

No. 21 • May 1998



LENSWORK

O U A R T E R L Y

Essays, Articles and Portfolios on Photography and the Creative Process



Essays

Bill Jay

Helen Stummer

Brooks Jensen

Portfolios

Peter Keetman

Janet Schipper

Perry Dibeck

WELCOME TO *LENSWORK QUARTERLY* IN PDF

LensWork began publishing in September, 1993 as a local magazine in Portland, Oregon. The original vision of the publishers was to issue *LensWork* monthly in a modest size, funded entirely by advertising support. The first four issues were 24-pages, 8½" x 11" format. They were distributed to about 1,000 photographers in the Pacific Northwest.

Shortly after this modest beginning it became apparent that *LensWork* had found a niche market; it also became apparent that the publication could be underwritten by subscriptions moreso than advertising. Beginning with issue #5, *LensWork* was converted to a quarterly format and renamed *LensWork Quarterly*. The new quarterly was completely redesigned as a 90+ page paperback book. Since then, the publication has been offered on a national and international subscription basis, and is available in more than 700 retail outlets.

With Issue #13 — Spring 1996 — *LensWork Quarterly* was redesigned once again; in

addition to the literary content we began to publish photographic portfolios. The paper stock was necessarily changed to accept finer printing — the most noticeable change was the new photo cover.

You are now reading *LensWork* in its most exciting evolution — as an Adobe Acrobat® Portable Document Format available on the World Wide Web. Because the articles and essays in *LensWork* are not time sensitive like traditional magazines, the demand for back issues has been ongoing. In an effort to make back issues continuously available (even after the paper-based issues are sold out) we have published each issue of *LensWork Quarterly* in this paperless Adobe Acrobat® format — a method of publishing that allows each issue to be available indefinitely to new readers. For additional information on this format, tips on reading this Adobe Acrobat® PDF, and other information specific to the electronic publishing of *LensWork Quarterly*, [click here to jump to the Appendix pages.](#)

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and information on the LensWork Workshops.

The premise of LENSWORK QUARTERly is that photography is more than mere craft. Photography is, or can be, a way of life. Beyond cameras and equipment, beyond film and chemistry lie the mysteries of the creative life shared by those who strive to communicate and express themselves clearly — fine art photographers, commercial photographers, amateurs and professionals.

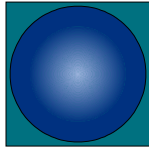
LENSWORK QUARTERly is an exploration of the path of creative photography. Through an exchange of ideas, insight, personal experience and opinions it is hoped LENSWORK QUARTERly will inspire photographic artists to create work which truly bears their signature.

The focus of LENSWORK QUARTERly is *ideas* rather than *images*, imagination rather than imitation, and an understanding of photography beyond craft. Images are published only as portfolios of art or to illustrate the concepts expressed in the articles. For those looking for a more image-based or technically oriented publication, we refer you to one of the many photographic books or magazines currently available.

We are pleased to offer editorial from nationally recognized photographers and writers. We're equally delighted to publish articles or portfolios from our readers. If you are interested in submitting an article or portfolio for consideration in a future issue, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for submission guidelines.

LENSWORK

Q U A R T E R L Y



*Essays, Articles and Portfolios
on Photography
and the Creative Process*

Number 21

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How to Be Famous, Sort Of

Stay in the arts long enough and you'll become a cynic — here's proof. A "lifer," Jay is in his element here; he pokes painful, jagged holes in the notion that *any* photographer has *ever* achieved celebrity or fame that's truly meaningful.

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Through a series of loosely related decisions — and in spite of considerable fear — this painter discovers that not only is she inspired to exchange canvas for film, but the safety of landscapes for urban ghettos.

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Brooks Jensen

Getting Serious:

The One Hundred Prints Project

Years ago, frustrated and embarrassed by boxes of work that lacked cohesiveness, Jensen was determined to pull together an actual "body of work." The marathon of printing and finishing resulted not only in a collection of exhibitable prints, but a wealth of new knowledge gained only through the grunt-work of dogged determination.

EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Why I Am Not a "Photographer"



Gather together a half dozen photographers and start a conversation about photography and its place in the Arts. The group will quickly, and sometimes emotionally, divide itself into two distinct camps.

