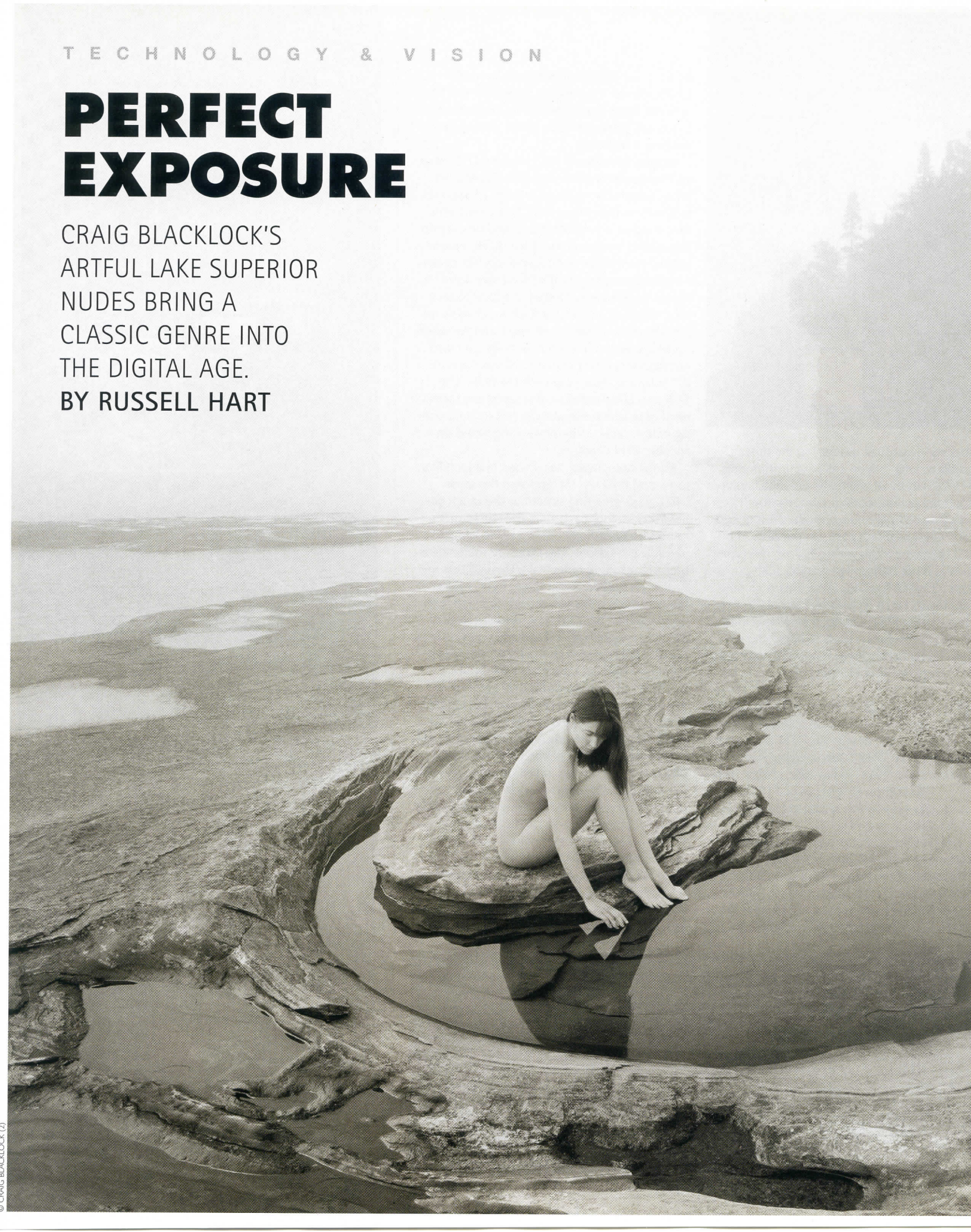


TECHNOLOGY & VISION

# PERFECT EXPOSURE

CRAIG BLACKLOCK'S  
ARTFUL LAKE SUPERIOR  
NUDES BRING A  
CLASSIC GENRE INTO  
THE DIGITAL AGE.  
BY RUSSELL HART







**C**raig Blacklock is Lake Superior's finest photographer, a reputation earned through self-published books such as *The Lake Superior Images* and *Border Country: The Quetico-Superior Wilderness*. His color views have all the grandness you'd expect of the world's largest body of fresh water. But big sky and sea-blue waves aren't what he loves most about the place. "I much prefer to work tighter in," says Blacklock, whose father, Les, and late wife, Nadine, made a family franchise of photographing Superior. "It's the textures of the rocks and the interaction of the surf with the shore that I get excited about."

The setting of Blacklock's nudes is the rugged shoreline of Lake Superior, from bedrock pools (left) to webs of driftwood (above).

