



LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

QUARTERLY

Essays

Robert Hecht
Brooks Jensen
Bill Weinstein

Portfolios

Charles A.
Hedgcock

Annu
Palakunnathu
Matthew

Ken
Royster

Catherine
Steinmann



LENSWORK

Q U A R T E R L Y



Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Celebrity and Obscurity — and Why I Am an Optimist About Photography

In the sixth century B.C., the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu wrote a book of wisdom in which his basic premise was that one cannot have black without white, up without down, positive without negative. For every *good* in other words, there is a downside, no matter how difficult it may be able to see. In this Editor's Comment, I would like to offer some observations on the downside of *celebrity* and why I am optimistic about photography in spite of the current climate of the Art World.

If we are honest, we must admit that our's is a culture that celebrates the celebrity. In fact, the way to successfully manage one's career is to *become* a celebrity, and this is true no matter what the field of endeavor. I became aware, after the Gulf War, of just how insidious this was when I saw on the newsstand an issue of *American Photographer* with a picture of Madonna and General Norman Schwarzkopf on the cover. The cover proudly announced that the feature article in the magazine had celebrities pick their favorite photograph of *themselves*. How more circularly inbred can one become? It was silly enough that a

photography magazine focused on pop culture icons, but to pander to celebrity vanity this way was, for me, over the top. It was actually this experience that started me thinking about what a photography magazine could be, a magazine that truly celebrated *photography* instead of equipment, celebrated images instead of icons, and most importantly championed photographers instead of photographic *personas*. This was the genesis of *LensWork Quarterly*.

The word *persona* comes from the Greek "per sona," or "through sound" and refers to the mask that was worn in Greek open-air theater. These masks were simple devices mounted on sticks that were held in front of the actor's face. Each mask included a small megaphonic projection from the mouth that would help carry the actor's voice further into the open-air theater. Therefore the mask worn by the actor was really the character of play. We have at the beginning of every play the *dramatis personae* — the list of characters to be played by the actors. In a strange and curious corruption of language, the word *person* has become to mean *the real thing*.

We identify so clearly our *persona* with who we think we *are* that our common speech can include such language “the real person behind the façade.” In other words we ask, “what kind of person are you really?” — hoping that we are about to hear the deep, inside scoop about the individual’s *real* self. The age-old business of symbolism over substance!

In photography, as throughout the rest of culture, this cult of the personality (really, a cult of the megaphonic mask, if I may) has developed to such a degree that without such a personality it’s difficult to get noticed. How does one get a gallery show, for example? One of the most common ways is to become a *person of interest*. If you can become a character, an oddball, a spectacle, in short, someone *talked about*, then it is easier to become visible in the world of gallery art. How do you get a photography book published? The easiest way is to be a famous dead guy! The reason is, I believe, that it’s easier in the marketplace to sell a book or a piece of art if the photographer is *known*. If the photographer is unknown then the challenge, in order to develop marketability, is not to make our work better but *to become more recognizable*.

And this brings us directly to the problem of celebrity. Said succinctly, if you want to get your work seen you *have* to be a

famous person. But the definition of becoming a famous person is to have your work seen! It’s a classic catch-22. I might add, the same can be said for magazines. If you want to sell a pop culture magazine, put a famous person on the cover. But if you put a famous person on the cover, you’re no different than any other magazine and therefore you blend in with the crowd and cease to be unique. Think of *People* or *Cosmopolitan*.

Fortunately there’s a simple way out of this dilemma. Just ignore all the rules and celebrate photography rather than the persona of photographers.

This doesn’t mean that we’ve never published and won’t continue to publish well-known photographers. We’re delighted to have published master work by André Kertész, Wynn Bullock, and even well-known contemporaries like Bruce Barnbaum, Linda Butler and Shelby Lee Adams. But in selecting work for the limited space in *LensWork Quarterly*, we are willing to resist the “celebrity” tide and publish wonderful work by people you’ve never heard of. The names Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Charles Hedgcock, Ken Royster and Catherine Steinmann are probably not familiar to most of you. But when we received their portfolios for review as submissions to *LensWork Quarterly* we were impressed

with the quality of their work and the broad range of their collective photographic vision. Do they have the necessary cult personality to have made a splash in the pop culture world? I doubt it. But are they dedicated photographers working with zeal at perfecting their craft and expressing their vision? The answer, as can be seen clearly in their photographs, is a resounding yes.

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's work has a lyrical, atmospheric quality that vibrates with life. She sees her world in terms of movement and breath — a quality that comes through her photographs with refreshing ease.

Charles "Chip" Hedgcock has taken Imogen Cunningham's advice to "photograph in one's backyard" *literally*. It has often been said that Edward Weston's genius was that he *saw* peppers as photographic subject material. Chip is to bugs what Weston was to peppers!

Ken Royster shows a rare quality in a photographer — the ability to bring unveiled emotion into a photograph and still exhibit the utmost respect for his subject's dignity.

