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# LENSTWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

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*Article*

Philippe L. Gross  
& S. I. Shapiro

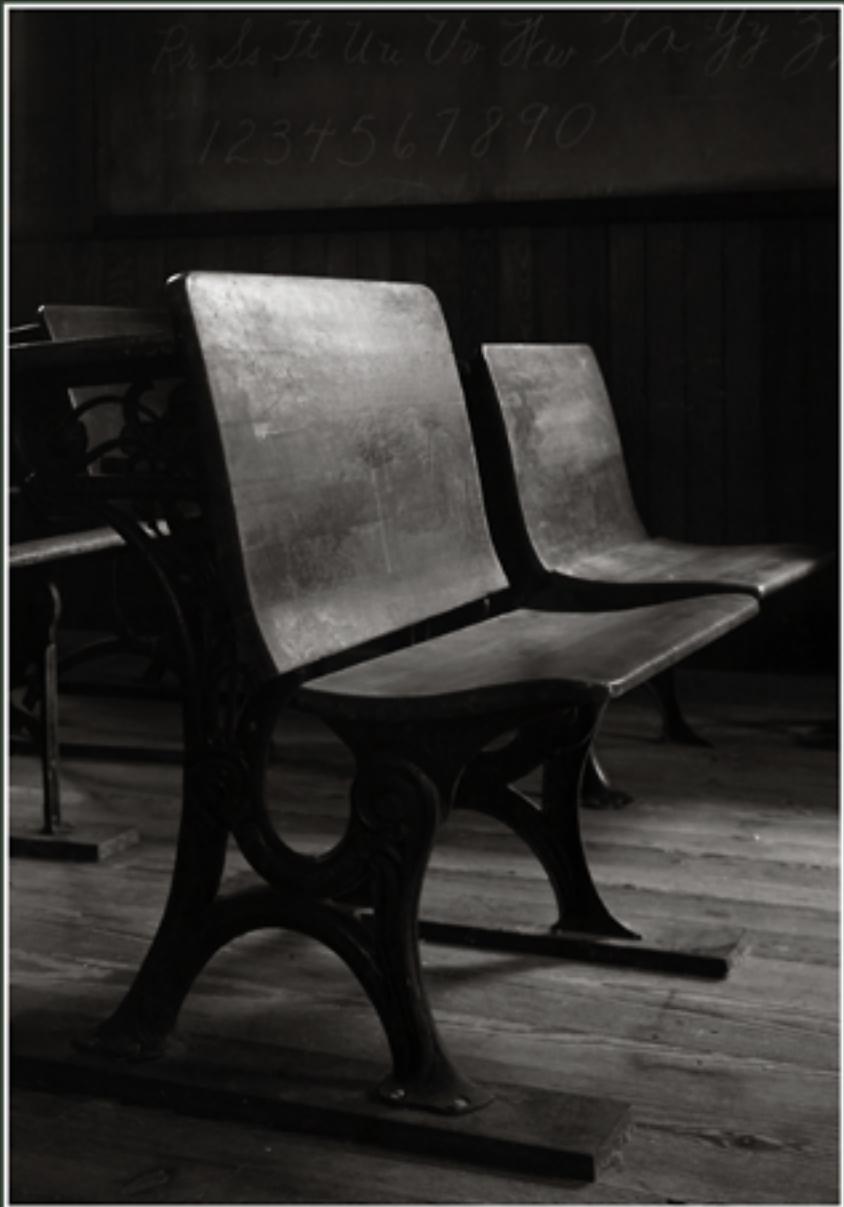
*Interview*

Tillman Crane

*Portfolios*

Tillman Crane  
Tom Florio  
Chip Thomas

*EndNotes*  
by Bill Jay



# LENSWORK



*Photography and the Creative Process*  
*Articles • Interviews • Portfolios*

*Editors*  
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Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

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**Philippe L. Gross & S. I. Shapiro**

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# EDITOR'S COMMENTS

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## *A Change of Venue*

*There once a man who said "Damn,  
for it seems that I certainly am  
a creature who moves  
in determinant grooves.  
I'm not even a bus. I'm a tram."*

We live in a world of yin and yang – the ever-opposing opposites: positive and negative, good and bad, up and down. If all things have their opposites, then what is the *opposite of creativity?* The answer is not obvious, and I suppose it is not so because there is more than one answer. But, certainly *one* of the answers is that the opposite of creativity is *habit*.

