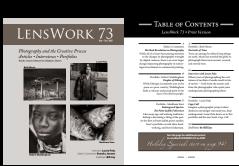
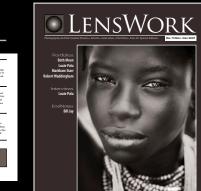
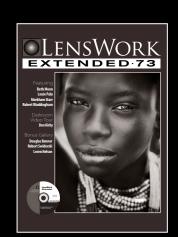


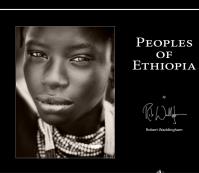
LENSWORK PREVIEW

Welcome to the free preview of *LensWork* 73. This PDF file offers an overview of the look at the content of LensWork in print and LensWork EXTENDED on DVD as well as sample pages.









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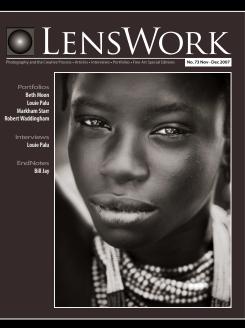
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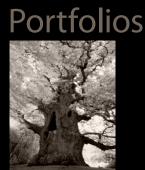
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Beth Moon Portraits of Time



Louie Palu *Cage Call*



Markham Starr Endangered Species: The Point Judith Fishermen



Robert Waddingham Peoples of Ethiopia

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A Darkroom Video Tour Don Kirby

Don Kirby is certainly one of today's leading black and white photographers — both as an artist and as a darkroom technician. Our Editor, Brooks Jensen, visited Don and his wife, photographer Joan Gentry, in their



Video

newly constructed home in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

It is not often that a fine art photographer gets to build a darkroom from scratch - or, more accurately, build a house around a darkroom from scratch. In this interview, Kirby gives us a tour of their new home, workspace, and his ideal darkroom — not the one of his dreams, but the one from his dreams, now made real in this little spot of photographic heaven in the desert.

Dew Diligence by Douglas Benner

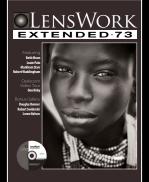


Reflections out of Mind by Robert Swiderski





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Louie Palu	15 images	30 images Plus audio interview
Markham Starr	11 images	61 images Plus audio interview
Robert Waddingham	15 images	95 images Plus audio interview
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Darkroom Video Tour with Don Kirby		\checkmark
Video Interview with David Gardner by Anthony Mournian		~
Photographers on Photography Audio		~
LensWork Podcasts		\checkmark
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Editor's Comments

The Real Revolution In Photography

There is an elephant in our photographic living room I'd like to acknowledge - and talk about openly, frankly, and with the attention it deserves. No, I'm not talking about digital photography, but rather the revolution — and its implications — in commercial printing. At the risk of sounding like an overzealous alarmist, I would propose that this topic may very well be the most important change taking place in photography today, and one that will affect every single one of us as fine art photographers, without exception. In my 20 years of writing and speaking about photography, I don't think I've ever addressed an issue with quite as many implications, nor one that asserts such a fundamental challenge to the status quo. In a nutshell, here it is: the photographer's handmade photographic print may no longer be the sole pinnacle of quality. Indeed, it is at risk to be dethroned, if not today, then in the very near future.

To make such a statement requires evidence. We've done some tests, and have measurement data that quantifies this topic a bit. But first, here is some short background.

When Our Breath Was First Taken Away by a Print

I've heard this story over and over — and experienced it myself. Many of us had a common experience early in our photographic careers that was life-changing. We became familiar with a photographer's work through publications; this introduction sparked our interest in becoming a photographer; we studied the work in books and we knew it well - or, so we thought. And then we visited a gallery where we could see the photographer's handmade original photographic prints, carefully crafted in gelatin silver, produced with a depth of tonalities that simply could not be reproduced on a printing press. Like so many who had that experience, I remember standing in the gallery, stunned, speechless, and thoroughly captivated by the visual treat inherent in the magical quality in an original handcrafted print - especially when compared with the commercially printed versions of these images I'd seen in books. That first experience of seeing an original gelatin silver print was fundamental to my passion for photography. I was immediately motivated to learn to print like the masters; I wanted their magic for my own.

