



F o c a l P o i n t

February 2009

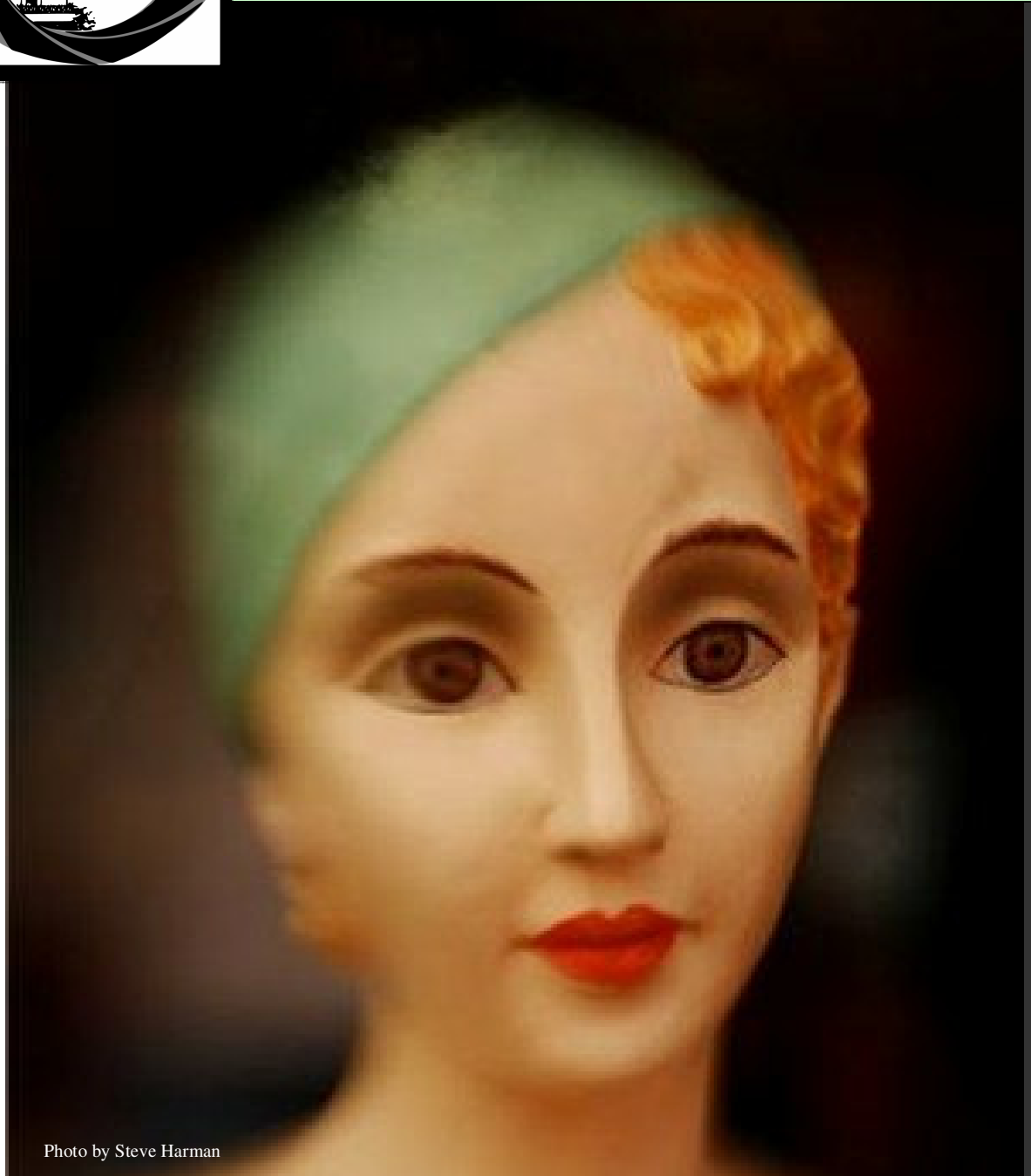


Photo by Steve Harman

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FROM YOUR EDITOR: This month's issue of *Focal Point* is a big one! Quite a few members contributed great articles for your viewing and reading pleasure. From antiques to techniques, old cameras and new gear, artistic endeavors and BCC adventures, there should be enough here for everyone's enjoyment and discovery.

