



THEN  
HE  
FORGOT  
MY  
NAME

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY

BEGINS AMID THE RUINS OF THE PAST

BY SUSAN COPICH



then he forgot my name  
Susan Copich takes on all facets in her latest project—photographer, set designer, costume and makeup artist, and model. Here, “the fall (RED)” and “amendments, amend, AMEN.” Previous spread, “SEEK” and “BLUE.”



## THIS WORK

in progress was born out of the acknowledgement of fear—fear of being vulnerable, alone, seen, unseen, weak, misunderstood, too much, not enough—and of my own mortality. Several years ago, my father was diagnosed with dementia, which led to frequent trips to our family home in Ohio. During one visit, my brother reintroduced me to a building he bought two decades earlier in downtown Youngstown, Ohio, that remains untouched, lost in time. The decay was visually stunning and reflected with such brutal clarity the experience of a middle-aged woman with aging parents, and all that it implies. Beneath the building’s deterioration lived the stories, the voices, the images of the women who had brought it to life. It yearned to tell its story—and within those walls I began to do just that.

Approaching work from the personal—and finding paths to truth by elevating it to the universal through myth, archetype, and character—womanhood was the obvious starting point. My previous project, *Domestic Bliss*, also was centered on this truth, but was approached from a claustrophobic, domesticated point of view. Then he forgot my name takes the inner dialogue of women

who lived or worked in this building, their history gleaned from research, found objects on set, as well as my own experiences. The universality of womanhood—the trials, wounds, strengths, tolerances, and seemingly impossible tasks—gave me a starting point. Because of the current conversation on power, sex, men and women, it is perhaps the first time in modern history that women’s experiential perspective is on the table. It is upending existing norms and redefining the feminine side of the story, giving it voice and credibility; asking the female population to not only seek their truth, but to let it be heard; requiring each of us to re-evaluate our experiences and then to articulate with clarity and subtly a more enlightened existence; demanding that we no longer model ourselves and our revolutions after masculine role models, but reflect deeply on our authentic experience. All this, no easy task and one that requires bravery, exposure, success and failure.

From the years of silence, a simple hashtag validates our experiences and unites a world of women. Hoping this conversation continues to feed more nuanced discussions about sex and power, it can create an understanding and re-evaluation of per-

spectives, becoming a new consciousness. And so, what began as a project about my father has evolved into what it is like to be a woman, with a look back at our history and tying that to the conversation of today, the #MeToo surge, as we move forward. The title, then he forgot my name, has taken on a new interpretation—and the denial echoing from some of the perpetrators rings harshly and loudly: “I don’t even remember her.”

In this solidarity to women, I have felt even more driven to direct, produce, model, act, set design, makeup, hair, lighting, and photograph each image you see here, and more. The singleness, the solitude in creating this work has given me space to fail, stumble, question, re-shoot, re-shoot again to whatever obsessive end. Another pattern has surfaced as this body of work has formed—a theme of red, white and blue, the colors present in each image or individually showcased. My intent wasn’t political, but, subconsciously, that is where I was gently led, then pushed forward, following the results of the national election. As the president enters his second year, fear is bleeding into my work, and I am suddenly cognizant of the vulnerability of democracy and connecting it with decay, both as a country and in the imagery I am projected, in this building where I find myself drawn back to. Despite it all, amid the ruin, the strength of the woman is revealed. ■

**SUSAN COPICH** is known for her 2014 conceptual photographic series *Domestic Bliss*, which has been shown around the world. *The Cupcake*, a video short in collaboration with Nathan Buck, was released in 2016. Copich was born in Youngstown, Ohio, received her BFA in performance and choreography from Ohio State, and has had careers as a modern dancer, actor, and entrepreneur. She lives in neighboring New York, and her two daughters attend Berkshire schools. Berkshire Magazine is launching a new series of quarterly talks, “Bringing it Home,” at the Norman Rockwell Museum on International Women’s Day, Thursday, March 8, 5:30-7 p.m. Commentary by editor Anastasia Stanmeyer and a conversation with Copich led by museum director Laurie Norton Moffatt will explore Copich’s artwork. Copich also will be part of a group show, “Domestication,” at Sohn Gallery in Lenox, March 23-June 10, with a reception on Saturday, April 28, 4-7 p.m.