This experience created an unconscious belief in my mind that the pinnacle of photographic quality was achieved through the careful craftsmanship of the individually made print, produced by the hand of the photographer, in the passionate confines of their darkroom. The corollary to this was that any commercially printed, offset lithographed version of an image was inferior — be it a poster, a fine art lithograph, or a museum-quality book. Time and expense were immaterial. The technology of offset lithography simply could not, under any circumstances, produce an image that had the magical glow and presence of an original gelatin silver photograph. Most of us have held on to that belief to this very day. And, therein lies the elephant in the living room.

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This belief simply ignores the ongoing revolution in commercial printing technologies. Improvements in technology have so narrowed the gap between reproduction and original as to make the differences between them indistinguishable — or nearly so.

I often visualize this narrowing gap in this way: Imagine Paul Strand in 1960s preparing to publish his seminal book *Tir a'Mhurain*. Using state-of-the-art offset printing technologies, that book was produced at an amazing (for the times) 175-line screen and with a maximum black density of 1.79. I know this because I own that book and have measured both parameters. That was the very best that could be produced in 1968 and that book was a wonderful publication for its time. A short 21 years later that printing quality would be thoroughly eclipsed by Ansel Adams' Yosemite and the Range of Light printed in a 300-line screen duotone with a maximum black density of 1.92. Again, I know this because I've measured the results. Yosemite and the Range of Light was a statement of shocking proportions at the time for those of us in photography. The quality of its reproductions was beyond our imagination. Even so, it was but the harbinger of the technological revolution in commercial printing that was yet to come. The technology that produce Yosemite and the Range of Light is now 18 years old (as I write this) - and a generation (or two) behind the times in offset printing technology.

While we photographers have observed the digital revolution in our world with the influx of digital cameras, digital printers, and "digital negatives," the world of offset lithographic printing has seen similarly profound changes in the printing technologies that create the *reproductions* of our fine art photographs. Gone are film and line-screen negatives, press cameras, and stripping — replaced by direct-toplate computer output, stochastic screening, and computer controlled high-speed presses. Today's high-end commercial

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presses can print dots so small they are invisible even when magnified by a typical photographer's loop. Ink layering technologies and today's computer controlled presses are so precise that the densities of ink now possible will exceed the blackness that can be created by selenium-toned, gelatin silver papers. Presses are larger, faster, and computer controlled to tolerances that cannot be measured by the human eye. I simply cannot express how it feels to stand at the end of today's stateof-the-art commercial presses and see one of my difficult and time-consuming handmade images flying off the back end of a commercial press at 8,000 copies an hour. It is both thrilling and frightening to then realize that I can't make a solitary print that has a maximum density as great as what I see amassing before my eyes.

While quality is increasing, costs have plummeted over the decades, too. With the incredible advancements that have been achieved in the printing world in the last two decades, the issue of *LensWork* you hold in your hand has a finer dot structure and a blacker maximum density — in a \$10 magazine — than Ansel Adams was able to achieve in his \$125 state-ofthe-art museum quality monograph less than 20 years ago.

The shock we young photographers had when we walked into the gallery and viewed the original gelatin silver fine art

photograph can be understood in terms of the differential — that is to say, the difference in the visual experience of looking at the printed reproduction when compared to the toned, gelatin silver print. As a thought experiment, imagine that we could quantify that differential - which we clearly can't, except in our imagination. What would be the difference between seeing Paul Strand's book in 1968 and his original prints? Pretend we could measure his fine art original at, say, "Quality 100" in our imaginary scale. If so, then his book reproductions may have been a measure of, say, 65. This 35-point difference in quality was so clearly and instantaneously visible that everyone could easily see that the original photograph was special, even breathtaking. Now, advance the technology through the intervening 21 years to the publication date of Yosemite and the Range of Light. The advances in technology improved the reproduction and narrowed the differential between the printed page and the original fine art print. When Yosemite and the Range of Light was published in 1989, the original photographic print was still at the quality of 100 (gelatin silver technology had not changed at all), but the reproduction in the book had improved tremendously. The quality of the book on our imaginary scale was, say, 85. The difference between seeing the book and the seeing the print had narrowed, but nonetheless was still substantial enough that

there was an easily perceivable difference between the two entities. We all marveled at the quality of the book, but still held the gelatin silver print in the highest regard.

