

KEEPING PACE

A Monthly Newsletter Devoted to the Darkroom Arts

Volume 99 Nov 1995

Is Photography Art?

Can photography really be treated as an art form?
 If this question was asked in 1895, the resounding answer would have been NO. The science of photography (and that is what it really was all about then) was an outstanding method of getting one's portrait made to hand down to the family as the years went by. The science was so good, that the material that was used is now considered to be archaic. The glass plates of Lincoln shot by Mathew Brady are still good enough to print from, regardless of how fragile the glass may be. The glass wasn't as archaic as the emulsions that were sometimes concocted on the scene. So, when did the field of photography finally get accepted as an art form? Would you believe that the battle is still going on? There are many art enthusi

asts (mainly painting and sculpture) that frown on anything so simply derived as a photograph. After all, all that needs to be done is to click the shutter. What became interesting was the parade of painters that picked up the camera (This included a tripod and large box containing the camera and the film and glass plate holders.) The act of shooting a scene became a labor of love. In the early 1900's artists such as Ed Steichen began to produce beautiful images and made prints that even, until today, will stand up against anyone else's when it comes down to it. The art was born before that, of course, but the recognition of the art form began with the formation of a group of artists in the year 1902 that called themselves the Photo-Secession and it's founder was Alfred Steiglitz.

He believed that photography was indeed an expression that could legally be called "ART." The main stream artists wanted little to do with this group of "chemists" and belittled their work. But Steiglitz didn't flinch. Little by little, more individuals became enamored by the skills of the photographers and beauty of their work. Then suddenly, the commercial field began to use images produced by photography. The half tone screen made this possible. The best photographers were used steadily and became well known. During the early 1930's the photographer became a busy person. Portraits were on the rise, and art was needed for the advertising agencies and the photographic field flourished. But the art photographer was still at odds with the art community.

How could the camera compete with the hands and eyes of a painter?

Then the giants of photography began to appear.

Names such as Steichen, Stieglitz, Clarence white, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Paul Strand, and many others.

Then along came the great Ansel Adams. He really introduced us to the fine art of manipulation of an image through his books and explanation of the problems that he had faced. His made great images with his camera and wonderful eyes, then produced miracles of work in the darkroom. His home made enlarger was a sight to behold. It was a horizontal machine so that very large images could be made with ease. His books on the subject of film and printing are the finest teaching and learning tools available.

The color invasion began with the invention of Kodachrome in 1937. Would you believe that Kodak made film sizes up to 11 x 14 in Kodachrome. It took about 10 years for the Federal Govt. to insist that Kodak had a monopoly and had to relinquish the processing of the large sheets of film to private labs. Kodak simply stopped making the large sizes and stuck to 35mm.

But lost in this great growth in the art field was the commercial photographer. Nicholas Muray, Tom Kelley,

Paul Hesse, Phillippe Halsman, Douglas Kirkland, Art Kane, Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, and many more. These great artists paid little attention to the art market, but their commercial work was so outstanding that their images are still considered art and sought all over the world. It was my pleasure to have been part of their lives. I made prints for many of these fine artists and recognized their contribution to the art world.

The seemingly simple act of shooting a table of food is, in reality, a serious challenge.

The composition is critical, and so is the lighting. The food must look edible and you, as an onlooker, must feel as though you are surrounded by the table of food.

I can remember making a Ciba print of a hamburger for the agency that handled "Jack in the Box." The image was good, but needed improvement. When I got through with this print, I thought it looked great. The agency thought it looked even better. They made a few thousand reprints of the hamburger with no commercial messages. Just the food image. They sent these out all over the town. I saw many of them on the walls in the different agencies whenever I was calling on someone in that agency. I felt responsible for the success of the image, but in reality,

the photographer did a great job.

The simple act of making a car ad meant that you had to have the most accurate lighting conditions, especially if it was an outdoor shoot. Most images made for Volkswagen were made on 8x10 Ektachrome film.

The lens used by one photographer for most of the ads was a 19 inch Red Dot Goertz Artar. This lens is mainly used by engravers for such things as flat art. However, the photographer used this lens and with the proper swings and tilts produced great images. If this wasn't art then it was certainly great skill.

