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"Thanks!!! **LOVE LensWork;** wish it was weekly..." -- *Scott*

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"I just picked up a copy of your magazine and I want to know, where have you been all my life? This says No. 36 on the front, does this mean I've missed 35 of these? **I enjoyed every bit of this issue, from cover to cover.** Just wanted to say hi and I'm sorry I didn't know about you before." -- *Katharine Thayer*

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"I just wanted to write and say "Thank You" for producing a magazine of **such high quality.** The May-June issue was the second issue of Lenswork that I had purchased and once again **no word has gone unread.** I am new to the world of Photographic Art and Photography but the insight that I get from the pages of *LensWork*, both written and visual far exceed the price of purchase. Thank you once again!" -- *Jason Gray*



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"I have been a subscriber for a while now and have to tell you **how starved the photography community would be without your publication.** I am so very happy you are no longer quarterly. I have only one wish for you, and I mean this in a good way. May you never enjoy broad commercial appeal." -- *Marc Climie*

"This 'preview' is a delightfully tantalizing treat, one which certainly brightened up my morning. On the other hand, it's cruel torture - now I've got to **race frantically out to the mailbox, day after day, eagerly hoping that the next issue of your excellent magazine will be waiting there ready to be devoured,** only to be disappointed by 'regular' mail. If you were trying to show just enough of the magazine to drive viewers into a frenzy to see the whole issue, well, you've succeeded. Thanks for putting out such a fine magazine." -- *Paul Butzi*

"I REALLY LIKE YOUR MAGAZINE! I **love to read the in-depth interviews,** and to hear what others are doing and thinking. It brings so much more to the field of photography when you can understand where someone is coming from. I also **enjoy the connection back to other arts.** After all, we do all speak a similar language and have common concerns when it comes to being creative." -- *Jim Graham.*

"Thanks. We are enjoying both the photography and commentary in *LensWork* - **thought-provoking and like having another congenial colleague** offering new thoughts and insights." -- *Ed and Dorothy Monnelly*

"Just finished looking through / reading *LensWork* No. 32. I wanted to say what a great publication you have here. **Thought-provoking editorials, thorough interviews, and splendid portfolios.**" -- *Miles Budimir*

Three New LensWork Audio Interviews!



LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios • Fine Art Special Editions

No. 48 Aug - Sep 2003



Portfolios

**Fay Godwin
Dave Jordano
Mark Story**

Articles

**Peter Hamilton
Sean Kernan**

EndNotes

by Bill Jay

LENSWORK

48

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Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

Editors

Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

Assistant to the Editors

Lisa Kuhnlein

In this issue

Articles by

Sean Kernan
Peter Hamilton

Portfolios by

Fay Godwin
Dave Jordano
Mark Story

EndNotes by **Bill Jay**

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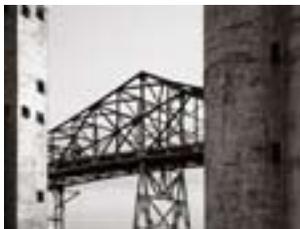
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Overloaded with little scraps of paper containing scrawled notes, our editor has cleaned out the drawer and is sharing selected random thoughts on photography.

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Random Thoughts

Over the years, I've gathered a lot of snippets of thought on photography. Most often these take the form of little scraps of paper stuffed in a folder I have labeled *Random Thoughts On Photography*. I often find it useful to just scan through this folder and use it as a means to jump-start my creativity or to shake me out of my ruts. Here is an eclectic sample of ideas which I publish here for no other reason than it helps me justify having kept these scraps of paper so long.

Here goes ...

•

I have two cats, both of them the same breed. They are Korats from Thailand – a small, all-gray breed. When friends come over they can never tell them apart. I'm consistently amazed at this. In fact, my friends wonder how I tell them apart! But, to me the two cats, although similar, are as different as can be. This comes, I'm sure, as a result of living with them on a daily basis. I see the subtleties that separate them; my friends see the similarities that make them the same.