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But how fares that comparison today?

A Glimpse Of The Elephant

Because of my involvement in the publishing industry, I have become very aware of the capabilities of today's state-of-the-art printers. I'd been suspicious for a long time that printing quality had narrowed the gap between offset lithographic reproduction and original toned, gelatin silver prints even more. I routinely measure the densities of our printing as an integral step in quality control. LensWork is wellknown for its printing quality, but because it is a \$10 periodical I know we don't push the boundaries of what is capable with today's printing technologies were budget not a constraining factor. Nonetheless, every 60 days and with every press check we reaffirm the revolution in printing technology is in full swing. It is evident in every measurement we make.

With this in mind, I proposed a test with our printer in Vancouver to push those boundaries to see what could be done. Specifically, I wanted to push beyond the limits we use in the production of *LensWork* to see what offset lithography could do relative to *dot size* and *ink densities* — the two most important characteristics that determine print quality from a technological point of view. (Even in traditional analog/darkroom photography, the most important *technical* characteristics are grain, sharpness, and density.)

Just how good is today's printing technology? To find out, we ran some tests during a pressrun of LensWork using (with full permission from the Bullock Estate) Wynn Bullock's famous image Child in Forest, 1951. We chose this image because we have a high-resolution scan we made of the original Wynn Bullock gelatin silver print that was acknowledged by him as the best version of that image he had ever produced. We also had the LensWork Special Editions reproduction of that image, produced using gelatin silver materials and selenium toned to the same densities in Bullock's original print. We printed this image during a pressrun for LensWork as a 20-micron dot stochastic screen tritone - specifically, our standard LensWork duotone plus a "skeleton black" which adds a bump of density in just the blackest areas.

The results? Well, they were simply breathtaking. The blacks in the offset print were a deeper black than the gelatin silver photograph; the whites were whiter; the detail was sharper; that indefinable *presence* that is characterized by a certain glow, a certain three-dimensionality,

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a certain indefinable magic, was a more present in the offset as a lithographically printed image than in the gelatin silver. And, this is not just *my* opinion but the universal opinion of virtually everyone I've shown this image to, even in some controlled, blind tests.

Here are the results in terms of measured densities.

Not every book or poster produced today will rival a gelatin silver print. In truth, only the most elite commercial printers, equipment, prepress, and press operators can work at this level. Such superb results are still difficult to obtain — as difficult as it was to produce *Yosemite and the Range* of *Light* back in 1989 or *Tir a'Muhrain* in 1968. But those extraordinary results of the previous generations are, indeed, now

		Tir a'Mhurain	Yosemite and the Range of Light	Child in Forest, 1951 gelatin silver photograph	Child in Forest, 1951 test lithograph
		1968	1989	1951	2007
D	ensity	1.79	1.92	2.07	2.25
1	Dots	175-lines per inch	300-lines per inch	Film grain (a stochastic pattern)	20-micron stochastic screen

* all measure with the same, calibrated densitometer, an X-Rite 400

The 20-micron dot structure used in this printing test was virtually invisible to the human eye, but was still *twice the dot size that the press is capable of printing*. On a better paper and with a different screening algorithm, the press is actually capable of printing a 10-micron dot stochastic screen. This is roughly the equivalent of 1,000-line screen which is literally 3.3 times finer than the screen used in *Yosemite and the Range of Light!* (A 10-micron dot is 1/2,500th of an inch. By way of comparison, the silver film Kodak TMax 400 has an average grain size of 2-3 microns.)

I need to be unmistakably clear about this, so let me elaborate just a bit. Not every printer can achieve such lofty results.

commonplace. Today, any printer worth their salt can produce excellent 300-line screen duotones. Even the corner print shop specializing in envelopes and business cards can print the 175-line screen that was state-of-the-art in 1968. The technology is working its way through the printing world and yesterday's cutting edge is today's commonplace - just as it is in every other aspect of technology in society. The world of commercial printing is evolving, steadily, surely, if a bit quietly from the point of view of the general public. To see it, however, one need only compare today's best museum-quality books to those of the past.