There were so many offerings this month that it was not possible to include them all. My apologies to those whose submissions didn't make it into this issue but, be sure to check out next month's --- your articles will be there!

Enjoy!

Thanks to Steve Harman, Lewis Katz, Gordon Risk, Karen Dillon & Karen Messick for their contributions this month.

BCC Gets Out

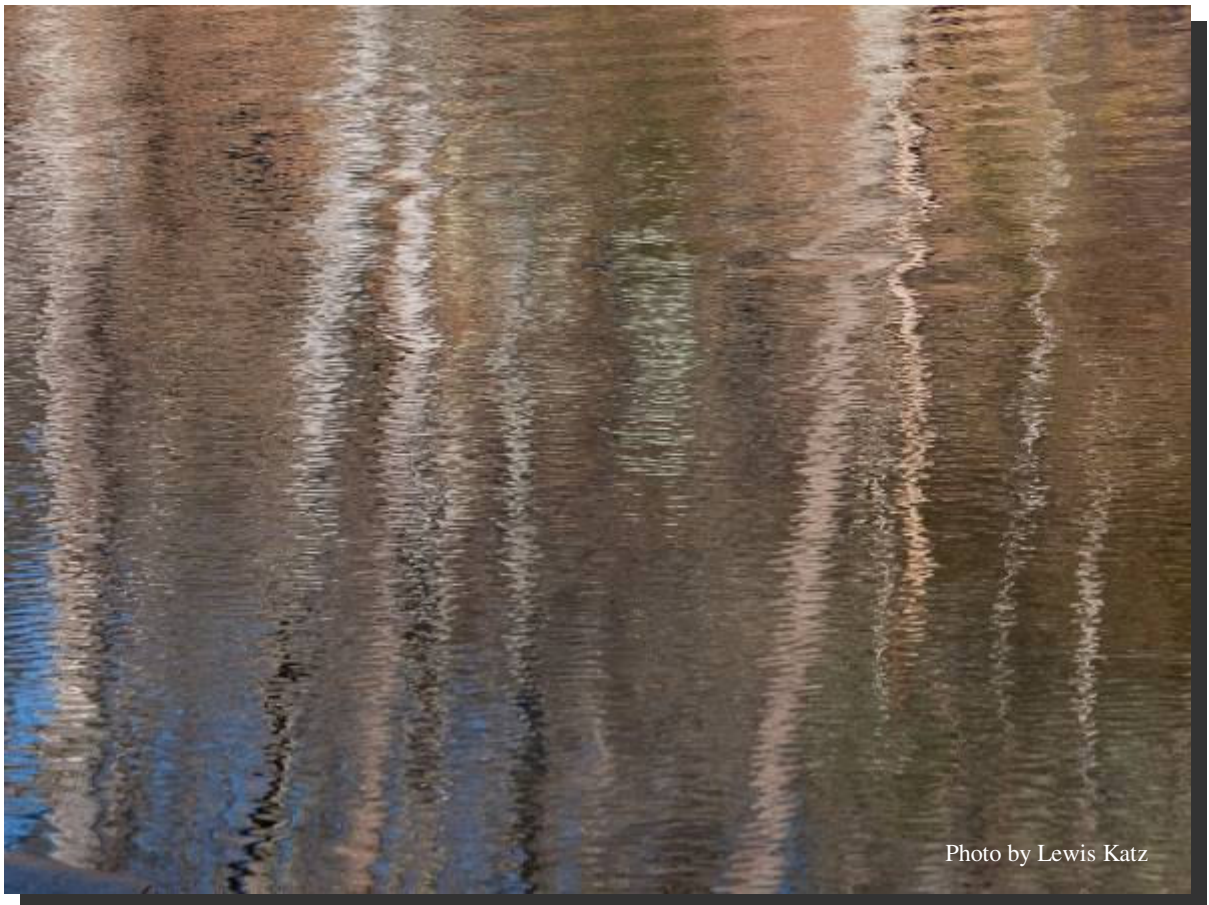


Photo by Lewis Katz

Gunpowder River



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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

By Lewis Katz

We had another great turn out for our field shoot at the Gunpowder River near Hereford on February 7. I think we were all surprised to see how much snow and ice was still there as most of it had melted away in the Baltimore area. Unfortunately one of the trails to the rivers edge and to the area where you can find rapids and rocks was too icy – we will revisit that trail at a later date in the spring.

