The online magazine for landscape photographers

on landscape

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Ideas Behind Reality in Photography

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States of Grace

INTRODUCTION, ISSUE 236

Although lockdown has limited On Landscape's ability to run the Meeting of Minds conference, the extra time that this has created has been put to good use, not only in setting up the Natural Landscape Photography Awards (whose submission deadline arrives at the end of this month) but also in building a small darkroom in the On Landscape office.

The far room in the office has always been meant as a darkroom, but getting it all planned out and installed has taken a long time. However, we're nearly finished now and I just have one final job to do ... the pressure testing! However, after flooding two previous houses with my darkroom antics, this shouldn't be underestimated. I might just drill a big 'calamity drain' in the floor, just in case.

Coincidental to this, Joe Cornish also gave me a couple of his old medium format cameras on long term loan. They're Horseman SW612 bodies, with 45mm and 65mm lenses and 6x12 and 6x9 backs, which are stunning little cameras that I'm really looking forward to taking into the hills.

One of the goals of the darkroom is to make piezography digital negatives from film scans (and digital files) in order to contact print using "alternative" methods (Platinum Palladium, Van Dyke, Cyanotype, etc). I'll no doubt keep you posted here with the first results.

Tim Parkin

on landscape

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David Lintern

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER

David Lintern

David Lintern

David Lintern is a photo journalist, teaching photographer and writer. He works on stories about landscape, the outdoors, environment, conservation, people and place.

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Some of you may remember David's name in the context of the campaign against the planning application for run-of-river hydro developments within the designated wildland areas of Glen Etive in 2020. As well as writing, David photographs, teaches and yes, campaigns, on other matters too. It would be easy to think that passionate advocacy for nature stems from early exposure to it, but in David's case, this was limited. That's clearly no longer so, and as well as changing his outlook on life, it's led to a new career and a new home. He talks about photography as a tool for investigation, rather than being about possession.

Would you like to start by telling readers a little about yourself – where you grew up, your education and early interests, and what that led you to do?

Hi and thanks for asking me to contribute. I currently live in the Cairngorms with my young family and work across Scotland. I'm lucky to have a mix of work including photographic teaching and guiding, a little commercial work for local businesses, as well as writing and photographing stories for the outdoors press, environmental organisations and newspapers.

None of this was a given and the road has been circuitous! I grew up on a new build estate in Wrexham and then the sub/urban fringes of South London. Horizons were limited in more ways than one. Education was a way out and I was the first of my family to go to university. I was lucky that my mum supported my escape plan despite pressures to the contrary.

I'm not formally trained in the arts, but I've always had broad interests, especially where the arts and politics intersect. I studied social sciences at Leeds at the time when the sociology department was co-chaired by a Polish survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and a feminist criminologist and lawyer. Music was my real passion, and over time the mixing desk and sampler became my instruments of choice. After a decade working as a cinema projectionist and audio engineer across arts venues in London in the late 90s and early 2000s, I retrained as a community music practitioner and eventually started my own small charity working in a rehabilitative arts setting with unaccompanied asylum seekers. It was easily the most useful I'd been as a musician. It also gave me new skills in fundraising and third sector organization, which enabled my move to Edinburgh a decade ago. We moved to the Highlands about 4 years ago.

Who or what first introduced you to nature, and what difference does being outdoors make to you?

Exposure to the 'outdoors' was limited at a young age but there was some. I was a cub and a scout, which I was ambivalent about except for the camping, which I loved. As a family, we weren't outdoors types, but we did go on holiday across Britain, mostly to National Parks. After the arguments and curly car sandwiches, my stepdad would fall asleep and my mum would sunbathe while myself and my sister went off and explored, so that was key to an early appreciation of landscape… specifically that feeling of escape and discovery, moving within and around a place as a way of understanding it. Finding your own way through natural architecture is fundamentally empowering. The sense of peace and sounds of wildlife were also very different to home. I also remember keenly the first drive over Rannoch Moor towards Glen Coe – I'd never experienced a horizon so expansive. It left an impression.

Later in life, when working long hours in London, getting out to the hills of Wales and the Lakes became important to my mental health, and moving to the Cairngorms from the Central Belt of Scotland demonstrates that the high lands are still where I feel most myself. Being in the presence of this many trees still feels novel and life-enhancing. I'm re-reading the Robert Adams book 'Beauty in Photography' at the moment, in which he says "…the main business of (landscape art) is a rediscovery and re-evaluation of where we find ourselves". I note in particular the double meaning in the last four words of that sentence. Making photos is a means of staying curious about the world, part of an ongoing process of noticing. Growing one's awareness and gratitude is a piece of work that's never complete, thankfully!

When did photography come into play, and what purpose did it serve at the time?

My stepdad was a keen amateur, and I would borrow his old Zenit and Praktica bodies. The lenses were invariably cheap, plastic primes – 35mm, 50mm and a 65mm I think. It was something we'd do together sometimes on those holidays, but rarely at home. I'm not at all mathematical and he'd get very frustrated with my lack of an understanding of depth of field, delivered verbatim as a table written on a postcard! Looking back, it's all grist – I now teach this stuff myself but in terms of relationships not formulas or equations.

I've never felt particularly confident with my photography at the time or since, although I'm learning to give myself a break as I get older. I had some talented friends for whom it was very much their thing. Music was my own outlet until I left London when I left that behind. That was a huge surprise, but words and pictures had been taking over for a number of years. In one way, the medium matters less – as long as there's some vehicle for learning and expression.

I'm less interested in the photographic artefact itself. Pretty is often vacant, a bit of a vanity, and can be more about the technique or the technology than the human, the seeing part. For me, photography is a tool of investigation, not acquisition. I'm interested most in stories, relationships and meanings, not quite as much in pure form. That might confuse because I make lots of very representational pictures, but at their best they are there to serve a particular purpose – to do a job in context. Then again, sometimes you just have to witness – anything else is gilding the lily - there's a line from Thelonious Monk I heard quoted on the Cerys Matthews' radio show recently: *"Stop playing all those weird notes. Play the melody."* Knowing what the melody is for us at any given moment is the hardest part of this journey we're all on.

So… there are plenty of fantastic photographers with better technique than I, making incredibly lovely photos. I appreciate that, and 'good light' and all those conventions, but it's not really what I'm up to myself.

If I'm doing anything, most of the time it's probably closest to photojournalism. The teaching work is just as important and is something I feel I can contribute that's useful. I think it's the best way to support people in developing a more creative life, if that's what they want. Lovely things hanging on a wall won't make you happy for very long. Staying curious about the world and lifelong learning through careful observation can.

Who (photographers, artists or individuals) or what has most inspired you, or driven you forward in your own development as a photographer?

As with music, I'm a big fan of lots of different things. Fay Godwin was a key early influence in making documentary work about the environment, and with a campaigning slant. Her work takes care and is modest. At the other end of the scale, there are Andreas Gurski's and Edward Burtynsky's images of human impacted landscapes, some of which I was able to see first-hand working in galleries as a tech. The grotesque scale, even machismo, is probably the point. All carry a health warning about what we are doing to the planet.

I'm fascinated by historical and archive work and have recently inherited my own family's 100 year old archive, which is intimidating. The 'camera returns' Simon Norfolk did in Afghanistan while embedded with the Army is genuinely illuminating, socially conscious art – truthful and beautiful – and the Albert Kahn archive and museum in Paris is a mind boggling body of work as well as a sublime place to experience it.

Gus Wylie's 'The Hebrides' is a favourite for its humanism, as is almost anything by René Burri, but especially the colour photos. He had a very contemporary globe trotter's eye, but the pictures of people are always deeply empathetic, something I think is vital. Sneering or exploitative visual work is probably the last thing the world needs right now. We should foster compassion - be kindred spirits, especially if we are to 'take' pictures of others in their environments, their places. I enjoy Stephen Shore, Bruce Percy and love Saul Leiter for their diverse uses of colour and tone, and I'm on a big Joel Meyerowitz kick right now – he's a brilliant theorist on using cameras as a tool – and the scenes are so well observed. There's at least as much street as landscape here. Ultimately, it's chaos out there… I only partly believe it's our job to organise it…

That's the photos – but I'm just as likely to bore you with my love of Patti Smith (for Pope, please!) or wax lyrical about the land artist Richard Long, where the photography is only the document of the work and not the work itself, bang on about Boots Riley's satire 'Sorry to Bother You' or enthuse about Alistair McIntosh's book 'Soil and Soul'…

How did you transition to making your outdoor interests your way of earning a living, and how much of a leap of faith was it?

I got into outdoors media through blogging. I enjoyed it and it allowed me to practice, within a largely friendly and supportive community that was generous with its feedback, and so get better at putting together stories. Experimentation, support and feedback are the building blocks of a creative life, regardless of the medium. That infrastructure is really important, and hard to replicate if online only. Face to face learning and sharing is more meaningful and therefore efficient; from formal education to camera clubs, group tuition or personal mentoring. It's about relationships.

That all sounds great, probably, but pursuing creativity isn't a good way to earn a living. Those not born into money are going to struggle, mentally and physically. We used to teach the hustle of freelance economics on the music foundation degree course I helped run, but the reality of the hustle for me was that it wasn't sustainable, at least in London – I didn't have my inputs and outputs aligned, was working 60-70 hour weeks, had no time or emotional energy for myself or my loved ones.

I think we need to be real about the reality of a creative life, which by and large is lived in financial poverty… especially if judged by the absurd standards of western society. 'Creatives' are the original precariat; we taught capitalism how to treat cab drivers and pizza delivery bikers. The reality of freelance creative life is mostly too much work and not enough money.

So far, I've been very lucky to be able to continue to come up for air now and then and ask myself what is important. I've often made compromises, tried to find a balance, which has worked for a time, but any climber will tell you that balance is only a temporary state, it always involves tension. There are thousands who don't get to keep asking, or lose faith along the way, or burn out. Part of due diligence in staying true to creativity is in learning to live with contingency. It's hard work for all, but for some it's much harder than for others. There's always a leap of faith, even now.

Tell us a little about your local area and the places that you are drawn back to?

I now live at the foot of the Monadhliath Mountains, within a short bike ride of Glen Feshie. I'm incredibly lucky to be here. There are grand scenes all around, but actually, it's the small things that make the most difference, every day – the local woods, the sound of the curlew on the marshes down by the Spey, the relative lack of traffic (as compared to south London). I still photograph these quieter, non-descript places, but it's not always necessary to take a camera.

We live in a low key village but despite what visitors might think, there are social, economic and environmental issues here too, perhaps less obvious than in the city but still present. Landscape has layers, wherever you go. In rural places, history is more obvious and the layers more exposed. The wider Cairngorms themselves are an onion, layer upon layer, or a forest labyrinth, a maze for waking dreams. What's really strange is that there are places on the summit plateau where not all the dreams are dreamt by human minds.

How does your personal photography, and project work, differ from the images you make to accompany your written articles?

I'm really just a professional nosy-parker, so both are tools of investigation. The difference with the former is I get to build the brief! That's a bit flippant, because I do that with work for the press too, but with the personal work the subject might be more obscure or hidden to me and need more time and reflection. There's not a market for a piece on landscape photos where the landscape is almost totally obliterated by weather conditions in the same way as a story about a visit to a range of hills I've not been to before…

I do some words and pictures for various access and environmental organisations too and this is generally more focused and less exploratory, with briefs based on what those organisations need, as well as what they believe I can deliver for them.

Would you like to choose 2-3 favourite photographs from your own portfolio and tell us a little about why they are special to you?

This was made at Loch Affric, pretty much the last photo I took as I left after nearly a week with the family. Its part of an ongoing project called 'powerful places', which is only ongoing insofar as I am now distilling the images I continue to make for it. It's an environmental documentary project - you've picked out a few of the others in that set, too. I'm trying to prompt the viewer to ask questions: 'Why is that there? Is this what I think natural is?' and so on… In this case, the photo is about hydro energy and bogwood.

I shot this recently, near home, shortly after my mum died. There are places in the mountains which still operate almost entirely on their own terms, despite a fair few human visitors. This is one of them. We may be living through the Anthropocene, but nature still holds a fair few of the cards. Conditions were growing quite wild, it was difficult to hold the camera still and I was perched on an unstable edge.

This shows what is likely to be a 'desolation wall' on a Corbett in Assynt. These structures were built by ex-crofters pressed into indentured labour by lairds during the Scottish potato famine, which occurred a couple of years after the Irish famine but is less well known. The irony is that the crofters had been cleared from their traditional lands by the lairds and then persuaded to switch from growing oats to potatoes, a crop unsuited to the climate. I like that this sits at the junction of traditional mountain landscape, environmental and social documentary photography. That people are both present and absent is important to the shot. The bare faced barbarity of British imperialism is hidden in plain sight, even here in our own country. It's worth exposing.

Which cameras and lenses do you enjoy using? Does your choice of equipment stem from its capability, or pack weight considerations?

At the moment my main machine is a Sony A7R III. I was a fairly early adopter of the A7s but was shocked at the quality from the stock lenses, and thought I'd made an error I couldn't afford by switching from Canon FF. I love that I can set things up to run a fully manual machine with non-menu access to ISO/AP/SS. Ergonomics are as important as picture quality – it's a craft, and craftspeople need tools they can use without impediment. One of the little things I like about the Sony is I can set up crop sensor on a custom button, which allows me to 'snap' into another focal length on the hoof.

Things have progressed on the lens front, thankfully. I have a Sony 24-70mm, f/2.8 GM which is the main workhorse for most of the commercial work, a Laowa 15mm which comes out very rarely these days but is of good quality, a Sony 100-400mm GM which renders beautifully and my favourite, a manual 40mm Voigtlander f/1.2, which doubles up as a portrait lens fairly well especially as it's not intrusive so people aren't intimidated by it. I see best at 40mm.

I have a few little cameras – an old Olympus TG3 waterproof which is a point and press, a Panasonic LX100 which I reckon is one of the best modern teaching cameras ever made and a new (to me) Sony RX100 VII, which is a bit too tiny and I haven't decided whether I like it yet. I appreciate small machines that don't get in-between you and the subject, but there are physical limits! I'd like an instant, Polaroid, camera and would love a Mamiya for projects, but ultimately all these things are just tools, they aren't the photography – just as a hammer is not a bookshelf.

I don't use a specific rucksack for my camera gear, and weight/bulk on a longer trip is always a consideration. But necessity is the mother of invention. Setting tight parameters for a task can foster new ideas and approaches. On my last (3 week) project I only used the 40mm, no filters, no tripod. It was liberating.

It's just as important to have everything to hand when the moment strikes. A lens in the pack just doesn't get used when you are trying to capture a decisive moment.

Over time the emphasis keeps shifting to online and previously well thought of print magazines disappear. Aside from needing to remain nimble and have an ever more diverse 'offer' to sustain yourself and your family, do the changes affect the way that readers interact with content, and the way that it needs to be presented?

I've half-jokingly called myself a 'minimum wage content provider'… but yes, there are all sorts of tensions there, some of which I've touched on already. Most obvious is the 'pivot' to video tutorials and reviews. However, I don't know if this is really new. Delivery mediums or platforms are always changing. Look at the music industry – we now pay Spotify to supply much of the same music we used to own on vinyl and then CD. Funny how the artists are still not being paid though.

As for me personally, I'm not really interested in making videos about how I make photos. I don't have a #vanlife you'd want to see – it's an old Berlingo with a rusty undercarriage, and my 7 year old iMac would struggle to crunch those zeros and ones too. I try not to get too hung up on what others are doing and stay focused on what I think is important and what I'm (hopefully) good at - working on stories, and teaching when lockdowns permit.

On the plus side, there are excellent examples of people using newer platforms like Instagram to tell compelling stories and be progressive with their work, and the photobook world is being rocked by various small imprints and collectives which I think is hugely exciting. The work still needs to be seen, people are still interested, and photography is a broad church. Just don't try to earn all your money from it, or you'll end up shooting Formula One or ads for Big Pharma. Or videos about ball heads...

There were some disturbing images last year associated with new visitors to the countryside. It's easy to be judgmental, but it could be argued that we need to get our own house in order too, as photo holidays and workshops have proliferated wildly. Looking ahead, how do you feel we might all learn to behave better?

There's a line by the climber Tom Frost I like a lot, *"How you do anything is how you do everything."* All I can say is how I teach. I've only ever done individual and small group tuition, because:
1 Practically speaking, the world of minibus tours depends on award wins and marketing and I'm not well-known enough to make it work well, or that interested
2 I am a pretty experienced teacher and aim to deliver concepts and approaches so that they resonate with the individual student at the time, which I'd find impossible to do on a larger scale; and
3 Of the environmental impact.

This may come across a little strong, but trophy hunt workshops, with tripods lined up in a row in front of a grand scene and everyone shooting the same thing, is not for me. Collecting visual scalps has little or nothing to do with helping students develop their awareness and a personal relationship with where they find themselves. There's often a colonial gaze at work here, too. This is usually unconscious on the part of the leader but nevertheless reinforces existing land-power structures in a way that's hugely unhelpful, both for the student and for the landscapes we all profess to love. At its worst, I believe overly pastoral or idealised image taking is analogous to resource extraction, and the outputs shared en masse, online, can get in the way of other people connecting in their own way later on. In the case of Scotland, it can amount to a form of ideological strip mining, reinforcing cultural trauma and leading to some of those scenes you're referring to. And as seen at the viewpoint for the Bookle (Buachaille) in Glencoe, our presence in enough numbers also leads to devastating physical erosion at particular sites. .

For all these reasons, I try to keep my workshop footprint as light as possible and mix up the locations, which of course may make my teaching 'offer' less attention grabbing than some others, but it's a price I'm willing to pay in order to be right with the world and my own environmental ethic. In the aftermath of Covid, this approach could be justified in hindsight, but I've only ever taught photography in that way. As I've said earlier in another context, empathy in creative practice is a key value. I can't pretend to get it right all the time, but if I can't act in sympathy with the places I visit and the creatures and people those places support, then I really shouldn't be there.

