STREET PHOTOGRAPHY CONVERSATIONS

WITH:

Matt Weber
Blake Andrews
Alison McCauley
Mike Peters
Charalampos Kydonakis
Richard Bram
Jay Maisel
Dave Beckerman

Interviews by James maher

NYC, 1998 by matt weber

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INTRODUCTION

My ultimate goal in *Street Photography Conversations* was to engage talented and experienced street photographers, whose work covered a myriad of approaches, shooting techniques, and experiences on the street.

When reading through the conversations, the inherent differences between these photographers and their styles are apparent. Some of the photographers featured here work commercially, some are writers and bloggers, some live entirely off their art, and one was even a taxicab driver. Some prefer auto-focus, while others prefer zone focusing. Their gear varies as well, from Hasselblads, Leicas, Canons, and Nikons to wide-angle prime lenses and telephoto zooms. Their work covers various subject matters, from shooting the 80s crack epidemic in New York City to shooting in the quiet city of Eugene, Oregon. The amount of life that these photographers have captured is simply astounding. Their passion for photography and exploring life is inspiring and contagious.

However, while there are so many different and competing ideas about street photography presented, there are a few constants that you will notice within each conversation: a passion for the craft of photography itself, an interest in studying the works of others, dedication to improving their work, a deep, unique and explorative personality, and a vested interest and passion for their subjects. These photographers love what they do.

You do not need to shoot in a specific way to be a great street photographer, but you need to have these qualities to achieve great work.

For each of the photographers featured, we were only able to show a small glimpse of their portfolios to highlight with their interviews. Make sure to visit each of these artists' websites to get a more complete understanding of the breadth and range of their work.

So let's start from the beginning. I know that you were a cab driver in the 80s. Is this how you got started with photography?

It had nothing to do with wanting to be a street photographer. I was driving a taxi and I saw so many crazy things on the street that I kept saying, "Damn, I've got to buy a camera." Driving a taxicab in 1978 on the night shift at four in the morning in midtown, if you saw the movie Taxi Driver, that was the world that was out there. There were prostitutes on the corner, Times Square was crazy; it was a dangerous part of town. I was robbed in my taxicab at double gunpoint.

Very few taxi drivers went up to Harlem. I chose to go up to Harlem because I couldn't disrespect someone and not take them there unless they looked like they'd rob me. I saw some crazy things: knife fights, people having sex on the streets, and all of a sudden I was like, wow, I better get a camera. Then, once I got one, I was constantly looking around and people were like, "This taxi driver can't keep his eyes on the road!"

My other inspiration was the changing neighborhood. Every neighborhood was losing its stores. "Oh man, that Jewish deli is gone," "Oh I used to buy my heroes there for 45 cents," my comic book store was gone, the automat where you put a quarter in and a little piece of pie comes out, where I used to go with my grandma was gone. Suddenly, everything was fancy GAPs and Banana Republics and all these chain stores and banks were opening everywhere. I wanted to start getting pictures of what was left. It was to preserve stuff in my mind.

My early work was basically just documents of the city with a couple of interesting street pictures just thrown in. Then, at one point, I just wanted to see some other photography and learn a little more about it and so I bought a few books and went to a few exhibits and at that point I was like, holy shit, there's this whole world that I didn't understand. I learned about Winogrand and Cartier-Bresson and a few of these other photographers.

Matt Weber

As a former taxi driver who once spent countless hours driving the gritty streets of New York City, Matt Weber has probably photographed more of the streets of New York City than any photographer since Weegee. Matt has photographed these streets with a stunning and compassionate sensibility and he has captured the City in a manner that few have ever done. His book, *The Urban Prisoner,* shows a glimpse into the too-often unseen side of urban life. You can view more of his daily street work on his website.

http://weber-street-photography.com.

About three years into it I started taking it seriously. I grew up in the City. I was never tough but I was always street smart. I knew how to stay out of trouble, how to talk my way out of trouble and I was like, "You know, I can do this." Then, about 13 years into it, I bought a Leica. I always wanted a Leica and I thought I'd never be able to afford one unless I just bought it and got over how much it cost.

So in 1998, I bought a Leica M6, just to watch in two or three years the whole world turn to digital, which is kind of weird. But it took me so long to become good with film and the darkroom and I'm not reporting news where it has to be six hours later. I'm scanning negatives. It's almost springtime and I'm looking at photos from last spring.

Do you think it's better that there is a delay?

It's interesting, what Winogrand said about looking at photos with fresh eyes. I don't even remember taking the photos; I have no memory of them. The only ones that I remember are if there was a big fight or if it was something particularly crazy. I don't remember taking 95 percent of the images.

It's kind of fun looking at the work with no recollection of having done it. I'm not saying that there's a great advantage to that either, I just get around to the work when I get around to it.

I still shoot film, but maybe I take ten pictures a year that are really worth printing. I mean really worth it, where I say, "I want to have prints of that." The rest of them are borderline and they would be good in certain books, but they don't necessarily have to be printed.

It seems like you have a lot of sentimentality towards your subjects. You have a lot of

respect for them. You photograph a wide range of people on the streets and capture what life is like. How would you describe your style?

I can't say my style doesn't exist but it's more of a sensibility. Style is more about what you shoot than how you shoot it. As I get older, I start playing games with arranging colors and trying to make nice photographs without just trying to shoot life itself, but shooting life itself is kind of rewarding. You get happy moments, you get love, you get sad moments when people are lying on the street, and you get angry moments when people are fighting. You get a whole range of emotions.

Tell us technically how you shoot.

I zone focus. I'm always focused at about ten feet at first. I start at ten and as I get closer I slip it to eight and if I get closer, then six feet. I don't really shoot closer than six feet because there's a certain point where [it's tough to get the shot candid] unless it's very crowded. On the street, six feet is about my limit because any closer and you're getting in some-one's personal space unless it's really crowded. If someone's walking up to you at ten feet you don't really notice, at eight feet you start to notice and at six feet you start to pay atten-tion. There's a point where you draw attention to yourself. Al-though, if something incredible is happening then, of course, I don't care - everything just switches off and I just want to get the shot. Also, the subway's different. All bets are off because you're in a tin can.
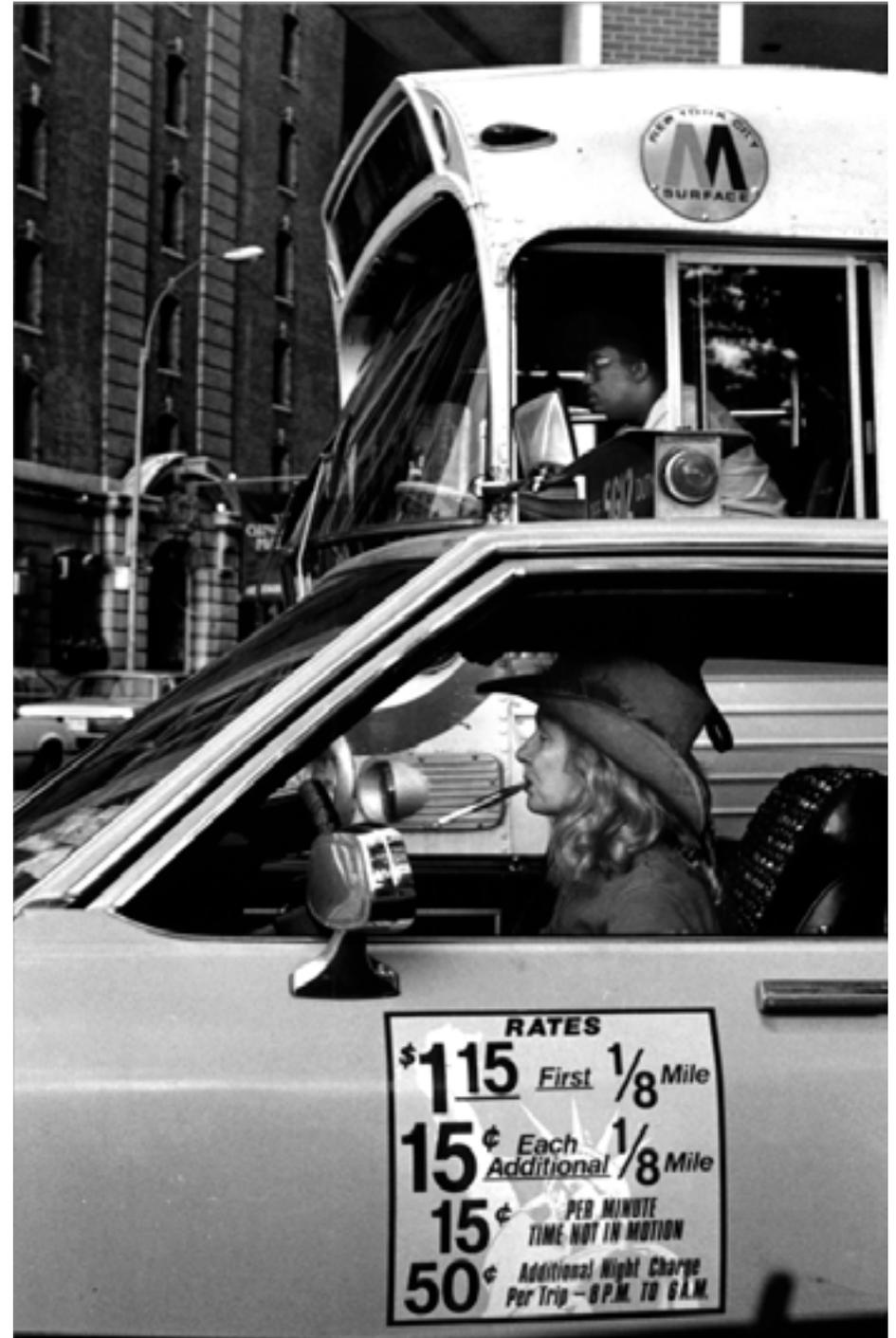
It has to be an incredible shot to risk getting beat up or even to risk getting into an argument. You don't know what people have in their pocket.

Do you ever shoot from the hip?

I don't shoot from the hip unless I feel like I'm dealing with people that can hurt me. If I don't see any danger then why would I want to do it? If the shot is worth taking then I want to get it right. I always say that you should look through your viewfinder if you can. The one exception is where I could get cut up over a photograph.

Even on the subway, I don't like to shoot from the hip because the depth of field is so small, shooting at F1.4. I don't have autofocus so I have to do a pre-focus usually. If they're across the car, say they're seven feet away, then I don't have to worry. If it's three or four or five feet then you really want to be locked in, so you just do a little pre-focus when they're not looking and then you sit and wait for things to happen.

If you're focusing at three, four, or five feet at night then you don't want to be off by two or three inches. You might get one eye in focus and one not. The earlobe being in focus doesn't help. You want the eyes in focus.

When I do need to shoot from the hip I'm also not shooting from low; I'm shooting from right below my chin usually because I want to make sure that I get it right. From down low the [perspective gets too distorted]. I shoot right below my eye level. That way it looks like I'm looking at the camera; If they see me it looks like I'm fiddling with it.

What lens do you use?

Nothing wider than a 28mm. At 24mm the background starts to bend and noses grow like Pinocchio. I don't want people to say, "Oh he's using a 21mm," just like I don't want peo-

ple to say, "Oh, he's using a telephoto." I don't want to use a wide-angle lens that distorts nor do I want to use a 300mm lens that has bokeh. I think when you use something between a 28mm and a 50mm then the lens doesn't come into play. There's no effect of the lens where you immediately say telephoto or super wide. It looks normal.

Tell us about how you learned over the years.

After fucking up and messing up again and again and again you eventually start to double-check everything. You make sure you have an extra couple rolls of film. The good shots come when they come, not that quickly, and I'm ready, but if my camera's not ready, something like that really annoys me. Also, you're not ready until you take the lens cap off. I've yelled at people on the street when they have a Leica with the lens cap on. A lens cap with a Leica?

I've had a lot of reasons for not getting shots. In the beginning, I didn't have the courage to take certain shots and later I was like, "Aw man, I should have taken that shot." At first, you're hesitating and then it's gone. That doesn't happen too often now.

What is your favorite area in New York to shoot in?

There are not many left. Obviously, Coney Island, but even that project is almost at an end after they renovated it and almost half of it is gone. I like the subways. I was a graffiti artist as a teenager in the early 70s, so I spent a lot of time decorating the tunnels.

It's weird, but when I think back to like '73 when I was running with these crews in the tunnels, I was fearless. I'm not fearless anymore, but a weird confidence comes over me sometimes in the subway, where I feel like, "This is my fucking train," even though it's not. I remember when we used to get like that: "Excuse me, can you move so I can spray paint that?" We were just like little mutants running around. When you get four or five

people together you start thinking you can do anything. So I'm thinking sometimes like, "This is my fucking train, I'll take your picture any day I want." Of course, that's not true.

How do you edit your work?

For many years, I just looked at the negatives and based on the memory of taking them I could see what interested me. In the negative I could see the composition; I could see the exposure, if it was well exposed; I could also see the sharpness. I once had this argument with somebody because I didn't do contact sheets. The only thing you couldn't tell was the expression on the person's face; It's hard to know exactly the expression. I can tell if the eyes are sharp, I can tell good exposure, everything. If I was doing portraits I'd be in trouble, but I'm not doing portraits. If I'm looking for the great street shot, the one where the composition is right, where the action is right, then it's pretty easy to pick it right out.

So I didn't make contacts, which is unusual. Most people make contacts. I'm not special, but it takes money, it takes time, and I would always just be rushing into the darkroom to make prints. I already knew which prints I wanted to make. 99 out of 100 times I was right. But, credit to the teachers, at the end of the year I might have missed two or three great shots because I didn't make contact sheets. But I just didn't have the patience. I just wanted to create the prints that I wanted. I would never tell someone not to make contact sheets. You shouldn't be in such a rush like me.

Now that I have a really good scanner, every time I put a strip of film into the scanner then I see all the frames. So I am actually proofing. But I am still right 99% of the time in terms of which ones I want.

What's some advice that you'd give to someone starting out?

A smart older man once told me a very important statement that has to do with chimping. I think that's what they call it, looking at the back of the camera. The thing about chimping is that when you get a really good shot and you see it then you immediately become satisfied. Now, just because you took a bunch of shots and one of them is very good, just because you have a very good shot of something, doesn't mean the next shot won't be the best shot you ever took in your career.

There's a difference between very good and great and there's a difference between great and once in a lifetime.

Just because you got a great shot doesn't mean the best shot of your life isn't the next shot. You just don't know what's going to happen. I never know what I have because I'm shooting film, so I tend to wait. I know I've got potential but I never know anything more than potential. You don't want to think mission accomplished. That's working against you.

Also, you shouldn't discard everything that's bad. You should hold onto your mistakes so you can see your growth and see what you were trying to accomplish. I have almost every negative that I ever shot. My one problem with digital is that you can delete, delete, delete. Your keepers are probably for reasons that later probably won't matter to you and meanwhile, the one shot that might have meant something to you is long gone and you won't know it because you won't remember taking the picture.

After 20 years, I've gone back and I've found all these outtakes and some of them are even better than what I thought were the original best shots. I found a couple of amazing

images; I found a couple of shots that I can't believe. I didn't even know I had them until five months ago. I took a picture in 1985 of the world trade center that was incredible. I had always wished I had photographed the trade center through the arches in Washington Square Park. It always pissed me off that I never took that shot and later I found the shot. There it was. Boom. I had the shot and I didn't even know it.

I found maybe a hundred shots that were really good that I didn't think had any value back in '88. I didn't even mark them. Image after image after image and it took 20 years for those images to gain significance. Pictures of the Lower East Side and now they're significant. Alphabet City, it was crazy; look at that abandoned car in the middle of the lot on 4th street with old junkies around - or Times Square.