This must be true for photography, too. Working with a given subject matter over and over develops the eye to the

subtleties that can't be seen when the subject is first approached. This ability to distinguish is not an act of will; it is a *result of experience*, careful looking and a certain degree of concentration and involvement with the subject over time.

One frightening implication is that this might also be true for those who look at our photographs. Because we are photographers, we see differently. The subtleties of tones and details that make a photograph sing for us might be completely invisible to our audience. We might marvel at qualities that are simply invisible to others. I once had a gallery owner tell me that almost no one who visited his gallery could see the difference between a silver print and a platinum print until he showed the tonal and density differences to them.

•

As artists, we are supposed to be willing to sacrifice a great deal for our art. But, the very concept of *sacrifice* is one that can have no end. How much should I be willing to sacrifice for my art? I'm not willing to die for a photograph. I am willing to be uncomfortable making one. Somewhere in there is the line that defines the limit I am willing to endure

for making art. My limits should be chosen with care and purpose. If I am not pragmatic about this it will be far too easy to become guilty or lazy.

For example, in the darkroom I know that it is functionally impossible to ever make a perfect print. Every print I made could be improved. So, at what point do I stop? This is a critical question that every photographer needs to ask of themselves.

I remember once feeling that I wasn't spending enough time in the darkroom and that the answer was to schedule myself into the darkroom on a regular basis. I first thought that I would print every Saturday. But, on further reflection I realized that family obligations and work would make this a practical impossibility. So, I decided to print every *other* Saturday. This, too, when balanced with every other obligation, seemed like a schedule too aggressive to be practical. I finally decided I would print one Saturday of every month. But then it dawned on me that such a lax schedule would mean that I would only print twelve times a year. How could I expect to be a photographer with such a paltry commitment? If I were a musician, such an inconsistent schedule would be ridiculous.

It's funny how the artist's signature influences a print. It shouldn't, but it does. If I look at a photograph and see that it was done by a "Master Photographer"

I'm often predisposed to assume that it's a better photograph than it really is. Conversely, if the signature indicates the artist as no one I've never heard of, I tend to be a bit more critical. In order to really see the work for its merit, it's important not to let this happen.

Intellectually, I know there is absolutely no relationship between how easy/hard it is to make a photograph and how good it is. Nonetheless, it's a natural temptation of every photographer I know to diminish the prints that came easily and overvalue the ones that took Herculean efforts.

Every time I attend a lecture on photography I'm glad I went – I learn a new idea or two regardless of who the speaker is. Every time I attend a lecture on painting, on sculpture, on music, on poetry, on writing, on woodworking, or on dance I am challenged, stimulated, boggled, slapped upside my head and habits, spun around and walk away thinking I need to start my education about art all over again from the beginning. I wish I had paid better attention in art class and read as many books about the other arts as I have about photography. I could have avoided so many pitfalls and mistakes that the other artists learned long ago.

I've noticed that my method of

photographing in the landscape has changed considerably over the last 20 years. I use to scurry around driving through the landscape at 50 mph searching for a good subject from the corners of my eyes. As a technique, it worked. But lately it seems that this method has become less functional. Now I find it better to stop the car, walk around, soak-up a place, study it leisurely, and then make a series of photographs, often within a hundred yards of the car. In fact, this technique seems to work so well it almost makes no difference *where* I stop the car. I wonder if this is an observation about youth, or only about me?

•

When I started photography my photographs were all gray and pasty. For the longest time I thought the magic was in getting a great Dmax black. In the next phase, my prints were way too contrasty and dark – black and white with hardly any grays to speak of. Now that I'm older and a much better printer I find that all the magic in a photograph is in the grays. I've come back to where I started but it is certainly not the same place.

•

When I started photography, I had very little equipment and made horrible photographs. Over the next ten years I bought all kinds of new equipment with very little improvement in my photographs. When I finally learned how

to see, I got rid of most of my equipment and my images improved dramatically.

