LENSWORK

PREVIEW

Overview of LensWork

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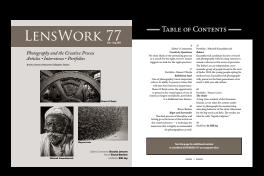
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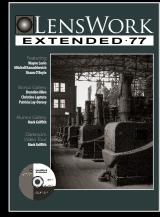
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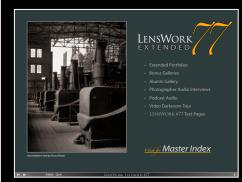
Welcome to the free preview of LensWork 77.

This PDF file offers an overview and selected sample pages of the content of LensWork (in print) and LensWork EXTENDED (on computer DVD).



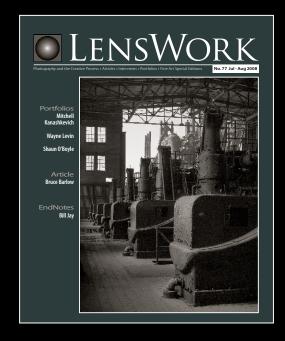






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Articles

Editor's Comments Creativity Questions

We often think of the artmaking process as a search for the right answers. Jensen suggests we look for the right questions.

Rigor and Surrender by Bruce Barlow The dual process of discipline and letting go is the focus of this article on the creative process — a technique for musicians that is highly recommended for photographers as well.

EndNotes by Bill Jay

Portfolios



Shaun O'Boyle Bethlehem Steel



Mitchell Kanashkevich Rabari



Wayne Levin The Akule

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American Biker by Brandon Allen



Bonus Gallery

Dualities by Patricia Lay-Dorsey



Remembrance by Mark Griffith

The Holga Series by Christine Laptuta



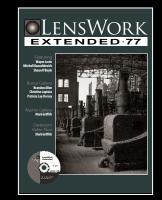


Mark Griffith Darkroom Tour

Mark Griffith's work as both a photographer and a workshop instructor has demonstrated that he is one of the contempory master printers of our age. In this installment of our ongoing series of video darkroom tours, we talk with Mark Griffith about his innovative approach to improvising and building solutions to the darkroom problems he's faced over the years. We tour his darkroom facility and take a look at some of his unique and money-saving solutions to common darkroom equipment challenges.



LensWork #77	<i>LensWork</i> #77 In Print	<i>LensWork</i> <i>Extended</i> #77 on Disc
Wayne Levin	24 images	39 images Plus audio interview
Shaun O'Boyle	24 images	46 images Plus audio interview
Mitchell Kanashkevich	19 images	27 images Plus audio interview
<i>Rigor and Surrender</i> Article by Bruce Barlow	✓	✓
Bill Jay's EndNotes	2-pages	3-pages
Audio interviews with photographers		✓
The American Biker by Brandon Allen		Bonus Gallery
<i>The Holga Series</i> by Christine Laptuta		Bonus Gallery
<i>Dualities</i> by Patricia Lay-Dorsey		✓
<i>Remembrance</i> by Mark Griffith		Alumni Gallery
Darkroom Tour Video with Mark Griffith		✓
More on "Fellow Travelers" Responses to the article in <i>LensWork</i> #76		✓
LensWork Podcasts		✓

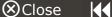


Extended portfolios, more images • Short audio interviews with photographers • Audio comments on individual images • Videos on photography and the creative process • Direct links to web sites, email addresses • Video interviews with photographers • And more all on a single computer DVD-ROM using the Acrobat 7 Reader.

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No. 77 Jul - Aug 2008

Portfolios Mitchell Kanashkevich **Wayne Levin**

Shaun O'Boyle

Article **Bruce Barlow**

EndNotes Bill Jay

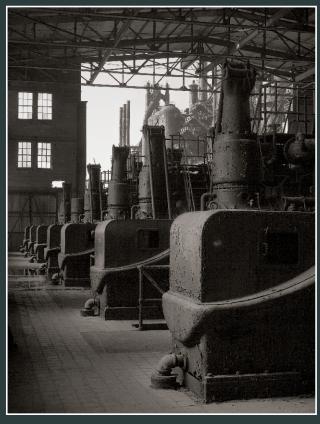


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Bruce Barlow Rigor and Surrender

The dual process of discipline and letting go is the focus of this article on the creative process — a technique for musicians that is highly recommended for photographers as well.