Catherine Steinmann's work is simply full of light — even in the shadows of deepest dark. The vibrancy, visual chaos and

ultimate beauty of her work, to use her words, *celebrates* New York City. It is so popular to depict large cities as places of grime and crowded oppression. Her work shows us so clearly that what we see is often what we *choose* to see. That she chooses to see light and lightness is a tribute to her creative spirit.

So much of today's best photography is almost invisible because the photographers are not plugged into "the celebrity machine." These fine photographers, although they're not famous, are producing work that needs exposure to an audience who appreciates their efforts, their vision, and their dedication to craft. The same can be said of new images from three photographers we're adding to the *LensWork Special Editions Collection* — Steve Mulligan, Carl Battreall, and Raphael Shevelev.

There is a popular rumor running around in photography circles these days that the glory days of photography are over. Photography is said to have achieved its zenith in the 1970s and 1980s. As the editor of *LensWork Quarterly*, I can attest that nothing could be farther from the truth. We see an incredible amount of very fine photography that comes our way as submissions, web sites, and books. Contrary to this popular myth about photography falling on hard times, I be-

lieve this is one of the very *best* times in photography's history — and I believe so from the sheer volume of high-quality work that we see. There are uncountable and innumerable dedicated photographers working in relative obscurity because the publishing world and the gallery world has to focus their attention on those photographers encased in history or a cult of personality. Believe me, photography is much healthier today than anyone knows; it's just relatively invisible. *LensWork* may be one small voice, but it is with great delight and enthusiasm that we highlight the work of these talented but less-known artists and give them the same consideration as their better-known peers.

I have often talked about *the path* of creative photography. Those of us in photography who approach the medium as a means for personal expression and creative vision know that photography is only a *medium*. Film and cameras and even photographs themselves are only means to an end. It is the *life* that photography illuminates that is the real significance of the path. If photography is to be judged by the fame of a few luminaries, it is destined to be a small art, indeed. If, on the other hand, it is a door through which humans can explore and share the mysteries of life — and a life examined closely — then it will remain a gateway to meaning and connection between people. It does

not require fame to communicate clearly. It *does* require dedication and persistence, talent and perseverance, time, honesty, discipline, work, insight and the ability to break through self-delusion. Notice that fame and visibility are not listed. Fame and visibility are a *result*, not a method. They are not even guaranteed. And most importantly, they are not at all what really counts. That we live in the age of symbolism over substance can hardly be denied. That does not mean we should succumb to the platitude of celebrity or be defeated by the discouragement of obscurity.

I am an optimist. I tend to be naturally of a cheery demeanor. Nonetheless, I find it encouraging to remember how many *decades* of virtual invisibility are to be noted in the careers of even the most famous photographers. In fact, if you really want to make great photographs, pray you never become known. Once you do, the world will do its best to force you to keep repeating the same images over and over. In the meantime, while you are invisible to the art world, keep making photographs and pushing yourself toward more honest and more powerful images that come from within.



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Book Cliffs, Colorado*
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*Cloud Reflection,
Courthouse Wash, Utah*
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Gypsy fiddler,
Cracow, Poland, 1994
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Descending Angel
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LWS 052
Layers, Antelope Canyon, 1998
Initialed by Bruce Barnbaum
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SAVED, SANCTIFIED & FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT



by

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ken Royster".

Ken Royster





ON PERSEVERING AS A PHOTOGRAPHER

by

Robert Hecht

Recently I opened a fortune cookie in a Chinese restaurant and received the following profound words of wisdom (*italics mine*):

Good things come
to one who *preservers*. (*sic*)

Well, I've been *persevering* for quite some time now as a photographer — steadily for over 35 years. I consider it to be the *real* work of my life, even though it would never have been possible without the economic support provided by my “day job” as a video producer. And while many good things have come to me from photography, I find that I must actively cultivate a positive perspective about my art work — and its relative success in the world — to appreciate the truly valuable aspects of a life in creative photography. In fact, the ability to find this positive perspective is critical to my ability to persevere.



THE HIDDEN EMPIRE



by

Charles A. Hedgcock

Charles A. Hedgcock



*Living Arts Section*

WEINSTEIN OEUVRE PERMEATES THE ART WORLD

*An art review **

PLEASE NOTE: Due to technical problems with the scanner, the first edition of JPEG images of Asher's work will not be available this week. However, the first reviews of his work are in. The following excerpts appeared in The New York Times this morning.

Already a darling of the cognoscenti, the precocious West Coast artist Asher Kyle Weinstein (1999-) is already being hailed as the first major post-millennial experimentalist in color-field painting. A prodigiously productive young artist — often producing one or two new canvases every day — Weinstein's work is being praised for its depth of expression within the self-enforced limitations of palette and substrate. Working with unstretched Pampers Preemie canvas, Weinstein's paintings are created in a simple, neo-primitive tech-

nique, applying his colors directly to the canvas using his own buttocks.