Said a parallel way, when I started photography I didn't really feel like a photographer because all of my equipment fit into a small camera bag. I started to feel like a serious photographer when I found myself toting into the landscape several cases of equipment, a rolling cart and a big photographer's vest. I started making good photographs when I got rid of most it. This may be as simple as this: after I got rid of so much equipment I found I spent my time managing my vision rather than managing my stuff.

•

It's too bad the apprentice system has died-out in photography. There is no doubt in my mind that the best way to learn photography is to become an assistant to someone who really knows what they are doing. Then just watch them, study them, absorb from them, and keep your big mouth shut for a long, long time.

•

The process of being a photographer is to work diligently to minimize the degradation in each step from conception to the final result. The subject is always better than the vision in my mind's eye; the vision in my mind's eye is always better than the negative; the negative is always better than the print; and the print is almost always a disappointment. Each step along the way introduces a bit more

degradation. The trick is to manage and minimize this slippage from vision to print. The devil is in the details.

•

The process of being an artist is to forget everything that you know and to really see, with eyes and hearts that are simultaneous naïve and sophisticated.

•

As a general rule of thumb, photographers who insist they cannot say anything of importance about their photographs should try more diligently to do so. Those who insist on talking about their photographs should refrain from doing so at all costs.

•

One of the deadliest traps in photography is defined by whatever is the current trend. In certain group-think herds, this mentality might be useful – for example, in team sports or the military. But, when an artist follows the herd they just end up looking foolish with cookie-cutter results. As a case in point I direct your attention to jumping dancers caught in mid-air. Lois Greenfield did it brilliantly, but everyone else's just look, well, wrong.

•

For years I've noticed that I see some of my best photographs when I'm really tired. I believe this has something to do with the natural quieting of my thoughts and the cessation of my natural tendency to intellectualize about my images.

Thinking non-thinking is the key. When I quiet my mind it's as though I hear better. When I insist on thinking, my pictures always look contrived.

•

There is a great benefit to being organized and almost no benefit to being disorganized. I never leave the darkroom messy or the trays unwashed. I label and file my negatives immediately after they are dry. I keep printing notes on every print. I number, categorize, sequence, order, file, clean, pick-up and systemize everything. I may be fastidious about this, but I find it allows me to focus my thoughts on the creative process rather than searching for something I can't find and desperately need. Worse, every time I get sloppy I re-learn this lesson all over again.

•

Why is it that when a group of photographers get together they always talk about cameras and lenses – or now, cameras and software? I can count on one hand the number of times I've had conversations over dinner or drinks with other photographers where the conversation is about *images*. The exception to this is in a workshop setting. Maybe this is why I like going to workshops so much.

In fact, the minute I hear someone ask "What lens did you use?" or ask about the film, I intuitively know I am talking to a copycat or a novice.

•

We have five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The best photographers seem to be the ones who don't ignore the other four. Think of Brett Weston, Minor White, and Eugene Smith, just to name a few. Their reputation as sensualists is almost as great as their reputation as photographers. I can't help but wonder if there is some connection at some deep level.

•

If the history of photography teaches us anything, it is that the tools we use to make photographs are constantly changing and becoming obsolete. (Who now uses wet plates?) So, why all the fuss about new equipment? And, why all the fuss about digital?

As Sister Wendy says, the progress of art – unlike technology – is not built up like an ever higher-reaching ladder. A calculator is better than an abacus, which is better than counting on your fingers – there is a linear progression of technology that improves with each new advance. This is not true in art. Albumen prints are not better than silver prints which are not better than inkjet prints, nor the other way around. They are all just different. A given image might look better as a silver print or as a platinum print, but platinum *as a medium* is not inherently better than silver *as a medium* nor are these better as a medium than the newer technologies.

In all cases it is the sensitivity of the artist that is of paramount importance.

•

If I had to restrict myself to just one activity that would improve my photography the most, what would that be? There is no doubt in my mind that I would *finish* more work.

