

## AMERICAN CONNECTION

Using a thermal camera to photograph the injection sites of those who've recently received their Covid-19 vaccination, **Linda Alterwitz's** latest work walks a fine line between art and science. Susan Burnstine takes a closer look.



Sheyenne, Three Days Post-Injection, 2021



Jilda, Nine Days Post-Injection, 2022



Marvin, Three Days Post-Injection, 2022

For the past 16 years Las Vegas-based photographer Linda Alterwitz has merged art with science as a means to create an in-depth exploration of the nexus between nature, society and the individual. Her most recent body of work, *Injection Site: Making the Vaccine Visible*, is a fascinating exploration of the physiological effects of the Covid-19 vaccination by traversing the science and constructs that have created divisions in the United States.

Alterwitz studied photography with Richard Ross while working toward her BFA at the

University of Santa Barbara. In graduate school she studied painting and drawing, but she remained fascinated by the magic the darkroom offered.

After being diagnosed with a benign brain tumour in 1998, she experienced a defining moment in her creative journey as an artist. 'When seeing the insides of my brain on a large sheet of film derived from an MRI, the subject matter of my paintings and drawings, which was influenced by abstract expressionism, became irrelevant to me,' she says. 'I became mystified with the invisible and what can be revealed by science and technology.'

In 2001 Alterwitz realised she couldn't accomplish what she wanted with paint and returned to photography. While working full-time, she attended classes at her local community college to study digital cameras, Photoshop, printing and scanning.

Her first series was inspired by the subject of art and science and mirrored the feelings she had while inside an MRI tube, which she describes as 'fear versus reassurance'.

She says: 'In my earlier photography work, I blended these two contrasting elements within each piece. Although the techniques never stay the

same, this underlying theme is still present in my work.'

In 2013 Alterwitz became inspired to start using a high-resolution thermal camera after seeing one used on the TV show *Cops*. She recalls, 'The imagery was completely fascinating, and I knew at that moment I needed to find a way to use that technology in my work. I didn't know why at the time, but I knew it would be an important tool.'

Her most recent body of work differs from previous series since her continued themes of fear and comfort are not visualised

as separate entities. Instead, they became one construct.

After the Covid-19 vaccine became available in the United States, a friend complained that her arm was bothering her. 'It didn't look red or irritated on the surface and, out of curiosity, I asked her if I could photograph her arm with the thermal camera,' she says. 'I was dumbfounded at what I saw nine days after the injection. It was then that I decided to record more people's immunological response to the vaccine.'

At first, Alterwitz photographed healthcare professionals, as they were the first to receive the vaccine in her area. 'I followed the vaccine rollout, photographing family members, friends and others who were over 65, then photographing adults of all ages. The most recent group I photographed was children,' she says.

Each subject is photographed once, and images are taken between 20 minutes to four weeks after the injection. So far, she has photographed more than 140 participants.

When considering if this work creates peace of mind or fear for viewers, Alterwitz says: 'At the beginning of the pandemic,

people seemed fearful of the images. Now, I believe people are more reflective of the time of the pandemic and I hope this work will be remembered as a unique documentation of an unusual time in our history.'

Alterwitz is continuing to photograph participants who have just received the Covid-19 vaccine, but she's expanded the project to include the Mpox, flu, pneumonia, shingles and HPV vaccines.

Additionally, she's been focusing on a separate thermal photography project for the past five years that has nothing to

do with the vaccine. 'In fact, it's quite the opposite and somewhat meditative,' she says. 'Moving from work that is intense to work that is more peaceful, or working on both at the same time, helps bring balance to my life.'

Alterwitz recently released a limited-edition self-published hardback monograph designed and produced with Jace Graf at Cloverleaf Studio in Austin, Texas. It includes a foreword by curator Vivian Zavataro and a signed and numbered archival art piece. It can be purchased directly at her website.

lindaalterwitz.com



Candace, Two Days Post-Injection, 2022



Markie, Four Hours Post-Injection, 2021



Daryl, Two Days Post-Injection, 2021

## EXHIBITIONS USA

### COLUMBIA

**National Portrait Gallery**

*Until 9 June 2024*

**Duty, Honor, Country:**

**Antebellum Portraits of West Pointers**

npg.si.edu

### FORT WORTH

**Amon Carter Museum**

*Until 7 January 2024*

**Come To Colorado: Selections from the Fred and Jo Mazzulla Collection**

cartermuseum.org

### NEW YORK CITY

**Metropolitan Museum of Art**

*Until 1 October*

**Richard Avedon: MURALS**

metmuseum.org

**Fotografiska New York**

*Until 16 September*

**Terry O'Neill: Stars**

fotografiska.com

**MOMA**

*Until 16 September*

**New Photography 2023**

moma.org

### PHOENIX

**Phoenix Art Museum**

*Until 5 November*

**Fashioning Self: The Photography of Everyday Expression**

phxart.org

### ROCHESTER

**Eastman Museum**

*Until 31 December*

**Gillian Laub: Southern Rites**

eastman.org

### SAN FRANCISCO

**SFMOMA**

*Until 12 November*

**Kinship: Photography and Connection**

sfmoma.org

### STANFORD

**Cantor Arts Center**

*Until 28 January 2024*

**Beyond Here: The Judy and Sidney Zuber Collection of Latin American Photography**

museum.stanford.edu