

REFLECTIONS ON AN EXHIBITION

THE CENTER FOR FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY'S 2007 B&W EXHIBITION

By Alice B. Miller

This past May, I was the sole juror for the 2007 Black & White Exhibition organized by The Center for Fine Art Photography for display at its Fort Collins, Colorado, gallery and online. Hour after hour, I painstakingly reviewed the more than 1700 entries, eventually whittling down the original pool to my favorite 50, as instructed by the center.

The exhibition vividly portrays beauty, pathos, innocence, loss, exuberance, isolation and other timeless themes. Without knowing the photographers' equipment or their years of experience, it was

crystal-clear that the winners are masters of their individual photo specialties and the requisite digital fine art techniques and technologies.

Laura Epstein-Norris, "Menemsha"
Specializing in family portraits and fine art photography, Laura Epstein-Norris has been a professional photographer for 18 years. She teaches digital and darkroom photography and is working on two books: Forever Family, with black-and-white photographs and essays about adoptive families, and a series of black-and-white yoga photographs for a book on the yoga of parenting. She was a finalist in the 2006 Critical Mass juried competition by Photolucida, and received the Aparicio Gil award from the San Francisco Art Institute while earning her MFA.

Recently, I had the opportunity to touch base with six of the winners. I asked what the images meant to them, what their motivation was for capturing them, and how the winning entries fit into their life's work. Below are highlights of their responses.

Laura Epstein-Norris, of Laura Epstein-Norris Photography in Mill Valley, California, created the image "Menemsha" in July 2005 as part of an ongoing personal project.

"Menemsha is a special place in Martha's Vineyard where our family goes every

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summer,” she explains. “The image is evocative of summer, of letting go, and of the complete lack of inhibition of childhood.”

The image is part of an ongoing body of work titled *Summertime*. “The series focuses on the unfettered joys of childhood, the freedom of lazy days spent at the beach, birthdays and barbecues, days on the boardwalk or riding the roller coaster, the weightlessness of floating underwater. These photographs are an homage to the special memories each of us hold,” she explains.

She captured the image as a RAW file with her Canon EOS 20D and 85mm lens at 1/200 second at f/14, ISO 400, and later did some editing in Photoshop CS2.

While Laura enjoys shooting in both black-and-white and color, because of the flexibility of Photoshop, she often doesn't decide whether the image will be output in black-and-white or color until she sees it. “Then I go with my gut,” says Laura. “I knew ‘Menemsha’ was going to be a black-and-white image. It has a timeless quality that felt black and white to me from the beginning.”

“To be able to share my work in this format in a traditional show and online, where it can reach a larger audience of photography lovers, was especially gratifying,” she adds. For more of her *Summertime* images, visit www.lauraepsteinnorris.com.

Joseph Schuyler, of Schuyler Photography in Delmar, New York, captured “Vietnam Memorial, Washington, D.C.,” in May 1992, after the image appeared to him in a dream.

Joseph had never seen the Vietnam Memorial, yet while visiting friends in the area the night before his trip to the Memorial, he had a dream in which he saw the image quite vividly. “When I went the next day, I was unprepared for the impact of being at the Memorial,” he recalls.

“Walking along the Memorial, one gradually moves under the earth, and the sounds and sights of the city disappear. I went immediately to the intersection of the walls and photographed the image that had appeared in my dream. To me, this image connects the real people whose names are inscribed, and who are now under the earth, with the ethereal plane of the sky. It is an homage to all war dead.

“Several elements connect it to my work as a whole: stark composition, fullness of

tone, internal tension, a visual connection between elements and a greater meaning beyond the physical subject pictured,” he explains. “When I studied with Minor White early in my career, he emphasized the concept of photographing a subject for what it is, and for what *else* it is. This image, and all of my best work, is true to this idea.”

Joseph captured the image early one morning, on a slightly overcast day, with



Joseph Schuyler, “Vietnam Memorial, Washington, D.C.”

