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"I get several photography magazines and **LensWork is the one I notice I most eagerly open.** You're doing good work." -- *Pat Breslin*

"Thanks for producing what is, in my opinion, **the only mag worth subscribing to.**" -- *Rob*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Two New Folios – Ryujie, Tatiana Palnitska and New Barnbaum DVD!



LENSWORK

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

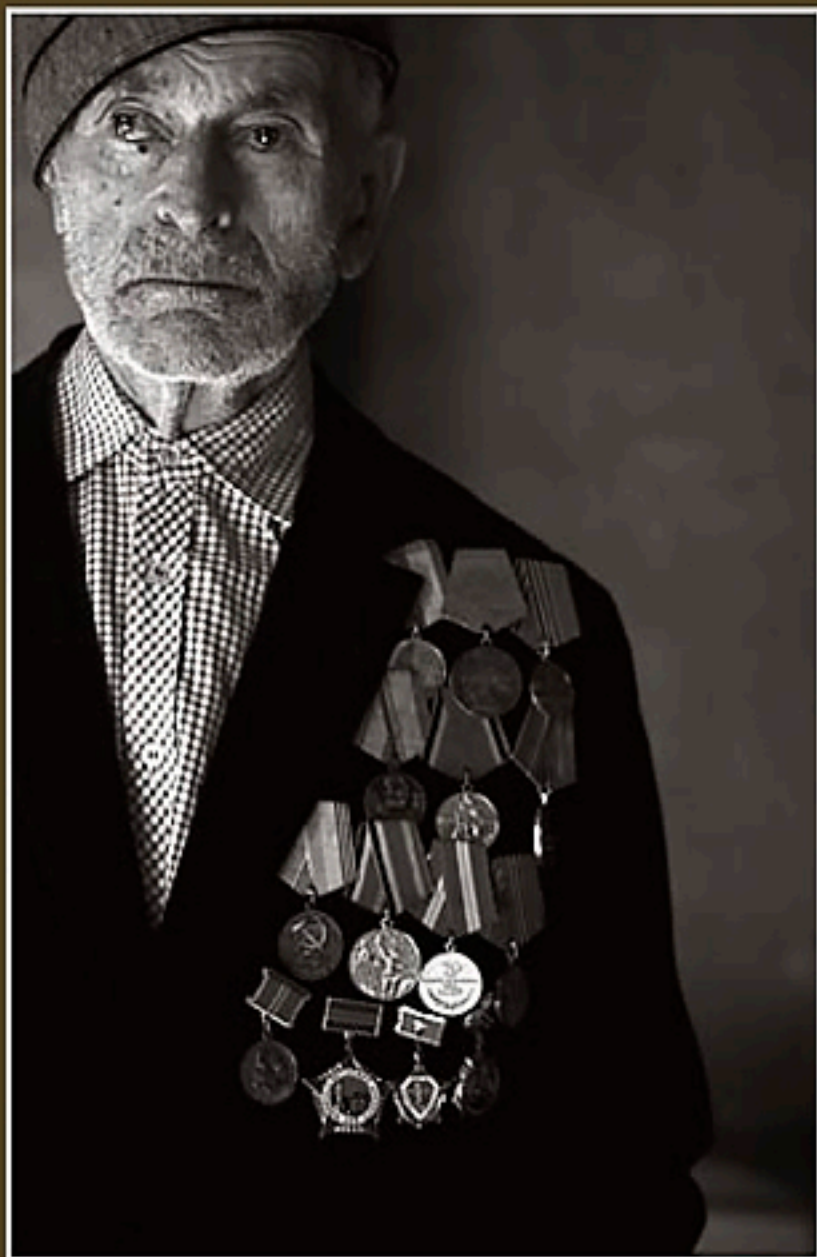
No. 53 Jun • Jul 2004

Article
Katharine Thayer

Interview
Neil Folberg

Portfolios
Andrew Beckham
Neil Folberg
Aaron Huey

EndNotes
by **Bill Jay**



LENSWORK

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JUN — JUL
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Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

Editors
Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

Article by
Katharine Thayer

Interview with
Neil Folberg

Portfolios by
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Gelatin Silver Folios, 10 images

Tatiana Palnitska



Ryuijie

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



People Are Not Faces

I remember a book that was published several years ago titled *American Faces*, by a photographer whose name I have now forgotten. The book was a moderately priced photography book that contained tightly composed head and shoulder photographs of Americans from all walks of life. Each of these people had been center-positioned against a basic white backdrop and instructed to look squarely into the camera lens. The photographs recorded what the subjects looked like and just a tiny bit of their clothing, hats, jewelry or other distinguishing characteristics, somewhat reminiscent of Richard Avedon's book, *The American West*. In *American Faces*, however, each face consumed almost the entire page. There were no captions, no explanations, no names, no locations, no occupations, in fact, no other information associated with each photograph at all – just a face staring back at me from the pages.