Portfolio: Mitchell Kanashkevich Rabari

Kanashkevich combines his love of travel and photography with his deep interest in remote cultures in this series of portraits. The Rabari are an independent, oncenomadic group of people found in the west of India. With the young people opting for modern lives, Kanashkevich photographically preserves the final generations of an exotic 1,000 year-old culture.

Portfolio: Wayne Levin

The Akule

A long-time resident of the Hawaiian Islands, Levin takes his camera underwater to photograph the mesmerizing schooling behavior of the akule (Hawaiian for the big-eyed scad fish). The results are what he calls "liquid sculpture."

EndNotes by Bill Jay

Turn the page for additional content in LensWork EXTENDED #77 on computer disc!

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Creativity Questions

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) once complained that computers were useless. He said, "They can only give you answers." Just imagine his response if he were alive today! We live in an answer-oriented, Wikipediated, data-overloaded, information age. It is almost like science fiction how readily information is available to us. Answers are a dime a megabyte.

But, art is the pursuit of questions. Art is wonder. Art is inquiry. Art is a peek into the mysterious. At its best, art is, like life, asking the right questions - and the right questions are so often more important than the answers we find. Over the course of my thirty-five years in photography, I have invariably found that asking certain questions is one of the most fruitful activities in which I can engage when working on a photography project - particularly at the beginning of a project. Come to think of it, perhaps it's even more important when nearing the end of a project.

But what are the right questions? Clearly, there is no single, universal response you weren't expecting one, were you? but I cannot resist at least attempting to offer some for consideration. So, here are a few of my oft-visited old friends and a few

comments from my experiences using them in specific projects.

What can I do with this?

Everything is made with a purpose, but the intended purpose is not the only way it can be used. As I run across new ideas, new products, new procedures, or new paradigms, I habitually and reflexively ask how I can use this new thing in my work. Take, for example, Adobe Acrobat. I first became aware of this software in 1998, when Acrobat was in its early stages - version 3. Acrobat was originally intended as a document-sharing format, for use primarily in business, government, and the graphics industry. Fine, but what can I do with this? I was immediately intrigued with its potential as a publishing and delivery platform for fine art photography and multimedia.

Our use of Adobe Acrobat as a publishing platform for LensWork is an implementation of the software for which it was not primarily intended. That the software works elegantly for LensWork Extended is more accidental than it is purposeful but who cares?

Here is another example: I became fascinated with photographing the blotchy

patterns and cement aberrations in the walls of Fort Casey, a nearby historic military facility. I thought they might make interesting abstract photographs to complement my work at Fort Worden. They did not. In fact, they were boring cement walls that I quickly abandoned as photographs in and of themselves. However, last year, in preparing an exhibition of my Made of Steel work, I realized this project would present better on a textured background paper rather than traditional photographic white paper stock. Pushing this idea further, I realized it would be a much more interesting project if each background were unique. The answer was to repurpose these Fort Casey cementwall photographs by modifying them to be light, tinted visual backgrounds. By asking What can I do with this? I was able to use these images in a completely unintended and unexpected way.

In essence, I think this is a classic case of not allowing our thinking to be limited by definitions. I know what it is, but what else can it be? How can I adapt it? With modification, what could it do? With every idea, with every product, there is the potential that it can be useful in unintended ways. As a habit, employing this type of curiosity is a productive way to think creatively.

How far can I take this?

It has often been said that we don't know if we've gone too far unless we go too far

and then come back just a bit. I've always found this sage advice in the darkroom, where, for example, I'll push an image until it's too contrasty in order to know where I'll find just enough contrast. This is the essence of the "How far can I take this?" game. In workshop critique sessions, I frequently find that students pull up short rather than push something beyond its limits. Don't be timid. Remember the advice of Goethe: "Boldness has genius in it." If you're going to make the trip anyway, see it through to the very end!

