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A Quarterly Newsletter

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Freestylin'

A Quarterly Newsletter

Your Value Leader...since 1946!

Introduction

This issue of Freestylin' celebrates the teaching of darkroom in our schools and shows that whatever future changes occur, the Darkroom is a valuable part of the photographic process.

If you have ever worked in the darkroom then you remember the feeling you got watching a print "come up" in the tray for the very first time. Making prints is like MAGIC! In fact, across the board, the word "Magic" is always used by everyone who ever got hooked on darkroom. This newsletter celebrates that first darkroom experience by bringing you two interviews with innovators in photo education.

In our Artist Spotlight we talk to writer, educator, and photo historian Robert Hirsch. Mr. Hirsch has authored three important texts on photography. "Photographic Possibilities" is the quintessential text book for advanced photo classes covering the entire spectrum of photo processes from the oldest classic methods to modern digital imaging techniques. "Seizing the Light: A History of Photography" is considered by many as one of the best and most complete historical texts on photo history. It is written in a friendly, accessible way that is both informative and entertaining. It has also earned acclaim from SPE and many other photographic organizations. "Exploring Color Photography" is used by many photo departments as the standard text on the subject. It is excellent for those just beginning color photography as well as those wishing to improve their techniques.

In our Educator's Spotlight we feature a discussion with two Program Heads from California State University, Northridge. Ed Alfano, head of the photography program in the department of art, and Fred Kuretski, head of the film production program in the department of cinema and television arts. Our interview describes how the film production program has enlisted the services and talents of the photo department by requiring basic photo darkroom as a prerequisite to students of film. This cooperative effort has increased enrollment for the photo program and has given students entering film production a better understanding of their materials and methods.

Eric Joseph - Editor
Vice President Merchandising &
Product Development

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Featured Artist

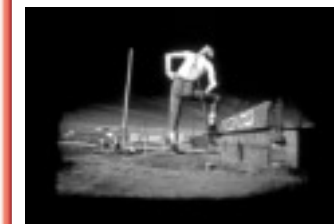
A Freestyle Interview with Photo Historian,
Author, Artist and Educator - Robert Hirsch

by Stephanie Morey

Photographer, teacher and author Robert Hirsch is best known for his numerous and popular books on photography. His classic "Exploring Color Photography" is one of the best selling texts we have on the topic. His prolific career spans nearly thirty years of service dedicated to the craft, art, and teaching of photography. Throughout his life he has forwarded the idea that photography can be a path for understanding the world more deeply.

(FS) What made you decide to write your first textbook?

I was frustrated by the dearth of good photography texts that existed at the time. Photography textbooks were basically technical manuals. I



"Cowboy Cafe" R. Hirsch

wanted to stress visual literacy - generating and realizing ideas - and be grounded in images that represented a diversity of ideas about the world. The notion that a photo textbook should concentrate on imagemaking and not on technique was hard to sell. I collected at least 50 rejections before finding a publisher.

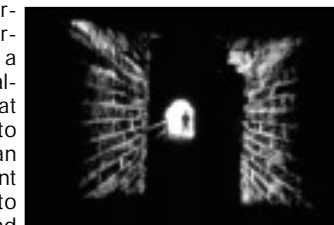
(FS) How far back does your interest in photography go?

Growing up in and around New York City I was fortunate to receive early exposure to a visually rich environment. As a kid I loved going to The Met (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). During one of those visits I became intrigued with the distorted perspective, elongated figures, and intense use of color by the painter El Greco. The connection I felt was an awakening to the expressive powers of visual art. But it was my dad, who had an art background and was an amateur photographer, who introduced me to photography. He had a darkroom in the basement and by the time I was twelve, I knew how to process and print black-and-white photographs. By fifteen, I was using view and 35mm cameras and buying my own equipment. Throughout high school I was experimenting in the darkroom and made a few short movies. I would go to photography exhibitions, mainly at MOMA, and take in what was being shown. Having access to such artistic venues was

important to me as a young person because it opened a path that I might not otherwise have taken. Photography became an integral part of my life. It is how I know my world.

(FS) What is your approach to teaching photography?

Photography is about interpreting a subject, creating a personal interpretation of a subject, realizing what one has to say as an artist. I want students to learn and then forget. Take it in and then let it go so they can make their own discoveries. In early classes I am directorial to ensure that students have the skills to know how things work. Fortunately, technical skill is the easiest thing to teach. I don't want to "emboss" students with my way of doing things. So, once students have mastered the fundamentals, I step back and teach by example and encourage them to find their own path. I have students make presentations on artists of their choice. The other students respond and establish a dialogue. Students need to test their ideas and the ideas of others in a freewheeling atmosphere. (This interactive method is also well suited for the online photo-history class I teach, where writing is the principal method of communication, because it requires taking time to think and present coherent thoughts. This skill can be applied to improve your ability to make and understand pictures.)



"Towards the Light" R. Hirsch

(FS) What advice do you have for photography teachers?

