



LENSWORK

Photography and the Creative Process • Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

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Article

Robert Hecht

Interview

Ryuijie

Portfolios

Pamela Ellis Hawkes

Robert Hecht

Ryuijie

EndNotes

by Bill Jay



LENSWORK

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Photography and the Creative Process
Articles • Interviews • Portfolios

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Brooks Jensen
Maureen Gallagher

In this issue

Article by

Robert Hecht

Interview with

Ryuijie

Portfolios by

Pamela Ellis Hawkes

Robert Hecht

Ryuijie

EndNotes by **Bill Jay**

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The masters more than likely related to their subject matter intimately and profoundly. Yet many of us attempt to copy their *subject matter* rather than their *feelings* for the subject matter. For Hecht, emulation gave way to emerging individuality in the simplicity of his kitchen. (Related portfolio starts on page 37.)

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS



The Importance of Structure

In another article I've talked about my 100 prints project and the lessons I learned when I dedicated myself to produce 100 finished mounted photographs in six short weeks. One of the lessons I learned in that project was the importance of *structure*. In this article, I'm going to expand on that theme.

When I began the 100 prints project, one of the first things I realized was that I would need to restrict some of the variables that were involved in the production of each individual image. For example, what size should each image be? What paper should I use for each image? What toning was appropriate for that image? By considering all of these questions on each individual image, I quickly recognized that the final style of the project would be discontinuous and not hold together as a unified body of work. I then decided to limit those variables, and I did so by printing each image to approximately the same size, on the same paper, with the same toning, and mounted the same way. Once I had made *that* decision, production of the body of work became considerably easier, and, of course,

the finished prints were similar enough to be exhibited as a unified body of work.

Writing about this now makes this decision seem easy, almost flippant. It was not. In fact, I sweated bullets over these decisions because I knew that they were the foundation against which the entire structure of the project depended. The obvious construction analogy is not only useful but it is quite accurate; *Without a good solid structural foundation, a building collapses*. I believe the same can be said about a body of work, and even about an artist's career.

It's the weekend, and it's time to make art. Don't laugh, this is a common scenario for most art-makers. So what are you going to do with your art-making time this weekend? Far too often the answer is "start." Photographers head to the field or studio with camera in hand, or perhaps into the darkroom with new negatives to print. Painters gather materials, stretch canvas, and start looking for something to paint. It's the same for all artists, writers, and creative types. Most of the time we start with a lengthy session of cleaning, or-

ganizing, preparing, and general fussing about. Although this is a manifestation of creative procrastination, at least it can be said that we start with *something* creative.

Eventually some muse speaks, however softly and impotently. A flurry of art making is engaged, time runs out, and Monday we're back at work. Next weekend, same program. Even with experienced and professional art-makers, I've found this to be a common frustration.

Having struggled with this for years, interspersed with occasional bursts of productive creativity, I've discovered a clue that has demonstrated a pattern that I've found useful in a my own art-making. First person experiential advice often runs the risk of being uselessly biased. This methodology may say more about *me* than it says about art-making, but if it's useful, it may be worth sharing.

Plainly speaking, I don't do well without structure. When I drive, I prefer lines on the road; when writing, I keep a dictionary handy; I tend to read instruction manuals; I'm confused by a new idea until I see the pattern in which it fits. Structure is also useful in my photography. I can be much more productive when I define a project and then set about the task of executing it. When the definition is missing, the

execution tends to be random, unfinished, inconsistent, and mostly theoretical.

I suppose I wish I was more free-flowing, more spontaneous. That I am *not* is plain to all who know me. To ignore this would simply complicate my work. One of the keys to success is to frankly face our limitations and work within them. As the Army slogan says, "Be all you *can* be." It does not say "Be that which it is *impossible* for you to be."

So, I think in terms of projects. A project might explore a specific idea, a photographic concept that may occur as a result of something I see or something I think. But in order to make this project a reality, I have to begin by defining it. I first determine the eventual *use* for the final product. Is it something I aim for the marketplace? If so, I think in terms of editions, marketability, scale, and costs. Is it something I see as a unique, single artifact? If so, I'm free to think in terms of Polaroids, hand-colored work, gifts, and even techniques that are destructive to my negatives. Is this destined for the wall or for a book? This helps me determine which camera to use, the scale of the images relative to the importance for detail and tonal clarity, graininess, and other factors. Essentially, by determining the final use before I begin, I can effectively reverse engineer the project for success.

Next, I think in terms of the scope of the project. How many images will/should this project include? One? Ten? 100? This helps me think in terms of how many photographic sessions I need to schedule, how many negatives I need exposed, whether or not the project is produced from my existing negative archive or requires new photographing. If I see the project including lots of images, this immediately defines what kind of exhibition space I should search for, too.

