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The Stories Behind Film Meet the People Shaping Its Future

Ray Barbee, USA

By Charys Schuler



Riverside, California, 2014

Ray Barbee has just published his first book, *The Joy is in Capturing the Journey*. This finally gives *SGC* the opportunity to feature his photos, something we've been eager to do since meeting him at the Leica Celebration of Photography a few years ago.

But the first time I ever heard of Ray Barbee had nothing to do with photography; it was in connection with his line of Vans skate sneakers. As with another portfolio artist in this issue, Cassandra Trenary, Ray is best-known for his artistry in a much more physical endeavor than photography. Whereas Cassandra is a principal ballet dancer, Ray is a world class skateboarder.

He was inducted into the Skateboarding Hall of Fame in 2020, and is described as “simply one of the most beloved skateboarders to have emerged from the late-1980s and early-’90s.” With a wide smile and willingness to chat about himself and other wide-ranging topics, Ray also shows an honest interest in others. The adjective you’ll find most often attached to his name in articles, whether about skateboarding, photography, or music, is “cool.”

What “cool” doesn’t describe are his eyes. They are focused, curious, and have a lot going on behind them. His eyes give away the drive and passion that has fueled his success across multiple disciplines.



Anthony Acosta and Vincent Alvarez, Long Beach, California, 2010

Ray has been called “the Fred Astaire of skateboarding.” This really makes sense to me if I think about Astaire’s tap routines: a slightly gangly frame that does a lot of complex, small movements and manages to integrate them all into a beautiful flow. It could also apply to Ray’s music-making, which is jazz-based, incorporating stream-of-consciousness improvisation into structures just present enough to keep everything flowing.

But Ray’s photography reminds me more of Astaire’s lovely ballroom style: more formal and detail-oriented, every toe and heel placement meticulously chosen, each line formed in flawless harmony with his partner. Interestingly, although I didn’t mention this association during our interview, Ray made this comment:

“Analog is a dance. You may be leading, but the materials have a say in the dance for sure.”

I love that Ray seems to dance through life, no matter if his partner is a skateboard, a guitar or drum set, or a camera. At the same time, he shows a level-headed awareness of the practicalities of making a living.

“I learned printing in the Long Beach Community College darkroom. Now I print at the Irvine Arts Community Center lab; that’s where I made all the prints for my Leica exhibition—it’s a lot cheaper than other places in the area. I always think about justifying the expense, you know? I’m really thankful that my wife has always understood and supported me doing all these things.”



Long Beach, California, 2018

Ray's conservative approach to the business side of photography is in line with the idea that all his endeavors need to be justified in a financial sense. "I took such a long time to bring out a book because I wanted to do it 'the old school way': with a publisher, not self-published. I knew a publisher would present the book with craft." It's the same way he went about making a living with skateboarding (on a pro team) and presenting his music (recording for a label).

In *The Joy is in Capturing the Journey*, Ray writes that his main inspirations are his wife, Stefanie, their sons Nolan and Maxwell, and the incredible skateboard community. He recalls thinking at some point, "I'm blowing it by not capturing this amazing life [in photos]."

Other inspirations he has cited include the "skate photographer camp", and Magnum photographers including Elliott Erwitt, featured in our issue 27. Ray shares a sense of visual humor with Elliott and, in some photos, shares the twinkle in his eye with viewers. In others, he enjoys a formal, structured approach.

"I get nerdy about composition. I don't wanna crop. There's a joy to pulling it off, like a skateboard trick."

Some of Ray's most striking compositions were made with a Hasselblad XPan panoramic camera and a 30mm lens. He recalls taking a long time setting up the shots, saying, "It's my version of large format." While on the topic of panoramic photography, we spoke about the WideluxX project, and Ray's admiration of Jeff Bridges' work. "He [Jeff Bridges] is such a master of that camera! He uses it to make people sort of abstracted in a way that is really interesting and unique."



Los Angeles, California, 2016



San Pedro, California, 2016



Kyosuke Miura, Long Beach, California, 2016



Venice, California, 2017



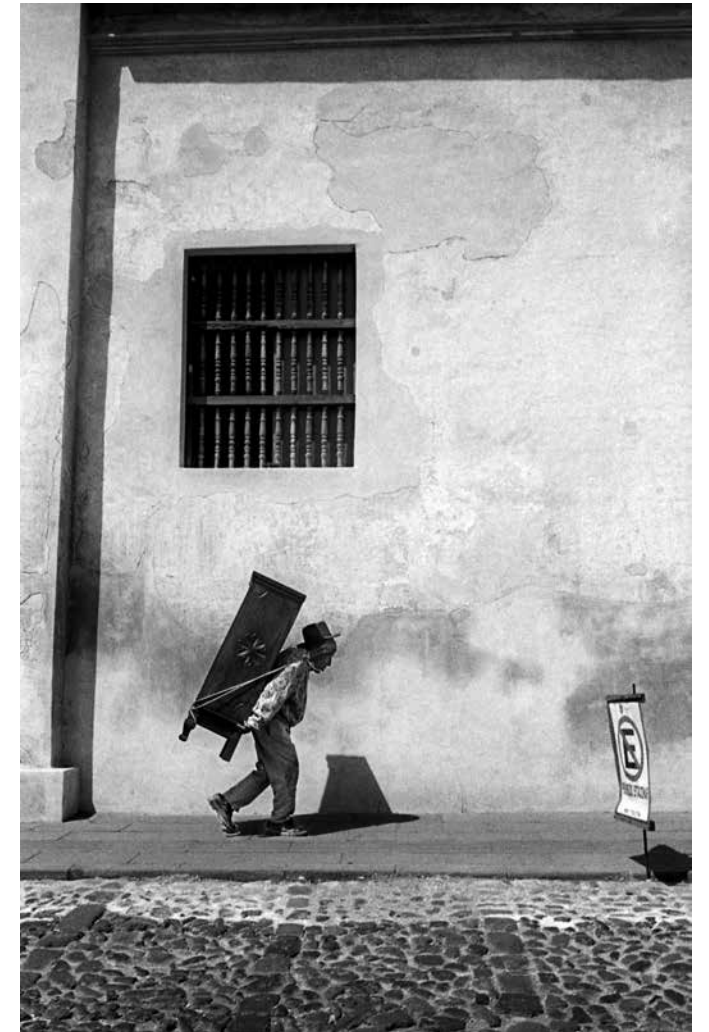
Long Beach, California, 2018



Jonathan Mattson, Fukuoka, Japan, 2008

Ray is also interested in the power of black and white photography in this context. “I love b&w because it has the ability to abstract. People can’t say that it’s ‘wrong’ like they can of color, like if the skin tone is ‘off’ or the whole photo has a certain skew to a color.”