You are making a mistake if you just delete like crazy. Storage gets cheaper and cheaper and in 20 years I guarantee you that your average boring shot of a taxi going down the street will be valuable, cause those taxis are long gone, the stores are all gone, and the hairstyles are gone. Even boring street shots have some value.

Everything's going to change. You actually know that. The only thing that's constant is change.

Tell us a last interesting story about shooting on the streets of New York City.

I missed a shot on 94th street. This guy was in a wheelchair and he was squabbling over money with another guy who had a fork. I've never seen that before. The fork was held up to his neck. I was with my daughter though and I wasn't going to risk her over a shot. I couldn't say, "You stay here while I go photograph the guy being held up by a fork." How often do you see a fork in someone's throat? It's usually a knife or a gun, not a fork. Forks are way down on the list of implements to use to take money from somebody.

You just can't get everything, although you want everything.
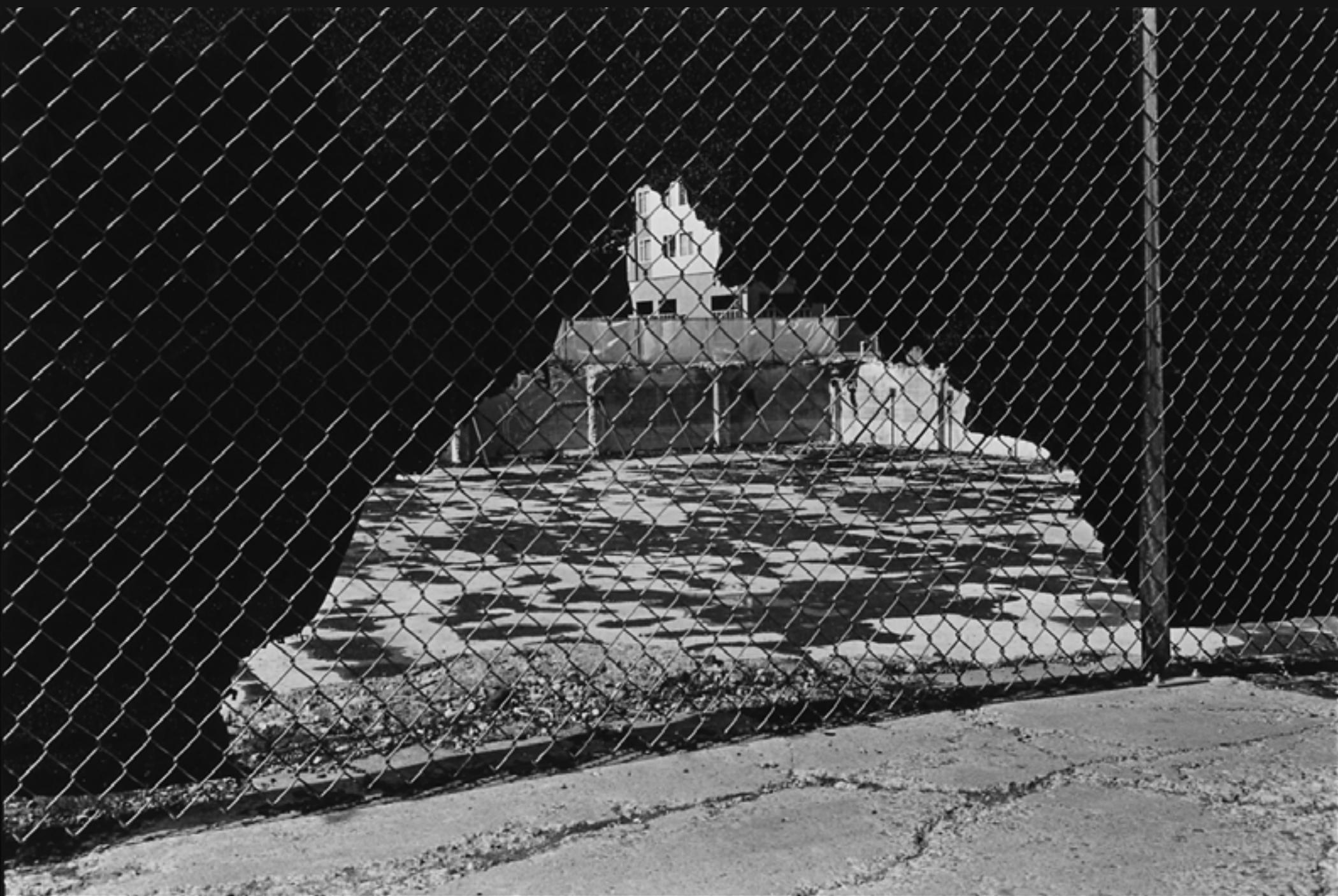
How did you first get into photography and what brought the genre of street photography to your attention?

I took a black and white darkroom class and sat in on a few history of photography classes in the early 90s. Then, I just gradually got more and more into it on my own, taking more photos.

At the time I was living in Portland. I would walk around my neighborhood and downtown, places that were filled with visual stuff and I would capture whatever struck my interests. I think Portland was pretty central to how I got started. It's visually dense. If I was starting photography in Eugene, or in a smaller town, I don't think I would have developed in the same way. I would probably have a different style right now.

I guess I am lumped with street photographers, but it can be a sloppy term. I don't think it describes exactly what I do, although I can see how I can fit in there. The typical street photographer shoots more in an urban setting. It's all about capturing candids of strangers. I guess a New York City sidewalk is kind of the archetype. A sea of people to choose from. I don't live in a city like that and so I don't often take that type of photo, although my work is built around some of the same spirit.

Street photography is a form of found photography where you're not planning what you're going to shoot. It's like a scavenger hunt, but with no list. You come home and you're not even sure what you've got until a month or a year later and even then you might not know. That's how I relate my work to street photography: Unplanned moments. They're everywhere.

I'm keyed into timing. That's a central component. I like photos that might not be there ten or five or two seconds later. A lot of times I'll wait for a photo that happens exactly and then it's gone quickly. Those are fun to capture because you know that no one else is going to see it but you.

Blake Andrews

Blake Andrews hails from Oregon. He began his street photography career in Portland before moving to the small city of Eugene. In addition to being a passionate photographer and a member of the UP Photographers street photography collective, Blake is also one of the most interesting and unique photography bloggers out there. You can access his blog at http://www.blakeandrews.blogspot.com. Blake also has a diverse portfolio of images that you should view on his website, http://www.blakeandrewsphoto.com. In our foregoing conversation, we chose to focus on his work in less populated areas.

You are a fan of Lee Friedlander, who did a lot of street photography in less populated areas and now you're shooting in Eugene, Oregon. Talk to me a bit about this type of street photography versus shooting in a city atmosphere.

Friedlander is the classic example of someone that can find photos anywhere. He's one of my all-time favorites for sure. It's hard to keep up with him. Early on he shot a lot in cities like New York and has some dense urban stuff, but then many of his photos have no people in them, yet they all have his style.

The main thing I like about him is that he's very graphic and he separates things into very pure visual components. A tree could take the form of a person taking the form of a shadow and that all kind of blends together. I've probably copied him. I do some of that myself. To the extent that I have that in my style, it's definitely influenced by him.

Why do you prefer to shoot in Black and White?

This relates to Friedlander, who shoots almost exclusively black and white. His style is sort of built around the formal, where he can layer patterns and shapes and shadows and combine them. I like to do that too, and the black and white definitely helps. You can layer in color but black and white just mushes it all together even more. You can take the oddest structures and then once you throw out the color it combines them in ways that might not combine otherwise.

It goes back to the idea that when you're taking a photograph you're not really duplicating reality. Some people think of a photo as the same thing as what was there in front of the picture. There is a connection but it's not an exact equivalence, and that's pretty central to the whole art of it. The black and white image gets that idea out front and says, "Okay, we know this isn't reality." We're instantly changing it into something abstract.
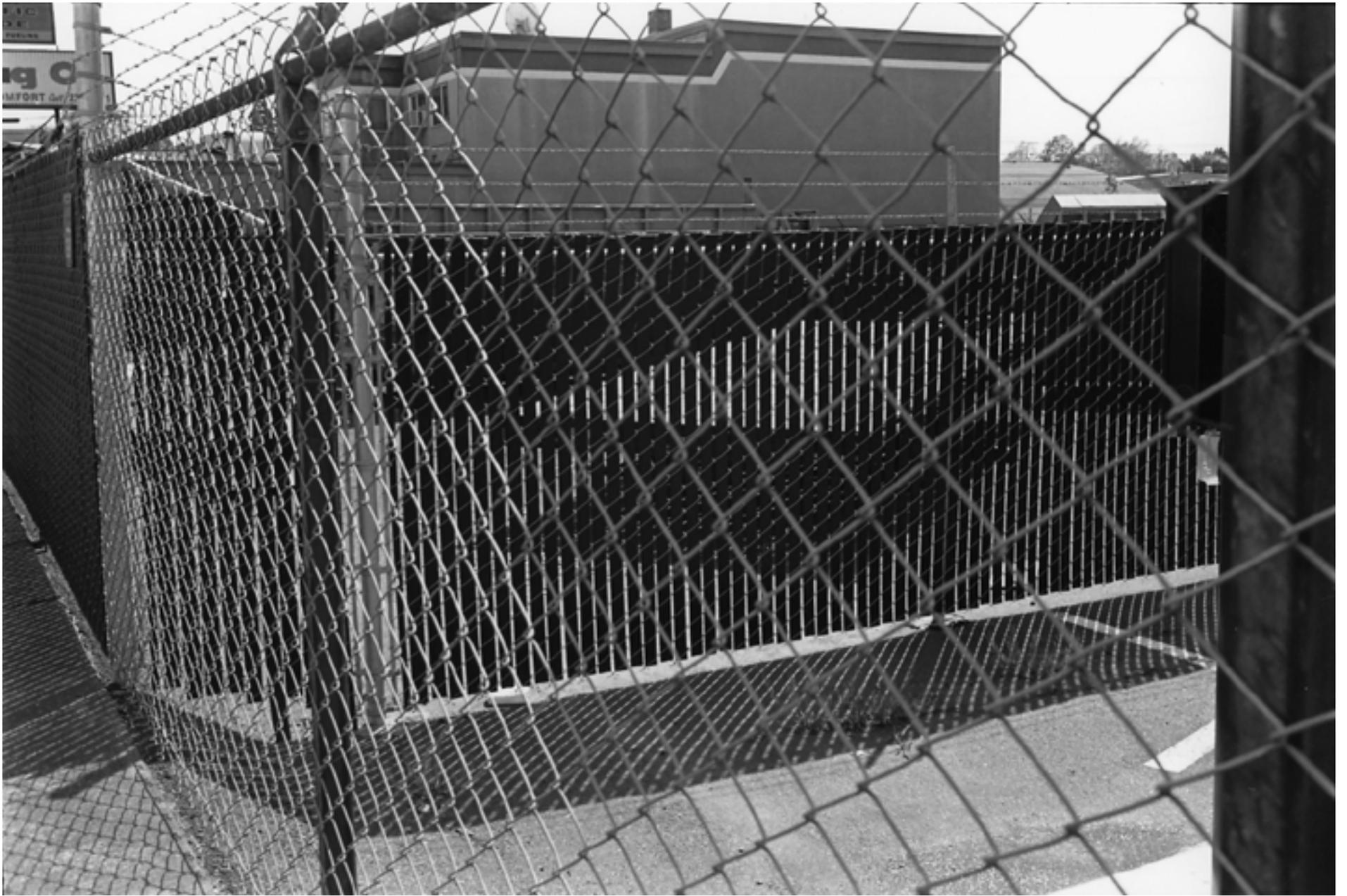
What do you shoot with these days?

Mostly a Leica M6 with a 40mm lens. I've gone through a bunch of cameras. I used to use a little Hexar, which was an auto-focus point-and-shoot. That and the Leica are both great cameras. The only problem with the Hexar is that it's not as sturdy. My Leica has lasted me 5 years, whereas I went through three Hexars in about that same length of time. I tend to wear out cameras quickly, like a pair of shoes or something. They go everywhere. Gradually, I beat the crap out of them.

I found it interesting that there are a lot of similarities between the writing style in your blog and your photography style. Both are often playful, witty, and even absurd. Tell me a bit about your style.

That's interesting. Is there something there? Yeah, but I hadn't thought of it exactly in those terms. When I'm out shooting, I'm not usually happy with just a static shot that sits there and there's no angle to it.

That applies to the blog too. I don't want to just write something that is a straight take, although I do that once in a while. I guess my brain is always looking for the other way to see it. Even if there is no other way, I'll make another way.

Sometimes that gets in the way of itself when making photos and you can take a picture that looks like it's too intentional. There's a dynamic there where I think some photos that work best are like a hotel postcard, or some Stephen Shore images, where it looks almost like the photographer is not even doing anything. Then there's the other end of the spectrum like Friedlander, where you can definitely feel his presence involved. If the shot was taken an inch to one side or the other it wouldn't be the same photo.

You've got to have that manipulation. All photos are manipulations. But I don't want to make it so obvious that it becomes the main characteristic. For the blog, I think it's sort of a fault sometimes. I'll just twist a topic into something weird just for the sake of weird-ness. And sometimes in my photos, it's a fault too. I like to do that once in a while, but I wouldn't want it to all be that way. I like to tweak things but hopefully without the tweak taking over what the essence is.

Most blogs are more like a Stephen Shore photo, where they're just a straight thing. Lucas Samaras is someone that is in totally the opposite direction, where it's so bizarre that I can't get much out of it. Somewhere in the middle is where I'm going for with the blog. I want some posts to be totally strange and some totally straight. And I don't want to know what's coming from day to day, nor do I want the reader to know.

How have you progressed over the years as a street photographer?

I think I'm pickier now. If I look back at some of my photos just from five or six years ago there are photos I wouldn't have printed. That might be what it takes to tell. I might have to wait five or ten years to look back on the photos I'm taking now and realize that they're not what I wanted. I guess I'm still learning and changing, although I started out shooting 35mm black and white and I'm still doing that, so I haven't moved past that.

It gets back to what I mentioned earlier. I'm trying to take photos now that look less like photos, that look less intentional. Also, a lot of the photos that interest me now are ones on the contact sheet that might have either a light leak or are ruined or off the frame, just something where I didn't even think about the photo. So I'm reacting afterwards differ-ently. I might have looked at those five or ten years ago and not have even printed them. Now I might print them up and look at them. They're not even an intentional photo but there's something about them, something abstract. Which is kind of sad really if you think about it. All those years of practice and improvement, only to succumb in the end to just random events.

Maybe eventually I'll be like Winogrand at the end of his life. He was on motor drive, shooting roll after roll after roll. I don't think that he ended up even looking at those photos. Maybe he realized eventually that he couldn't improve on chaos.

At a certain point, I think it gets back to the issue of intentionality and you realize that the decisive moment is sort of an illusion. Those photos are fun to take but there can be a transparentness to them. The other side is that I'm not shooting in the city. Sometimes there are people but usually it's a lot of shapes, odd angles, and compositional exercises. So I'm more reliant on chance to inject energy, whereas someone in a city is surrounded by moments. They maybe don't have to look as hard.

Street photography seems to be blowing up on the internet, but not quite as much in the real world yet. Do you think this online emphasis will eventually help it to gain more recognition in galleries?

I don't have a good fix on what the main art world is looking for. I've never had a handle on that. I think it just likes to have new things. If there's some novel approach then that will get shown in galleries more than if it's a strong photo. I think in that world street photography is looked at as having been done already. There's not much room to go forward with it. At least that's how I think the art world sees it. I can kind of see that too, although I don't fully agree. Most of the street photos I see feel familiar, but that doesn't mean that you can't go forward. Every second there are new photos to be taken.