And, while the bar is rising in the world

of commercial printing, it is not moving at all in the world of gelatin silver or the other traditional technologies. The gelatin silver, platinum-palladium, gum bichromate — *et cetera* — prints we make in the darkroom today use essentially the same materials and techniques of 60 years ago with only slight modifications. While traditional photographic techniques remain the same, commercial printing improves day by day. The obvious conclusion is that the gap between the two is narrowing bitby-bit — or, I should say dot-by-dot.

I first began seriously to think about the implications of this when a photographer well-known for his collectible fine art photographs related to me a fascinating story. He told me that three different customers in the course of a year had returned the fine art photographs they'd purchased from him for a refund — *because they felt* they weren't as good as the reproductions in his book! I know other photographers who have confessed to me that they strategically limited the use of digital sharpening when preparing images for publication because they do not want to see their published images in sharper focus than they can produce in the darkroom. Will photographers ask their printers to hold back ink so as not to exceed the black density they can achieve in the darkroom? You may think this is ridiculous, but it happens routinely with photographers

whose originals are platinum-palladium prints.

Considering the Implications

LensWork

Back to today's young photographer whose knowledge of fine art photography comes only from books: What is *their* experience when walking for the first time into a gallery or museum today? When the "reproductions" are essentially indistinguishable from the originals (at least in terms of dot structure, tonal densities, and detail). Is their impression of the original diminished — at least compared to us older photographer's experiences of some 30 years ago? In 1975, I was stunned at the quality of the original. How different would my *life* be if my reaction had been indifference?

This is an incredibly amazing technological threshold we've crossed. It concerns me that no one seems to be discussing the implications — so allow me to start the discussion with a just few questions that indicate the nature of this revolution.

What does it mean when the highest quality version of a photographic image is no longer the one that the photographer produces in their own darkroom? True, the darkroom (or the digital darkroom) is still where the photographer will invoke the *creative* act of making their vision manifest. But, what does it mean when the "original artifact" they create is no better

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than the reproductions that are possible from this first creative-act print? What if the original is second-tier quality? Think of this! Since photography's inception, the highest quality that could be produced of any image was unquestionably the one that was made by the photographer. (Remember, I'm not considering the *artistic* input, but only the technical quality.) What does it mean if that's no longer a true statement?

Of course, not everyone making fine art photographs is going to have their work reproduced with an offset press. Not every photographer is planning a book - although I do sometimes think these are a small minority! Even if you never take one of your images into ink, there are still implications for your photographs. Simply said, thirty years ago, your original gelatin silver photographs were far better (from a technological point of view) than the best reproductions in the books of Adams, Weston, or Strand. Tone for tone, there was no contest: gelatin silver would beat ink every time. Of course, even the reproductions of these masters were very likely better artistic statements than ours, but that's an aesthetic judgment and we're focusing in this article strictly on the image-quality issues.

So, what are the implications when advancing technology turns the status quo upside down? What if anyone's reproductions can be better quality than the great masters' original prints? How does this influence our thinking about the masters' photographs — or ours?

How much of our appreciation of a photograph is tied to the gorgeous pigments and luscious glow of the medium itself? What if this special quality in a print is no longer special?

What are the implications for collectors? Reproductions, no matter how good - up to this point in history - have always been inferior. That is to say, the original was always easily identifiable because it was always better than the reproductions. But what if the handmade photograph is now the inferior one? Again, such possibilities turn the status quo on its head. In fact, this is a yet totally unheard-of question in the history of artwork -going back to the beginnings of time. There has never been a situation in which the reproduction was "better" than the original - at least not that I am aware of. Even with today's printing technology, the reproduction of a painting will never be as good as the original because it lacks the texture, specifically the three-dimensionality of the brushstrokes on the original canvas. A reproduction of a painting is easily distinguished from the original.

