



"Alder Forest,  
Mt. Baker-  
Snoqualmie  
National  
Forest,  
Washington,  
2006."

P O R T F O L I O

You can't see the forest in William Neill's new work,  
but love of nature still motivates it. **By Russell Hart**

# For the Trees





**W**illiam Neill's stature as one of photography's great color landscapists was built on images that have a revelatory sharpness, presenting nature in greater detail than you'd see if you were there yourself. That quality, and much of the creative control Neill brings to his art, have in turn depended on the photographer's use of a 4x5 view camera. Neill's latest body of work is a complete departure from photography's view camera traditions. Shot with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II, Canon's top-of-the-line, 17-megapixel digital SLR, the new images still focus on nature—though focus may be a misleading word.



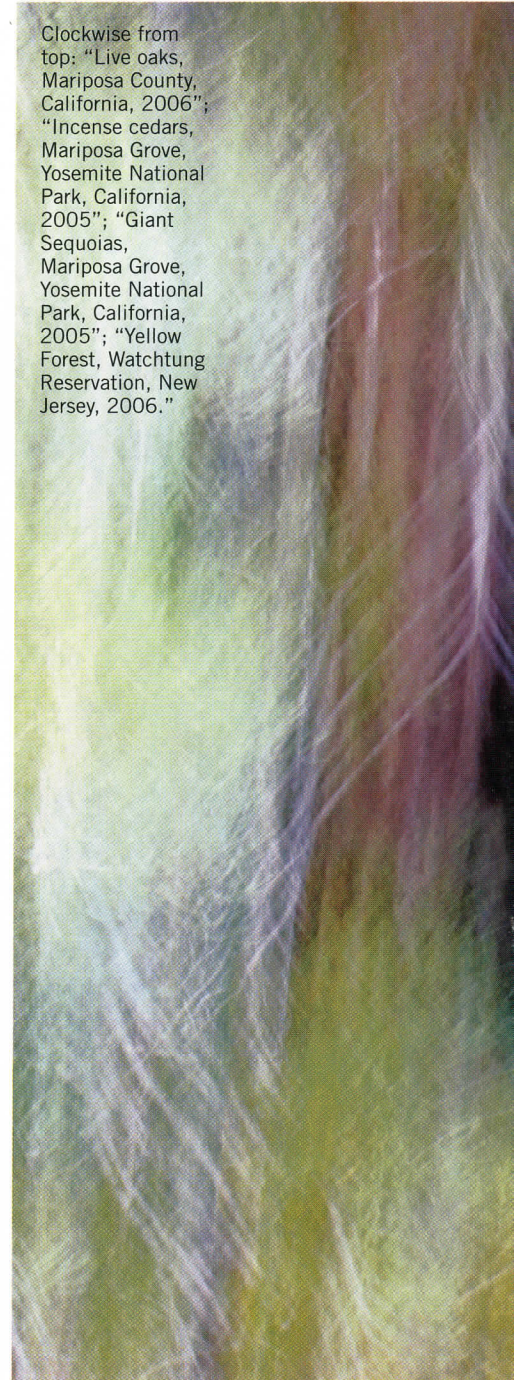
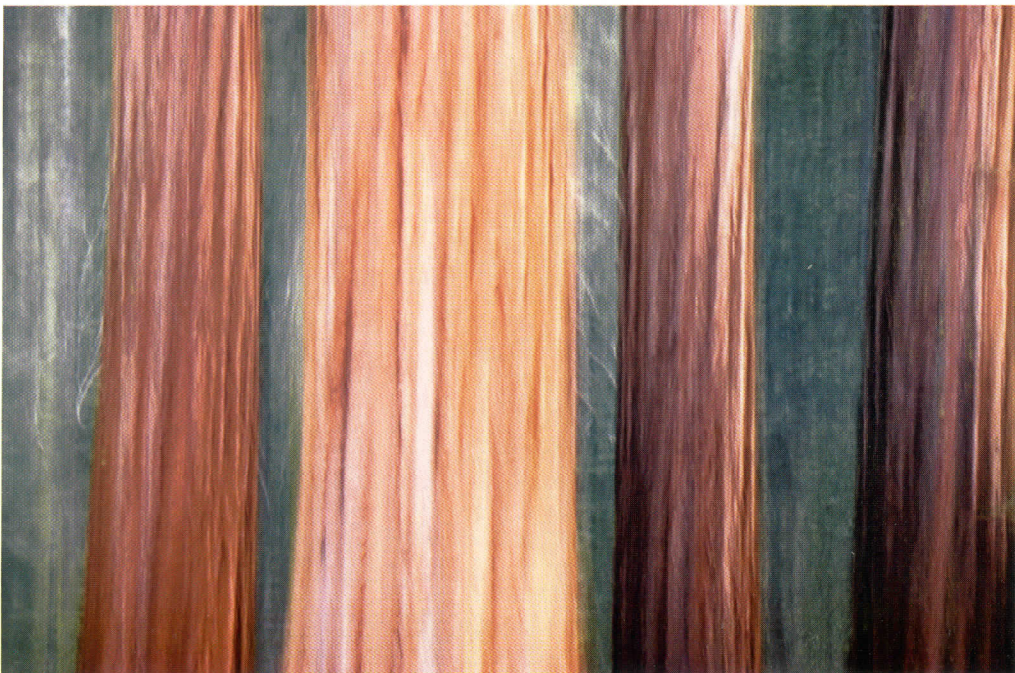
They rely on deliberate camera movement to create a blurry, impressionistic rendering of the trees, rocks, and water that have always been the raw ingredients of Neill's imagery.

