



© RICHARD AVEDON

One day during the six years that Laura Wilson helped Richard Avedon produce *In the American West*, her son came home from school buzzing about the man he'd seen in science class wearing a beard of bees. "When Dick heard the story, he was amazed," says Wilson, a Dallas-based photographer and writer who scouted locations and events for Avedon's epic project. "The school suggested we put a notice in a beekeepers' journal asking readers who were interested in having their portrait taken with bees to send a snapshot of themselves." About 40 unremarkable pictures came in the mail. Then a Polaroid arrived of a man with an extraordinary face. "From the first glimpse, Dick sensed the possibilities of the portrait," remembers Wilson. The shoot was arranged and, with the help of an entomologist who placed the scent of the queen bee on the subject's bare chest, the bee-models swarmed without stinging.

Avedon's bee man is an astonishing image, and per-

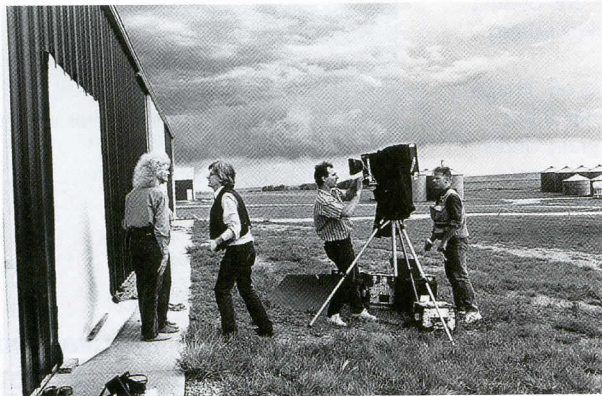
Clockwise from top left: "Ronald Fischer, beekeeper, Davis, California, 5/9/81"; Avedon with coal miner Roger Tims, Reliance, Wyoming; Avedon and Ronald Fischer; preparing to photograph the Johnson sisters, Wildhorse, Colorado.

# LOOK WEST

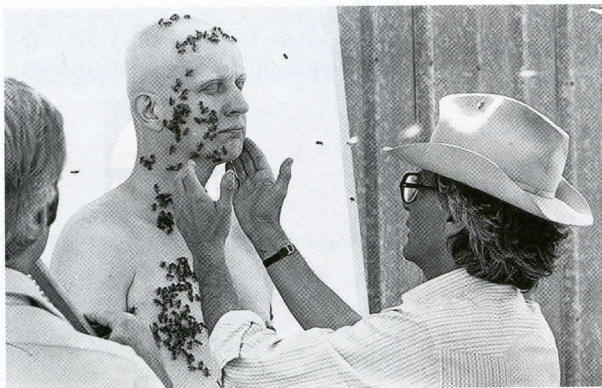
AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF HOW RICHARD AVEDON CREATED THE WILDLY ORIGINAL PORTRAITS OF *IN THE AMERICAN WEST*. BY RUSSELL HART



© LAURA WILSON



© LAURA WILSON



© LAURA WILSON

haps the most well-known of the 750-plus portraits the photographer shot for his Western project, many of which are included in a new exhibition, "Richard Avedon: Portraits," at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (see page 46). But its preconception wasn't typical. The other pictures were created in a simple outdoor studio with local subjects. "We would set up at places and events where we knew we'd find large numbers of people—rodeos, coal mines, truck stops, oil fields," Wilson explains. "We'd tape a 9x12-foot sheet of white seamless paper to the shady side of a building, put the 8x10 Deardorff on a tripod, and then start looking at all the people who were there." When Wilson asked interesting people to pose for Avedon, they would sometimes ask her, "How much is it going to cost?"

