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Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

QUARTERLY

Essays

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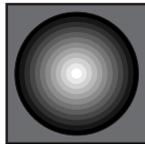
Portfolios

André Kertész
Paula Chamlee
Paul Kenny



LENSWORK

Q U A R T E R L Y



Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

No. 23

Nov 98 - Jan 99

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- The Editor's Corner

For a detailed listing
and preview
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

9

Editor's Comments

Fine art photographs at real people prices?

Our editor announces The *LensWork Special Editions Print Collection* — fine art prints from digital negatives! What does this mean? For photographers: *Freedom and income*. For art buyers: *Access and affordability*. And for galleries: *Increased value of original art*. With everyone a winner — it's impossible to contain our excitement!

17

Portfolio : Paula Chamlee

High Plains Farm

31

Robert Gurbo

André Kertész: Lost in America

Gurbo traces the complex and fascinating photographic and personal history of “the father of photojournalism” through a roller-coaster photographic career that crossed two continents and spanned 73 of Kertész’s 91 years. A passionate man with the fullness of life’s experiences, Kertész worked for over 70 years, “making images which often bypass the brain only to be delivered directly to the soul.”

45

Portfolio : André Kertész

Lost in America

65

Chara M. Curtis

Central to The Process: Passion

Once again, Curtis shares her keen insight and ability to describe the elusive. This time, she sets out to persuade us that *passion* — the very fuel that drives much of our art — isn’t found in the act of *controlling*, but rather in the act of *letting go*.

69

Portfolio : Paul Kenny

A Portfolio

81

Brooks Jensen

What It Means To Be An Artist

Somewhere between fun-loving cynicism and brutal realism, Jensen enjoys tearing the veil of naiveté from would-be artists’ eyes. “Here, presented for the first time on paper, are the things you should know before throwing away your life on an art career.”



EDITOR'S COMMENTS



The LensWork Special Editions Print Collection

Fine Art Photographs at Real People Prices

Before I even begin this article I need to make sure it is quite clear what this article is about. I am about to launch into a serious review of the gallery *system*. I am not, however — and I cannot stress this enough — attacking gallery *owners*. They are as powerless to change **the system** as photographers are, and should be recognized as such. I respect what galleries do and have done for photography too much to criticize them for what they do well.

Now, having said that, let me state that the system of gallery sales of photographic artwork that we currently have makes very little sense — with the exception of a very few photographers and collectors.

I say this simply because — as I'll show in this article — it is failing most consumers, failing almost all photographic artists, and even failing many of the gallery owners themselves (witness how many of them disappear as business failures). Let me state again, *there is no one to blame* — it's just the inheritance of a system that was originally designed for other art media and other technological times. The disservice that is perpetuated with this outmoded gallery system is hurting photography, hurting new photographers, limiting the availability of new and exciting work, and serving only a very small and extremely elite group of lucky artists and elite-positioned entrepreneurs.

Why do I say this? Look at the realities of money. Consider the typical lover of photography after attending a gallery opening. They find an interesting piece of photographic work they lust after and would like to own. Obviously, there are a number of people who *can* cough up \$600 to \$2,500 for a photographic print because a number of them *do*. But for the vast majority of people who would love to own a photograph, even a paltry \$300 is a tough nut to crack, in light of mortgage payments, car loans, the kid's dental braces, and groceries. Having to pay \$600 to \$2,500 for a photograph is simply out of the question.

The consumer gets aced-out because the *prices* are too high. The gallery gets aced-out because their *expenses* are too high. The photographer gets aced-out because breaking into the system is so hard. So why does this system even exist?

Simply put, the reason photographers and gallery owners play this difficult game — and as far as that goes, most consumers, too — is because they're all *gambling in the photographic lottery*. Everybody wants to buy the next "future superstar's" photograph for \$600 and watch it escalate to \$10,000 at a Sotheby's auction. In other words, you're not supposed to buy this

photographer's work because you *like* it, want to own it and hang it on your wall to enjoy it; you're supposed to buy it because it's a better investment than soy beans or pork futures.