Apart from the XPan images, most of Ray’s work was shot with just one setup: “My trusty, faithful Leica M6 and 35mm Summicron.” The way he came to the camera feels very Zen.



Guatamala City, 2018

Having started with his wife’s Pentax K1000, he quickly realized that for the images he wanted to capture, a rangefinder would be better. A friend gave him a Minolta CLE which he’d found in a pawn shop in Texas. But shortly after that, another friend, Robbie Jeffers, saw Ray with the Minolta and offered him a camera he had sitting around unused: a Leica M6 with 50mm and 35mm lenses. “That’s the camera I shoot with to this day,” Ray says with a big smile and a small shake of the head.

Ray says that a rangefinder is like a street skateboard in some ways. “A street board flips easier, there’s more control; the rangefinder is smaller, it’s less obtrusive. I’m able to work in a way that allows me to get the moments that I want. I’m looking for the *unposed* moment. That’s what I’m looking for.”



Fred Mortagne, Barcelona, Spain, 2019

But at least one photo in his book was posed: the image of the skater lying on the ground. “That’s Fred Mortagne, ‘French Fred’. He made the photo that’s on the wall there. We thought it would be cool to get a shot of him lying like the guy in the picture, then get a passerby doing a doubletake... So that didn’t work out! But I still like the picture.”

When I asked Ray what he’s doing next with his photography, his eyes lit up. “I really want to make a documentary book about Long Beach, where I live!” Ray seems to have a particular affinity for letting ideas percolate over time and cross-pollinate in his creative subconscious. For example, his earliest memories of noticing photographs eventually led to the moment, decades later, when he began to take photography seriously.

“I remember as a kid how I loved sitting down with my parents’ record collection and being as mesmerized by the imagery as I was by the music. Then, in 2008, I came across a book from photographer Milt Hinton. He was also a jazz bassist for Cab Calloway. In his book I saw great images depicting their travels, concerts, TV spots, and studio sessions—those intimate photos that you couldn’t capture unless you were playing in the band: candid, not posed. He knew how to capture a fleeting moment and turn it into something special. That really excited me, and I knew I wanted to do that.”

Ray has said that beyond specific sources of inspiration and tools, what really motivates him is the same, whether he’s skateboarding, making music, or shooting photos: camaraderie. I can certainly believe it, having seen firsthand the number of people who flock around him when he enters a room, even while trying to be unobtrusive. He has obviously made friends all over, and made acquaintances feel like friends.



Willis Kimbel, Bakersfield, CA, 2017

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<https://shop.silvergrainclassics.com/products/silvergrainclassics-issue-28-winter-2025>

What REALLY Happens to Film in Airport Scanners?

By Lina Bessonova



"I'm sorry, *madame*, but either you put your film through this scanner, or you can't pass security! And please, don't delay other passengers." I had never seen such scanners before, but I had a bad feeling just looking at one. The airport security staff in Geneva insisted that the scanner was safe for films up to 1600 ISO, and the lady even brought a printout of the data sheet which confirmed her assertion. She flat out refused to do a hand check, even though I explained several times in perfect French that on those twenty rolls were two weeks of my documentary work, not holiday snapshots.

The crowd behind me is growing, I am feeling extremely pressured and intimidated — so, twenty rolls of T-MAX 400 disappear inside the brand-new, big, clinically white scanner, freshly installed at the Geneva Cointrin airport. Fast forward a few days, and I am taking solid grey rolls out of a developing tank. This isn't just a bit of base fog; the films are fully burnt.

But could it have been bad processing? A bad film batch? A weird light leak? Could I have overheated my film somewhere? The security staff are trained professionals, the scanner manufacturers give "film safety" assurances, and they can't be wrong — can they?

The official reassurance (and pressure) made me doubt myself. But I still started being very cautious around airport scanners. I observed security procedures at various airports carefully, asking for hand checks everywhere I could, and making note of the responses, figuring out a way to get my films through securely. During the process, I experienced a huge number of intimidating episodes, including the time the Nice Airport security staff called the police and wrote a report about me just because I insisted on a hand check — and after all that, they pushed my films through the X-ray machine. I occasionally shared my frustration on Instagram and got hundreds of messages from people all over the world who had the same (or even worse) experiences, missing flights or losing valuable shots because of airport security procedures.

Even though I'd been aware of the issue before, it became clear that flying with film was a true problem for the analog community, not just an inconvenience. Yet the question remained: were all those X-ray machines which seemed to ruin films random accidents, or could they be shown to be an actual threat? Other questions occurred to me, too. What about protective bags? And what about the claim that X-ray scanners are "safe up to 1600 ISO"? I decided to design an experiment, which could possibly give all the answers.



THE EXPERIMENT

My cat is thrilled that we are having what she considers a party: it's 4 AM and the floor is covered with film boxes, containers, and scraps of aluminum wrapping. The human is moving around the room, occasionally dropping colorful pieces of paper which are fun to play with. However, the white furball is the only one having fun: my fingers are bleeding, my wrists are hurting, I'm only halfway done with the exposures, and the flight to Amsterdam is departing in less than ten hours.

