

WILLIAM LESCH

*His painted desert
isn't a national park.*

What do you get when you cross Todd Walker with Frederick Sommer? Possibly William Lesch. The Tucson denizen's unorthodox views of his native desert owe a certain debt to both of those more well known photographers.

Lesch studied at the University of Arizona with Walker, whose pioneering use of graphic arts techniques has its equal in Lesch's light—a multi-hued panoply that reduces the subject's surfaces to unmodulated planes of color. And while Lesch's jazzy scenes seem a far cry from the quiet desert abstractions of Sommer, with whom Lesch had a brief stint as an assistant, both photographers repudiate the desert's vastness. Lesch does this by shooting at night, when the landscape can be offered up in intimate, tantalizing bits.

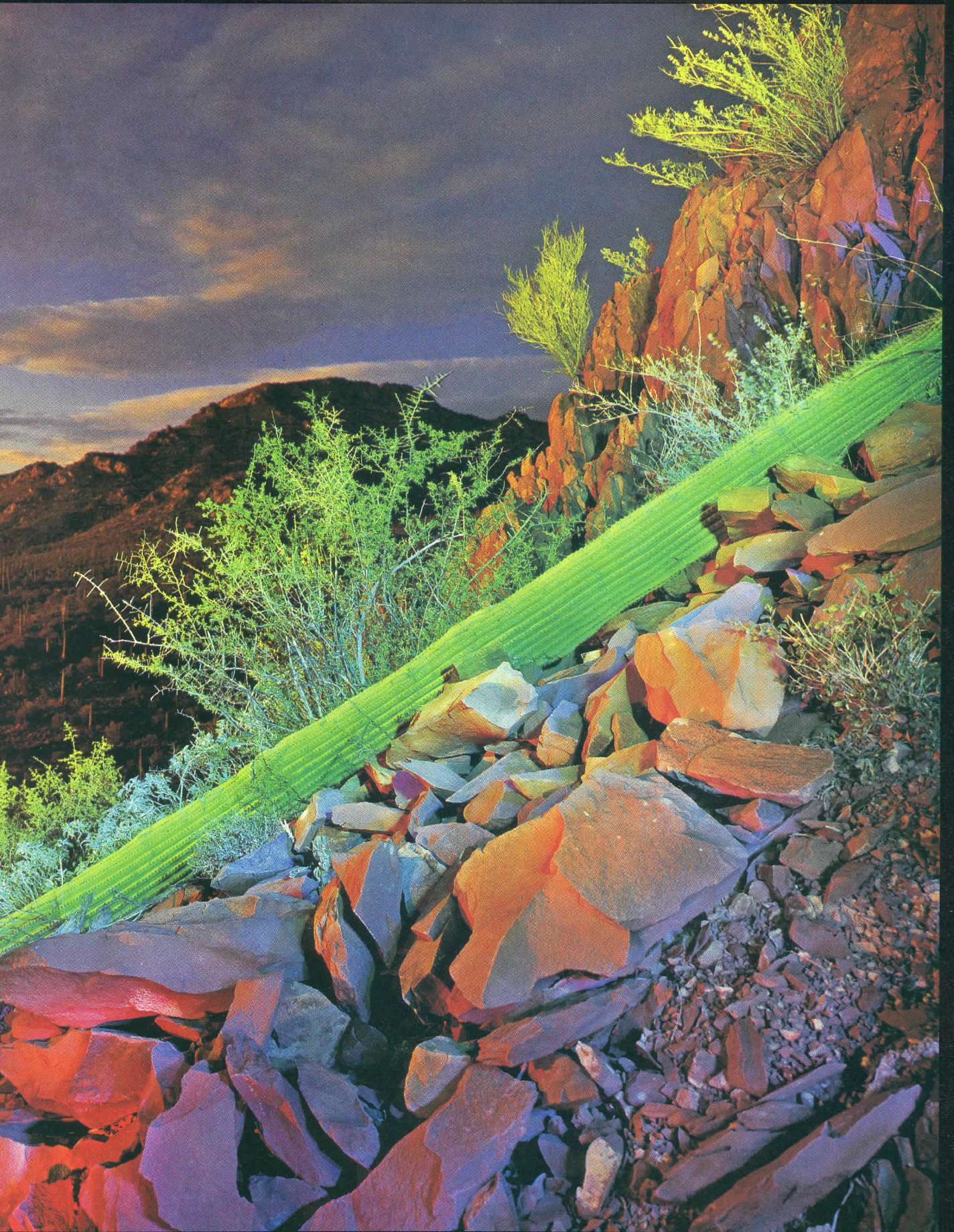
Shooting at night is also fundamental to Lesch's lighting technique, which requires that the shutter be kept open for long periods while the photographer paints the desert with colored light. At first Lesch used a small strobe for the task, firing it repeatedly as he walked around his subject. He's since switched to a battery-powered lantern—in effect a glorified flashlight whose narrow beam he keeps moving across the subject during the exposure. Colored gels are held in front of the lamp and freely switched to control the colors. A single shot can take 12 hours.

Even now, the results of the technique sometimes come as a surprise to Lesch, and he says that's what motivates him. "When I know exactly what I'm going to get," he says, "I lose interest."

—RUSSELL HART

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM LESCH COURTESY ETHELTON STERN GALLERY, TUCSON







*"I use light and color like a painter uses pigment.
I want to show that this place is alive."*