Let me illustrate this with an exercise – I might add, an exercise that won't illustrate my point if you don't play along. So, please do so. Here is the exercise: Count the number of letters "f" there are in the following phrase:

Finished files are  
the final result of years of  
scientific research.

How many "f's" did you count? If you haven't seen this before, there is an 85% chance according to statistical odds, that you will have counted four letters "f."

You're in good company if you did so, at least the company of four-fifths of those who try this exercise. You will also be wrong. There are *six* letters "f." Try again.

I love to use this puzzle to illustrate an important point about creativity: *We don't see things as they are, but rather we see them as we are trained to see them.* My friend Morrie Camhi said it well, "We don't see things as *they* are. We see things as *we* are." You see, because most of us are trained to read phonetically, we count the phonetic "f" sounds and tend not to see the two "f's" in the words "of." To our mind's eye these "f's" are pronounced like the letter "v" and therefore are skipped in the count. Most people skip them not because they are illiterate, not because they are stupid, and not because the letters are hidden. They are skipped because we are so often ruled by our *habits*.

There is an old saw that says, "When your only tool is a hammer, the entire world

looks like a nail." So it is with habits. Once engrained, they tend to change everything we see, everything we think we know and – most importantly for this article – the way in which we tend to create. Similarly, when your only tool is a specific kind of camera, the only things you will see to photograph are those things best suited to that camera.

I learned this lesson in a most tangible way, somewhat by accident. I purchased, for no particular reason, a new hand-held rangefinder. For over twenty years I had used only tripod-stabilized view cameras. Shortly after this purchase I took a week's vacation on the Oregon coast intending to do some photography. Instead, I was weather-bound by a week of constant rain and wind. My view camera was useless and my spirits were as soggy as the landscape. Finally, on the last afternoon of the last full day, a break in the clouds delivered the most beautiful angular light across the beach at that soft and sculpting right-angle of winter. Seeing the beach dunes and grasses bathed in this amber glow, I knew my opportunity was fleeting. This was the moment that I would discover the creative necessity to avoid habits. I took a walk on the beach with a new way of making photographs in my hand, and it changed my way of *seeing*. The effect was more than I could have predicted.

I had an incredible feeling of freedom and fluidity; I was stunned by the flood of images I started to see. I could work more intuitively– reacting to the light and subject material without premeditation. I had experienced the "yin" of the view camera, but had never worked with the "yang" of the hand-held camera. I discovered that both have their qualities: just like night and day. One is really no "better" than the other, but they are distinctly *different*. The question is which is "right" for the moment?

By nature I tend to be conservative in my equipment and techniques. I have always believed that it was better to know a couple of films well than to skip all over the spectrum, never really exploring a set of variables deeply. I still believe in this and know that the best photography comes from those who know their equipment and craft the most. The lesson I learned on the beach that day, however, is that *habits* can create the opposite of creativity. Sometimes a change of venue, be it physical, mental, equipment-oriented, a change in the medium, a change in the presentation, or a dozen other variables – can sometimes be a most creative act. Habits are useful things but so easily can become ruts. A little shaking-up from time to time seems to be a good thing even though it might drive us, for a short period of time, out of our well-defined comfort zones.

There are habits of *thought*, too, just as there are habits of *action*. How many photographers have I met over the years who have thought that the best photographs are to be made in the Desert Southwest, Yosemite, or more recently, Tibet or India? Why are there so few great photographers from, say, the Midwest? (My apologies to David Plowden, Art Sinsabaugh, Harry Callahan, and, well, you know who you are.) Why are there no great photographers of international acclaim from Winnipeg or Lubbock? Is it that there is nothing to photograph there? I doubt it.