So I guess I don't see the main gallery world latching onto it anytime soon. Unless it's something like the Vivian Maier case, where it took something that was done years ago, but now can be seen in a new way, so that's what the gallery world might latch onto. So maybe for street photos that are taken now, we might have to wait fifty years and then someone can look back on them. In the future, they might be seen as the last gasp of pure documentary, before Photoshop completely took over photography.

There are people out there making really strong street photos. Every day they're making new ones that are great. Now, whether they're going to get picked up and seen in the broader world, I'm not so sure. I think it definitely has a life online and there's a strong community there but it's similar to a bunch of people hanging out in a bar. They all know each other and what they're doing, but it's very insular, and a bit cut off from the main current.

I think there's value to it. I just wouldn't expect it to catch on, but maybe that's kind of the appeal too. Street photography is its own little world.

It sounds like you shoot a lot but don't post many photos online. Do you think that people show too much of their work online these days? Should they edit themselves more?

I think it's fine if people want to put up a photo a day but I'm kind of the opposite. I don't really put up any photos, but right now as I'm talking to you I'm looking at a thousand photos sitting on my desk, just waiting to be sorted out and dealt with. So I'm probably the worst person to ask about editing.

I edit basically in the darkroom. I go through my contact sheets. I'll take rolls and rolls and rolls and at the darkroom, I look at every frame and I'll print anything that looks vaguely interesting. Maybe three or four per roll. So that's one form of editing.

I have a few photo groups here where every month we meet and we share photos. For that, I'll edit down further. I print a few hundred prints a month and I generally edit those down to carefully sequenced stack of 52 for each meeting. So that's another layer of editing.

One main reason why I haven't gone the digital posting avenue is because it's easier for me to deal with my pictures in a concrete way. I like them in a stack in front of me, even if that stack is 1000 random photos. Also, I trust feedback from my local photo friends more

than online feedback from strangers. There is a risk of misinterpreting online feedback, but it depends on the photographer. You have to think about the feedback you're getting and figure out how to value it.

So the next level of editing ideally would be to funnel these down over several years into a nice book of fifty pictures; that's kind of the classic approach. The problem is I don't do that. When I reach this point then I stick them in various boxes and I don't know what to do with them.

At a rate of a photo a day, I think it's difficult to keep quality. I mean, maybe there are people that can do it. Maybe Winogrand might have been able to do that in the 70s, but I don't think most people can make a good photo every day that is high enough quality to merit being singled out. I know I can't.

There are ten thousand photographers out there with the same problem: photos upon photos, and maybe there's some core there but it takes energy to go through. And street photography tends to be its own project. It doesn't divide up neatly into "I'm going to shoot this subject, then this one." Instead, it's just a stream. Maybe one reason why I haven't gone digital yet is because digital editing just scares me. If I have a hard time editing film, then digital is just going to be a mess. From my point-and-shoot, I have about fifteen thousand pictures on my computer that are just mislabeled and I don't know what to do with them.

On this note, do you think these social photo-sharing sites can be harmful in certain ways for the development of a photographer? Do you think it is dangerous to think about how good your photos are based on how many 'likes' you get?

I think those sites are generally a good thing. When I was taking photos in the early 90s, there was nothing like that. I didn't know any other photographers. There was such a smaller photo world and maybe in some ways that was helpful because I was sort of

working in a closet for a while, developing my own thing. But I'm kind of jealous. I wish I could have had someone to show photos to.

I think the one danger might be a sort of homogenizing effect. Everyone's putting photos up and looking at each other's photos and styles. When I go to the Hardcore Street Photography group that's on Flickr, it kind of all blends together. There's this type of photo on there that people are looking for almost and trying to take, which kind of repeats itself.

It's the Alex Webb effect. Not that most people can be as good as him, but I see his style as dominant online. Find pedestrians in dramatic lighting, put people in the right positions, create a singular moment. There are a billion things out there to shoot; why is everyone doing that?

Probably before the age of the internet and sharing, that wasn't such a dominating effect. People may have had more individuality. So that's a danger, but in general, I think the photo sharing sites are a good thing, especially if you live in Oklahoma or somewhere and you're a lonely photographer out there and you're trying to find a community. Then the internet is a blessing.

You write frequently about photo books and have quite a large collection of street photography books. What are some of your favorites?

Here's my list of 25 essential street photography books, in no particular order:

Bystander, Westerbeck and Meyerowitz
Saul Leiter (Steidl)
Slide Show, Helen Levitt
The Americans, Robert Frank
Lee Friedlander (Galassi/MOMA)
Henry Wessel (Steidl)

The Sadness of Men, Philip Perkis
A Day Off, Tony Ray-Jones
Grim Street, Mark Cohen
Private Views, Barbara Crane
Inner City, Joseph Mills
In the Company of Strangers, Gus Powell
Leonard Freed: Photographs 1954-1990
William Eggleston's Guide
American Sports 1970, Tod Papageorge
1964, Garry Winogrand
Signs and Relics, Sylvia Plachy
Lightlines, Ray Metzker
No Title Here, Jeff Mermelstein
Nothing Special, Martin Kollar
All Zones Off Peak, Tom Wood
Found in Brooklyn, Thomas Roma
Personal Exposures, Elliott Erwitt
Wild Flowers, Joel Meyerowitz
Recreations, Mitch Epstein

Can you tell us how you got started with photography and how you progressed early on?

I grew up moving from country to country and I'm still living this lifestyle decades later. I think the frequent moves made me very restless and I always wonder if there is somewhere better than the place I'm currently in. This, in turn, makes me want to move even when there's no need to. I could call it a vicious circle, but I love the excitement of a move, so it's not really vicious.

As a small child, my favorite pastime was drawing and painting. I was a very quiet child and I only felt comfortable expressing myself visually. Studying Visual Art at university was a natural choice for me. I specialized in painting but eventually became frustrated by the long hours in my studio, cut off from the world, and I moved quite naturally and gradually towards photography. It started when I used photography as a research tool for my paintings, then as part of the mixed media notebooks that I made during art school. I remember the eureka moment when I finally understood that photography could be everything I wanted as a means of expression. I realized that I was much more excited by photography than by any other art form. I had commitments and needed to carry on painting for a few years but by 2007 I allowed my obsession to take over my life. I haven't looked back.

I started photographing in the street, not only because it's accessible always but because I enjoyed the lack of control. I was never comfortable with the idea of my work slotting into a genre and what I photograph is fairly irrelevant to me. The only constant is that I don't set anything up. I like to find things. What matters most to me is why I photograph something or someone and what feeling I can get across with my images. How I photograph is important too but I am constantly trying new ways of working. I really like messing around with cameras and light and seeing what I can do. I enjoy basic cameras and bad lenses. I love unpredictability and mistakes.

Alison McCauley

Alison McCauley is a photographer whose work explores the issues and ideas of identity, belonging, and memory that are tinged with feelings of melancholy, restlessness, and loss.

Her stories are weaved together in non-liner, intuitive narratives and this interview focuses on three projects, *Anywhere but Here, Dancing with a Cobra,* and *Riviera Dreams.*

McCauley is a member of UP Photographers. You can view her website at http://www.amccauley.ch.

It seems like there's some sort of connection between getting restless and enjoying moving constantly and the surprise and lack of control that you look for when making your work. I find it fascinating though that even with this aim for happenstance, your body of work has a consistency in the way that it feels, and you just mentioned the feeling as being the most important aspect. Do you actively seek this out, have your instincts for this developed over time, or do you find it just happens?

Early on, my photography was all over the place. I tried many different ways of working but it wasn't until the winter of 2008 that I took a couple of photographs that really spoke to me. It happened by accident. I was bored with trying to photograph in the cold, dark and quiet streets of Geneva and went inside to have a coffee. I was absent-mindedly fooling around with a little compact and the reflections on the glass of the window. Later when I looked through the images, I realized I had made a breakthrough. The two successful images were the first of my on-going series *Anywhere but Here*, which is about restlessness and longing to be somewhere else.

Over the next few years, I continued to add images to this series but I also continued working on various documentary projects until I lost faith in the idea of "concerned" photography and realized that I was never going to make enough of a difference and that photography probably wasn't the best way to tell these stories anyway. Once I admitted this to myself, I felt free to concentrate on my personal work. It wasn't until 2016 that my work became consistent. I don't regret the time I spent chasing different work because every experience feeds into who I am and the work I do now. I think it's not a bad idea to have a really wide base to start off with and to narrow down gradually.

I'm naturally drawn to scenes that have an ambiguous, dark mood. I like simplicity, quietness, and a bit of mystery and melancholy. However, over time, I've developed ways of working with cameras, lenses, and mechanical filters that help me get the feeling I want to get across.

When talking about surprise and lack of control, what role does editing have for you? Do you try to take that control back at all during editing?

Yes, I definitely take control back during editing. I know what I want and I'm quite decisive but since my aim is to create a hazy, non-linear narrative, I trust my instinct more than reason.

You mentioned messing around with basic cameras and bad lenses and light. Can you elaborate on this a bit more?

I like compact cameras but they do have to have manual controls. Autofocus is a nightmare for me! I've used Holga and pinhole lenses and I love making my own filters with bits of plastic and dirty glass. I like to play around with flash and even torches. I like using reflections and I'm mad about shooting underwater. The underwater success rate is kind of low for me, but when they're good, it's so exciting.

I can't recall exactly, but I'm reminded of a quote I believe from Martin Parr, who said that photographers take about ten years to truly find their voice and direction. I personally feel the same way in this. I certainly took a lot of photos back in the first ten years that I use now and they fit into what I'm trying to do, but it did take something close to a decade to really be able to focus in and start to have a clearer idea of what I want to work on and focus in on. It sounds like maybe this was somewhat similar for yourself?

Mr. Parr is a wise man. That describes exactly how it happened for me. I'm always slightly concerned when I see beginner photographers whose photographs seem to have a narrow, consistent look. It's often an empty gimmick and they run out of steam quickly because we need to do that flailing around while we develop as artists. I think it's all that trial and error and experimentation that gives a photographer a solid base to grow on.

It was an amazing feeling when I reached that point of consistently making the kind of work that I felt really good about. Eliminating the things I realized I didn't want to do was

an important part of my development as a photographer. It made me feel sure that I was on the right track and my confidence grew exponentially. I still have doubts sometimes, but that's normal and healthy.

Also, it sounds like you feel your work got stronger when you stopped trying to tell other people's stories ("concerned photography") and started to try to tell your own story? Or started searching for inner feelings and ideas and connecting them to what you saw in the outside world? Am I on the right track with this?

Yes, I always felt burdened with too much responsibility when I tried to tell other people's stories. I took it so seriously that I didn't dare have much fun. When I began to use photography to express myself, I felt liberated. There were no longer any boundaries and I could do what I wanted.

I really like your way of putting what I do, "searching for inner feelings and ideas and connecting them to what you saw in the outside world." It's spot on. I may borrow it!

Can you give us a sense of what it's like when you go out for a walk photographing? Do you typically have a location in mind or do you prefer to just wander and get lost? Do you go back to the same locations over and over again? It sounds like you've lived in many places that can be tougher to find and comfortably photograph people in natural settings (not that that's the only content to capture) - can you talk a little about how you handle this and work around the challenges?

In many locations (such as Geneva, where I live) the chances of seeing something I want to photograph are not that high, so I tend to always have a camera on me and go about my life without the specific intent of photographing anything. I love walking and this helps with the odds of seeing something interesting. When I'm somewhere that I find visually rewarding (to me) I go out with the intention of finding images. I need to concentrate when I do this and I become totally absorbed. I'm incapable of even listening to someone when I'm in the zone. I'm not sure which process yields the best results but some of my

favorite photographs have happened when I was doing something else and I just happened to notice something interesting.

I have a real preference for places that have a disheveled, warm, chaotic feel to them. I suppose the locations look more like my photographs than the cool, organized and slightly sterile locations such as Geneva. I have always found Geneva really hard to photograph but I've taken this as a challenge and I'm determined to gather enough images to do something interesting. Luckily I'm not in a hurry!

Is there a photo that you think most hints at who you are beneath the surface? Or some aspect of you?

I think I know how you feel about Geneva. I spent my life living and photographing in busy/chaotic areas, and recently had a child and moved further out to a much quieter area. I'm actually finding this new area to be more inspiring now to be and photograph in, but I'm still at the point where I have no idea what I'm shooting, I don't think I'm coming back with much that's good, with a couple of exceptions, and I just feel like I'm trying to figure out how to connect myself with such a new area. It's a good feeling, but I feel like I'm beginning all over again as a photographer.

I totally understand and think it takes a while to get a real feeling for something or somewhere completely different. It can't be forced or hurried. I think you're doing the right thing by carrying on photographing without putting pressure on yourself. It's nice to keep your eyes fresh and kind of feel your way gradually.

I want to talk more about a couple of your projects. Can you tell us a little about the background and meaning in *Anywhere but Here*? It views like the type of project that developed and morphed organically and over a long period of time. Is that on base?

Absolutely, it started with those two images that I took in 2008. As I added slowly to the series, I began to realize that this growing collection of photographs was a physical manifestation of my constant desire to be somewhere else. This is how I describe the project:

These images attempt to express the restless feeling that the place I'm in isn't where I should be and that the next location will be better. As someone who has always moved around, I am very interested in the idea of belonging to a country or a community. This is a feeling that I've never had and, although I feel like I'm supposed to belong somewhere, I don't want to. If I had this feeling of belonging, I wouldn't have a reason to keep wondering about it. The geographical and temporal reference points in the photographs are blurred because the work isn't about the location or time, but about a state-of-mind. There's no real beginning and I don't think there will be an end. The work comes from reality, but it's a reality that's distorted by subjectivity. It's an expression of my state of mind during these restless off-moments.

And I have the same question for *Dancing with a Cobra*. Can you tell us a little more about that project?

The title comes from a childhood memory of a time I was playing with a friend near the edge of the jungle in the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia and I came face to face with a cobra. That evening I told my mother I had danced with a snake and I showed her the undulating movement the cobra and I had made as we looked each other in the eye. I was about five years old at the time.

This is a full description of the project:

At the beginning of 2016, I moved back to South-East Asia. I had spent my earliest years in the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia. Returning, after all those years, brought back half-forgotten feelings and hazy memories. Coming back gave me the perfect opportunity to explore these early childhood memories that differ so much from those collected from later periods of my life. As a child, I remembered events or details that my adult self would probably find unremarkable and the big life events that an adult might consider important have long disappeared from my memory. There are many memories that probably weren't formed at the time of the incident but implanted from stories people told years after the event, like my supposed memory of Lee Kuan Yew's heartfelt, tearful announcement after Singapore had been expelled from the Federation. I'm sure I was too young to remember this moment in history.