What struck me as I viewed this book was how *uninteresting* it was. As I flipped page after page, I saw faces that were no different from the faces I see everyday in life. Without knowing who these people were, I found myself asking questions:

Why should I care to look at these faces? Why did the photographer think I should? Did I miss something of importance in this work? Or, was there nothing there to miss? Why did the photographer, publisher and bookseller invest their money, time and energy into this mundane project?

It might be that *American Faces* was a “conceptual project.” It might be that the photographer intended *on purpose* to present these faces with no explanations or additional information whatsoever for some unknowable reason. If there was a “message,” it was not explained. As I pondered my reactions, I found the *reasons* why I thought it so quite interesting.

It seems to me that without any exceptions, what makes a photograph of a stranger interesting is not what they look like, but rather that sense of humanity that makes them a unique individual. What they look like, of course, contributes to the communication of who they are, but in and of itself, a mere likeness is usually not enough to sustain a viewer's interest.

In order for a portrait of a stranger to be relevant, to be interesting, to be worth

looking at, we must become interested in who this person is and what it is about them that makes them worth noticing. It is not a stranger's *appearance* that makes them noteworthy but their *being* that does so. I think it was Paul Strand who said, "It is one thing to take a picture of a stranger. It is a much more difficult thing to make a portrait of a stranger whom the viewer will *care* about." I should want to know what *they* care about, who they are in relationship to the world around them, and other things that make them a unique individual. Such information is presented to us in a photograph not merely in skin or an expression. It is also in their surroundings, their clothing, and in the other symbols of their existence that communicate to us knowledge of this person beyond their mere surface appearance. If a portrait is only what they look like, I am left with all data and no questions. With the best portraits I always find I want to know more, learn more, look again, and am left somewhat wanting.

Photography, compared to other art forms, is uniquely bound to the instant. It is *still* photography. It is the intersection at a specific time and place between two lives – the life of the photographer and the life of the subject. The photographic process is bound by this restriction, but the photographer is not.

This can be clearly illustrated by consid-

ering the family portrait as a personal memento as compared to the artistic portrait as a creative work. The family portrait is intended, and in fact is *judged* on its ability to present the likeness of the individuals photographed and to preserve that moment in time. The creative portrait must go beyond this. To present *meaning* is a much more difficult and lofty goal than to present mere likeness.

Photographers dislike acknowledging the truth of this built-in limitation of the craft. It is often said that a photograph that needs a caption is an inferior photograph. It is simply not true. I remember first seeing Eugene Smith's famous photograph of the bathing mother and child in Minamata, Japan. I remember how my pathos changed to anger when I read the caption that related the mercurial poisoning that caused the child's deformities. Was it an inferior photograph because I did not know the cause of the scene? Was it a better photograph once I did?

Photographers often resist the use, particularly in book form, of captions and other uses of text. In doing so, they eliminate that which might broaden our understanding of the individual so the portrait of their appearance is more meaningful. For example, show me a picture of a rough looking young man with a caption "Unemployed" and I will be likely to interpret that person's life in a consider-

ably different light than if it was accompanied by the caption “Mass murderer.”

I’ve discussed the use of text in greater length in other articles. The point for this discussion is not text, but *story*. Every person is a history, a drama, a campaign of success and failure, an accumulation of trials and solutions, ignorance and innocence, loss and gain, love and loneliness. This is true for *every person* – including the photographer and the viewer. What makes a portrait interesting is our ability to relate, our ability to understand and share. If we have nothing in common with the subject, we have nothing in common with the photograph and little interest in it. Gene Smith’s photograph is so powerful because we can relate to it – either as parents or the children of our own parents. We all know the fear and instinct of caring. We know the trials of life, and that we all suffer and strive to triumph over it. His is not a photograph of what someone looks like, but rather what someone’s *life* is like – which makes it a *great* photograph.

It’s true that to present meaning in a still photograph is a difficult and ultimately an incomplete compromise of the subject’s story. One simply cannot use photographic media to fully describe or relate all that

there is to know about something as complex as a human being. The same could be said of writing, sculpting, film, storytelling or any of the other “relating” arts. This does not mean that the artist’s efforts are not worth pursuing.