The Carbro print was around for almost 60 years. I made many of them in my youth. The few images that I saw that were construed to be "art" were terrible.

The work of photography was definitely a 2 part job. The camera was the first part of the process. Without the image, there was nothing. But all we see as aficionados is a print. Most top commercial photographers didn't have time to make their own prints.

So the Ansel Adams' and some of the rest of the photographers such as John Sexton, Bruce Burbaum and many others that were truly dedicated to the art form were the only ones who produced great images on paper.

The rest of the commercial field had to rely on people like me.

The Dye Transfer print, introduced in 1947 (and soon to be re-introduced to the world again) became the standard for print quality. However, the photographer had little time to spend in the darkroom with this very complicated print process. As a result, darkroom technicians that engaged in this new process were few, and hard to find. The person relegated to making a Dye Transfer print for a prestigious client had to have some of the same feelings about the emotional impact that the photographer did. But, as luck would have it, the commercial field needed the art work for reproduction. This meant that we, (the Dye Transfer printers) became a necessary evil. Not only did we make prints of food, cars, cigarettes, and many other items, but we also made prints for finest commercial photographers in the world.

However, with advent of the digital imagery, the need for these great prints has dwindled to a halt. The art field, however, has been active not only with Dye Transfer but with a revived Carbro print and the very brilliant Cibachrome print (Ilfochrome) as well. The whole concept of the artist doing everything has returned. Most art photogra-

phers today are producing their own work with great accuracy and skill.

What is it that makes a print great enough to be considered "art"?

It is a combination of many things. The image of course, is the first place to look. The image must move you. The emotional impact must be present, otherwise the image will be boring. It can be a simple shot of a leaf, but if it is shot and printed properly, it can still move you.

Let us examine the mystery about black and white.

What does it take to make a great negative? The photographer must be aware of the scene's contrast level and overall density. This is what the zone system is all about. It would take more than this newsletter to describe how it is used, but Ansel Adams and David Kachel have the best books on the subject. I recommend them highly.

When I first began using my 4x5 Graflex camera, I used sheet film. This meant that I could be able to process my images using the processing times and temperatures that produced a specific "gamma." Sheets containing this information was usually packed with the film. I used my reliable Weston meter and inscribed numbers on the scale that

allowed me to measure the scene and determine what gamma to develop in order to assure that my images would print properly on number 2 paper.

Remember, this was years before variable contrast papers were invented.

An example. On a very sunny day and with enough shadows in the scene, I might process my film at gamma .60. If the shot was considered normal, I used gamma .70.

If the day was overcast, I used gamma .80 and if the day was really stormy or foggy, I used gamma .90.

After a while, I just had to look at the scene to determine the gamma. I still used the meter for determining exposure.

Why is it so important to use the correct gamma? If you didn't pay attention to the resultant gamma that you produced, you would have to use different grades of paper in order to make a print.

The advent of the variable paper was a great invention. This meant that you could print most of the image with a specific grade number and dodge or burn with a different grade number. **Control.** This is the name of the game. Without control, you will soon be tired of making mediocre prints.

The biggest problem with most of the new variable papers is that they are

coated on RC base. I have found it impossible to get a good black image using RC based papers. I personally prefer to use papers such as Gallerie, Seagull, and especially Luminos and the new Kodak Polymax papers. They are excellent fiber based papers and have great range and brilliance.

The choice of film is critical.

If you are shooting a scenic, would you use Panchromatic or Orthochromatic film? Remember, this is for making a great black and white print.

If the scene has a large expanse of blue sky, and Orthochromatic film were used, the sky would be bald. Clouds and sky would look almost alike. I would have chosen Panchromatic film so that a light yellow filter could be used to make dramatic difference in the structure of the sky and clouds. Imagine using a red filter? The sky would be rendered very dark and the clouds would still be light and detailed. The T-Max films are great for scenics. The images are as sharp as possible and the sensitivity, even though it leans towards the red areas, is still very good.

Flesh tones? The great Josef Karsh who excelled in portraiture used films in an interesting manner.

If the subject was a man, he would use Ortho film and some filters to accentuate

the differences in the color and the textures in the skin. Deep warm skin would reproduce with details and character.

