

Christine Michalka-Marahrens' new exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art uses a smartphone camera



The Instagratication exhibit shows well-known scenes around Virginia Beach as shot through a cell phone application and edited by photographer Christine Michalka-Marahrens.

Photo by Haley Bowler

by Haley Bowler, Savanna Gault, and Kate Dodson

With new photography applications, such as Instagram on smartphones, anyone can be a photographer. A simple picture can be transformed into a creative work of art, thanks to a variety of filters. The result is a growing community of amateur photographers sharing their pictures online. All of the technology they need is at their fingertips; Instagratication.

One such artist's work is now on display at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (Virginia MOCA). The exhibit, entitled *Instagratication*, features photography by Christine Michalka-Marahrens that portrays various scenes of Virginia Beach. Michalka-Marahrens uses her smartphone camera to capture the area's beauty, as the phone is more convenient than her professional camera.

Native to Germany, Michalka-Marahrens lived in Virginia Beach during her husband's North American

Treaty Organization deployment. Her husband, a curator for past exhibits at the Virginia MOCA, contacted current exhibit curator Heather Hakimzadeh about his wife's photography. Hakimzadeh set up the exhibit in September, which will remain on display until Dec. 30.

"It was difficult to pick which pictures to put on the wall because she gave me so many to choose from," Hakimzadeh said. "I chose pictures that were different from each other to create contrast, as well as a well contracted

and dynamic display. I also wanted to showcase pictures to show recognizable scenes from Virginia Beach that people could relate to."

As Instagram is so accessible, virtually anyone with a smartphone can upload a picture to be seen by the general public. However, Hakimzadeh states that many photographers critique this application for encouraging bad art.

"I think the fact that she (Michalka-Marahrens) specifically uses Instagram shows that the world of photography is changing," Hakimzadeh said. "It is a challenging medium to use, but with experience, she was able to create real art. This exhibit is a statement that validates Instagram photography."

She uses the hundreds of camera applications on her iPhone 4 to edit each photo. On average, Michalka-Marahrens uses five different applications per photo, taking between 10 to 15 steps to edit each one. Some of her favorite applications include Instagram

Camera+, Snapseed, Filterstorm and PX Express. The applications allow fast editing, which gives her the option to share her work online.

Michalka-Marahren's hard work seems to have paid off; she has inspired amateur photographers in the community to submit their own images to the Virginia MOCA Facebook page. In addition to reaching out to the community as a whole, the museum also wants to incorporate the younger generation. Their Teen Apprenticeship Program gives high school students the opportunity to learn about art in art career settings.

To continue the community-based art, the Virginia MOCA plans to feature more local photography. Local photo-journalist Matt Ich's series of photography depicting the Hampton Roads area will be featured at the museum next year. Through methods such as creating a Facebook page for fans to upload their artistic work, the Virginia MOCA is sparking initiative for the community's participation in its exhibits.

"Instagratication features a local artist and incorporates innovative, contemporary art with the hope that visitors are challenged when they have the opportunity to think differently about the place they live when they see the photos," said Erika Guess, public relations associate.

Bowler, Gault and Dodson are students in the journalism class at Frank W. Cox High School. More of their work can be found in the Falcon Press, the school's newspaper, which hits stands throughout the school year.



The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art

Photo by Amy Matzke-Fawcett

ALSO The Disposable Film Festival playing at MOCA

In addition to the Instagratication exhibit, the Virginia Museum of Modern Art is celebrating art created with low-cost technology. The Disposable Film Festival, which will be featured in the Price Auditorium, showcases cinema created with devices such as mobile phones and pocket cameras. The Disposable Film Festival encourages film makers to experiment with unconventional technology and validates their art.

VIRGINIA BEACH IN AN INSTANT

Stepping out of the main gallery and into a bright, warm hallway, visitors at the Virginia Museum of Modern Art encounter the Instagratication exhibit. Spread out over a bare wall are breathtaking photographs, made more prominent by their simple white background. The pictures are taken from various places around Virginia Beach and are sure to resonate with local museum-goers. However, the familiar scenes are presented with a twist. Virginia Beach residents are likely to see their favorite landscapes from a different angle. Colors are either darker or more vibrant, and textures are either crisper or blurrier, all done with the artistic eye of photographer Christine Michalka-Marahrens via her smartphone.



Two of the photos in Instagratication at MOCA

Photo by Haley Bowler