Most photographers will admit that one of their most pressing problems is trying to determine *what* to photograph. It seems like such a simple task. In truth, like all the simple things in life, it takes a lifetime to get good at it. In this issue of *LensWork*

you'll see portfolios from photographic artists who work with this in mind. The key to their success seems to be *interest* and *access*.

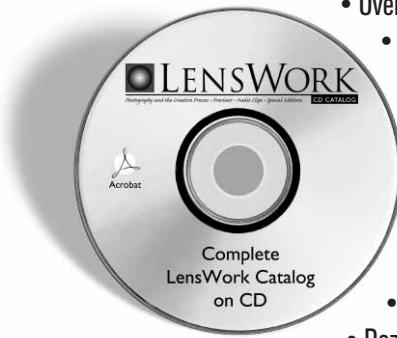
Tillman Crane has worked on the same photographic themes for more than a decade. James "Chip" Thomas works as a medical doctor in the community of people he photographs. Tom Florio makes still life constructions with materials he finds and photographs them in his studio after a day of commercial shooting.

Sometimes a change of venue has nothing to do with a change in location.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Mollon".

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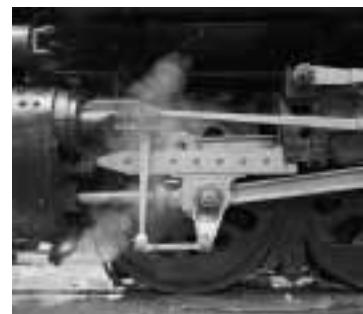
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# NAVAJO SHEEP CAMP



*by*

*Chip Thomas*

Chip Thomas



*Minnie with the pack animals on slick rock*



# BARRIERS TO SEEING

by

Philippe L. Gross and S. I. Shapiro

[Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from a new book *The Tao of Photography: Seeing Beyond Seeing*. This book is a unique approach to the art of living that draws upon ancient Chinese Taoist wisdom and photographic artistry to provide insights into creativity, spirituality and awareness training. It discusses the photographic process in the context of Taoist philosophy, especially the philosophy in the book known as the *Chuang-tzu* as well as the pioneering work of 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologist Abraham Maslow.]

Artistry in photography requires the ability to achieve a state of unconstricted awareness, free of conventional ways of seeing and thinking. Such a state of mind is also a characteristic of liberated living according to the *Chuang-tzu*, allowing the Taoist sage to "leap into the boundless and make it ... home."

Unfortunately there are many barriers to achieving a state of unconstricted awareness. This article is an exploration of those barriers, for we believe that becoming more conscious of them is an important step toward the liberation of the mind and photographic artistry.

## *Deficiency-Motivations*

Many photographers, including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Jeff Berner, and Freeman Patterson, have claimed that the need to control is the greatest barrier to seeing. According to the



