

The online magazine for landscape photographers

on landscape

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The Path Towards Expression – part 2

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INTRODUCTION



Tim Parkin | Editor

As mentioned in the editorial in issue 200, we have put together a survey so that we can get more of an idea of how our subscribers see On Landscape and to garner ideas for how we can develop the magazine in the future.

The magazine continues to grow and with that growth comes a few new challenges in how to develop. Technology also changes with the growth of YouTube and more people using mobile devices to access the content. Many people want to see things stay pretty much the same but from our conversations with other people, there are all sorts of new content that we could develop.

Our actual plans will be somewhere in the middle of course. We will maintain the majority of what people like about On Landscape and will gradually try out new ideas and ask people for feedback on them. Over the last few months, we've made some changes to try to make the website perform a little faster and also made some changes to the mobile theme to make it easier to use. We have also introduced podcasts and streamcasts in our 'Passing through' feature and recorded a few more live events.

We enjoy the benefits of being a small company (stability, ease of decision making, etc) whilst some of the downsides are resource limitations (we only have so much time and we have to get out now and again!).

We hope you will help us by filling out the survey and pointing us in the right direction for future development. If you have any feedback that doesn't fit with the survey, please feel free to drop us a message on support@onlandscape.co.uk.

We'll compile the results in a future issue and let you all know what our intentions are but thanks again for your support and help in making On Landscape successful!

Here's the link to the survey, just click the logo and it should pop up in a browser window.



on landscape

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Stu Levy

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER

Stu Levy

Last autumn [Stephen Gledhill](#), who is one of our subscribers and contributors, suggested we got in touch with [Stu Levy](#). He had just got back from a trip to The Lake District with six photography friends. Most of them have known each other since a large format monochrome landscape photography workshop in Bluff in Utah in 2001. One of the newcomers Stu is well known and highly accomplished, respected and published photographer based in Oregon in the US. We got in touch with Stu to find out more about his photography and his time as an assistant instructor with Ansel Adams.

Tell me about why you love landscape photography? A little background on what your first passions were, what you studied and what job you ended up doing.

Photography and rock music were my twin passions during my teenage years in the mid-1960's. I was doing documentary photography in high school and college, but also photographed musicians, both for publicity use and in performance.

There was no art in my home, and my only exposure to art was through school trips to the Art Museum, where I was attracted to surrealism – my favourites being Miro, Magritte and Escher.

I was given the book [Family f Man](#) as a high school graduation present, and learned about Karsh and Cartier-Bresson while in college, but knew nothing of the West-Coast Landscape tradition in photography.

I started Medical School and had almost no time for photography

for the next 6 or 7 years.

Up until then, I had no real “outdoor” experiences but I wound up on a 3-day backpacking trip in the mountains of Aspen, Colorado with a classmate. I discovered a sense of “wonder” on that trip, but also had my camera with me and made slides to document the experience. Once or twice a year backpack trips on vacation were my only chances to make photographs.

I had moved to Oregon for my medical residency training, and as it was nearing completion, I decided to build a darkroom and start photographing in black and white again.

Around that time, I saw a show of Ansel Adams prints at the Portland Art Museum. It seemed that light was radiating out of the prints which I had never experienced before. I thought that if I could just borrow one of Ansel's negative and perfect the necessary burning and dodging techniques, I too could become a good printer.



[Stu Levy](#)

Stu Levy lives in Portland and has led a photography workshop on the Oregon Coast for over 30 years. He studied with Ansel Adams and was an assistant instructor for Ansel's workshops in Yosemite and Carmel, he also taught at the Ansel Adams Gallery Workshops. His photographs are in many public and private collections including The Center for Creative Photography, the George Eastman House, the Portland Art Museum, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the High Museum of Art and the Wilson Centre for Photography. He was one of the founders of the Photography Council of the Portland Art Museum and was the Council President from 2003 to 2006. He is also on the Board of Directors of Photolucida and the Pacific Northwest Photographers Archive.

stulevyphoto.com



I started to voraciously look at photographs in galleries, museums and books – trying to give myself an education in the history of photography.

My wife was also a physician who was a year behind me in our training, and when she finished her medical residency, we took a year and a half off, mostly backpacking through the Western United States.

In 1979 you enrolled in one of Adams’s summer workshops in Yosemite National Park and returned in following years as an assistant instructor. Tell us more about this experience and how it helped shape your photography.