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The trick in this, of course, is not the "going too far," but rather the next step of coming back just a bit. We need to know that we've gone too far. We need to know that we need to come back just a bit. But how can we possibly know this unless we push our ideas, our vision, our execution, our process so clearly beyond what is reasonable that we can recognize that we've passed the apex of excellence and begun the decline into "overdone?"

Some people confuse "How far can I take this?" with a closely related question, "What are the limits?" These are not the same question. By focusing on the limits, it is far too easy to give up too soon. Rather than apply the brakes before you hit the brick wall, accelerate through the brick wall so you can discover where the true limit resides. Some postulate that

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creativity has no limits. I would propose that an important aspect of creativity is discovering precisely where its limits are. By this, I'm not referring to "shock art," whose purpose is to exceed the cultural limits of good taste for the purpose of publicity and notoriety, but rather as a means of discovering the limits of your thought process, your technical process, and the unconscious, assumed limits that are not really limits at all.

What if I combine these two things that don't seem related to one another?

At its most fundamental, the process of thinking is often one of classification, of terminology and definitions, of positioning and relationships. Looking out my window, I can ask what that creature is on my bird feeder: it's a bird, a finch, a mammal, a flying, nesting, egg-laying creature. Such knowledge allows me to place it in a hierarchy of thought and context. These observations are factually accurate, but woefully incomplete.

The creature on my bird feeder is also a consumer, and will, in its turn, be consumed. It is a dancer; a singer; an observer; a complex ecology of host and parasite; the aural backdrop to my computer work; an offspring, a mate, a parent, the current generation in a long line defining its avian genealogy.

Philosophically, any given thing is perfectly unknowable because we can never know it completely. Said another way, any given thing is known by its relationships with other things — and this is the trap that thwarts creativity.

The moment we define a thing, we limit our thinking about it. At the speed of thought, we restrict it, box it, classify it, limit it. But knowing this, we are equally at liberty to redefine how we think about something by recognizing our own self-imposed limitations and asking the question, How else can this thing relate?

A practical example: I often find it incredibly useful to wander through stores that I would never normally visit. Walk through a sewing center and consider the tools seamstresses use. How you might adapt them for use in your photographic efforts? That's where I found handheld rotary cutters, Velcro buttons to attach my cable release to the tripod, and embroidery hoops that work perfectly as frames for various dodging and burning cutouts. I can't imagine working without the "centering ruler" I discovered in the graphic arts supply store, or the air gun from the welding supply shop. I've discovered the most interesting tools and ideas in marine supply stores, industrial safety suppliers, automotive supply stores, and, one of my favorites, flea markets. And

this isn't limited to products and tools. I sometimes find the most interesting ideas by reading magazines I would never normally bother with. My local library has hundreds of magazines, covering every conceivable topic - well, and even some inconceivable ones. I make it a habit to stop by regularly and take a look, just for

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In one sentence, what am I trying to say? Shakespeare said that brevity is the soul of wit. It may very well be the soul of creative

the exercise of combining ideas that have

nothing to do with my photography with

my photography.

and artistic clarity, too.

From time to time I'll show some new work to some unsuspecting victim and be surprised when they innocently ask what I am trying to accomplish with this work. They are not insulting; they are genuinely curious. I know I'm in trouble when my answer is fumbling, incoherent, rambling, inconsistent, filled with justifications, and touched with a twinge of defensiveness. If I don't know what I'm trying to say, how can I expect others to understand?

With every project, I try to write a single sentence that explains the project. If my sentence reads like Faulkner — running on for pages — I know I still have some work to do, not with the sentence but with the focus of my project!

Pretend that you're writing a blurb for your work that will appear in a catalog, a dust jacket, a press release, or a marquee sign. I would propose that our audience should be able to comprehend the context of our project and our most important point through the title, subtitle, and a sentence or two about the project. I often find that photographers write their artist's statement after the project is completed. Far too often it ends up being an historical statement about how the project came to be. Instead, write the artist's statement near the beginning of your process, or perhaps in the middle, and use it to clarify the context, purpose, conclusions, or primary points you're trying to communicate through your photographs. The photographs are the message, but if you can't describe the message in a short sentence, or a title, or a brief artist's statement, it may be that you are not yet sufficiently clear in your own mind what it is you are trying to communicate.