If the subject were a woman, he would use Pan film and try to obtain an alabaster look in the flesh tones. In fact, he purposely under exposed the images of the men so that he could maintain the highlight structure that was so important to his "look" of quality that he was after.

The exposing and processing of a black white print is critical.

I was taught by an old German born technician about how to process paper prints. Always process the paper print to it's maximum, he said, so as to insure a rich black. If this isn't done, then the blacks will never become black. Vary the exposure so that the image can be processed to it's fullest. Those of us (me included) who have pulled a print out of the soup before it's time have not really fulfilled the image to it's potential. The great printers know this. They also know how to dodge and burn an image to get the effect they are after.

Making some sort of "map" of the intended image will help you when reprints are to be made. Make a full size print, and indicate where the burn is to be and what the percentage of the total exposure it is. The same goes for any dodging that

may be necessary.

Paul Caponigro said that you must listen to to the **voice of the print. Namely, exposure, development, density and contrast.** This is from a man that has had great success in the art world and knows what controls are available to all of us. All we need to do is learn how.

There are a lot of questions and answers about which chemistry should be used when processing either a negative or a print. Some people write articles about some specific developer that will affect the print in a certain way.

Remember this: The manufacturer wants to make sure that the best possible negative or print can be made with his film or paper. He has hired scientists and top chemists that know the material better than anyone else. I am sure that the developer they recommend for their film and paper is the best that can be produced.

Most of us would like to believe that we know more than the manufacturer. We don't.

The next question is what kind of enlarger should you purchase?

It all depends on what you are trying to convey with your work.

A diffusion enlarger will produce a cleaner print at the expense of sharp edged

details. A condenser enlarger will produce a dirtier print, but with sharper edge effects.

If you use a great apochromatic lens, then the question of sharpness is lessened. However, there will still be a difference between the two methods.

The cost of the enlarger has little to do with the final quality of the print. The understanding of **what and how** to make a print is what is most needed.

One of my subscribers asked me about the advantages of the cold light system.

It produces less heat, and has a much smoother coverage. Remove any image from your enlarger carrier and turn on your enlarger. Now in a dark room, take an easel meter and run it across the easel. Does the needle or the digital number stay steady? If not, then your enlarger is not evenly lit. The cold light source is very even. But this is a very fast, but flat as a pancake system. The light source is highly actinic and allows for very short exposures on black and white papers or even matrix film. If you were to use such a light source and make and process your own negatives, you would want to increase the necessary gamma requirement by .10.

On the other hand, if you have a conventional diffusion system with a color

head, you will get a crisper image with the added advantage of being able to use the filters in the head to simulate the necessary contrast changes.

If you own a Condenser system, your images will jump out at you. Make sure that the condensers either match the lens length or be slightly larger. This will insure coverage of the negative. Make sure that the lenses in the condenser unit are of a high quality. I have used the Omega Variable condensers with great success. The best I have seen are those manufactured by Durst. The cost of the enlarger need not be extremely high. In fact, I highly recommend looking though the magazine called "Shutterbug" to find bargains.

One of my readers recently found an old Omega D2 with a lens for \$35. What a bargain. The lens, and the light source are the 2 critical things to be concerned about.

However, if you use you enlarger for photo composition, then a registration carrier and easel are a must. The enlarger must be able to be locked in position once you have gotten to that point.

If you are a Cibachrome addict, then you must be aware of the speed requirements. Most enlargers are too slow. The one exception is the new ZBE enlarger. I

contains a 1080 watt light source (diffused) with a great color head. It will outperform many enlargers that cost more.

I have always been addicted to the D2 image. I don't know why. I like the sturdy Eiffel Tower construction and the simplicity of the added parts.

The way to make a preparation for a black and white print is as follows:

First make a test strip, about 4 inches x 10. Look at it for 2 things. First of all is the contrast, then secondly, the density. To me, the contrast of the print is the most important item to be examined and determined. Then the overall density of the test print. If necessary, make another attempt at another test strip. When you are satisfied, make an 8x10 print of the full image. Process it in the manufacturers developer for the recommended developing time and temperature.

Dry this "test" and really examine it.