Why Amsterdam? Well, remember that modern white monstrosity of a scanner in Geneva? Amsterdam Schiphol has 25 of those CT (computer tomography) scanners. And I am planning to go through them three times, recording the amount of damage to 35mm and 120 films, with and without a protective bag. And before that, the plan is to go through the Berlin Brandenburg "old" X-ray scanners six times, to check the effect of repeated exposures. All of this requires a lot of well-sorted film, which proves to be a bigger task than I had imagined. And yet, at 11 AM that same day, I am already at the Berlin airport, doing my first round with 12 bags of film.

After every round, two of the plastic bags (one from a protective pouch, one from a cotton tote) are left with the cameraman — on this particular day, he is an iPhone-man, as we are filming very discreetly. After going six rounds, we leave the twelve "Berlin" bags with my husband at Fotoimpex, and take six more to Amsterdam, this time asking for a hand check. As we have a bunch of 3200 film, the request is granted.

CT SCANNERS

As we explore the Amsterdam airport, we see several line-ups of CT scanners. They're futuristic looking, quite fast, and very powerful. If you're told you don't have to take liquids and laptops out of the suitcase, that's a CT scanner. A regular X-ray scanner has one plane which emits radiation. (Fun fact: X-rays were discovered by a German scientist, W.C. Röntgen, who shot some of the world's first X-ray images on dry plates from "Dr. Schleussner" which became ADOX.) CT scanners have the source of the X-rays going in a circle around the thing to be scanned, creating a 3D image. The "old" X-ray scanners have a power limit; the CT scanners can go around in circles as many times as the security staff wants, causing immense damage to the film. Yes, immense. Shockingly more than I expected. At every ISO.



THE RESULTS

Even understanding the CT technology, I had high hopes for Cinestill 50D. And at first glance, this 50 ISO, daylight-balanced film seemed almost okay. However, high-quality scans revealed the damage: especially at -1 and -2 stops, the fog is quite apparent. For 100 ISO, I had ADOX CHS 100II: in black-and-white, the color shift is not there, so the damage seems slightly more tolerable. But at 200 ISO, that base fog is progressing, present at borderline usable levels (with a bit of a muddy veil over the image), and the fog starting to visibly ruin film at 400 ISO. I re-tested CT scans with Cinestill 400D and Portra 400, consistently getting heavy color shift and base fog. And it only went downhill from there. After a single CT scan, Cinestill 800T doesn't look like itself anymore. And Delta 3200 — well, that one is, obviously, dead.

X-RAY SCANNERS

The CT scanner damage is so impressive, that it's easy to overlook what the "old" X-ray machines do. The negatives, except for Delta 3200, didn't exhibit dramatic damage or visible waves. In fact, if there were no reference films, the ones that went through X-rays six times would have looked fine. Except that they weren't all, actually, fine.

Up to 200 ISO, the films are decisively safe. However, at 400 ISO, things change. I got quite a few 400 ISO films in my life which had X-ray "waves"; it all seems to depend on the calibration of the specific scanner. The Berlin scanners, clearly, were using only moderate power; they caused no waves and almost no base fog — I say "almost" because after six passes, the 400 ISO HP5+ 120 roll gained 0.03 in base fog. Exactly the same thing happened to Portra 400, which was taken through six scanners in different airports as a reconfirmation test.

Is that change negligible? Sort of. The color shift is only visible if one looks for it. However, the point should be made that X-ray scanners are NOT fully safe up to 1600 ISO, like their data sheets claim. This fact is even more clearly confirmed with Cinestill 800T: after six passes, there is a color shift and an increase in grain. That change starts happening as early as three X-ray passes. It remains a shootable film, but not the original one. And, depending on one's luck, "waves" are always a possibility.

35MM VERSUS 120

That little steel canister that holds the 35mm film, and the fact that 35mm roll is thicker, offer quite a bit of protection. The part of the roll which is closer to the center consistently exhibits 30-50% less fog than the outside layers. There was no test done on sheet film, but my assumption is that it's even more vulnerable than 120.



PROTECTIVE BAGS

The lead-lined bags help, but only to a certain point. Their protection ranges from 30 to 50%, sometimes a bit more, but it's never 100%. They are great for keeping film up to 800 ISO usable after 1-2 CT scanner passes, but over two passes, for every ISO over 200, there is quite serious visible damage.

Facing those results, I wondered whether there was any way to protect the films to the extent that the CT scanner wouldn't be able to reach them. I cut an X-ray shield apron open and used that thick lead rubber. (*Important note: lead is a heavy metal; please don't handle materials containing lead at home if you have small children.*) I tested one and two lead layers, with and without steel, going through CT scanners with Portra 400 twice. Obviously, carrying thick lead-lined double-layered bags is not a viable solution for traveling; they're **super** heavy. I just wanted to see if full CT scanner protection was even possible.

And yes, two layers of lead rubber + steel container did shield the film three times better than a protective bag. And yet, they did not provide a complete barrier. If you look for the fog and color shift, you still see it, especially at -1 stop.

I began to get a little crazy — what about three lead layers? But that would be a completely impractical solution even if it worked, so I left it to theory.

CONCLUSION

Going through airport security is a game of variables: film ISO, film format, protective bag, intensity of the scanner, time inside a scanner, and number of times the film is scanned. With X-ray scanners, we can still afford to gamble, taking small damage and occasional waves on our rolls. With powerful CT scanners gaining popularity, it stops being a gamble; rather, it becomes a task of protecting our film from guaranteed damage.

SilvergrainClassics sent an official press request for comment about film safety to the scanner manufacturers three months in advance of publication but did not receive any reply.

The video of the entire experiment is on [YouTube.com/linabessonova](https://www.youtube.com/linabessonova)
All images are on www.linabessonova.photography/videos#/airport-scanners/
The project was supported by Fotoimpex - fotoimpex.com

Leica at 100: What We Found in Our Neighbor's Archives

By Marwan El Mozayen & Charys Schuler



All photos by Charys Schuler

We live in a world overflowing with images, where photographing our meals, moods, and moments is taken for granted; we forget how radical it once was. There was a time when making any kind of photograph was a privilege reserved for experts, requiring heavy gear, technical know-how, and planning.

