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Sunday, 02 August 2015

Thoughts for Your Sunday ~ Making a Left Turn at Albuquerque**

Written by **Ctein**

First, a *Short Public Service Announcement*.

By now, all of you who ordered Kate Kirkwood prints should have received them (with the possible exception of a few international orders). If you have not yet received your print order, regardless of where you live, please e-mail me (ctein@pobox.com) so I can pay special attention to the tracking on those orders.

If I don't hear from you, I'm going to assume you received your order and it was in good shape and you are happy with the print.

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So... you know those two black-and-white photographs I posted a few days back? They're not isolated cases. Since the beginning of last year, despite the insanity of my recent life, I've added 50-odd photographs to my portfolio. (No, they are not up on my website; I haven't had enough time to do everything else and update that. Real Soon Now.)

Two-thirds of those photographs are black and white.

Since the beginning of this year, 80% of what I've printed has been black and white.

I haven't done that much black and white work, relative to the color, in over 40 years. For the past two decades, up until very recently, my work (film and digital) has been between 95% and 100% color. It wasn't part of some strategy, it was simply that whenever I would decide to go out photographing my muse would be strongly, almost universally, inclined to choose color over black-and-white.

Something is different. The numbers have grown to be more than a statistical fluke. It might be passing fad or fancy. It might be because I find black and white easier and more relaxing to print than color, and I have been overworked and exhausted for too much of the past couple of years. It might be that I am totally infatuated with infrared black and white, but that like most infatuations, it will pass. It might be true love, a genuine secular change in artistic direction for me.

Honestly, I don't know. Mind you, I don't really need to know. I will find out in due time.

(I do find some modest amusement in the notion that, given the several left turns my life has taken of late, in 10 years people might be saying, "Oh yeah, Ctein. The novelist. He does B&W photography too, you know. ... didn't he used to do color or something?")

So, what's *new and different* in *your* life, of late?

(**Thank You, Bugs Bunny)

Ctein, TOP Technical Editor
(who is posting on-and-off while Mike's nomadic)

(*To see all the comments, click on the "Comments" link below.*)

Featured Comments from:

Posted on Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 02:22 PM in Ctein, Photographic aesthetics, Print Offers, Reflections | Permalink

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Comments

Hmmm; teaching (full-term courses at an accredited institution, as opposed to short in-house training at work) again, this time both an advanced course and an introductory programming course. This is something I've liked doing (and the advanced course is the same Machine Architecture and Organization course I taught on zero notice last year and loved), so it's nice to do it again.

It's the introductory course I'm nervous about; it's so long since I learned to program that everything I remember about it is dated enough to be, I think, more dangerous than useful. And I haven't been around beginners that much for the last 20 years (I've been programming professionally since 1969). This should be interesting!

And doing a lot of video editing on that concert video project, and getting more and more comfortable with that (I did a lot of film and some video in high school and college, where I almost hat a second major in film, but just a bump or two of activity after that, until recently. In college, "editing" involved gang synchronizers and splicing blocks. Now it involves rather expensive computer hardware and software instead -- and boy is it easier! Things we couldn't consider for the expense back then (they required optical printing, which was off the table) I now do casually with the basic software (four-way split screens, even hand-drawn insert masks).

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Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 02:47 PM

Ctein: If your recent black and white work is on film, we can look forward to more of your excellent darkroom articles.

[***Ctein** replies: Pat, that is not gonna happen. No film, not any more. Not ever. That horse has sailed (or sumpin' like that.*]

Posted by: Pat Trent | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 03:15 PM

Well- since you asked...

http://reciprocity-failure.blogspot.com/2015/08/my-not-so-torrid-middle-aged-digital.html

Posted by: Stan B. | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 03:16 PM

It's really important to be able to look back over what you've accomplished over a long period of time and examine the progression. You can discover things about your own work that you were too close to to see clearly otherwise.

l finished a couple projects lately that lent themselves to B&W, which I hadn't printed in many years (my Streit's portfolio being the prime example http://bit.ly/19haTFZ). It did open some new channels in my creative thinking. I find I'm now much more attuned to seeing the world as if I've got Tri-X 400 loaded in my DSLR. We'll see if that leads to anything in the coming months and years.

Posted by: Joe Holmes | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 04:00 PM

What's new with me? I recently accepted a full time instructor position (photography) and have to create a two year syllabi sooner than later.

I too recently ventured back into infrared photography, but this time via digital. I have 'Part I' posted on my blog if anyone is interested: http://www.photoscapes.com/blog/2015/7/my-return-to-infrared-photography

Other than these recent changes, nothing else to report of photographic interest.

BTW, the last time I was in ABQ, I headed south for White Sands.

Posted by: Darlene Almeda | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 04:03 PM

What's new and different in my life, of late? In terms of photography, that's easy; in other aspects things haven't been moving much lately, but that might be about to change drastically as I applied to a job abroad, which is likely to turn my life upside down and inside out. As this is a photography blog, my professional ventures are of little to no interest, so let's stick to the topic.

