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

"I truly love your magazine, and **find it an inspiration to my own work** in photography, although I am just a wanna be "artist" turned amateur. Your magazine is a great comfort to me while I sit on board ships in the Arabian Gulf stinking of sweat and dreaming of cooler climes." -- *Timothy Gordish*

"I also wanted to compliment you and a wonderful publication. It is **clearly better than any other similar publication** - especially *Aperture* (the "new" version)." -- *Jack B. Combs*

"**I LOVE your publication** - a friend of mine just gave me the most recent issue." -- *Lorraine Shaw*

"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*

"The concept of what you are doing is fantastic; and, of course, it is more than a concept." -- *Bill* "P.S. **Appreciate most of all the "brains" so evident in the operation.**"

"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*

New LensWork Special Editions Images from Andrew Beckham and Fay Godwin!



LENSWORK

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

No. 54 Aug - Sep 2004



Article

Bruce Barlow

Interview

James Whitlow Delano

Portfolios

James Whitlow Delano

Abba Richman

Steven Scardina

EndNotes

by Bill Jay

LENSWORK

54
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Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

Editors
Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

Article by
Bruce Barlow

Interview with
James Whitlow Delano

Portfolios by
James Whitlow Delano
Abba Richman
Steven Scardina

EndNotes by **Bill Jay**

— ■ TABLE OF CONTENTS ■ —

7

Editor's Comments

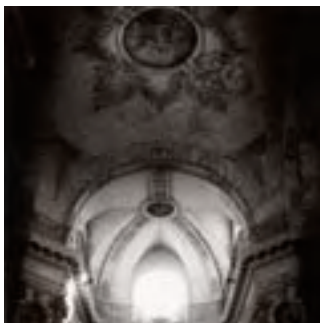
Why I Am Encouraged
By *The Piffle on Parade*

There may seem to be plenty of reasons to be pessimistic about photography's future, but our editor remains convinced that this is a great time to be a photographer and there is, in fact, great art in the making.

13

Portfolio : Steven Scardina

The Spirit of Holy Cross



33

Bruce Barlow

Fred Picker's Legacy

Picker was known through his newsletter, books and videos for his almost-militant message of craft. Years later, Barlow's first-hand account reminds us to take inventory of our own habits.

41

Portfolio : Abba Richman

The Alphabet: Observations From A to Z



51

Interview with James Whitlow Delano

Since our feature of his Japan work in *LensWork* #26, Delano's volume of cultural photographs, accompanied by amazing personal experience, lead us to find out more about this prolific photographer and his work.

61

Portfolio : James Whitlow Delano

China: Between Past and Future



82

End Notes by Bill Jay

Current LensWork Offerings
Start on Page 84!

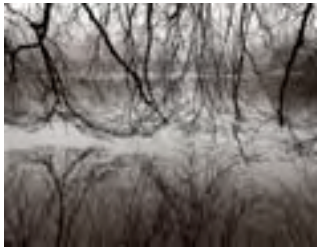
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New
LensWork Special Editions
Gelatin silver images

*From Fay Godwin
and Andrew Beckham*



. . . And More! Starts Page 84

EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Why I am Encouraged by the Piffle on Parade

Chapter 1 – Pessimism

There are those who insist that the heyday of photography is past. They would point to the fact that galleries are struggling to sell photographs; workshops struggle to fill class rosters; MFA programs are facing reduced funding; and the general public's diminished respect of photography as an art form. There is some evidence to support their claims, but their reasons tend to blame everything except the photographs. I believe photography's struggle is simpler than this. When you strip away all the excuses and incrimination, the reason is simple: the public considers most current art photography to be nothing more than mere piffle on parade. Ouch.

It's amazing how many times in my thirty years in photography I've heard a photographer complain about the lack of print sales, the mistreatment they've received at the hands of gallery owners and the unfairness of the art world in general. Then I look at their work and see precisely why they are so frustrated. It's tough to sell work that the public thinks is uninteresting, uninspired or just plain bad; it's tough to publish when the books don't sell; it's tough to exhibit work when no one wants to see it. It is far too easy to

blame the public, blame free market economics, blame "the system" or blame some other convenient entity when the artwork just isn't very good. Nobody overestimates themselves quite like an artist does. Sorry, but this is true for all of us.

Plainly said, anyone can make art – and many of us do. Making art does not however, guarantee that anyone else will care about it, care about us, want to see it, want to own it, or want to pay for it. To do so would imply that they feel your artwork is *valuable* in their lives. They might not. The value *you* ascribe to your artwork does not influence *their* sense of value one whit. Nobody overestimates the value of art like the artist who created it.