That changed, dramatically, about a century ago in a small German town called Wetzlar.

Wetzlar may not be as widely recognized as Mainz with the Gutenberg press or Cape Canaveral with spaceflight, but its impact on human history is just as significant. This is where photography became personal, portable, and part of everyday life. At *SilvergrainClassics*, we're fortunate to live right next door. While many travel across the world to visit Leica's headquarters, we can simply stop by and often do.

For the brand's 100th anniversary, we want to take advantage of our unique access, to go beyond a typical retrospective filled with familiar facts and recycled timelines. We want to invite our readers on a journey through the Leica archive, deep behind the scenes, with someone who lives and breathes this legacy every day: Tim Pullmann, Leica's official archivist.

We've known Tim for years. He is one of the kindest and most passionate people at Leica, a true lover of photography since his teenage years. When we reached out with our idea for a chronological exploration of the archive, Tim didn't hesitate. He even gave up his own free time for our private, after-hours tour.

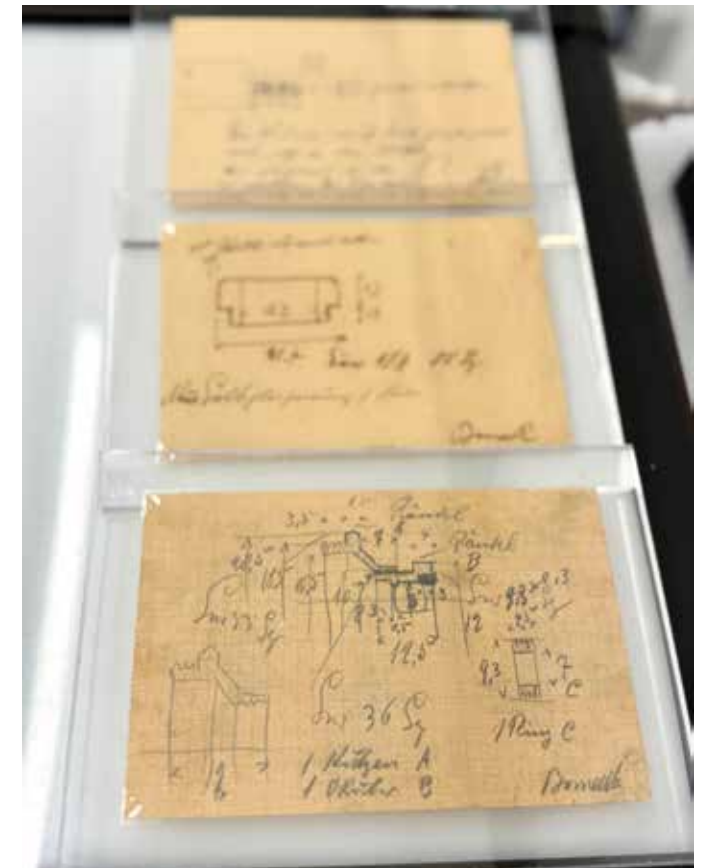
Our concept was simple: walk through the decades, starting from the company's beginnings. What we didn't expect was how adventurous the experience would feel. Even for Tim, who's guided hundreds of archive visits, it is still a place of exploration. "I've probably only really looked at 30% of it," he said with a smile. "There are lots of surprises waiting for me."



Accessing the archive requires moving through layers of alarms and access-controlled doors, which is fitting, considering the treasures inside. There are rare cameras, original product sketches, letters, technical blueprints, one-off prototypes, internal documents, negatives, and layer upon layer of books, magazines, and photographic prints. We were like kids in a candy shop, turning around in circles, not sure where to start. Fortunately, Tim was there.

Beginnings: 1920s-30s

We started—appropriately—at the beginning: in the mid 19th century, Ernst Leitz was producing high-quality microscopes. Medicine and biology were undergoing explosive growth, and Leitz microscopes supported a new scientific age. But after World War I, with shrinking markets and rising pressure, the company needed a bold new idea.



That idea came from Oskar Barnack, a visionary who proposed using 35mm cine film in a compact still camera. The result, the Leica I, was introduced in 1925, and it redefined photography. The first thing Tim pointed out was how revolutionary the Leica I truly was, and not just for the Leica company; it created an entire consumer photography ecosystem. Companies around the globe began producing accessories for this new format, and the impact didn't stop there.

In the archive, we found early advertisements reflecting a cultural shift. Notably, women began appearing as camera users, not just subjects. Leica was changing not only how we photographed, but who photographed.



Moving through the 1930s, we reached one of the most technically exciting but also morally complex chapters in Leica's history. The Leica II (1932) introduced interchangeable lenses and a built-in rangefinder, and soon over 300 companies were attempting to copy Leica's engineering. Stores around the world began to hire and train special salesmen for cameras. But as the company grew, Germany was changing.

The late 1930s and WWII period remain one of the most difficult parts of not just Leica's story, but of German history.

The War Years

Ernst Leitz II, who ran the company at the time, was a high-profile democrat before the Nazis came into power and did not simply fall in line. Between 1933 and 1945, together with his daughter Elsie he quietly facilitated the escape of more than 80 people, most of them Jewish, out of Nazi Germany. Tim shared that some employees were designated as overseas representatives and sent abroad to the U.S. and other countries to escape persecution. It was a strategic effort to save lives.

But Leica was deemed essential to the war effort, and came under enormous pressure. In 1941, with the threat of Nazi seizure looming over his company, Leitz made the calculated decision to join the Nazi Party, allowing him to watch over the company and continue his efforts to protect who he could.

During this period, Leica produced optics and equipment for the Nazis that were considered war relevant. And, as Tim showed us, there's a sudden gap in any documents relating to consumer products. Despite this formal capitulation, Leitz's daughter Elsie was arrested and spent months in a Gestapo prison, and the regime never stopped eyeing him with suspicion.