My photographs are a visual interpretation of these childhood memories but they are also an instinctive, emotional response to these altered, yet familiar places. By using my recent photographs, I am both consciously and unconsciously recreating moments from my past. This process and the photographs themselves enable me to keep these memories alive. The process has proved to be cathartic and has helped to free me of a nagging nostalgia and melancholy caused by an abrupt departure and the loss of a nurturing and happy environment all those years ago.
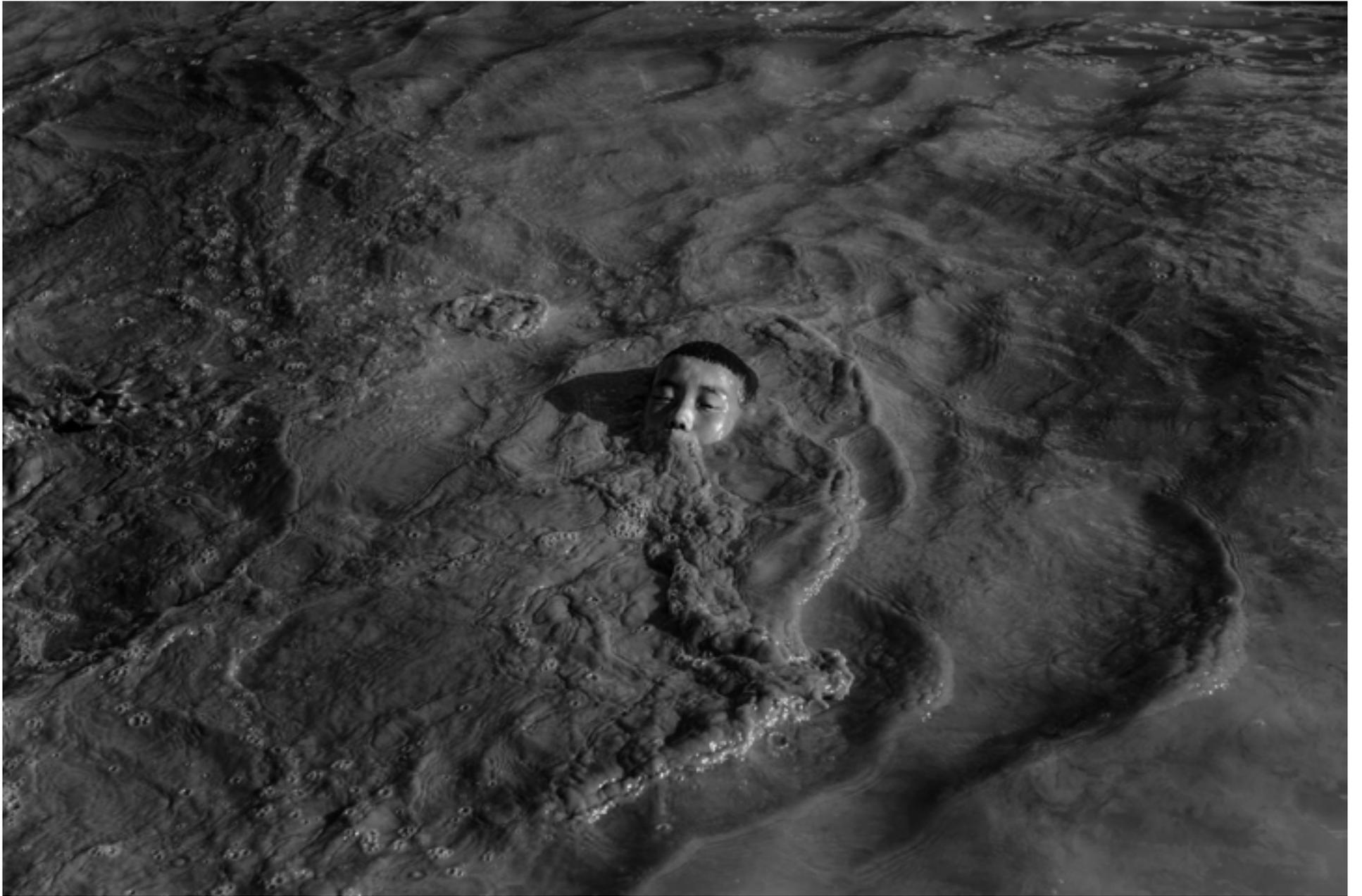
The years we had in Malaysia were surreally idyllic. I've wondered since if it was naivety and we were happily living our isolated lives, sheltered from reality, or if it was about the timing … probably both.

We lived there during a historically peaceful and optimistic era, having arrived two years after the end of the Malayan Emergency and having left just before the 1969 race riots and the subsequent imposition of another emergency rule and the loss of civil liberties. Malaysia has gone on to develop and prosper but that free and breezy mood I remember has gone forever.

After moving back to Southeast Asia, you mention it brought up a lot of childhood memories and feelings? Did the process for shooting this differ from *Anywhere but Here*? Did you have these childhood memories and ideas in mind before you went out to photograph or did you look for moments that brought them out, or a little of both?

The photographing stage was very similar to the ways I usually work. I tend to shoot first and think later. I never went to find images that fit the story. It all kind of fit together, probably partly because so many of the images are quite hazy and open to interpretation.

The process of writing and editing was more emotionally intense for this series though. *Anywhere but Here*, has no time limit and no real location whereas *Dancing with a Cobra* is about the memories from the six years of my early childhood in Malaysia and the three years that I recently spent back in Southeast Asia. Time and location are almost everything to this series. I think this idea of lapsed and lost time made this series difficult emotionally. While I was writing and editing the project, I was almost overwhelmed by feelings of loss … the loss of the locations as I remembered them, the loss and destruction of so much of the environment, the loss of many people from my life but mostly the loss of innocence, mine and seemingly the world's. Eventually, as I continued to work on the project, I began to feel better. The experience was eventually cathartic.

I very much enjoyed the photos in *Dancing with a Cobra*. You can feel this powerful emotional connection in the project even without knowing your background for making the work and all of these stories and emotions that went into it. And at the same time, the photographs make me reflect back on my own childhood, even though it seems like it was in a very different environment. That's all you can ask for in a body of work, right?

Thank you. Yes, to be able to use photography to work through emotions is fantastic but the fact that the work also stirs something in the viewer is more than I could hope for.

How is your *Riviera Dreams* project going? I connect strongly to the idea behind this project because a lot of what I have been photographing in the past decade is the take-over of New York (where I grew up) and its overall spirit. Your quote "I'm drawn to the vicious, addictive mess of melancholy, nostalgia, and disillusion that lies just under the surface" is a fantastic way to put it, and it seems to be a phenomenon that's happening in certain places all over the world.

Even though photographing the past decade in NYC must have been really interesting, it must also have been a little depressing seeing the character gradually being sucked out of the city.

Riviera Dreams is advancing very slowly, mainly because I need to spend more time down there. I hope to go to the film festival in May and maybe sooner. It's a rewarding place to photograph because there is an almost constant stream of new people arriving for conferences, festivals, and holidays. People are there with a purpose and it makes them interesting to watch and to photograph. The area is small but it's busy and changeable with lots of strange interactions and transactions going on. Also, the light is good most of the time and being near the sea makes me feel good! I really want to get stuck into this project.

Can you give me a couple of photographers that inspire you?

The late, great Robert Frank has always been one of the photographers who most inspires me. His photography and film work was groundbreaking at the time he made it, but what is most extraordinary is that it still looks fresh and exciting today.

For a few years, I've been obsessed with this book that is a recreation of Kiyoshi Suzuki's original dummy of his book *Soul and Soul*. Suzuki's original book was self-published in 1972. The more recent book's title is Soul and Soul 1969 - 1999. It's published by Noorderlicht's Aurora Borealis. It's a beautiful object and it's a privilege to see the reprinted pages from Suzuki's raw, scruffy dummy and to get a glimpse into the working of his mind. I find the photographs inspiring but the book's wabi-sabi presentation inspires me just as much.

Anything else I didn't ask, or something you'd want readers to know about you or your work? (No need to answer if you think we've covered everything).

I'm currently working on a completely handmade version of *Dancing with a Cobra*. I'm making an edition of thirty-three A5 sized books.

How did you first get into street photography?

I got into photography when I was in high school. I grew up in an urban place in New Jersey and the natural inclination was to go outside and photograph. I never considered myself a street photographer, just someone who photographs on the street.

I've always photographed on the street, but I began to take it more seriously in 2002. Up until then, most of my personal work had been done in 4x5, where I'd walk the street, meet people, and photograph them.

After 9/11, I felt like there was a seismic shift in society in the New Jersey and New York City areas and I wanted to go out and photograph to see what I felt about what I was seeing. It almost seemed like there was a massive Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on the faces of people around here. I didn't want to do it as formally as with the 4x5, so I began experimenting with the 2 and a quarter. I had always liked the square format; I used to shoot with the square format a lot commercially and I decided that I would stick with square and keep it really simple. I didn't want to shoot 35mm. All of my commercial work now is 35mm format and I felt that the square would differentiate what I was doing for myself from what I was doing commercially.

I also liked the idea of a larger negative because I love the tonality that you can get out of it. Also, it puts some pretty severe limitations on what I can do. There are no wild lenses or anything super fast. It slows you down. It was more challenging than going out with an auto-focus, auto-exposure, auto-everything digital SLR and so it forced me to work within the confines of the gear and the square itself. I like having limitations like that.

Mike Peters

When not shooting commercially, you can find Mike Peters wandering the streets of New York City and New Jersey searching for candid portraits with his Hasselblad.

Mike's work successfully blurs the lines between traditional street photography and street portraiture. His candid portraits, typically of the everyday person, capture a stunning emotional depth. The connection he has with his subjects is palpable. You can view more of Mike's work on his website.

http://www.mikepeters.com.

Tell us a little more about how you shoot technically. Is it tough to shoot with a Hasselblad on the streets?

I shoot with an F-series Hasselblad. It isn't much bigger than a DSLR. It has the focal plane shutter in the body. The ones that I use go up to 1/2000th of a second. I use the F lenses, which don't have shutters on them. I use either a 50mm, F2.8 or a 110mm, F2. Occasionally, I'll use the 80mm, F2.8.

I shoot film. I was shooting Fuji 800Z for the past ten years and they discontinued that so now I'm shooting Portra 800. Film has gotten a whole lot more expensive. Every time I click the shutter it costs me a dollar.

I use a handheld meter. I'm particular that the film is exposed right because it's horrible to scan if it's not. Generally, I'm shooting anywhere from 4 feet to 10 feet away, 15 feet sometimes, but usually at a conversational distance. I'm not using anything long. The 50mm is like a 28mm view. It works well in close situations and the 110mm is good for picking people out. It's just slightly longer than normal.

It's tough to get the focus correct. It's not like shooting with a Leica with snap focus. You have to be deliberate. Very often, I'll shoot at F2 because I like shooting in sketchy light. To me, that's always a rush. Recently, when I was shooting down at Occupy Wall Street in Zuccotti Park, I was shooting mostly at 1/125th at F2.8 or F2. The place is like a cave; there was just no light.

You can't zone focus on the Hasselblad. Even with the 50mm, you really have to nail it. With the 50mm, I probably still have a centimeter and a half of good focus. With the 110mm, shooting at F2.8 or F2, I probably have about 5 millimeters. There's no room for error. On a contact sheet everything looks perfect, but then when you scan it and you look at it at 3200ppi, then the flaws show.

You seem to get very close and your portraits seem so candid and full of emotion. You also often capture that split second when a person looks at you before they notice and react to being photographed. Tell us why you like this moment so much.

I like to wait for people to get quiet and I look for those moments where somebody's lost in thought. It's facial expressions and body language, but it's really more. I like to find people who are lost in a moment or people who have something very expressive on their face or in the way they hold their body that suggests a thought that most people can relate to.

Sometimes I'll photograph people not looking at the camera and a lot of times I'll actually wait for them to look up at it. In some situations, the eye contact works. Every situation is different so I just try to gauge it.

I like that instantaneous moment where people look up but haven't had a chance to acknowledge the camera or react. People's faces are still neutral at that point and I think it forges a bit more of a connection with the person looking at the photograph. If there's not enough going on with the person in terms of their facial expression or body language that can carry the photo without the connection, then I wait for the eye contact to make the connection.

On the topic of connection, you seem to connect mostly with the ordinary person or the everyday man. Why do you think that is?

It's funny, when I go out I try and look for people that I can relate to. I look for things that seem familiar. I always try to have some sort of connection with the idea about why I am photographing a person.

I'm not interested in photographing people like the homeless or people who are incapable of defending themselves. On the other end, I'm not interested in celebrities, fashion models, or rich people.

I grew up in a working-class neighborhood and I relate to the type of people that go through the world invisible unless they're getting made fun of on the sitcoms. Nobody really pays attention to them, yet it's where I come from and it's who I am. Somebody once said, photograph what you know, and so I took that to heart. It's what I know, who I know, what I'm comfortable with, and where I come from. It just seems to make sense to me. I want to acknowledge people's existence as they go about their everyday lives.

I think you find out more about yourself from photographing other people, just simply by the choices that you make. I walk down the street and I may walk past ten thousand people and for some reason I see one person that I have to photograph. What does that say about me, about the choices that I make, and about who I choose to photograph?

I feel like a lot of street photographers go out and look for that random moment where there's peak action, or for this weird juxtaposition, and for me, it's about making connections on more of a human level. It's more driven by the subject then it is about juxtaposition.

You know, a lot of bad street photography is like a one-line joke. You look at it and you go 'ha ha ha' and then you forget about it. I'm trying to get to a level where anybody can look at the photograph and relate to it.

How have you progressed over the years as a street photographer?

I didn't know what I wanted to do when I first started, but I paid attention to what I was photographing and the results informed me. I really just followed the photographs. It continues to be a journey of discovery. It's not like I go out with a specific idea in mind. I go out with an empty head and I learn from the pictures when I get back. I follow the photos.

I find that I get more particular as I've progressed. If anything, I probably shoot less. I think I have a better idea of what I want. Every year the number of rolls of film I shoot goes down.

I'm also less afraid to point my camera at a stranger four feet away and take their photograph without asking. It's easier for me to get close and to feel confident about what I'm doing. I feel like what I'm doing is appropriate. I'm not doing anything wrong and I feel good about my work. I look at work that was done thirty, forty, and fifty years ago and it's easy to see the importance of actually making these photographs. If Vivian Maier or Fred Herzog weren't around making their photographs the way they were in the 50s or 60s, then we wouldn't have all of these great photographs to inform us of what it looked or felt like in those times. It gives context.

You are working on a new book, correct? Tell us a little about the project and your editing process.

I've been working on this book, which started out as a variety of projects in 2002 but eventually became one. I call it *The Dream*. I feel like I'm done shooting for it, so right now I'm going back and rescanning old negatives and editing down to the picture selections that I really want.

[The process] is hard. Sometimes you like pictures for all the wrong reasons. It's hard to be dispassionate. I feel like I get better at editing as I get older. It's a learning experience.

I had an interesting experience a couple of years ago. There was a friend of mine who liked my work but hated my picture selection and he couldn't exactly tell me why, so he introduced me to Christopher Anderson from Magnum. Chris very graciously agreed to sit down with me for a couple of hours and look at my work and he pointed out some really eye-opening things to me.

Up until then, I was like, "Am I a street photographer or do I shoot portraits?" My street photography wasn't that good but my portraits were much better and he got me to see that, so I became very clear about that. It's been much easier since then to make peace about what I'm shooting and how I edit things. I'm not trying to mix in portraits and street. Now I understand where I'm coming from. For some reason, I had a hard time accepting where I was at.

For years, I had done portraits with a 4x5 on the street and I thought that shooting in the square would loosen me up and allow me to shoot in a different style. But the reality is that no matter what, I just keep going back to who I am. I tried to be the more spontaneous, weird juxtaposition kind of guy, but the reality is that I didn't do that so well. I photograph people.

What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer? What are some things to avoid?

My advice is to go to Amazon.com or go to the library and get some books about street photography. Go back to the beginning and educate yourself. Try to learn from the acknowledged great street photographers of the past. There are an amazing number of people to learn from.

I see a lot of people that go out and they shoot random people walking past the camera with a wide-angle lens and they think they're Garry Winogrand. What they don't understand is that there's no context to what they're doing. It's just empty. They haven't had any connection with themselves or with the work that they're doing. They're just out shooting in a style.

Really good street photography is not about style. As Winogrand said, it's about the form and content coming together to make something interesting. Not a lot of people manage to capture that.

For young people, don't be too self-satisfied early on. Really look deeply at some great work that's been done in the past, try to figure out which of it resonates with you, and then try to go in that direction. But also try to put something of yourself into the photograph. Have a point of view. Although that's easier said than done.