Chapter 2 – Piling On:

Evidence in Support of the Pessimism

Here is a case in point. For a number of years I've been an observer for an annual fund-raising photography auction. Photographs are solicited and donated from photographers all over the country – a few well-known photographers, a few regionally known photographers, and quite a number of students and MFA graduates. The auction is usually attended by well over 100 photography enthusiasts and

collectors. By watching this event for over a dozen years, I've learned a lot about what sells and what doesn't sell. And, I've collected some hard data that leads to some interesting conjectures. My observations may not be a definitive analysis, but they do indicate a few interesting tidbits.

Statistically speaking, the average print sells for about forty dollars. Matted! This figure has remained fairly constant for ten years; it hasn't even kept pace with inflation. Remember, this is the *statistical average*, so keep in mind that there are about as many prints that sell for \$20 as sell for \$60. When the free market reigns and the buyers are unencumbered by the dictates of the gallery system, it's illuminating to where the free market price migrates.

I should add that photographers who hold an MFA (particularly an MFA *in photography*), almost without exception, sell for less than the statistical average. On the other hand, people who are painters who pick up a camera and make photographic art always – *always* – sell for prices far higher than average. It seems that being an artist with a camera is more valuable than being a camera-person attempting to make art. There is a lesson here, one that us camera-people should take to heart.

The best work from well-established artists sells for four to six hundred dollars. Good, you say, at least respectable. But

you might think differently when I add that these prices are usually about half the established gallery price for the artist. Hmmmm ... when the free market reigns the customer's perception of a fair price can be surprising – and uncomfortable!

Of course, the counter argument says that public appreciation always lags behind innovative vision. Given the opportunity to defend their bad artwork with this cliché, many artists will simply claim that their artwork is too sophisticated for the public to comprehend and appreciate. Of course, when saying this they refer to the same unsophisticated public who, for generations, has appreciated Beethoven, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, George Gershwin, Fred Astaire, Monét, Picasso, Billie Holliday, Miles Davis, Auguste Rodin, and Gary Larson. (I'll wager you'd have never thought you'd read a passage extolling Monét and Gary Larson in the same sentence! Perhaps this is a *personal* sentiment.) This, of course, is the same unsophisticated public who has extolled the classic photographic masters like Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Paul Strand, and Eugene Atgét as well as the more modern luminaries like Robert Frank, W. Eugene Smith, or Minor White. Need I continue with contemporary folks like Michael Kenna, Robert Glenn Ketchum, Robert Adams, or John Sexton? The unsophisticated public, in my observation, is not nearly as

uncouth as discouraged artists would like to assume.

I'm not sure why it is so difficult for artists to accept, but let's face it, crap is crap. It is not sometimes crap and sometimes *not* crap. It is not *neither crap nor not crap*. Crap is not *both crap and not crap*. Such convoluted Zen logic may be appropriate in studying koans but when it comes to artwork such thinking is just plain intellectual crap.

Chapter 3 – The Beauty Myth

And while I'm at it, let me address the other silly myth that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This may be true when we are talking about, as the original phrase was, the beauty of a woman. Although this cliché may be true about women, when applied to art it is not. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but *quality* is universally recognized. Well, it *used* to be anyway.

I think some of the misconceptions about making photographic artwork comes from the fact that photography is a universally accessible artmaking technology. It is too easily assumed therefore, that the creation of photographic art is a skill that is universally distributed; that everyone can do it well. This assumption entirely misses the point. The creation of photographic artwork has no more to do with photographic technology than a better brush

determines the quality of a painting or that a superior instrument guarantees a quality musical performance.

America is the land of opportunity – home of the free and the brave. We are winners here. We are all Horatio Alger in an artist's frock. We all have the opportunity to grow up and become President. But, very few of us actually *do*. Similarly, anybody with a camera can make good art but very few actually do. *Potential* and *achievement* are two entirely different things.

Chapter 4 – Now That I've Depressed You: Rescue from the Depths of Despair

Now, having voiced my pessimism, let me explain why all of this encourages me beyond reason. In the vast sea of people who use cameras there are a lot individuals who have the talent, perseverance, vision, and the resources to produce absolutely wonderful photographic artwork. You – yes *you* – may be one of those individuals. I am encouraged by piffle on parade because I know that bad quality work acts as a motivator for those in pursuit of excellence. Scattered throughout the donated auction work I referred to above were some absolutely magical photographs created by artists working in virtual anonymity outside of their immediate family. I know that I may look at dozens of books shelved at the local bookstore before I find one whose images are breathtaking.