Much like Picasso, Asher Weinstein displayed his talent from the earliest age, as seen in his first suite of color-field paintings, "The Meconium Series." Here, working in the thickest, most viscous choice of obsidian blacks, Weinstein applies thick, deep, and almost three dimensional strokes, reminiscent of the post-WPA work of the young Jackson Pollack, an early influence. Limiting himself to the smallest of canvases — scarcely five inches square — Weinstein achieves a minimalist expression of the starkest black and white angst, expressing perhaps his Shakespearean view of himself as "From his mother's womb untimely ripped." The dense paint, its

thickness emphasized by ragged volcanic textures against a background of purest white, display the rawness and energy of a young artist discovering his craft.

The Meconium Period, as with Picasso's "Blue Period," was short lived, soon replaced by a lyrical, environmentally-conscious romanticism. Working exclusively in earth tones — burnt sierra, umber, and the dark tones of petrified wood — Weinstein's work is seen to soften, spread, play with the margins of his canvases. Here his experimentalism explodes, as he delves into a world of abstract shapes that seem to turn into Rorschach tests of the artist's — and the viewer's — imagination. The experience is like the childish game of finding objects in clouds. In an innovative new technique, Weinstein frequently pre-treats his canvases in a wash of the palest yellow, further softening the lyrical, ecological forms of his contrasting strokes.

In a wildly innovative temper, Weinstein has added to the visual and tactile impact of his paintings by challenging the viewer with a third sense — the olfactory. Using a technique that the artist refuses to divulge, Weinstein perfumes his medium before applying it to the canvas. This attar, redolent of the scents of nature in the raw, earthy yet entrancing, perhaps influenced by Weinstein's interest in the British

"Shock" artist Damien Hirst, who has a similar interest in fermenting media, is not designed to shock. Rather, it enhances the environmental impact of the total work, and is a valuable selling point to collectors. (See related article in Business Section: "Calvin Klein to Market New Stool-Based Perfume," page C1).

In an interview, Weinstein revealed plans to move beyond color-field painting into the world of sculptural forms, once he is introduced to solid foods. If the young artist can achieve in sculpture what he has already amply demonstrated in painting, the art world may be seeing the emergence of the first major talent of the 21st Century.

The first public exhibition of Asher Weinstein's work is scheduled for early 2000 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, simply and starkly entitled: "Poop."



* [Editor's note: We recently received this email from our friends Bill and Julia Weinstein shortly after the birth of their son, Asher. In the current Art environment, it was too good to not publish. "Congratulations," and thanks, Bill.]



NEW YORK CITY



by

Catherine Steinmann

Catherine Steinmann





“OWNING” PHOTOGRAPHS

by

Brooks Jensen

I remember when my kids were growing up they both were enamored with the *Star Wars Trilog*y. They owned all three episodes on video tape and would watch each movie over and over *and over*. My Dad was always amazed at this because he could never understand why anybody would want to watch a movie a second time. “You know how it’s going to end,” he’d say to the kids with frustration. “Why do you want to watch it again?” To a small degree I sympathized with his position, but I would remind him that he owned a number of LP’s that he listened to frequently because he enjoyed hearing the music again and again, even though it was repetitive.

My kids watched those movies over and over again because they were fun and they were fun every time they watched them. Similarly, my wife explains that she needs to listen to a new CD over and over until she “owns” the music — that is, until it is engrained in her consciousness so well that she knows it intimately. But there is more going on here than mere repetitive appreciation or memorization.

Each time my kids watch *Star Wars*, the movie stays the same. *They* change. This is the key. A good photograph, like a good movie



MEMORIES OF INDIA



by

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the first names 'Annu' and 'Matthew' written in a cursive style, with a horizontal line underneath.

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

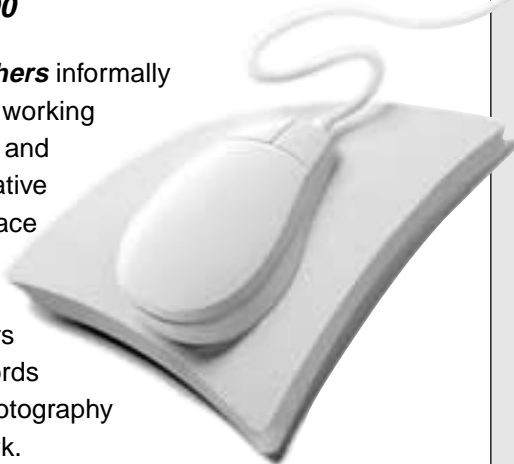


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Being There audio

Audio interview with David Grant

David Grant Book



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Audio interview with Robert Vizzini


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Audio interview with Phil Kenny



Lost in America

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Audio interview with Robert Vizzini



transitions

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Audio interview with Robert Vizzini

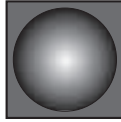


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