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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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ADD TO CART

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

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

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

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

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

New book on photography and the creative life by Brooks Jensen!



LENSWORK

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

No. 56 Dec 04 - Jan 05

Interview

Linda Butler

Article

Frank Van Riper

Portfolios

Linda Butler

Olivier Mériel

Robert Weingarten

EndNotes

by **Bill Jay**



LENSWORK

56

DEC — JAN
2004 / 5

Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

Editors

Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

Article by

Frank Van Riper

Interview with

Linda Butler

Portfolios by

Linda Butler

Olivier Mériel

Robert Weingarten

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Why Make Art?

Life is complicated, busy, challenging, difficult. In daily life there is enough seriousness going on that artmaking can seem like a trivial pursuit, a discretionary expenditure of time for the idle and the self-indulgent. But this is an oversimplification of what artmaking is really all about.

In this time of war and political strife, in the age of AIDS and global warming, I was recently challenged by a political activist to “get serious and get engaged” in the meaningful things of life. She proposed that my indulgence in artwork was somehow flitting away the valuable hours of my life when I could be doing something that made a difference. The structure of her criticism brought into focus the fact that so many people do not understand the role of art in the world. In a pragmatic society it's too easy to think of art as a game, or perhaps an entertainment. It is, or at least can be, so much more than that.

Communication

The fundamental reality of life is that *life is relationship* – relationships with our families, our friends, our communities,

our world, our history, our ethics and morals, our sense of destiny, and our place in the universe. Artmaking is an extension of this fundamental communication.

At its most simplistic, artmaking is communication with the viewers who will look at the fruits of our efforts. But in some regards this is the least important form of communication that takes place as a result of having made art. There is a certain egocentricity in craving an audience for one's art – an egocentricity that can be unhealthy if its primary motivation is limited to “look at me.” If the connection with viewers is based on a more healthy approach about sharing, I think an audience can be important. But, fundamentally, as so many of us have discovered and admitted long ago, having an audience for our work is the dessert of artmaking, not the primary motivation.

Of more importance to artmaking is our communication with artists from the past – our response to the universal questions of human existence that all artists throughout time have asked and answered in their artmaking. We pick up the thread of those who have gone before us and, in

our turn, add our responses to life and communicate these through our artwork to artists in the future. It's this relationship both backward and forward in time that makes artmaking important. It's not mere idle speculation; it is our fundamental response to life that connects us with every other human both in history and in the future. We may not be able to speak directly to those in different times, but we can communicate through our artwork in ways that make our responses alive.

And there is another form of communication that, I believe, is even more important than these – and that is the communication with our deeper self. It is human nature to think all day, every day, even in our dreams. The mind is a constantly running dialogue on life. But the constant chatter that fills in our normal waking consciousness is not our only self. The subconscious bubbles up in dreams. Our soul shows itself in our fundamental perceptions and assumptions about life. Every one of us is the accumulation of our years of learning and trained behavior that filter all of our perceptions and thoughts and reactions to all that parades before us in daily life. There is a deeper self in every one of us that lies behind the mask of our public face. Our deepest thoughts, our innermost feelings, our subconscious reactions may not be visible, may not be easily accessible, but they are a part of us nonetheless. Artmaking is one way to

communicate with this deepest self and see what it is that lies behind the curtain of our everyday existence. It is a spiritual pursuit; it is a personal pursuit; it is a meaningful pursuit for each and every one of us.

Limitations

The moment we try to make art we confront in harsh realities our own limitations. Satisfaction in artmaking is both fleeting and a rare commodity. More frequently, the idealized artwork that we visualize in our mind's creative eye fails and suffers in the translation to molecules and reality. None of us are as talented as we would like to be. None of us are as creative as we would fantasize ourselves to be. The confrontations – the *battle* – is one of the greatest reasons to be an artist. It is humbling; it is motivating; in its frustration it is challenging. One of the great purposes of life is to try, as best we can, to exceed our own limitations. It is human nature to strive for that which we can reach. It is human nature to pursue that which cannot be done. As individuals we strive to do that which is beyond our capabilities. This is the heart of artmaking – especially. To play a composition on the piano that is beyond our fingers; to paint color or reality that is beyond pigment; to express in words that which cannot be spoken; to photograph that which cannot be seen – these are the fundamental wings on which art flies that makes our work

both inspiring and worthy of achievement. If it's easy, it's not quite art, which is why photography has often struggled to be accepted as a sophisticated and legitimate art form. It does appear to be so until one picks up the camera and tries to use it to express a personal statement. No one appreciates photography quite like another photographer because other photographers are best equipped to appreciate the achievement of a stunning photograph.