•

I agree with Oliver Gagliani that photography took a giant step backwards when money got involved. Not that there is anything wrong with money, but the twin seducers of money and fame seem to be seen as a *right* by some photographers, not a *reward* for a lifetime of achievement. That one chooses to make art does not mean that one has accomplished anything. I might choose to make dinner, but this does not make me a chef. I might choose to play an instrument, but you should be glad that this is an intellectual example only. No one has a right to have their work exhibited, published, purchased or admired. These results are all earned, not guaranteed.

•

I've concluded that I cannot make good photographs with my friends in tow. When I go out photographing with my friends, I am too interested and diverted by conversation and camaraderie to make images that matter. I wish this weren't so, but in looking back on my 30 years in photography I find it is true. My best images seem to be those that I made after

being out photographing all alone for more than a few days. It takes a while to drop-off daily life and get into a creative and receptive frame of mind. Professionals cannot afford this luxury – perhaps there is something I can learn from them.

Similarly, I cannot photograph well when there is music playing. Nor when I am eating. Maybe I am just a one-sense-at-a-time kind of guy.

•

Photography can be such a fun hobby. But, I find artmaking is a completely different thing than a hobby. A hobby is a diversion, a vacation, a relaxation, a pastime – i.e., a way to pass the time. Artmaking is a battle, a confrontation, a pursuit, a matter of the soul and survival, a passion, a pile of frustration and a grain of reward, an irresistible impulse, an addiction, a form of self-imposed insanity in a world that does not require me to make art at all. My art is, therefore, a great joy simply because it is of no use whatsoever to anyone at any time. In fact, if it had a great purpose I would find it work.

A hobby is a collective activity. Artmaking is solitary. A hobby is about stuff. Artmaking is about the soul. A hobby gives us a break from everyday life. Artmaking is the core of everyday life. Grocery shopping is real and the hobby is time-off. Artmaking is real and groceries are time-off.

Photography is and can be both. I find I slip back and forth and my relationship with my camera changes from season to season, from year to year. Sometimes it is a hobby. Sometimes it is my mentor. Sometimes it is my slave driver. I used to feel guilty being a hobbyist and tortured being an artmaker. Now I see it as a spectrum – one I can move around in as I choose. Photography is just a tool – and hammers can hang pictures or build houses. It is not the tool that defines the challenge, it is the user and the decisions he or she makes that count.

•

Glass is the most marvelous and amazing thing! It can be clear or smoky, distorted or transparent, bend light as a lens or reflect light as a mirror. It can be cleaned to a spotless, invisible nothing. It can be ground to a diffusing glow. It can be colored and thereby color the entire world. It can be shaped, bent, folded, stretched, hollow or solid, thin or thick. It is the first and most important part of the photographer's tool that actually touches the light. If glass can be all these things, how much more so *the photographer's mind*.