There were great reflections to capture in the afternoon light of the trees along the banks of the river. Reflection images are always good teaching tools – especially in the use of a polarizer filter. You need to be careful not to “overpolarize” as that will remove some of the arty look of the image. You also do not want to use too fast a shutter speed as that will freeze the motion of the water over the reflections. I usually shoot at 1/8th or 1/15th of a second as seen in these 2 images. [previous page and below]



Photo by Lewis Katz

I look forward to seeing you on future outings – please check the calendar on our website for the schedule.



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Gear

Discovering fun with my new Lensbaby3G

By Steve Harman



I have long admired those ethereal Lensbaby shots in photo magazines and in presentations by Tony Sweet. The lens seems to be in fairly common use for dreamy images of a bride at her wedding. Well, having procrastinated for several years, I finally took the plunge and purchased a Lensbaby.

The Lensbaby is unique in the image it can capture. The image seems like a hybrid of a bellows and a tilt-shift lens. Even though some of the images resemble fisheye lens work the Lensbaby differs in that it has a sharp area within the image, termed a "sweet spot", surrounded by gradually increasing blur. The lens has an

accordion like body that can be compressed, extended, and/or bent off-center in any direction for different results.

The original Lensbaby was a crude photographic tool, having a single uncoated lens optic and a rubber gasket that held one of the four aperture rings (resembling thin metal washers) in place. The Lensbaby 2.0 improved sharpness and ease of use. Three tiny magnets hold the aperture ring in place and the addition to two multi-coated lens elements which produce sharper images. Fast forward to today, Lensbaby now offers three new versions of the Lensbaby depending upon your budget and use.

They are now available as The Muse, the 3G (Control Freak) and the Composer. The Muse is sharper version of the original or 2.0 version. It is for on the fly, quick snapshots (half the cost) and includes a set of fun aperture rings (pinhole, shapes, soft).

The 3G offers the same accordion body design for flexible placement of the sweet spot that can be fine tuned with 3 external control rods and a focus lock button. The newest and most advanced design is the Composer. Gone is the accordion body, now replaced by ball that freely and smoothly rotates. The focus ring is mounted around the lens element, is turned to the perfect focus just like a regular lens.

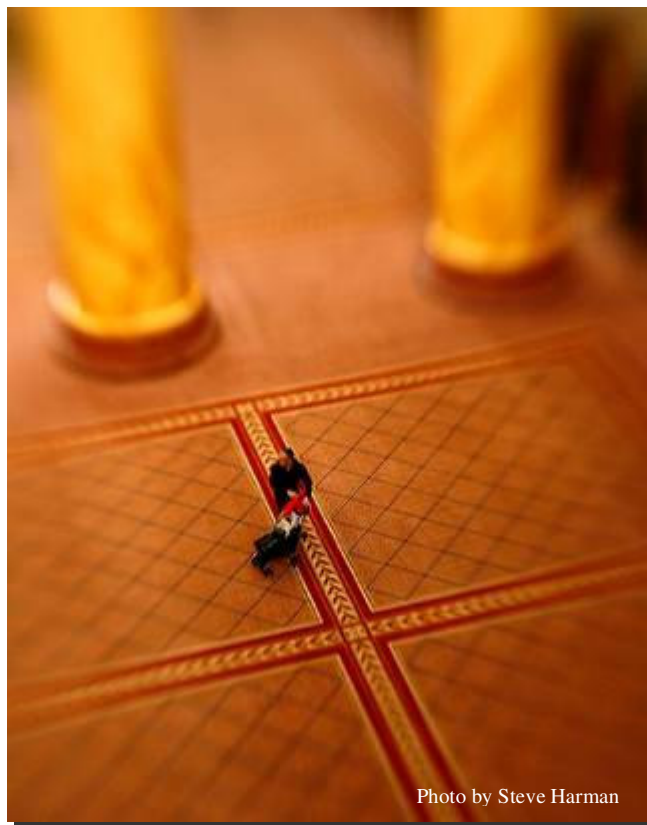


Photo by Steve Harman



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Gear (cont.)