A great portrait may be an incomplete story, but even a partial story can be important and moving. What is most encouraging about this line of thought is how simple it is to make a creative portrait that interests. The first rule is to simply listen and learn. I would contend that there is no such thing as an uninteresting person anywhere on the planet. Everyone has a story to tell; everyone *is* a story to tell. And the role of the photographer in the making of a portrait is to listen and observe, feel and absorb, to take the time to learn that story before ever unpacking the camera. Caring comes before you can capture their story on film. In this way of thinking, to make a portrait is to be a blend of translator and storyteller – not a bad role for someone with a camera. As a friend of mine once advised, the essence of being an artist is “Do not speak until spoken *through*.”



Questions from the Whirlwind:

TEMPLES AND MONUMENTS



by

Andrew Beckham

Andrew Beckham



Domed Ceiling, Church of The Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, Israel

EMBRACING BEAUTY

The Post-Postmodern Pictorialist Landscape Photograph

by

Katharine Thayer

I can hear the guffaws already, knowing well that to speak in defense of the pictorialist landscape is to risk being laughed at, or simply ignored. Conventional wisdom says that the pictorialist landscape is as outdated as the bustle; that everything that could be said about nature has already been said; that romanticism, as a form of idealism, is based on outdated and discredited assumptions about truth and reality; that emotions like affection and reverence for nature, or for anything else, are ludicrous in the ironic postmodern age.

Much of this conventional wisdom is itself based on faulty assumptions, misconceptions, and outright antipathy to and alienation from nature, maybe even from life and love as well, but it has served to maintain the dominance of a particular ideology of landscape photography for decades. I'll address some of these misconceptions in more detail, but first, the good news:

The good news is that in spite of the efforts of those who consider themselves the arbiters of what is acceptable in art to keep them out, beauty is back, landscape is back, romanticism is even back. Photographic artists are rediscovering historical photographic processes and revisiting the landscape with eyes newly attuned to beauty and celebration of nature.

Pictorialism has come to mean many different things, so before further defending the pictorial landscape, I should say what I mean by it. A pictorial photograph is a photograph made with the intention of creating a work of art, or to express the emotional reaction of the photographer to what he or she saw, rather than simply to document the existence and superficial appearance of an object, scene, or person. In pictorial photography, the picture is an object in itself that, while

CHILDREN OF THE SUN



by

aaron huey

Aaron Huey



Nino Ratiani gets a haircut from his mother in their home in the village of Usghuli.

INTERVIEW WITH NEIL FOLBERG

Brooks Jensen: *Celestial Nights*, published by Aperture, is your latest book and is a very interesting body of work – photographs of the pristine night sky with moonlit and starlit landscapes. I want to begin our conversation with a quote from the book that I thought was a good description of the work. It says: “The land and the skies are offered to the viewer as mystical points of entry and departure.” These photographs of night skies and night landscapes do seem to deeply touch the soul. How did this process get started for you?

Neil Folberg: I think I’ve always been interested in astronomy in a sort of a general way. But, I think the most *personal* encounter is the one that you have when you’re sitting underneath the dark skies in a wonderful place. There you have a chance to experience and feel exactly what it *means*. For me, that experience took place in Sinai. I spent several years working there on daytime landscape photographs shortly after I came to Israel. I can’t even begin to guess how many nights I spent camped in this magnificent, remote desert – maybe three hundred nights, or something like that.

CELESTIAL NIGHTS

Visions of an Ancient Land



by

Neil Folberg

Neil Folberg



Comet Hale-Bopp, 1997

The LensWork Folios



The Tulip

FRAGMENTS OF TIME

Ryuijie

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Bruce Barnbaum
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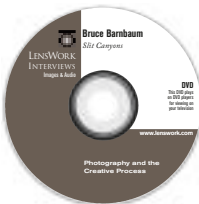
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Photography and the Creative Process

LENSWORK INTERVIEWS



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Bruce Barnbaum *Slit Canyons*

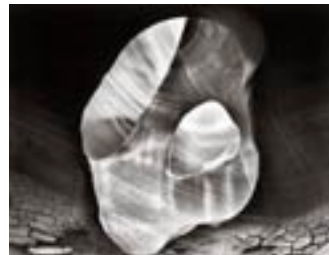
“As I walked through that first canyon, I was just mesmerized by what I was seeing. From the very first I felt like I wasn’t in a canyon; I was in a *force field*. Forces have no orientation – there is no up or down. There is only movement. My photographs *in* the slit canyons were never meant to be photographs *of* the slit canyons. They are intended to be analogies of the forces in nature.”

Bruce Barnbaum

One of the great moments in any photographer’s life is when they discover a subject that has never been previously photographed as an object of a fine art photograph. Bruce Barnbaum’s exploration of the desert Southwest led him to the spectacular and other-worldly “slit canyons” where he discovered a new photographic subject that has now become one of the icons of contemporary landscape photography. Since his discovery, literally thousands of photographers have traced Barnbaum’s path, but no one has photographed them so well.



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