On July 12, 2013, my interest for photography was dimming. I was stuck with a camera like the one Ctein converted for IR photography and my lenses were two native ones that can only be described as worthless and two OM's that, though excellent, did oblige me to use manual focus, which is not bad 'per se' but required the awful and time-consuming 'MF Assist.'

One day I was attending a live concert where there were lots of young people using film cameras, I engaged in a conversation with one of them and learned that shooting film wasn't so expensive after all; a few days later I met a Nikon FE2 owner who let me peep through his camera's viewfinder. As an adolescent might have put it, I was like 'oh, wow'. That brightness and clarity had an hypnotic effect on me.

That helped me making up my mind about converting to analogue, an idea I had been dabbling with for some time but kept procrastinating. I had two OM lenses and some (not much) money to spend, so I thought 'why not'? I bought an Olympus OM-2n in pristine condition.

I wasn't prepared for what came next: I gradually lost any interest in shooting digital. It wasn't supposed to end that way, but it did. The pleasure of using a proper SLR was such I found myself hating to compose via a screen and fiddling with buttons to dig out the infamous 'MF Assist' from the rather fastidious menus.

Even more to the point, my photography now is almost exclusively in black and white. On one hand, I found Ilford films to be my favourites (especially FP4); on the other, and more crucially, I realized colour is a distraction. The presence of even the merest hint of colour attracts all the attention, deviating the eye from forms, textures and contrasts. (Now you know why those cheesy selective colour pictures are so popular...) It's too hard to get the graphic elements in the picture to draw any attention when colour is present. It somehow attenuates the strength of lines and dominates the picture visually.

Colour and black and white are antagonic languages: they demand completely different mindsets and subjects. If you favour bold, strong lines, colour photography will do you no favours. The same with textures: no colour photograph can give the subtleties of textures that black and white does. It's nothing to do with resolution: it's the colour dominating the scene and stealing the show.

On the other hand, there are scenes that just make no sense in black and white. If it's colour you want to depict, i. e. if it is what makes the picture work, then colour it'll have to be. It's all a matter of how you want your pictures to work. Abstraction vs. reality, graphic content vs. natural renderings. As for me, black and white wins big time. Others, of course, may think differently. Which is OK with me. I'm no proselyte. (Actually, I'm currently sampling the Kodak Gold 200...)

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Posted by: Manuel | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 04:09 PM

What's new and different in my life?

An old friend is gone.

A new website is born.

And I own a printer.

What it all means and where it will lead me, I don't really know.

Posted by: James Sinks | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 05:15 PM

I'm actually diving back into photography again after a hiatus. I spent about 20 years shooting landscapes and making large prints. The past three years I've been diligently applying myself to oil painting. In retrospect I took up photography because I didn't know how to paint. Now just as I'm reaching a level of minimal competence in painting...the siren song of photography is calling again. I forgot how much fun it was to get up at 3 am to be in place for a sunrise shoot, and just how beautiful a perfectly tuned print can be.

I'm beginning to explore what the higher resolution and smoother files of the Eos-5Ds R can do for black and white, which I dearly love. I've always had a very measured, methodical photographic style and generally still come home with fewer than 50 captures after a morning shoot. Probably comes from the film era, when I was very conscious of the monetary cost of every click of the shutter. Now it's the time cost of editing and polishing the files. I still can't wrap my head around coming home with thousands of files.

Posted by: Geoff Wittig | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 05:28 PM

I saw the headline and thought Mike had driven south from Wisconsin and was heading to western New York via Albuquerque.

Posted by: hugh crawford | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 08:28 PM

Without intending to do so, I seem to have embarked upon a "one year, one camera, one lens" adventure subsequent to my acquisition of a secondhand Sony RX1.

Well, a *pair* of them, actually, plus a modified .75x wide-angle converter for the Sony FE 28mm/f2 lens. So not exactly "one camera, one lens," but close enough for my purposes, anyway.

I haven't taken a photo using any other cameras since this past February and so far, I am finding this (originally) accidental detour both effective and educational ... and to a very surprising extent, even fun! Who knew?

Posted by: JG | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 08:36 PM

What's new and different? Well, I've made my own left turn, after a few zig-zags, to recapture the "fun" of photography. I've just been too freakin' SERIOUS. You name it, I've gotten intense about it. Did it make my images better? No! Did I have more fun? No!

A couple years ago, during self-introductions at an artist's group my wife belongs to, I said "I play with photography." And that's my new direction.

Posted by: MikeR | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 08:42 PM

I've been making books

http://vizionspeak.com/books/

and building furniture

http://vizionspeak.com/2015/07/a-new-desk/

instead of taking photographs but I'm looking forward to getting back into image making very soon!

Posted by: Kefyn Moss | Sunday, 02 August 2015 at 11:43 PM

After a serious amount of personal, lets just say "life challenges" over the last 10 years, I've got my creative photography chops back. The reason - some will scoff at this - Instagram!