The instructions that come with the Lensbaby are satisfactory for identifying part names and what direction to turn them but lack much on the operation or practicable hints. These I later realized can be found on their website and forum. So ill prepared on the use, off I went to try it out on the streets of Baltimore community of Hamden.

With all the models except the Composer, it takes some time to get used to the recommended Lensbaby grip. With the two middle fingers extended and the remainder barely holding the camera body, the cradling the lens reminds me of Star Trek's Spock doing his famous Vulcan mind meld. Absentmindedly I forgot to put in any of the aperture rings for greater depth of field, so I stuck with the lens default setting of f/2.8. Secondly, I did not realize that you could compress the accordion body almost back to the mount to achieve maximum focus distance. Duh, it was not until I mentioned the frustration with the limitation of focusing only close up objects that a fellow Lensbaby owner brought me into the full focusing potential of the lens. The exposure is made in either manual or aperture settings only. Sometimes trial and error, I adjusted the ISO or made exposure compensation adjustments after viewing the histogram. Moving objects certainly pose a big challenge, bending the accordion to place the subject in the sweet spot while tracking the object with the finger on the shutter button as it moves is very hard. I found that pre-focusing on a certain spot and letting the subject move into that location is best. I am sure that Hamden residents found it quite amusing to see that photographer chasing that lady in a long black hooded coat up the street with lens attachment that looks very much like a miniature Weber grill. Never less, focusing on objects approximately 18 inches distant at f/2.8, I was happy with the ethereal images I achieved.

My second attempt at Washington's Old Pension Building allowed me opportunities to try my new knowledge gained from this first experimental blunder; I tried to change the location of the sweet spot to both near and distant subject in order to change the weight of visual interest within the image. I stood in the edge of doorways and leaned over third story balconies to "assassinate" my victims as they moved into the pre-focused sweet spots. I was often able to get pretty sharpness in the sweet spots even handheld with ISO settings of between 200 and 400.

Obviously, using the tripod made handling and focusing easier on stationary objects. Results can be obtained similar to this effect in Photoshop using motion blur but the look is not quite the same as the spherical aberrations obtained with the Lensbaby. Plenty of Lensbabys can be found on used markets (such as eBay where I purchased mine) for less than half the retail price. I enjoyed my first two days of hunting Lensbaby subject matter. Explore your creative side with this simple tool.

