Photography and the Creative Process Articles Interviews Portfolios

QUARTERLY



Essays Bill Jay J. D. Marston

> Interview Chip Hooper

Portfolios Adam Jahiel

Bruce Barnbaum Chip Hooper

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Q U A R T E R L Y



Photography and the Creative Process Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

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The progression of anything – including art – is built upon the work of those who precede us in the process. In its time, techniques can have cutting-edge appeal, only to fall out of fashion. What remains is *content*; but will it withstand the test of time?

Portfolio : Bruce Barnbaum The 1998 Images

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Artists: Rebels Without A Cause

In his signature style, Jay enjoys going on the rampage against insidious advertising in our culture, only to make the claim that art and advertising have been bedfellows all along; that money is the reason there is art; and that rebellious attitudes are worn by artists, but capitalized on in corporate advertising.

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Interview with Chip Hooper

it's much more than visual interest. Knowing our "personal themes" may be

at the heart of completing ourselves as

people — and ultimately — as artists.

The incredible challenge for many of us is to fit photography into our already overburdened lives. Hooper manages to have it all as he integrates his love of photography, his passion for the Big Sur coastline, his work in the music industry, and his home and family in the Carmel Valley of California.

Why are we unwittingly drawn to particular subject matter? Marston suggests that

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LensWork Special Editions Prints Collection Catalog

Portfolio : Adam JahielThe Last Cowboy

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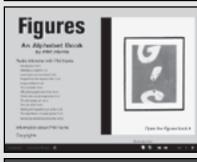
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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



The Problem with Technique and Content

One of my favorite quotes is from Sir Isaac Newton, arguably one of the most intelligent human beings in the history of the human race:

> "If I've seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

The debt we owe to those who have gone before us is immeasurable, but we must also realize that in the organic process of history everything grows, changes, expands, complicates, becomes more sophisticated, and never-ever stands still.

Consider the mere *presentation* of photographs. At The Art Institute of Chicago I've seen a copy of Frederick Evans' *Sea of Steps,* which was produced sometime around the turn of the century. The photographic paper is *glued* to a piece of railroad board with rubber cement and

decorated with ink pen drawings of lines and *fleur-de-lis* on the matte board.

Later, more sophisticated photographers — particularly the West Coast landscape school — decided that the best method to present photographs was to dry-mount them on 4-ply acid-free matte board, and overmatte them with 2-ply matte board with a window cut-out. A later generation expanded this theme to the 4-ply matte board window matte with a beveled-edge. More recently, the rage seems to be the frame-box in which the photograph is suspended in a three-dimensional box, appearing to float behind the glass with no matte board whatsoever. I've seen this presentation in no less than a dozen shows, including such well-known photographers as Mark Klett and Phil Borges.

My point is simply this: yesterday's sophisticated ideas often become today's student minimums. Show your friends and family an 8 x 10 image with a hinged mount board and bevel-cut window matte and they'll assume you're showing them your art. Show those in the art world the same presentation and chances are they'll assume that you are showing them your student work. Fashion evolves.

Ideas evolve, too. When Weston photographed *Two Shells*, such still-lifes were revolutionary, marvelous, almost shocking in their stark simplicity. Today's cuttingedge photographs are considerably more complex — at least by today's standards. No doubt, in the reasonable future, these ideas, in turn, will seem arcane.

The main reason I bring all of this up is because it is a dangerous trap that a considerable number of photographers have mistaken for something far more significant. Take technology as another very apropos example. The history of photography is a long series of competing and increasingly sophisticated technological means, each evolution of which has launched a career for people who have now been forgotten. Ansel Adams was the most accomplished black and white printer of his time. But, if Ansel were just

starting out today he would find himself in the midst of thousands of photographers who print as well or better than he does. (Come to think of it, doesn't this come directly back to standing on the shoulders of giants?) His fame, if derived solely from his printing techniques, is short-lived. Said another way, whatever is spectacular today will likely be commonplace tomorrow, and any notoriety derived from being technologically spectacular will certainly doom a piece of work, or a career, to a mere historic footnote. We live in an era in which everything gets better, cheaper, faster, more common, and frequently easier.