This extends to location tagging images online. There are exceptions, but I think carefully before I name a place, and I never location tag. Early on, I was accused of elitism because I took a qualified stance on this, but awareness now seems to be growing that while we might be in control of the image, we aren't in control of how it is used by others, and by social media algorithms once it's published online.

Are you hopeful that after the various lockdowns, as well as recognising the benefits of being out in nature for both physical and mental wellbeing, we may realise that we don't always need to travel and that the constraint of staying local can in fact be an opportunity?

Yes, this was true of me too. I learnt a lot from exploring more locally, even though I'm spoilt for choice because my new local is full of trees, mountains, lochs and wildlife. I think where this argument gets stickier is when we acknowledge that some people live in situations that are very far away from natural beauty and in situations that may be full of anger and violence and empty of resources and expectations. In my last year of music teaching in Tower Hamlets I did a quick straw poll of my class, asking how many had ever left London. About three quarters had not. And about a quarter hadn't ever been outside of the borough. What of their horizons?

Direct pressures from too many people in sensitive areas, and getting to them in the first place are readily identifiable as impacts, but photographers can be big consumers when it comes to equipment and clothing. You began to write about this previously in the context of outdoor activities **and I wonder if it's something you might revisit?**

I've worked a fair amount in this area since about 2017, albeit outside of the photographic world per se – both as a writer and as an editor of an environmentally focused outdoor magazine. It would be interesting (and frightening!) to see the carbon cost of my camera gear. The social and environmental effects of the cobalt used in lithium ion batteries often mined using child labour in the Congo, is well documented. There are ways of mitigating the impact locally – recycling, buying and selling second hand – but ultimately, we operate at least in part within a high turnover 'industry'. In the global north, we trade in likes, comments, award gongs, pixel counts and tripod weights. But industrial capitalism makes a habit of consumption; often of places and people in the global south'. We're in a dopamine frenzy but the drugs don't work. Most of us already know this in our hearts, but the dopamine has induced a trance it's difficult to break free of.

As a consequence and counterbalance, I try to think harder about the purpose of my photos and my practice. What am I trying to achieve by doing it? Is it paying a bill, and if so is there a trade-off and is that trade-off worth it? Or does the output provide an alternate perspective or empower those people or places represented in the photos? Has my own or my student's outlook and output progressed; if so how and if not why not? Images carry meanings whether we intend them to or not. So, to my mind, I need to be deliberate and as considerate as I can be.

It's also worth saying that this is a fallible and ongoing process, and there are worse hobbies to have than enjoying your surroundings, taking only photos and leaving only footprints. Overall, it's just useful to stay reflective and open. That's the work.

What would you like to see more people do and disseminate through their followings, by way of images or words?

Ultimately, I may have some robust views here and there but it's not for me to tell others how to be. I also know that messaging is inefficient if overly didactic. Culture moves in hard stops occasionally, but in between our major social dramas it's incremental. I do believe that artists are servants, not masters. They are here to serve others, not help themselves… but photographers, like any creative people, should be free to follow their hearts and minds, with the single caveat that we serve our subjects and our audiences in good faith and glad heart and without harming other people, creatures or the places that sustain them.

Do you have any particular projects or ambitions for the future or themes that you would like to explore further? Either from a creative viewpoint or a campaigning one? When we got in touch you were about to set off on a long-distance walk?

I'm just back from walking the Cape Wrath Trail.

It was a hard road in all sorts of ways, and reiterated to me once again ongoing issues of land justice and the deep trauma of the Highland clearances. I made some portraits and interviews along the way which I hope to share at some point, somehow. There's another nascent project in my local area about people and place I'd like to develop as well, given time and energy.

After some limited success in environmental campaigning over the years, partly using photography, I'm looking for other approaches. There were powerful lessons to be learnt from the Glen Etive campaign that (On Landscape founder and editor) Tim Parkin and I were part of. We used pictures from a variety of photographers showing the natural beauty of the glen to show what would be lost if the industrialisation of the river was allowed. Arguably, they only spoke to the already converted. They were used as a counter argument that the place was being 'marketed' by our campaign as somewhere solely for visitors; that we and they didn't understand the needs and wishes of the local community. This is what I mean about meaning in photography – once out in the world, it can be misdirected, reattributed and used to turn people against each other and the environment. So, I think in future project work I'll need to be more purposeful about how I use my camera tools. We are at saturation point. Pretty isn't always enough.

If you had to take a break from all things photographic for a week, what would you end up doing? What other hobbies or interests do you have?

I have kids, so there is little time for other 'hobbies'! I still love cinema of all types, and have shelves full of books I've yet to read, and love to cycle and paddle as well as walk, so a week without the all seeing eye of Sauron shouldn't be too hard. I'd probably still be 'seeing' shots, though – is that allowed?!

And finally, is there someone whose photography you enjoy – perhaps someone that we may not have come across - and whose work you think we should feature in a future issue? They can be amateur or professional.

I find the British landscape photography scene quite English-country-garden parochial and it wouldn't hurt to mix it up a touch. So here's four: Dan Wood makes striking environmental portraiture in and about Welsh communities. Marc Wilson has just completed a 6 year photo project about the Holocaust which took him all over Europe. John Macpherson is probably the best photo storyteller in the Highlands. And Beka Globe makes deeply evocative black and white landscape work on the Isle of Harris. None of these people are tourists, all are invested, and we can all learn from that.

Thank you, David.

As well as David's images, his website showcases his writing. The website's sub-title, words and pictures, highlights the importance and interwoven nature of the two and I recommend taking a look.

Tim has previously interviewed Marc Wilson about The Last Stand, and you can find this article here.

Interview by
Michéla Griffith

My images combine an early love of drawing and painting with a long-standing passion for photographing the landscape. An important part of my portfolio continues to be about the interaction between water and light in, but I'm also experimenting with movement on land and even my own progress on foot through the landscape.
michelagriffith.com

on landscape

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David Lintern

PORTFOLIO

Guy Tal

IDEAS BEHIND REALITY IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Ideas Behind Reality in Photography

PART II

Guy Tal

Professional photographic artist, author and speaker working primarily in the Western US.
Website

Interview by
Tim Parkin
Amateur Photographer who plays with big cameras and film when in between digital photographs.
Flickr, Facebook, Twitter

Continuing our discussion about the vagaries of reality and truth in photography, Guy Tal and I start to talk a little about the way that it's easy to talk about some of these ideas in the abstract but almost impossible to define rules and criteria. Don't expect any easy answers to arise during our chat but it's only through articulating your ways of thinking that you get to understand the issues a little better. If you want to catch up with where we were, you can read part one below.

Ideas Behind Reality in Photography - Part One

Tim Parkin (TP): You know we are organising the Natural Landscape Awards Competition **at the moment and we have gone through the idea, this philosophy of the heap if you will. I did the same for the Wildlife Photographer of the Year and there is no boundary, there is no line you draw, it's contextual. It's to do with the zeitgeist, it's to do with how cameras work, it's to do with what's possibly new or what's going to happen in the future. We don't know at the moment, so it's all subjective.**

For instance, in terms of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year, there were certain things which were on one side of the boundary or the other. A heap isn't a single grain of sand, 500,000 grains of sand is a heap, absolutely.

Guy Tal (GT) Is twenty a heap?

TP: To an ant, yes. To a builder, certainly not.

GT: It's a judgement call.

TP: You can make that judgement call and then when you go to the heap experts, they just have an argument about it.

GT: Don't get me started on experts! That's another thing in art, people claiming to be experts in some general sense when in fact they may come from a fairly narrow philosophical foundation. Many times, if you dig a little deeper you find that those foundations are entirely subjective and arbitrary. Certainly, you might be an expert on subject A that's founded on some philosophy, but if my philosophy is different from yours, then it pulls the rug from under your feet. The very thing your expert judgement is founded on, is not relevant to me.

It's OK to disagree in art. In fact, it's one of the ways art grows: people disagree and argue and find creative ways to depart from the sensibilities of their day, and suddenly you have a new movement. A hundred years later, the new movement and the old movement both seem obvious. For example, nobody today will argue that impressionism is not a valid form of artistic painting. But when impressionism came about most of the art world, including the most powerful art institutions of the time, condemned and ridiculed impressionism. Today we read these old criticisms and laugh at those critics.

TP: Even outside of art that's true in science and engineering. Demonstrably consistent.

GT: Expertise is bound to time and circumstances. As we learn more, often former experts cease to be considered as such, or may even be proven wrong.

If you take an argument to its conclusion and end up with some version of "that's just the way it is," and can't defend your position beyond that point, then you haven't proven anything. You are merely expressing an opinion. To me that's the case with arguments that end with some version of "it's not real photography." To appear objective, people who hold such views must set a hard line where no line really exists. Whatever line you may declare has to be arbitrary. Paradoxically, in doing so you don't create a defensibly objective measure; you just codify a subjective judgment.

TP: In terms of this idea of self-consistency, when we were discussing the competition, we realised that all the people who were organising it have work in their portfolio that they've done that wouldn't be allowed in the competition with the rules we've had. So our judges have a range of different ideas but they'll also be applying the context of the competition and audience.

GT: My question to you is this: when you realise that your own work (or perhaps the work of other photographers you admire) may not qualify for a competition you are judging, what do you do with that knowledge? Do you just concede to judge your own work differently than other people's work? And if you choose to keep this dichotomy, do you let those who enter the contest know you will be judging their entries by criteria you don't adhere to in your own work? I would think that most people who enter a contest expect the judges to share their values.

TP: This becomes an interesting aspect. That's when the conversation about the heap comes in. It's to do with this argument, it's not to do with where a line is drawn, it's to do with at what point can you really say it's definitely a heap or definitely not a heap? Most people would agree that above N grains it's a heap and below N grains it's not. Not everyone will agree but if you can hit a generally acceptable Zeitgeist answer then you'll satisfy the majority. (as an aside, the English language works like this, nobody has definitions for what many words really mean, we have lots of different definitions that are close enough that we can 'get away' with communicating - until you're a lawyer)

GT: This is actually the argument against contests in art: they are judged with an eye to the zeitgeist, to some popular low common denominator. This has the effect of encouraging conformism and discouraging creativity. There is another way to think about judging photographic art, perhaps the story of the Gordian Knot where you take the attitude of "who cares if it's a heap?" If you limit your judgment to just the obvious cases (heap or not a heap), are you not in fact disenfranchising exactly the work that may be most artistically deserving—the most creative, the most challenging, the most original?

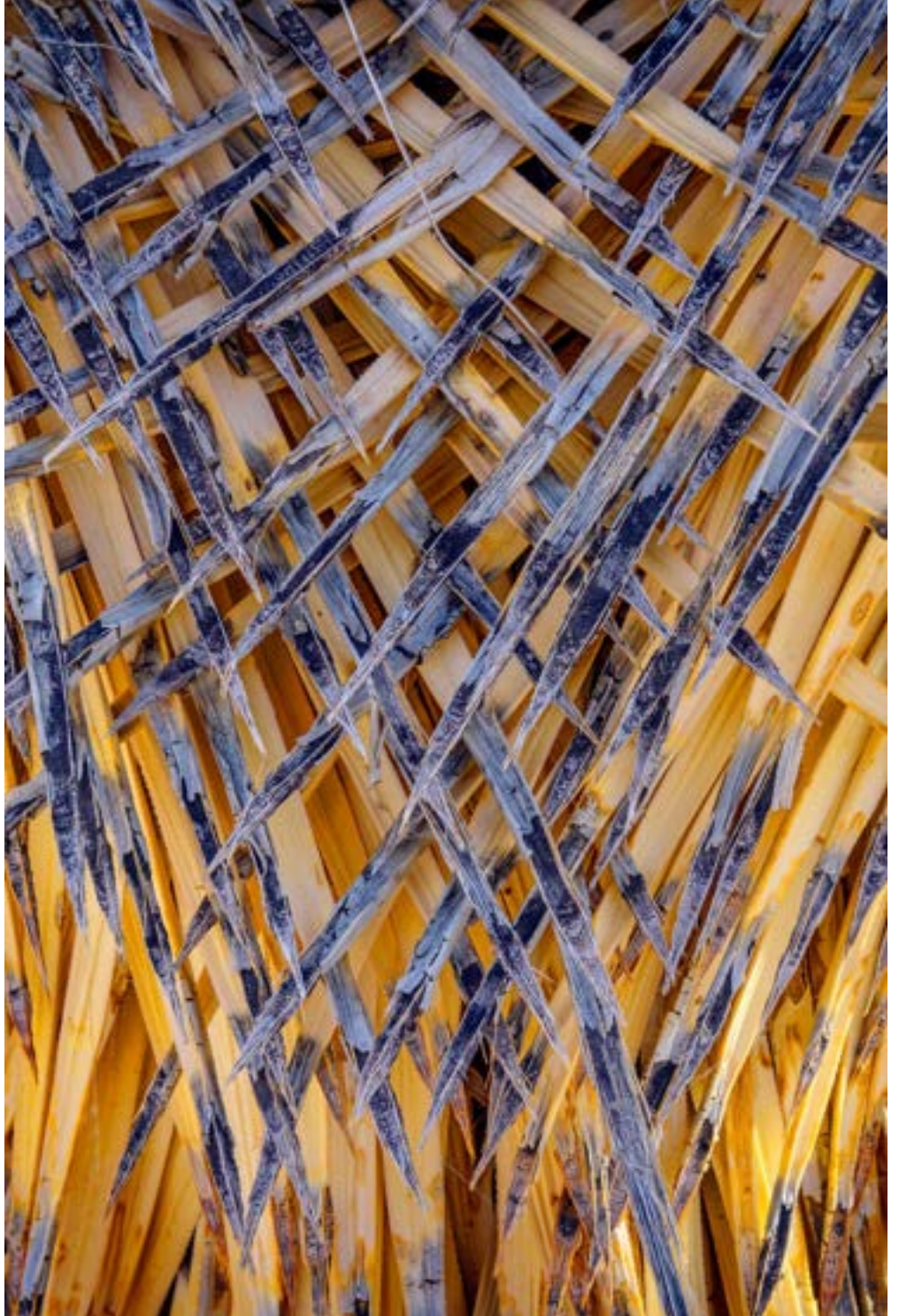
TP: This is to do about etymology. Some people are interested in the distinctions for practical reasons, some for philosophical reasons. For most people, most of the time it doesn't matter.

GT: That's fair, but I think it's also worth challenging these people's beliefs because they might accept some things only because they are common beliefs or common ways to approach photography, not necessarily because there's any real value in these beliefs in a given context. If we don't examine and challenge our beliefs, we (and photography) may never evolve, perhaps even remain mired in long obsolete notions that have ceased to be useful. I think for most people the belief in the realism of photographs may just be a comfortable "anchor", a way of avoiding change (really, of acknowledging change that has already happened). Anchors might keep you safe and grounded when things around you are in turmoil, but anchors will also prevent you from going too far or discovering anything new. The reason art looks different in different periods is exactly because at some point, some artists decided to unmoor themselves and explore uncharted waters, to break away from the Zeitgeist and usher in a new one.

TP: Here's an example of an edge case, we had multiple conversations about the idea of focal length blending as an interesting aspect. We came to the conclusion that it would be a step too far for most people therefore would disagree that's not deceptive. However, I've thought it would be a very useful tool in many ways and, if used well, it shouldn't have to be deceptive. Some 'rules' are just arbitrary.

GT: It's important to highlight that deception involves intent. Tools and techniques don't have intents, people do. Deception is not about whether someone applied some tool or technique, it's about whether someone used a tool or technique specifically intending to deceive others. I don't think that's necessarily the case for most people who use such tools. Also, again, I have to challenge whether falling back to the expectations of most people is a good way to judge any creative endeavour.

There are certain things people today consider "acceptable" in photography, such as fairly liberal adjustments to colour and contrast—things that are decidedly unrealistic but that have become so common that they are now acceptable. How do you think they became common and acceptable? They weren't always so. Can we really say that at some point in recent history someone just slammed the "acceptability door" shut, and no one can ever again add anything new to that list of acceptable things? I argue that there is no "someone" qualified to do so, and even if there was there's no way they would get away with it. Both art and photography are constantly evolving. Technology gets better, the capabilities of cameras keep getting better, people's understanding of the medium keeps getting better, people's skills are getting better. Should we always maintain allegiance to what was acceptable in, say, 1940 or 1980 or 1990? Do we just draw a line and say: that's it, no more acceptable things are allowed, even though technology keeps allowing us to do more and more?



TP: When I was judging the Wildlife photographer of the Year we decided we can't have absolute rules as things will change over time and therefore it's got to be reflected by the people who are making the decisions. The judges are chosen to reflect the Zeitgeist and they should have an influence on the way the rules are implemented.

GT: That's fair, but then you also have to accept that "winning" such a contest really means prevailing by the subjective opinions of a small handful of people whose job is to decide whether your work is benign and generic enough to not offend anyone. Certainly, there are many good justifications to want to impress certain qualified judges, especially if your goals in photography are driven by popularity or business considerations, rather than artistic expression. But if you do aspire to evolve as an artist, I don't think that appeasing those committed to the current zeitgeist is a good thing to aspire to. Not even for photographic artists who wish to remain within the bounds of "straight" photography (which just happens to be part of the current zeitgeist in some venues, but it wasn't always and is not universal).

