

BETH LILLY  
THE ORACLE @ WIFI: Artist Statement

As an artist, I saw the potential in cell phone cameras for individuals to directly interact with an artist, actively engaging in the creative process. The technology could bridge time and geography, enabling me to make a photograph specifically for a stranger anywhere in the world and email it to them almost instantly. The question for me then became – why would anyone call me for a photograph? Starting in 2006, I began a project where I presented myself as an oracle and artist who could randomly generate images that would answer callers' questions, like a photographic version of fortune telling. Sending out emails, I invited people to call me on my cell phone on the seventh day of each month.

There are two rules to this interaction. First, when they called me, they had to keep their question secret. I do not know the questions when I take the photographs. Second, wherever I am when I received their call, my location would be the starting point to find and create three photographs for them. After I emailed the caller their three photos, they had to reply back and reveal their question. The final document is a triptych. I pair the question with the images and post all the readings on my website. To date, I have photographed for over 400 people. The large majority of the callers are strangers to me and often calls originate from countries outside the United States, mostly Europe, Canada, and the Caribbean.

After this process of interaction, the main interest of the project for me is the interpretation of the readings – an experiment in how text affects the interpretation. By pairing the text next to images, each question begs an answer to the question it poses. Viewers must apply contemporary cultural associations to explore the potential symbolic meanings. Once the question is read, viewers find themselves incapable of interpreting the images in any other way. However, the meaning each person arrives at is entirely subjective, dependent on their personal experience and prejudices, so each combination has an endless number of possible narratives.

As an artist, the project challenged me to identify and visually reveal the symbolic possibilities of the most banal objects and activities of our civilization. For myself, the project satisfies a curiosity I have for the secret thoughts of other people. It's a kind of voyeurism where I get a glimpse of their private lives. Given the opportunity to ask any question of the universe, what would they want to know? As a viewer, the combinations of text and images are often fresh and surprising, suggesting answers that can be humorous, haunting or even profound.

Beth Lilly  
[sbethlilly@gmail.com](mailto:sbethlilly@gmail.com)  
[www.bethlilly.com](http://www.bethlilly.com)  
<http://oracleatwifi.blogspot.com>

20 26<sup>th</sup> Street NW, B-2  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
404-805-5431