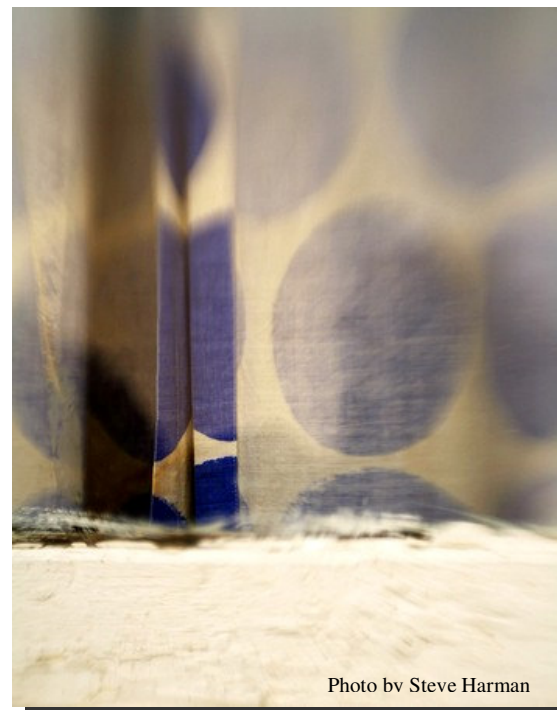


Photo by Steve Harman

<http://www.lensbaby.com/lenses.php>



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Collector's Corner

Graflex Large Format Cameras

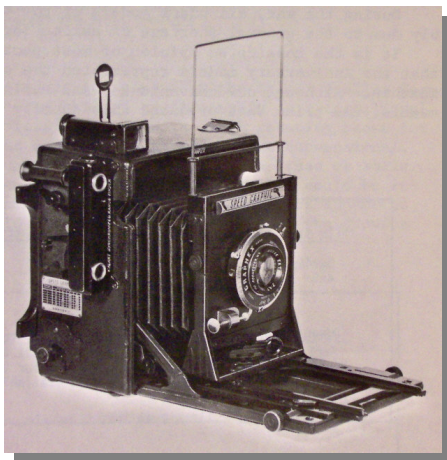


Folmer & Schwing started as bicycle manufacturers in 1887. A partnership between W. F. Folmer & Wm E. Schwing, incorporated in 1890, began camera manufacturing

in 1897. George Eastman purchased the company in 1905 and moved to Rochester NY, eventually becoming a department of Eastman Kodak Co. In 1926, the new Folmer-Graflex Corporation took over and changed its name to Graflex Inc. in 1945. The

For those interested in large format film photography, 4x5 is the most common format.

Others are 5x7, 8x10 and larger. Graflex is an economical way to get into large format photography. These are the press camera of the 30s, 40s and 50s. Late models are rugged and can company was in business until the early 1980s. still be found on eBay at reasonable prices.



Many variations of the Graphic cameras were made over their long existence. The Speed Grafic is the most common in later years. Graflex made a small version called the Miniture Speed Grafic. Also, a version called Century Graphic which took 120 roll film backs to give you negative sizes 6x6, 6x7 or 6x9centemeters.



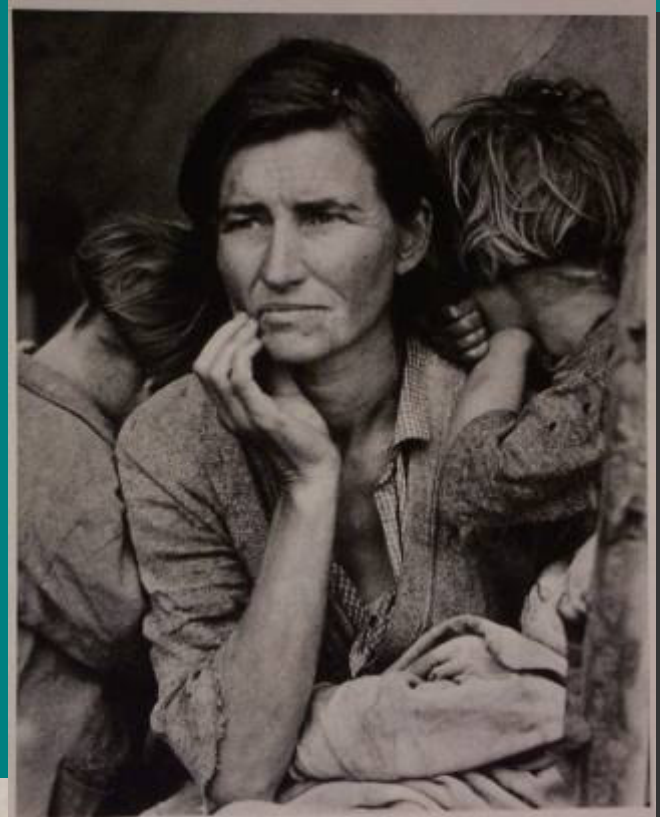
The famous images here, with the photographer's names, were all shot with Graflex. The cameras from 1936 and 1945 show the style of the cameras used by them. I adapted the lens mount of the Graflex XL pictured here to use a modern Mamiya lens.





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Collector's Corner (cont.)



Dorothea Lange, *California, 1936*. Library of Congress.