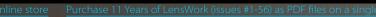
What if I were to come at this from the exact opposite direction?

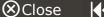
The universe is composed of the yin and yang, the eternal play of opposites. Male and female, up and down, left and right, positive and negative, the illuminated world and the dark inside our camera box. If the world is a two-sided coin, isn't it unreasonable to think that the answer is always heads?

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I think I am like most people in that I have my own personal reflexive and habitual ways of approaching certain problems. We are creatures of habit. But, I have learned that my habits are sometimes the impediments to my success. I'm not against habits — I'm glad I don't have to reinvent new ways to tie my shoes every morning — but from time to time it's nice to work against the grain.

I photograph almost exclusively using a tripod, so from time to time I force myself to do work handheld - just for the exercise, just to keep loose. I typically find myself attracted to a photographic composition because I happened to see it from a certain angle. So, before photographing it, I'll walk around it and look at it in the opposite direction — like a golfer lining up a putt — just to see what it looks like from a completely different perspective. If my instinct tells me it's a landscapeoriented composition, I'll search for a portrait-oriented one. Wide-angle lens versus telephoto, color versus black and white, matted and framed verses handheld and intimate, a single image versus a series, physical print versus a digital publication, and (referring back to the beginning of this article) the question versus an answer. Perhaps this is a reflection of my early days as a view camera photographer, but I often find it useful to turn the world upside down and look at it from the exact opposite direction.

What is the structure of this work?

As photographers, we work one shutterclick at a time. Often, we explore the world this way, projectless, working randomly. We all do this in one form or another. But then, something happens. We see a subject or an image, and a deep resonance appears from nowhere. Sometimes this is a whisper from the gentle muses, sometimes a bonk on the head that leaves us stunned We discover a project — one that may direct our creative life for yet unknown years. We've found our "photographic turf," as it were.

But, in the interstice between inspiration and full-on productivity lies that vast wasteland of indecision. We know we are on the edge of a project, but what is it? We know this idea has potential, but in which direction?

With every project, there is a framework, a pattern of content and process, a flow of ideas and visualization, a pace, a scale, a scope, in short, a structure — hidden at first — that is essential. Over the years, I've discovered that a large part of my creative process is to discover this structure. Without it, I often flounder, not knowing how to proceed nor what to do next. Once I discover the structure of the project, the rest is, well, not easy, but at

For me, discovering the structure of

a project is best accomplished by spending time with it - quality time, uninterrupted time, silent time. Like good soup, there is no substitute for patient simmering. I look at the initial images. I think about them. I pay attention to how I react to them. I start playing with them — sequencing, printing variations, listening to them. Slowly - I cannot rush this delicate process - a structural form for the project starts to coalesce. I nudge it a bit. The form takes shape. I nudge some more, testing and experimenting. Then,

full blossom. I know such a description

is painfully fuzzy, but it's the only way

I can describe it.

On my personal website is a project I call Hope Eternal. It is a short video of still photographs of a North Dakota pioneer's cabin. This started as a pile of prints, nothing more, nothing special. I had photographed it "because it was there." (I've learned to just give in to these impulses, with the faith that my subconscious sometimes knows better than my rational self.) Years later, I was reviewing my image archives and there they were, whispering to me. I spent time with the images, looking, printing, sequencing, playing, fiddling around with no particular agenda. What would it be like to live in this cabin? I could hear the wind. I could feel the patient desperation, the faith, the never-ending struggle to farm an inhospitable land. The faded color, the dry, cold wind. And there it was, there was the structure — in this case, a video, because the sound of the relentless plains wind was absolutely essential to the images. Faded colors, simple faith. The project simply told me what it wanted to be and all I had to do was complete the work.

Questions and more questions

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This list could, of course, be endless. I suspect it is. I also suspect that each one of us might have a different set of questions that manifest our individual creative impulses. I don't want my examples - my questions — to be misconstrued as some sort of authoritative list. They are my questions, ones that I've found useful on my creative path. If I had more space, I could explore others. Who has done something similar? Where did they succeed and fail? What is the work itself trying to tell me? What if I changed the scale of the project? How will this work be seen in the context of contemporary life? What about in the future? What am I missing? What have I left unsaid? Where have I said too much?