Ansel Adams used to "dry his tests in a microwave.

Try it. It works.

At this point, you can determine the overall contrast and density, but more important at this point is the possible corrections in density by dodging and burning. As I said earlier, when you get a good print, take a black marker and draw lines around the areas that needed attention and what

the percentage of dodge or burn was required. Don't place exposure times on this print, because if it is printed later, the chemistry may or may not, be the same. Just use the percentages.

Masking.

The one thing that most printers are not aware of is the possibility of making a contrast mask and adding it back to the negative to open up an area or to lower the overall contrast on the negative. Yes, even in black and white.

If you don't have the luxury of pin systems or vacuum easels, don't fret. 2 pieces of glass (for small images use lantern slide glass) and 2 clothespins, and a simple, very dim, light source. Use a light dimmer if you must.

If you don't have a timer then shame on you. But if you can count out loud and keep time place the masking material on a sheet of glass (in total darkness) emulsion up. Then take your transparency and place it on the masking film, also emulsion up. Place the second sheet of glass over the sandwich, place the clothespins and turn on the exposing light. Keep the exposure quite short. Then disassemble the glass packet and taking only the masking film, process it in a simple HC-110 developer (15cc per liter of water) For a very thin image try 30 seconds. for a moderate density try 1:30 min. For a

dense mask, try 2:30. You will have to use your eyes and your imagination to get this process done. When you are satisfied with the results, record the info for future work.

replace the mask over the transparency by eye (if you must)

Does this process work?

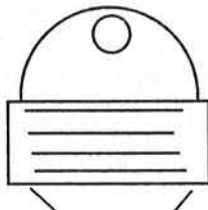
Yes it does. Will it replace using densitometers and charts? Not on your life. But it is another example of how it could work.

The light source on the enlarger is most important. So is the lens. But the light source is part of the enlarger and when it is out of whack, and uneven it will drive you mad.

The perfect example of a great old enlarger that had one very bad thing about it was the light source on an Elwood. Any size.

It was the most uneven light source I ever encountered. I once made a Dye Transfer print of a table full of food. It was so uneven that I thought some one had placed a pile of mussels in the center bowl. They were actually a pile of light colored clams. Making the light source even was a chore that we simply had to do.

We used a technique developed by Ed Evans.



He would take the dome off the enlarger and place an X and an O mark on the ground glass in the opposite corners.

(The top sheet of glass.)

He also placed a long piece of measured thin tape along one side of the top glass.

Then he would place the dome back on and activate the enlarger. He would size the image of the tape to match the original and make sure that it was sharp. Then he made sure that the X and O were visible. This is done with no carrier in the enlarger so that all of the light source could be seen.

Then he placed the light source of the enlarger through a light dimmer switch and lowered the light level so that an exposure could be made on the easel. We used a glass plate called the Kodak 33 plate. This material was usually used for contrast masking. We developed this plate (with a red safe light) using a strong developer such as D19 and examined it until we could see a definite uneven image.

Then we fixed, washed, and dried it. Then we removed the top dome again, and locating the X and the O we registered the new plate to the top glass and taped it in place, placed the dome back on and we reduced the unevenness to a point where it almost looked perfect.

The only problem with this effort was getting the right exposure and developing times.

Then after 4 or 5 months, the heat of the bulb would eventually discolor the plate and we had to do it all over again. Keep records. Did it work? And how.

I have experienced trouble in obtaining the Panchromatic Litho film required for serious color correction and for exacting highlight masks.

Kodak used to produce a simple film called Kodalith Pan. It worked great, but because of an environmental problem, this material has been dropped. It was an absolute necessity for the highlight portion of the Dye Transfer process. I know that Fuji produces a film called litho 100 and it works great. Konika also makes such a film. Agfa makes a film called P-911. It works great. But trying to find a dealer that carries this material is like finding hen's teeth. Kodak does make a great film called Ultratrek Pan Litho (UPF) it works wonders. Call your dealer or any litho supply company and I am sure that they can supply you.

The Dye Transfer process is about to get off the ground. Dr. Patterson is getting set for the announcement. For those of you who have been waiting, your patience

is about to be rewarded. As I said before, the Matrix film is slightly slower than the previous batches, however, the dyes are far better and much more archival. The receiver sheets come in paper as well as white Polyester film.

