

The Art of Photography Richard White

PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOPS ON LINE GALLERY PHOTOGRAPHY ARTICLES HIGH COUNTRY CALENDAR

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Tree & Field, Mallee, Victoria

Some years ago I wrote a piece titled Photographic Integrity, for Better Photography magazine whom I still write for, which touched on fabricated landscapes and my views on adding things to a scene as if it was a seen and captured image. The article is still posted on my web site www.richardwhite.com.au if you would like to familiarize yourself with it. Another I might draw your attention to is an article by Bruce Barnbaum on his web site www.barnbaum.com under Thoughts on Digital Photography.

Quite often when someone, who still has a preference for film in some areas, makes a comment on digital photography the assumption is that that person is attacking the new medium. I think this just exemplifies the narrow thinking of those who have made the switch and refuse to accept that film based photography is still as good as it ever was and in some areas has no rivals.

I have always held a view, well since I became a Professional Photographer 22 years ago (prior to that I had no view), that there are certain cameras (and film) that are/were better suited to certain jobs. It is rare that you would find a Jazz singer singing Opera or an Opera singer singing Jazz. Each is a specialist and each suits one type of song better than the other. The parallels with photography cannot be over looked. If one assumes

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that there is one type of camera or one type of capture medium for *all* photography, that would conduce to a fantastic result, then perhaps ones view of “quality of image” needs to be addressed.

There is no doubt that one type of camera/capture medium will record all subject matter, but will it do justice to all and will it achieve the goal that you are seeking?

In my last newsletter I mentioned that on my recent trip to Nepal that my 35 mm film based camera gave up the ghost on the second last day I was there. Now I am in need of buying a new 35 mm camera. Would I choose another film camera or look into buying a digital camera? For me to do the latter, some thought it was the equivalent of Bob Dylan going electric. I am still in deep discussion with myself.

It was and is something that I am giving a lot of thought to. Because of the nature of my business there are some jobs I do each year that would benefit from recording it on the new medium. Also I would not have to tell some other job requests that I have to wait for the film to be processed when they are asking for me to email the results that evening or the next day. So you see I do see the benefits. In the past I have had to relinquish jobs that necessitated using a digital camera. Jobs that were required to be photographed one day and high res JPEgs emailed the next. All I could do was sigh when those jobs came along. When one is trying to make a living it is no fun to turn work down. Maybe the demise of my 35 mm film camera in Nepal was a good omen.

Losing work of that nature also made me realize that of all film that might be in trouble then I think 35 mm will be. There are still plenty of film cameras being sold (Nikon have ceased making film cameras by the way) and plenty of people need 35 mm film, but as the market reduces the number of items for this format, as they have been doing, then things will get tough.

I also see the benefits of still owning a film based 35 mm camera for when I want to photograph certain things using a very high speed film. Mainly just to emphasize the grain and yes I know that there is a drop down menu that allows you to add grain to scenes, but you know it just isn't the same. (A leather jacket and an imitation leather jacket look similar, but up close and personal they are miles apart). But this isn't the fault of the camera, it is the post processing software that can only deliver a facsimile of the real thing, if it's the real thing they are trying to emulate. And I guess perhaps that's where my real difference lies, not with digital cameras, but with the software that is used in post production.

I know in the professional market that many have abandoned their 120 format photography for digital technology. There is a perception that by going digital you are saving heaps of money and perhaps you are indirectly, but the time spent on the post production of images, which in the past the labs use to do, is the one element that many professional photographers have not even considered or have been caught up in the vicious spiral.

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At the recent trade show in Sydney the only stand to actually be displaying film was Fuji Film. Everyone else was on the digital treadmill. No problem here for me because technology changes so rapidly and we feel we must keep abreast of things so we can update as regularly as possible. Last years model was fabulous, but the latest is even better and we **must** have it. Well this seems to be how it is at present and you can see why things are released at regular intervals that necessitate us to upgrade. If we were to buy everything today and stayed static for 5 or 10 years it would all work the same as it did when we bought it. Assuming it hasn't broken down.

The photographic industry has at last received a shot in the arm and once again appears to be keeping its head above water. The main problem now of course is that the corner store will usually sell everything you need and so many established photographic stores have gone under or are feeling the pinch.

The traditional sellers of photography are having to compete with stores that sell anything electrical or anything for the home or in some cases anything that we eat. The argument is that competition is good for the consumer, well this consumer, who use to be a customer, things competition stinks when it gets out of hand as it seems to have in the photographic industry.

I think one of the most important questions that one should ask is: by changing equipment from analog to digital or even digital to analog, will it actually improve your photography? The answer has to be no unless of course you feel that by being able to view the image on the screen after you took it will help you see things that you may have over looked when you took the picture. For me this is stretching it a little, but I guess if you feel it helps then who is anyone to argue.

Photography has always been about vision and capturing a moment in time. Recording things we see as we pass through each day. Basically that has not changed and the great number of images that are recorded each day still do just that. What has basically altered our perception of photography is the post production of images via the computer. Having that ability to add, subtract, alter, change, contrive, almost anything we want so often from bland images, has in the opinion of so many been the single one thing that has changed our thoughts on the photographic image.

The exceptional that is now seen and recorded is considered to be contrived and fabricated because it is so fantastic it cannot possibly be real. Have we reduced the art in photography to the idea that all images are now conceived via the computer?

Are we also so saturated with images each day and in every corner of our existence that we no longer have the ability to recognize something unique when it is presented to us? The bombardment of the visual must eventually have a numbing effect on us, like a political campaign, and so our senses become desensitized to the incredible.

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This proliferation will of course not let up. It will need to come down to the individual to be far more discerning with what they look at if it is at all possible to cut yourself off from the burgeoning bombardment.

Several years ago there were many who were predicting photography's Armageddon was just around the corner with regard to film, but the two seem to be coexisting quite comfortably although there seems to have been a shift in numbers from one side to the other. I doubt that it will ever be a see-saw and no doubt those who still choose to record on film and produce prints via the darkroom (B&W or Cibachromes) will be similar to productions that appear off Broadway. In other words they will be fringe groups, small in number.

Whether you record with a film camera or a digital camera is really immaterial. Whether it is produced in a darkroom or via a computer, if the image is not up to scratch then the hardware used matters not. I am against blatant duplicity of images when it comes to capturing the world we live in. A black and white image can be seen as getting off to a bad start because it has altered reality from the capture point, but the lineage to the truth of the photograph is still intact.

For photography to survive as a visual reflection of our times and still to be believed then those who photograph may just have to search their conscience a little deeper.

NEWSLETTER PRINT OFFER #8 100% guaranteed

The eighth offering is again the photograph I have presented at the head of this newsletter:
Tree & Field, Mallee, Victoria.

These photographs are designed to give you the opportunity to purchase one of my photographs at a reduced rate. This will apply **only** to receivers of this electronic mail.

This offer lasts till June 25, 2006.

Photographs are usually offered in the image size of 11 x 14" (27 x 35 cm) approximately. The size may vary slightly depending on cropping of a particular image.

About the image

The image was made in 1991 on T-MAX 120 film using a Bronica Medium Format camera.

Over the years this photograph has changed slightly in its printing style. This is my latest printing of this image and it's a photograph that I still enjoy to look at. I hope you do also.

The print will be over matted to an overall size of 407 mm x 508 mm (16 x 20").

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The image will be printed on Kodak Polymax Fibre base paper and butterfly hinged to rag museum board ready for framing. As always only the finest materials are used in the production of the images.

Details relating to the image and print number will appear on the back of the photograph.

If you are not inspired by the images that you make, don't take up macrame, just work a little harder.

Till next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath the name.