If you read some of the original thinking about straight photography, it was about loyalty to a "photographic look"—to aesthetics, not to realism. The reason why the pioneers of straight photography believed the aesthetics of photography had to be distinct from those of painting, is because they wanted to remain loyal to the mechanics of photography at the time. They felt that the products of their cameras and chemistry were worthy in themselves and didn't need to be manipulated to look like paintings. That's the same as modern poets saying their poetry doesn't necessarily need to rhyme or be in the form of a sonnet, to be considered worthy poetry. It has nothing to do with the realism of the content of the poems. But we're no longer in that world where photography is just about optics and chemistry. Photographic tools today are much more capable and flexible than that. Photographs today are not physical/chemical impressions of light; they are just bunches of numbers. You can manipulate numbers in endless ways. There is no single decisive "photographic look" mandated by the mechanics of our tools.

TP: I don't know if you looked much at computational photography, that's going to put the cat among the pigeons for want of a better phrase. As it's no longer optical in many ways, there are no lenses being used, the images are being constructed from flying photons.

GT: Some images generated by artificial intelligence may appear realistic despite never involving an impression light. It's funny that we're now seeing algorithms attempting to identify the signatures of artificially generated image elements, to distinguish them from images created by impressions of light. Of course, this is futile. The same technology that created artificial images is trying to see if it can successfully fool itself, which of course will only teach it how to do it better. I don't think that any technology attempting to verify the realism of photographs post-exposure can ever be perfect. I think the future of realistic photographs (e.g., photojournalism) will have to involve cameras digitally signing files at the moment of capture. This will help distinguish images "as captured" from images that have been manipulated. I think this will be a great thing for photography, both journalistic and artistic. Once and for all we'll be able to separate decisively the (minority of?) photographs created explicitly to represent reality from so many other useful and creative things we can do with photographic tools, and nobody will have reason to feel deceived. Viewers will know in advance which photographs are representations of reality and which are not, just like they know what combinations of words describe reality and what combinations were put together creatively to be a poem or a novel.

TP: I've still got to write my article about photography within virtual worlds. I had a Wild West game where you wander around the whole of America, and it's incredibly well rendered. It's a perfect place to investigate photography, they have a fly through mode where you can go through and take pictures, change the time of day, play with shadows, lighting and mist.

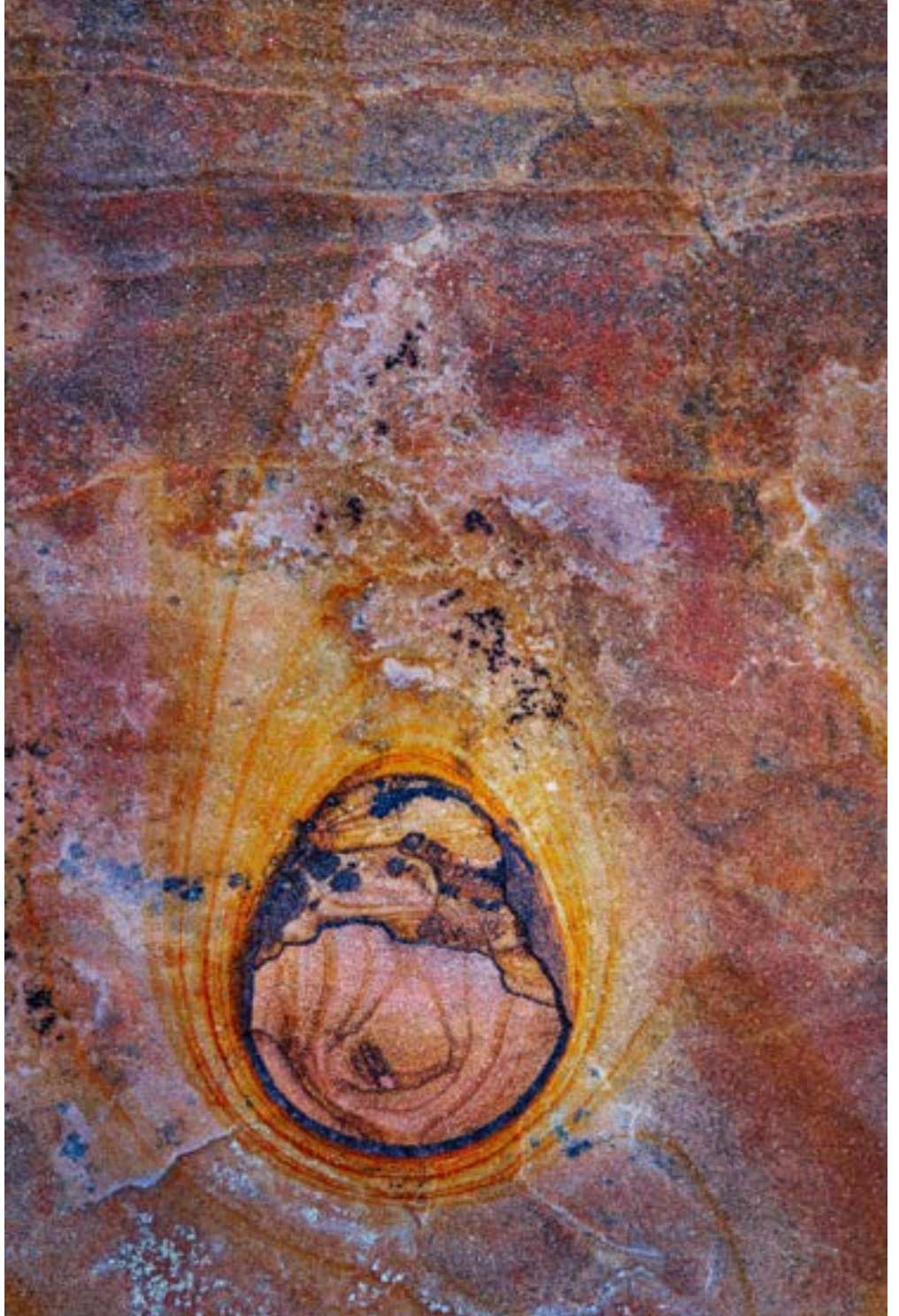
GT: Technology today is such that we can manufacture images computationally that are practically indistinguishable from images created by impressions of reflected light. We shouldn't think of it in terms of "good" or "bad," it's simply a fact we have to accept and adapt our understanding of photography to. In fact, this emphasises even more our original point: you should never assume a photograph to be an impression of something real just by virtue of it being a photograph, or looking like a photograph. This has been true for a long while but I think it's finally starting to sink in. If you look at something that appears to be a photograph, that does not mean that it's an actual impression of light reflected off something real. You have to doubt it, you have to judge it by its origin and context. Also by relevance. In many cases when it comes to photographic art, it is entirely unimportant whether it "really looked like that." Representing appearances is not necessarily the only, or even the most worthy purpose of any photograph. To scrutinise an artistic photograph on the basis of realism may ultimately distract from its intended meaning for no good reason.

TP: I judge International Landscape Photographer of the Year and I go through 40,000 pictures over the space of a week. Anything goes in that competition, and you can tell anything goes in a majority of cases you can identify the pictures that have been manipulated. Very often you can't tell and you know something is not right and you go online and look at the location and you realise it doesn't line up.

GT: So it doesn't line up, and the technology to depart realistically from the way things look will only get better. We have to educate people about that, not try to protect them from it. AI gets better the more data you feed it. AI can factor what most people will find popular, what most people respond to, what most people like, and generate completely manufactured images that by design are guaranteed to be liked, and the algorithms can do so without involving any human consciousness or creativity in the process. Just think of the day when AI can just launch a drone or tap into satellites and produce the most spectacular photographs from anywhere on the globe, picking the exact right moment and angle based on billions of bits of information.

At that point, you'll have the most realistic and beautiful photographs possible without involving a human photographer at any point. In fact, a human photographer likely will have no chance of competing with it. The only way a human can improve on a machine (at least for now) is in creativity: in doing things in unexpected and original ways, and not according to templates or the zeitgeist. Seeing this future coming, are we really doing a good thing by placing so much emphasis on qualities that ultimately a machine will be able to do better than humans? Just let people know your aim is to reward human skill and creativity, not objective realism, and you're done with the prejudice instead of perpetuating it. You're done creating incentives for people to cheat; you're done having to disqualify otherwise wonderful entries because of some technicalities; you're done restricting photographers' expressive range to 19th-century canons of aesthetics—the whole sordid mess.

Aspiring to realism may seem like a lofty goal but really the only way to do it without becoming mired in paradoxes and subjective judgment is to ask, about every photograph, "Is this what I would have seen if I was standing next to you?" My guess is this would disqualify most of the entries, and likely most of the works of the judges themselves.



TP: As you say, you have two choices. You either make all the decisions yourself or you do the investigations yourself or your proxy your decisions to somebody you trust. That's this the idea of the curator, still, you don't trust those because you have to decide whether you trust them with your proxy decision.

GT: You need to know something about the judges and how they make those decisions. When all a judge can say is, "I decided this based on my subjective sensibilities," well, I have my own subjective sensibilities so why do I need yours? What makes you more qualified to pronounce that X is "better" than Y?

Of course, there are situations where a judge's subjective opinion really is better than mine, at least in some sense, because the judge may be more qualified, more experienced, or more knowledgeable than I am. So the real question may not be how to judge a photograph but who is qualified to do so. David Hume wrote about this in "Of the Standard of Taste." He narrowed it down to five qualifications: "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practise, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice." According to Hume's criteria, which I agree with, a good judge of photography is not necessarily someone who is a famous photographer or someone who has made impressive or popular photographs, but someone who has demonstrable expertise in photography spanning far beyond just their own work and genre: someone with proven knowledge of the history and various philosophies of photographic art, familiarity with the works of many other photographers, and a trained eye to consider nuances, not just the immediate aesthetic impact (or realism) of a photograph.

TP: There was an interesting conversation about AI and there have been quite a few algorithms that use fractals and AI to increase the resolution of images and Photoshop's super resolution is one of these that's worked recently. One of those was the Gigapixel fractal, something like that, and it looked at patterns of structure in objects, found things which were similar in its library of pictures that were higher resolution and it introduced a picture of an actor in a window in a skyscraper that wasn't there because it recognised something in the texture of the windows that looked like the actor photo in its library.

GT: Let me interject something here about the use of language. When you call your product "super resolution" or "increasing resolution," it's important to know that these are just marketing terms. In technical terms, there is no way to increase the resolution of a photograph. The resolution of a photograph has to do with how much detail the lens resolved and how much detail the sensor or the sensitised surface recorded. Once the shutter closes there is nothing in the world you can do to change things like resolution or exposure, and yet you have products that claim to do exactly that! What these products do is manufacture details that look like resolution but they don't actually increase resolution. That's physically impossible to do. So, by using these products, ironically, you may get an image that looks more realistic but that in fact is less realistic. The added details did not come from the real subject, they were computed by an algorithm. So now you have to draw another line to decide which algorithms generate pixels you're willing to consider as realistic and which go "too far." Of course, many of these algorithms are proprietary and/or very complex, and you can't make an informed judgment about what they do. This by the way is one of the dangers of AI: you give it the ability to learn and do things, but unlike standard computer algorithms you have no insight into how or why AI decides to do what it does. It teaches itself.

TP: The new super resolution **does the same thing, it's looking at patterns it sees elsewhere, and it's very good with straight lines and repeating patterns. It doesn't tend to introduce new detail, but people are seeing textures being generated which aren't in the original pictures. There has to be an element of the software making up something that looks OK, not what it actually was.**

GT: So here's another paradox for you: if you define a photograph as an impression of light reflected off a physical object, then as soon as you run any photograph through something like super resolution, you can no longer say it's a photograph. We have to adapt our language and attitudes to the reality of photographic technology.

TP: This will be integrated in your phone camera without you even knowing it.

GT: It already is. There was a recent article on PetaPixel where a Samsung executive admitted their processing algorithms rely on crowdsourced data—on what "the average person believes looks best" rather than on any considerations of fidelity to realism, and certainly not to subjective artistic expression.

TP: It's not there yet but I believe it's in some of the firmware that's coming out.

GT: So again, we keep coming up with reasons for why you shouldn't be very dogmatic about things like realism, because technology is going to make a mockery of however you choose to define it. You should not rely on any prior assumption that just because something is a photograph, therefore it's real, or objective, or what you would have seen yourself in the same circumstances. That has already gone out the window a long time ago, and it's only going to fly further out the window the more technology continues to evolve.

TP: But yet there is a desire that people want to be able to say when they look at a photograph, say if it's your photograph, if I was there, I may not have seen what you saw. But if I had a camera in the same position as you had a camera in, I would expect to see what you're showing me with some manipulations around post processing.

GT: It's an understandable desire but it's also unrealistic to expect realism to be the default case. If realism is what you desire, you have to go out of your way to verify it, not just assume it. But here again I think people who hold such desires may benefit from questioning these desires. Of what importance is it to know that if you put your camera on my tripod and copied my processing decisions you would end up with the same image? Odds are you can't reproduce the same conditions anyway, and will never experience the same situation (if you could, then is the photograph really that artistic?). Also, it's more than likely that if my tripod wasn't there, you may not have even noticed the elements I used in my composition. Why not instead appreciate a photograph for what it is: an original, beautiful, expressive creation? Certainly, there is value in some circumstances, to knowing what things "really" look/looked like the photograph but these cases are generally more useful in journalism, not in art, and realism is just a subset of what photography is capable of. Photography can also be a medium for creative art, which is explicitly meant to show viewers things in unique ways, not as a random person would have seen them. This has nothing to do with any technology. You can stick to straight photography and still make creative photographs that depart from what a random person would see.

Let's say that I sit back while you go out and make a photograph in a certain location, and then you sit back and I go and make a photograph in the same location. If neither of us saw what the other was pointing at, I think our challenge as artists is to come back with subjective, creative, and original photographs, not to document the most obvious things and return with the same images. Photographing the obvious is not art. It involves no creativity and no imagination. In this sense, if you want to have a contest of best renditions of things as a random person would see them, you concede in advance that your contest is not about rewarding artistic merits—things like creativity, imagination, expressive skills, etc.—things requiring by their definition a subjective interpretation.

TP: Let's look at David Ward as a photographer that I really admire in the way he can see in a location. I know I've been with him on locations, and he'll point his camera at something and even though I can see what he's pointing the camera at, I don't know what he's doing. When he shows the final picture or you go behind the ground glass you say 'that's incredible, there's no way I would have seen that'. Yet, the reason why it's incredible is it's still exactly what it was. If it was made up in Photoshop, it would still be a beautiful image but it would lose the artistic connection and recognition that I personally see as an amazing part of David's work.

GT: Absolutely, but to me that's the distinction of art from representation, and that's why I said in other places that visual composition is the number one tool that a photographic artist has to express themselves creatively. You can compose from real elements, real impressions of light, real colours, real forms, real lines, and still be creative regardless of post-exposure processing. If somebody else had walked up on that same scene who has not seen your photograph, it likely would not have occurred to them that the elements in your composition can be composed to make a meaningful photograph. To me that's what makes photography art, not just (or at all) the ability to manipulate post exposure. But this is also at odds with the desires of people who want to believe they would have seen the same thing in the same circumstances. Even if you've done very little post-exposure manipulation, the answer to the question "is this what I would have seen myself?" can still be a decisive no.

TP: Yeah, quite often even if you let them look through your view finder, they still wouldn't know what you're looking at because they don't see.

GT: That's true because the final image is visualised in your mind, not finished when it's "straight out of the camera." Later on, even little things: a little contrast adjustment here, a little dodging or burning there, can completely change the impression of an image even if it's a very subtle variation. It can completely change the mood of a photograph. Change the white balance a little bit, darken somethings, desaturate one thing versus another. You move the emphasis, you change the balance of visual weight in the photograph. All those things to me are the artistic skills in photography. It's not about "I ran these three filters, and I got this effect that makes everybody go wow, so now I'm an artist."

TP: I hear calls for people to label all images that use composites as graphic art. It's never going to happen, and there is no reason anybody would want to label their photographs consistently. There's no law out there that's ever going to say this. It's always going to be for the photographer that's producing something to decide whether they are going to label their own artwork, not other people's.

GT: I think it's silly. If your goal is to create strict formal definitions, and you demand that images not meeting these formal definitions should be explicitly labelled as art, then you must also demand that photographs which involve no creativity or imagination (i.e., most documentary photographs) should not be allowed to be labelled as art (creativity and/or imagination are qualities listed in most formal definitions of art). This usually doesn't sit well with people who demand labels, but you can't have it both ways.

Art has nothing at all to do with any measurable or quantifiable or verifiable metrics. Manipulating a photograph doesn't make it art just like tossing paint on a canvas doesn't automatically make it art. For example, if you ever saw a painting by Mark Rothko and you don't know anything about Mark Rothko, who he is, what he does, what he tries to accomplish with his work, you might look at one of his paintings and think it's the most boring thing in the world. It's a shape against a background and that's it. Then you read about some of his philosophy about the effects of colour, and it is extremely interesting. You understand why he does what he does, and that "why" is what makes his work art. It's not seeing a thing on a wall that makes it art, it's the thought that went into making it that makes it art. I think Picasso said something along those lines about Cezanne. He said *"It is not what the artist does that counts, but what he is. Cézanne would never have interested me if he had lived and thought like Jaques-Emile Blanche [a famous portrait painter at the time], even if the apple he had painted had been ten times more beautiful. What interests us is the anxiety of Cézanne, the teaching of Cézanne, the anguish of Van Gogh, in short the inner drama of the man. The rest is false."*

For me that it is a big part of art appreciation, understanding these contexts and the philosophy behind the work. It's not just, "this is prettier than that so it's better art." That is a very limited way to judge art.

TP: Moving away from this idea of reality etc., I want to go onto the idea of individual image versus the body of work. Most of the photographs that people look at on Instagram, Flickr, they are consuming them as, I'm not going to say the hero image, but the image that has to stand alone, decontextualised and still work completely. Do you think many photographers are missing out on the strength of the body of work, the contextualised image?