As an educator, I want to fire-up my students' creative engines and drive them to do their own exploration. Technical lectures are necessary but not enough; I demonstrate that ideas drive strong work by showing inspiring examples that demonstrate the methods being taught. I teach people to be disciplined, but allow them the freedom of artistic movement. I encourage them to take chances and stretch their boundaries. I want to get them to the point where the photographs they really want to see are the ones they make themselves.



"Air Mail" R. Hirsch

Continued on Page 3

Classroom Spotlight

**The Future is Dark(room):
How darkroom experience is helping
cinema students see better at
California State University, Northridge**
by Stephanie Morey

An increasing number of schools' film and cinema departments are finding that the photography department is more than a distant, collateral relative. In fact, because photographic concepts are so fundamental to film, cinema departments are realizing in greater numbers that their colleagues across campus can play a vital role in their curriculum.

One such school is California State University, Northridge (CSUN), where, in the mid 1990s, the Department of Cinema and Television Arts began requiring pre-majors of the film production program to have hands-on darkroom experience by taking a basic photography course from the photography program, taught by professors of photography. Part of the rationale was a staffing shortage, but the greatest part of it was the realization that the photo program was better equipped to address many essential topics, both in terms of staff and facilities.

We had the opportunity to speak with two professors over at CSUN: Frederick Kuretski, Professor of Cinema and co-founder of the film production program and Edward C. Alfano, Professor of Art and head of the photography program. Together they founded the cooperative relationship that currently exists between the two departments.

How do classes in photography help a student of film?

(Fred) Many film students are only interested in learning to become a commercial success. I wanted to create a professional who has a deeper understanding of the art form, including its materials. But these days students never set foot in the darkroom. They send their movie film out to a lab. They neither know what happens to it when it's there nor do they think it is important. As a result, students do not understand the limitations or potential of the medium. Ed's photography program is better equipped to address issues of film structure, emulsion, chemistry and the physics of optics than we are.



"Untitled" by Mike Adelmann

On another level it is about composition. Form adds meaning to content, and composition dominates form, so, in a way, you simply can not teach composition in film without discussing the still image.

(Ed) And composition should be driven by concept. When you take photography classes at CSUN we emphasize that concept is not sub-

servient to technique. We focus on developing awareness and getting students to visualize an idea beforehand.

How do Film and Photo differ?

(Fred) In both disciplines things like composition and lighting are important, but in film there is so much movement of and within the shot that one has to confront a great deal of change at every moment: 24 frames a second are moving past the lens while the camera and subject are moving as well. In this sense film is a kind of performance art, and film students become preoccupied with direction and performance. Photography, on the other hand, is a presentational art. It slows things down. It forces students to focus on the importance of each moment in terms of framing, balance, and composition.



"Untitled" by Miguel Ponce de Leone

In photography, a single captured moment has to say everything the photographer intends. In film, not every frame has to be a perfect photograph. But if, for example, you wanted to impart a sense of balance during a shot then it is critical that the beginning and end frames are in balance. You could say that photography teaches film students how to make the beginning and end of a shot, the most essential unit of a film.

What do you cover in the classes for the film pre-major?

(Ed) Naturally we cover the fundamentals including exposure, contrast, optics and lenses. And we get them into the darkroom to learn how to develop and print. Also, the more students see the more they learn, so we give them a sense of photo history by introducing them to important photographers, the work they were producing and the historical context within which they were working.

Do film students ever switch majors?

(Ed) Sometimes students find that they prefer to express themselves through photography. But we get a number of students who realize what photography has to offer in terms of their film career. Many of these students concurrently study photography beyond the pre major requirement.

How does the Photo program benefit from having film students around?

(Ed) I try not to differentiate between film and photo students. We get students from all disciplines. Mixing them offers fresh points of view and enriches everyone in the program.

(Fred) Film students have a different orientation from photography students. Because of that both groups bring a different visual aesthetic to the classroom. The more one is exposed to rigors of other art forms, the better artist one becomes in their chosen medium.

Recommended Text Photographic Possibilities

by Robert Hirsch



Photographic Possibilities is an inspirational guide to both alternative and traditional darkroom processes. The book explains how to achieve unusual results through the use of different chemistry (both prepared formulas and those made from scratch), special camera equipment (toy cameras, pinhole cameras, disposable cameras), alternative processes (cyanotypes, platinum printing, Van Dykes, polaroid transfers) as well as ways to combine "traditional" photography with digital technology to create intriguing hybrid imagery. The information is presented in an engaging and thorough manner, and the different processes are accompanied by examples from a wonderfully diverse group of contemporary artists.

Most importantly though, is the emphasis this book places on the ideas behind the image - the relationship between concept and technique - what the artist was trying to say, and why he used that particular technique to express it. By focusing on this aspect of artistic expression, this book encourages photographers to look beyond conventional darkroom methods, and fully engage the photographic medium to express their ideas.

I also recommend...

"Seizing the Light - A History of Photography"
by Robert Hirsch

"Exploring Color Photography"
by Robert Hirsch

"B&W Photography: A Basic Manual"
by Henry Horenstein

"The History of Photography"
by Beaumont Newhall

Laura Madden -
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Product Spotlight Arista Premium Chemicals



Introduced just a year ago, the Arista® Premium Chemical line has established itself as the industry leader in quality and value. Optimized for group darkrooms, perfect for home darkrooms, Arista® Premium Chemicals are quickly displacing Kodak in schools across the country.