Perhaps the most moving story Tim told us was about a woman who had visited the archive. She had been a forced laborer during the war, and she shared that members of the Leitz family would personally visit the workers' barracks to check on their wellbeing.

Leitz never spoke about what he had done, even to his grandson. But years later, his quiet acts of resistance came to be known as the Leica Freedom Train.

These are not comfortable stories, but they're essential. In a way, they explain why Leica, even 100 years on, continues to carry not just technical prestige, but gravitas. It is a company which has always made decisions based on both realism and hope.

Post-WWII

After the war, Leica resumed production, selling mostly to U.S. servicemen stationed in Germany at first, but soon reestablishing itself globally. An important chapter here is Leitz Canada; Leica opened a full-fledged manufacturing facility in Midland, Ontario. For decades, this factory produced not only consumer lenses and cameras, but also special-purpose optical tools, including models made specifically for the U.S. military.

As we browsed a heavy drawer in the archive, Tim pulled out one of these military-grade M-mount lenses. It was industrial scale, impressively fast, and had a weight that bordered on intimidating. But it wasn't just the optics that made an impression. "This one is famous for how it sounds," Tim said with a smile. And sure enough, when we turned the aperture ring, the clicks echoed like the sound of turning a safe dial in a heist movie.

In another, seemingly random box, Tim pulled out a set of zoom lenses. At first glance, we assumed these were examples of the SLR zooms which were developed in collaboration with Angénieux and Minolta for the Leicaflex and Leica R series. But our jaws dropped as Tim explained that these were zoom lens prototypes designed for the Leica M system. Yes, zoom lenses for M-mount rangefinders! This design from 2010 was brilliant, both mechanically and optically, but the lenses were too difficult to produce and never made it to market. Still, it was a beautiful glimpse into what might have been, and a thrill at seeing the only ones in existence, all lumped into one non-descript box.

Branching Out, Facing Challenges

In the 1950s through the 1970s, Leica also ventured into moving images, offering Leicina Regular-8 and Super-8 cameras under the Leitz brand. The archive holds not only examples of the cameras, but also Super-8 reels made with them. These reels, alongside slide trays, document business trips, marketing efforts, and Photokina exhibitions. Many of the stunningly well-preserved slides documented Leica's strategic expansion into Portugal in the mid-1970s. These images detailed the early years of what would become Leica's long-standing production facilities in Portugal, which remain active to this day.



This was more than just a visual record. Tim mentioned how these images gave him a feeling of time travel, a personal glimpse into the life of the company across eras. From crisp photos of engineers at work to snapshots of Leica's early Photokina booths, the images felt more like family photo albums than corporate archives. "You suddenly see the people behind the documents," he told us, visibly moved.

In the mid-1960s, Leica faced its first serious existential challenge. The rapid emergence of Japanese SLRs, offering faster lenses, through-the-lens metering, and increasing automation, placed immense pressure on traditional German mechanical camera makers. Leica responded with the Leicaflex series. These cameras were beautifully constructed and mechanically excellent, but they proved too expensive to manufacture and failed to meet commercial expectations.

Then came a turning point: a collaboration between Leica and Minolta. In 1976, the Leica R3 was introduced. It was the first modern Leica SLR to find real success in the market. Although it shared its foundation with the Minolta XE, Leica engineers incorporated their own refinements in areas such as metering, shutter and mirror damping, and overall body design, drawing on developments from the Leicaflex years.

The R3 played a key role in stabilizing the company and marked the beginning of Leica's R-system. While often overlooked today, the R3 was a state-of-the-art camera in its time and laid the groundwork for a system that would continue for more than two decades, culminating in the R9.

The 1970s were the era of the pocket film revolution, most notably the 110 format. Tim pulled out a box containing Leica prototypes that never made it to market. Not only had Leica developed a compact 110 camera, but also a matching slide projector, in cooperation with Kindermann. The prototype I had the chance to hold was the most sophisticated 110 camera I had ever seen, and clearly ready for production. But due to a change in board members, both the camera and projector were shelved, never reaching consumers.

Tim showed us another camera which didn't meet its expected purpose: a special Leicaflex model for the 1972 Olympics in Munich. With the serial number 13, it was intended to be given to "the unluckiest athlete" of the games, but the idea was scrapped after the infamous terrorist attacks.

Progress Rooted in Heritage

The 1980s brought many milestones: the release of the iconic M6, and the R4, R5, and R6 in the SLR line. Successful consumer point-and-shoot cameras were introduced in the 1990s. The first models were developed in collaboration with Minolta, and reflected Leica's characteristic quality and carefully considered design.

As the digital age dawned, Leica faced new challenges. Their first digital attempt—a scanning back—could take up to four minutes per image. You couldn't even shoot a salad before it wilted. But perseverance paid off. Today, Leica produces some of the most respected digital cameras in the world. Though we risk sounding biased, Leica's ability to unite its design legacy with current digital performance is hard to deny.

Through it all, Leica has stayed true to its heritage. The shutter in today's M cameras still traces its lineage directly to the Leica I. One in five M cameras produced today is still a film camera. Over the past hundred years, through complex times and choices, Leica has both shaped and sustained the highest

standards in photography and stayed true to its roots. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that it continues to compete against its larger, Japanese-based rivals, still standing as one of the most reputable and sought-after brands for cameras and lenses worldwide.

As our evening in the archive ended, we stepped into the stillness of Leitz Park, our thoughts lingering on everything we had seen. Leica's story runs deeper than the cameras it is known for. It is shaped by the people who built it and the decisions they made.

So, here's to Leica at 100. To the engineers who pushed boundaries and to 00100come in the next 100 years. To the archivists who protect what might otherwise be lost. And to the many stories still waiting to be discovered in a box on a year shelf.

Kelly-Ann Bobb, Trinidad and Tobago

by Rachel Brewster-Wright



Home Alone



Bahia - Jabari

Kelly-Ann Bobb has sprung into the analog photography scene with her beautiful photographic work. Having only picked up her first medium format film camera in 2018, she has since gone on to create thought-provoking projects including both her 'Black Bodies' and 'Home Alone' series. Her work was recognized in several international photographic competitions, placed as a finalist in the Lucie Foundation competition with an outstanding image, and she created the first analog photograph to be accepted into the Central Bank Museum of Trinidad and Tobago.