All of this is particularly bad news if your photographs are noteworthy because of the viewers awe at your technique. Assuming this is the case, then clearly the only enduring quality of a photograph is its *content*.

But here we find a different problem, because content is so often tied to culture, and culture changes even faster than technology. How much would you pay for a Limited Edition lithographic poster of Jim Morrison? Well, because it's been recently advertised, we know lots and lots of people will pay \$50. But, how much would you pay for a Limited Edition

lithograph of Will Rogers? Probably very little, because most people don't remember who Will Rogers was, yet his fame in his time was far more wide-spread than Jim Morrison's ever was. A photograph's content is often bound tightly to a specific place in a specific time. Outside that place or outside that time, the content symbolism and conventions may be completely undecipherable. Even worse, they may be decipherable, but now valueless.

So, if technical prowess leads to fleeting fame, and meaningful content is eventually forgettable — what remains for a photographer to do that has lasting importance? Said another way — perhaps a much simpler way — what do you *choose* to photograph? There are probably as many answers to this question as there are photographers, but two answers seem to surface more frequently than others.

(1) Record history for those in the future with curiosity (e.g. the burning Hindenberg), and (2) use photography to explore the ageless questions of Truth, Beauty, Justice, and The Spirit.

There is no easy answer to this. No matter how well you command your craft and no matter how insightful your content, you might still be making piffle. It seems the only sane approach is to make the very best piffle you can, and at least have a ball doing so.

Come to think of it, that's not a bad result, after all.

Bonds

THE 1998 IMAGES

A Portfolio

by

Bruce Barnbaum

LensWork Publishing, in cooperation with Bruce Barnbaum, is delighted to announce The 1998 Portfolio, a collection of Bruce's 1998 images (from the following pages) as LensWork Special Edition Prints.

See the catalog at the back of this issue for details.



Layers, Antelope Canyon

ARTISTS: REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE

bу

Bill Jay

I am fascinated by those archaeological documentaries on television. You know the ones I mean: close-up of a hand brushing away at a piece of dirt and, then —*voilá!* —a tiny shard of pottery is miraculously uncovered.

How do they do that? How did they know that a shard will materialize in the exact spot on which the camera was trained? How many times did they go through this process — sweep, sweep, sweep, nothing — until they got the right place?

Then the shard is reverently held up to the camera until it fills the frame while the narrator sonorously deduces from this itty-bitty piece of trash that the makers were the mesocryptonites who lived in the lower Wahili three thousand years ago, buried sacred pigs with their dead, invented forks, married their sisters, constructed bamboo geodesic domes, worshipped nautilus shells, wove clothing from billiberry bark, believed their ancestors came from the stars (Alpha Centauri to be exact), laid the foundations for Greek philosophy, and suffered population depletion by hunting rhinocerii with sling-shots.

THE LAST COWBOY

bи

Adam Jahiel

This portfolio, along with an audio interview of the photographer and additional photographs, is available in the LensWork MultiMedia Library. For more information, visit our website at www.lenswork.com.



Riley Cleaver, Winter's Camp, 1994

Personal Themes

bу

J.D. Marston

The chill of the cold, the smart of the wind, the glowing relaxation of the summer sun. When I view or print my photographs, I remember the sensation I had in my body at the moment of exposure. These "bio-memories" are all important to me, yet, as I penetrate through the memories, I dive deeper into an even more fundamental sensation that dawned in me a long time ago.

Just when it began, I can't exactly say. It seems it's been a process that has continued as long as I remember. I do recall being five, standing in the glass corridor of my school with my nose pressed against the window. A swallow swooped in front of me, flying straight toward my eyes. As I watched, the bird slammed — seemingly in slow motion — into the window, its body twisting in a wrenching sideways snap. I felt a visceral sensation of emptiness, of an eternal moment of impenetrable stillness. In this stillness, the sense of "I" vanished and all that was left was space.

