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"Thanks for producing what is, in my opinion, **the only mag worth subscribing to.**" -- *Rob*

"Thanks!!! **LOVE LensWork;** wish it was weekly..." -- *Scott*

"I truly love your magazine, and **find it an inspiration to my own work** in photography, although I am just a wanna be "artist" turned amateur. Your magazine is a great comfort to me while I sit on board ships in the Arabian Gulf stinking of sweat and dreaming of cooler climes." -- *Timothy Gordish*

"I also wanted to compliment you and a wonderful publication. It is **clearly better than any other similar publication** - especially *Aperture* (the "new" version)." -- *Jack B. Combs*

"**I LOVE your publication** - a friend of mine just gave me the most recent issue." -- *Lorraine Shaw*

"I just picked up a copy of your magazine and I want to know, where have you been all my life? This says No. 36 on the front, does this mean I've missed 35 of these? **I enjoyed every bit of this issue, from cover to cover.** Just wanted to say hi and I'm sorry I didn't know about you before." -- *Katharine Thayer*

"The concept of what you are doing is fantastic; and, of course, it is more than a concept." -- *Bill* "P.S. **Appreciate most of all the "brains" so evident in the operation.**"

"I just wanted to write and say "Thank You" for producing a magazine of **such high quality.** The May-June issue was the second issue of Lenswork that I had purchased and once again **no word has gone unread.** I am new to the world of Photographic Art and Photography but the insight that I get from the pages of *LensWork*, both written and visual far exceed the price of purchase. Thank you once again!" -- *Jason Gray*



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"I have been a subscriber for a while now and have to tell you **how starved the photography community would be without your publication.** I am so very happy you are no longer quarterly. I have only one wish for you, and I mean this in a good way. May you never enjoy broad commercial appeal." -- *Marc Climie*

"This 'preview' is a delightfully tantalizing treat, one which certainly brightened up my morning. On the other hand, it's cruel torture - now I've got to **race frantically out to the mailbox, day after day, eagerly hoping that the next issue of your excellent magazine will be waiting there ready to be devoured,** only to be disappointed by 'regular' mail. If you were trying to show just enough of the magazine to drive viewers into a frenzy to see the whole issue, well, you've succeeded. Thanks for putting out such a fine magazine." -- *Paul Butzi*

"I REALLY LIKE YOUR MAGAZINE! I **love to read the in-depth interviews,** and to hear what others are doing and thinking. It brings so much more to the field of photography when you can understand where someone is coming from. I also **enjoy the connection back to other arts.** After all, we do all speak a similar language and have common concerns when it comes to being creative." -- *Jim Graham.*

"Thanks. We are enjoying both the photography and commentary in *LensWork* - **thought-provoking and like having another congenial colleague** offering new thoughts and insights." -- *Ed and Dorothy Monnelly*

"Just finished looking through / reading *LensWork* No. 32. I wanted to say what a great publication you have here. **Thought-provoking editorials, thorough interviews, and splendid portfolios.**" -- *Miles Budimir*

New Photographures by Burton Pritzker, Gordon Osmundson, and Larry Wiese!



LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios • Fine Art Special Editions

No. 44 Dec 02 - Jan 03



Interviews
Peter Elliott
Yousuf Karsh

Portfolios
Martha Casanave
Peter Elliott
Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin

EndNotes
by Bill Jay

LENSWORK

44

DEC — JAN
2002 / 3

Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

Editors

Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

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Interview with
Peter Elliott

Portfolios by
Martha Casanave
Peter Elliott
Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin

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LSS-013 Three Chairs, Walnut Creek, TX, 1991



LSS-014 Chairs & Curtain, Whidbey Island, 1989

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Art As Gift

There was, back in history, a collection of molecules known as the very first photograph ever. From that humble beginning of Niepce, Talbot (or somebody, somewhere) there eventually grew a second photograph and a third and a fourth.

These begot the fifth and the sixth and the seventh and the eighth and yesterday I begot the umti-bizillionth photograph in the history of man. Think about that ever-growing pyramid of images. What was a rare and unique commodity that filled us with wonder and excitement is now so common as to be 1) taken for granted, 2) just one image seen in the context of gazillions of others, and 3) anything but rare.

When Steiglitz, Steichen, Strand and Adams were just beginning to make photography a respectable art form there were so few photographs of high quality available that it was relatively easy, at least by today's standards, to be noticed. Try this exercise: Imagine yourself standing in front of a large magazine rack at a substantial bookstore. Think of the number of photographic images contained within the

pages before you – all of which will have a shelf life of 30 days or so. We are *drowning* in a sea of images. And in spite of this massive flood of images and ink, it has only just begun.

Today, while you read this, manufacturers of printing presses are busy cranking out bigger, faster and better machines to give us more photographs to look at, more pages to read in spite of the fact that bookstores are full. Don't misunderstand me here: I'm not saying that presses should stop and that books should not be published; I am a free market advocate of the highest order. I do, however, think that it is important for each of us photographers to consider the dilemma that faces us. The original print, the book, the magazine, and now the Internet, are vehicles of almost unlimited capacity when it comes to the production of images. How many are enough?

There are tribes in Africa whose counting system consists of four numbers: 1,2,3 and many. To these people, one thousand is functionally the same as four. As soon as

we reach the limit of our counting system, any quantity is functionally the same as infinite. Well, with regards to images, *we are there*. The world does not need more images anymore than it needs more novels. We can't read all that has been written any more than we can see all the photographs that have been made. I once read that in our age we will have to think, understand, and adapt to more information in seven years than our ancestors did in their entire lives. We live in the midst of a plague of quantity – visual overload – five hundred channels of television, tens of thousands of magazines.