When we meet online to talk about her work for this article, she has just finished seeing patients for the day; in addition to being a photographer, she is also a surgeon. I am blown away by her energy and enthusiasm for her professional medical work alongside her passion and obvious talent as an analog photographer. One thing that strikes me immediately is how much of her approach to both important fields in her life is due to an underlying love of research. As Kelly-Ann puts it herself, she is a "geek," as I am, and we talked at length about our interest in the vast world of fascinating processes once you begin to explore analog photography.

Thinking back to where her journey with analog began in 2018, Kelly-Ann says, "I think my catalyst personally was my Mum's passing. She passed away in August 2018 and we had an apartment in New York, so I was there packing away things. I think it was a bit cathartic for me to document the process with photography and film cameras. From there, I fell in love with alternative printing, darkroom printing, which led to where I am now with it. It's tactile. It's involved. You have to think things through, and I guess in that process of working things through, maybe there's a parallel of working through your emotions, too."



Home Alone



Bahia

While taking an elective course in Belgium at the beginning of 2018, Kelly-Ann had come across a local market and was curious about the vintage analog cameras she saw there. She set about haggling and eventually got hold of a Mamiya C330 which she calls her “lucky charm.” It’s one of her favorite cameras to shoot with because she enjoys the creative freedom of being able to change lenses and because it operates as a TLR which suits the way that she enjoys shooting.

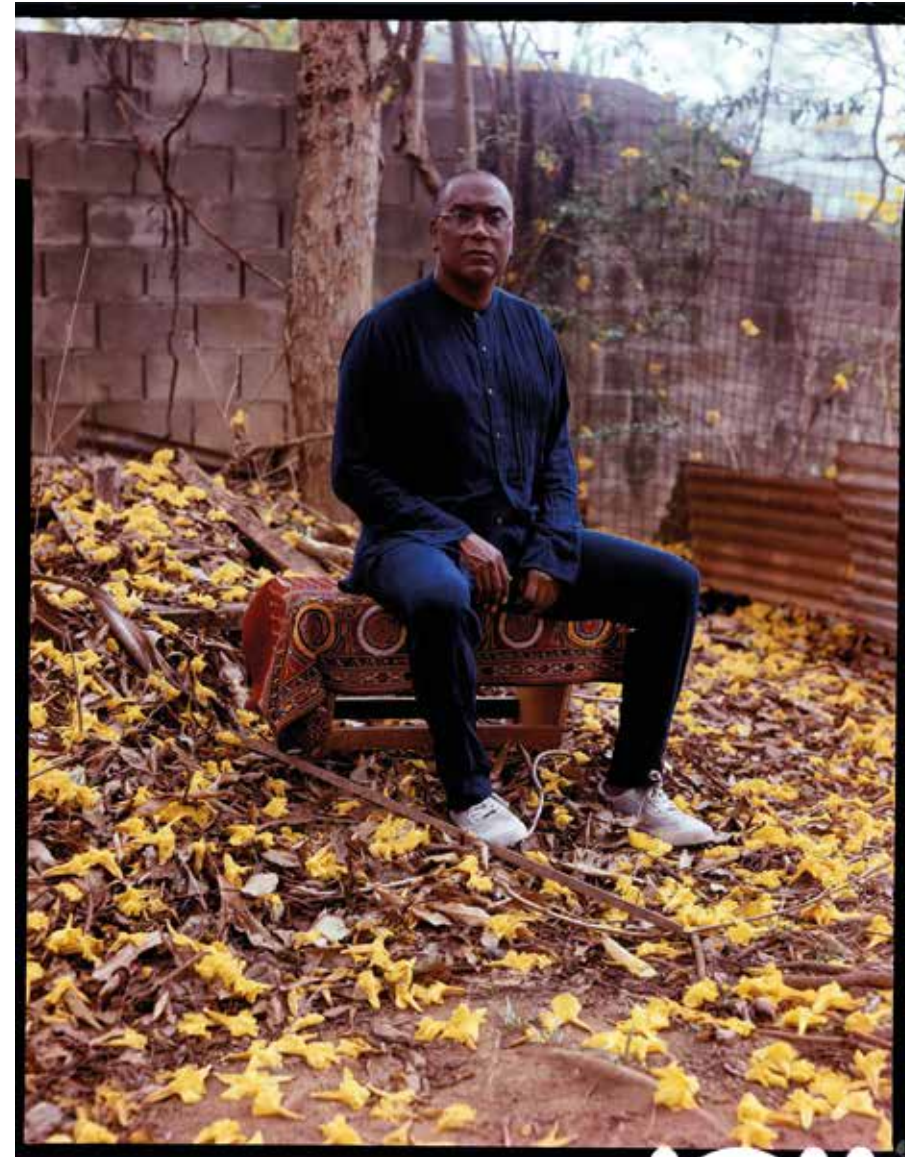
“At the time, I had a digital SLR that I had travelled with, so I got hold of a 120-format film camera and from there I started collecting film cameras.

From that desire to collect them, I started to research how to develop film, realizing there were so many different formats, and I completely switched over to film photography. I have nearly 90 film cameras now and they range from 35mm to a 4x5 that can be modded to 8x10, and a range of Polaroid cameras, too. But I would say that I’m mostly drawn to medium and large format.”

Given the beautiful work she creates, I was curious to find out how she has developed her analog photography practice since 2018. “My training was from the ‘University of YouTube’ which is an endless resource!” she laughs.

“I did the research because for most of the cameras I like to shoot with, there’s no real automatic setting. I needed to understand aperture and shutter speed and light metering, and besides YouTube I got a lot of information from forums.”

We also discuss her choices of film stock, and which are her favorites. As a Person of Color capturing other People of Color with analog photography, these choices have played a significant role in the final aesthetic that she has created through her work. Once again, we talk about her research and experiments in the subject, along with adjustments she made to her work to create the final look.