This is not the case with the photograph. The original fine art materials consist of

properties that are not fundamentally different from those used in the reproductions — paper and some substance to discolor it. What always differentiated an offset lithograph from a gelatin silver original were that the line-screen of the reproduction was visible, the density of black areas were lighter (and the dynamic range was reduced), and, therefore, the sharpness and detail could not be fully preserved. But since this is no longer the case, the difference between an original photograph and a reproduction comes down to two remaining properties: the intangible knowledge that the hand of the photographer made the gelatin silver print (but not the offset lithograph); and, the tangible signature that the photographer applies to the original that may or may not exist in the reproduction. Is this enough to keep gelatin silver originals on their lofty and exclusive pedestal? Will there be a point in the public's mind where the superior image quality of an offset printed image trumps the artifact nature of "the original"? What happens if collectors always value the artifact, but the general public values the superior image quality? It remains to be seen how the "hand of the photographer" will ultimately compete with the new reality in which the reproduction may be the superior visual experience.

Discussing this concept with photographers of late, the most common rebuttal immediately offered concerns size. "Perhaps, yes," they might say, "but book reproductions are relatively small and original prints can be quite large." This is often true, but today's printing presses can just as easily print on paper that is 32x40" — a standard sheet size in commercial printing. There are few photographers making gelatin silver photographs that large. The technology in printing is not what limits the size of photographic images in books.

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Or the photographer will claim, "The gelatin silver prints are more archival." *Are they?* An acid-free press sheet and a pigment-based ink may actually be *more* archival than gelatin silver materials.

"What about the paper weight and texture of fine art photographic paper?" Presses can print on paper that is even heavier than double-weight. Commercial coatings can create any surface texture you want.

"But, it costs so much to print a book or a poster." It does — because a pressrun must in the thousands to amortize the initial costs. It does — today. It does — but it costs a lot to build and outfit a darkroom. It costs a lot for each print you make, if you consider your time. The secret of the "Ansel Adams business model" is that his posters have always been the largest component of their financial success — not his original gelatin silver prints.

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Even so, there is still a magic about "the original" that cannot be dismissed. Or, is this changing, too?

The Original

I can hear many of you scream, "But, an offset lithograph is not an original!" In general, that's obviously true — although there are exceptions (Todd Walker comes to mind). Setting aside the few exceptions, in this age of digital photography, the entire question about *What is an original*? is also in flux. As an example, let me share my experience producing the new version of my *Made of Steel* exhibit that was recently shown at the Wilson Gallery at Florida Community College, Jacksonville.

All 84 of these images were produced from scratch by scanning the original negatives or working with the original in-camera digital files. As such they were completely new productions from the original capture materials. The final images were all finessed in Photoshop with the typical dodging, burning, localized tonal adjustments, and sharpening that are typical in the new digital workflow. I then printed all 84 images specifically for this exhibition. When I'd completed the printing phase of the project — which took an entire weekend (wink) - it dawned on me that I had printed the 84 photographs for an exhibition in less than 72 hours. The hard work, of course, had required months of work - scanning, Photoshop

work, aesthetic decisions, and the artistic finesse I had performed on each image in the previous 90 days. The process of producing the physical *prints* was almost anticlimactic. This gave me pause to think more deeply about the prints themselves.

As an unplanned-for afterthought, I decided to donate the entire exhibition of 84 prints to the College for their permanent collection. Why not? I still have the intensive-work part of the project stored on my harddrive, and an additional set of prints will be a very easy thing to generate. The prints as artifacts are no longer the rare and unusual commodity that are the result of months of painstaking labor in the wet darkroom. Now, the valuable part of the months of painstaking labor are the digital files - which I still have, even after my donation of the prints themselves. It reminds me of the old joke about the grandfather who asked his grandson to explain his "software business" - a term the old man did not comprehend. When the grandson explained the concept of selling software, the grandfather remarked in amazement, "What a business! You sell it, you still got it!" Similarly, the definition of "original print" is now a confusing one.

Of paramount importance for this article, however, is this question: If the concept of an original print is confused by my example of desktop printing — where a single print takes 15 minutes to produce and the ink densities cannot come close to an offset tritone, quadtone, or hextone — how much *more* does the concept of "original print" become confused when the best quality image can be produced using offset lithography at the rate of 8,000 press sheets an hour?