Perceptive magnification

In the biological sense, our physical senses exist for only two purposes: fight or flight. We are constantly on the lookout for danger or opportunity. As human animals, our ability to scan the environment is far more important than our ability to see the environment in the artistic sense. And this is one of the great reasons to make art. So much of life is involved in scanning, quickly looking and assessing a situation for its danger or opportunity. But, artmaking is not like this at all. The artist doesn't scan; they look deeply. Watch a painter or someone drawing with pen and ink. Then look, and look again. They search for details and relationships. They look at the same area of the composition a hundred times until they see it precisely. It is this magnification in the perception of detail, in the perception of relationships, that differentiates normal consciousness from the seeing used in artmaking. Scanning looks for big

things; artmaking is minutia. Scanning is instantaneous; the seeing in artmaking is extended in time. By changing one's perceptive magnification in scale, in detail, in time, the world becomes a different place than the threat we live in on a daily basis. Artists soak up what is before them whereas everyday consciousness tends to bounce off of it. In everyday consciousness a stoplight is just red; in artistic consciousness that red is a variety of subtle reddish shades, shadows and highlights, and in it we see far more than a mere traffic commandment. It is a cliché in art to discuss the fascination of watching, for hours, a spider build its web. We've all done it. But this is a fundamentally different relationship to life than that of the gardener for whom the spider might merely be a pest. Audubon saw birds differently than most of us because he painted them. Weston saw his vegetables differently because he photographed them. It is far too common and erroneous an assumption that artists make art because they see the world differently. I think this is backwards: They see the world differently because they are artists. We can, too.

An Excuse

Peer pressure is a powerful thing. Genetically, biologically, we are herd animals. There is safety in numbers and it's far easier to do what everyone else does. So, artmaking becomes one of the handiest excuses to break from the pack. An artist

can linger over a sunset for hours, with permission, because they're doing the important work of making art. Artmaking is a culturally acceptable form of stepping outside of time and normal comprehension. If you're a "normal person" to sit and intently watch the clouds come and go for hours at a time would seem to be an idle waste of time. But if you're an artist, you can employ the excuse that you are waiting to see how the clouds change and how the light affects the landscape differently. People will smile at you and grant you that permission. I remember once photographing a museum of Chinese culture and history in a small town in eastern Oregon where tourists could learn about the Chinese laborers of the nineteenth century. I found it fascinating and wanted to photograph there. By making my interests known, the museum director was more than willing to grant me full access behind the rope barriers to do as I pleased in the pursuit of art. I could stay, I could go, I could move things, I could change lights, because I was making artwork – and they were supportive. Being an artist has given me access to things, places, and people I would never have been able to explore had it not been for the excuse of artmaking.

Pursuit of perfection

Everyday life tends to be a pragmatic exercise. It's been said that "enough is as good as a feast" – which is true in every-

day life, but not when you're an artist. In everyday affairs "good enough for government work" is good enough, but in artmaking there is a different standard. Artmaking pursues excellence in quality regardless of time, regardless of money, regardless of effort. It is one of the few things in life that we do with this total disregard for economy. This is one of the reasons why artmaking and commerce are such uncomfortable bedfellows. What is the value of the piece of artwork in the market? No matter the answer, it's not likely to be commensurate with the value of that artwork to the artist who made it. To the artist, artwork is not simply a commodity; it is a manifestation of the artist's best and highest efforts, their noblest accomplishment in life. It is the pursuit of quality that makes artmaking so addictive in a world in which pragmatism is the rule.

I wish I had said these things when I was told to "get serious." I'll admit that instead I fumbled and hesitated because I'd never really thought about it before. I'd never been asked *why* I make artwork, or thought how important artmaking is in our imperfect world. Now that I have thought about it a bit, a more logical question would be: How could we possibly go through life *not* making art?



TESTIMONIAL TO THE AMISH



by

Robert Weingarten

Robert Weingarten

I was in New York for a gallery opening in April, 2001, when I decided to take an unscheduled road trip to Amish country – just 90 minutes away. Until then, much of my work was done in Europe, where the remarkably rich landscape is often touched by the hand of man – while being devoid of the clutter of modern life such as cars, signs and telephone lines. I was expecting to find this aesthetic amongst the Amish.

Shortly after I arrived, however, I realized there was something much more profound that I wanted to photograph. In the midst of our 21st century world, these people were living in a serene and separate way. The clock had been standing still for one hundred years, and I wanted to absorb and record the simplicity that stood in stark contrast to my experience of growing up in New York City. I had been working on this project for six months when the events of September 11th intensified that contrast; New York seemed a world apart from the quiet Amish lifestyle and bucolic countryside. They were clearly living in Another America. Perhaps it was their sense of innocence, or their grounding in faith and family that compelled me to know more about their lives. It was not possible to photograph this landscape without including the people whose lives were woven through hard work and simple play into its very soul. The two were inseparable.

There is an irony in the photographic technology used for this project, which took several years to complete. During the time I was producing this series my work migrated from analogue capture (Hasselblad and Nikon F5) and Iris printing, to digital capture (Canon 1DS 11.2 megapixel) and Epson prints. In a matter of years my entire photographic world had changed, but the Amish life stood constant and unaffected.