Blacklock's most recent pictures, while a departure from the color views that have earned him a living, have allowed him to explore that phenomenon more fully. Collected in *A Voice Within: The Lake Superior Nudes*, the work picks up where Edward Weston left off. Like

Weston's outdoor nudes of muse and lover Charis Wilson, the images depict a single model—Blacklock's wife, Honey—but in lakeside settings that range from Michigan's Upper Peninsula to the Ontario shoreline. (See Technology & Vision, page 53.)

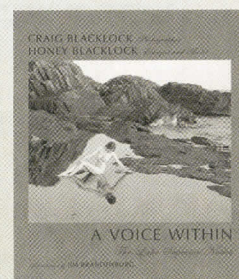
Working with the figure didn't come easy. "My early efforts were very awkward," says Blacklock. "I had preconceptions about the poses I wanted to use and directed Honey into those. Boy, did they look stiff and awful." Blacklock soon realized it was better to take his posing cues from nature itself. "We decided to let the landscape dictate where Honey would be (continued on page 94)

## CAMERA ART



"I treat whatever camera I'm using as if it were a view camera," says Craig Blacklock. Shown here using a Toyo 45All field camera to photograph his model (and wife), Honey, Blacklock also worked with a Pentax 67 to create the images in *A Voice Within: The Lake Superior Nudes*. (All but a few were shot on a Bogen 3021 tripod.) The self-published book (right) is a virtuoso printing job. Its images closely match the original inkjet prints Blacklock produced for his shows at Duluth, Minnesota's Tweed Museum of Art and the Minnesota

Center for Photography in Minneapolis—prints made with Epson Stylus Pro 7500 and 9000 printers and Cone Editions' PiezoTone Carbon Sepia inks. The Cone Carbon Sepia is made from naturally warm-toned pure carbon pigment. "It took a few months to work out the printing process," Blacklock allows, "but the results are pretty stunning." See text for more details about the photographer's working methods. —R.H.



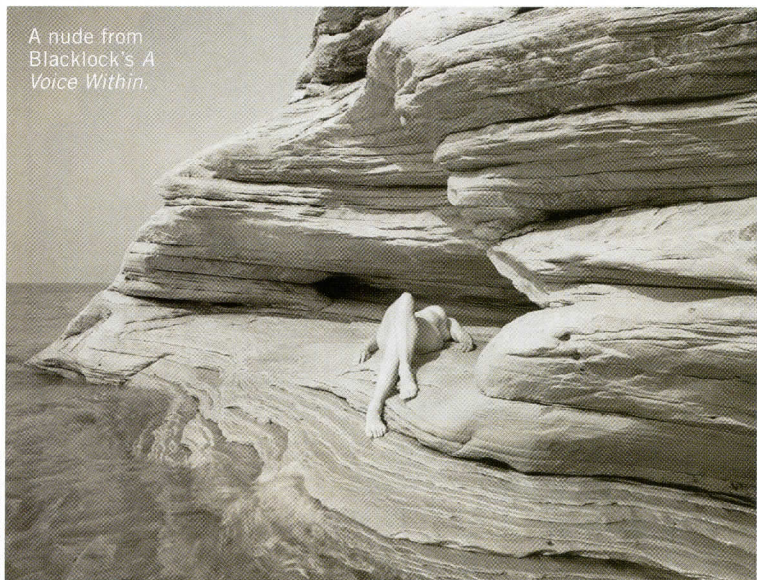


# PERFECT EXPOSURE

(continued from page 59) within the scene," he explains. "'Fidget,' he'd tell me, 'I'll watch,'" writes Honey Blacklock in the book's ambitious and highly personal essay, which does for her husband what Charis's writings did for Weston. "Charis Wilson compared the free movements of the nude model to how one would sneak out of bed with a sleeping rattlesnake—cautious and with the knowledge that at any moment, the photographer will call 'Hold!'"

Shot with a Toyo 45All 4x5 and a Pentax 67, the photos' pristine skin tones belie both the ruggedness of the Blacklocks' working environ-

Blacklock reports that after years of shooting color, working in black and white—for the first time since his college years—was a liberating experience. "After using Velvia, with its very, very critical five-stop subject brightness recording range, to be able to get a couple of stops on either side of that by compressing development was pretty amazing to me," says Blacklock, who did thorough Zone System testing with Kodak T-Max 100 film before embarking on the project. "The light's color temperature didn't matter, and I could shoot in more contrasty light if I wanted, so we were much more



A nude from Blacklock's *A Voice Within*.

© CRAIG BLACKLOCK

ment and the careful planning that often went into a sequence of poses. "I had to be conscious of how I was sitting or lying on the rocks and what kind of pose we'd be doing next because I would get rock impressions in my skin," says Honey. "I would take off my underpants and bra maybe an hour before we would actually start working so the elastic lines would fade." Craig took out unwanted marks in Photoshop, though goose bumps from the chilly water are plainly visible in his 34x42-inch prints. The hardest thing, he says, was getting rid of early tan lines. Honey quickly learned to wear loose-fitting, UV-filtering clothing. "I haven't had a tan since the summer of 1996," she says.

productive in this project than I've ever been with color."