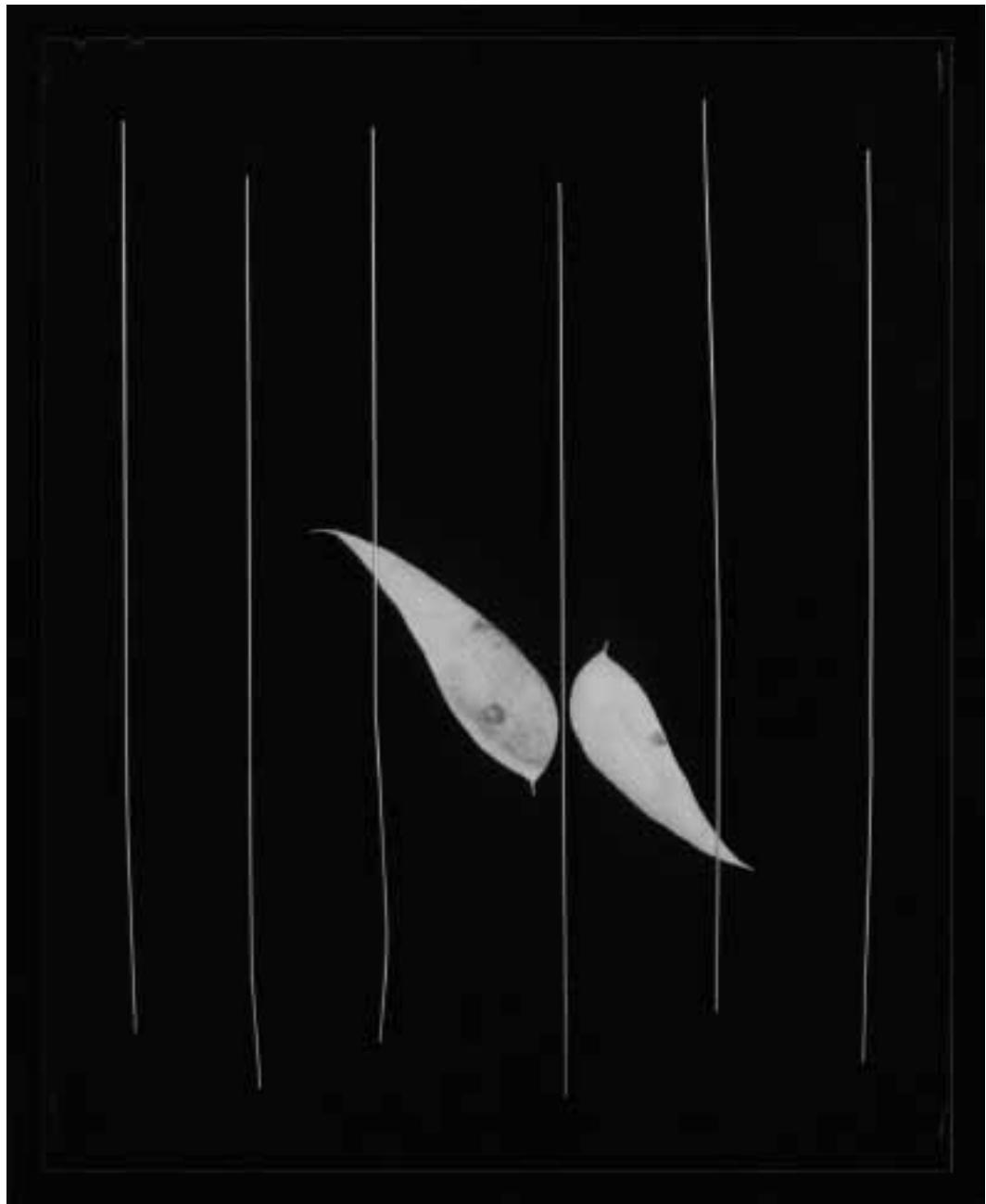
# STUDIO STUDIES



*by*

*Tom Florio*

Tom Florio





# INTERVIEW WITH TILLMAN CRANE

Tillman Crane is a large format photographer currently finishing a five-year teaching project with the Waterford School in Utah. His new book of photographs, entitled *Structure*, is being released June 1, 2001 by Custom & Limited Editions, San Francisco. It includes 70 tri-tone images and a foreword by Paul Caponigro. We interviewed Tillman Crane from his home in Sandy, Utah.

Brooks Jensen: We're delighted to have this opportunity to chat with you about your photography and to congratulate you on your new book.

Tillman Crane: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure talking with you.

BJ: Let me start by asking about your "day job," because it's very interesting. You're the director of the Photography Program at the Waterford School, where you teach photography. You are the exception to that old saying about teachers and doers – you both *teach* photography and you *do* photography. Would you tell us a bit about your involvement with this rather unique school?