I remember standing there, absorbed, for quite a while. I arrived late for class and while my teacher was bearing down on me for tardiness, her penetrating voice seemed to echo through a long corridor that removed her as a reality

INTERVIEW WITH CHIP HOOPER

Brooks Jensen: It's been my observation that a lot of people

assume that artists live a life that's different from everyday people. But, in fact, you still have to mow the grass, go to work in the morning, pay the bills and do all that stuff. Is it fair to say that the difference isn't in the *everyday* things that we *all* do, but is in the way one integrates everyday life and the life

of a photographic artist?

Chip Hooper: That's right. I have two kids and a wife and

a job and all that.

BJ: What do you do for a living?

CH: I'm a booking agent for bands – mostly rock-n-roll bands – a lot of well-known groups.

BJ: So, you're semi-retired or independently wealthy?

CH: (laughing) Not even close!

BJ: So, you're at the office early in the morning and there late at night, doing business, paying your taxes, managing staff, – and there comes a time when you say time out, I gotta walk away from this, and you grab your camera and head down the coast?

CH: Right.

BIG SUR and the CALIFORNIA COAST

by

Chi Baper

Chip Hooper

We are also publishing a portfolio of Chip's work in the Anasazi ruins in the LensWork MultiMedia Library as well as several prints in the LensWork Special Editions Print Collection.

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Crashing waves and splash, 1994

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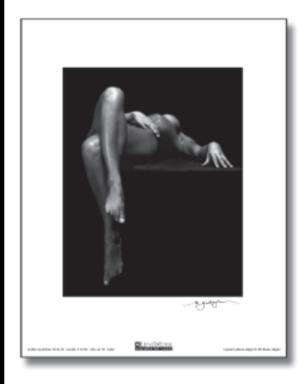
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Sample print Ship Rock, New Mexico, 1989 by David Grant Best

Bruce Barnbaum: The 1998 Portfolio

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LWS052 Layers, Antelope Canyon, 1998



LWS060 Archways and door, Gordes, 1998



LWS053 Striations and pool reflections, 1998



LWS054 Broken Bow Arch, 1998

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LWS055 Leaves on cottonwood burls, 1998



LWS056 Ruina de la Recolección, 1998



LWS057 Observation Tower, Oppède-le-Vieux, 1998



LWS058 Carcasses and approaching storm, 1998



LWS059 The Rock Rainbow, 1998



LWS061 Sunset, 40-mile Ridge, 1998

THE PROCESS OF MAKING THE LENSWORK SPECIAL EDITIONS PRINTS

LensWork Special Editions Prints are all produced in a traditional black & white darkroom, by hand, using the best materials and processing techniques now available.

To begin, the photographer's original fine art photograph is scanned into an ultra-calibrated computer system. The image is fine-tuned in Adobe Photoshop to perfectly match the photographer's original photograph — with sensitivity to tonalities, scale, cropping and detail.

The image is then inspected in the computer at high magnification, where dust spots or marks that might have been introduced in the scanning process are eliminated.

The computer image is then output at a service bureau using a Postscript output image-setter. The resulting LensWork negative is a 425-line screen half-tone reproduction of the image suitable for printing in our darkrooms. An image setter is the same device used in the printing industry to make film for platemaking in the printing of books and magazines. The finest printing presses, however, can print at best an image of 300-line screen.

In the darkroom, we *can* print the tiniest 425-line screen dots, since photographic paper can resolve this extremely fine dot and make it

visible. Remarkably, the tiny dots are so small that they are virtually invisible to the naked eye, and barely visible when examined through a powerful viewing magnifier. The resulting "photographic prints" preserve the look and feel of continuous tone photographs even though they are half-tone reproductions. The LensWork Special Editions Prints reproduce with exceptional fidelity what photographers consider to be their best work — with rich photographic black, pure, clean whites, and the subtleties of all the gray tones in between.

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