Robert

“I remember reading articles and looking at a couple of videos about the technology that went into developing film and making the color rendition of skin accurate, but when they referred to the accuracy of skin color rendition, they usually considered Caucasian skin, not necessarily People of Color, so I’ve realized that I think this is why I like slide film. Slide film doesn’t have much cast and the colors are usually quite true to reality. I’ve found that Ektar 100 also renders darker skin complexions really well.”

Thinking about the adjustments she makes, she continued, “I do see a difference. I’ve learnt to edit to get what it is I actually saw. I think that is why I focused on and titled some of my work ‘Black Bodies,’ because I wanted to share the Caribbean experience through film photography. I think as a woman analog photographer, as a Black Caribbean analog photographer, I try my best to make sure that my face and people that look like me are portrayed.”

A driving force behind the work that Kelly-Ann creates is the idea of connection and at its deepest, about sharing the Caribbean experience with others.



Shalisha

“I would like for people to be able to connect with the faces that are portrayed. Growing up in the Caribbean, you learn a bit about everyone. You learn about the world as a whole. For my generation, because of the internet and social media, it’s easier to connect with others, so it’s easier to realize realities outside of your own world and really understand how other people live in other places.

I think what I would like is for people to experience joy looking at my photos, to make a connection with the pieces, and to learn about Caribbean experiences.”



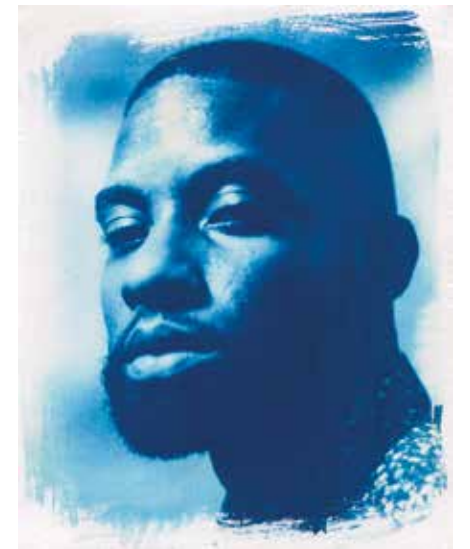
The Cloth - sustainable fashion



Black Bodies



Jabari



Jaffari

This theme continues through to her current focus, exploring the world of editorial fashion photography through the analog medium. Kelly-Ann puts Caribbean designers and People of Color front and center, captured from the perspective of documenting Caribbean life.

“Most of the people I work with are not models. I’ve only worked with two models. I’ve recently decided to explore the genre of editorial fashion photography and the goal behind that is the same [as for other parts of my work]; I want to tell the Caribbean story. So, I collaborate with Caribbean designers and really document Caribbean fashion in a way

that’s almost like documentary photography. The goal is sharing the story of the Caribbean designer and the Caribbean reality. It’s an extension of what I would like my photography to be.”

Kelly-Ann also shared what she finds could be one of the most valuable things that came from entering her work into competitions: ensuring that people of color are more widely portrayed and represented on an international level, both in front of and behind the camera. “When you enter these competitions, you have to describe your work, to be able to put words behind the image. That itself is a skill! You also need to understand how to put images together for cohesiveness,

which, again, is a skill. So that was another main goal in entering. I didn’t expect to place, but I wanted to get into the habit of figuring out the steps required to curate my work.”

For me, one of the most interesting parts of Kelly-Ann’s story is how she’s recently found the two main areas of her life, medicine and analog photography, coming together in an unexpected way. She tells me that the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago is very close to Venezuela and “with the humanitarian crisis, we’ve had a lot of refugees from Venezuela coming to Trinidad on boats. Our government has made measures as much as possible, to give them a starter

registration, jobs etc. I contacted an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) because I wanted to do a photo essay on the experience of the Venezuelan refugees here in Trinidad and Tobago. The person who runs the NGO learnt that I’m a surgeon, so we’re currently also organizing a clinic for them that I would be running as a doctor.”

“It’s moved from me wanting to do a photo series, to me going to actively volunteer and work with them,” she says, “which I love, because it builds that connection. Street photography is difficult. I don’t like to feel like I’m ‘stealing’ images. It’s important for me to feel a level of connection with the people

I photograph and that’s why I wanted to partner with an NGO to do this photo series—I wanted to have a real connection. Now with the way it has moved to starting a health clinic, it feels organic for me.”

“In high school, one of my goals with doing medicine was Doctors Without Borders so it would allow me to travel, to see places, to document my experience, and allow me to practice medicine. That’s still my dream. I don’t know if I’ll always be able to have them [photography and medicine] connected, but this opportunity to have them come together, I appreciate.”

Coming to the end of our conversation, discussing her portfolio of work so far, I think Kelly sums it up beautifully. “I feel as though my photography is just becoming what it’s supposed to become. The process and the journey have been organic—one opportunity after the other. I’m just enjoying the journey as it happens.”

I, for one, can’t wait to see what she creates next.

The Importance of Play

By Andrew Sanderson



Dried leaves

What is it that you enjoy about photography? Are you a person who delights in methodical, controlled processes? Or perhaps you are a Lomography or Holga enthusiast who embraces light leaks? Fortunately, creative photography has room for both these extremes and everyone in between, which is most of us, I suspect.

Play is essential to creativity; this has been extensively studied and written about.



Condensation faces

“Play provides the natural, imaginative and motivating contexts for children to learn about themselves, one another and the world around them. A single moment of sustained play can afford children many developmental experiences at once, covering multiple areas of learning and reinforcing the characteristics of effective learning.”

From “Teaching and Play in the Early Years” -OFSTED report. 2015.