Artistically, the only vision that seemed appropriate for this project was to produce the work in black and white, then adjust the finished prints to have a platinum feel. Meanwhile, I was working on the color series titled *6:30am*, which had a completely different aesthetic sense. Fortunately, the new technologies that have emerged during the last decade have permitted me to move easily from black and white to color. I gave away my darkroom to charity some time ago, and in 2004 converted to all-digital capture. With the Epson printer I'm able to make museum prints for both projects. So, in my own way I am enjoying the beauty of simplification.



GETTING NOTICED

by

Frank Van Riper

For almost any artist, part of the satisfaction, the joy, the *thrill* of creating work is in letting others see and enjoy it. For the painter or photographer this can happen by having a piece on a gallery wall or similar public place; for a sculptor by having his or her work displayed in a grand indoor or outdoor art site; for a musician or dancer it can take the form of a public recital or performance.

Getting noticed is part of human nature. We all want to be noticed, and hopefully be appreciated. This is true in things as cosmic as relationships between people and cultures, or as personal as whether anyone is going to like your latest painting, picture or poem.

To those just starting out, getting artwork displayed is challenging enough. But once that challenge is met, the other more daunting job is to have someone – *anyone* – in the press review it. And here I use “the press” loosely, including everyone from the head art critic for the *New York Times*, to a freelance writer offering occasional restaurant and arts reviews, to a local weekly shopper.

I speak from a unique perspective. For more than 20 years I was a newspaper reporter and editor. Since 1982 I have been a professional photographer. Since 1992, I also have been the photography columnist of the *Washington Post*. Therefore I can say with assurance that, with some notable exceptions, there simply are precious few outlets that regularly review work by new or emerging artists in Washington, DC. Sad to say, the establishment press, including my

INLAND FROM NORMANDY



by

O. Mériel

Olivier Mériel

Now 60 years since the liberation of France by Allied and French Resistance forces, Mériel's images depict a luxuriant and peaceful landscape. Ten years before he was born, his parents' home on the Normandy beach was destroyed by Allied shelling. Now, he photographs French villages and shoreline under the unique atmospheric conditions that dominate Normandy and the English Channel. The area provides a wealth of dramatic and moody conditions which feed Mériel's appreciation of chiaroscuro – and at the same time create light that is very difficult to work with photographically.

Mériel observes that working with large format (mostly 11x14) “gave me a relationship to slowness, to solitude, and to silence.” In his work, which often employs long exposure times, he finds that the resulting “hyper-capture” records a reality that is actually surreal. Mériel has also learned to appreciate the magic of photographing into the sun, of working *with* rather than avoiding backlighting. “One must start by mastering a technique before one can make a work of art. I agree with Braque in his statement that ‘Art begins where technique ends.’” Mériel continues that “Art is above all a complexity, a complexity that one must be capable of making simple. For me, art has a relationship with the impossible. Art is almost impossible to make, as it confronts us so much with that which is complex and difficult.”

Work for the book, *Secrets du Pays d’Ouche*, was commissioned by the town of Conches en Ouche – which is located inland between Paris and the coast. Mériel is currently working on a large commission from the Coastal Conservancy that encompasses the entire Normandy coast – from Mont Saint Michel to le Havre. Mériel was a natural for the project, as the rugged Atlantic coastline has been his lifelong home. “Living at the seashore since birth has prepared me. I have been initiated into two worlds; that of the land and that of the sea.” Mériel worked on the project from January 2003 through the spring of 2004, but will continue the project for a four-year period. This feature includes images from both projects.



INTERVIEW WITH LINDA BUTLER

Brooks Jensen: Now that you've just completed your latest book, *Yangtze Remembered: The River Beneath the Lake*, I'd like to learn some details about the four years of work you've put into this project.

Linda Butler: I think of it as a portrait of the Yangtze River before, during, and after the Three Gorges Dam project. It's not so much about the dam itself – there are only a few photographs of the dam in the whole book. The dam began to be built in 1994 by the Chinese government over a lot of objections from environmentalists around the world. It's being made in two stages: the first stage opened in 2003, and the next stage is going to be completed in 2009. When it's finished it'll be the largest concrete dam in the world. It'll create a lake that's as big as the distance from Los Angeles to San Francisco – 360 miles. There are an amazing number of people who live along the river. About 1.3 million people are being displaced by the project. Its purpose is to reduce problems with flooding on the Yangtze River, and to provide cleaner energy – particularly to some of the developing regions in China in the south – and to improve navigation.

YANGTZE REMEMBERED

The River Beneath the Lake



by

Linda Butler

Linda Butler

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published by Stanford University Press; 204pp, 108 duotone reproductions, \$65.
To order signed books please call photoeye 1-800-227-6941
For information about 8 special edition prints go to www.LindaButlerphoto.com
To contact Linda directly, e-mail LBphoto@aol.com



Wu Gorge Upstream, Beishi, 2003

The stone slabs in the foreground were part of an ancient trail used by villagers and trackers to walk from the village of Beishi upstream to Quingshi, about five miles away. To complete this path hundreds of feet above the river, men cut a notch six feet tall and four feet wide into the face of the cliff in the background. Farmers cut down small tangerine trees (stumps at right) before the inundation.

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