What are we to do with this glut? Advocate or legislate an earlier, simpler time of life? Too unrealistic and regressive. Drive ourselves loony trying to consume it all? Impractical. As consumers, our only sane alternative is to specialize, embrace the niche, narrow the focus, and ignore the rest.

If consumers are becoming niche-focused in their attention, as photographers this plethora and plague of images is redefining our relationships with our audience. These are strictly natural forces, market conditions, *supply and demand*. It seems that today this law of economics, when applied to photography, is more appropriately *plethora* and demand.

The strategy, therefore, seems clear. If it is

so difficult to find a fleeting relationship with a large audience, why not develop a meaningful relationship with a smaller group of people?

How big does an audience need to be for you to feel your work is a success? I'm not asking this rhetorically. I am suggesting that determining a concrete answer is useful. *Quantify it*. If your work is seen by three people will you be satisfied? Three hundred? Three hundred thousand? Three hundred million? Somewhere between three and three hundred million is probably your number. Who are these people? How do you find them and, most importantly, *what do you want from them?* Define your niche, define what you want from them and, by the application of reverse engineering, this can define your actions, your projects, your products, and ultimately your chances for success.

Let me offer a concrete example of this idea. A dozen years ago I was concluding a photo project and needed some way to add closure to the work – i.e., to find an audience. A friend of mine from the world of book arts told me about an idea called a *keepsake*. It is traditional in the world of book arts to create an annual keepsake, a small giveaway token, which is given freely to a select group of one's peers, customers, and friends. It is often a beautifully printed poem, a broadside, or folder – usually something small and intimate,

easily affordable to produce and distribute, much better than a mass-produced postcard but less than a gallery-worthy original. I thought this was a marvelous idea.

Adapting this idea for my use as a photographer, I created a small folder (called a French fold) out of a single sheet of 8½x11 art paper, on which I printed a bit of text including a title and explanation. Inside this folder I affixed an original, gelatin silver 2¼x3¾ contact print from the project. I produced a couple hundred of these and mailed them, with no forewarning, to people I knew who I thought would appreciate receiving this gift. They did so! And, by defining the project within both my means to fund it and my time to produce it, I found the project rewarding because I was able to share my work with a broader, albeit small, audience. (You can see and learn more about how I produced this keepsake on our website.)

This wasn't a commercial venture, didn't make me famous, and didn't lead to a show at the Art Institute of Chicago. It did, however, bring an element of fun to the project and defined a niche relationship with a group of people who, to this day – *years* later! – still make comments about that keepsake. It rose above the

din because it was special, unlike those ubiquitous publicity postcard mailings which instantly end up in the round file. My audience for this might have only been a couple hundred people, but my ability to share my work with them (and their comments and “thank you” notes back to me) is a reward that I treasure.

Of course, the keepsake idea is adaptable and may be defined any way you want. The audience could be one or one million. (How much money and time do you want to spend?) It can be offered to your inner circle of friends or everyone in your community. It can be a print from the dark-room or off a printing press. It can be one image or many. It could be used on rare occasion or, like the book arts folks, as an annual rite. The question is, *What will satisfy you?* By quantifying it and making it happen, you will be guaranteed an audience will see your images rise above the plethora and din of photographic noise that assaults them everyday.

Art as gift – what a novel idea.

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BEWARE OF DOG

You Might Fall in Love



by

m. casanave

Martha Casanave



THE COLOR OF HAY

Ancient Peasant Ways in Modern Transylvania



photographs by

Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin

Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin

with text by

Henry Woods McLaughlin



Easter Sunday, Sârbi, Romania, 2000

Fashion has changed as women replace homespun black with printed fabric in their skirts, and give up their leather and wool *opinci* (the traditional footwear) for vinyl pumps. However, what has remained constant is Sunday afternoon, where one learns to flaunt one's sense of style.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER ELLIOTT

Brooks Jensen: I understand that your introduction to photography was through the commercial world ...

Peter Elliott: True, I started photography in a different way than most people who are doing fine art photography – I was simply looking for a summer job. I was directed to an art studio that produced advertising for Sears and Wards. They had an illustrative studio, a photography department, darkroom, key line ... all the different departments of a full commercial art studio. They hired me to be their messenger – this was in the days when you didn't hire a messenger service to carry things around the cities; companies actually hired staff messengers. On staff, they also had a photographer who needed a new assistant. So, at about age fifteen, I was thrown into the studio – loading Hasselblads, 8x10 holders, learning a little bit about lighting, but mainly getting exposed to the darkroom. The first thing I learned was how to process film.

BJ: And you started doing personal work even then?

PE: All during that summer I was reading a lot of great books – Hemmingway and Fitzgerald – and I was caught up in the whole Cartier-Bresson thing right away. I immediately got a 35mm camera and started taking pictures. I just became rabid about it. I was doing photography around the clock. Any time

HOME FRONT

American Flags from Across the United States



by

Peter Elliott

Peter Elliott



*Hear an audio interview with Peter Elliott and see more of his images
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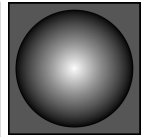
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LensWork Publishing
909 Third Street
Anacortes, WA 98221-1502 U.S.A.

USA TOLL FREE 1-800-659-2130

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