

I Raise My Eyes

Joe Lipka





The East Entry to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart is officially known as the World War I Memorial. The entry is best known for the four words, “God, Country, Notre Dame” above the double doors.

It was a cold, crisp winter day. The strong sunshine conveyed an intense clear light, but little heat. I sought warmth from the Indiana winter inside the Basilica.



Light from a stained glass window
on the south side of the transept
cast a shadow on the north wall.



I turned to the right to photograph Ivan Meštrović's Pieta. I was not happy with the initial results because there was a kneeler directly in front of the statue. In order to remove the kneeler from the composition, I approached the statue, knelt and raised the camera.



It was then I understood the genius of Meštrović. One had to kneel and raise their eyes to experience the beauty and power of the sculpture. The details that one could not see from a distance are only revealed when the viewer is kneeling and looking up at the sculpture.

At that point I raised my eyes and looked at the ceiling of the Basilica. There was an undiscovered beauty above me.



After discovering the beauty of the ceiling, paying attention at Mass became a problem. Kneeling (supposedly) in prayer, I succumbed to temptation and paid more attention to the building and than to spiritual matters.



During Mass I ducked, bobbed and twisted my head to compose imaginary photographs. The congregation must have thought I was afflicted with palsy because of my odd head movements.





I became convinced I was either possessed by photographic demons or suffered the curse of photography. I could not enter the Basilica without creating mental photographs.

Later, I returned with my camera to exorcise the photographic demons not by running from them, but by embracing them.





EPILOGUE

MEŠTROVIĆ AND ME

Ivan Meštrović was invited to Notre Dame in the 1950's. The University built him a studio where he taught classes and created art until his death in 1962. After his death, Meštrović's studio became a classroom for metal sculpture classes. My attempts to create metal sculptures in that same studio were judged by all to be abject failures.

After failing in three dimensional art I felt that the two dimensional art of photography was more suitable for my artistic sensibilities. The spirit of Meštrović taught me two important lessons in art; one in his studio and a second lesson in the Basilica.





Joe Lipka has shared his vision since he began photographing.

In the last thirty years, his photographs have appeared in over one hundred juried exhibitions, more than twenty solo exhibitions and have been printed in both *LensWork* and *Black & White Photography* (UK) Magazines. His photographs of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart were selected to appear in the LensWork Book Project, 2017 *Seeing in Sixes*.

His website www.joelipkaphoto.com has continuously evolved since it was launched in 2004. His blog *Postcards from the Creative Journey*, published weekly since 2010, is a collection of his photographs and thoughts on the creative process.

COLOPHON

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*The images in this portfolio
were between 2015 and 2017
at the University of Notre Dame*

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