The thousands of variables that can be considered with any given project are far too numerous to consider here. But I often find myself asking the same *kinds* of questions with each new project. Will I include text? Will this project be produced in more than one medium – for example, multimedia, printed form, or original photographs? Is there an audience who will appreciate this work? Where will I find them? Will they be willing to pay for the privilege of seeing this work? Or do I need to pay them for the privilege of showing it?

All of these questions become a part of the structure of the project. Once the project is defined, it's not cast in cement. It can be changed, modified, scrapped, restarted, or completed – after all, this is *personal* artwork not a commercial assignment. (Although, I will admit that some of these techniques can be used in thinking

through commercial assignments, and often are second-nature to experienced commercial photographers.) Where I find this idea of structure most useful is in the control and expenditure of my limited art-making time. Let's be honest, this is a rare commodity, especially for those of us who have jobs, families, responsibilities, and other pesky realities. With a defined structure for a project, I find it easier to assign myself specific tasks that moved the project along – session by session, weekend by weekend.

I am a pragmatist about this. If I were omniscient, I could accurately project exactly how many hours of my creative life would be required to produce a final photographic project. I am clearly not omniscient, but that doesn't change the concept. It only changes my *knowledge* about it. There are a finite number of hours of thought, tinkering, sweat, and craft that will be required in order for any project to be completed. I may not *know* how much time is required, but I do know, with absolute certainty, that the only way to reach the end is to *begin* and *do the work*. It's the structure of the project that helps in this process. Even if the structure is modified or abandoned, having it in place makes *beginning* and *progressing* considerably more likely. And a lot more fun.



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ARTIFACTS & IMAGES



by

Pamela Ellis Hawkes

Pamela Ellis Hawkes





THE MATURATION OF INDIVIDUAL SEEING

or
To See A World In A Grain Is Grand

*An essay with photographs on finding one's own vision
and subject matter as a photographer*

by

Robert Hecht

Just about everyone is familiar with the lines from William
Blake's great poem, *Auguries of Innocence* –

*To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower;
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.¹*

That pretty much says it all about seeing and about being present
in the moment, and those words have undoubtedly inspired
many souls, artistically and metaphysically – they certainly have
inspired me in those ways.

But I ask you, if a mere grain of sand can reveal the infinite
universe, doesn't that also suggest that just about anything else
in the world could do the same thing for us? That what matters
most is our being present, our being tuned in to the infinite and
eternal reality of things? That perhaps, ultimately, as artists, our



KITCHEN DETAILS



by

R. Hecht

Robert Hecht

*Hear an audio interview with Robert Hecht and see more of his images
in the LensWork MultiMedia Library. Online preview at www.lenswork.com.*







INTERVIEW WITH RYUIJIE

Brooks Jensen: Most photographers struggle to get a dozen good images a year. You are well-known as a photographer who has an extraordinary volume of work – a reputation for a prolific output. It’s always one of the first things that people talk about when your name comes up in conversation. How are you able to keep your creativity and productivity at such high volume year after year? Is it that you have the talent, the eye, or the time?

Ryuijie: I don’t really have the time so hopefully I have the talent! (Chuckling.) You know, I don’t know how to answer that question. Other photographers have asked me that same question and it always takes me by surprise. It doesn’t really seem that difficult to me.

BJ: It’s not as though you have some strategy that you target to produce a specific number of images per month or some such thing?

R: No, no. I work in bursts. I’ll do a great deal of work in a month or two and then slack off for a little while and start again. I guess part of that has to do with inspiration,



FRAGMENTS OF TIME



by

Ryuijie

Ryuijie

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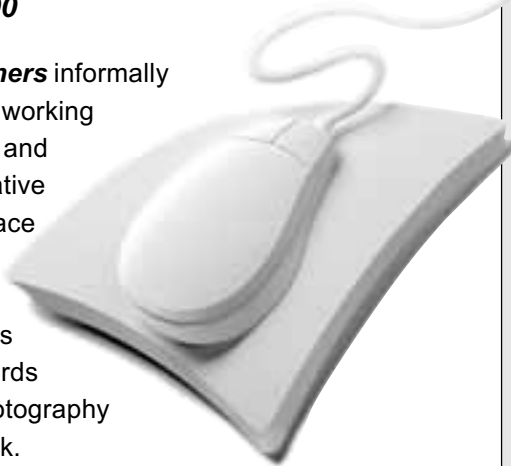




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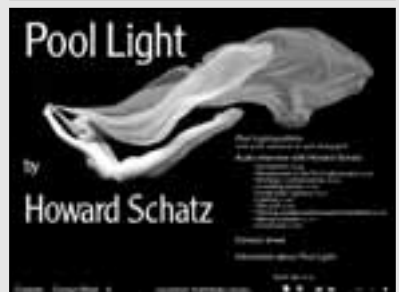
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