After 30 years as a commercial film photographer, Joseph Schuyler now shoots digital for most of his performing-arts, editorial, academic and business clients. His personal work remains primarily black-and-white medium format and 35mm infrared. Schuyler received two Golden Light Awards in portraiture and landscape from Kodak and various exhibit awards. For more of his work, visit www.schuylerphotography.com.

his Hasselblad SWC on Konica Infrared 750 film, which allowed him to capture a scene with such an extreme contrast range at f/22 for 1/15 second, with a yellow K2 filter. “I spot-metered the scene and exposed and developed using the Zone system,” Jo-

seph says. “I used the minimum focus distance to make the names recede, becoming smaller and less distinct as they rose toward the sky.” Post-production included dodging, burning and selenium-toning on double-weight fiber paper.

“I believe we have an effective and worthy Memorial for the soldiers who fought in the nightmare that was the Vietnam War,” he adds. “Now that we’re in another tragic quagmire, the sadness and significance of

this Memorial have been reawakened, taking on new urgency.”

Jacob Kedzierski of New York captured “NYC_Untitled 832am” on November 2006 as part of an ongoing NYC project.

The image title was no more than a convenient placeholder, according to Jacob, who couldn't think up a fitting title. “I had insomnia, so instead of tossing and turning for hours on end, I headed into the city with my camera,” he says. “I feel that the image perfectly captured the insomniac state I was in that morning.”

Since moving to New York City in 2004,



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Top: Jacob Kedzierski, "NYC_Untitled 832am"

Jacob Kedzierski, a professional fine art photographer for 11 years, specializes in abstract images. He favors film for his landscape, architecture and experimental photography, and he keeps a point-and-shoot digital handy for more casual shooting. For more of his images, visit www.pbase.com/lettuce76.

Bottom: Shaun Sullivan, "Gurnville Trees #4"

A professional photographer for 25 years, Shaun still shoots black-and-white film exclusively for personal projects, while he prefers color film and digital for his editorial and catalog clients. In addition to "Gurnville Trees #4" being selected for the Black & White Exhibition, he won second place in the 2007 International Photography Awards in the Trees category. For more of his work, visit www.shaunsullivanphotography.com.

Jacob has focused on capturing the dizzying effect the city has, "exposing the city in a way that leaves you in a familiar, yet unfamiliar place," as he describes it. "For the past three years, I've been working on an abstract double-exposure series on New York City, which is what inspired me to capture this building," he explains.

This abstract image is actually two images exposed on a single frame of film. It was shot in natural lighting with a Nikon FM-10 using Kodak Tri-X film and a Nikkor 35-70mm lens with a Tiffen orange #16 filter. To bring out the clouds somewhat, he used brightness



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Mark Woods, "Hairpin Turn"

A professional photographer for 20 years, Mark Woods specializes in portraits of high school seniors, children, families, couples, schools and dance studios. A digital photographer since 2003, that year he was named one of the state's top ten photographers by the Associated Professional Photographers of Illinois. He is the 2007 PPA Gold Level Photographer of the Year. For more of his work, visit www.woodsstudio.com.

and contrast adjustments in Photoshop. "When shooting multiple exposures, the images tend to blend together better in black and white," says Jacob.

He adds. "It was while I was studying video production at the Art Institute of Denver that I became serious about photography, so I was honored and flattered to find out that my work had been selected for the Colorado-based Center and the online exhibition!"

Shaun Sullivan, of Shaun Sullivan Photography in San Anselmo, California, created "Gurnville Trees #4" in early 2005 as part of a personal project.

"Gurnville is a town north of my home," says Shaun. "Early one foggy morning, I was driving to a photo location for a client. The image is one of those happy accidents where you just look out your window and there it is. 'Gurnville Trees #4' documents something that caught my eye and my emotions—something I wanted to remember."

