

ELLEN STONE

The CEO and founder of the photographic arts agency Public Offerings Ltd guest-edits our art section.



Portrait of Ellen Stone Sofia Wilkinson-Steel
WRITER Megan Wallace

In the words of the American sculptor Carol Bove, “Becoming an artist is not a good business plan.” The figure of the impoverished artist is a tired cliché, undoubtedly, but for many it’s also a sad reality. In today’s world of rising tuition fees and slashed funding, where a handful of established galleries reign supreme, the art world is an increasingly hostile place, particularly for early-career artists. But it doesn’t need to be – at least according to this issue’s guest art editor, Ellen Stone.

A curator, creative and the founder and CEO of photographic arts agency Public Offerings Ltd, Stone makes it her *raison d’être* to nurture artists at every stage in their journey, sheltering them from the harsh climes of an industry that can, as she puts it, “completely eat up and disregard people’s real passion”. For anyone not up to speed with the responsibilities of running an arts agency, Stone’s work at Public Offerings Ltd includes curating exhibitions, negotiating high-profile publications, organising events, developing collector relationships and appraising archives, all in the best interests of the artists she represents.

If it sounds like her schedule is crammed, that’s because it is. As she admits, hard-working arts professionals are in demand in the art world – even if they draw less attention from the public. “People often think of the art world as just the artist, but it’s an incredibly collaborative industry that needs gallerists, curators, academics and people to write and talk about it,” Stone explains. “That’s really where I found my place.”

The journey towards finding that place was, Stone says, less than conventional. “I grew up in the northeast, spending most of my teenage years just outside Newcastle, which meant I wasn’t part of the traditional art world. So I looked at it from a slightly different perspective and found myself exploring it through curating and interacting with other people’s creativity, making it into something more,” Stone says.

Performance of Myself ©Kirsten Barnett





"The Twins" ©Ava Williams

It's this desire to participate in the artistic zeitgeist that turned Stone onto Public Offering Ltd's unique selling point: its focus on the undervalued but culturally influential medium of photography. "I realised that there was a need for a company that was looking at photography as a very serious art form, offering all of the support mechanisms that blue chip galleries offer classical painters or sculptors, and really thinking about it as an important curatorial medium for the modern age," she notes, explaining the "light-bulb moment" that led to the company's genesis.

While Stone's enthusiasm for photography as an art form is partly rooted in her career history – after working at contemporary gallery White Cube she went on to become Rankin's Head of Books, Exhibitions and Archive – it's clearly also a passion that transcends the professional. "You can define different periods in art history through different mediums that really defined how people were viewing the world. Photography is that for the contemporary era," she says, every inch the art history enthusiast. "Everyone can access photography, everyone has an understanding of the visual language

of photography, because it is the primary medium we use to express ourselves as contemporary beings through social media."

The democratic nature of photography is a clear motivator for Stone and informs the Public Offerings Ltd ethos of prioritising women, LGBTQIA+ and ethnic-minority artists, whose perspectives have been historically shut out from galleries and textbooks. Giving you a taster of Stone's diverse roster, the Public Offerings Ltd online gallery houses a cacophony of artistic voices, featuring surreal parodies of the beauty industry, courtesy of London-based fashion photographer Jasmine De Silva, in casual co-existence with portraits of queer youth, captured by Floridian street artist and documentary photographer Crummy Gummy (Mauricio Murillo).

Yet despite being a truly eclectic mix of artists, a common thread is evident: Stone doesn't shy away from art with an opinion. "There is the traditional face of the art world, and we don't believe new collectors want that anymore. Emerging collectors want to see themselves reflected in the work they buy. Whether finding someone

who shares a gender or sexual identity with them, or finding someone from a similar economic background, we are living in a time when personal identity is coming to the forefront and at Public Offerings Ltd we are advocating for diverse voices to be heard, because if we support diverse artists now we can shape what representation looks like across the art market of the future."

The political preoccupations common across the artists represented by Public Offerings Ltd are also shared by British embroiderer Holly Allan and American photographer Amanda Rowan, the artists highlighted by Stone as part of her guest edit. A long-running collaborator of Stone's, Allan tackles the gendered history of her chosen medium of embroidery, traditionally carried out by women and long dismissed as a simple hobby, by juxtaposing it with tenderly stitched naked women as a reference to the nude's prized place in western art history. "The visual language that Holly has is soft yet loud, which is very difficult to create," notes Stone. "It's something that I really respond to. The pieces are touchingly feminine but at the same time are very expressive, which is such a contemporary take on a traditional medium."



(Right) "Crystal Clean" ©Jasmine De Silva

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Much like Allan, Rowan has an ambivalent attitude towards convention. A self-described "rock'n'roll love child", the photographer grew up in the bohemian, post-summer-of-love era in California before spending her twenties as an actress on Broadway and in Hollywood, gathering first-hand experience of the critiques of sexist media culture now visible in her work. Rowan's colour-drenched still lifes and portraits explore ideas of female sexual power and domestic confinement. "Amanda knows how to play with sexuality, with colour and with expressing the self, but using it as political critique," says Stone.

However, it's Rowan's voracious cultural appetite that makes Stone believe that her work is so well placed on the pages of this issue. "Amanda is someone who can pull together different influences, from burlesque and pin-up to classical painting and the Dutch masters. She has this understanding and wide artistic vision that *HUNGER* started out doing. It's not just fashion or documentary or beauty, it's everything. Amanda really does the same thing."