J. Novak; singer/songwriter Juliet Simms; and the band Saves the Day. Left, a recent self-portrait of Thompson.

Christina Z. Anderson, an associate professor of photography at MSU, said creativity was always Thompson's strong suit.

"She didn't always appear to be the best student in general, but when it came time for critique, her work was always the best," Anderson said. "Everything she did was excellent. Quirky, creative, unusual—her sensibilities are well suited for her field."

photographs usually didn't contain people. But the more she photographed bands, the more she began to love the raw humanity on display when artists were on stage.

"Photographing people really made me uncomfortable, but I worked through that," Thompson said. "I started to realize people performing are really vulnerable. I've come

For her part, Thompson said she benefited at MSU from having professors that gave direct critiques of her art and drilled the notion that you can't stop making new work.

Thompson said she tended toward landscapes at first but then moved toward more conceptual pieces. Her

full circle—I think it's really important to document people."

The desire to photograph people has recently led Thompson to pursue a project doing portraits of comedians. Some are famous, some aren't. It doesn't matter, she said. The project arose from a piece of advice that she took to heart and now shares in turn to others seeking their way in the photography business:

"If your passion is photography and photography is your business, you should always try to have a personal project. When I was in school I was doing fine art, my personal project was photographing bands. Now I photograph bands for my business and my project is comedians."

And lately, when she goes to see a band just for fun, she is trying to adhere to a New Year's resolution—leave the camera at home and just enjoy the show. 📷