

Photo finish

Using a camera turned artist's life around

By **ANDREW MCGINN**
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IF life can be summed up with a snapshot, Heidi Kirkpatrick's had a blurry thumb covering it. After all, until just a decade ago, the Springfield native didn't even really have a clue what she wanted to do.

She tended bar. She waited tables. She took drugs.

"In high school, I just wanted to run. I absolutely hated North. I hated Ohio State, too," Kirkpatrick, now 44, said.

Then her father-in-law, seeing how she snapped pictures on vacation, gave her a camera. A good one.

Trading "one addiction for another," she dove into photography.

Now she will open her first Midwest exhibit, at the Springfield Museum of Art, on Saturday. The show, with Bowling Green's M.M. Dupay, runs through April 3.

Kirkpatrick is what you might call a late bloomer. But all things apparently do have a reason — admittedly, she had been too wild to have a sharp eye.

"It has to be in you. The mechanics can be taught. But you can't teach the art of seeing. I'm pointing out things most people miss," said Kirkpatrick, who took up photography when she moved to Oregon nine years ago.

The exhibit here will be a retrospective of her first career decade and includes plenty of stuff most of us miss.

One series, "Girlie," is an examination of seemingly mundane household merchandise, from cigarette lighters and coffee mugs to pepper shakers. Or, in her eyes, "Booby art. Real derogatory stuff," as she put it.

Kirkpatrick also explores female imagery on the street, in the form of public advertising.

And in combining another



love, urban landscapes, she projects images of architecture onto nudes.

The work should go well with Dupay's hand-crafted collage work, which takes to task stereotypes about beauty. She combines such things as campy images in '50s fashion mags with references to famous Greek art.

Who knows if Kirkpatrick would have seriously taken up photography if she hadn't moved to Portland?

"It rained all the time and my husband was working 14 hours a day," Kirkpatrick, formerly Heidi Lambert, said.

So she took her new camera and enrolled at Portland State.

"The younger students took photography because they thought it'd be easy. But I loved

it so much," she said. "I became the student people loved to hate."

One day in class, "A woman had these dreamy, soft images," she said. The images were taken with a Holga, an all-plastic, Chinese-made toy that sells for \$20. She had to have one.

Kirkpatrick now shoots almost exclusively with a Holga. In fact, she's been through nine of them — each had to be secured with electrical tape because light seeps in.

With the camera, the edges of an image get distorted before falling completely into darkness, she said.

"The Holga suggests you're an extremely creative photographer or you're extremely cheap," Kirkpatrick said. "I'd like to think I'm the first."

And because it's essentially a point-and-shoot camera, the Holga allowed her to get back to basics.

"I was getting bogged down in the technical jargon. The Holga was so freeing. All I had to do was see," she said.

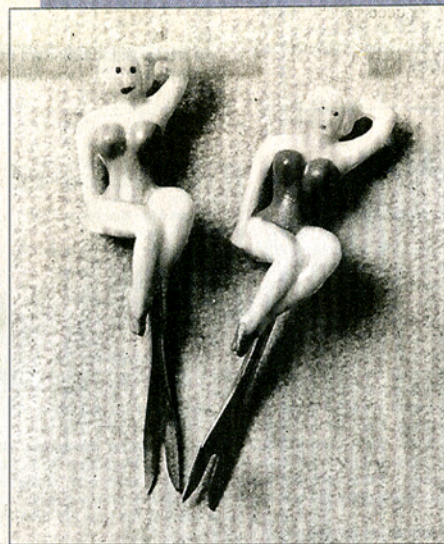
The Holga also has one big advantage when she takes to the streets to shoot.

"Sometimes you can't be taken seriously with the Holga. But you get into places where I couldn't go with my 35mm and big-ass lens," Kirkpatrick explained. "To look like a photographer is the last thing I want to do."

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M.M. DUPAY'S collage, "Two Heads Are Better Than One."



TOP TO BOTTOM: Heidi Kirkpatrick's photos "Flesh and Stone," "Think My Clothes Off" and "Girlie: Corn Cob Picks."

Photography by Heidi Kirkpatrick and collages by M.M. Dupay open Saturday at the Springfield Museum of Art. The joint exhibit runs through April 3 at the museum, 107 Cliff Park Road. Admission for non-members is \$3. The museum is closed Sundays and Mondays.