GT: Yes, I would say that photographers and viewers who expect a photograph to be "self-contained" and require no further knowledge or context than what's in the frame (this is known as "formalism"), are missing out. But that's based on my own experience. I know for me knowing something about the photographer and the provenance/philosophy of a photograph gives me a richer, deeper, more meaningful, more emotional experience (even if that photograph doesn't have an initial high impact). In terms of a body of work, there are two ways to look at it: where the photograph "sits" within the entire body of work produced by an artist (which may span multiple subjects or genre) is to me very interesting. But there's a narrower sense in which a photograph may be part of a specific body of work: some theme or story. Here I'd say that a body of work is not necessarily "better" than a single image. It depends on the theme, whether it is more conducive to a series or to a single creation, etc. A piece of writing is not necessarily better because it is a novel rather than a short poem. It depends on the content.

TP: Do you think photography can benefit from more written word around it? Or more about the artist experience?

GT: Again, you have to put that in context. Yes, I think some photographs can absolutely benefit from writing to accompany them, but only if people would actually read that writing. Surveys show that reading in general is in decline. Many people today just don't read, especially texts that involve some complexity, texts that require readers to digest nuanced meaning and to relate emotionally, perhaps do some research to fully understand. Still, as a creator, you're rewarded either way: you can take pleasure in the acts of photography and writing and have these creative acts enrich your life, regardless of whether others see or read what you created. If you feel that writing enhances your work and/or your creative experience, I say it's worth doing just for those reasons. As general advice, I suggest to creative people to not "dumb down" their work by oversimplifying it. The "fast food" model of designing popular dishes in order to sell the most meals, works for fast food, but not so much for creative gourmet cooks. I don't think art should be pursued like fast food.

TP: When you do photographic workshops with people do you have a way of trying to nudge people into looking at work differently in terms of the experience and the photograph?

GT: My method is brute force! When we start a workshop, on the first day we get everybody together in the afternoon in a room and we stay in that room for four hours! We talk exactly about the topics that we are talking about today. I know nobody is going to retain even a fraction of it, but the point is to set the tone: we are not here just to show up at sunrise at some known spots so you can go home with a photograph. We might do that a few times because it's fun, interesting, and beautiful to see but that's not the primary reason why we are here. We are here for you to try to think about photography in more creative ways.

Nietzsche had this great saying: *"The more abstract a truth which one wishes to teach, the more one must first entice the senses."* You want to show them proof that it's the effort to develop that interest to go beyond photographing the obvious—pique people's curiosity and interest enough that they would be willing to set aside their habitual seeing for the next couple of days. Then it becomes your challenge as a teacher to try to convey as much of that as possible. The point is, you have to first rip out the barriers to get to a point where you can start talking about creativity and expression, and not just technical trivia or how to "get the shot." If you do it in a very subtle way, I think most people would just ignore it. Especially if you take them to places where they would be overwhelmed with beauty and might say "to heck with that expression stuff, here's an incredible sunrise." I think you have to drive it home hard.

TP: Not quite extreme as Minor White's way of doing it!

GT: No, I'm not going to make them take dance classes and send them out into the world with some cryptic assignment! (Note: if you want to read a first-hand account of what it was like to take a Minor White workshop, there's a good one in John Daido Loori's book, The Zen of Creativity.)

TP: I like these ideas. The ideas of beauty behind photography and the idea of beauty used as a bait and switch tool. Here's some beauty, oh and while you're looking at it, here's something I wanted to get you to see.

GT: I like to think of it more in terms of Daniel Kahneman's separation of system-1 and system-2. Where system 1 is your instinctive system that does most of the work unconsciously and it feels effortless to you. System 2 is the conscious system that has a choice, and it can decide. I think of it in terms first of all having to overwhelm your system 1, to get you to respond consciously, beyond just your gut reactions. I need to show you something that makes your system 1 instantly give up because it doesn't have a pattern for it.

System 2 takes over, now I have your conscious attention, I have to make it worth your while to want to do it, to invest the effort to try to understand and to explore beyond the obvious. It doesn't make any sense for me to just get that initial wow and grab your conscious attention and then your system 2 examines a picture consciously and concludes "I've got everything out of this photograph; I'm going to move on." I want to give you something interesting, a visual puzzle that you would actually enjoy looking at and figure out.

Ultimately as a photographer, there are two kinds of experiences you should strive to maximise. There are experiences related to creating a photograph and there are experiences related to looking at a photograph. As an artist, you should be conscious of both. I think that part of the reason most people never get the most from photography is that they are only concerned with the experiences of other people who will see their photographs, and often neglect their own.

TP: Out of interest have you ever judged a photography competition?

GT: I have a couple of times and I decided not to do it anymore.

TP: I can totally understand why! When you were judging, did you think about what it was you were trying to judge? When I've been judging competitions in the past, I find myself falling back onto patterns of behaviour that I don't like in terms of what I'm choosing and what I'm not choosing.

GT: My greatest frustration was that before I look at a photograph I wanted to talk to the photographer and ask them what they were after and why they made the choices they did. That would have given me some context to judge against. I could look at two different photographs that may both be "landscape" but the photographers are coming from completely different perspectives, representing completely different experiences, meant to express completely different things. If I don't know anything about those contexts, the only thing I'm left with is, "this is prettier than that," or "this is more technically competent than that." I don't think I'm bringing anybody any value by telling them "I think your picture is the prettiest of this set" or "I think your picture has the best sharpness of this set." Artistically, I don't feel like that's very valuable feedback. If I can know something about what the photographer is after, where they are coming from, what they are struggling with, it gives me something that I can hopefully provide them value with.

TP: This is the problem with the idea of the image with no context again, isn't it? It's very difficult. It's a single image it's a tough thing to consume on its own, and especially landscape photography. The number of ideas you can represent through a single image is difficult. Difficult to transfer any message beyond simple instinctive responses.

GT: It reminds me of a letter Hermann Hesse has in one of his books. It's a letter that he wrote to somebody who asked him to evaluate their poetry. The letter explains why he feels he can't do it.

Hesse's letter:
"Thank you for your charming letter and for your poems and stories. The letter expresses a confidence that I must, alas, disappoint. Even if I were not suffering from eye-strain and burdened by a much too heavy correspondence I would have to disappoint you, for what you ask of me is something I do not have to give.

You present me with your poetic efforts and request me to read them and then tell you what I think of your talent. You ask for severe judgment and candid appraisal, flattery will be of no use to you. Simply put, your question is: Am I a poet? Am I talented enough to be entitled to publish poems and, if possible, to make writing my calling?

I would like nothing better than to be able to give a simple answer to this simple question, but that is not possible. I consider it altogether out of the question to draw from sample poems by a beginner whom one does not know personally and intimately any conclusions about his lasting qualifications to be a poet. Whether you have talent can, of course, be made out, but talent is no rarity, the world is teeming with talent, and a young man of your age and education would have to be actually lacking in normal endowment if he were not able to write acceptable poems and essays. Further, I will no doubt be able to see from your work whether you have read Nietzsche or Baudelaire, if this or that present-day poet has influenced you; I will also be able to see whether you have already formed a taste for art and nature, which nevertheless has not the slightest thing to do with poetic endowment. At best (and this would speak well for your verses) I will be able to discover traces of your experiences and attempt to form a picture of your character. More is not possible, and whoever promises on the basis of your early efforts to appraise your literary talent or your hopes for a poetic career is a highly superficial character, if not a swindler."

TP: This is the problem with the majority of people consume images in general. Inevitable, nobody consumes in that way.

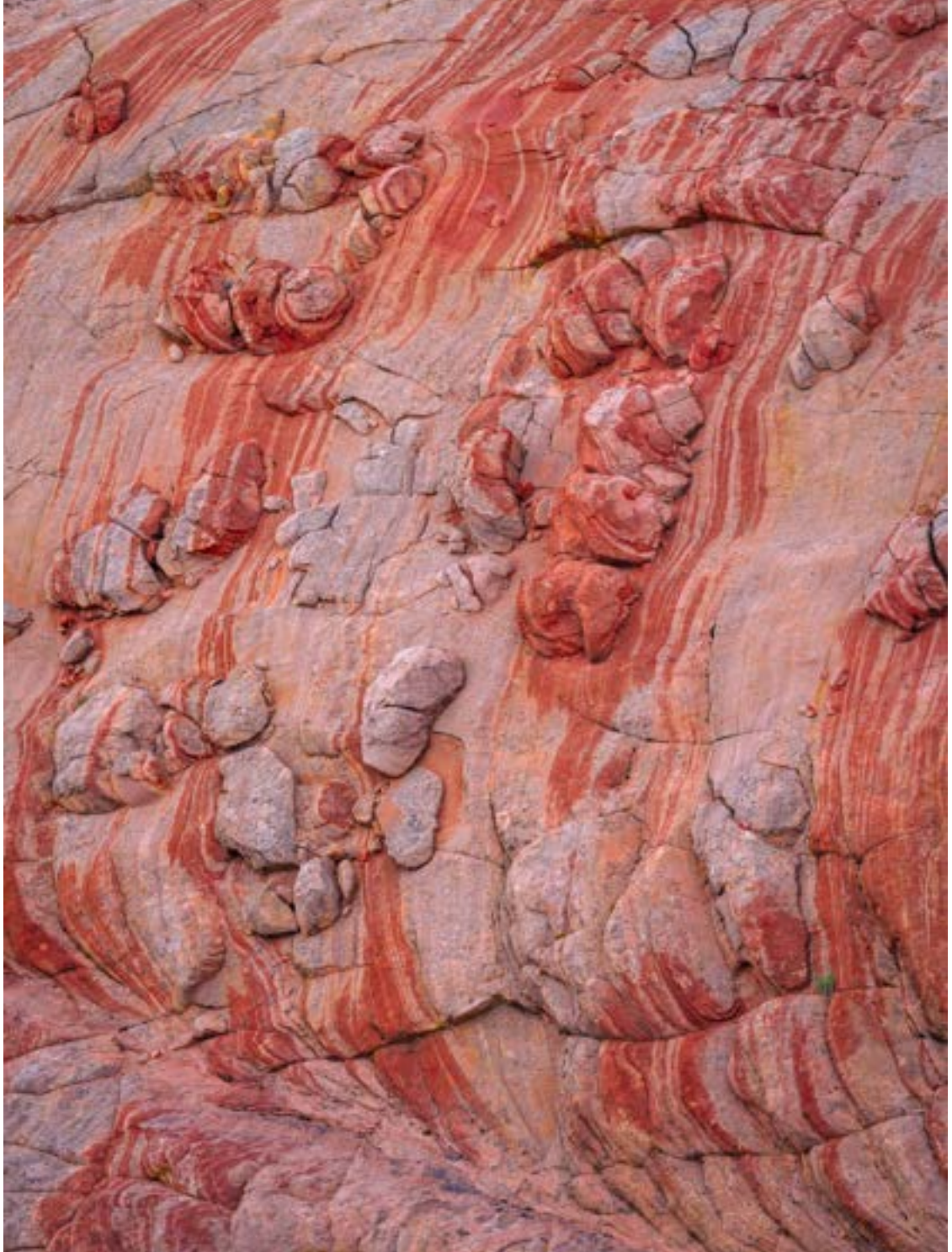
GT: I wouldn't say anybody but certainly it's a minority of people who seek a deeper, more deliberate, more informed relationship with photographs, and with photography as a medium. It certainly requires effort beyond just treating photographs as just representations of interesting or beautiful things. Then again, I think it's also an opportunity to prompt more people to at least try to engage with photography in that way. Inevitably at least some may realise that it makes for a richer and more satisfying experience. If you help such a person who had not considered it before shift into the minority, then I think you may be doing them a great service.

TP: Thank you very much for your time Guy!

GT: It was a pleasure.

Guy Tal

Ideas Behind Reality in Photography



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Astrid Preisz

ON CREATIVITY

On Creativity

KEEPING AN OPEN MIND & NO PRECONCEPTIONS

When I was a child, I knew nothing about the concept of creativity. When I was a young adult, I knew nothing about the concept of creativity. I did not think about it; I did not analyse it. I just poured all my emotions – the happiness, the fears, the sadness, the loneliness, the insecurities - into my poems, stories, and fairy tales. It was what it was.

Was I a creative child? Was I a creative young person? I probably was but what does "being a creative person" mean? Is there a creativity gene? Are we born creative – or not creative? For a long time, I had thought I had lost my creativity and was looking to find it again. The harder I looked, the more inaccessible it seemed to become. For a long time, I had identified being creative as producing something beautiful, interesting, unique and beat myself up because I seemed to have lost that ability. I couldn't "create" anymore, so I had lost my creativity.

After years of work and care for my sick and old parents, I was finally confronted with myself again when my mother died. I had to accept the challenge of being "me" again and not living other people's lives. That threw me off track for a while.

When I finally took up a camera for the first time, it was not so much for producing something beautiful, inspiring, and unique. It was about engaging with nature that gave me so much solace and peace, and I just wanted to share what I loved.

Astrid Preisz

I am an Austrian nature and landscape photographer with a deep respect for nature and all its creatures. I find the beauty in the mundane and the wonders in the small things, and I want to convey what I see with my eyes and my heart. My photos are triggered by an emotional engagement with the world surrounding me and reach from landscapes to small scenes to abstractions. After a difficult personal situation a few years ago, photography became my lifeline and has developed from a hobby to a passion, which I want to live with respect for nature and as a responsible nature photographer.
astridpreiszphotography.smugmug.com

CREATE IN YOUR MIND

During the past years, I have come to realise that the creative process is not necessarily linked to the "creation" of a product.

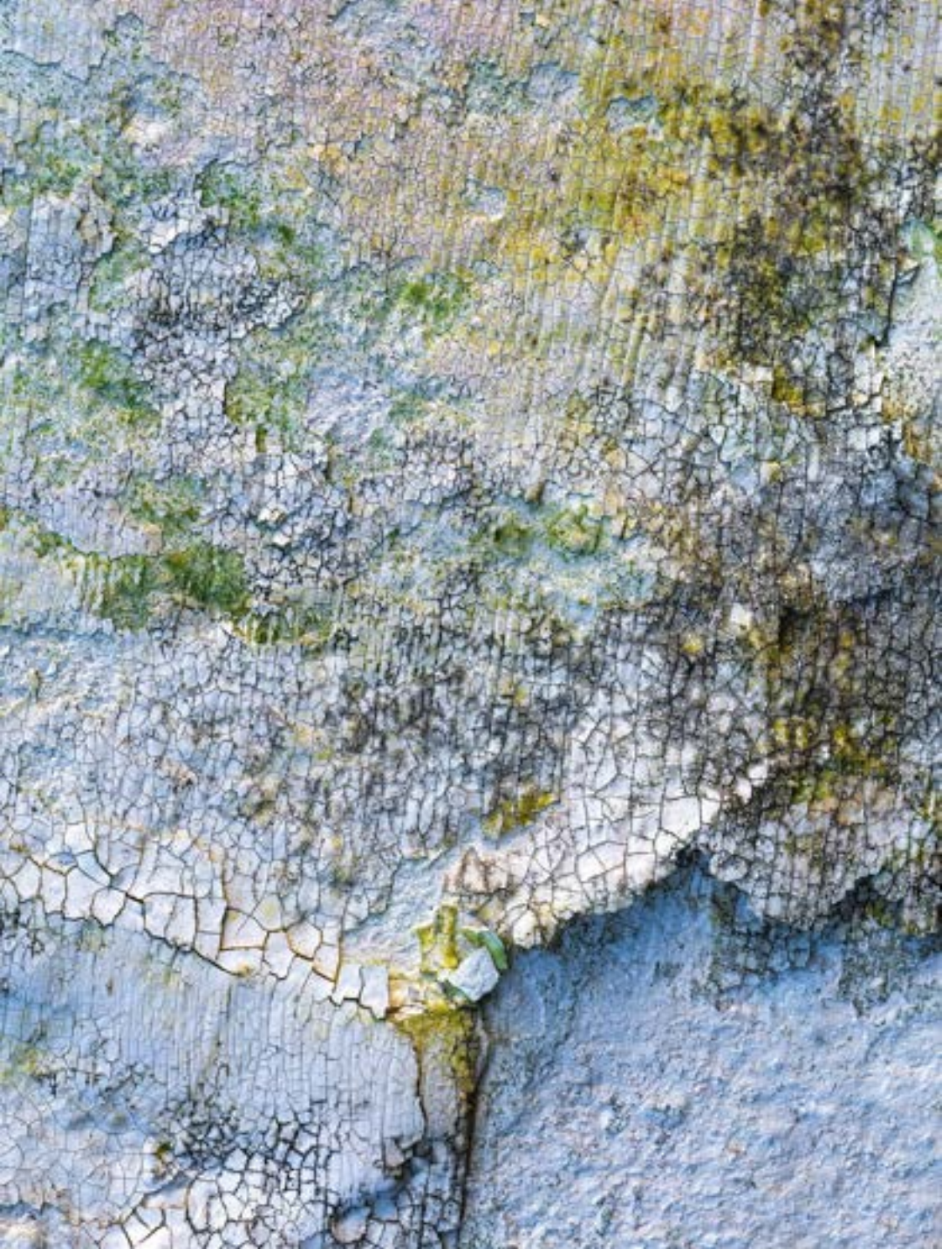
For me, creativity means engaging with a situation, internalising a sensual experience making it my own. The world we experience is not an objective truth but a perception of reality filtered through emotions, moods, and beliefs. Creativity starts when our mind is open to take in whatever comes through these filters – without thinking, without analysing.

Creativity happens when we don't rein in our minds with rules and regulations but just let them go and do their own thing. Because our senses are continuously adjusting to our state of mind and our moods, there can never be one "default setting" for triggering a creative process. Creativity happens in my mind without the need for a tool like a brush, a pen, or a camera.

