

M E N T O R

Brooks
Institute's Paul
Meyer is
connected, in
more ways
than one.



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Contact Teaching



Paul Meyer is documenting his interactions with his two sons—visiting the playground (below left), reading to the class (left), and giving a bath (right). The photographs are taken with a camera mounted on a helmet and set to fire automatically at timed intervals.



Once upon a time, Brooks Institute was considered a great technical school but perhaps not the best place to pursue an artistic vision. Times have changed, and this magazine can vouch for that. We see remarkable work coming through our office from Brooks—photographs that are technically superb, to be sure, but also some of the most visually challenging images being created by today's college photographers.

A driving force behind that transformation is Brooks teacher Paul Meyer, himself a 1981 graduate of the school, which is set in idyllic Santa Barbara, California. Though Meyer studied industrial/scientific photography at Brooks, and had planned to apply his skills to a government job, a twist of fate put him in the precincts of some of today's most influential photographers, giving him connections that he still uses to his students' benefit.

Meyer's journey began when the government cut funding for a marine research center where he'd planned to work after graduation. With the job no longer waiting for him, he took a trip to New York City to visit his Brooks roommate, who was working as an assistant to famed photographer Richard Avedon. When Meyer was there, it came to light that Hiro (Avedon's former assistant, by then a world-class photographer himself) needed a new studio manager, and Avedon's staff got Meyer to apply for the job. It didn't take much convincing. "I thought Hiro was really cool because he was so technical," says Meyer.

Meyer returned home to Hawaii and immediately started work as an assistant to a local commercial photographer. Then, about three weeks after he got home, on a day he was leaving for a one-week location shoot, a phone call woke him up at 5 A.M. It was Hiro, asking him to sign on as his assistant. That same morning, Meyer's monthly issue

of *American Photographer* arrived in the mail—and the entire magazine was devoted to Hiro. The cover posed the question, "Is This Man America's Greatest Photographer?"

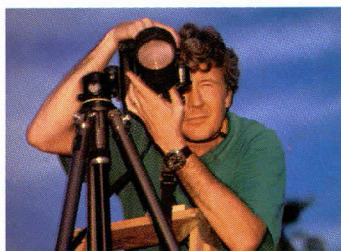
Meyer was Hiro's first assistant for almost a year. Among other things, he printed the photographer's famous fighting cocks series. "It was an intense environment," he says. Adding to the intensity was that Meyer was camped out in the one-bedroom apartment of his ex-roommate, who was then working on Avedon's legendary *In the American West* project, and the ex-roommate's wife, who was assisting photographer Barbara Bordnick. After his year at Hiro's, Meyer freelanced for photographers Michel Tcherevkoff and Anthony Edgeworth, then went on to a full-time position with Eric Meola.

Finally, burned out by New York, Meyer moved to Los Angeles and began his last and longest assistantship, with editorial and advertising photographer Larry Dale Gordon. He traveled all over the world with Gordon, shooting alongside his mentor, until his alma mater offered him a teaching position.

Meyer's connections have helped him place Brooks graduates with a

panoply of photographic stars. At the moment, his former students are serving as first assistants to Steven Meisel, Steven Klein, and Arthur Elgort. Others are assisting Annie Leibovitz and Bruce Weber. Recent graduates have also been "in and out" at Irving Penn's, Pete Turner's, and Patrick Demarchelier's. And the entire current staff at Avedon's is made up of Meyer's former students.

Most important, Meyer's exposure to the cutting edge of professional photography enriches his teaching, and that in turn has helped change the way photography is taught at Brooks. "I think the teaching at Brooks is more energetic now," Meyer says. "And it embraces the idea that an artistic image can still be commercial." ■



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