There are those who will claim that photographic art is produced by the "artsy fartsy crowd" who can't make a decent image, and whose pursuit of art is replete with arrogant elitism. This camp will also uphold salability and appreciation by the masses as the virtuous yardstick to judge the value of a photograph.

The other camp will, with considerable indignation, accuse the first camp of being "mere hacks." They will claim that photography for the masses is mere calendar art and a debasement of photography's true

artistic potential. If the conversation proceeds long enough, a member of the second camp will probably quote George Bernard Shaw, "If more than 10% of the people appreciate your art, you can be assured that it is shallow, trivial and worthless." (That's not exactly what he said, but it is often the form the "quote" takes!) The second camp delights in the esoteric. The first camp delights in broad appeal.

That these two opposing views *exist* is not surprising. That these two philosophies should be so *antagonistic* toward one another *is*. The confusion arises, in my opinion, because of a simple lack of definition of terms.

Photography is nothing more than a means of communication. It is a language,

and often referred to with the cliché “visual language.” It is a means of expressing ideas, of communicating, of formulating a thought and sharing it, telling it or yelling it.

If you would review that last sentence you would see that this exact same definition could apply to the written word. Writing is a form of communication. The parallels between writing and photography can be instructive.

If you have an opportunity, ask a writer for your local newspaper what they do for a living. He or she will likely respond, “I’m a journalist.” Ask a person who writes poems for a living (or passion) what they are. They’ll proudly announce that they are a poet. Ask someone who creates restaurant menus, billboard signs, advertising inducements, corporate memos, prescription labels, academic papers, or other forms of the written word what they do and you will likely *never* hear “I am a writer.” They will tend to specify what they do in more descriptive terms — “I am a *copywriter*, a *researcher*, *speechwriter*,” etc. In fact, if I announce to you that “I am a writer” what type of writer naturally comes to mind? Most likely you will think me a novelist and

rarely would you suspect that I write, say, song lyrics.

Writing is a sophisticated form of communication. It’s history spans a couple of centuries of culture. It’s forms are well defined, well understood and infrequently confused. The terminology that has surrounded those who write provide precise definitions that describe the type of writing one does. Photography, on the other hand, has been a part of history now less than 200 years. Its uses, definitions, perceptions, and visual history are still barely being defined.

This adolescent maturity leads to considerable confusion. Take the example of an individual who derives their living by creating commercial advertising photographs. Ask this person what they do for a living and their response will be, “I am a photographer.” Ask the person who takes family pictures of you and your loved ones in the professional studio what they are and the answer will be, “I am a photographer.” Ask a person who takes pictures for publication in the daily newspaper — “I am a photographer.” The individual who uses cameras and lens to create works of art for galleries and museums — “I am a photographer.”

All these uses of the medium of photography are lumped together in language *and in thought* under the generalized term *photography*.

This is why, when I announce I am a photographer, I am often advised that I ought to go up to the local mountain pass where I can get some fantastic photos of the pristine mountain lakes, alpine sunsets and the wild grizzly bears. Those who offer such advice don't understand the difference between their perception of photographic art and my interests which lean considerably more toward the Edward Weston / Walker Evans / Paul Strand / Lewis Hine / Wright Morris use of the camera. I sometimes cringe and hesitate even to tell people that I am a photographer because I know what they think of when I use the term. What they think is *not at all* what I mean. In fact, I don't even *own* a motordrive.

Few people, even among the "bowling and beer" crowd would confuse the writing of Charles Dickens with that of, say, Rod McKuen let alone lump them together in the same group. But tell them you are a *photographer* and you'd better watch out.

Several years ago I took a vacation with a group of friends, none of whom were photographers. You can imagine my dismay when I learned that not one person on the trip had brought a snapshot camera because they all assumed that I, with my monorail and tripod, would serve as group photographer. They assumed that I would happily make reprints available to them in far superior quality than they could achieve with their little pocket cameras. You can also imagine their dismay when they learned that all I had with me was black & white film. I enthusiastically accepted their assignment and proceeded to make the first photograph of the outing. Setting up the tripod, assembling my collapsible camera, taking meter readings, focusing under the dark cloth, *et al* required 40 minutes or so. At least I *made* it require 40 minutes or so. Funny, every time I mentioned that this might be a good spot for another photograph, they all disappeared in a flurry. The opening group portrait was the only picture of the entire vacation.