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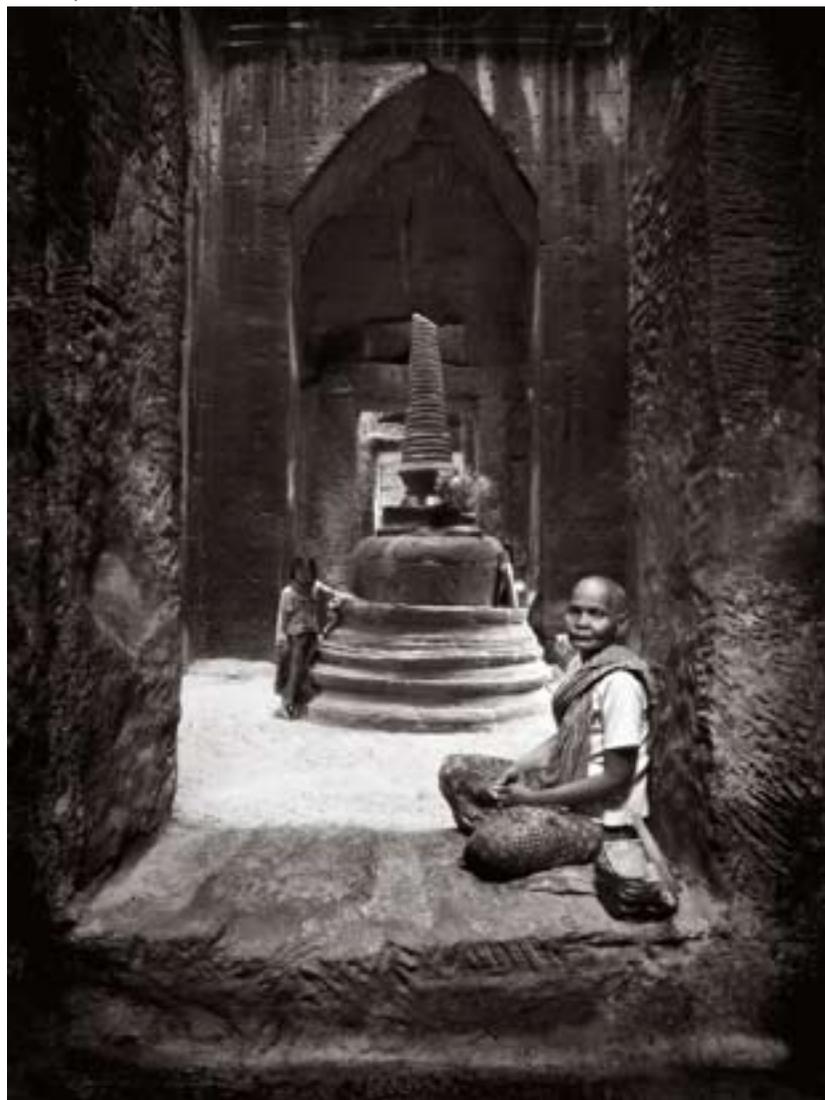
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Monk Boys, Looking East, Angkor Wat

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Question: What can you do with a digital negative?

Answer: How far does your imagination reach?

From: *Brooks Jensen*

To: *LensWork* Readers and Photographers Everywhere

Like the daguerrotype, the albumen print, the dry plate, and the handheld camera, each new revolution in technology opens new possibilities and new kinds of images never before imagined.

A lot of photographers are starting to experiment with Photoshop, digital negatives and the creative possibilities of these new tools. It's a mind-warp to see what can be done! And no one can predict where these new tools will take us, but it promises to be an exciting ride!

Like many of you, I am starting to see what I can do – just a glimpse, not a full-frame view yet. Nonetheless, I have faith that our collective creativity will find fascinating new images, new ways of seeing the world, new presentations that will redefine what photography can become, even if we stumble along for a while in trivial dead ends. What can we do with a digital negative? The only way to find out is to start playing and see what happens!

With this in mind, we are offering three new gelatin silver sample prints from my Japan work that illustrate some of the new directions I'm exploring with digital negative layouts and traditional silver printing.

I have no idea where all of this will lead us. I have no special knowledge or insight, no special crystal ball. My efforts are as experimental as the next photographer's. But, because of my role as the Editor of *LensWork*, I am in the position of sharing my experiments in the hopes that some of you will see much farther than I can.



Here are some of the ideas I'm playing with in this new work:

- I love silver prints so I'm creating digital negatives that can be printed in my **traditional wet darkroom** using (my favorite!) Ilford Multigrade Fiberbase paper in traditional chemistry.
- I'm creating work **inspired from the tradition of Japanese woodblock printing** known as *ukiyo-e*. I'm following their conventions of layout and design by creating layouts on the computer using scans of my silver prints.
- **Traditional zone and tone images** with a non-traditional, hand-created border and **graphic design elements**
- A digitally created **paper texture** using traditional Japanese themes textures
- A title "**cartouche**" – a small graphic element with three dimensional tonality and title text (pronounced *car-toosh'*)
- A second cartouche with the image title
- **An artist's mark** – known in Japan as a *honko* – in the image. This traditional mark functions in oriental art as the artist's signature.
- A **text component**, usually a poem from ancient Japan or China
- A visual "tissue" underlay to the poem

This kind of work may not appeal to everyone, but if you'd like to see a sample that illustrates a few of the possibilities of merged technologies and digital negatives, this is an opportunity to do so. And, in the tradition of our sample print program, **all images are under \$20!**

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ASSEMBLED WORKS



by

Dave Jordano.