No one subject defines Shaun's body of work, although he considers his trees series representative of his fine art work because it's in black and white. "I try to have my camera with me at all times, in case I just see things that need to be recorded, from people to textures to landscapes to still life," he says.

He captured the exhibition image with his Hasselblad using an 80mm lens. He exposed Kodak Tri-X at EI 200, for $\frac{1}{15}$ second at f/2.8. After scanning the image on his desktop scanner, Shaun did considerable work in Photoshop.

"I had a mental image of how the original scene looked, and I tried to recreate it," says Shaun. "I adjusted curves, levels, sharpened a little, burned in some of the trees that were fading into the background, and darkened the foreground a bit. I took the gradation out of the sky so nothing would compete with the trees. I wanted it very simple, just the bare elements, mist and trees."

Mark Woods, of Woods Studio of Photography in Clinton, Illinois, captured "Hairpin Turn" in 2004.

"The immediate change in direction of the dancer reflects the contrast between strength and beauty," says Mark. "Her bend and flexibility made me think of the hairpin turns race-car drivers make, hence the title. I wanted the viewer to ask, 'Is she really doing that?' In this age of photo manipulation, people are less trusting of what they see. The answer is yes, she is really doing that. No tricks. The title also plays well, since dancers use hairpins to secure their hair into a bun."

He captured the image with a Canon EOS 20D and

Sterling "Rip" Smith, "Going Up"

When Rip Smith hung his first prints in Ice House Artists Co-op in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, in January 2006, he called it "the realization of a 40-year dream to be recognized as a fine art photographer and to be able to offer my work for sale in a recognized gallery." In 2007, in addition to awards from the Center, he won Best Black & White Digital and Best Color Digital images at the Washington County (Maryland) Museum of Fine Arts. For more of his work, visit www.sterlingimages.com.

Canon 28–135mm IS lens (at 80mm) on a Bogen CS-1 camera stand. The exposure was $\frac{1}{200}$ at f/13, ISO 100. He lit the image with two 60-inch white umbrellas, two AlienBees 1600 monolights and four 2x8-foot Fome-Core reflectors and scrims, saving the images to his Lexar CF card. In Photoshop CS, he dropped out the original background and floor and added a floor with reflection and a background with gradation.

"As a portrait photographer, I feel it is important to take the time to step away from work and find new and different ways to create," Mark says. "I appreciate greatly the opportunity the Center gave me to show another side of my photography."

Sterling "Rip" Smith, of Sterling Images in Martinsburg, West Virginia, captured "Going Up," the image chosen by the Center for its poster promoting the show, almost 40 years ago.

"'Going Up' is actually one of two images shot within a couple of minutes, with the other image showing a person walking down the stairs," says Rip. "The image of the boy running up the stairs started as a study of how light played on the steps. When people started moving through the shot, I realized they would add a new dimension to the image. I particularly like how the fluid form of the running boy contrasts with the rigid structure of the steps."

While the architectural nature of "Going Up" and other work from that period is consistent with Rip's current work, there is a significant difference. "Some of my best early images included people, while my recent work is more focused on the architecture or landscape and rarely includes people," observes Rip.