Everybody wants to be Bruce Gilden or Alex Webb or Lee Friedlander. I've seen Bruce on the street and we've had a lot of conversations. He's a good guy; he's a funny guy. But the work that he does is really based on who he is and where he comes from. There's an authenticity to what he does, but when other people try to do it, it's just a style.

A lot of people think they can't differentiate between style and substance. A lot of people never get what authentic means. It takes a lot of effort to know yourself well and to be comfortable in your own skin. Some people get it right away but some of us have to work at it for a long time until maybe we figure it out.

So you think that the better we know ourselves the better street photographers we'll be?

Not just for street photography but as human beings or as artists. If you're involved in any sort of art then having a better sense of yourself will always make for stronger work. Authenticity cuts across everything. Like Matt Weber: Matt is who he is and he makes no bones about it. So does Gilden, so did Walker Evans, and so did Diane Arbus. They were very much clued into who they were. That comes out in their work. That's what makes it so interesting.

What do you think about what the internet has done for street photography?

I think that there's a real interest in street photography on the internet, although I'm not sure if that's good or bad for the long run. Everybody with a camera thinks they're a street

photographer. I think there's a lot more work out there these days, but there's still a small amount of great work. There's just a vast amount of really mediocre stuff and I think that the vast amount of mediocre stuff has gotten even more vast. And more people can see it.

There also seems to be a balkanization of forms of street photography, where there's this one accepted form and either you fit into it or you don't. I tend to think that street photography is broader than how it is often defined on the internet.

But the internet is a great thing. I've made connections with people all over the globe. A lot of people sneer at Flickr, but I've made a lot of great contacts through Flickr, people who I've met in real life. I see work that inspires me every day. There's an enormous amount of crap on Flickr, but if you're careful about whose work you look at then you can see great stuff.

There's a great sharing of information if you pay attention to some of the right groups. It has opened me up to a lot of new work. It's a great thing, but it can be overwhelming too. Like right now, I'm in a phase where I'm pulling back and looking at less stuff. I feel like I'm overwhelmed at the moment. I'm just trying to limit my exposure a little bit. I'm trying to edit the book, plus I have a demanding full-time gig shooting for a university, I work a lot of hours there and I also try to have friends and family and other endeavors besides just photography.

Who are a few of your favorite street photographers?

In terms of photographers that I've drawn inspiration from, I certainly have to go back to Walker Evans, Cartier-Bresson, Diane Arbus, W. Eugene Smith was a huge hero for me early on, Leonard McCombe and Grey Villet from Life Magazine, Winogrand, and Friedlander. Somebody who's not a street photographer but whose portraits kill me every time is Richard Avedon, and even Irving Penn's portraits are sort of mind-boggling.

Avedon was always looking for that tell-tale moment on the person's face. In a way, his portraits probably inform what I do on the street more than anyone else. Arbus was really photographing herself. People say, "Oh, she photographed freaks all the time," but they were pretty much self-portraits, or at least I see it that way. Avedon, when he photographed people in the studio, he was looking for something, just like I look for something when I'm on the street, but instead of working with the person to get what I want, I have to try and find it in the wild. I have to find the person that I connect to and then I wait and hope that some random person doesn't step in front of my camera, or that the light is good enough, or that at F2 I've nailed the focus, or not.

I'm not bringing people into my space; I'd rather go out searching for them.
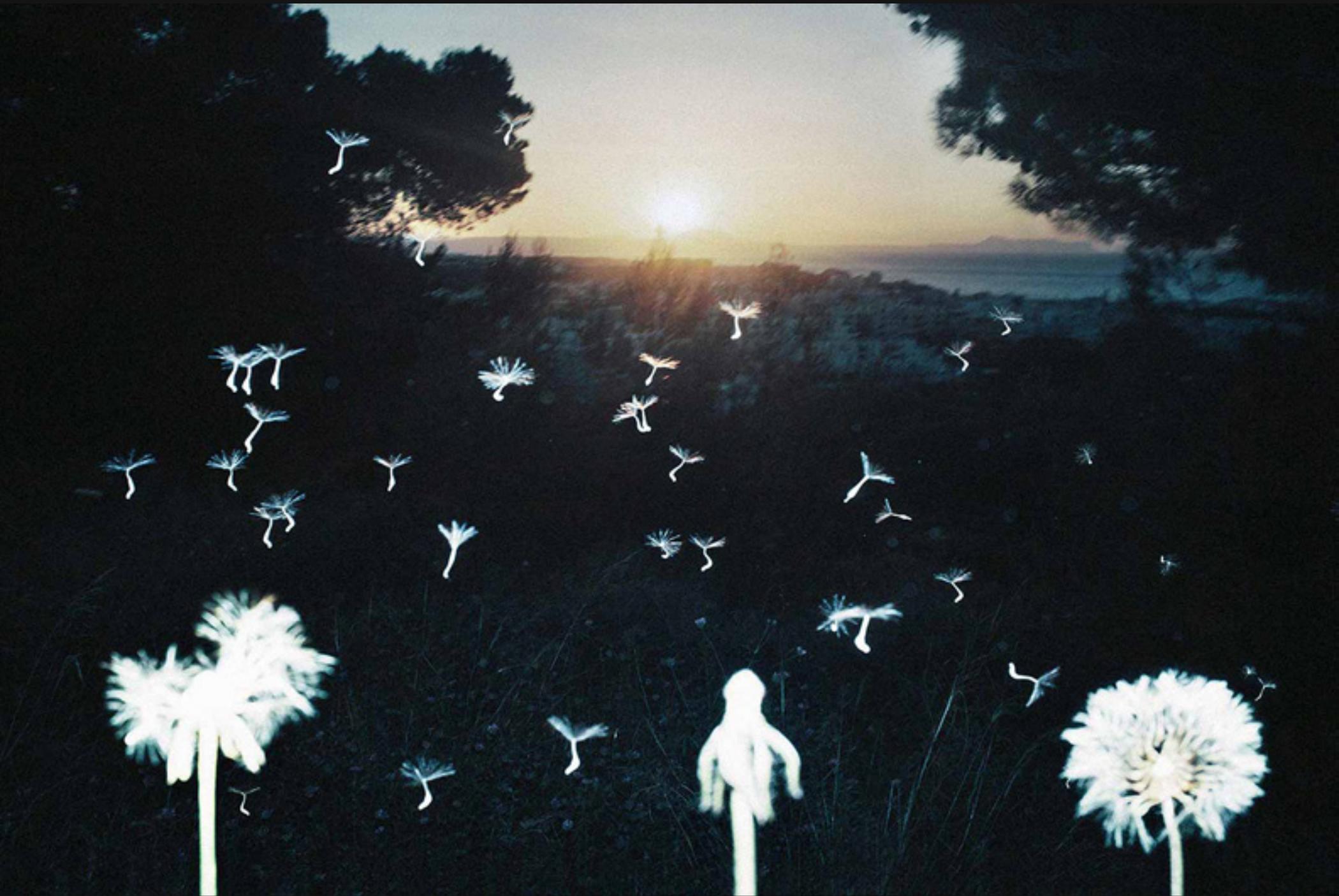
Can you tell us how you got started with photography and how you progressed early on?

I got my first analog camera in 1997 when I started to study architecture in Thessaloniki. There was a photo-club of architect students at that time (Φ.Λ.Α.Σ.), where I took two lessons of developing and printing b/w film, but I started to shoot more intensively after I got my first digital camera in 2008. Gradually I found in photography a way of expressing myself easier than other kinds of mediums I had tried before such as drawing with charcoal or playing music. The only available source to search things about photography in my town back then was the internet, so apart from shooting I spent some time looking at work in Magnum, In-Public, American Suburb X, Blake Andrews' blog, HCSP + Fotografi Di Strada + La Pura Vida Flickr groups, etc. In 2011, I started my 'dirty blog' to organize and present what I did and also show other people's work that I found inspiring.

I don't remember when I started following your blog, but it seemed like you were developing your visual style at that point both on your own and through inspiration from others. It's a little dark, emotional, mysterious, sometimes quirky, some of the snapshot type aesthetic. Did you start off shooting like this from the beginning or did this take time to develop? How would you describe the overall style and direction of your work?

My inspiration comes mainly from Sam Peckinpah, Akira Kurosawa, Luis Bunuel, Fransisco Goya, Max Ernst, Weegee, Diane Arbus, Mark Cohen, Cristobal Hara, etc. It took me a lot of time and effort to transform some thoughts visually and still I'm not sure about anything. Maybe the only thing I know is that if I do the same thing continuously I get bored in the end, that's why I'm trying to surprise myself whenever it's possible. Most times it proves to be a difficult task, sometimes there are thoughts coming out of

Charalampos Kydonakis

From the island of Crete, his home, to NYC, Charalampos Kydonakis (also known as Dirty Harrry) has brought an incredibly unique and powerful voice to the world of photography.

He has recently published two photography books, Warn'd in Vain and Back to Nowhere, twin tales taken in New York City and Crete.

https://www.dirtyharrry.com/

what is out there, that reveal to me something I hadn't encountered before. These few moments are the ones that stayed in my memory and became my favorite images over the years. I call my images "dirty photos." A friend once told me to change it, but I didn't.

What type of camera and focal length do you typically use? Anything else we should know about how you like to shoot from a technical perspective?

My lenses are cheap old ones between 20-35mm, I use them with adapters on analog 35mm film, DSLR, and mirrorless cameras. I'm using manual settings, no auto-focus, no auto-anything. I don't like much saturation, sharpness, clarity, and anything that makes the digital images seem too digital. Alcohol is in the game too. Technical mistakes can't always be avoided, sometimes they're even welcome. I tried to shoot with my mobile phone, but it's slow and I couldn't do much with it. At some point i felt I lost the joy of touching the images so I got a printer and started printing some images that i wanted to see on paper. Over the last 2 years, I started shooting film too again. If I had more time and money, I'd shoot only film. Generally the equipment and technique details are useful in the beginning but not really important in the end. With a few words, if you want to screw something the screwdriver is not the only way.

You create such a unique look with your use of flash - I find it adds so much to the look and feel of your work. Can you talk about your reasoning for often using flash?

The flash helps me to be independent from the existing light, no matter if it's day or night out there. It was also important for me to experiment with techniques that I had no idea before. Anyway, it's a simple tool, like the tripod, the aperture or whatever, I often shoot without flash too when the batteries are over.

So when you go out shooting, is it complete chance and surprise, or do you even have any preconceived notions in your head about the types of images you are looking for? Do you go to the same locations over and over or do you like to find new places?

The ideas of the projects I'm trying to develop are not born beforehand. A pre-decided concept would make the whole thing seem like a job to me. At the same time, just shooting without anything behind it can't lead anywhere, so I 'm trying to balance between the total freedom of discovering what's out there and the existing thoughts in the backside of my mind about how all these things can be connected. I wish there were new locations to discover every day, but I live in a small town, so usually the places I go to shoot after work are some specific ones. Even when I visit bigger cities like NYC or Istanbul after some necessary time around anywhere, I usually end up in the same places.

Can you talk about the role that editing takes place in your work? Do you think your ideas are born during the editing or shooting phase, or a little of both? Do you find it difficult to pull together your themes and ideas when editing?

The first years I never edited, I just kept on shooting. After I made my blog, I started searching and editing other people's work and this helped me edit my own stuff too. As the years pass by the editing process changes, some ideas of the past may be re-worked or completely replaced too. A weird "why" appears behind every thought and someone has to deal with himself and all the work that was done by everyone else before him again and again… Inevitably everything recycles, so the effort of developing an idea and avoiding a subconscious repetition becomes a never-ending headache… Sometimes people you trust can help you with it, sometimes it's a more personal issue. Generally, my thoughts on photography are floating on time spent during walking, traveling, shooting,

editing, discussing with friends, drinking, listening to music, sleeping. In the last two years, apart from editing, I'm trying to work my projects in InDesign to see how my thoughts can take shape as an object in the future.

Let's talk about *Warn'd in Vain*. You spent 7 months in New York. The work in the book is wonderfully unique, which is so tough to do in one of the most photographed places in the world. I know the environment must have been extremely different from shooting in your hometown, but did you find the experience of photographing here much different? Did it take time to get used to the city?

I think the major difference between the process in each place has to do with the time devoted. In Crete, I'm usually shooting a bit after work or during the weekends, but in NYC I knew that my time was limited, so I tried to stay out and shoot till my feet couldn't walk any more every day. The seven months I spent there were split between 6 trips. When I first got there I was hanging around pretty much anywhere to have a general idea of each district. It took me some time to move away from the busy avenues, where I got bored of people looking at their cellphones. Manhattan is the main Metropolis landmark, but Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx have their own character too. Maybe subconsciously the smaller scale in these places made me feel closer to what I was used before. *Warn'd in Vain*'s final cut is a mosaic with images from all the above places.

You gave the book an Argonautica theme. Can you give us a quick background of the Ancient Greek poem? Can you talk about how and why you came up with the idea?"

Argonautica" is a 3rd century BC epic poem of Apollonius Rhodius about the glorious and tragic story of Jason. It's a myth of a big adventure about the struggle for power, love,

betrayal and revenge. There are a few related movies, my favorite ones are [Medea](#) by Paolo Pasolini (1969) and [Medea](#) by Lars von Trier (1988). After my first months in NYC, I tried to search for connecting lines between my presence in NYC and what I came across there. The body of work that had started to develop would be a chaotic task for me to edit without any kind of background. Greek mythology gave me some ideas to sequence my thoughts in this place across the ocean; a contemporary Colchis, the city that was considered the end of the ancient world. Gradually I started searching for metaphors that could form something after my time in the city expired.

You followed up *Warn'd in Vain* with *Back to Nowhere*, which you describe as a twin book. The photos were taken on your island of Crete between 2009 and 2017. The books have an underlying similarity to them even though they were taken in completely different places, yet you can feel that *Back to Nowhere* was created from your home while *Warn'd in Vain* feels like the exploration of a foreign place. Can you tell us a little about the Greek mythology/scenario that you used for this book? What does the term *Back to Nowhere* refer to? Did you find the editing process to be different for this project since you were much more intimate with the surroundings and had been shooting it for such a long time?

I edited both books at the same time right after I returned from NYC, and some initial thoughts when I first went there were on combining images from both places in one book. Finally, I decided to separate them in two twin tomes that would be different enough, but under a common background. There is a main difference between the two books; *W.I.V.* is a stranger's question mark inside the world's most photographed city, *B.T.N.* on the other side is my view on my island, the only place I won't be able to see how it looks in the eyes of a stranger. *B.T.N.* is based on the myth of Crete's iconic figure,

Minotaur, the bull-headed human inside the Labyrinth. Even if Minotaur is supposed to be a monster, he has been treated in various ways by artists over the centuries; sometimes he is depicted with brutality, sometimes with fear, sometimes with tenderness. The *Back to Nowhere* title came out of what I was thinking at that time when I returned home after NYC - going back to my nowhere which at the same time is my everywhere, as I'm not sure if I ever got somewhere. Even if the imagery in the two books isn't similar, I think there wasn't much difference in the way each material was edited.

How would you describe your home / Crete?

It would be less complicated to describe it in pictures... What is sure is that the reasons for my connection with my island are possibly on the opposite side than the visiting reasons for 99% of Crete's guests. I think I feel better during the winter that everything is quieter here, even if this silence is sometimes too tough. Obviously family, life, history, and landscape are important factors, but I don't know if the only attaching feelings are coming out of them. There is an underground bond with this place that I have no idea how I can explain more precisely.

Where do you go from here? What are you working on next?