How to Play the Game to Win, Sort of

Which brings me to the stupidest part of this game of all. Without a doubt, the best thing you can do to enhance your status as a photographer worthy of investment, whose career is truly on solid financial grounds, is to *die*. Barring that, a press release that you're not feeling very well is the next best thing.

I can't help but finalize this train of thought with a difficult conclusion. The system doesn't need to be scrapped, because it *has* served so well the people it was intended to serve — the master photographers, the investor/collector, and the gallery owner who serves these two.

There's nothing wrong with the system; it's just not the right system for the consumer with a budget, established photographers who want to reach the widest possible audience, the new and mid-career photographers who want to develop an audience, or the publisher or gallery owner who wants to stick their financial neck out to support the work of

merit of a relatively unknown or only regionally-known photographer. And from that point of view, the gallery system is failing most photographers *and* their artwork.

An Alternative to The Gallery System

Ever since I started thinking about all of this, I've been bothered by it and the conclusions I came to. I've been bothered by it not because I think I was *wrong*, but because I didn't have any solutions or any alternatives for the system *or* for my own artwork.

Now, I do.

The Evolution Of A Technology

When I started publishing *LensWork Quarterly* in 1993, my involvement with the computer escalated dramatically. I learned Adobe Photoshop and the printing world, and slowly saw the possibility of a totally new way of making stunning photographic prints in the darkroom.

In 1996 I began experimenting in my personal photographic work with digitally created photographic negatives that could be contact-printed on regular gelatin silver, black & white photographic papers. My objective was to preserve the final look

and feel of a fine art silver photograph. I love the deep black densities that are possible with silver, and *impossible* with ink. I love the marvelous continuous tonalities of grays, and bright whites, found in original silver photographs.

It literally took me two years of experimenting, but at last I have succeeded. The contact prints made by my digital negatives are indistinguishable from the original prints I made from my camera negatives! The only way to tell the difference is with a powerful magnifying loop, where the digital nature of the contact negative can be seen under magnification. You'll have to see it to believe it.

The Genesis of the Idea

Not long after I started working with the technique in my personal work, I found myself asking a series of very interesting questions:

What if a complex set of dodging and burning, bleaching and spot-toning, fussing and fretting could be reduced to a straight print from a digital negative? Said another way, what if the creative act of the photographer needed to be performed only once on a master print that could be duplicated

easily and inexpensively, with no compromise in print quality? What if I applied this technique with other photographers to help them produce their images less expensively? What if photographers were freed from the drudgery of darkroom repetitions and could apply themselves to the creative process of photographing and printing original prints? What would this mean for selling their work? If creative minds had an outlet for their work that provided them cash flow, wouldn't they be liberated to concentrate more on the creative aspect of their work rather than the mere darkroom mechanics of reproduction?

This technical success in my personal photography had evolved into the potential for a totally new paradigm for the distribution of photographs. This line of thinking has been expanded and adapted into the *LensWork Special Editions Print Collection*.

What excites me the most is that this idea provides a practical solution to the problem I originally identified in my earlier criticisms of the gallery system. Applying my digital negative technique to the work of other photographers has allowed us to

create a new paradigm for photography that was not even *possible* just a few years ago.

Fine Art Photographs At Real People Prices

That the masters of photography have become collectible is wonderful for photography. But, in order for photography to be *vital* and *alive*, beginning and mid-career artists who are producing stunning work also need to be seen, appreciated, and *collected*. Established photographers need a way to make their work accessible to everyone. Here at LensWork, we believe that photography is not a pursuit limited to dead masters, or restricted to recognized images only. Nor should it be restricted only to consumers who can afford the prices required in the purchase of artist-made originals. We believe there is room for both kinds of photographs in the market.