Created in the mid-1960s, the image,

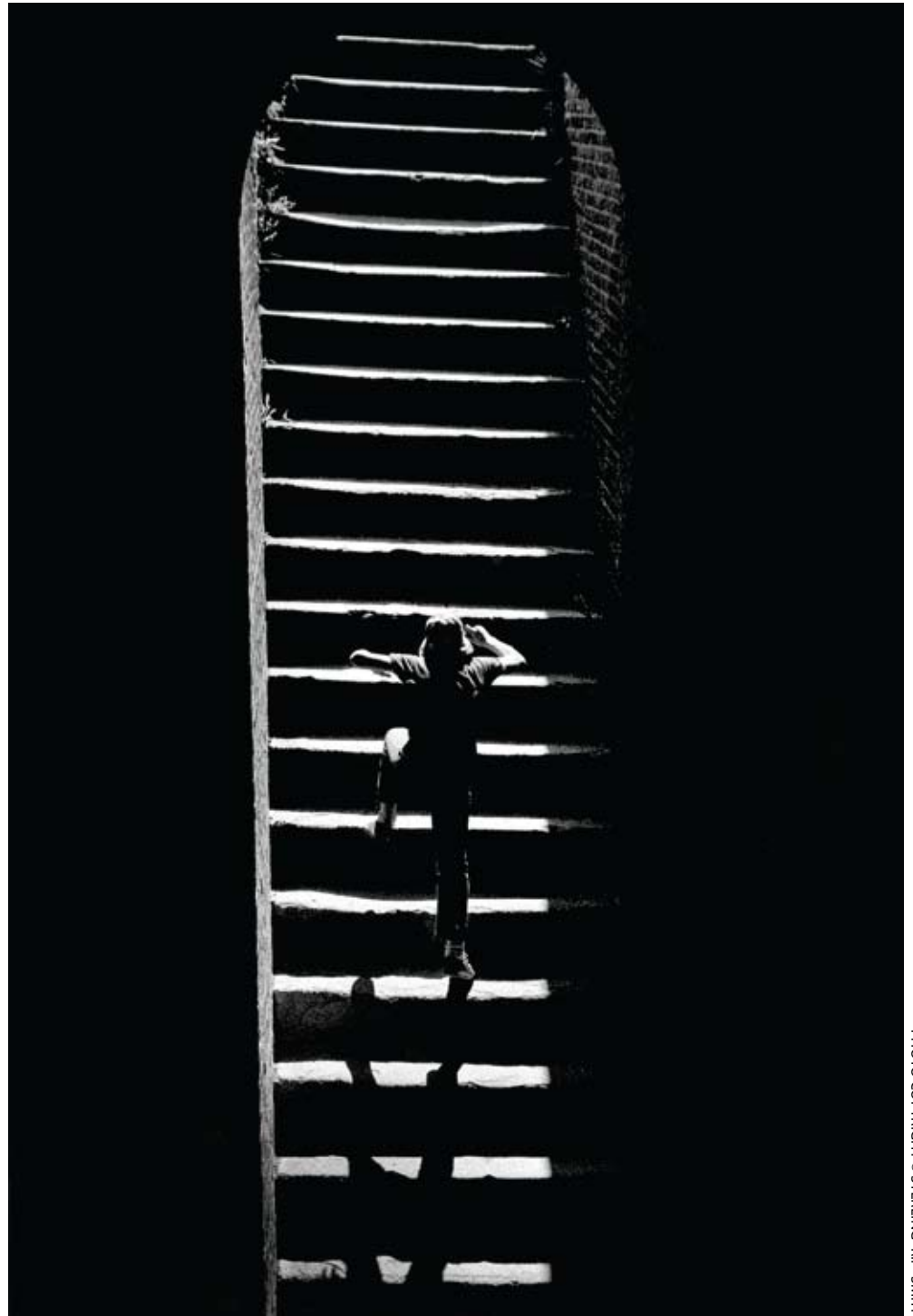


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like virtually all of his work at the time, was shot in black and white with Kodak Plus-X film, probably with a Leica rangefinder and a 50mm Summicron lens. Rip rediscovered the image several years ago when he was scanning the best of his old negatives on a Nikon film scanner. "I worked on it in Photoshop and finally produced a good print on my Epson UltraChrome-ink printer," he recalls.

To see The Black & White Exhibition in its entirety, visit www.c4fap.org/

exhibitions/2007BW/index.htm. For calls for entries, visit www.c4fap.org/call_for_entries.asp.

Alice B. Miller, the former editor of Studio Photography magazine, is a writer and editor based in Long Island, New York. She is a member of the International Photographic Council's board of directors and has served as a juror for the Black & White Spider Awards and for the Center for Fine Art Photography. She may be reached at alice@photogator.com.