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A Conclusion Full of Questions

I began this article by proposing that the photographer's handmade photographic print may no longer be the sole pinnacle of quality. For some, this is clearly a heretical statement. You may challenge this assertion; you may resist it. You cannot, however, deny that the differential in image quality between the "reproduction" and the original (at least as measured by dot structure, DMax density, sharpness, and tonal separations) is less now than ever before. My observation, as a publisher deeply involved in printing fine art images on a commercial press, is that we have crossed the threshold already. The implications for this evolving technology are profound. The implications will change fine art photography - or photography, in general — in ways we cannot now glimpse, let alone understand.

My crystal ball — and brain — are far too limited to be able to fully foresee the implications of this train of thought. I do know, however, that the future will be incredibly challenging to one of the fundamental truths of photography since its birth - that the solitary photographer was the sole source of ultimate print quality. What will fine art photography's future be when the best quality images can easily be produced by thousands - if not tens of thousands? What are the implications for us artists when the highest quality artifact of our creative vision can only be produced through an expensive process like offset printing? Does that make fine art photography have the same kinds of financial challenges that face the cast-bronze sculptor? What does it mean and how will it affect our creative process when the craftsman in the printing shop can technically improve our work beyond our own skills, capabilities, and equipment? What are the implications when the book or the poster are no longer a compromise in image quality?

These are difficult questions and ones that may be impossible to answer here in the midst of this technological revolution. I won't be surprised if it takes a generation (or two) for these murky waters to once again become clear. There is no question, at least in my mind, that this is the real revolution in today's fine art photography.

It is a very large elephant, indeed.



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Peoples of Ethiopia



by R. Will

Robert Waddingham



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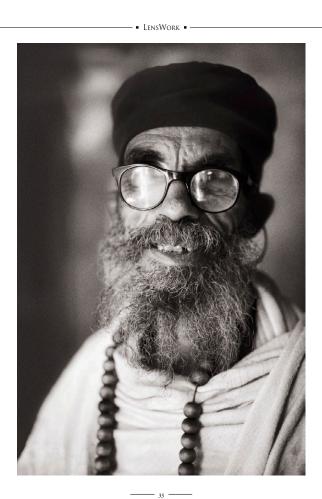
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Endangered Species

The Point Judith Fishermen



Markham Starr



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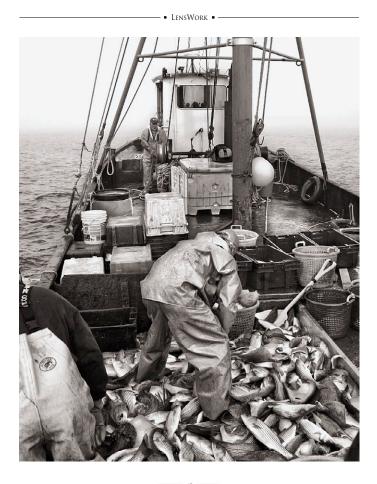
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Portraits of Time

Ancient Trees of the World



Beth Moon

Beth Moon

The Yews of Wakehurst

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Avenue of the Baobabs, Morondava, Madagascar This is truly the strangest and most magnificent of the six species of baobabs found only in Madagascar. Anyone wanting to see this incredible site should travel soon, as I am afraid the baobabs of Madagascar are endangered. The name is misleading, as these trees are the last remains of a huge forest. I saw two huge trunks laying in the fields when I was there in 2006. **Overview of** LENSWORK

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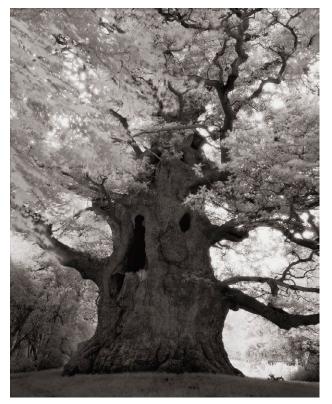
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Maiden Oak, England

The largest Maiden Oak in England, its estimated age is Elizabethan. Now on a private estate, this tree boasts a girth of over 30 feet with a hollow trunk. A survival tactic, trees of great age will hollow-out to allow strong winds to pass through.



Two Yew Trees, "The Sentinels of St. Edwards," England Planted sometime in the 18th century, they frame the north door of the church. It is presumed they would have been part of an avenue, but are all that now remain.