This became very clear to me last July. With COVID 19 restrictions being alleviated in summer, a friend and I decided to spend a few days in Venice. We wanted to visit the city without the usual masses of tourists and take some photos. Long story made short, all my gear was stolen on the night train and I ended up in Venice with only my phone. Of course, I was devastated at first, but then I decided to not let this spoil the experience for me. We explored the city, we made photos. I made photos with my phone. And while I was taking in everything that inspired me, I realised that I was no less a photographer, and the creative process was not less intense because I didn't have a camera. Even without a phone, even without a piece of paper to draw or write on, even without my voice to tell the tale, the creative process would have been the same because it entirely happened in my mind. The very event that had robbed me of my precious tools made it very clear to me that creativity was completely independent of tools and techniques.

Tools only come into play when you become aware of this creative process and you want to externalise what your mind has come up with by processing reality with your emotional filters in place.

If you have never produced any "creative" work of art in your life, this doesn't mean that there is no creativity. Whenever we engage with our environment, whenever we react to a situation, whenever we try to find a solution for a problem, creativity happens. Some of us find an outlet for how our mind is coping with experiences in the form of writing, painting, making photos, or whatever. For others, it just means deciding how to go on with their lives, how to solve a problem, how to tackle a task. That doesn't make the creative process less valuable, just less tangible for others.



MAKE – DON'T PLAN

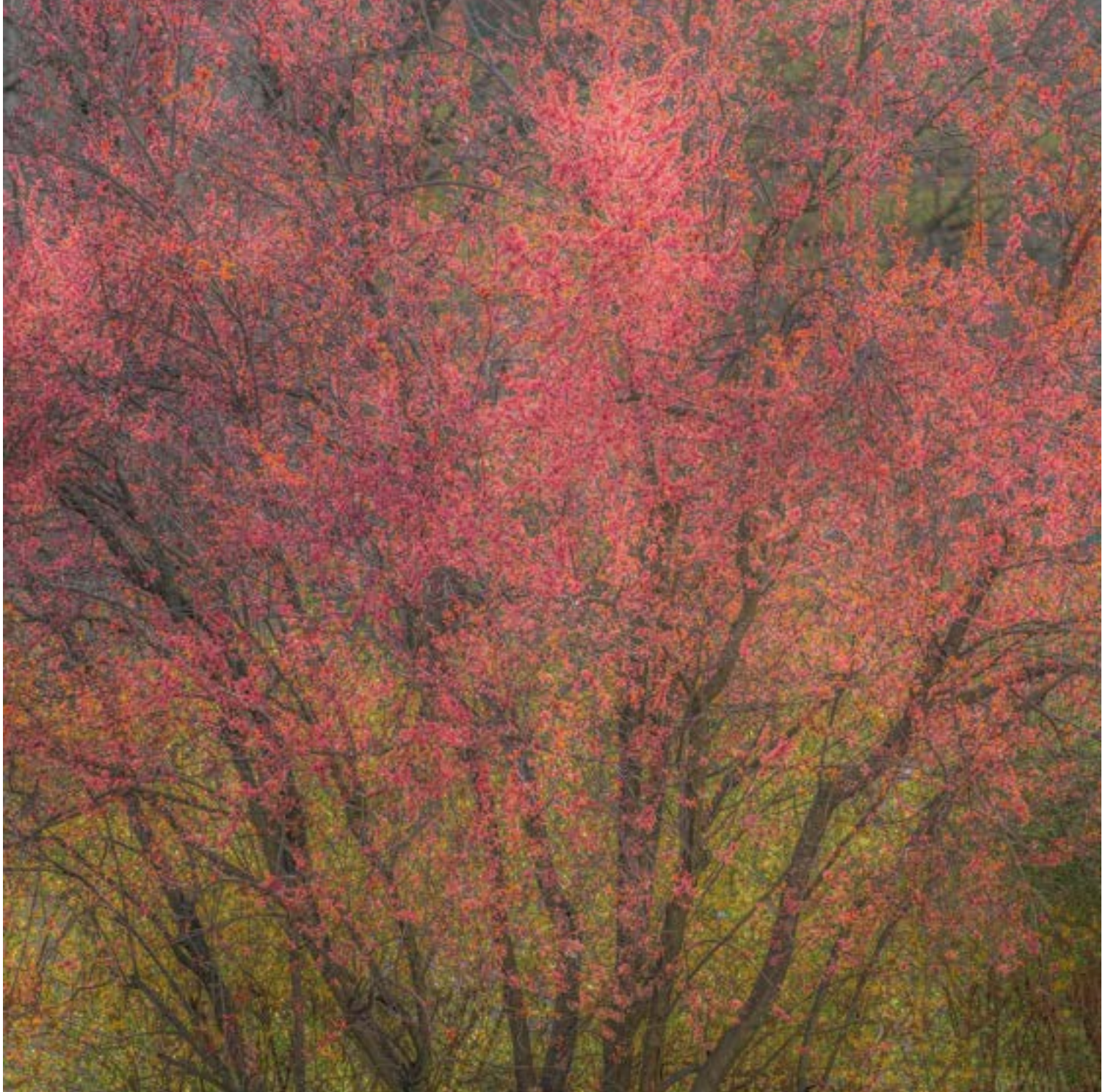
For me, the outlet I choose is photography, together with the occasional writing of poetry or short prose. My creative process is always triggered by the interplay of a sensual experience and an open mind. This sensual experience can be positive or negative, a situation or an emotion. It can stretch over a longer period or happen in the blink of an eye. For me, these experiences are often strongest when I am out in nature because that's when I feel most in touch with emotions and sensations. However, the creative process can only happen if I don't suppress my feelings and keep my mind open and susceptible to their influence.

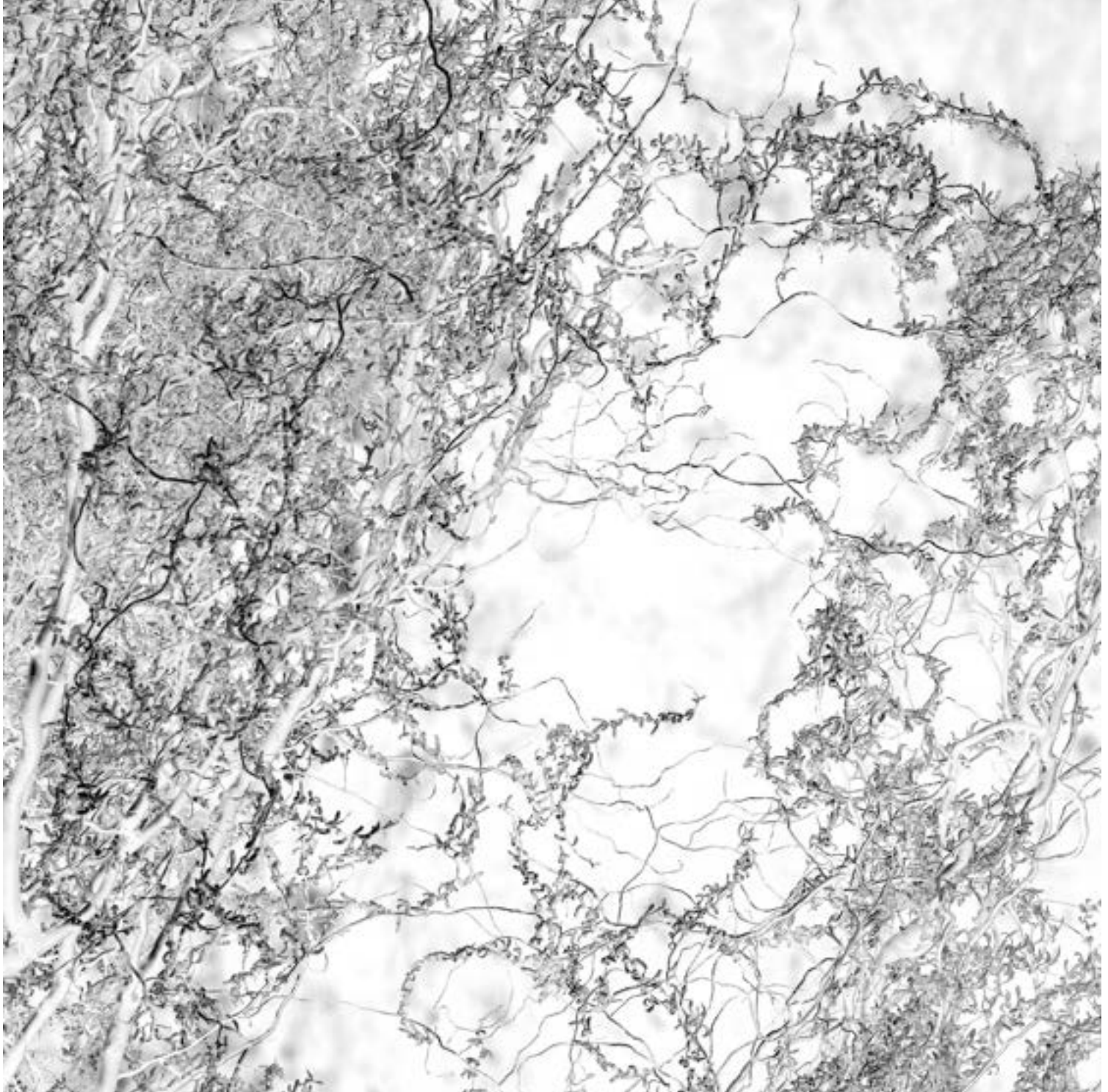
Whenever I plan to produce something "creative" it won't work. Whenever I try too hard, I get disappointed. Creativity is nothing that can be planned or forced. Going for the ultimate creative photography or post-processing technique just for the sake of producing a creative work of art will, in the long run, kill creativity. When alternative photography and processing techniques become an end in themselves, being used, again and again, the results become predictable and repetitive.

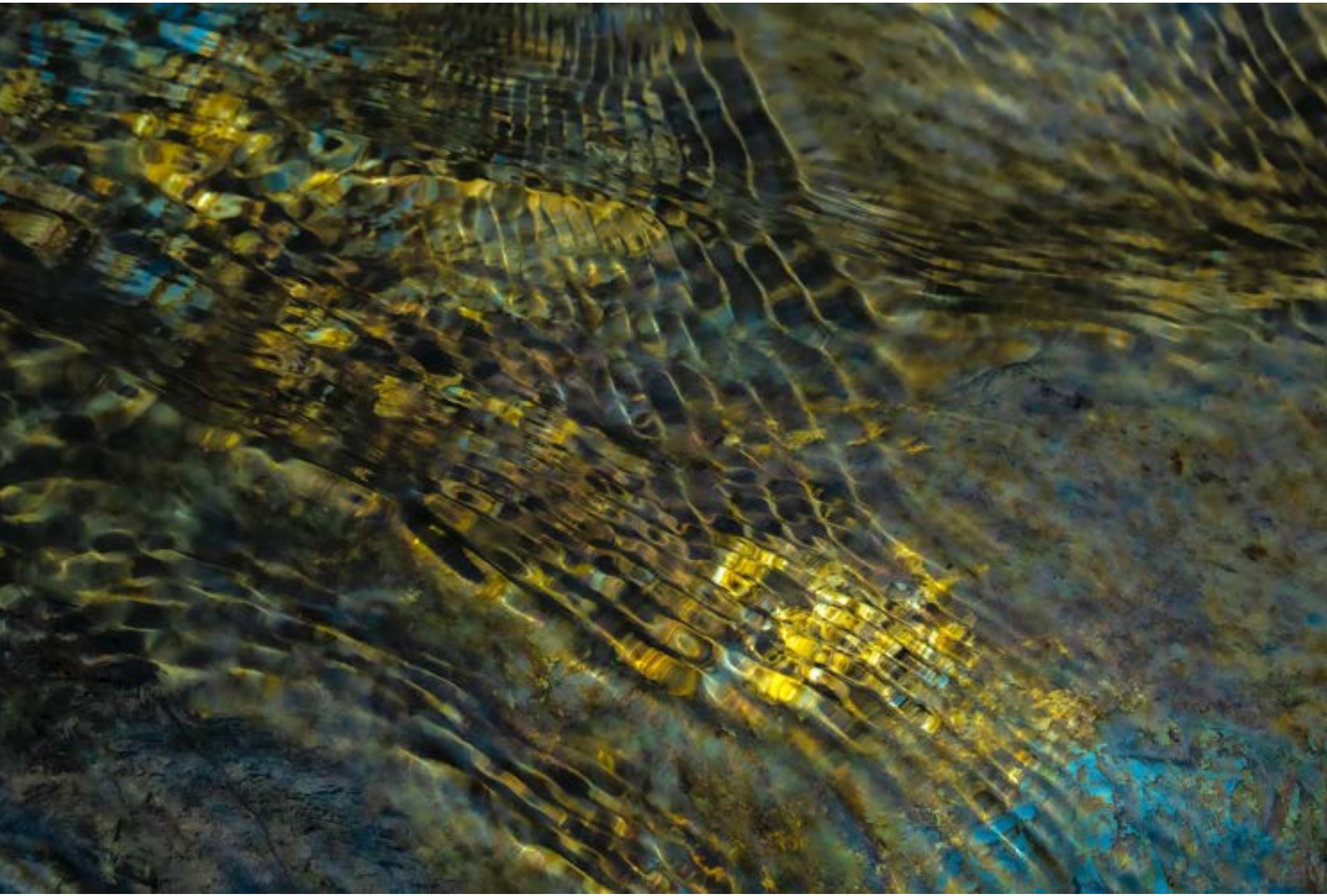
Creative photography for me means: to look, feel, engage, let the photo grow inside of me, let the photo tell me what it wants to be. No preconception, no big plans. The result might be new and surprising even for me.

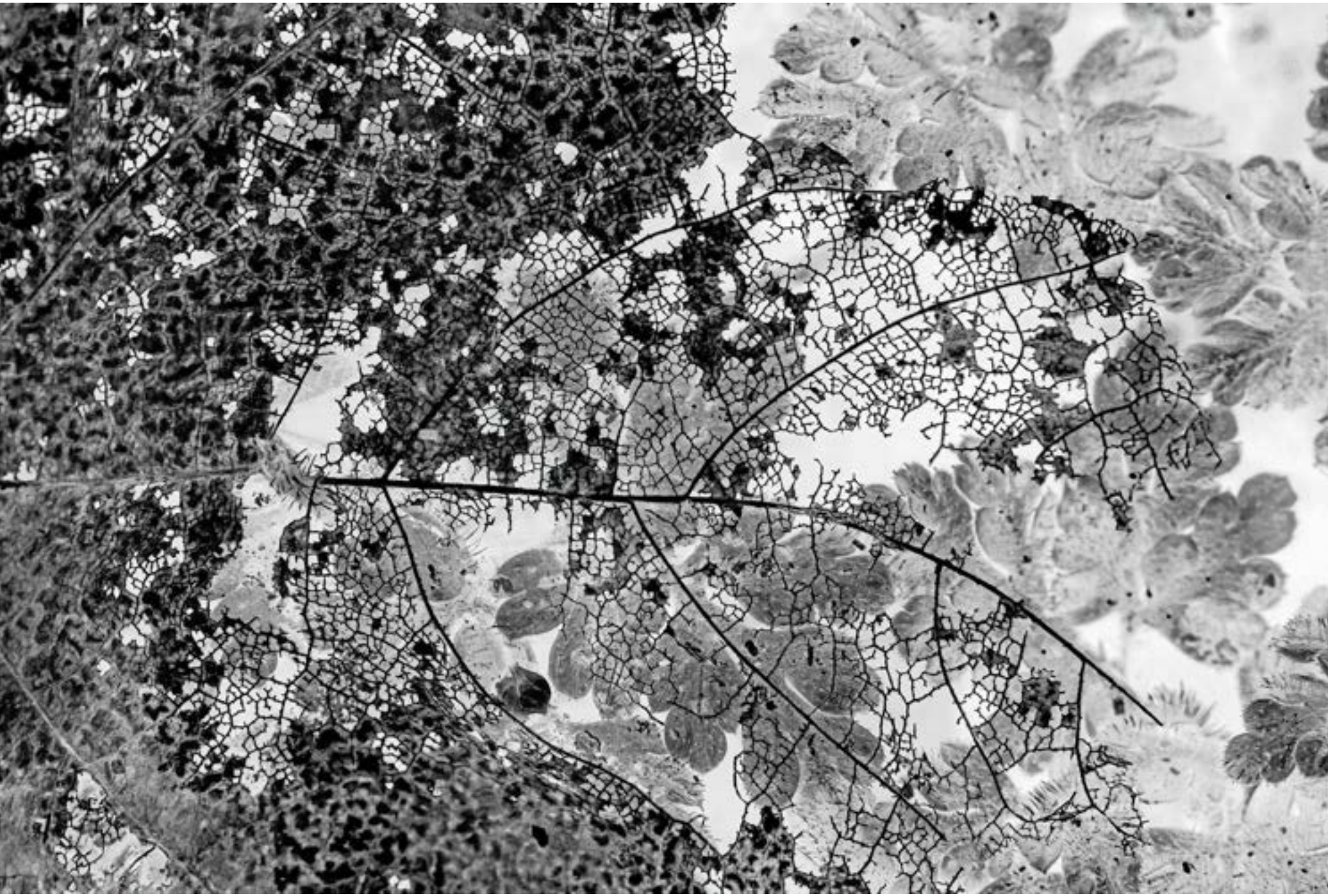
Astrid Preisz

On Creativity









Wendi Schneider

STATES OF GRACE

States of Grace

THE SINUOUS ELEGANCE OF ORGANIC FORMS

My work is rooted in the serenity I find in the sinuous elegance of organic forms. I photograph intuitively, guided by what I feel as much as what I see. Informed by a background in painting and art history, my images are layered digitally with colour and texture to manipulate the boundaries between the real and imagined and are often altered within the edition, honouring the variations. Printed on translucent vellum or kozo, these ethereal impressions are illuminated with white gold, moon gold, silver, or 24k gold on the verso, creating a luminosity that varies as the viewer's position and ambient light transition. My process infuses the artist's hand and suffuses the treasured subjects with the implied spirituality and sanctity of the precious metals, echoing the moment of capture and ensuring each print is a unique object of reverence.