Where galleries focus on master photographs, artist-made prints, and investment/collectors, the *LensWork Special Editions Prints* serves the needs of those who love photography, and new, emerging, and mid-career artists. The philosophy is based on the broadest possible distribution at modest prices rather than on limiting distribution through scarcity

and elite pricing. We can offer *LensWork Special Editions Print Collection* photographs at extremely affordable prices — \$39 to \$99 — for the person who wants to buy, own, and appreciate the look of fine art black and white photographs. These prices are possible because of the combination of LensWork’s world-wide audience and the efficiency of printing perfect prints easily from digital negatives. Prior to this new technology and today’s global communications such a paradigm was simply not possible.

The LensWork Special Editions Print Collection

The *LensWork Special Editions Print Collection* is comprised of photographs produced in direct cooperation with the photographer and printed to their specifications to match their original artist-made photographs. The *LensWork Special Editions Prints* are then signed by the photographer, assuring that each print is produced to their satisfaction.

Each photograph selected for the *LensWork Special Edition Prints Collection* is produced in a limited edition — not with the intention of creating a phony market value through forced scarcity — but rather to encourage photographers to produce more work, to encourage people to purchase a

broader assortment, and to foster the sense that photography is a growing, changing, living, organic process, both in the production and the marketing of fine art photographs.

Because the edition size is limited and prints may sell-out quickly, the catalog of *LensWork Special Edition Prints* will only be available at the LensWork Web site (www.lenswork.com). This catalog will be updated regularly to show the prints currently available. Because we anticipate the selection and availability to change regularly and rapidly, we will not print a paper catalog.

I cannot tell you how excited I am about this new paradigm for distributing the best photography has to offer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Galt", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Real People Prices

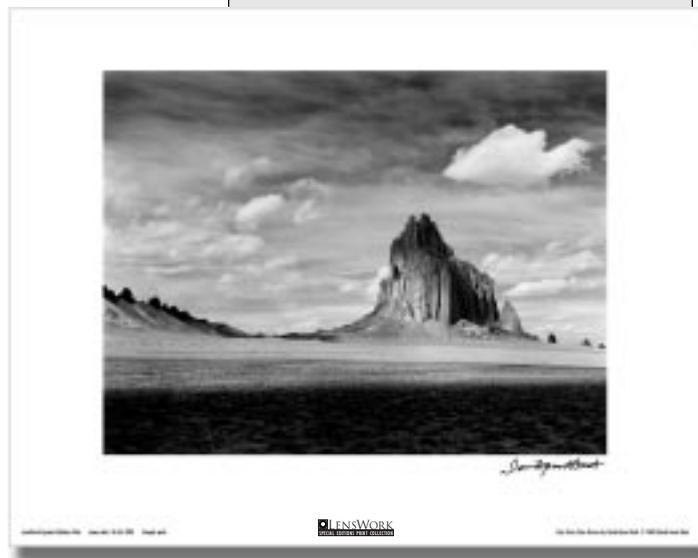
Each gelatin silver print in the Collection was made from a digital negative, scanned from the artist's original fine art photograph. Collection photographs are printed by hand on gelatin silver photographic paper, toned and archivally processed to the artist's specifications and approval. It is indistinguishable from the artist's original — unless you examine it with a strong magnifying glass. Each print bears the photographer's actual signature, and edition information.

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Sample print *Ship Rock, New Mexico, 1989*
by David Grant Best

HIGH PLAINS FARM

A Portfolio



by

Paula Chamlee

Paula Chamlee

From the book High Plains Farm by Paula Chamlee

ISBN 0-9605646-8-3

There is always that same feeling when I make the long drive into Texas, across the Panhandle, and am heading toward the home place — an exhilaration, a heightened energy that fills me with expectation and excitement. I become aware that my being is permeated with the feel and force of the wind, the smell of the soil, the blue of the sky.