Dave Jordano



Detail, Cermack Avenue Bridge, Chicago, Illinois, 2001

PARSING THE GOOD

What makes good work good?

by

Sean Kernan

When we look at the creative work in our media-soaked world we find, salted here and there, some fairly good work, and also a little *really* good work. But if we look around out beyond the reaches of the commercial to the realm of art, we can find work that is just another kind of good altogether. It stays with us, opens us to new things, enlarges our sense of the world. Call it capital G Good.

That it even exists fascinates me perhaps because the mystery of making it is so deep and because it suggests the possibility of transcending my limitations. I've spent a lot of time thinking about it, trying to puzzle how really good art arises.

Now, when I talk about a kind of platonic Good I sound to myself like a pie-eyed innocent. In this difficult age of ours (arguably no more so than Plato's) the notion that there is Good can seem incredibly naïve. But I'm talking about art, and art doesn't stand apart. Instead, it lets us see into it in a way that nothing else does. It can be difficult, thorny, annoying, beautiful, but its effect is that after we see it we're not quite the same person we were before. Literally.

Of course, thinking about art at all is like thinking about smoke. When you try to break it down, its components blur and drift.

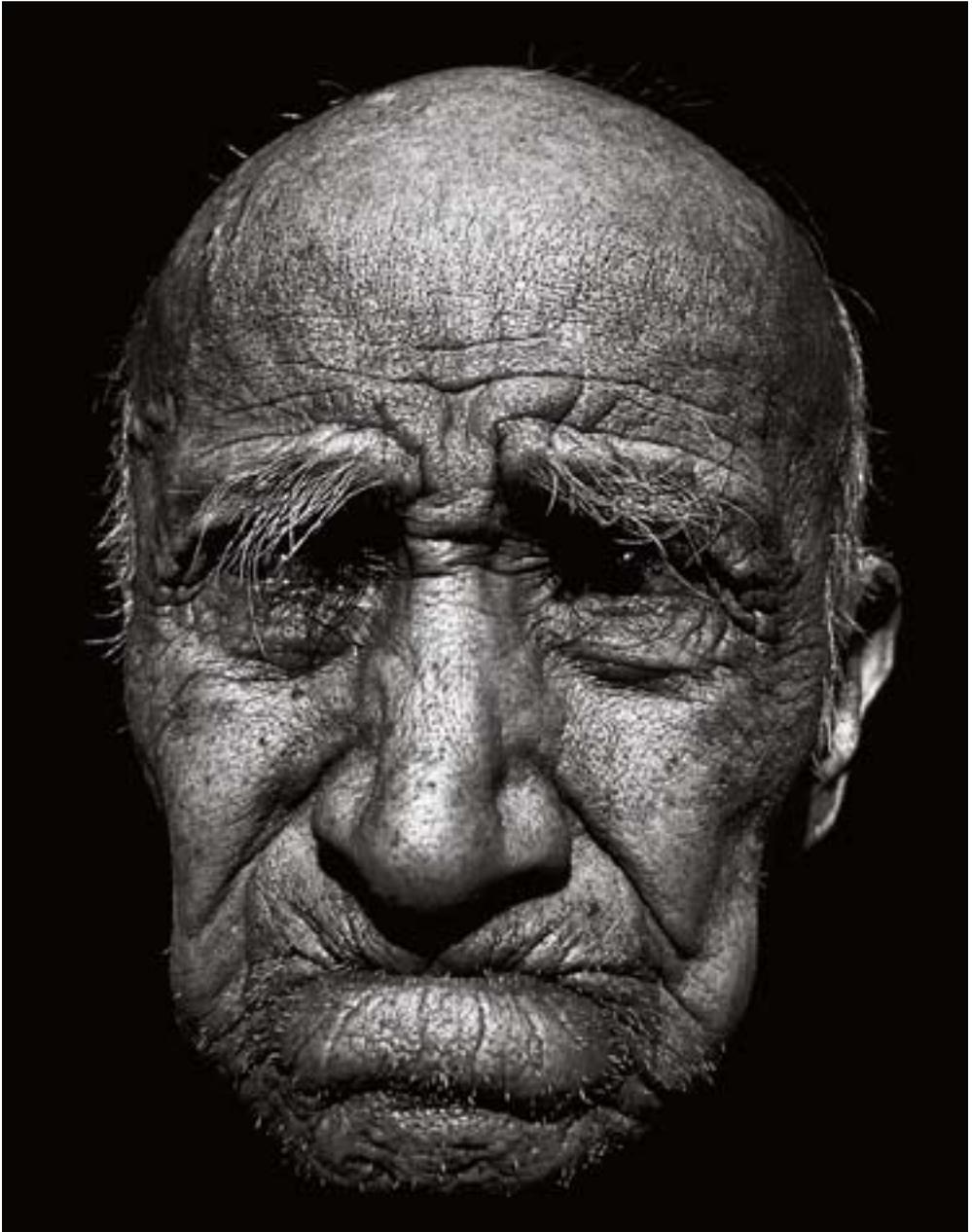
BEYOND THEIR YEARS



by

Mark Story

Mark Story



*88-year-old Navajo Native American male
Home for the aged, Canyon DeChelley, Arizona*

FAY GODWIN: LANDMARKS

by

Peter Hamilton

The road leading to Fay Godwin's remote seaside home on England's south coast meanders across a marshy hinterland. Every so often the narrow throughway offers glimpses over a landscape which forms a constant reference point in her photographs. Flat and bleak, undistinguished by the rolling vales and woodland which always seem so quintessentially English, it is home to some scrawny sheep and assorted cattle, and little else save the odd shack. To those unfamiliar with its melancholy wastes, it would seem to