"We didn't always travel every day," says Honey Blacklock, who estimates that a typical excursion lasted ten days. "A good percentage of a trip was often spent in the same location for maybe two or three nights, working just in that area. And when we saw a setting we really liked—a particular rock or tree branches—we'd wait for certain conditions and work it pretty thoroughly."

The couple's dedication was such that they spent their honeymoon—they were married in 1999, three years into the project—on remote Foster Island, off the lake's Ontario shore. "It's a small island, but it ended up giving us seven images for the book," says (continued on page 96)

## AMERICAN PHOTO DIRECT

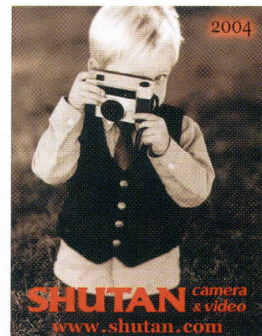
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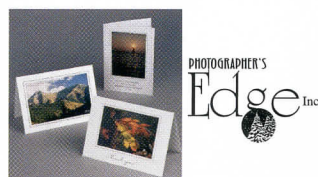
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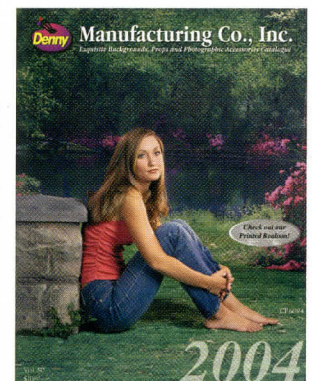
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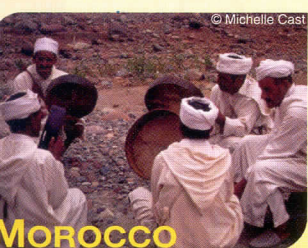
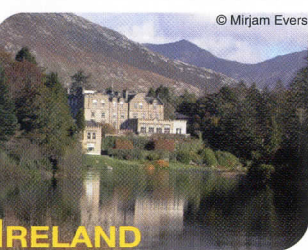
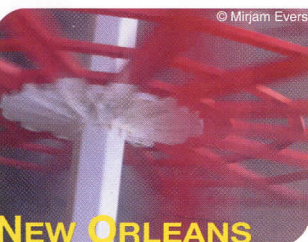
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## PERFECT EXPOSURE

(continued from page 94) Blacklock. "There are fingers of water coming into the rock and fingers of rock going out into the water, and the formations have striations from the glaciers. Small pools in the bedrock reflect the sky like gems. It's an incredible place, absolutely made for the human form to be juxtaposed against." Says his wife, "The lake brought us together, and there was no more appropriate place to celebrate our marriage."

**A** *Voice Within* has extraordinary production values, with a big 12x14-inch trim size and warm tritone reproduction. The 34x42-inch inkjet prints in concurrent shows at Duluth, Minnesota's Tweed Museum of Art and the Minnesota Center for Photography in Minneapolis are just as lush. He had planned to make platinum prints, but settled on digital in part because of the control afforded by Photoshop. "I could never have done this in a darkroom," says the photographer, who made early prints on silver paper. "There's no way I could have worked on an area that was Zone VIII right next to a Zone II and not gotten a visible edge." In fact, Honey Blacklock's consistently luminous skin tones are partly the result of isolating figure from ground in Photoshop, after scanning the negatives with an Imacon Flextight Precision III scanner. "In most cases I've meticulously gone in and outlined pixel by pixel her body to separate it from the rest of the image," says Blacklock. "That way I can preserve subtleties of skin tones while I crank up the contrast on the rocks."

To increase the density of dark tones in his prints, which were made on Epson Stylus Pro 7500 and Stylus Pro 9000 wide-format printers with Cone Editions' PiezoTone Carbon Sepia black-and-white inks and Hahnemuhle Photo Rag paper, Blacklock actually ran them through the printer twice. "The folks at Cone Editions told me that no one could figure out how to do this," he says. "The problem was registration." Blacklock solved the problem in Photoshop by creating a mask to separate the dark tones; he pulled dark areas slightly away from adjacent lighter areas, then feathered their edges. "That way, if I'm slightly out of register it's not going to show," he explains. The extra ink is laid down in an initial "skeletal black" pass; the full tonal scale is applied in a second pass with the help of carefully placed registration guides.

The arduousness of Blacklock's methods recalls Edward Weston's existential struggles to make the perfect 8x10 contact print. Blacklock is more sanguine about such technical challenges. "The whole process is just a way of trying to record what we see with our eyes," he says. "I'm trying to get back to something that looks natural."

To order a copy of *A Voice Within* or prints by Craig Blacklock, visit [blacklockgallery.com](http://blacklockgallery.com).