The high plains of the Texas panhandle have lured many, but only the hardy have stayed. The winds can be fierce and unrelenting, the winters bitter, the rainfall scant, and the neighbors are often few and far between. The region attracts those who have a craving for self-sufficiency, love a challenge, or are just plain stubborn.

I left the farm to go to college less than a month after high school graduation — I couldn't wait to get out. Hungry for adventure and independence, I wanted to see the world and experience a broader life.

Although there have been yearly visits back to the farm over the thirty-three years since I moved away, only in recent years have I felt compelled to return there to photograph in depth. I wanted to photograph the farm while my parents are still active — while the extraordinary energy and spirit of their presence fills this home place.



ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ: LOST IN AMERICA

by

Robert Gurbo



André Kertész's (1894-1985) brilliant and innovative career in photography began in 1912 and spanned 73 years. This Hungarian born photographer's ability to construct lyrical images, infused with personal insight and wit, was present from the moment he picked up a camera in 1912. His early work from Hungary (1912-1925) and Paris (1925-1936) is defined by his ability to capture simple scenes of everyday life. His keen but subtle sense of timing and composition enabled him to create archetypal imagery with deep and emotional statements about the world around him. When he left Paris in 1936 he was considered to be a master photographer by his peers; today he is acknowledged as the father of contemporary photojournalism.

By the time André Kertész set foot on American soil he had already produced many of his trademark images, such as *Underwater Swimmer*, *Forced March to the Front*, *Chez Mondrian*, *Satiric Dancer*, and *Mondrian's Glasses and Pipe*. His photographs had been extensively reproduced in many European magazines, such as *Vu*, *Vogue*, and *Art et Médecine*. His first books, *Enfants* and *Paris vu par André Kertész*, had been met with success. His work was included in several exhibitions including, *Film and Foto*, and *Modern European Photography* at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York City. Even today his celebrated exhibit which opened in 1927 at the gallery Au Sacre du Printemps is considered to be a highlight of his career. He had

LOST IN AMERICA

A Portfolio



by

André Kertész
(1894 — 1985)

All images © Estate of André and Elizabeth Kertész



Lost Cloud, New York, 1937



New York, 1961

CENTRAL TO THE PROCESS: *PASSION*

by

Chara M. Curtis



There's something that can't be learned from attending schools, seminars or workshops, or from reading books and magazines. In fact, its flame is often doused by the ardent academic who approaches education as the goal rather than the means. Though it's the ultimate prerequisite for continued success, it doesn't enjoy the status of more mundane credentials. Maybe because it's feared. Maybe because it can't be measured by degree. Or maybe it's because we don't have to work for it; it comes only through being allowed. We can't wear it as a feather in our cap, but it's what puts wings on our heels. What I'm talking about is passion. Pure passion.

I've known a lot of people who have entered the field of artistic endeavor driven by passion. They have eagerly reached out to learn all they can learn about the tools and the crafting, only to lose their zeal. I've wondered why. What happens? I've been ready to assume it was one of those great mysteries of life, but