TC: I was invited to come out to Utah five years ago to get the program started. The Waterford School is a private school in Sandy, Utah, that has a unique mission: it's returning to the classic liberal arts foundation of academics, fine arts, and athletics. We've just finished a huge project, completing the construction of



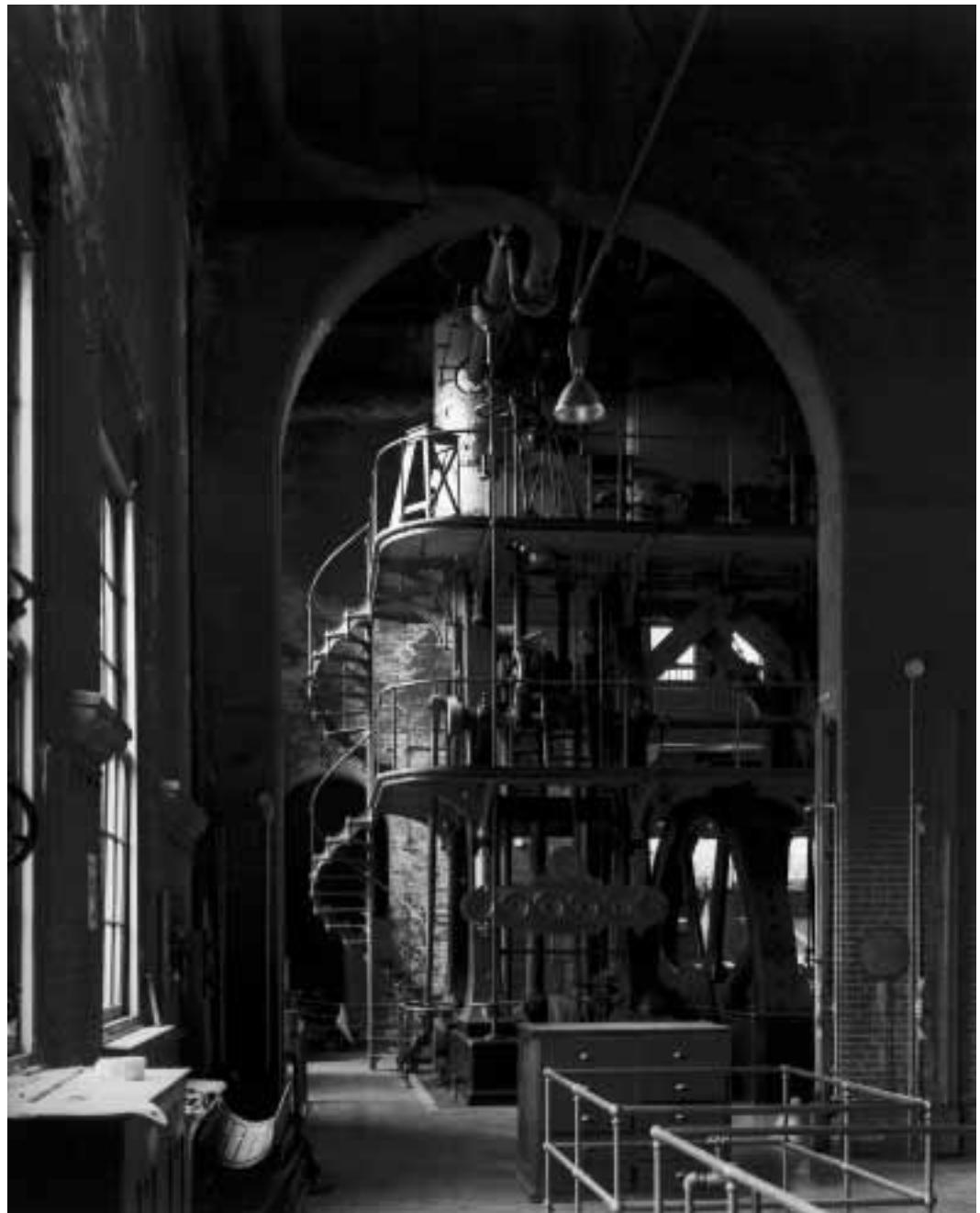
# STRUCTURE



*hui*  
Tillman Crane



*Hear an audio interview with Tillman Crane and see more of his images  
in the LensWork MultiMedia Library. Online preview at [www.lenswork.com](http://www.lenswork.com).*



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