HOW DID THE PROJECT DEVELOP?

I did not start out to create a series — it has evolved organically. I simply make work about what I'm drawn to. I now recognise that art and nature have always provided refuge for me. Thinking back to my childhood in Memphis, I often sought solace and solitude beneath the swaying branches of the venerable weeping willow in the far corner of our yard as the light faded, trying to figure out how I fit into this world.

Wendi Schneider

Wendi Schneider is a Denver-based visual artist widely known for her ongoing series of hand-gilded photographs, States of Grace - illuminated impressions of grace in the natural world. Drawn to the serenity she finds in the sinuous elegance of organic forms, she embraces photography to preserve vanishing moments of beauty in our vulnerable environment. Schneider has perfected a gilding process in which her images seemingly dance on the paper's surface amidst reflections of light on precious metals, creating a synthesis of technique and subject.

Born in Memphis, TN, in 1955, Schneider grew up in a family of artists, later earning an AA in Art History from Stephens College and a BA in Painting from Newcomb College at Tulane University. Her interest in photography germinated in the early 1980s with the use of a camera to reference models for oil paintings. Mesmerised by the possibilities of the photographic art form and the alchemy of the darkroom, yet missing the sensuousness of oils, Schneider began to layer oils on photographs to manipulate the boundaries between the real and the imagined. This process laid the groundwork for the unique layering and gilding that would later become the foundation of States of Grace.

In 1988, Schneider moved to New York City and began a diverse and successful career that included fine art commissions, photography for magazines, book covers, and advertising, and later (after a move to Denver in 1994) design and art direction. In 2012, she began to produce a collection of photographs featuring flora and fauna – the States of Grace series, which was to become her signature body of work.

wendischneider.com

I later discovered the undulating limbs of the willow echoed in the sensuous organic forms of Art Nouveau, which I first encountered in the incredible production design of the 1964 film My Fair Lady. My fascination with the delicate lines of Art Nouveau blossomed while studying studio art and art history at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. In fact, one of the reasons I transferred to Newcomb College in New Orleans was because of the Arts & Crafts / Art Nouveau Newcomb Pottery that had flourished there in the early 1900s. I have an eye for detail – if I see a photograph hanging on a wall, I will notice if it's even an eighth of an inch off kilter. My eye for detail helped shape my path at Newcomb. One of my most memorable assignments involved cutting a two-inch section from a magazine page and blowing it up on canvas in oils — I chose a detail of a glass of ice water. In the same period, I discovered a book on photomicrography. Seeing the mesmerising microstructures of cells made a lasting impression.

To paraphrase Marcel Proust, "*The real voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes*." I feel it's important to look deeply. It's less about how the subject appears, then how it is seen and felt. The focus to define the soul of the subject is calming for me. I'm deeply moved by the exquisite, essential lines of a subject — as if their very essence is contained in their form.

As The Snow Melts 2020

The Weight Of The Gold, 2020

Pre-COVID, I often travelled to photograph, but I photograph wherever I am, and even the familiar walks with my dog Truffle are constantly changing. Nothing in nature remains the same, and the light is constantly shifting. Now, with climate change, it seems even more crucial to capture these magical moments. I continue to make the work for myself, as I need to. Making work keeps me somewhat sane, at least my version of sane.

I'm still that wide-eyed girl from Memphis, constantly searching for solace amidst whichever stunning landscape I find myself exploring and trying to elevate the intrinsic beauty and value of my subjects. My work is a testament and tribute, an adoration and obligation.

An Evening With The Moon, 2018

Dusk Falls 2020

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT PROCESSING THE IMAGES AND PRINTING?

It's somewhat elusive to talk about my process as I work intuitively and allow myself to go with the flow of whatever I feel like doing at the time. My original capture is usually, but not always, only the starting point for the final versions of an image. While I'm documenting these moments of spiritual connection, I'm interested in portraying a more personal interpretation of the image. To achieve this, I layer the images with colour and texture on my iPad, or in Photoshop or Lightroom, and frequently move back and forth between those programs multiple times with each image. I want my work to mimic the multifaceted states of nature, including the experience of shifting light refractions and feeling the spirituality in the essence of the subjects. I'm drawn to nuanced colour and the luminosity and depth the leafing infers, and I continue to play with the metals to enhance the palette. I'm still playing and making discoveries in the results almost 9 years later. I often vary the prints within the limited editions, depending on how I feel about the image when it's time to make the print, and sometimes the leafing materials change as well. It depends on the desired outcome, though the hands-on journey of each piece may take it in a different direction. Coming from a painting background, I'm less interested in the traditional idea of printmaking multiples and usually only make a few versions of an image at a time. I treasure getting lost in time during all stages of the creative process.

Crescent and Crow

ABOUT EXHIBITING THE WORK

Before I left New Orleans to open my photography business in New York, a friend insisted that I show my hand-painted photographs to Joshua Mann Pailet of A Gallery For Fine Photography. Joshua was very supportive of my work and began representing me after my move. When I began this series in 2012, I really had to start over, as I had been out of the fine art world for many years. Joshua invited me back to the gallery, and I also began exhibiting the work by applying to juried shows.

One of my gallerists and I connected at a Portfolio Review, one through a juried exhibition, one became aware of my work after I purchased a print for my collection, one had seen my work at AIPAD, and one is an old friend who I reconnected with last year at the Center for Creative Photography Legacy of Light symposium.

Within the series, there are images that can be grouped by subject, theme or treatment. My website now has an archive page that allows visitors to search by keywords to create collections. Each exhibition of work from the overarching theme of States of Grace has been different and curated specifically for each exhibition space. I love having that flexibility for both the gallerists and myself.

Locust, 2016

Cypress, 2017

The Gossamer Threads Of Dreams, 2019

One of my travelling exhibitions is called Evenings with the Moon, based on the hope for recognition of our similar desires and needs in our collective consciousness - we all live under the same moon. The exhibition is paired with poetry and music to further explore the ties that bind us.

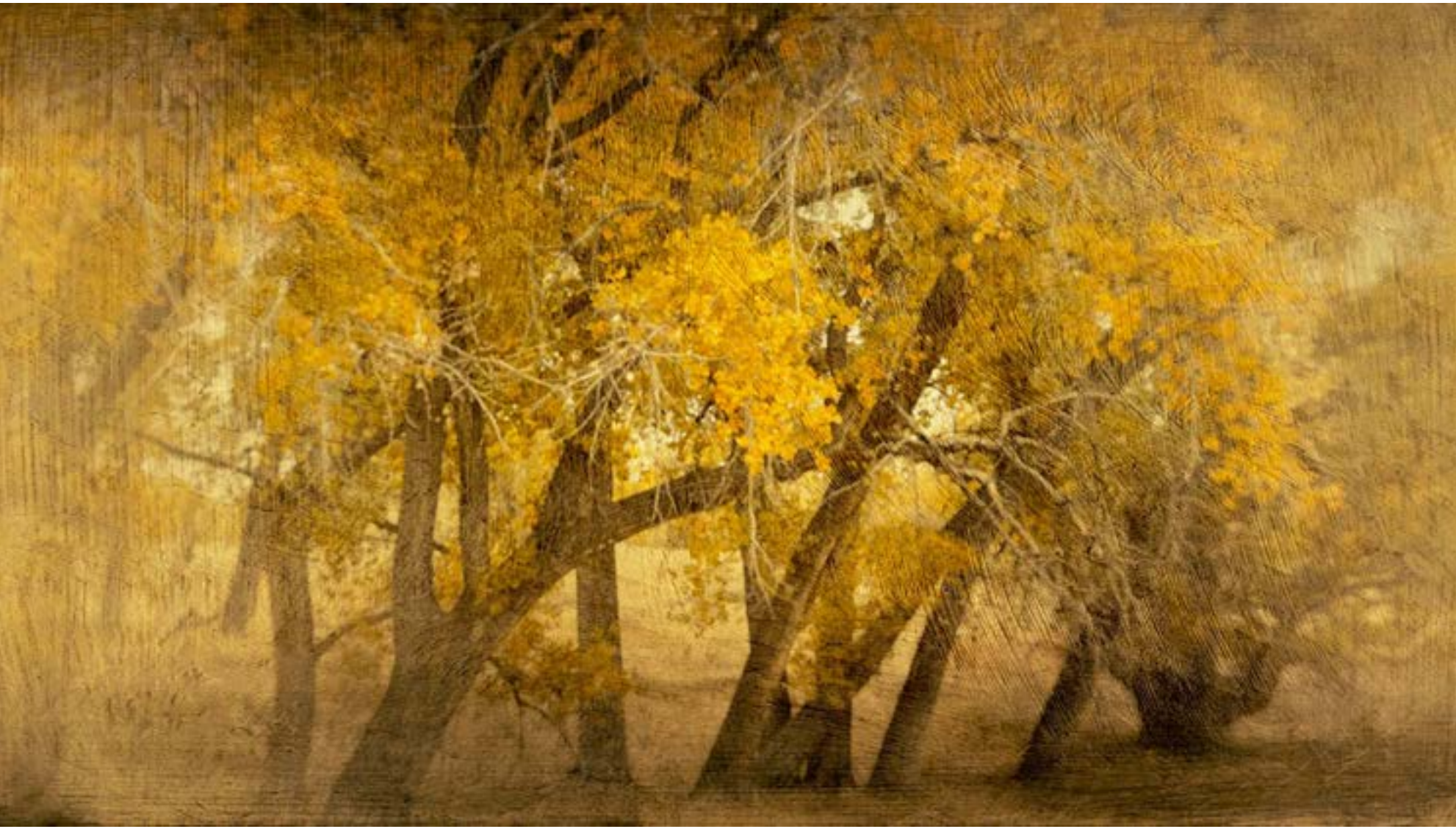
States of Grace has evolved, however, with another collection of prints currently at Catherine Couturier Gallery in Houston and Rick Wester Fine Art in New York, entitled the Patina Collection. The Patina Collection is an assemblage of gilded prints in the States of Grace series paired with antique frames – the synthesis of 40 years of collecting turn-of-the-twentieth-century art and objects and creating images inspired by my collection of Pictorialist photographs. The serpentine shapes are echoed in the subjects I photograph and the frames that house these works. This collection of States of Grace is a way to bring my inspirations full circle. With every new collection or exhibition of my work, I strive to make the intangible tangible and to preserve the visual poetry of these vanishing moments of beauty in our vulnerable environment. The Patina Collection prints are truly one-of-a-kind objects of reverence.

Wendi Schneider

States of Grace

Red Crescent Bord

An Evening With The Moon, 2018



The Weight Of The Gold, 2020

As The Snow Melts,
2020

Dusk Falls ,2020

Cypress, 2017

Locust, 2016

Refuge, 2020

The Gossamer Threads Of Dreams, 2019

Brent Doerzman

PORTRAIT OF A PHOTOGRAPHER

Brent Doerzman – Portrait of a Photographer

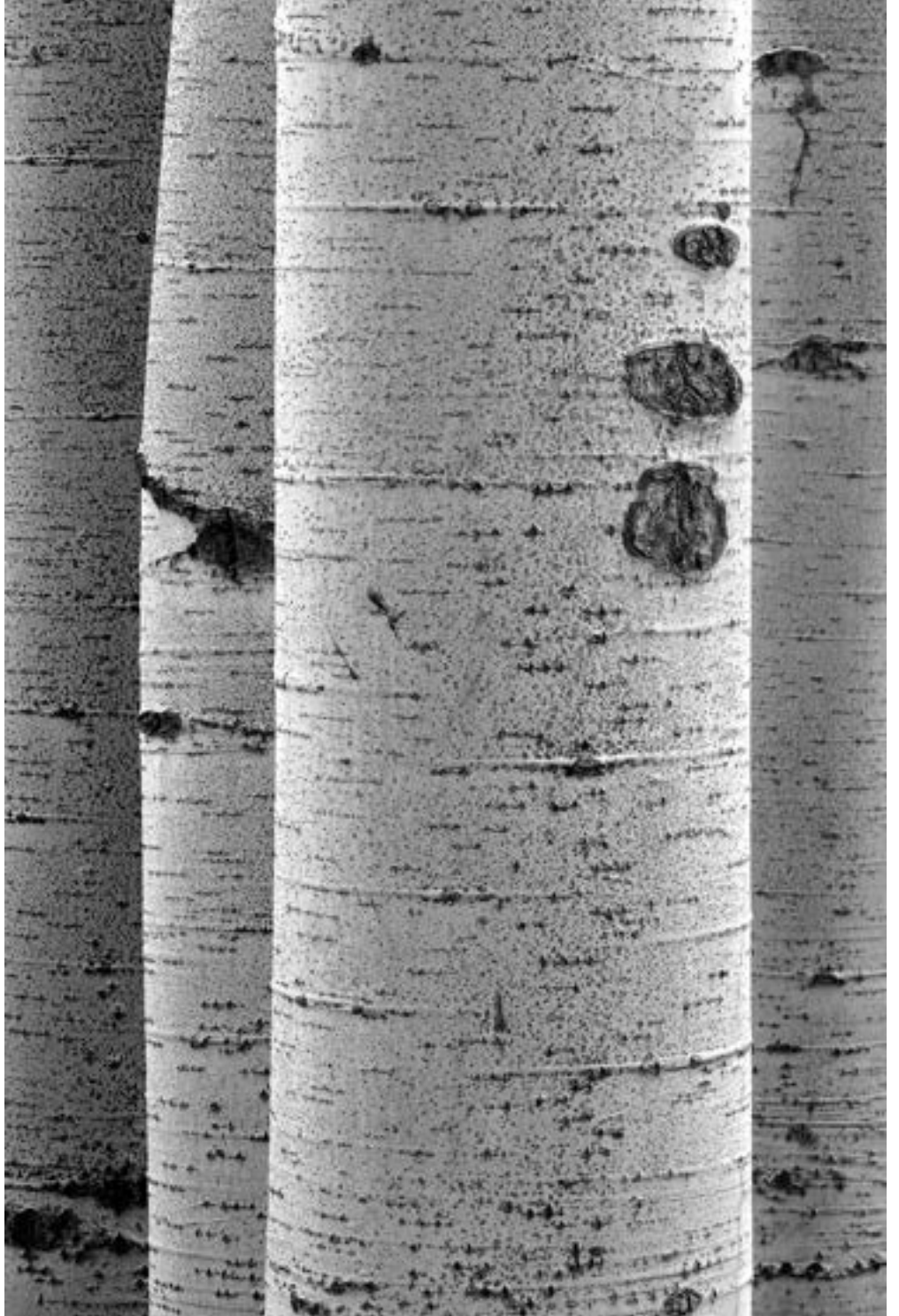
INTIMATE & TIMELESS EXPRESSIONS OF NATURE

Matt Payne

Matt Payne is a mountain climber, adventurer, and fine art nature and landscape photographer specialising in unique and hard-to-reach locations and subjects, including the highest mountains in Colorado. Matt has climbed the highest 100 mountains in Colorado which is where his love for landscape photography began. Matt produces a podcast dedicated to that love affair called F-Stop Collaborate and Listen Matt's goal for the podcast is to create a space to have meaningful conversations with other landscape photographers all over the world. Matt also follows a very strict code of ethics as a nature photographer.
mattpaynephotography.com

I first learned about Brent Doerzman (pronounced Doors Man) in 2010 when I was researching an article I was writing for my old Colorado mountaineering website. I wanted to feature the best Colorado landscape photographers but was very new to photography and needed some advice, so I went looking for it on the now defunct Google Plus site, which was an incredibly active photography platform back then. One of the names that kept getting mentioned repeatedly was Brent Doerzman, so I went to have a look at his website. At first glance, Brent's website feels a tad outdated; however, once you start digging in you recognise that it contains an absolute gold mine of landscape photography in the form of trip reports.

One thing I quickly learned about Brent when I first started researching his work is that he was at the time strictly using 4"x5" film cameras to produce his work, which was impressive to me at the time, having been so new to photography. Fast forward to 2013 – I was finally ready to start exploring Colorado's mountains with the sole purpose of photographing fall colour, a rite of passage of sorts for all landscape photographers residing in Colorado. I reached out to Brent, having only exchanged a few emails with him in the past for my article in 2010, to see if he wanted to meet me at a location I really wanted to explore. Brent agreed to meet and guide me to the good camping sites in the dark and so off I went on my first trip to Owl Creek Pass, a location I now photograph nearly every autumn. One thing became immediately clear to me after spending the weekend with Brent – he was one of the kindest and thoughtful photographers I have ever met and that has held up to this very day.



Photographically speaking, Brent has mainly focused on Colorado; however, he has made images all over the United States. His love for the Colorado mountains started early, as his family would travel from their home in Iowa to vacation in Colorado almost every summer. Once old enough, Brent would make photographs with his father's camera whenever possible. Several years on the high school yearbook and newspaper were followed by Brent getting a degree in commercial photography from Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, CA., and in 1989 he was fortunate to get a fantastic deal on a 4"x5" wooden field camera and a few lenses – and off he went to explore the world with his camera! Brent moved to Denver in 1991 and worked as a commercial photographer's assistant and ventured into the mountains to take photos and play as often as possible, pursuing nature photography as much as he could. Brent's love for Colorado's mountains shines through in his photographs, especially his 4"x5" work, which if you were to ask any well-established Colorado nature photographer, has set the bar high and has offered inspiration to us all. Brent's work is mainly focused on the finest qualities of light and how that light interplays with the landscape before him – usually a beautifully composed scene comprised of aspen trees and glorious Colorado mountain peaks. These images are no simple feat considering the use of the 4"x5" medium and the challenges found there with dynamic range, set-up time, and cost. Take for example the images he created on a single trip in 2006 – the quality of light, subject, and composition is nearly impossible to beat when it comes to Colorado autumn photography.