References
McKeown's Price Guide to Antique
& Classic Cameras
View Camera Magazine



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Club Camera Runs

Light! Camera! Action! – Club Camera Runs

Getting up at 5:30 to shoot sunrise or planning to wander around Ellicott City with a camera is much easier when you know that others have committed to being there too.

Camera Runs (club shoots) provide a chance to practice without the distractions of family or the pressures of important events. They give us opportunities to observe, chat, try new things and commit time to the craft we love.

To get the most out of a shoot be prepared:

- ✓ Camera bag.
- ✓ Tripod.
- ✓ Coffee.



Text & Photos By Karen Dillon

When you're prepared, comfortably dressed and equipped, you will shoot comfortably. But get ready to get out of your comfort zone and try something new! It's easier when you're shooting with others—you won't feel so self-conscious.



Learn to shoot without a tripod...



...or with one...



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Club Camera Runs (cont.)

Study others, how they get down low...



...lower...



...and even lower



Feel free to imitate others' shooting styles! Direct your camera toward the same subject.





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Club Camera Runs (cont.)

Bring questions, new equipment, your camera manual—and be prepared to learn...or be amazed!



You're almost sure to get a different perspective on methods.



At the end of the day you might even get that "top-o-the-world" feeling! A feeling that comes from sharing and socializing. A sense of accomplishment that you've tried something new, learned a few good tips, or made a few good exposures.



Reading camera manuals, web sites and photography books is only a starting place for learning to shoot well. Putting theory to practice makes that learning meaningful, and what better circumstance is there than social shooting with like-minded people?



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Thinking Outside the "Purist" Box

Whatever That means...a slide maybe with no filters attached?

by Karen Messick

Recently Tony Sweet visited the Baltimore Camera Club and shared his presentation on Visual Artistry, along with his new book. He challenged the members to think differently about their image making and asked who is a "purist", and then, he proceeded to remind us that, even those photographers we thought were "purists" in historical photography were not!

My work is ever changing and I remain open to new ideas and technologies available to the photographer in our time! Why not use those tools; if it makes a good image then what's the deal? So here's some stuff I have been playing with and an image sequence to show how I got there. Charles Collier was the first club member whose image of The Old Pension Building in Washington, I can remember. It was a magnificent image. Then I saw an image Steve Harman made there, and it too was a fabulous image. Both those images were fairly pure, except maybe for some dodging and burning, and some selective cropping. My first opportunity to go there with the intention of creating images was with Barbara Williams a couple weeks ago. I have been there three times since. It is a fabulous building with lots of photo opportunities. Below is the process I used to get to the final image, which evolved. What's really cool is that my interest was perked about using a mirror effect by some images Barb and Kathleen had shown in the print competition. Then Barb was sending me shots she had taken and mirrored the image, so I Googled the process and found a tutorial on line and voila I was a mirroring maniac! This process takes a little time, but once you have the image finished you want to mirror it is very fast and easy. The link is below.



This is the raw image as shot. The image has an acceptable tonal range, with no clipping, but is fairly uninteresting. When I shot it I was thinking down the road.....

This is a single shot (the raw file above) processed once as a pseudo HDR image. You can see some of the details such as the shadows of window lights have been brought out. To me the image has an overall luminosity the raw file did not have.