I've started working with material from Istanbul, and also shooting some black and white and film stuff in Crete. All these will need a lot of time to be in good shape for a future publication. Unlike *Warn'd in Vain* and *Back to Nowhere*, I'm now trying to work the idea-shooting-editing-designing process simultaneously whenever it's possible. The whole thing is sometimes more clear to me this way, sometimes more chaotic too. Time will show.

Is there a photo that you've taken that best explains who you are?

There are times my thoughts are best expressed by a landscape, other times by a street scene, a portrait or whatever. I'm not sure if I have a favorite photo. I'll put 2 random ones below - both were made in my town, the man image in 2010, the forest one in 2015.

What's the most important piece of advice that you would have for a photographer just starting?

I would advise everyone not to follow advice.

How did you first get into photography and what first brought the genre of street photography to your attention?

For me, it was an outgrowth of becoming a photographer. I was 32 years old, living in Louisville and I had lost several jobs at that point. So out of the blue, with the encouragement of a girl that I was seeing at the time, I decided to be a photographer. I had to make a living in a hurry, so I began doing public relations photography.

The entire job is to make sure everyone looks nice: men in suits giving each other plaques, ribbon cuttings, happy group shots and things like that, but occasionally you take one at a reception and it's a little off and a little weird and everyone looks uncomfortable. At the time, I wasn't intentionally looking for that, but something always made me click the shutter.

I always had just a bit of an edge and a slight bit of cynicism. So over time I began to take more of these and began to see them happen. But I wasn't showing them; they were just sitting in the contact sheets. Then I got my first big break when I became the official photographer of the Kentucky Derby Festival: sixty or seventy events every year within about a three-week span - an unbelievable buzz and a huge amount of work.

But it was all public relations work. You know, you do so many happy photos and you've got to have some bitterness in there, just to keep your sanity. So I began to really look for the outtakes. I put together my first exhibition in Kentucky for a gallery that I was working with and I called it *Spectators, or Derby Festival Outtakes*, made up of all the uncomfortable little moments that people do not wish to see. That was the start of my street photography, I think.

In the course of doing all of this event photography, your skills become really sharp. You're working every day, all day, clicking shutters. It's in your fingers and not your head, which is where you have to be to be a street photographer.

Photo by Jan Meissner

Richard Bram

As one of the original members of IN-PUBLIC (now Up Photographers), Richard Bram has been shooting on the streets and spreading his passion for street photography for quite some time. Luckily for us, Richard is equally as interesting as his photographs and he does not hold back or sugarcoat his thoughts. Richard's work has been seen in galleries from Louisville to Germany. You can view more of his work on his website.

http://richardbram.com.

The first time that I went somewhere with no agenda and a whole bunch of film was when I heard about an agency that ran tours through Russia in '92, where you stayed with Russian families in their apartments rather than with a tour group. It was a crazy time to go because it was a year after the second revolution - that brief chaotic moment between two different controls when you could go anywhere and shoot anything. I had two weeks, a week in Moscow and a week in St. Petersburg, just by myself with two cameras and film, and I walked all day every day and just shot like crazy. That was when I realized that working like that was what I really wanted to do. It was a seminal moment.

Then in '97, I moved to London and changed everything in my life simultaneously. I began to just do personal work. That is where it really started rolling. It became all I did for the most part.

Tell us technically how you shoot, what camera and lens do you use?

If it comes down to it, I'll shoot with an iPhone if it's all I've got. It's with whatever camera I have with me. If it'll record an image, it'll do. I just blew up a 17" by 22" print from an iPhone and it looks great. If the image is good, it'll work. If it's a bad picture, then it'll look *really* bad.

But mostly, I use a Leica M9. I've been doing my personal work with Leicas since 1988. Before the M9, I used the M6 and I started with an old beat-up M3. The M9 is small, unobtrusive, the files are gorgeous, and it's a well thought out manual machine. Mostly, I use a 35mm lens and occasionally a 24mm.

The camera is always on and it's pre-focused and I'll check the exposure. Sometimes I shoot automatic, sometimes manual. When the light is a little tricky then I'll go to manual.

As I've progressed, I got less and less afraid of being close to people and shooting very close to people, so the focal length of my lenses got shorter and shorter. If you're closer

then it means you're more involved.

I really do look at the backgrounds. Alfred Eisenstaedt said to look at the background first. You get that taken care of and then it's a lot easier.

But I make sure to *always* have a camera. Whether I'm going to the post office or the dry cleaners, there's a camera around my neck and it's on - you never know. That's the number one commandment. Thou shalt always have a camera.

What's your philosophy on street photography?

There are a lot of different schools on street photography and so I argue with people about this all of the time. My philosophy is that I am looking for something that is a little unusual in the everyday, something just a little off. I'm looking for something more going on that could be inferred or implied that isn't actually in the rectangle.

It doesn't have to be a joke picture, although the world needs more jokes these days. There's nothing wrong with a really good joke, but that's not enough. Someone standing in front of a funny sign is not enough unless there is a real interaction that works on more than one level.

Maybe it comes from being a public relations photographer, but I'm always looking for a significant gesture, a look, or something that shows emotion and human feeling. I do take pictures of people just coming at me on the street, but ultimately that's unsatisfying and it's not enough. It's not what I look for in my pictures.

There are a lot of clichés in street photography. We all do it. I might take one today as I walk back to the subway, but chances are that I won't show it to anyone. That's where the editing comes into play. And why is it a cliché? It's because everybody does it. When you're starting out, you pay attention to the focus, to making everything sharp and clear,

and to the subject being in the right place in the frame. It's really exciting. But with a little time and experience, you realize that everybody does that. What more is there?

Another cliché is lots of telephoto pictures of faces. Yeah, that's an interesting face, and that's an interesting face, and so is that... But if you see a whole book of them then it's just boring as hell. Maybe there's a place for one of them in a series, but a mass of them? That's all you're doing, close-ups of faces looking at you and mugging for the camera? Oh god, save us! I never want to see another wrinkled old market woman or a guy with a cigarette with his arm out of the car in my life. There's a reason you call these things clichés.

I want you to wonder; I want there to be mystery, where you want to know more. It's like, what the hell is happening? That's interesting and that's what I'm looking for with the really good pictures.

There's a funny color picture from a few years ago of a plump woman looking at a band on a green field with a little bouncy pink-and-white toy castle. It was fifty yards from our house in London; there was a little fair going on in our park. Then recently, I walked into the Museum of Modern Art, and there is Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World" hanging on the wall, which is the painting of the girl in the long brown grass looking up at an old beat-up house on a hill. It's the same image, only flipped and comic. I didn't think of that relationship at the time, but I hit something there. It's a fun picture, but it also keys in.

Look at the controversy over this year's World Press Photo award winner, with the woman in a burka cradling a son. People say, "Oh, it's a Piéta; it's a Michelangelo." It's not just Michelangelo; it's one of the basic cultural touchstones of Western Art, with someone in mourning cradling a loved one. This goes back to the dawn of human history. That's why that picture is great. It's not because the picture is a cliché; it's because it has an echo that goes back thousands of years to the human condition. W. Eugene Smith's "Tomoko in her bath," the terribly mercury-poisoned, deformed girl being bathed by her mother is the same thing. Does this mean that it's a cliché or a copy? No, it means that it's a magnificent photograph and incredibly important.

In a great picture (and I'm not saying I've ever taken anything on that level) you will get something beyond what's there. That's what we all hope for. If you're searching for it consciously then you probably won't find it. But you may, in a moment of grace, get it.

You are very interested in art history. How do you think this informs your street photography?

You need to study the history of art. You're just not going to learn anything about lighting that wasn't known to old portrait masters. Right now, everybody should go up to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and see the Renaissance portraits and then go see the Cindy Sherman show. Where did Cindy learn that? It was from going to art school. Even Salvador Dali said, "If you think that modern portraiture and modern painting has surpassed Velazquez then go on with your blissful ignorance." And he's right. You have to know where things come from.

If I have a distinct style, it's probably that a lot of my work is a little classical in some ways. Not formal, but it will have some of that because there will still be a balance within the picture as expressed within the rules of art. Not formally, not a triangle, not a square, not a circle within the photo, but the eyes will move through and there will be a balance somehow within it.

If you want to break the rules, great, but first you have to know the rules. Learn your craft and learn the skills. Learn the technical stuff until it's part of you, unconsciously. Then you can do anything that you damn well please.

You have to go to the library and study great photography. Imitate the masters. Go out and make a bunch of Kertész's, go out and do a bunch of Henri Cartier-Bresson's, and then go out and do a bunch of Mapplethorpe portraits. And then go back to your own work. What you learned just goes into the background.

There was a big controversial Robert Mapplethorpe show up in Cincinnati in 1989, with all

these sexual images in it. I went in and was knocked out by these gigantic three-foot by four-foot portraits in platinum. I thought, "How did he do that?" So I went home and I spent three weeks working on it until I could get that technique down. And it was just a technique; it wasn't that hard. I never did it again, but I can pull it out if I need to.

Even if you don't like a photographer and don't understand why they're great, you've got to look at their work and figure out why someone else thinks they're great, even if it doesn't connect with you. That is what is not happening now. The literacy is lacking. You're not going to get it just from the web: It takes hard studying.

Let's talk about editing. Tell us about how you edit and evaluate your work. How do you go about looking at your work with an objective eye and pick out your most effective photos?

Editing is the hardest and most important thing of all. The difference between a good photographer and a talented amateur is editing. It's not how many great pictures you get per frames taken.

You have to concentrate on what's actually in the frame and that's the hard part. That's what drives you crazy. Sometimes you think, "Oh, that's a great shot," and you look at it on the computer and it's not so good. You want it to be great, but it's not. You say, "Well if I could have moved an inch over or I should have bent down." If there's a coulda-shoulda-woulda

attached to it then it's no good. That's it.

But that's okay because you'll take another one. There might be more in an hour, there might be more in five minutes, or there might not be one for six months. I've gone through long periods when there was nothing. Editing takes care and you have to know what you're doing. How do you know? You just do it over and over and get really hard on yourself and you take your work to people who are not kind to you and let them critique it.

If you've got a hundred Flickr followers and they all say, "Oh, great capture man, really cool, hot shot dude," that will teach you nothing. You want to show your work to someone who will tell you, "Actually, you didn't get it and you missed this and it's kind of boring and there's something coming out of his head and you really need to be a better editor of your work."

I got that beaten into my head until I was bruised and dazed and it taught me a lot.

I discovered very quickly that I wasn't nearly as good as I thought I was. There's that comic graph, you may have seen it, where the point where you think, "Oh, I'm so great," turns into, "Oh, I'm shit," and then you start to learn from that point and then eventually you may achieve Nirvana, or it'll be like the rest of us where you just keep looking for it for the rest of your life.

My fourth year in London was when I met David Gibson, Matt Stuart, and Nick Turpin, and became the fourth member of IN-PUBLIC. They're very fine, very committed, and hard, critical street photographers. We have a private message board where we post pictures for each other and tear the photos apart with knives. It's a fierce, hard peer review. There are no prisoners taken and no mercy expected or given, but if most guys really like a photo then you know you've probably got a good picture. That's my peer group and that's why I don't post things on Flickr.

Look at a person's work: Do you actually like the work of the people who are giving you the 'attaboys?' If their work is banal and ordinary then their critiques are not worth anything. If they're shooting really good stuff then that's a different story.

Take a classic photographer like André Kertész, who died in the mid-'80s. He started shooting before WWI. Immediately, what comes to mind is maybe ten pictures and if you really know his work then you can probably call up thirty, in a seventy-year working life! A big retrospective might have a hundred and fifty pictures.

Winogrand shot like a maniac, to a neurotic extent, but he was a great editor. You know, he went to all the rallies in New York, he was at the Love-Ins, he went to Anti-War marches, he was at the hard-hat pro-war rallies. How many pictures of those did we ever see? Maybe ten? He took thousands and thousands of frames and we have seen ten pictures. He never published a book about it. There were a few of them in *Public Relations* and that was it because that's the odds. He was judging his photographs and was really, really tough.

I've had a talk with Bryan Formhals, who said, "I want to see the process, all I see is the good pictures," and I said, "Yeah, exactly, there's a point to that." We all take bad photographs; I've got loads of them. The odds in street photography are terrible. It's not 100:1; it's not 1000:1; it's much higher than that. It's really bad. If you take three to four great pictures in a year, then you're doing really well. I don't care how many thousands of frames you shoot.

You shot in black and white for so long but now you have transitioned to color. Why is that?

Digital does have a lot to do with it. I always shot color for my commercial work. In the old days of film, I would always carry two cameras, one with black and white film and one with color slide film.

I did my own work mostly in black and white because I could make the prints myself and I liked working in the darkroom, but I just couldn't print the color photos myself. I could not get color prints to match my conception of what the scene looked like.

I finally got the right printer, an Epson 3880, and when I got the M9 I didn't shoot a roll of black and white film for three months. I shot like crazy and it was all color and I started printing it to my standards because I could finally do what I wanted with color, my way.

So now, when I go out, most of the time, I'm shooting all in color - and it's a challenge. It's harder because you have the distraction of color, which is something else to deal with. Some things work in color, some in black and white, and some in both. But color can also ruin a picture because if what's happening in the front is really strong but there's a hot pink fluorescent thing in the background then your eye is always going to go back to that hot pink fluorescent thing. You should have moved over and hidden it if you had the time. If you didn't have the time then, well, that's another shot that didn't work.

It's also another way of reinvigorating myself. I've been shooting for a long time. After a while, you need to try something new to keep yourself awake, because you can't keep falling back on the same things over and over again. The shift to color has done that. It's something new to go out and wrestle with.

Do you consciously seek out the crowds?

I take a camera with me everywhere, but if I'm consciously out shooting then I'll go some-where crowded.

Gus Powell said, "The city is a generous place. It's always giving you something". If you're in a crowded place, then there's always something coming at you. People are coming and going and they're absorbed and in their own worlds. They're screaming and they're crying and they're talking. There's always something. How can you not partake of this cornuco-

pia, this torrent of faces, coming at you all the time?

I've recently spent a huge amount of time on Broadway and Prince in SoHo, shooting heaving crowds. It's hard to work in that insanely crowded environment. You really have to have your chops and be unafraid and fast. It freaks a lot of people out. You do not know what's going to come at you. It's kind of a new thing for me, but it also harks back to photos that I had done working at the Kentucky Derby with the huge crowds of people. It's a return to something I used to do with a new eye.

Also, people are a lot more conscious now than they used to be. I came to New York in '88 and I shot with my big Nikon F2s, which are really loud cameras; you could hear them a block away. It would go 'clack clack clack' and I wouldn't care and nobody would notice. Now these days, it's tougher.

That's why I admire Blake Andrews because it's harder to do it in a place like the suburbs. It's a much more sparse landscape for a street photographer, but he does it. For people who say there are no pictures in the suburbs, well, you're just not looking for things and you're not seeing them. They're everywhere. The best pictures are within fifty or a hundred yards from your house, wherever that is. So keep your eyes open.

Do you think your personality shows in your work?

My first three months in London were a little tough because I was adjusting to everything, being married, being in a new country, changing the entire way that I worked. A friend of mine, Susan Lipper, came over to visit one day and I asked her to take a look at my contact sheets. She said, "Well there are some good shots here but mostly what I'm getting is sort of angry, hostile and alienated," and I said, "Yeah, that about sums it up," because that's what was in them. If I'm feeling good, then my pictures are going to be different than if I'm feeling angry. It'll show in your pictures.

I think I probably have a couple different styles depending on my mood or how I feel that day. Depending on what kind of attitude, I may or may not use a flash, even in the day-light. Not quite in a Bruce Gilden style, but just trying to do something different with the light. It depends on whether or not I'm feeling critical because I think that using a flash is inherently a little hostile since you're banging somebody in the eyeballs. So you've got to decide whether your subject matter deserves that. If you're doing it just because it's a cool thing to do then it's not enough.