I purchased a smartphone and found I had a digital Polaroid in my hand. Loved this instant publishing platform. Started to think square and see again photographically. Used it to rebuild confidence and have now dug out the only camera I kept after giving up my equipment - my trusty OM1N.

Also purchased a mint, used, Olympus E1 to explore digital again. Yes, it's only 5MP and considered obsolete, but those 5,000,000 points of electronically converted light are good ones.

Posted by: David Cope | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 12:45 AM

I've started selling prints at art markets again. Did my first just the other week.
https://anthonyshaughnessy.wordpress.com/2015/08/03/selling-prints-again/

If anyone fancies trying this, I've found it to be a lot of fun even if you don't sell anything. Having people come to your stall or stand and ooh and aahh over your nice pictures is really nice and you get to speak to a lot of interesting people.
Anthony

Posted by: Anthony Shaughnessy | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 05:10 AM

The birth of our first child (daughter) has moved my life sideways. And photographically it's given me a whole new reason to pick up the camera. It ain't art, but I get loads of pleasure looking at the results :-)

Posted by: Martin Doonan | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 06:44 AM

Ah, black and white. I got my first digital camera in 2007 and I cannot recall a single black and white picture of value I had shot with a digital camera since. Color being the native format for Raw, that's what I used. And I enjoy the hell out of it, making color a part of the composition or just an element that's "there". But a month or so ago, I shot a few pictures of our new puppy with the camera set on mono JPEG. And I enjoy the hell out of it, making pictures clean...without the distraction of a color element. One of my old Olympus cameras is now set up for mono JPEG ("monotone" in the Olympus vernacular). A couple of my Canons now are set for Raw + mono JPEG (color is still my comfort zone, after all).

(From my travel direction, if I turn left at Albuquerque and deviate slightly to the right, I eventually end up in Silver City.)

Posted by: Dogman | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 07:44 AM

Like the freedom to shoot any aspect ratio(because the cropping is so easy), and the freedom to check an exposure *immediately after it has been made*(by looking at the histogram), the freedom to decide later whether or not to turn off the color is an unquestioned advantage over the film methods, and the folks who argue against such photographic improvements are mere internet gum-flappers.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Keith, now that you cause me to think on it, I pretty much never work that way. Before I step out, I know what "medium" I'm going to be working with. I don't change my mind in the field.*

Don't get me wrong, it's nice that I could. I just hardly ever do.

Back in the film days, I carried two camera bodies when I wanted to do both B&W and color photography. It wasn't a big deal. Lots of photographers did that. Digital's nice in that one body will suffice and you don't have to change rolls of film, even, but it doesn't feel like a profound difference to me.]

Posted by: Keith B | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 12:18 PM

I'm doing nothing new/changed. Well, that's not quite true. I should say I *haven't* been doing anything differently except ... not shooting.

Once we moved (nearly 3 years ago now) I didn't have a space where I could process film. The basement in the new place is **still** crammed full. Le sigh. But ...

I've FINALLY decided which digital camera I am going to acquire. I've never had a "proper" digital camera, primarily because everything I saw and touched was more computer with a worse-than-Windows interface, not an M or OM or Pentax with a sensor in the film gate.

So, yes, I am going to get a Fuji X. I've settled on the X100T, but until it is actually in hand I would be open to an X-Pro with one or two lenses. I will still work toward constructing a darkroom (I love the darkroom,) but a totally digital workflow will free me from the chemical front end.

And most of my shooting will be black-and-white.

I may even bump into Mike on one of my sojourns.

Posted by: Earl Dunbar | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 03:23 PM

I prefer the IR camera with the color. So I can take advantage of the unusual pallet for the images. I do like black and white versions too. However, I have recently completed a photo book containing my notes on digitally recreating the look of the old Kodak Velvet Green gaslight paper. And the only B&W images I had to use were IR. Some of them are very pretty. By the end of this week, Mark Osterman will have the package of materials I sent him at the George Eastman House. Then I get to hear if he liked the end result of over a year's work.

Posted by: Mathew Hargreaves | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 06:24 PM

[Ctein replies: Keith, now that you cause me to think on it, I pretty much never work that way. Before I step out, I know what "medium" I'm going to be working with. I don't change my mind in the field.
If I'm not shooting for a straight, representational result(a job, or spec job), I'm out looking for light, and the structures and surfaces that modulate it in evocative ways. Color *may* be present, or not.
Fun experiment in color/B&W viewing:
Look at the first four or five movies that were shot in color by the great American cinematographer Conrad Hall: "Harper(1965), Divorce American Style(1967), Cool Hand Luke(1966), or Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid(1969): Watch them for a while in color, then turn the color on your TV off: You'll see that Hall lit these movies using classic B&W lighting, even though they are fine in color as well.

Posted by: Keith B | Monday, 03 August 2015 at 10:54 PM

The comments to this entry are closed.