**B**lur as a photographic technique certainly has its own tradition, one acknowledged by Neill, long a member of Canon's Explorers of Light. Among the 20th-century masters who've experimented with it are colorist Ernst Haas, in his seminal series "The Creation," and Harry Callahan, well known for his tack-sharp black-and-white work but less so for his long-exposure color images of neon at night. Yet Neill has a distinct technical advantage over those photographers. The effect of moving a camera during an exposure is highly accidental; if you shoot film, you can't evaluate the result until you process and print it, and at that point it is difficult if not impossible to re-create the circumstances of a photograph. But if you shoot digital, as Neill does,

you can view the result on your D-SLR's LCD after you take the picture, and adjust your technique—the amount, speed, and direction of the movement, as well as your shutter speed—until you get what you want.

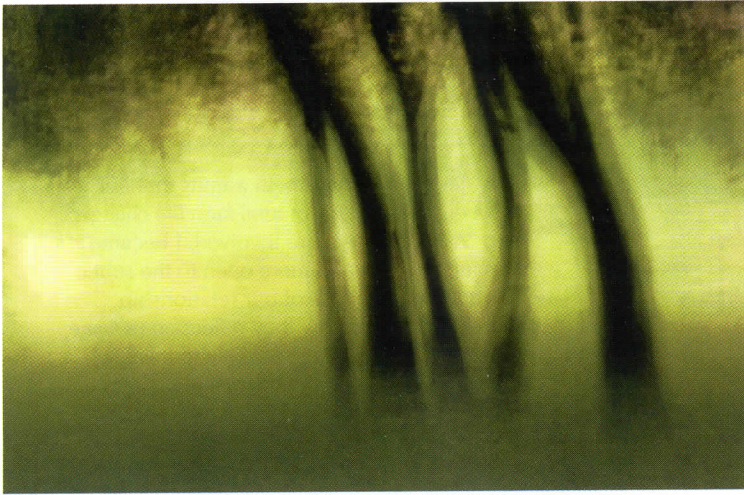
"I try all kinds of movement, up and down or sideways, starting and stopping, and changing direction in the middle of the exposure," says Neill. "Sometimes I just jiggle the camera. It's a learning process, a sort of feedback loop." Even with the EOS-1Ds Mark II set to its lowest ISO and the lens stopped way down, there's often still too much ambient light to permit a long enough exposure time. In that case Neill

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Clockwise from top: "Live oaks, Mariposa County, California, 2006"; "Incense cedars, Mariposa Grove, Yosemite National Park, California, 2005"; "Giant Sequoias, Mariposa Grove, Yosemite National Park, California, 2005"; "Yellow Forest, Watchung Reservation, New Jersey, 2006."





uses a Singh-Ray Vari-ND filter, with which he can adjust neutral density to reduce the light entering the camera by up to eight stops.

After a few tweaks in Photoshop, including boosting contrast lost when a scene's brighter areas blur into darker ones, Neill outputs images at large sizes with Canon's 12-color, pigment-based image-PROGRAF iPF5000 and iPF8000 printers, which have 17- and 44-inch carriage widths, respectively. A new member of the Canon Print Masters program ([photoworkshop.com/canon](http://photoworkshop.com/canon)), the photographer usually prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag, a watercolor-style paper.

Using inkjet technology rather than the digital C-print on which Neill often relied for his "sharp" work is just part of the photographer's new strategy, but his aim remains the same. "I'm trying to stretch, but it's only to find new ways to express what I've been trying to show all along—the beauty of nature," he says. "It may sound trite, but that's still what gets me going." Visit [williamneill.com](http://williamneill.com). ■



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