For example, the first time I had a whole body of work where I did that was *Big Hair and True Love*. I was in a really bad mood; I just had a bad breakup and I was feeling kind of hostile and so I went to the State Fair and worked on it in that style for several years. Be-cause it was nighttime, I did a whole bunch of the work with a flash. It was pretty harsh. I resort to that now and again depending on how I feel about the subject, or maybe be-cause I'm not feeling good about myself. As I said, I think our psychological state at any one moment will show in our work.

There are not many contemporary street photographers that have had their work shown in galleries. Can you tell me about your experiences with galleries?

My involvement with the gallery world started early. I had always went to photography shows in galleries and I wanted to be there on the walls myself. At the time, it seemed like the best option for getting my personal work seen and noticed was in Louisville. In 1988, I was invited to join Zephyr Gallery, an artists' coöperative, after selling a print that I'd sub-mitted to them in an open call for work. I enjoyed being a part of Zephyr and remained with them until I left town in 1997.

The constant interaction with creative people - painters, sculptors, print-makers - who were not photographers was great, too. These colleagues afforded me critiques from a different viewpoint, which was so important. As a member, one was allotted a solo show every year or two, and there were always group shows to be part of. This gave me

a chance to put together bodies of work apart from the bread-and-butter shooting that consumed most of my energies. My first street photography shows, *Spectators* and *Big Hair & True Love*, were premiered at Zephyr to good reviews in the local paper and regional art publications and even sold prints at respectable prices.

When I took trips, I would carry a set of slides with me to show to appropriate galleries. This led to a funny incident: In 1990, I went to visit a friend in San Francisco. I summoned up my courage and walked into Fraenkel Gallery, the foremost photography gallery in the city. Fraenkel's assistant took a look at the slides and said, "Jeffrey, look at these. There are some great images here." Jeffrey asked, "What is it? Street Photography?" "Yes." "Eh, it doesn't sell - I got boxes of Winogrands back there and nobody buys 'em." ...and that was that.

I was one of the only straight photographers showing anywhere in the region so I stood out from the more photography/art-school work being shown. Thus, in 1995, some of my photographs were included in a works-on-paper exchange show with the visual art community of Mainz, Germany, one of Louisville's Sister Cities. In 1996, several artists from Louisville were chosen to go to Mainz for a Sister Cities' Art Festival and I was included. I made friends with the local art community there, which served me well when I moved to London less than a year later.

In London, I found representation with Art for Offices/International Art Consultants, and they have fairly consistently sold a few prints every year or so. But Germany turned out to be good to me. Through my Mainz artist friends, I met a gallerist in Mannheim, Friedrich Kasten, who loved and has championed my street work. Galerie Kasten has given me several exhibitions and we collaborated on my first little book, "Richard Bram: Street Photography," a bit of a 'best of' selection from several different portfolios. (OK, it's not a clever title.) This led to further exhibitions in Mainz and Frankfurt as well.

Since I've been in New York, I've had prints in one group show, and in 2011, I had my first exhibition of color work in 25 years. I still show every other year in Kentucky, too, and

have been in group shows all over Europe and America. Even though the numbers of people who might see a gallery show is a tiny fraction of those who will see an image on the Web, I enjoy it. There is still no better way to see a photograph than in a well-made print, right in front of your eyes. The immediate impact of a physical object is a much deeper experience.

Street photography is still only rarely seen in the big galleries, though, and rarer yet from current practitioners. At last year's AIPAD show, I asked a dealer if he had any contemporary street photographers, and he showed me work from the 1980s. I've often felt that the only way to be seen in a major gallery is to be already famous, dead, or preferably both. The obvious question is why? If it is shown, it will sell. However, it is not as easy a sale as work that is more decorative. I do not mean that in a bad way, but I know what Jeffrey Fraenkel was getting at. In buying a photograph to go in your living space that you will look at every day, you are not likely to buy something that could feel uncomfortable.

Also, the mainstream art gallery world just doesn't seem to get straight photography. As Paul Graham (who is the rare exception) said in his 2010 essay, *The Unreasonable Apple*, "They get artists who use photography to illustrate their ideas, installations, performances, and concepts, who 'deploy' the medium as one of a range of artistic strategies to complete their work. But photography for and of itself - photographs taken from the world as it is – are misunderstood as a collection of random observations and lucky moments, or muddled up with photojournalism, or tarred with a semi-derogatory 'documentary' tag."

You began as a painter, correct? How do you think your painting influenced your photography and the way that you see things?

I was a painter before I morphed into a photographer. It influenced me in a major, major way. I have an edge over guys who never painted because not only did I paint but also I became aware of the history of art. That, in some ways, can free you up because you begin to understand that you have no obligation to do anything new.

Whatever it is, it's already been done. You may find a new avenue or a new path but you don't have that obligation, which is sort of a weird way to come at it anyway. Certainly the painting helped me enormously.

I have noticed that your style tends to be very graphic, focused on lines and colors, yet it is humanity and gesture that is often the centerpiece of many of your photos. Tell me more about your style and how you bring these elements together.

I think gesture is probably the most important part of any photo. If a photo has something to say, one of the ways that it is said is through gesture. Gesture has to do with the subject matter, while light sometimes has to do more with the photographer.

I don't like the word style. I think it's a very superficial attitude. If somebody says, "I want to develop a style," I say, "Good luck Charlie, why don't you develop your heart and your soul first and then see what comes out of it." To me, a style seems to be something that's applied at the beginning of the process and acts as a limiting factor.

A guy named Don McKay sent me a quote: "Photography is only a tool to see life and the way you embrace life is how you photograph it." Another great quote is by Jean Dubuffet, "Art does not like to sleep in a bed that is made for it. It would rather run away than mention its own name. What it likes is to be incognito. Some of the best moments are when it forgets what its name is."

Jay Maisel

Jay Maisel began his career as a painter, studying at Abraham Lincoln High School with Leon Friend, Cooper Union, and Yale, before becoming a photographer in 1954. Since then, Jay has had a long and illustrious career as a commercial photographer but has also amassed a huge archive of stunning personal work, much of it captured on the streets and much of taken it in New York City, his hometown. Jay has a keen eye for color, light, graphic views, and stunning gestures. You can sign up for his workshop and view his work on his website.

http://www.jaymaisel.com.

People are always looking for answers and what they should be looking for is questions.

After all of these years, what it comes right down to is that I have no idea what I'm going to do and I like it to be that way. I try not to have any idea what I'm going to do, although sometimes it's hard to go out empty. I might preconceive something, but not in street photography. I might find something that I like and failed at and then I'll go back and do it again, but basically I try to approach it with no axe to grind and no tales to tell. I have no specific things that I'm looking for. I'm looking for anything that interests me.

I'm looking for something that's out of the ordinary and you just can't choreograph that; it has to happen. On the other hand, if you're fascinated by the way that somebody looks and you want to photograph them, then you may have to talk to them. My classes seem to do that very, very well.

Street photography can be a lot of things. It can be portraits or it can be interaction. Portraits are easy but interaction is a bitch because you have to know in advance what's going to happen. So it involves a certain kind of perception without interference.

But for any answer I give you there are a million opposite answers. I know some guys who have been taking the same pictures for thirty years, literally, and they've done very, very well, but that's not what I'm interested in.

Tell us technically how you shoot. Why do you often prefer to shoot with a telephoto view?

When I started out, I carried around a lot of lenses. My major lenses were a 50mm, a 90mm, a 180mm, and a 300mm. I never liked wide-angle that much because I felt like it puts you in a position where you're exposed to a lot more in the frame. The guys who are really good use 28mm, but I never really liked anything below a 50mm.

A telephoto view is hard to use for street photography in some ways, while a wide-angle view is hard to use in other ways. Telephoto gives you an immediate and dramatic grab of the landscape, while a wide-angle view gives you more scope, but then you become responsible for more real estate.

So now, I walk around with one 28-300mm zoom lens and it takes in the 50mm, the 90mm, the 180mm, and the 300mm view. It's a slow lens, but I'm not shooting at 10 ASA anymore. And since there is a 28mm on the lens then I sometimes shoot at 28mm. But it's not my predilection.

I have not put another lens on the camera in about three years. I'm very free now. My Nikon 28-300mm is about the same size as your Canon 24-70mm lens. Over the last three years, since I found this one lens, it has never occurred to me to put on a prime lens unless it did something that the 28-300mm can't do. For instance, if it was a 50mm F1.4 since sometimes I shoot at ISO 12,800 and there still isn't enough light. So F1.4 would give me 4 stops more. Also, I don't know if I could work anymore without automatic focus. I used to, but you get slower with age.

There are a lot of attitudes and ideas about lenses and one of them is that you should be about two stops down from maximum aperture to get to the sweet spot on the lens. That's usually true, but I've been looking at some of my stuff that was shot wide open and I can't believe how sharp it is. I talked to my Nikon rep and I said, "What do you think is the real sweet spot of that lens," and he said, "You're not going to believe me, but wide open." It's incredible. You cannot take pictures of normal people who have normal skin without thinking, "oh god". I'm showing pore pictures. It's scary sharp.

Another issue to pay attention to is white balance. Auto white balance is something that you should only use as a last resort, because what auto does kind of compromises everything. If you're in a situation with nine different lights then auto is perfect, but if you're in a situation where you know it's daylight and you know you're going to go into fluorescent, don't be lazy, change it for each one.

In fact, if you're in any kind of a situation and you don't know what the light is, try it on all settings before you start shooting, because you have a wide range, and it also depends upon what you want. You may be shooting at the end of the day and the light is red and beautiful, but you may be interested in the 'real' color of the images, in terms of what they truly are. So you switch it to tungsten because that's the color of the light at that time of the day.

I would not use automatic unless I was really forced to. I only use it if something is happening quickly and I don't have the time to pick out, whether it's fluorescent or tungsten or daylight. But it's a lazy solution.

I noticed that you like to bracket when you shoot. Why is that?

One of the reasons is that if you're bracketing then you don't have to look at the frame as much to see what you've got. If you're in the midst of shooting and it's really good then you don't want to waste time making sure [that the exposure is] okay. I know I'm okay; I know I have it one way or another.

There's a lot of resistance to this on the part of people who are very comfortable with computers. They will say, "Look, you don't have to do that, you can make a command and you can look at all of your pictures light and all of them dark and all of them in the middle." And I say, "Yeah, but I have to take a minute to do that on the computer." I don't like to sit in front of a computer. I enjoy looking at my pictures but I hate sitting in front of that thing.

Then, there's another thing, when I'm out in the field and I bracket, I can say, "Hey, light works much better than dark in this particular situation," or, "Wait, you know, I'm right on. I'm right on and under and over don't work." The interesting thing is that there's never, ever in my experience a situation where it's always one or the other. Sometimes light is better; sometimes dark is better; sometimes right on is better and that is why I bracket.

You've got to understand that it's not film and darker isn't always better like it used to be. But I'm still surprised when the lighter one is better.

You've taught a lot of workshops. What are some of the biggest mistakes that your students make?

I don't really look at it that way; I don't think they make mistakes, I think that they have technical difficulties and sometimes they're just not fast enough and that's part of what the workshop addresses.

You know something that they don't know yet. You're shooting at 1600 ASA. They're shooting at 200 ASA and I'm like, "What, are you out of your fucking mind?" And they say, "Well, I'm using a Canon and I can't get the high ISO." Then change cameras.

Light was really an issue when I first started because you were talking about 10 ASA film and 32 ASA film and then maybe 100 ASA. It was a different thing. Now I almost always shoot at 1600 ASA.

What are some of the best qualities that your students can have?

Curiosity and more curiosity. Then sometimes just the ability to render what they think or what they see. My wife is a terrific photographer. She gets things that I don't see, but she's too lazy to carry around a camera. But now she has a cell phone camera and some of the stuff she captures blows me away. It's really good.

Also, when they're good they're very, very open. I had a guy in one of my classes who was amazing. He had a feel. He took a picture of a woman in the streets from above her looking at her hat and it was a great, great shot. Whatever he touched was good. Other people went out shooting with him and said that they were so glad to come back alive

and that nobody killed them, because he was so passionate and intrusive with his work. I think that a lot of people when they're beginning get interested in things that don't move, like buildings. Then, later on, they realize that they should try something more challenging, so they begin to photograph people.

I loved the perfection in the work of Ernst Haas, and then as he got older he wasn't doing perfect stuff anymore, he was doing people more and I thought that was a shame. Finally, I realized that he was going for bigger game, not just perfect and easy, but more challenging things. He had upped the ante; his images were more emotional and less graphic.

Tell us a little bit about how you carry yourself when you're out taking photos and trying to capture candid images. Do you think these factors play a difference in your images?

I was told early in my career by an art director named Bob Cato that I walk too fast and I said, "How the fuck can you tell?" He said, "There's nothing happening from picture to picture; you're here; you're there; you're here; you're there." I talk about that in my classes; I teach them that advice.

There are amazing photographs that are taken by satellites and amazing photographs that are taken from planes and helicopters, but when you get down to the ground and stop and wait, that's when you're able to make pictures about people.

As it gets tougher and tougher for me to move, because I have bad arthritis, I find it works into my plan because I try not to move quickly. I like to lurk. I had a guy who was in one of my classes who was hyper, excited, and active. And so I said, "You're going to go photograph the parade, but the parade is not important, so don't photograph the parade. It's just going to go by. Photograph everyone standing around with nothing to do and most of all, stop running around."

So as luck would have it, in a city of seven million people, two million of them who are at the parade, I run into him and he says, "It's fucking amazing. I've just been standing here and everybody comes to me. I would have been running around like a chicken without a head."

It takes a long time to realize that sometimes the best advice is 'Don't do anything. Just stand there.'

For keeping candid, there are a lot of ways. It depends on what's happening in front of you. There's no one way to do it; there's no one answer. It's not medicine and it's not law.

Some tricks are to not make sudden moves and always keep smiling, especially after you've gotten nailed. I don't mind being nailed; I just don't want to get hurt.

One way is to be really fast and not take a lot of time to capture the photo. Another way is to be really slow and engage people, although I am not really interested in engaging people.

There was a kid in my class up in Vancouver who got the best pictures of everybody technically and she did it with a point-and-shoot. One day, we were walking together and I realized that she could get pictures that I could never get because she would talk to people and she would feel them out, so that's one wonderful way to do it. I'm kind of a hit and run guy. I love engaging people but I don't think that's what I'm there for.

Tell us about how you edit and organize your work. How do you go about looking at your work with an objective mind and picking out your most effective photos?

How do I edit? With great pain.

There are certain photographers who are really good editors and they'll go through a

hundred pictures and pick out three. I'll go through a hundred pictures and I'll knock out three and I just keep knocking them out. But to be able to pick out the good ones right away is really difficult.

Although, sometimes you know right away that you've got a great shot because you were so petrified when you shot it that you might you screw it up.

Right now, I'm doing something that I never did years ago. I never, ever cropped anything and never manipulated the photo after. Now, I'm cropping because either I can't get close enough and I know that from the outset or I fucked up around the edges.

Prior to this, I always thought that if I cropped then I was going to lose image quality. Now, I can take half the frame, throw it away and show the other half and unless you're some sort of technical genius or asshole, it's not going to make any difference because the content is still what's most important. I remember in 2000 when Nikon came out with the D1, which had 2.8 megapixels, I was making 40 by 60 inch prints.

I'm currently creating a slideshow of about 225 images and about 12 of them now are cropped. I would never have done that before.

Why do you prefer to shoot in color?

All of my work is in color. I shot black and white for the first ten years or so and then I never shot in black and white again. I don't really see in black and white at all. Some guys do, but I don't.