offer almost nothing of interest to a landscape photographer, particularly one working in a genre long-dominated by the monumental topographies and sweeping vistas of an Ansel Adams. Yet Godwin's intriguing photographs of this area are a key element in her work; her prints of it as stunning as any she has made elsewhere in the British Isles.

Though otherwise poles apart, the work of Godwin has evoked a similar public resonance in the UK to that of Adams in the US. The key to this is her interest in combining her image-making skills with environmental politics. Like Adams, Godwin has deployed a love of landscape with a consummate ability to encapsulate its character and forms in images that advocate the need to conserve threatened areas and to highlight the impact of environmental change. Her work has largely been diffused through books and print sales, rather than commissions. She has even been the figurehead of a major national conservation body. But to confine her simply to the role of "landscape photographer with attitude" would do scant justice to a career and an oeuvre of great scope – as demonstrated by her major retrospective, *Landmarks*. Held in London's Barbican Art Gallery in 2001, it is still touring as I write,

LANDMARKS



by

Fay Godwin

Fay Godwin

www.faygodwin.com



Callanish after hailstorm, Lewis, 1980

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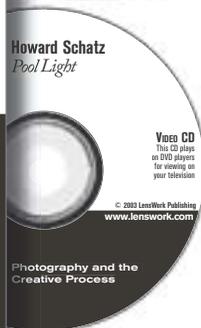
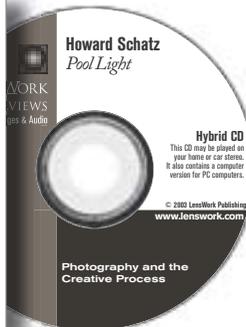
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#LWI-005

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Working from the highly successful Schatz/Ornstein studio in New York City, Howard Schatz is one of the most prolific photographers in the world. He has over a dozen books to his credit in as many years, including Pool Light, the topic of this LensWork Interview. In addition to his prolific book production, Schatz' advertising clients include IBM, Clairol, Citibank, Helene Curtis, Mercedes Benz/Italy, AT&T, J. C. Penney, Hewlett-Packard, and Epson Color Copiers — amongst a host of others. In this program Howard Schatz discusses:

- The challenges of photographing underwater
- The setup for each of the photographs in the program
- The process of collaboration with a model
- Lighting techniques
- Personal motivations and project management
- And many other creative ideas learned from his years as a successful photographer



A few of the images (*originals in color*)
from *Pool Light* by Howard Schatz
discussed in this program

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Morrie Camhi
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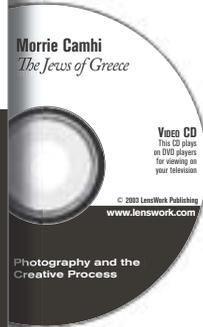
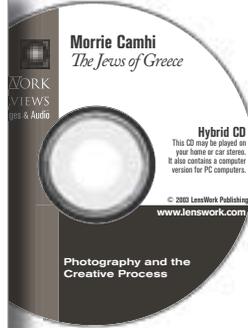
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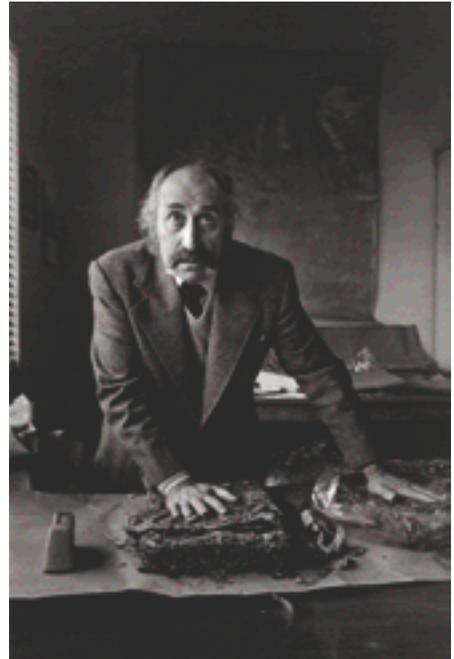
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Morrie Camhi on photographing Saby Tchimino:

When I was talking with Saby Tchimino before I made the photographs, he was animated—just about as animated as a person could be. When I began to make the photographs, he suddenly stood stock-still, petrified before the camera that was raised to my eye. He had given me a lesson in tobacco, instructing me which of the two tobaccos was really good, and which was inferior. I deliberately confused his instructions, saying how wonderful it was to know that the tobacco on the left was the great tobacco. He said, "No, no! That's the poor tobacco." And I said, "No, it is the great tobacco!" And, the fight was on. Of course, now I had the animated Saby back again and that is the photograph you see.

*Aaron "Saby" Tchimino, tobacco specialist,
Kavalla, Greece by Morrie Camhi*



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Don Kirby
Wheat Country

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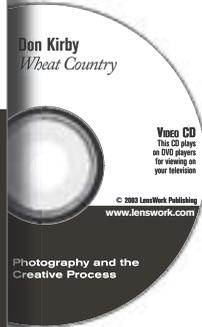
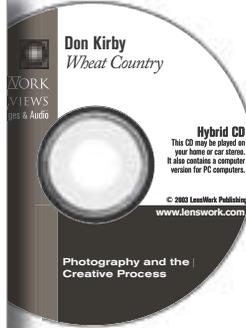
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**Don Kirby on photographing
in the wheat country:**

I think it is beautiful country out there. It's not, as you say, easy to photograph. The photographs require extensive manipulation of the negatives and the prints to pull them off. Sometimes I think I'll just photograph this a little more easily and not undertake the negative manipulation but somehow those never work. (Chuckles) Then I remember that effort is not the issue. Nobody cares how hard it is to make a photograph. It's the image that counts.



Wheatfield, Preston Ranch Road, WA 2002 by Don Kirby

For details on these programs and sample clips, visit our website www.lenswork.com

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