The core idea of this article is simply that *words have meaning*. It behooves us to understand the meaning of words when we use them. But here is the rub. The word *photographer* means something to

non-photographers that it does not mean to photographers. In the same way, the term *imaginary number* means something to a mathematician that is quite different than the concept we non-mathematicians might perceive.

When I realized this several years ago, I changed my letterhead and my business card stationery. I removed all occurrences of the word photographer. My stationery now says *Brooks Jensen Arts*. Although my work is primarily *photographic arts*, the word *artist* conveys to the general public much more accurately *what I do* than the

word *photographer*. When we understand the words *as they are heard*, we can communicate more effectively.

I am therefore proposing that we photographers follow the lead of the novelist, the poet, the journalist and the copywriter. When someone asks what you do, answer that you are a portaitist, a landscapist, a studio constructionist, an advertising imagist, or a weddingist.

Come to think of it, maybe *photographer* isn't such a bad term after all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brooks Jensen". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

VOLKSWAGEN

A Week at the Factory



by

Peter Keetman

From the book
Volkswagen: A Week at the Factory
Published by Chronicle Books, San Francisco
ISBN #0-8118-0268-X

In April 1953, Peter Keetman photographed for a week in the Volkswagen factory, on speculation and without commission. His hope was that this body of work would further his career as an industrial photographer — a hope which was not fulfilled to the expected extent. The work was rarely shown at the time, and even then, only a few images. It did not result in a lasting commission by the factory, nor to wider publication. Nonetheless, the work endures. Seventy-one images from this remarkable body of work were published in 1992 by Chronicle Books in *Volkswagen: A Week in the Factory*.

The selection of images in this issue of LensWork Quarterly are reprinted by special arrangement and with the permission of Professor F. C. Gundlach of Hamburg, Germany, archivist of the Volkswagen images.



HOW TO BE FAMOUS, SORT OF

by

Bill Jay



Inexplicably some people want to be famous, while others are hoping for abduction and the prospect of being used in alien sex experiments. Both groups have equal chances of success. But the really, seriously delusional are those who want to be famous as photographic artists. These unfortunates are classified, professionally, as suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder 1. And I am not making this up.

According to the mammoth tome known as the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, the above disease is instantly identifiable because the sufferer

1. has a grandiose sense of self-importance,
2. is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success,
3. believes that he or she is “special,”
4. requires excessive admiration,
5. has a sense of entitlement,
6. is interpersonally exploitative,
7. lacks empathy; is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others,
8. is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him,
9. shows arrogant, haughty behavior or attitudes.

TWELVE QUARTETS

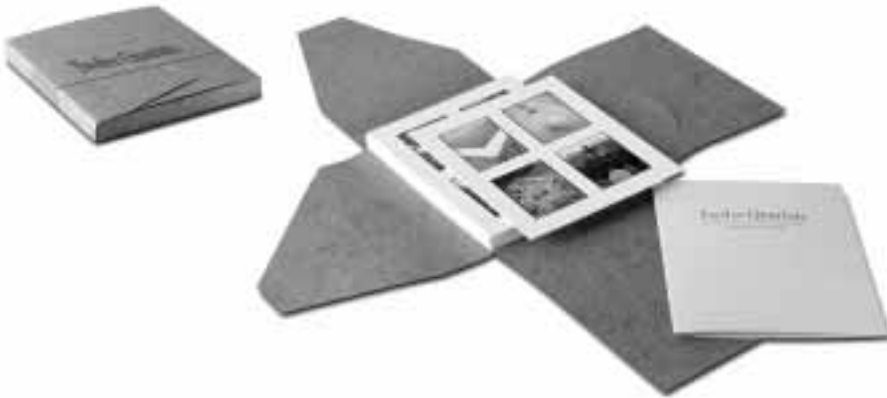
A Portfolio of Photographs



by

Janet Schipper

Janet Schipper



Twelve Quartets is a portfolio of forty-eight original photographs. The images were made between July 1995 and August 1996.

The portfolio was designed and produced by the artist. The photographs are mounted on two-ply acid free boards and the wrapper is Zanders Elephant Hide paper.

Twelve Quartets was published in November 1996 in a limited edition of 60.