During our time off, through a chance connection at a photo gallery in Carmel, California, I learned about Ansel’s Yosemite Workshops and attended in the summer of 1979. The technical lesson I learned was that in order to make a good print, one needs to make a good negative, and Ansel could teach the craft to master that. But more importantly (Epiphany moment #1), I was exposed to the world of Photography as Art, and to the world of Photographers as Artists, which may never have happened without that Workshop environment.

I feel that the week at the Workshop changed my life. I made my first significant photograph 4 months later (Havasu Stream - Epiphany moment #2). Ansel and his staff liked my work, and two years later I became an assistant instructor at the Workshops for one or two weeks a year, which continued throughout the 1980’s. At the same time, I helped establish the Portland Photographic Workshop which held monthly meetings to share and discuss work, plus several field-session workshops each year.

Who has specifically helped you in realising your photographic ambitions over the past few years?

I can't give enough thanks to my late wife Cris for her critical and emotional support of my photography career. But I am also grateful to the two individuals who published my work:

- Chris Pichler (Nazraeli Press): [Grid-Portraits](#), [Cranial](#)

[Czar, Eh?](#) and [Honk If You Love Steiglitz](#).

- Brooks Jenson (Lenswork) [In Search of the What Else](#)
Lenswork produced a book of your Photographs 1979-2013: In Search of the What Else. Tell us about this project. How did it come about? How did you decide which photographs made it into the book?



Brooks Jenson, the publisher of Lenswork Magazine, was one of the original members of the Portland Photographic Workshops, and we've known each other since the early 1980's. He started a new publishing venture, the Lenswork Monographs, first using his own photos for the book.

After making minor format changes, he asked me to be the second in the monograph series. He told me the size of the book and the number of pages but said I had total control of the content. Rather than a career retrospective (which was tempting), I decided to use imagery related either to water or The Coast. I got editing input from several close friends, designed the book myself, and was able to attend the press run in Vancouver, B.C. with Brooks. It was a thrill to watch state of the art printing presses in action, and I was thrilled and honoured to finally have a book of my landscape photos.

You say on your website "My photographs often involve fragile landscapes in which I feel a sense of timelessness." Do you intentionally go looking for the fragile landscapes or is that what you're drawn to photograph?

In the early 1980's I started photographing in the Columbia River Gorge. I saw beautiful landforms being destroyed or threatened by development, and the formation of an environmental movement to protect it – an area less than an hour from my home. It reminded me, on some level, of a book by Eliot Porter, *The Place No One Knew*, about the Glen Canyon which was flooded for the creation of the Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell (on the Arizona – Utah border). I not only wanted to photograph the Columbia River Gorge before it changed too much but also wanted to see what was left of the Glen Canyon, which led me to backpacking trips near Escalante, Utah.



Tell us about your Grid-Portraits and how this project which evolved into a book evolved. Did this style of portraiture evolve as a sense of frustration with traditional portraiture?

While camping in an amphitheatre in the Escalante that was “too big to be photographed”, I remembered David Hockney’s technique of using multiple photographs as brush-strokes to describe a space.

My first attempt with the 4x5 was a dismal failure, but as I tried it a few more times, I asked a photographer friend who was with me if I could take his portrait on a bridge I was about to photograph in segments. I made a Polaroid of his face, then had him hold the Polaroid next to his face while I exposed a negative. I then moved the camera to photograph his chest, and he placed the Polaroid in his shirt pocket. Then I photographed his feet. Then I had him move to a distant position on the bridge, photographing him there, and made several other photos to the right, left, above and below – and thus the Grid-Portrait project was born (Epiphany moment #3). A few years later I returned to Escalante to successfully photograph the Choprock Amphitheatre.

This was also a time when clutter in my home was causing distress for my wife, and many of the subjects I photographed had a lot of artefacts, or “stuff”, in their environments, which in part defined who they were. The Grid-Portraits also tried to overcome my frustration with traditional portraits that only showed one instant of a person’s life. These showed a person in two or three environments of their life. It was as if a film was made of the person, and the viewer remembered two or three separate scenes and tried to blend them together, although they never existed simultaneously. I referred to the special combinations as “recombinant architecture”. The images often included a set of Polaroid prints of the image as it was being constructed, the waste of the Polaroid process, and myself – the photographer. Nazraeli Press published the book *Grid-Portraits* in 2010, and I can be seen ageing in the chronology of the photos.