I've been lucky to have been with Brent on several trips into the Colorado mountains for autumn photography. This usually takes the form of early cold mornings, long days of exploring and scouting alone, and sharing beer around a campsite at night comparing what we were able to find in the field. Even though Brent transitioned to using digital exclusively in 2014, he uses the same slow and methodical approaches to the craft in the digital medium. This approach has rewarded Brent in spades and when we are around the campfire at night comparing images, I am always jealous of the incredibly unique photographs he is able to create. By studying Brent's approach in the field and the end results he achieves, I have personally improved my own photography by leaps and bounds. It is an absolute joy to watch him work in the field – he approaches every scene with a child's mind, open and curious about what he might find within the frame of his camera. This approach has ensured that he rarely photographs scenes that have already been photographed (a trait I personally find inspiring and rewarding) and he finds new and interesting ways to present a subject we both have a passion for – Colorado's mountains in autumn. In fact, this passion is so deep for Brent that he saves his vacation time from his hard full-time job to use it on a perennial journey into the mountains each autumn. Additionally, up until last year, Brent did not even own his own digital camera – he would borrow a camera and lenses from a close friend each year for these journeys. His passion for this subject runs deeper than anyone else I have ever met.

Lastly, one of the aspects of Brent's photography that I most admire is his way to isolate the most important qualities of his subjects and bring them to life. He's an absolute master at determining what to include or exclude in the frame, which is in my opinion one of the most challenging things a landscape photographer must learn to do. Often this isolation takes the form of light – where Brent pinpoints with exact precision the perfect amount of his subject to include to emphasise the interplay of light and shadow on his scene. Sometimes this isolation takes the form of getting in and focusing on the intimate details of his subject, whether it be a singular leaf floating on a pond reflecting blue sky and golden aspen leaves on a gentle crisp autumn morning, or a single aspen tree holding on to its last leaves of the season among a forest barren of any leaves.

I am so happy to have discovered Brent and his amazing photography. I am also incredibly grateful to be able to call him a friend – he has inspired my work and so many other photographer's work here in Colorado in countless ways and highly recommend you take the time to peruse his work.

Brent resides in Denver, Colorado and is busy helping his wife of twenty plus years raise two awesome young men. He is a craft beer aficionado and a wonderful human being. As always, I always would love to hear your comments about these columns and the thoughts they may have evoked in you.

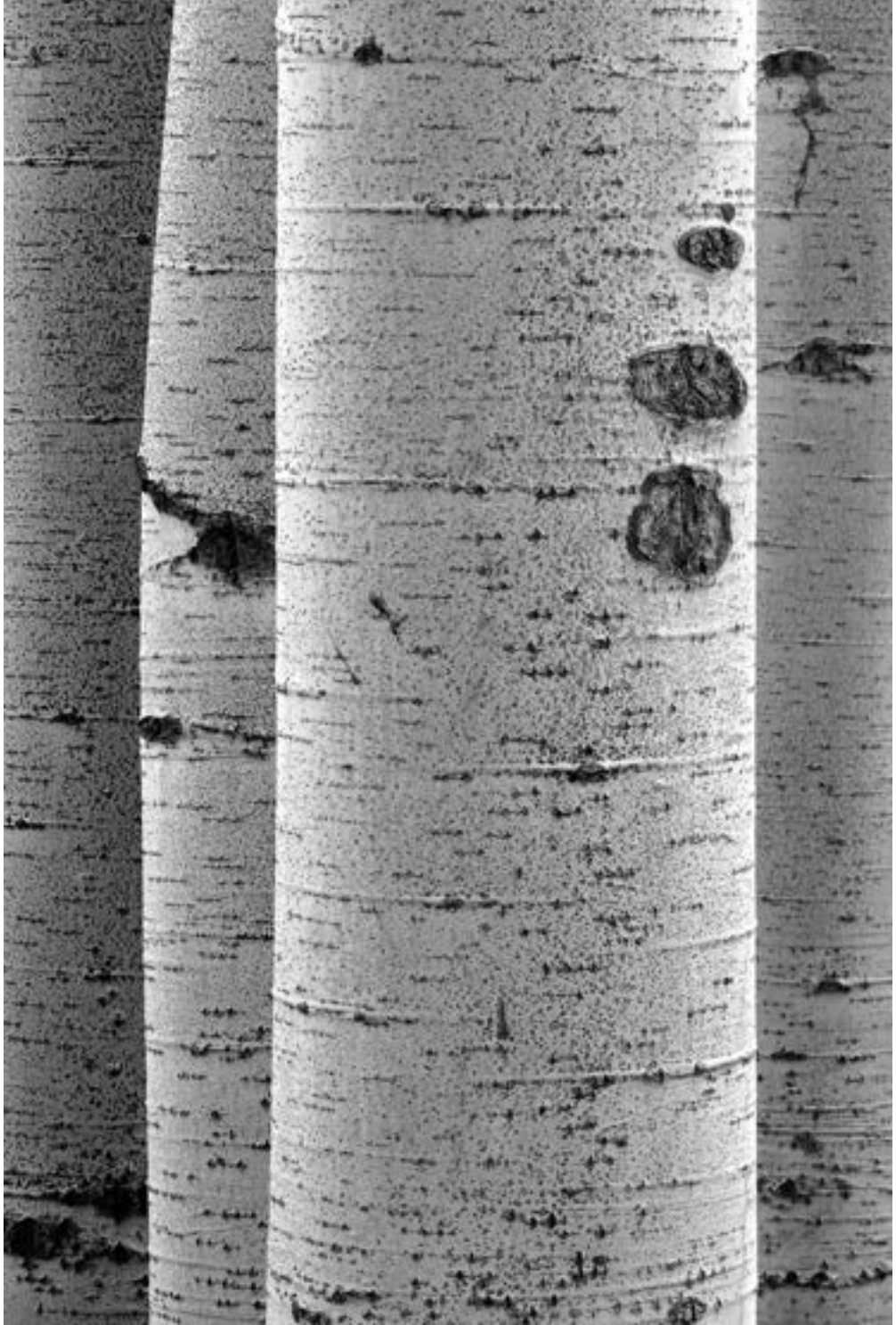
If you enjoyed this article and want to listen to my conversations with other great artists, consider subscribing to my podcast, "F-Stop Collaborate and Listen," on your favourite podcatching application.

Do you know someone you feel has yet to be "discovered" and should be featured here? Send me an e-mail – I look forward to hearing from you.

Brent Doerzman

Brent Doerzman

Portrait of a Photographer

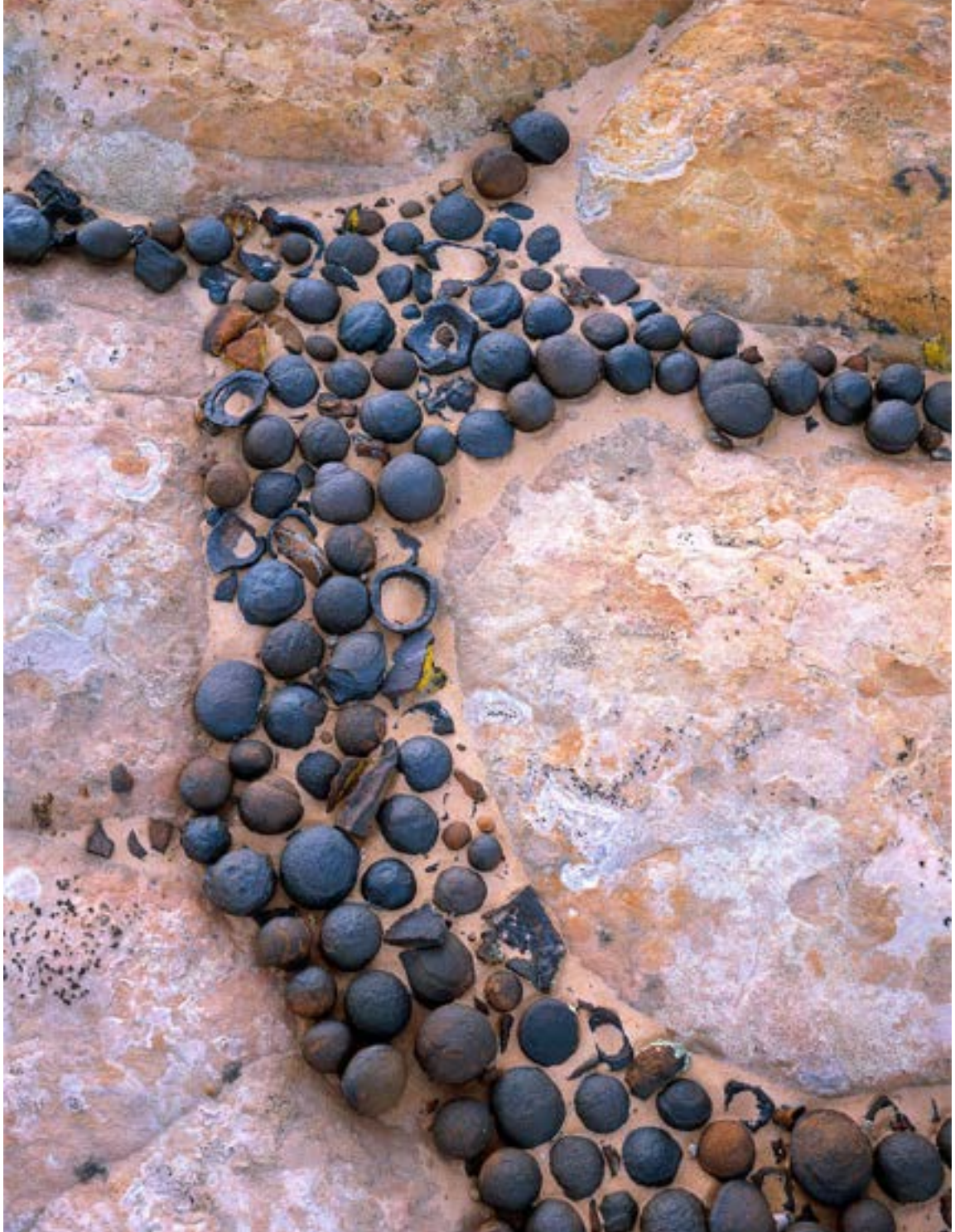


Portrait of a Photographer |

Brent Doerzman

Portrait of a Photographer |

Brent Doerzman



Portrait of a Photographer |

Brent Doerzman

Portrait of a Photographer |

Brent Doerzman

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Brent Doerzman


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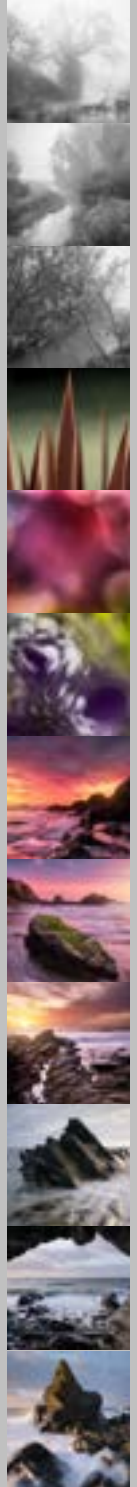


4 x 4 Portfolio

THE ART OF GETTING OUT THERE

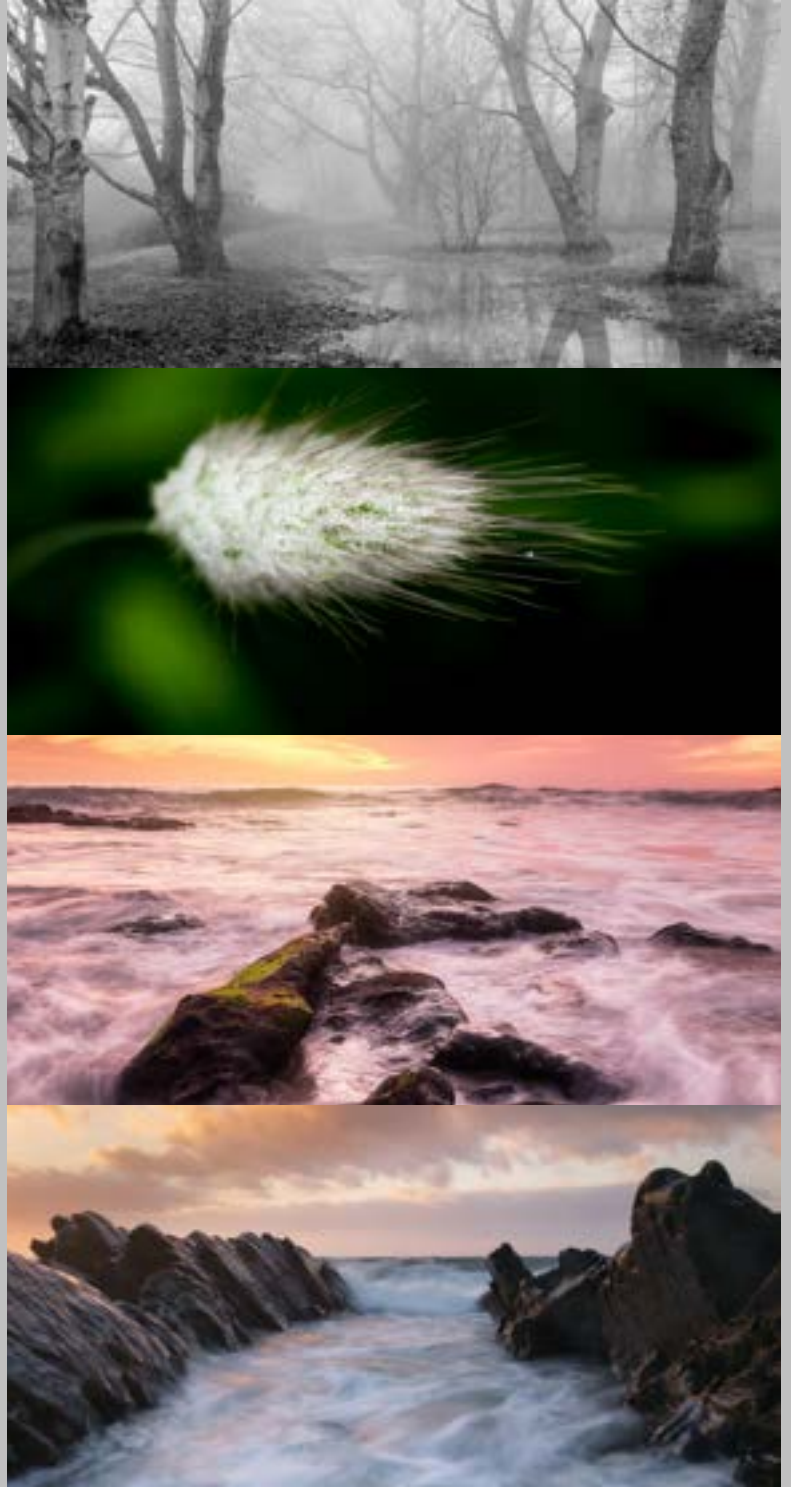
Our 4x4 feature is a set of four mini portfolios each consisting of four images related in some way. If you would like to submit your own 4x4 portfolio please visit this page for submission information.

Folio 1 - IAN SCHOLEY
Alconbury Brook

Folio 2 - JOHN HIGGS
Unexpected Consequences

Folio 3 - KEVIN NELSON
Location, location, location - Moss Point

Folio 4 - STEVE FORDEN
Glion Muigh



Folio 1 - IAN SCHOLEY

Alconbury Brook

Ian Scholey

An engineer and project manager by training based in Cambridgeshire, I spend weekends and holidays where possible preoccupied with amateur landscape photography around the UK. My engineering background and interests have helped feed my interest in digital photography to the extent has become my creative outlet. Trips further afield have included Lake District, Cornwall, Yorkshire and the West Coast of Scotland using my VW campervan as an ever flexible transport and accommodation.

www.newfolio.co.uk

Alconbury Brook is a tributary to the River Great Ouse that snakes around Huntingdon racecourse and through Hinchinbrooke Park (home to Oliver Cromwell's family) before meeting the river at Brampton Mill. Given a reasonable amount of rain it regularly floods and creates opportunities for landscape photography in an otherwise rather uninspiring local natural landscape, particularly if the weather is icy or foggy.

It's part of my regular route to walk the dogs over the past 20 years, so assuming their patience – they have been known to jump into the water and then expect help getting out - I can take the opportunity to capture a few images. These images were captured in the winter of 2020/2021 after a lot of rain and they do convey the cold and dampness. The misty weather coincided with weekends for what turned out to be a peak in creative opportunities.

All four images are taken at locations over a stretch of Alconbury Brook each less than a few hundred yards apart over approx. 6 few weeks of winter; so represent a snapshot in time of that area.

The misty conditions helped separate the trees and brook from the background with the vegetation still showing the fast flowing floodwaters that had receded leaving the long dead vegetation.

I have a long term aim to complete a larger body of work focused on a slightly wider area. The lack of any traditional grand landscapes means it feels more of a challenge and often focuses on woodland and rivers. I definitely feel the need to progress from a single image to a project based creative process.

More and more my best work seems to have been monochrome conversions and in the bleakness of winter, of course, nature helps with that pre-visualisation.