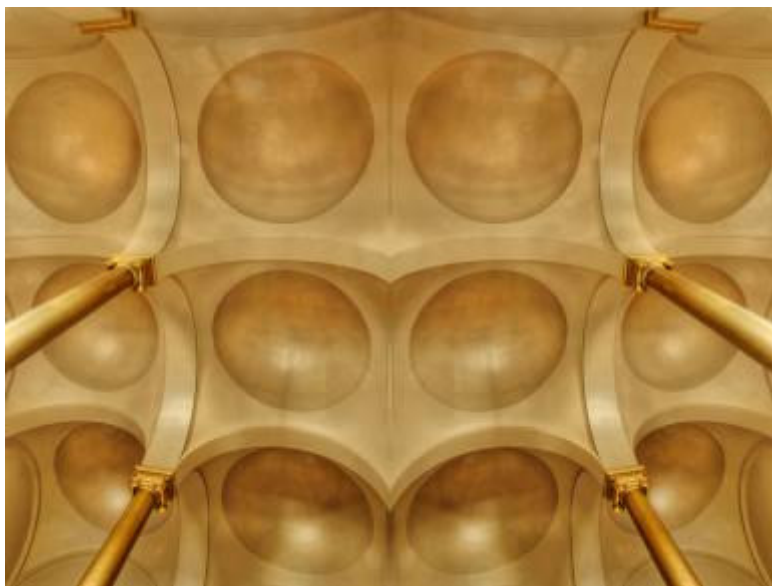




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Thinking Outside the "Purist" Box (cont.)

The image is then brought into Photoshop and cropped, rotated with levels and curves applied. It is beginning to come to life. I am envisioning this image with a mirrored effect applied. Notice the careful cropping and positioning of the corner points and arches. This is very important when envisioning a completed image. But if you look at my original shot you will see I paid attention to that detail there as well.



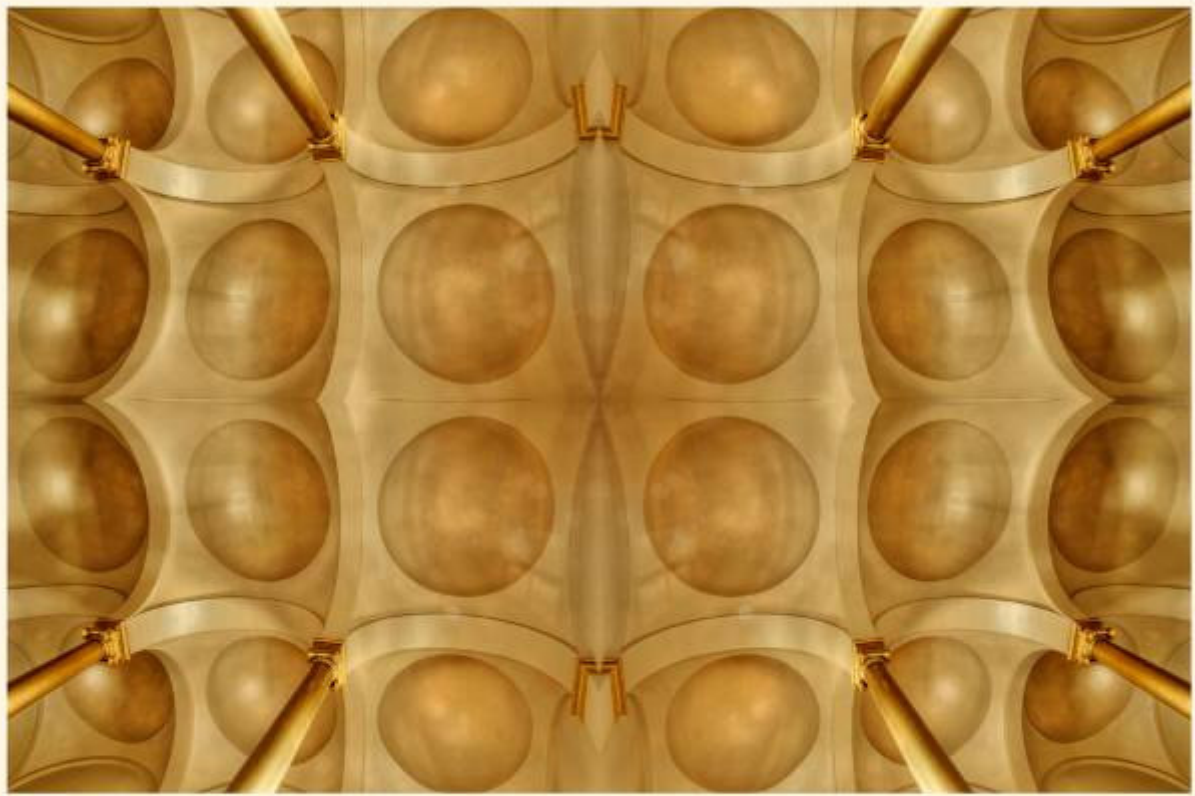
Ok, so this is the mirrored image and I still was not satisfied, and thought it needed better balance, so I mirrored it again! So far from pure now!!!!!!
Link below for instructions:

<http://www.accessdigitalphotography.com/photoshop-tips-and-tricks/creating-a-mirror-image-in-photoshop-cs3/>



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Thinking Outside the "Purist" Box (cont.)