There's one picture I shot that made me realize, "don't shoot black and white," because when I got the picture back it wasn't what I meant; it was an American flag with a chartreuse tree and a viridian green porch on a cream-colored house. It was nothing of what had moved me.

Look outside; it's color. Black and white is like an inside joke among photographers. You know and I know that the only thing that looks like a black and white print is another black and white print, because there's nothing in the world that looks like a black and white print. Having said that, I still love and admire the black and white of other shooters.

What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer?

I would say to be respectful. For me, it's very important that I don't fuck up anybody's day, so sometimes I won't take a shot when I really want to take a shot, because I don't want to make them unhappy, or I don't want to get killed, neither of which is a very attractive option.

Be aware of other people. Put yourself in their shoes and treat people with the same type of respect that you would want. It doesn't matter if you're shooting a tree, but when you shoot people be aware that they shoot back.

What do you think makes a great photograph?

It's a visceral thing, it's a personal thing.

You need the content. If it's only light and it's only gesture and it's only color, then it's a study. Studies are valuable but they don't move people emotionally.

A lot of work that is very beautiful, is empty. They're studies. And studies are fine but they're not photographs. They don't reach you on a visceral level.

There are millions of things that I've photographed that for me have resonance. They are personal and I love them, but they may not reach other people. You have to accept that and understand that it's really all about the photographing, not the reactions of others.

How did you first get into photography?

I got into photography when I was 15 years old, living in the Bronx. I was trying to be the Avedon of 15-year-olds. I was getting everyone to pose for me in what I considered to be high couture. I'd have my 13-year-old sister put on a miniskirt and then I made a backdrop out of a foldable aluminum table and I draped different things on it. Eventually, I joined a course at a community center.

From there, I started taking pictures at night. That seemed really interesting to me. Back then, I shot in pretty much the same way as I do now. Even from the very beginning, I had a fast lens, a 50mm F1.4, and I took pictures of friends. There always seemed to be headlights in the background of the shots. I would put somebody in the street on a busy thoroughfare and I would take the type of shots where today everybody would go, "Oh, what beautiful bokeh." Also, I never used flash, even in those days. I never liked the way flash looked.

There was a long period where I got into filmmaking. At 16, I made a 16mm film that got a lot of praise and awards and was shown on television. I always had a certain affinity for film, almost for film itself, for the innards. I had a feeling for the emulsion and the actual physical thing.

Then college began and I took pictures for all of the college magazines. What I found interesting when I went back and looked at all of the pictures I had taken was that very little has changed over all of these years. It's absolutely amazing. The only difference is that at some point I became interested in photographing strangers.

After college, you've got to jump a long way till I got back into photography. I didn't shoot again until I was about 35 years old. In college, I studied literature and philosophy and wanted to be a writer. I worked as a screenplay writer for ten years, very poor, living in the East Village. Screenplay writing led me into computers. I went back to Columbia, studied heavy-duty programming, and began to work as a programmer.

Dave Beckerman

Originally from the Bronx, Dave Beckerman has been photographing in New York City since he was 15. He began his professional career as a screenwriter and then a computer programmer until leaving the corporate world to pursue his passion in 1998. Always experimenting and testing new waters, Dave was one of the first photographers to begin selling his art over the internet. He was also one of the first photography bloggers and consistently provides some of the most interesting insights on the genre.

http://www.beckermanphoto.com.

Then one day, I walked by a guy's cubicle and saw this shot of New York City taken with a Hasselblad from New Jersey. I looked at this print and the detail was incredible. It was perfect in every way and so I started talking to him. Eventually, this guy gave me a Canonet rangefinder, which had a fixed 48mm lens on it. That was it. I was off for the rest of my life.

Whatever job I had I always took the Canonet with me. Wherever I went, that was my world. I wanted to photograph my world, and I was very uncomfortable in that world. I definitely had phobias about the subway at that time and I always thought that it was a good idea to photograph the things that you were most afraid of. That goes back to my father. He would always tell me World War II stories about walking to the hedges on Normandy and there were snipers all over and I was like, "Well there are no snipers here, what's the worst that can happen?"

So I began to photograph the subway because that seemed like the most difficult thing to do since there's no escape. You're very close to people. One of the things that people don't realize, other photographers know this, but the average person doesn't realize, is that it's not just the person you are taking the picture of. There's also a crowd of people around you looking at you and wondering what you're doing. So you have to be fast on the subway. I began to measure out distances. I would know that on the six line from this pillar to this pillar is eight feet or twelve feet or whatever it was. I began to memorize all the distances and then you would wait for something and pre-focus. I began to learn all these secrets

During that time was when I began to actually study photography. I got a book that was a consolidation of the whole *Zone System* by Ansel Adams and I was also very thrilled by Cartier-Bresson and the things that he had done.

Eventually, my phobia went away. I had all sorts of fears. People often say, "I'm afraid to put the camera to my eye. What if somebody says something to me?" I was just as afraid as anybody else, maybe even more so, and so I would always say to myself, "Pretend that

today is the last day of your life and really believe it." Now if today was the last day of your life and you saw something, you'd take the picture. So what's the difference?

Over the years, nothing bad ever happened. In fact, only good things happened. For example, one day I took a picture of a very tough looking guy standing next to a businessman. The tough guy is in a wife-beater on the subway right next to the businessman, who looks so meek, reading his book. So I bent down, took the camera and put it to my eye. That's another thing that I learned, don't ever try to be sneaky. Just do it. If you're going to do it, do it. And I took a couple shots and it was perfectly framed.

The tough guy saw me take the picture and I just sort of smiled at him. Then, about a year later after I had it posted in my blog, I got the sweetest sounding email from him. He had found it and he says, "That's the best picture anyone's ever taken of me and I would just love it if you could send me five prints. My mother wants one and my girlfriend wants one."

But you do have to have a sense of what is real danger and what is not real danger. It's not all Cinderella out there. One of the first street photography students I had told me he went to take a picture of a guy selling souvlaki and the guy chased him with a butcher knife. I was like, "What did you do? How did you take his picture?" He showed me, "First, I went up to him and I took the lens cap off and then I was fiddling around with the camera." I'm like, "You're already gone; you're dead already." If there is any secret to it, it's that everything is set before you shoot and you're gone before anybody realizes. Basically, you want to be a shadow.

Another time, I did a workshop on street photography and I got like ten or twelve people. It was the most pleasant day and it was that special summer weekend where Park Avenue was closed to cars and it was perfect with just bicycle riders. I'm shooting all over and everything looks sort of interesting to me and I turn to them and nobody has their camera to their eye. I'm like, "What are you doing? Look around. Don't you see anything?" And they're like, "No, I don't really see anything."

So the next part of it that I gradually learned is that you are basically photographing yourself. It's like all the things that you've learned. I've read a lot of Russian literature; I like classical music. One time, I went around photographing an idea from music, where there's a major theme and a minor theme. I had the idea that every picture should have a major theme and a minor theme so that there should be something that you should see immediately, but then there should always be a secret. But where does an idea like that come from? It comes from having studied and cultivated knowledge at some point.

It was all interesting to me; the people were interesting and I was somebody coming from the Bronx and then living in Manhattan. I hadn't really seen a skyscraper. My parents didn't take us into the City to see Central Park. I don't think I saw Central Park until I was 28 years old. I'm just like any other tourist in New York.

Tell us technically how you shoot. What camera, lens, and settings do you use? How do you get candid photos?

I use a Canon DSLR and for the most part, I use one prime lens and that's it. I haven't changed lenses in a good eight to ten years. 50mm is my natural view. The only reason that I use a zoom is for when I need a longer lens and compression for some reason. I don't use a zoom because it can zoom. I use it more because it has a long lens and because it has image stabilization.

On my SLR, everything is set, so for example, if I walk into a dark place I'll put it on AV and it's ready to go and if I'm walking on the street I'll put it on TV so I can shoot at 1/1000th. The only thing I generally change is the ISO.

Everything is pre-focused. I always use the center dot and I often hold the focus on the back of the camera. I also don't hold down the button and fire thirty frames per second. I wouldn't want to deal with that. I come from the old school where everything's manual. I'd do the same thing with a manual camera. I'd pre-focus on something near and then reframe.

You may find that your techniques change. I did zone focusing for years. Now I really hate zone focusing. First of all, zone focusing with a 50mm is tough, but even when I was zone focusing with a 35mm or a 28mm, I like for the main subject to be in focus and the other stuff to not be in focus. I don't really want everything to be in focus. I like to shoot often at F1.4, even on a bright, sunny day and with an automatic camera, you can pre-focus in a second.

I also don't like shooting from the hip and not looking through the viewfinder. I have developed a whole series of do's and don'ts and I think they have to do with the idea of hard and easy. Zone focusing is just a little too easy, so I try to make it as hard as possible.

There are a lot of tricks. A great one is that you want to look as much like a novice as possible if you can. I used to go out with a tourist map and stand on the corner and some-times I would ask people where 35th street is.

One thing that impresses me about you is that you like to experiment. You have done large format, 35mm, darkroom printing, and you jumped right into the digital with Ep-son printing, digital infrared, and your newest experiment is digitally painting over your photographs. Tell us about this progression and why you enjoy experimenting with new techniques.

From the very beginning, I had a very experimental attitude. I basically took pictures of my family back then that were very posed, but I experimented with things like putting wax on glass. I wanted to get that special glamour or Hollywood glow.

One of the first experiments that I did was when I had seen these Max Fleisher cartoons and they were all very carefully hand-drawn, but they always had effects where it looked as if they would scratch the film. So I came up with an idea. I got a glass plate with a light under it and a razor and a magnifying glass and I began to etch into the emulsion of the film itself and make little holes and stuff like that. Film was the medium and it was inter-

esting to put a hole into it and then make a print from it. Somewhere I have a bunch of very old negatives with a bunch of holes and scissor marks in them.

I have that bug in me. As a kid, I took apart radios and I took apart the television. Sometimes I put it back together again and sometimes I didn't. I went to infrared film and infrared flash; that was a couple years of my life.

Another idea that I had was that I wanted to be the Ansel Adams of urban. I had wanted to take the techniques that I had learned that he was shooting in Yosemite and bring them to the city. Once I took a view camera and I brought it into the subway and into a subway car.

I rented a 1200mm lens and I rented what's called a rectilinear lens. It's not a fisheye since everything is proportional. The lens itself was like $20,000. It was a Zeiss and it was the widest lens available. It comes with its own radial neutral density filter that you have to put on top because there's so much light that falls off. It comes with a level because if it's off by the slightest amount then everything looks screwed up. I just went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the front steps and it looks like the museum is six miles away and there's somebody in the foreground that's huge. None of them are good pictures.

I do need that new thrill every once in a while because otherwise, it gets boring. How many times have I seen that shot? It's funny, I have gotten the most keepers with a new camera on the first day. At one point, I bought a Hexar, which was a very silent rangefinder film camera, and the first day, just as I'm walking into my building, I see two guys and one of them is taking books out of my garbage, so I turned around and took a quick shot of the guys, just as a test. It was the first shot on the roll, and later on I developed it and I see that the guy has a book in his hand and the title is *101 great careers*. I normally wouldn't have taken that shot because I would have been too bored. I see people going through my garbage every day.

There's a funny story about experimenting from when I was working in filmmaking. I did a lot of things with a guy named Hollis Frampton, who was an experimental filmmaker. He was very well known. His thing was that he would walk along the street and every once in a while he would find a little strip of 16mm film and then he would take it and turn it into a loupe and he would just watch it for 2 hours, the same maybe 8 frames, over and over again. I got into a big argument with him. I said to him, "This is incredibly boring. This is some incredibly boring shit," and he replied, "Well, just wait till you get married. If you think that this is boring, wait till you get married."

How would you describe your personal style? How has it evolved over the years?

I like the idea of something enchanted about the very best shots. I thought of photography as a way of going beyond the curtain of what we really see. This is sort of a philosophical thing. Plato has the story where he's in a cave and there are a couple of people in front of a fire casting shadows on the side of the cave. He's basically saying the shadows are what we see. Shakespeare said the same thing. I always had a feeling with photography that if you did it well you could sort of pull the curtain aside, like in *The Wizard of Oz*, and see what was really there. That's sort of a romantic idea.

I think in general there's a sweetness to my work. I don't really do hard edge things. There are some emotional stories and there's some mystery to it.

While you do a lot of traditional street photography, you seem to do just as many urban landscapes. Do you think that urban landscapes fall under the umbrella of the term street photography?

A straight shot of the Brooklyn Bridge is not street photography. If someone is jumping off of the bridge then that's street photography. If Cartier-Bresson took a shot of the Brooklyn Bridge it would have been street photography because he would have done some-

thing with the design that would have made it not about the Brooklyn Bridge anymore. It would have been about something else.

It has to go beyond just being a document of something or even just a pretty shot. There has to be a kind of tension. There has to be a thought. Street photography is actually a very literary sort of art. As soon as you start seeing things that are juxtaposed, like what doesn't belong here, then it is street photography. If you look at the picture you'll find something that you didn't see the first time.

That's why I sometimes get confused when some people say that I have a style because one-third of my work is street photography and the rest is basically urban landscape photography, documentary photography, and painted photography. They're all different genres.

You were one of the pioneers of selling photography over the web, beginning in 1999 and you have a very interesting point of view about selling street photography. What have you learned?

Here are the rules. There are rules about what sells and what doesn't sell given your audience. If you're selling to the connoisseur in a well-known gallery and your initials are HCB or you're Doisneau, that's one thing. If you are a name, then it doesn't matter anymore because you can sell anything.

The difficulty with selling street photography of people is that people do not want to see pictures of other people in their living room. They just don't. I remember having this argument with a friend because he was telling me, "I don't understand that Dave, because the first thing that we recognize, the most important thing our brains are developing as babies, is to recognize faces." I said, "Well, if it's a face of your mother or somebody in your family or an idol, fine, but if it's a stranger it won't sell, unless the buyer is an artist or an art collector and that side of the brain has grown from looking at too many good pictures."

For example, one of my very best shots is the one with the girl and her tongue out tasting snow. It's a technically difficult shot; everything had to be working in order to capture it. When people see the image they say, "Wow, that's great, what a great shot!" That shot has never sold and cannot be sold because she's an actual human being.

When people put something on their walls, it's like a badge. It's basically saying, "These are my creative tastes; this is what I want to look at every day; and this is how I feel about life," in the sense that it's sort of like any other part of decorating a house. Life is hard and you want something peaceful on the wall.

On the other hand, street photographs work very well in books and eventually, what happens is that in forty or fifty years they become historical and then they become worth a lot of money because of the clothes people are wearing and because the culture has changed. If you have children and you leave your estate to them, then they will eventually be worth something. They become documents of what life was like. The perfect example is Vivian Maier.

Tell me a little about your printing. You put a lot of pride and effort into your printing. Do you think that it's as important to learn to print these days?

Now you're making me feel like an old-timer. When I began, we walked to the darkroom with no shoes in the snow. The final product was the print and you were really only as good as the print was. You worked hard and you used different papers and you wanted a good dynamic range and all this other stuff.

That's not true anymore and it's becoming less and less true. I don't know. I really only see it going in the direction where there will be thirty by forty inch flat screen frames in every home and you'll change it just by clicking.

I don't know if in fifty years if anybody's going to give a crap about whether or not they have a print except for that very small group of collectors. There's always going to be collectors of things with intrinsic craftsmanship. But for the majority of people, everything is digital and video, based on something flashing, and they don't even know if you have a really good print.

So is it worthwhile learning to print? I don't know and I find that fascinating.

What advice would you give an aspiring street photographer? What are things to avoid?

Try not to concentrate so much on the photography part of things in life as a general rule. Remember that your street photography is only going to be as interesting as you are.

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