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Superior to Metol-based developers, Arista® Premium developers are phenidone-based, delivering negatives with finer grain, crisper contrast and a better tonal scale. Prints have richer, deeper blacks, better mid-tones and cleaner whites. The paper developer also has a longer tray life and exhausts gradually eliminating the "sudden death" effect of Kodak developers. The odorless fixers clear film in under 30 seconds and paper in one minute. The powder rapid fixer is the only one of its kind on the market.

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With hundreds of students in the darkroom making thousands of prints, schools that switched from Kodak to Arista® Premium Chemicals create a safer work environment, see better print quality and save money!



All products featured in our
newsletter can be found on our
website at www.freestylephoto.biz

Artist Spotlight Cont'd.

(FS) What do you like about being in a darkroom?

The beautiful thing about the darkroom is its physical presence: the smells, the sound of water running, a dimly lit setting. With digital creation I feel there is a material disconnect with the process. Yes, you hear the click of the mouse and the hum of the computer, but I never get that sense of bodily interaction. For me the darkroom is a critical center for conducting visual experiments. It offers the opportunity to contemplate, to dream, and physically realize ones' possibilities. Today, most student experience involves computers. By the time they are in higher education, the majority of their work is digitally based. But there are students who want to experience that sense of wonder as an image develops in a tray and this entails getting "dirty" in the darkroom.

(FS) What other types of classes are important for photography students?

A good history of photography survey class is important. It shows what photographers have done and tells us about our recent history.

Photography is not isolated from society. It is, itself, a social construct. A lot of what we observe/think/process is done via photography. It is a key element that helps define our culture. Therefore, it a way to gain an understanding about why things are the way they are.

Also, classes in other artistic disciplines are vital. Painting, sculpture and other art forms offer different ways to visualize our world. To have a life in the visual arts is to be familiar with more than just your own field.

Photographers should also study philosophy. Philosophy informs the work we produce. It offers a wider perspective and a wider view of what it is to be human. And as previously mentioned, writing, because it teaches one how to communicate with symbols.

(FS) That's a lot of work.

There is a danger that exists in society: it perpetuates an illusion that being an artist is easy. Successful artists have tenacity and the will to work. You have to live it and feel it to be good at it.

Photos from "The Architecture of Landscape" series by Robert Hirsch. Mr. Hirsch's web site is www.negative-positive.com.

Visit our website at
www.freestylephoto.biz/newsletter.html for
the complete interview with Robert Hirsch
including more photographs.

SPE News Center

Current Regional Conference Schedule:



2002 SPE Regional Conferences (as of 9/10/02)

MidAtlantic: Oct. 18-20 Pittsburgh, PA. **Keynote Speaker:** Duane Michals. **Venus:** Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, Silver Eye Center for Photography, and Pittsburgh Filmmakers. **Also:** Curators' Panel and portfolio reviews; an exhibition and talk by Andrew Borowiec ("Along the Ohio.") and a history of Pittsburgh photography by Charlee Brodsky. **Honored Educator:** Sarah Van Keuren, who will receive the Sol Mednick Memorial Award. **Conference Chair:** Jan Erlich-Moss, photoart@mindspring.com

Midwest: Nov. 7-10, Allendale, MI. Organized through Grand Valley State University (Allendale, MI) **Co-Chairs:** Victoria Veenstraveenstrv@gvsu.edu, and Tony Thompson

Southwest: Oct. 25-26, Tempe, AZ. **Host:** Bob Galloway, ASU and Maricopa Comm. College. 480-731-8630 robert.galloway@mcmill.maricopa.edu **Info:** Angie Buckley angie@angiebuckley.com

South Central: Oct. 17-20, Thibodaux, LA **Hosts:** Deb Lillie, Nicholls State University Chad D. Smith 405-366-0160 cdsmith@ou.edu

Northeast: Nov. 1-3, 2002, at Ross School, East Hampton, Long Island, NY. **Retreat-Renew.** **Conference Chair:** Alexis Martino of the Ross School. Ann Chwatsky 212-673-5689 annphoto@aol.com

Southeast: Oct. 25-27, VCU in Richmond, **Venue:** Omni downtown Richmond, VA. **Help and suggestions for programming welcome** Dale Quarterman, Professor of Photography dquarter@saturn.vcu.edu, Tom Lopez tomlopez@mindspring.com

West: Nov. 15-17, at California College of Arts and Crafts' Oakland campus. CCAC is also the 2002 institutional sponsor. **Contact:** Susan E. Ciriclio, Photography Department, CCAC 25212 Broadway, Oakland CA 94618; Brian Moss. bcmoss22@adelphia.net 310-452-0150

Northwest: No conference this Autumn, but are exploring a January conference. If that falls through, they'll schedule a small, simple retreat. David Lee Myers 503-325-4789 myersdl@pacifer.com

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