You've exhibited widely over the years. Which of these were the most memorable and why?

- CameraWork Gallery, Portland 1982 – my first show, which introduced me to the Portland photographic community
- Governor's Reception Office, Salem, Oregon – Columbia River Gorge photos
- Blue Sky Gallery – first showing of the Grid-Portraits
- Ansel Adams Gallery, Yosemite – work was present next to Ansel's photos.
- S. K. Josefsberg Studio, Portland – a combination of landscapes and mural-sized Grid-Portraits, where Chris Pichler of
- Nazraeli Press first saw my work and expressed interest in publishing it.
- Viewpoint Gallery, Sacramento, California – complete show of Grid-Portraits

What are you most proud of in your photography?

I'm happy to have had a few original ideas and images that were recognised by the art world (Grid-Portraits; Golden Gate Bridge #176 Sailboat and Shadow.) I'm also pleased that my workshop teaching has helped nurture other photographers' craft and creativity.

Can I see a little Brett Weston in your photography? (possibly Minor White here and there?) Who else has influenced or inspired you?

In 1982 I was invited to join The Interim Workshop in Portland, a group of photographers who had studied with Minor White in the 1960s and continued to meet monthly, sharing their new photographs and discussing



them in the ways that Minor had taught them. There was a large emphasis on the emotional content of the images, and I found that Minor's use of abstraction in the landscape appealed to my interest in surrealism.

The Workshop members recalled that Minor used to tell them to not only photograph something for "what it is," but figure out what else it is and photograph the

"what else." Although I was a fan of all the f/64 Group photographers, I found myself most attracted to Minor White's work because of its abstraction as metaphor nature as well as its similarity to surrealism (as opposed to Brett Weston whose abstractions I felt were more purely graphic).



What are your favourite landscape photography books?

- Ansel Adams - My Camera In the National Parks
- Wynn Bullock (Scrimshaw Press)
- Paul Caponigro – The Wise Silence
- Laura Gilpin – An Enduring Grace
- Emmet Gowin – Petra
- Elliot Porter – The Place No One Knew
- Art Sinsabaugh – 6 Mid-American Chants
- Josef Sudek – Panorama
- Carlton Watkins – The Columbia River Gorge
- Edward Weston – My Camera on Point Lobos
- Brett Weston – 50 Photographs (Merle Armitage)
- Minor White - Mirrors, Messages & Manifestations

Could you tell us a little about the cameras and lenses you typically take on a trip and how they affect your photography?

Any interesting transitions in your craft over the years?

Current camera equipment:

- Nikon D850
- Nikon 17-35mm
- Nikon 24-70mm
- Nikon 70-200mm
- Optional: Nikon 19mm PC lens

Learning how to properly expose and develop negatives (at the Ansel Adams Workshop) was my biggest breakthrough, and there is a definite difference between my pre- and post-workshop negatives and prints. Working with Photoshop and good scanners to digitise my negatives, starting in the late 1990's, was another transition, and that made entry into the digital-capture world easier.





How do you think your choice of camera and lenses influences your style of photography?

I remember looking at a reproduction of Ansel's Mt Williamson from Manzanar in a book, seeing both the extreme depth of field and some exaggeration of shapes that I realised could not have been done with a fixed lens camera. At the same time, my best friend from Medical School was obsessed with Hershey's Chocolate Syrup which came in cans. I wanted to photograph it in the style of Andy Warhol's soup cans, but realised that if I wanted the sides of the can to be parallel, I couldn't see the top of the can, and if I wanted the top to show, the sides would converge. The answer was to use a studio-type view camera that could correct the perspective distortions.

I started using a 4x5 inch view camera to allow for custom development of each sheet of film, higher resolution in the image than I could obtain from a smaller camera, and for the parallax, or perspective, distortion corrections. I often carried five or six lenses with my camera. In the mid-1980's I imagined my dream camera – an 11x14, with auto-focus and a motor drive, that had a digitising back with 300 dpi resolution, and weighed 3 pounds.

During my view camera years (1982-2012), the most common lens I used was a 150mm "normal" lens. Since switching to a full frame digital SLR, I usually use a 17-35mm lens. I use it to tell "more" of the landscape story and feel it gives a closer approximation to my experience of being in the landscape. And despite having a fairly high level of Zone System expertise and extensive use of masks in the printing process, I feel that the newer generation of digital cameras lets me work with high-contrast situations much better than I was able to with film.