MY PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

by

Helen Stummer



Twenty-two years ago I was deeply involved as a painter of ship wrecks, landscapes and people suffering. During a weekend in Manhattan, I saw an exhibit by women photographers at the International Center of Photography. I was so impressed with the show that I decided to sign up for a beginners' class in photography. All I wanted was to learn how to use my camera better so I could improve taking pictures of things that I wanted to paint.

That decision changed my life.

We were given an assignment to photograph our neighborhood. Everyone set to work producing photographs that would be expected — suburban landscapes and portraits. Everyone, that is, except me.

“Why don't you move if you find your area so boring?” my instructor asked.

“I don't want to move, I just don't find the New Jersey suburbs interesting to photograph,” I replied.

TRUCK FARMERS

The Last Harvest



by

Perry Dilbeck

Perry Dilbeck

A mere twenty years ago, just sixteen houses rolled lazily by as we rumbled down the three mile stretch of oiled gravel road on our way home. Now, much of the farmland is entombed under more than five hundred houses.

As with much farming nowadays, the small, independent farm can't compete with the commercial farming giants; the last resort is to cash in on the value of their land, and sell. With the rapid growth in population in the area just south of Atlanta, the valuable land is quickly purchased and converted into housing subdivisions. Over the years I've come to miss the scent of cultivated land, and the sight of a hand raised nonchalantly as I pass each neighbor's farm.

With less than thirty acres of land, the truck farmer is able to provide food for his family and eke out a living by selling surplus fruit and vegetables at local farmer's markets, roadside stands, from the back of his truck, or from the cool shade of the back yard.

Before the truck farmer disappears from the landscape altogether, I've decided to photograph these proud people with their simple ways; I purposefully chose the older farmers whose land and homestead have been passed down through many generations. Like so many things of their generation, their way of life will more than likely go to the grave with them.

(The images were taken with a Pentax 6 x 7 medium format camera and Holga plastic cameras.)



GETTING SERIOUS

The One Hundred Prints Project

by

Brooks Jensen



“There is that little corner in the basement that could work.” Or, “The extra bathroom could be converted easily enough.” They are such simple thoughts that function as precursors to building one’s own darkroom. But the path they tempt one to walk down is longer and more treacherous than one might guess.

For example, the minute you have your own darkroom, all of your friends and neighbors will now perceive you as a photographer. At parties you will no longer be introduced as “John Doe — he works for XYZ Company.” You will now be introduced as “John Doe — he’s a photographer.” As Ted Orland has joked, suddenly you will be invited on a regular basis to photograph a friend’s wedding. For free. “Bring your camera,” will become code for “You’re not invited because we enjoy your personality and desire your companionship, but rather because we’d like someone to record this event and we’ve volunteered you involuntarily.”

All of this can be endured or creatively avoided — all except one deadly question. “Let me see some of your work.” I used to dread that question; I hated that question. It forced me to confront the (capital P) Problem of (capital C) Completion. It’s frankly *embarrassing* to be

Appendix 2

Subscribing to *LensWork Quarterly* Formats & Availability

LensWork Quarterly is published four times a year — Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter issues. The information below describes the various formats and availability of *LensWork Quarterly*.

Paper format

Each issue of *LensWork Quarterly* is printed in a 96-page paperback book format on bright white, 80-pound paper.

A limited edition only is printed to fulfill the needs of our subscribers, distributors, retailers and a few on-hand back issue quantities.

Paper back issues are available from our offices while supplies last. When these are gone, they are *not* reprinted.

Subscriptions (Paper only)

One and two year subscriptions are available in the USA as follows:

- \$29 for 1-year *
- \$55 for 2-years *

Call or fax for overseas rates.

Retail

The paperback book format is available in book stores, photographic supply stores and other retail outlets around the country. The retail price is \$8.95 per issue. If you are a retailer and would like to offer *LensWork Quarterly* to your customers, our distributor is Ingram Periodicals Distributing. Call them or our office for additional information.

Back issues

Some retailers keep unsold copies and make them available as back issues until they are sold out. Back issues are also available from LensWork until sold out for \$8.95 per issue plus \$2 each shipping & handling. Back issues are *not* reprinted.

Computer formats

Because the essays and articles in *LensWork Quarterly* are not time-sensitive, we are regularly asked for back issues long after the paper format copies are sold out. To make *LensWork Quarterly* continually available, each issue is also available in computer file format.

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