Some labs have overloaded their freezers and had over two years supply, but most of the aficionados could not afford to stock up with such expensive material.

Many of my readers are trying the UltraStable pigments with their own separation negatives. It seems to be catching on.

Kodak makes a duplicating film specifically designed to make duplicate negatives. If you purchase the larger sizes, you will be able to duplicate the separations you already have. I have used it to make contact 4x5's and it works great. The contrast range is a matter of development, and the density is simply a matter of exposure. There is nothing complicated about it.

It's funny, but I have been making photo comp prints for most of my life. Some of the prints were extremely difficult to produce. I know that the scanner and programs like Photoshop can probably make me look sick when it comes to the amount of time it requires

to make a decent image. I know of one job that I did many years ago that required 37 different 35mm images placed in one layout with images in front of and behind other images. This job was the final straw that convinced me that there was a better and easier way to do it. Now I realize that my approach was probably the better way to go. The high cost of making 37 sets of separations and all of the blackout and silhouetting masks would require more memory than most computers could muster. I once asked a computer whiz if he could duplicate my effort, and he said "probably but at a very high cost."

I have been involved with computers for the past 12 years. Most of that time was devoted to writing my 5 books and my monthly newsletters and some articles.

However, I do occasionally teach the employees at a lab here in Las Vegas. They specialize in PhotoComp work as well as other photographic work. It is here in the Photo Comp department that I have found some interesting facts.

The scanner and Photoshop are fantastic, but they can't do everything. I doubt if any one could ever reproduce my 37 piece strip.

However, I must admit that I have seen incredible things done to photographic images that would boggle the mind.

I saw a painting copied to an 8x10 Ektachrome. This was then scanned on a very high end machine and eventually, the image was opened on a 21 inch screen that was needle sharp. Part of the image consisted of a hot air balloon with a basket hanging below. The client complained that the lines holding the basket were not too visible.

In a flash, the technician enlarged the area to 800 percent, and proceeded to add more definition to the strands of rope holding the basket.. It seemed as if it took about 2 seconds. And this without worrying or making a frisket.

The biggest problem that I see with the computer and the scanners, is that about 99% of the technicians (and this is what they really are) are not artists. Becoming accepted as an artist in any field requires that some sort of professional art training has been present. Not necessarily so with the new school of photographic manipulators. Some of these whiz kids are great. The books and magazines about the subject of scanning and manipulation abound in every book store. I can stand on line waiting for the computer store to open and occasionally start

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conversation with a fellow enthusiast and find out thaty he insn't interested in fine art but simply business, bookkeeping, and keeping records.

The most astonishing thing for me it that in my lifetime I have seen the demise of photographic commercial art. (I mean color printing.) Thank God for the art student and the professional fine art person. They make waking up in the morning a glorious event. Just take a look at the difference in calendars. Some are just gaudy and very unprofessional and some are great.

I know one young man that only shoots at the hours of 12:00 AM through 5.00AM and he uses the moonlight to capture some very interesting scenes.

He sees nothing wrong in sleeping in a pick up truck and being awakened by a bear looking for food. His images are currently showing at the prestiougous Ansel Adams gallery in Yosemite and in many more places too. My good friend Rene Pauli of San Francisco has been doing very well with his own brand of Carbro. Call him at 415-495-6139 or if you are in San Francisco, make a date to see his work. Just sensational.

There are many fine artists that I have had the absolute

pleasure of seeing them mature into very disclined artists with a good following by collectors.

Most galleries love to see the ancient images, but sometimes viewers complicate art with history..

As good as some of the work of Mathew Brady is , his fame was acheived by hard work and capturing a grerat event.

Looking at the tremendous work done to produce a color sentitive material. The ideas of the artist begat better methods. The mother of invention is you know who.

I have been fortunate to be able to see the transission from black and white to color film, from color film to color negative film, from Carbro images to the Dye Transfer proceses. The books about the history miss the story be being factual. The story should be made into a great book or even a movie starring Charlton Heston.

In the meantime, good luck with your good work.

Thanks,

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