What sort of post-processing (analogue and digital) do you undertake on your pictures? Give me an idea of your workflow.

In my basement darkroom, I had meticulously tested each film and developer combination I used to find the ideal development times for contrast control. Fuji Acros 100 film developed in Kodak XTOL was my favourite combination during my last darkroom years. Re: Papers: I originally used Oriental Seagull, then Kodak Polymax. When it was discontinued, I switched to Ilford Multigrade Warmtone.

I use Lightroom to catalogue and edit my photos, but all of my processing is done in Photoshop. After initial Camera Raw adjustments, I make several duplicate layers and add a "levels" adjustment to each. It lets me create the equivalent of the burning and dodging adjustments I used to make with variable contrast paper in the darkroom. I then add a layer mask to each, and non-destructively eliminate the section of each layer which does not express the tonalities I desire. I make my own prints using an Epson printer, usually on Canson Infinity Photographique Baryta paper.

Tell me what your favourite two or three photographs are and a little bit about them.

HAVASU STREAM

This was the first significant photo I made after studying with Ansel Adams. It represented a place of absolute serenity to me, and I was visually excited by the sensation of seeing mercury, or liquid silver, in areas of the print. It was made using a Rollei SL66.

Three days before the image was made, I purchased a digital spot meter and a wide angle lens for the camera, both of which were essential to its creation.



GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE #176 (SAILBOAT AND SHADOW)

This was made for one of the few commercial assignments I have ever done. I was shown previous images made by photographers I greatly respected and was told to do nothing remotely similar – so my first half-dozen ideas were instantly eliminated. The idea of photographing the bridge's shadow occurred to me, but when I tried it, it was too late in the afternoon and the shadow didn't look right. I went back earlier in the afternoon the next day and composed the image with my 4x5 camera. Just before I made the exposure, I saw a sailboat floating just outside my frame, but realised there wasn't time to re-compose the image; and I was happy with the position of the shadow. Within the next half-hour, several boats sailed through my image, and this was my favourite of them. It truly felt like a gift for being patient.





ARTIST'S PROOF AND CONSEQUENCES

I have begun thinking of the Grid-Portraits as selectively combined memories from a movie about a person – in this case, before, during and after the pregnancy of a couple of my friends. The original concept was to

show the pregnant mother standing next to a Mexican paper-mâché doll in her doorway, and eventually have her hold the baby in symmetry to the doll. The two columns on the right were made in a totally different room from the area in the left side of the photo, but we moved the carpet from the first room to the second to “blend the

space” and create a visual environment that never existed (I now call this recombinant architecture). Including the baby in several frames was a reference to the feeling the parents had of being overwhelmed.



If you were told you couldn't do anything photography related for a week, what would you end up doing (i.e. Do you have a hobby other than photography...)

I'm involved (Board member) with a few photography organisations that have nothing to do with my own work:

- PhotoLucida – an in-person as well as virtual portfolio review, based in Portland, Oregon
- Portland Art Museum Photography Council – raises money to expand the collection
- Pacific Northwest Photographers Archive – a research archive to house the negatives, prints and working documents of photographers who either lived or worked in the Pacific Northwest, so their work doesn't end up in a dumpster after their death.

My other non-photographic activities include hiking the nature trails near my home, continued yard maintenance at home and listening to a variety of live and recorded music. And I still have involvement with the medical profession by teaching efficiency skills for using Electronic Medical Records to new physicians.

What sorts of things do you think might challenge you in the future or do you have any photographs or styles that you want to investigate? Where do you see your photography going in terms of subject and style?

Future challenges are to continue to make images that hold my fascination, in both familiar and new locations. I'm also hoping to make Grid-Portraits using the digital camera and tilt-shift lenses to re-create the lens – imprecision that was present when I made them with the 4x5.

Who do you think we should feature as our next photographer?

Len Jenshel / Diane Cook <http://cookjenshel.com>



Interview by
Michéla Griffith

Photographer Michéla Griffith looks to create individual images that show that the camera is a creative tool as much as a paintbrush, and is hopeful that she is making some progress as her images of water and light are often mistaken for paintings. She exhibits locally and is a member of the professional artists' association Peak District Artisans

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