When I find it, I know that photography is alive and thriving.

I am encouraged beyond reason by the simple fact that there are still so many people who are making photographic art and that so many of them are doing so with such passion. Contrary to all logic, contrary to all economic barriers, contrary to all the odds for failure and against success, there are still thousands of you out there creating wonderful photographs. I know because I see so many of them. If you could sit in my seat as the editor of *LensWork*, you would certainly agree. Sure, we see a lot of work that is not yet ready for publication, but we also see so many great images that we just don't have room to publish. We see repeated submissions from determined individuals who demonstrate their progress and growth in such impressive ways. Just about the time we are discouraged by the volume of beginning work we see, someone sends in a portfolio of images that simply takes our breath away – someone unknown, unpublished, working in total anonymity. I can tell you with confidence that there are thousands of you toiling in your darkrooms (or on computers) doing work that is just wonderful. Keep plugging away; the universe will not allow your work – if it is truly deserving of an audience – to remain hidden forever.

I am encouraged beyond reason by these

times in which we live. A friend of mine just sent me a little photographic project he'd been working on for the last few days. It was a portfolio of a dozen still life images of leeks from his garden. Wonderful! He photographed them digitally, prepared a small presentation to share via an Acrobat® PDF file, and emailed it to me just hours after he'd completed it. Think back a decade or two – or ten. What would he have had to do to share this little project? Think of the labor involved in producing a dozen prints, preparing them for a presentation, and distributing them to his friends. He might still produce it as fine silver prints today – he is an accomplished darkroom technician – or, he might just email it and post on a website without ever physically printing the images. The point is *he has a choice to share this project in several ways* that are only recently available to us. Furthermore, whatever he learned by doing this small and easily finished electronic project are lessons he can retain and employ in more serious or substantial projects. Even though this was just a quick digital project he was thinking and seeing and working at photography, and that in itself is entirely positive.

I am encouraged beyond reason by the ease with which we can now make stunning photographs. Think how far we have come technologically in the production of a simple image. Remember wet plates?

In “art-time,” they were the required technology not that long ago. More recently, just thirty years ago, it was a daunting task to develop the skill to make a beautiful enlargement – we had to master the Zone System, for example. Now it is so easy that there are far more photographers making beautiful enlargements than there is room for in galleries and exhibition places. And the encouraging part of all this is that advancing technology and craft is allowing more and more photographers to concentrate on the important part of making artwork – the content of their vision, not the mere construction of it.

I am encouraged beyond reason by the world of publishing. When I started in photography there was *Aperture*, the Fred Picker Newsletter, and a slew of magazines filled with advertising and equipment reviews. Sure, there are still a plethora of equipment-oriented magazines, but finding good work to look at in better periodicals is much easier today. More than that, I am encouraged when I compare the quality of today’s publications to any of those from an earlier generation. There also has been a geometric expansion in the world of book publishing in the last 30 years. There was a time not long ago when a dedicated photography book collector could own them all – *everything* that was published. With so many choices now, we must pick and choose between the overwhelming volume of

commercially and self-published photography books. Doing so is a joy because the printing in today’s books is so spectacular and the wide range of subjects and projects mean there is something to appeal to everyone.

So, I am encouraged in spite of the challenges. It is easier than ever to make photographs. It is easier than ever to find an audience for our work. It is easier than ever to make contact with one’s peers and share ideas and images and to learn from each other. We can easily travel farther and faster than the photographers of a few generations ago. We can see and own more photography than ever before because of the revolution in publishing. In short, it is a good time to be a photographer. Ultimately this is why I am so encouraged today – we have so few excuses for not producing great work. Our remaining challenge is facing what has always been the true challenge for artists of all times – what do you want to say? The more we photographers find ourselves engaged in the challenge of making meaningful art, the less we are likely to be surrounded by piffle on parade and the more we are likely to be amazed at the work we see and the work we do.

THE SPIRIT OF HOLY CROSS



by

Steven Scardina

Steven Scardina



*Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croux, Crypt
Le Mans, France
Fr. Basil Moreau's remains were exhumed from the Holy Cross Cemetery
and transferred to this crypt in November 1938*

FRED PICKER'S LEGACY

by

Bruce Barlow

If the world is just, Fred Picker will be remembered as one of the best photography teachers in the history of the medium.