Picasso was right in insisting that the creative path is one of questions. It is a path that is best illuminated by raising such questions. I know of no better way to discover, to guide, or to deepen our work.



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BETHLEHEM STEEL



Shaun O'Boyle

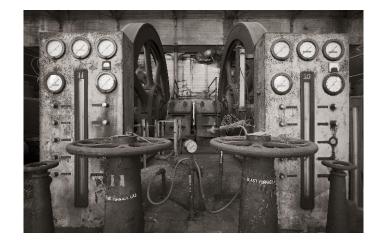
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Rabari



by

Ulffron

Mitchell Kanashkevich

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Marked by Life

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THE AKULE

The Big-eyed Scad of Hawaii



Wayne Levin

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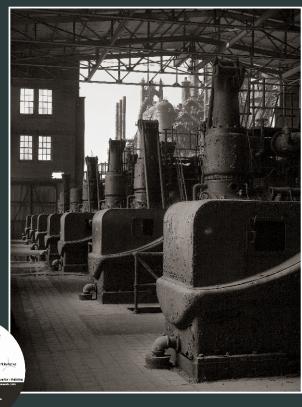
Wayne Levin Mitchell Kanashkevich Shaun O'Boyle

> **Bonus Gallery Brandon Allen Christine Laptuta Patricia Lay-Dorsey**

Mark Griffith

Darkroom **Mark Griffith**





EXTENDED Portfolios



Wayne Levin The Akule 39 images plus audio interview



Mitchell Kanashkevich Rabari 27 images plus audio interview



Shaun O'Boyle Bethlehem Steel 46 images plus audio interview



Mark Griffith



Brandon Allen The American Biker



The Holga Series



Patricia Lay-Dorsey

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- LensWork Podcasts
- · LensWork Vision of the Heart
- Additional Bill Jay EndNotes
- Responses to Fellow Travelers

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Mark Griffith's work as both a photographer and a workshop instructor demonstrates that he is one of the contempory master printers. In this video tour we talk with Mark about his innovative solutions to the darkroom problems he's faced over the years. We tour his darkroom facility and look at some of his unique, money-saving solutions to common darkroom equipment challenges.



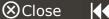
LensWork Extended is a true multimedia publication that dramatically expands the contents of our 96-page magazine, LensWork — then loads-in lots of audio, video, and "extended extras." In the spirit of the paper publication, the focus continues on the creative process, with each issue offering an engaging mix that only multimedia makes possible.

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Brandon Allen

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I've always thought that my culture — in "Anywhere USA" — was quite uninteresting. Foreign cultures appeared more intriguing and exciting. But once I stopped and dug a little deeper, exploring some of our sub-cultures, I found that many incredibly interesting people and traditions have always been around me.

One specific sub-culture that especially fascinates me is the persona of the old American biker. I've seen bikers my whole life — heard the roar of their loud pipes from my bedroom; watched them drive by on the highway; sub-consciously conceded them the fast lane when they dominated the road. Hoping to learn more, I decided to ride with them, talk to them, and photograph them.

In speaking with and photographing hundreds of these bikers, I found there were dis-



tinctly different types. Some were weekend riders, and some rode just for fun. But the men who really caught my attention were those for whom biking was more then just a lifestyle: it was their life.

I found those American Bikers to quietly demand respect. Their appearance is rough; each wrinkle on their weathered faces has a story behind it. The pins on their worn leather vests are proof of the distances they've ridden and the places they've seen. Their tattoos are worn proudly, as if part of a rite of passage. Stained patches, each with a different slogan, define the man for who he is, or serve as momentos honoring some fallen comrade.

These men were every bit as interesting as I had suspected. Each one seemed to have a sense of purpose, and wisdom wrought from age and experience. While riding with them, I felt their strong sense of brotherhood. They were surprisingly accepting and kind, and most of them were more than happy to remove their sunglasses and allow me to capture some true American Bikers.

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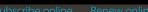
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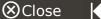
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Thumbnails













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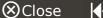


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