ALL ABOUT THE GOLD

Karen Messick

And this is the final image with a poster look applied to frame the image, and maybe another tweak of curves to finish it off. Hope that sparks your creativity. For more images see my blog and click on the label on the sidebar for The National Building Museum. <http://blog.karenmessickphotography.com/>
Or visit http://web.me.com/karenmessick/Karen_L_Messick_Photography/Print_Color_NBM.html



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Photography Philosophy

Words of Wisdom from James L. Amos: Picture Taking and Picture Making

by Diane Bovenkamp

On February 18, 2009, James L. Amos gave an excellent insider's view to his photographic journey at the Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, within the exhibit titled "Photographs of James L. Amos: Geographic, Illustrative, and Personal." This article highlights some of my impressions about his philosophies and techniques.

May I introduce you to Mr. James L. Amos:



Background: Mr. Amos spent 16 years as a Professional Technical Representative at the Eastman Kodak Company, followed by 26 years as a photographer for National Geographic until 1993, and ever since his time has been divided between doing unassigned photography for stock and fine art, organizing his photographic collection, and making inkjet prints.

During his discussion, Mr. Amos continually discussed his themes of picture taking and picture making, and of the "luck" of being at the right place at the right time.

[Although, don't they say that luck favors the prepared mind?] Remember in my notes below that most of these photos were taken with Kodachrome 25 ISO film, with a non-digital 35mm camera.

Here are my interpretations of some of his words of wisdom (food for thought):

- Picture Taking: being in the right place at the right time, with the right tools and with the right frame-of-mind and vision.
- Picture Making: thoroughly researching the subject and setting-up a shot that you might not necessarily "stumble across" in real life.
- Colonial Williamsburg, VA. Grande Illumination Parade was lit by 50 strobe lights on trees and he had a camera platform to rise above the crowd (picture taking). He took another shot of Colonial Williamsburg food still-life arranged in front of a fireplace (picture making).



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Title

- Atrium of Atlanta Hyatt Regency Hotel: The windows in the elevators were dark, so he gave elevator riders flash units to discharge as soon as he raised his hand. (taking)
- Chesapeake Oyster Fishermen eat and pray on boat. He saw the shot the first day, but didn't have the right lens, so he returned the next day and took the "picture that made him." (taking)
- Easter Island disco dancing. Lights in rafters highlight drawings on the wall. An assistant shone light on "the most beautiful woman in the place" from a distance of 10 feet. (taking)
- Platinum theme. Bounced light off the walls of a small white room to take photos of £5,464,000-worth of platinum jewelry and paraphernalia. (making)
- Four types of early American glass (amber, blue, clear and vaseline): The uranium in vaseline glass fluoresces when use regular flash units covered with UV filters. (making)
- In-camera masking (superposition of one image upon another in one negative). Magnify detail in background of 11th Century Islamic Ewer at the Corning Glass Museum. (making)
- Three Kangaroo Rats at University of Nebraska. Scientists "Shake'n'Bake" the rats in bags with colored fluorescent powder and track their migration at night with UV light. (making)

For more information about the James L. Amos exhibit at UMBC, visit their website (<http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/gallery/current.php>). There will be a collector's edition exhibit booklet that will be published and ready for purchase within the next few weeks. For more information about James L. Amos, go to his website (<http://www.jameslamos.com/>). If you get a chance before the exhibit closes in March 23, Check-It-Out! You may even get ideas about photographic compositions, themes or techniques that you want to emulate in your own work.

You, too, can appreciate this exhibit, as demonstrated by these BCC members:



Photo by Kay Muldoon-Ibrahim