Folio 2 - JOHN HIGGS

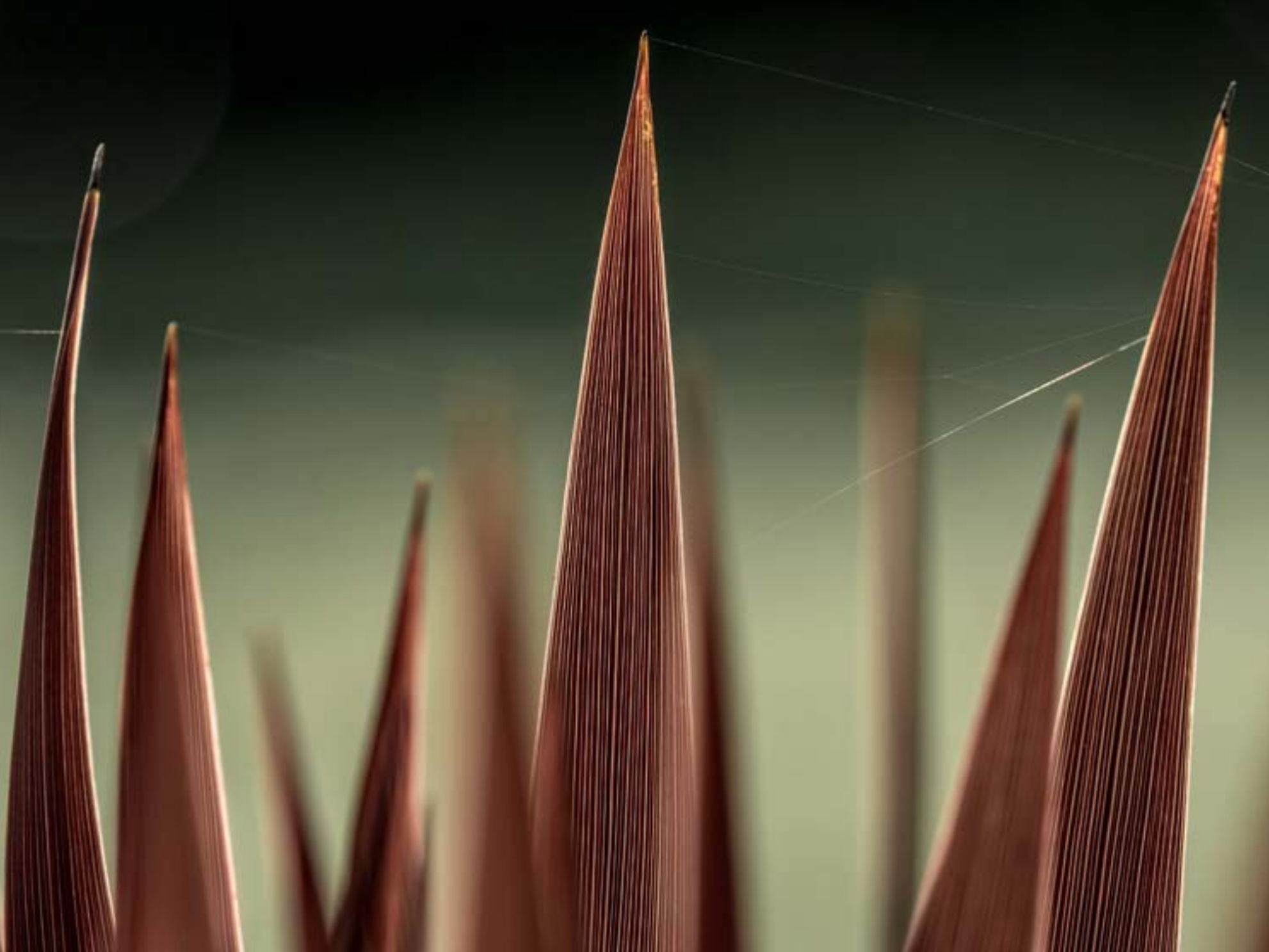
Unexpected Consequences

John Higgs

I am an amateur photographer, now retired who enjoys creating images using the landscape as a resource rather than a subject.

I have lived in my current house for over forty years. Many changes have been made over that time but the garden has remained essentially the same. My objective during this long year was to look with fresh eyes on something that had become invisible through familiarity and (weather permitting) create some interesting images.

John Higgs



Folio 3 - KEVIN NELSON

Location, location, location – Moss Point

As a landscape photographer location means everything. And every now and then, you find an amazing spot that offers multiple views and subjects. After looking around on Google Maps I came across Moss Point in Laguna Beach, CA, looked at the forecast and the tides and decided to check it out. Although the beach is very small, I was pleasantly surprised with all the options for shots. Long, layered, sharp rock formations on the south end, tall rocks on the north end and plenty of smooth, weathered boulders in between.

One of my favourite things about finding a new location is watching how the light affects the landscape as it changes. As you can see, Moss Point didn't disappoint. It had just stopped raining for a couple of days, very rare in Southern California, so I was hoping the clouds would stick around and bless me with a killer sunset. I spent the evening moving up and down the beach looking for compositions, taking several shots as the light dimmed and the sun began to set and then WOW, the sky lit up like it was on fire. Resulting in some of the best landscape photos I've ever taken.

I hope you enjoyed a little scenery from Southern California.

Kevin Nelson

Kevin Nelson

I'm a Photographer and Art Director with 20 years experience in multiple disciplines based in Southern California. My landscape work focuses on dynamic moments with long exposure camera techniques. This allows me to take a naturally beautiful setting or subject and add a slightly surreal feel through texture, color and definition. The result is a photograph that looks both familiar and otherworldly.

constructivad.com

Folio 4 - STEVE FORDEN

Glion Muigh

Steve Forden

Amateur landscape photographer based on the Isle of Man, with a passion for coastal photography and the uplands of Scotland and the Lake District.
steveforden.com

This collection of images was taken in a small area on Glen Maye (Glion Muigh in Manx, meaning luxuriant glen) beach, on the rocky western coast of the Isle of Man. I have chosen these four photos because of the positive story they tell of my development as a photographer over the past year. I arrived on the Isle of Man just before lockdown, moving here from London, to stay with my wife's family and we've been here ever since. This has represented an excellent opportunity to develop my craft and invest some real time in thinking about the kind of images I want to take, honing my compositions and generally making the sort of progress that only comes from putting the effort in to improve. Previously I had been largely restricted to occasional trips out of London to Scotland or surrounding coasts when I had the chance.

My experiences at Glen Maye provide a neat encapsulation of the improvements in my photography. Despite its fascinating geology, wonderfully textured and shaped rock and rich potential for creative composition, it is in fact quite a challenging place to photograph (or at least I find it so). Getting the optimal tide time, when waves are interacting most engagingly with the rocks and when somewhat unsightly seaweed is covered up, can only come from experience borne of repeat visits. In many places it is challenging to isolate features of interest and images can become somewhat cluttered.

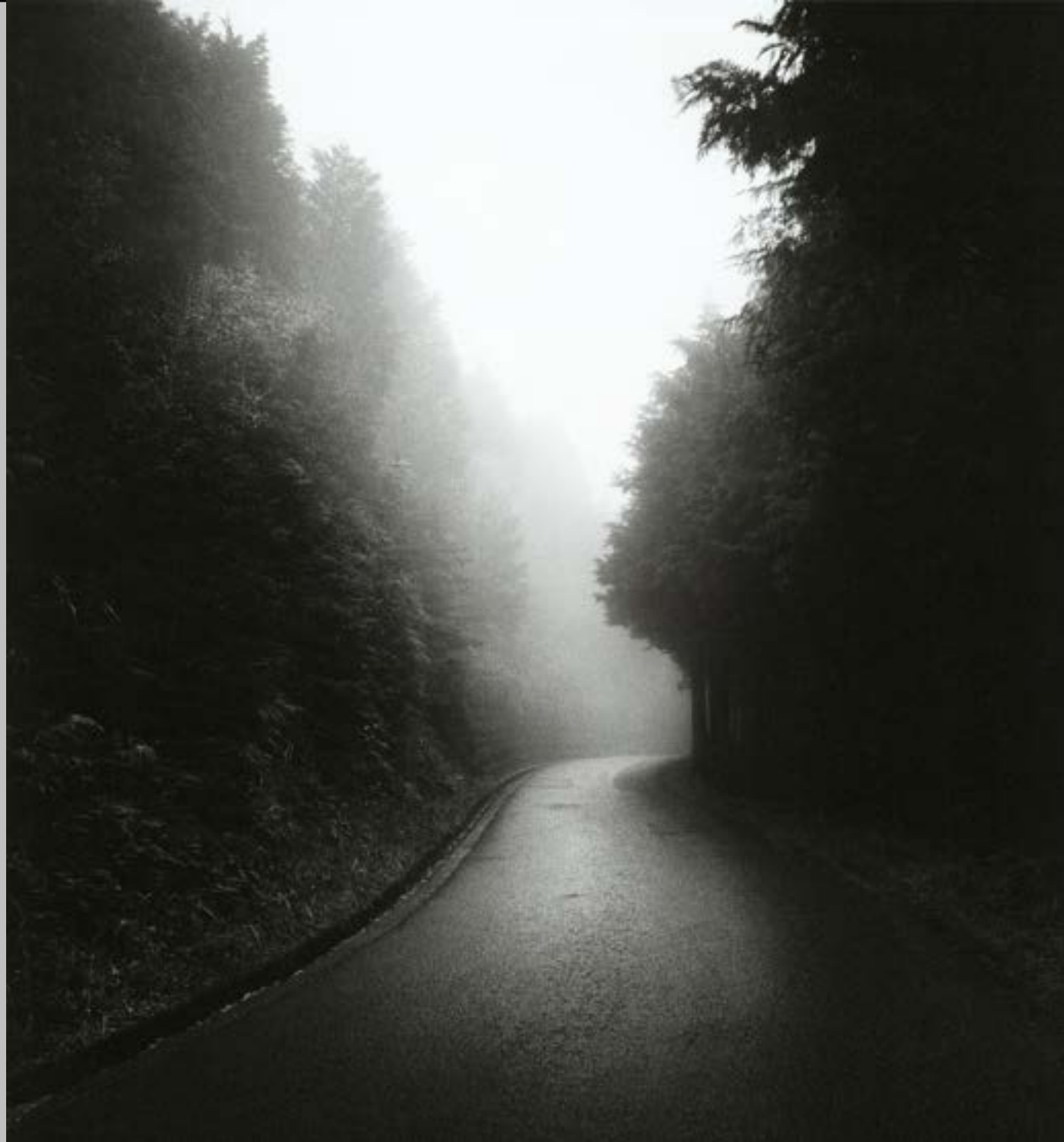
Prior to this year I probably would have contented myself with taking relatively ill thought through snapshots at this location, but upon first arriving post-lockdown I realised that to really make the most of this area, I would have to work hard. This is an attitude I have tried to adopt consistently throughout these past twelve months and I am a much more satisfied photographer for it. I am also a happier one too, as knowing that I can return over and over again to the same spot much reduces the pressure to get images I am pleased with. I know I still have much to learn and many improvements to make. Perhaps in five years, I will look back on the photos I have submitted here and cringe. But for now, they represent where I am as a landscape photographer.

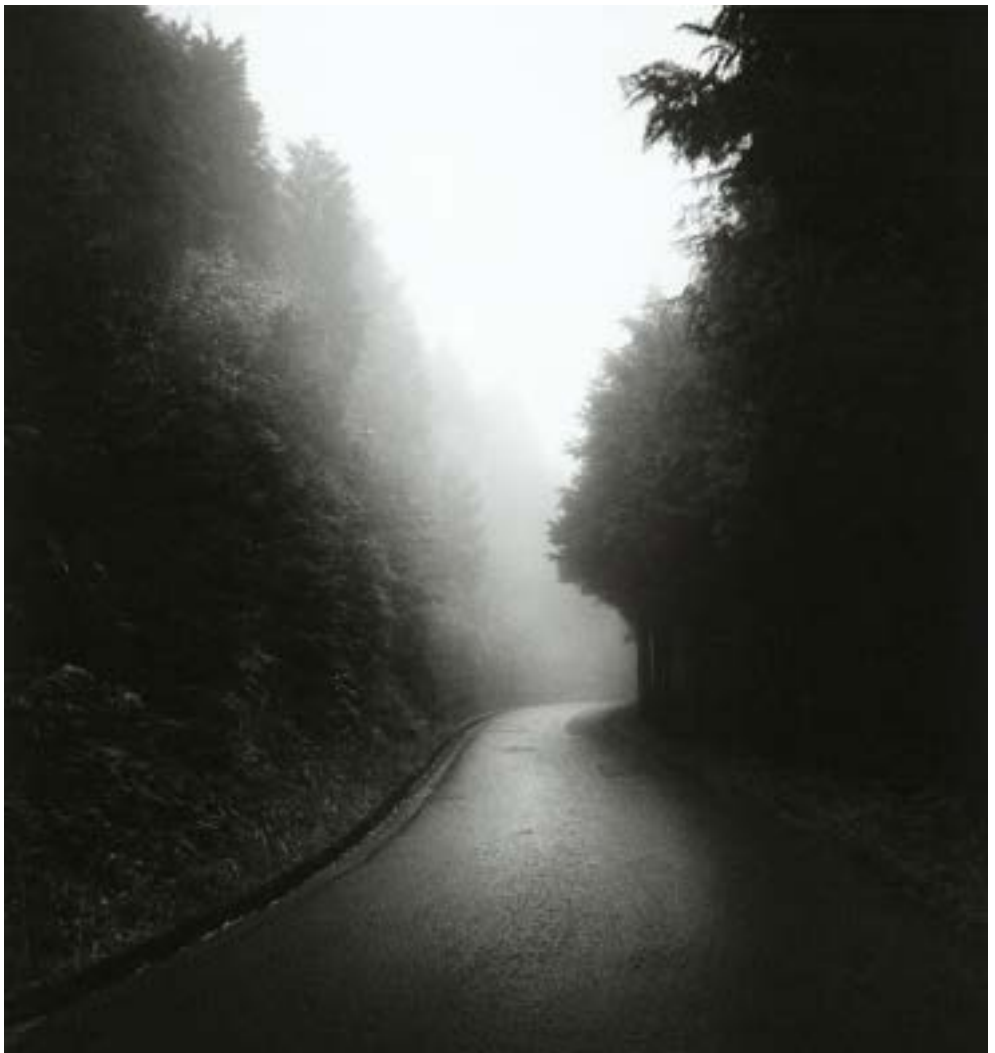
Endframe

‘Pilgrim Path, 2003’ by Michael Kenna

Cody Schultz discusses one of his favourite images

As I sit here, beginning to type out this essay, I look at the only coffee table photography book of Michael Kenna’s which I own: Forms of Japan. This collection of over 300 of Kenna’s photographs revolves around his work done throughout the years whilst in Japan. Included within the book are some of his most well-known and respected pieces he has ever created. It also just so happens to be the book that had introduced me to the intimacy, the delicacy, of his moody works. Though I had heard of him beforehand - being a black and white landscape photographer myself, it is rather difficult not to - my appreciation for his work was not as strong as it currently stands until I began flipping through this collection.





'Pilgrim Path, 2003' by Michael Kenna

Due to the bulk of this book, it had taken me a solid week to flip through each of the pages, reading the introductions to each of the sections and the beautiful haikus which accompanied each photograph. The photographs which captured me the strongest were documented through the use of a sticky note, marking the pages for future reference, for future inspiration. When I arrived at page 166, however, I was taken aback. On the left-hand side of the spread stood a haiku by artist Matsuo Basho.

Look this way -

I, too, am lonely

Autumn dusk

Wow. Heart strings were tugged at immediately - and they still are. The connection I had with that simple poem was immediate. Never before had I felt what I feel when reading such a piece of writing.

Then, I looked at the photograph on the right-hand side of the spread. The deep, dark forested sides of the piece - both on left and right - are contrasted by the bright white sky and muted grey road. My eyes immediately are drawn into the photograph, the variety of contrast levels imploring me to explore the various aspects of the photograph. I imagine myself there, standing where Kenna had stood to make this photograph. I imagine myself deafened by the silence of these dark woods; yet the silence beckons for me, asks me to continue walking along the road, the pathway, toward the light and beyond. Behind me, I dare not look, for there is nothing but darkness, evidenced by the creeping blacks on the lower portion of the frame. It appears as though the forest is taking over the frame with its darkness, the brightness just barely clinging on.

It is the intimacy of this small piece that compels me to continue exploring the intricate details.

Even now, after over a year has passed since first witnessing Pilgrim Path, 2003, I cannot help but get lost within the frame. The details of the ferns, of the leaves on the trees; the patchwork on the road; the gentle gradation of tones from grey to pure white. These are all aspects of this piece which stand out to me as I continue to inspect it with each passing witness.

Michael Kenna's work has found itself inspiring me rather heavily: I had taken on the challenge of composing my photographs in the square format, as well as attempting to break my compositions down into the most minimalist they can be so as to better convey the message I wish to get across. There is still much to learn.

Cody Schultz

Although it was not until 2014 when I bought my first "professional" camera, I believe a part of me has always loved photography. I remember constantly taking pictures around the house, of my family, of our vacations, and especially of Jazmine, my family's dog. At first, I had thought that landscape photography was boring, not understanding why someone would want to wait hours on end in a single location, just to end up going home empty-handed. Yet in 2016, I found myself doing exactly that. I found myself going on long hikes with my girlfriend, sweating and panting as we walked up steep hills to various waterfalls, often coming home only to realize that none of the photographs I took were portfolio-worthy. The memories shared, however, made it so much more worthwhile than any photograph ever could. And that, I truly believe, is why landscape photography is so special.
codyschultz.com

on landscape

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