

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON PHOTOGRAPHY #2

BY
JOE LIPKA



Windows and Mirror
from "Light Through a Window"

Random Thoughts are just that; various ideas on the topic of photography and creativity that seem to randomly pop into my head. I ponder on them and then record them a folder. When inspiration strikes I formalize them and when enough are compiled, I decide to add them to my web site. The web page has become a bit unruly with all the scrolling required, so they need to be given a new home in this document.

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Joe Lipka
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Archival Processing Part Un (not too serious)

Lots of photographers worry about archival processing. I don't. Never have, never will. (Okay, so those of you out there that know I basically print platinum/palladium prints and they are pretty long lasting anyway, so it's not a concern.) Some people obsess about it, so I thought I might help you out a bit. With tongue firmly planted in cheek, here it goes: Try following the manufacturer's instructions. While a novel approach from the dedicated die hard photographers, following instructions is pretty much the way to go. If you want to go all out, you can test for residual hypo, and selenium tone if you want. (I used to selenium tone a lot, but that was when printing papers had that really ugly gray green tint and selenium gave them a cool bluish, purplish black hue favored by us nascent West Coast Photographers.) So this advice doesn't satisfy you because your work is worthy of the ages? I don't mean to upset you, but there are really a very small number of photographers that need to worry about archival processing. You and I are probably not among them. Here's how to tell if you really need to process far in excess of the manufacturer's instructions. (With apologies to David Letterman's top ten list....)

MOMA calls and asks,- no begs, you to show your photographs.

AIPAD has a reception in your honor at their annual meeting.

You have to pay your darkroom assistants overtime to catch up on your backlog of print orders.

You have received NEA and Guggenheim Grants.

John Sexton calls you when he has darkroom questions.

You hire another assistant to handle requests from MFA students writing their theses on your photographs.

Your darkroom needs a hazardous waste permit.

I don't have any of these problems, either, so I guess I will continue to follow instructions.

Archival Processing Part Deux (maybe serious)

Brooks Jensen (editor of LensWork) told me of the time he found a photograph at a garage sale. The photograph was a black and white image of a sailboat. The reverse side of the photograph had ribbons and commendations indicating that the photograph had received critical acclaim at several exhibitions. There it was, offered at a garage sale for fifty cents. My assumption was that if that photograph was not purchased at the garage sale, it would meet an ignominious end.

All that hard work gone forever. Why? Because the kids didn't like 'em. You can try to educate your progeny to recognize that what you do is worthwhile, but if they don't like your photographs, out they go. If you can't get your family excited about your work, it might be time to take a critical look at your photography. It's easier to change your photography than your family.

Makes that whole archival media/processing thing we obsess about a moot point, doesn't it?

So, have you thought about what is going to happen to your photographs? Will you give them to your heirs? (Will your heirs want them?) Will you donate them to your alma mater? (Will they want them?) Or will they become fodder for a yard sale right before they head for the local landfill?

This assumes, of course, that the images you have made will be capable of communicating your feelings about the subject through space and time to future viewers. Is the content of your art worthy of archival processing? And isn't that the big question about archival that has to be answered?

Three essentials of field photography revisited

I related my essentials of field photography to fellow photographer David Simonton. (Well, now you need to go back and look at the first set of random thoughts to see what the three essentials of field photography are.) He agreed with my selection of essential elements and then one-upped me. His vast improvement to my list was to add the adjectival phrase, “guilt-free” to Access. Being able to get into a site (we both like to photograph in old buildings) and not have to worry about being escorted off the premises by the local sheriff is really what a photographer wants. “Guilt free” Access is important because it takes away that worry that you will get to spend the weekend in a rural North Carolina calaboose with a guy named Bubba.

Oh, and another thing that David pointed out was that getting permission can sometimes get you to other locations that might even be more productive than your original destination.

Nude Photography

I have not done nude photography in a long time. (That’s where the subject of the photograph is nude, not the photographer – just wanted to make that perfectly clear.) There are some nude photographs on the site, so it’s not like I am a complete novice. But since it’s been while since I have produced any of this art, I thought some research was necessary to see what the contemporary vision is like. So I researched. There are studio nudes and environmental nudes. Studio nudes are contortionists covered in baby oil. Environmental nudes vacillate between an unclothed person standing in the woods, or posed in an awkward position in an odd environment. Both types are not successful photographs for me. Thinking about this some, I came to the conclusion neither were believable situations. The concept of a “believable nude” was born. I would consider a believable nude to be “A photograph of a nude where the person is comfortably

posed and in a believable location”. Shortly after making up my mind on this topic, some research material arrived in the US Mail; The Victoria’s Secret Catalog.

This is commercial photography, not fine art, so one would expect an attractive presentation of the product. The photographers succeed in this case. One expects to see women in an indoor, boudoir and bath setting in their unmentionables. (We also note that in defining the word unmentionable, we also include the aspect of barely visible.) So, these photographs are very close to being the believable nude photographs I define above.

There is one thing that I find that does not quite ring true. Footwear. It has been my (limited) experience that spike heel shoes are usually the last thing a woman puts on. To “keep it real” I would really like to see Tyra Banks strut her stuff in a pair of pink, fuzzy bunny slippers.

The pondering and research will continue.

Photographic Lectures

Went to an Photography lecture last night and listened to a respected curator talk about photography. He spoke artspeak. I didn’t understand a word he said. I didn’t understand most of the pictures he displayed. Never did the distinction between photographers and artists who use photography as a medium become as apparent as it was last night. I’m sure that if I could understand the jargon of the art world it would have been a wonderful lecture. It seems that contemporary art is now being created in order to fulfill some academic theory that has been postulated by some professor or critic.

“Goodness” or “Acceptability” of art is now based on adherence to a specific set of artistic requirements promulgated by the artistic establishment.

Curiously enough, today’s establishment were the radicals and

young upstarts that rebelled against the art establishment in the 1960's. We are now the establishment and very ripe and (I hope) very susceptible to overthrow by the next generation of artists.

Long live the revolution.

Autobiographical Art

A mandatory prerequisite for autobiographical art would be to have an interesting life. So, if you choose to make autobiographical art, you should be interesting. Not just to yourself, but to others.

If you choose photography as a means of therapy for your personal problems, I have a suggestion: Spend the money and get professional help. You will solve your problems sooner and save the work from bad art. That's a "win – win" situation.

What Photographs should I show?

If you want to impress someone with your photographs show someone show:

Properly exposed and developed photographs.

Something they haven't seen before.

If others have photographed it before then photograph it in a way that is new or different.

A world that they want to belong to. A place they would like to be.

Approaching Photography Today

It's about the process of creating the image, the story that can be told with the image, using your images to connect with other people. It's not about film, paper, developer or technique. It's about the imagery and the story it tells. In my portfolios I always

include some introductory text along with the images. It is very difficult writing about the images, what they mean as opposed to the easy way out of writing about making the photographs. You should lead your viewers to the edge of the photograph so they know what to look for when they see your images. Sometimes I do it, sometimes I don't. But the lessons are learned along the way so the next group of photos is better.

The challenge for me is to think about what I want the photographs to portray before I go out to photograph and then "deliver the goods" with my camera.



Winter Door
from
"A Walk Down Academy Street"

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