Fred's methods made the craft of photography accessible, while the emphasis remained on the art. "Don't be creative when you should be mechanical," he repeated, "and don't be mechanical when you should be creative." He tried to separate the technical aspects of *craft* – from the aesthetic aspects of *art*. He stressed the importance of finding ways to make the craft easier and more consistent so that technical aspects took less of the photographer's attention. Ideally, establishing consistent routines allowed the photographer to focus more attention on making better pictures. "The hardest part of photography," Fred admonished, "is finding the right place to stand," – meaning that the technical stuff is really quite easy, while finding and framing pictures worth making is a life's work. Fred's emphasis on simplifying equipment, using one film and developer combination, and making each step of processing and printing a habit were liberating because this simplification eliminates distracting technical choices and frees the imagination to more closely explore the world. Some examples:

I got my view camera Christmas of 1984 after I attended Fred's Zone VI Workshop. I was intimidated by the camera's newness, bigness, and seeming fragility. How would I ever learn to use it? The tripod alone was intimidating – even though I'd worked in

[Fred Picker b. 1927 d. 2002]

THE ALPHABET

Observations from A to Z



by

Abba Richman
מביתו / אבא

Abba Richman

A



B



C



INTERVIEW WITH JAMES WHITLOW DELANO

[**Editor's note:** *The following interview was recorded in June of 2004 shortly after Delano had returned to his home in Japan from photographing in Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula. Delano has established a worldwide reputation for his ability to capture the essence of foreign peoples and cultures and bring them visually and viscerally to the West in his subtle and delicate photographs. Coordinating the nine hour time difference, I talked with James via telephone from his home in Tokyo, Japan.*]

Brooks Jensen: So, let me start by asking the most obvious question of all ... How does an American land in Japan for ten years and decide to photograph a project that takes him literally all over Asia?

James Whitlow Delano:

It was actually a series of calculated steps and chances. I'd been living in Los Angeles and had been working on small magazine jobs – I was doing portraits and some fashion. I met a guy who had come back from Japan, and we talked about his time there. It sounded very appealing, so I did some research. Although I decided to stay in Los Angeles, I passed on my information to a third person who actually moved to Japan. Some time later, I visited this person in Japan and was so intrigued that I thought it might be a good idea to come here and stay for nine months or so. Eleven years later, I'm still here!

CHINA

Between Past and Future



by

James Whitlow Delano

Uighur men talk over tea near Id Kah Mosque, Kashgar, Chinese Turkestan



Tibetan girls running, Labrang Monastery, Gansu

SPECIAL EDITIONS SILVER SAMPLE PRINTS



LSS-040 Door and Latch, Paisley, OR, 1990

* Discount coupons may not be applied to the purchase of other sample prints. All images © Brooks Jensen



LSS-041 Door, Pioneer Village, Crosby, ND, 2003

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In addition, this group of images is a special example that is worth seeing. LSS-041 was photographed with a digital camera whereas the other two images are from film. If you've been interested to compare film to digital when they are each printed in a traditional wet darkroom, there is no better example than these three sample prints!



LSS-042 Door and Stick Latch, Service Creek, OR 1995

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Copper beech, Stourhead, 1983

by Fay Godwin © 1983

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Steps, Mujib, Jordan, 1999

by Andrew Beckham © 1999 Andrew Beckham

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James Whitlow Delano

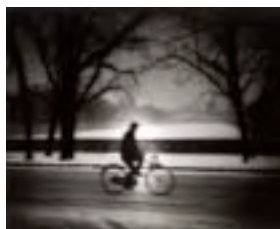
China: Between Past and Future



"Some people don't like being "the foreigner." I find that people around the world are pretty friendly, but you have to be patient. I love to learn about cultures so that I know what I'm seeing and can present what is being shown in a context that has relevance to both the culture and the viewer. Then, when I arrive and start photographing, I set all that aside and look for the transient moments to make images of. It's important to me that there is a reason why I am there, but I don't want that reason to stifle my ability to create something interesting."

James Whitlow Delano

Delano has established a worldwide reputation for his ability to capture the essence of foreign peoples and cultures and bring them visually and viscerally to the West in his subtle and delicate photographs. His images are unique in that they are neither Asian nor American. They are more a cross between European photography and Asian photography. His images remind us more of Josef Sudek in Prague than Eugene Smith in Japan. [This interview was conducted in June 2004 from his home in Tokyo.]



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