Once a subject was chosen, Avedon would place him or her against the seamless paper, focus on the ground glass under a dark cloth, then move to the front of the camera, where he manned the cable release while one assistant slid sheet-film holders and dark slides in and out of the camera and the other took meter readings and adjusted the lens aperture and shutter speed. (He used strobe only once, and controlling the existing light was often as simple as holding a small white card directly in front of the subject to brighten the eyes.) That arrangement not only

let Avedon work quickly—Wilson says it was about average to shoot 20 to 30 sheets of 8x10 Tri-X of a single subject—but it also kept the camera from hindering the interaction between him and his subject. “Nothing was between them,” she says. “This permitted him the intimacy of eye-to-eye contact, which would not have been possible if he were holding a camera up to his face. That intimacy is central to the way Avedon works.”

**W**hile Avedon was photographing hard-living westerners, Laura Wilson was watching and photographing Avedon. She contributed the original essay to *In the American West* and is now working on a book that incorporates both her photographs and the journals she kept, to be published in the fall of 2003. It will be a fascinating behind-the-scenes study of how one of our greatest photographers makes pictures, but it won't reveal top-secret techniques. “As Dick says, anyone can use an 8x10 and a white seamless the way he did,” observes Wilson, who shoots for *GQ*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. “What makes an Avedon portrait is who he chooses to photograph and how he brings them out. Dick has an ability to connect with people, and he's interested and curious and open. They sense that.” ■

#### LITTMAN 45 SINGLE SWEEPSTAKES, 2002. Official Rules

1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED. Send a postcard on or after August 18, 2002, with your name, address and phone number to American Photo/Littman, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Entries must be postmarked no later than October 31, 2002.
2. This Sweepstakes is open to legal residents of the 50 United States and D.C., 13 years of age or older, except the employees of the Sponsors, Hachette Filipacchi Media U.S., Inc. and members of their immediate families.
3. Entries that are lost, late, illegible or incomplete for any reason will not be eligible.
4. One winner will be selected at random from all eligible entrants. The odds of winning depend on the number of eligible entries received. The winner will be notified by mail. Return of any prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and selection of an alternate winner.
5. Each winner will receive a Littman 45 Single fitted with a 127mm f/4.7 Rodenstock Ysarex lens and 100 percent parallax correction. Approx. retail value (“ARV”): \$2,350. Prize will be awarded.
6. No substitutions in prize or cash will be allowed except by Sponsor.
7. Liability for any applicable taxes will be the sole responsibility of the winner.
8. For winner's list, mail a self-addressed, stamped envelope after October 31, 2002 to: Littman 45 Single Sweepstakes, 2002, Attention: American Photo Magazine, 1633 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.



## DIGITAL SERIES CARRYING SYSTEMS

For the ultimate protection of digital equipment and accessories, **Tamrac's new Digital Series Camera Bags** set the standard for protection, quality and functional design. Construction is of ultra-strong Ballistic nylon with foam padding and lined with smooth nylon that doesn't create lint or collect dust. **Dual Foam Technology™** provides shock protection and vibration dampening. **Universal Memory & Battery Pockets** will hold different types of memory cards and batteries.

For carrying a pro digital SLR, Tamrac has dozens of products to choose from including the versatile **Photo/Computer Backpack** and the compact **Pro 5** for professionals.

To organize your digital media, rechargeable batteries and accessories, Tamrac offers four new **Memory & Battery Management Wallets**.



**NEW** For Tamrac Luggage and Computer Cases, visit [www.AuthenticTraveler.com](http://www.AuthenticTraveler.com)

For a Free New 72-page color catalog call: **1-800-662-0717** Dept.AP

© 2002 Tamrac, Inc., 9240 Jordan Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311

To see these and over 100 other products, visit us online.

[www.tamrac.com](http://www.tamrac.com)

Circle #60 on reader service card



PHOTO, LUGGAGE & COMPUTER CASES

# STUTTERING... Help prevent it!

For more information, write or call toll-free: **1-800-992-9392** [www.stutterSFA.org](http://www.stutterSFA.org)



STUTTERING FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

A Nonprofit Organization Since 1947—Helping Those Who Stutter

3100 Walnut Grove Road, Suite 603 • P.O. Box 11749 • Memphis, TN 38111-0749