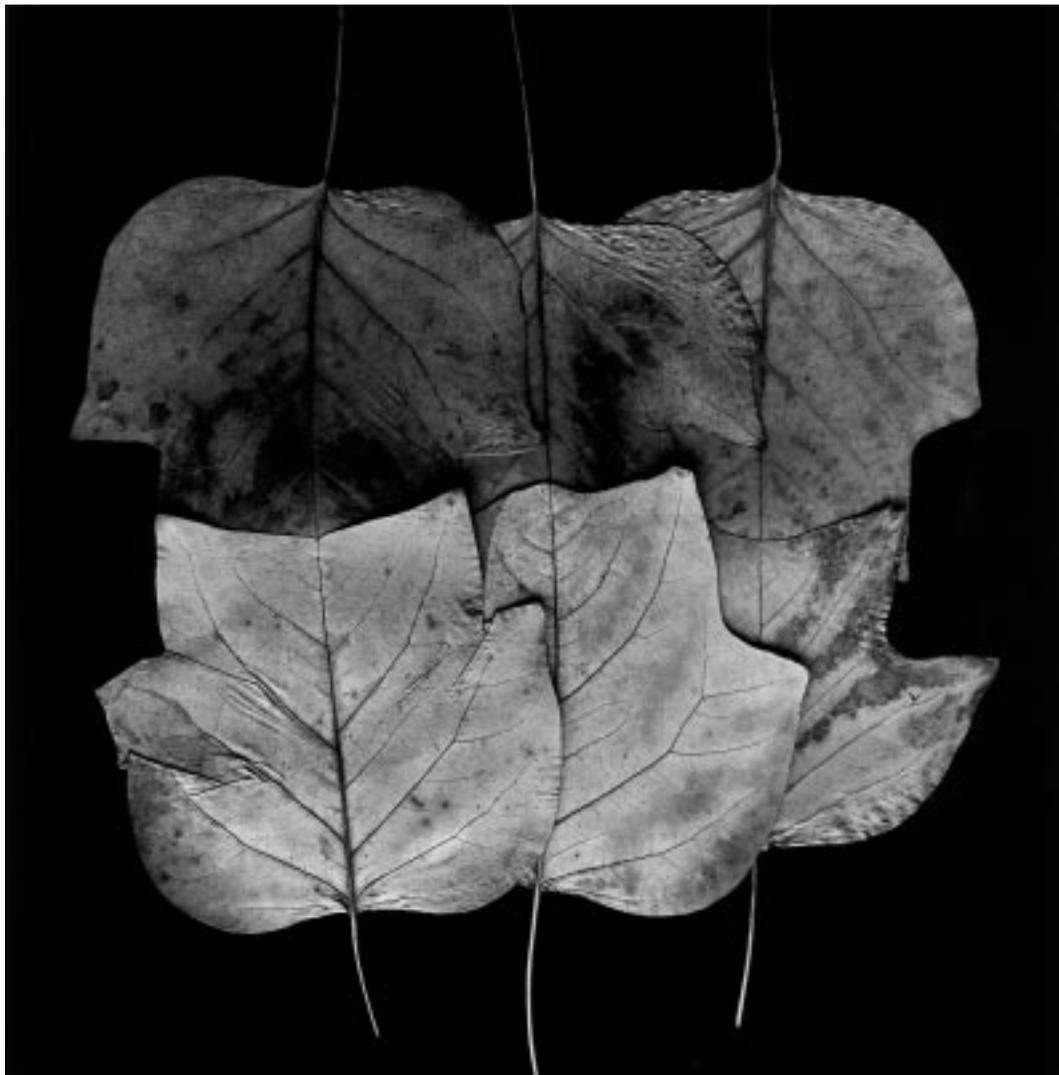
A PORTFOLIO



by

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Kenny". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Paul Kenny



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ARTIST

by

Brooks Jensen



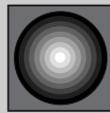
As an artist and the publisher of *LensWork Quarterly*, I occasionally am asked the most baffling question imaginable. Someone, usually a younger person, begins a conversation by expressing their enthusiasm for photographic art. They tell me about a few pieces of artwork that have “blown them away” and explain that they feel as though, in photography, they have found something they have searched for all their life. (I assume by this that I am supposed to be impressed by what an inconceivable long period that is when you are 16 or 18 or 22 years old.) They continue, explaining that they have a vision and that Art needs them and they need Art — they are called and must respond. I resist the temptation to roll on the floor with laughter. Instead I smile and ask them to continue. They tell me they have been studying the great masters of photography —like Nan Goldin and Herb Ritts — and after careful consideration they have decided to dedicated themselves to a career as a *photographic artist*. The problem is that they don’t quite know what that *is*. So, they come to me with a question like, “I want to be a photographic artist. What should I do?”

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