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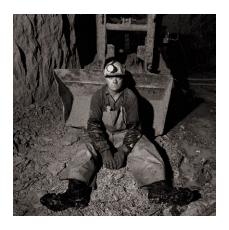
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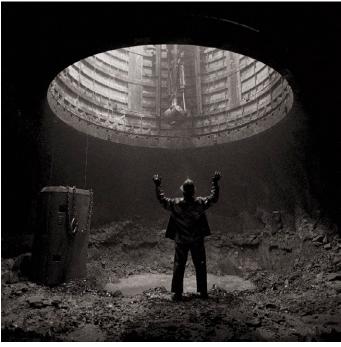
CAGE CALL

Life and Death in the Hard Rock Mining Belt





Louie Palu



– • LensWork • -

Shaft miner at the 2500 foot level station before drilling, Louvicourt Mine, Val d'Or, Quebec

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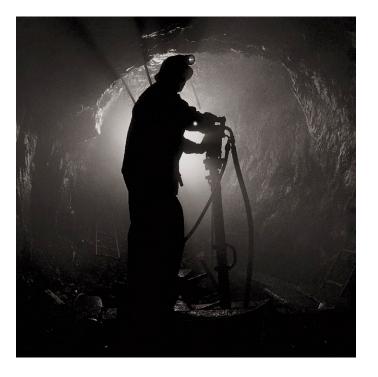
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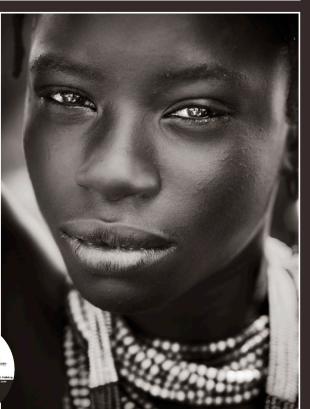


Beth Moon Louie Palu Markham Starr Robert Waddingham

> Darkroom Video Tour **Don Kirby**

Bonus Gallery Douglas Benner Robert Swiderski Loren Nelson

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Portraits of Time 24 images plus audio interview plus	tions which is a second secon	leet Peoples of Ethiopia 95 images			
Bonus Gallery					
Douglas Benner Small Worlds	Robert Swiderski Reflections out of Mind	Loren Nelson Buildings In Transition			
		bullangs in Hansidon			
LensWork Podcasts LensWork Vision of the Heart Podcasts Photographers on Photogra-	Video Tour: Don Kirby Don Kirby is one of today's leading black and white photographers— both as an artist and as a darkroom technician. We visited Don and his wife, photographer Joan Gentry, in their newly constructed home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is not often that a fine art photographer gets to				
Additional Bill Jay EndNotes					
C .	build a darkroom from scratch — or, I should say, build a house <i>around</i> a darkroom from scratch.				
Adobe Acrobat Version 7 System Requirements: This DVD-ROM can be played on your PC or Mac com- puter using the free Adobe Acrobat Reader "Version 7 or newer available via download from www.adobe.com.	LensWork Extended is a true multimedia publication that dra- matically expands the contents of our 96-page magazine, LensWork — then loads-in lots of audio, video, and "extended extras." In the spirit of the paper publication, the focus con- tinues on the creative process, with each issue offering an en- gaging mix that only multimedia makes possible.				
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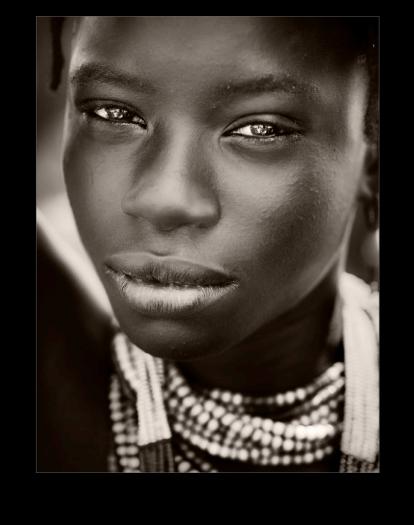
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Peoples of Ethiopia

Robert Waddingham

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