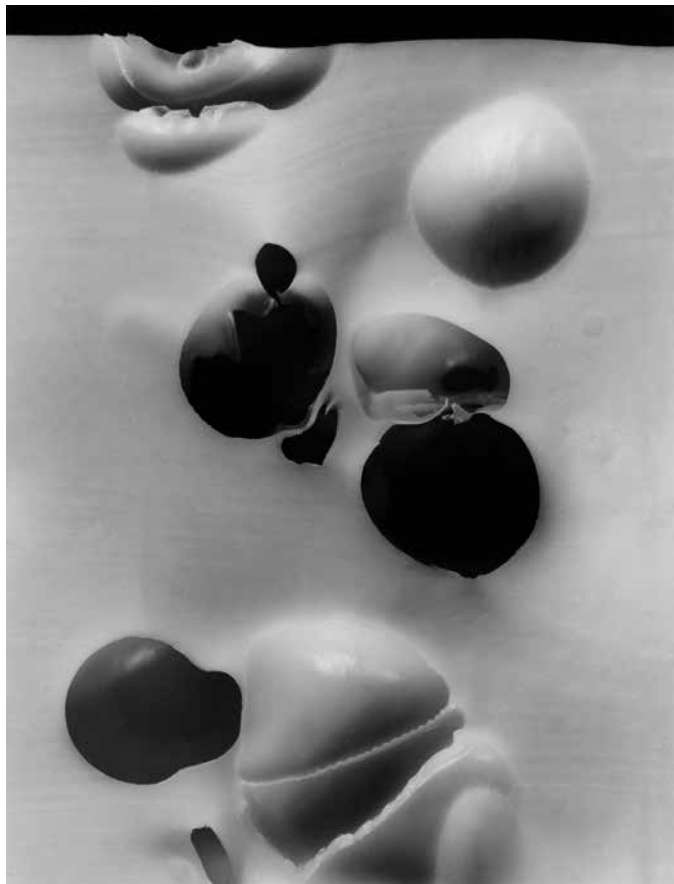
But what does play mean in terms of photography? For me it means being free to spend time with equipment and materials with no pressing need to produce anything and not feeling that the time needs to be allocated to a task or a result. It is freeing myself from the sense that I need to be “successful.”

My personal way to play involves a lot of freedom and experimentation with almost all parts of the photographic process. But it is just as possible and important to play if you are someone who is exclusively inspired by a very exacting process such as lith printing. The only important thing is to free yourself from expectations. Perhaps you'll discover an entirely new area of subject matter or simply turn out results that are not what you expected — but sometimes the unexpected can be marvelously inspiring if you give it a chance!

During our teens and early adulthood, we are likely to hide these creative, non-conformist urges, thinking, “This might not work,” or “What will other people think?” These attitudes are learned and, if we don't resist, ingrained in us. I don't use the word “resist” lightly; we must actively fight against the constant pressure to be serious about life. Yes, there are serious subjects, but that doesn't mean that you never get to experience the pleasure and stimulation of play again. Many adults are wary of trying something new for fear of making a mistake; but a fear of failure will kill creativity before it has germinated. Play requires an open mind and an excitement about all possibilities, with no need to produce “results.”



Audrey



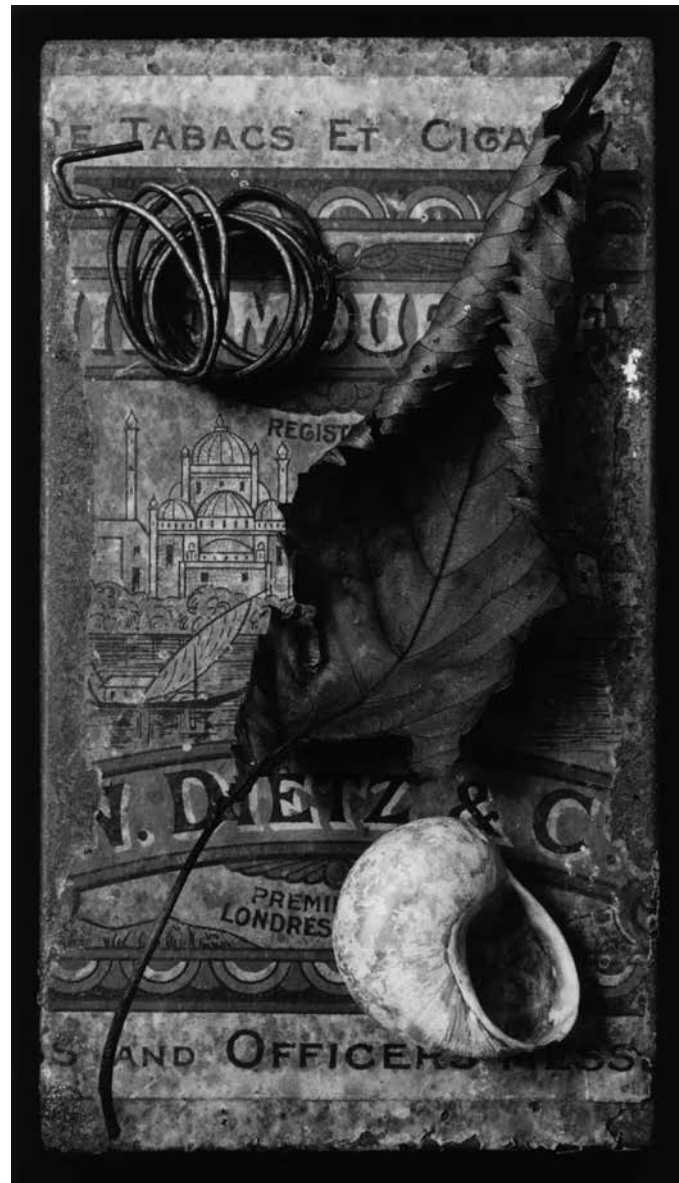
Emmental

Sometimes I will take several different cameras, put them out on the table, and handle them with different lenses, simply looking through them. Sometimes, that is pleasure enough. Often, looking through one of the cameras will give me an idea to photograph something in the room and this has produced some interesting images over the years.

I use a range of film sizes and formats, and enjoy all of them, though not if I use any one too much. If I stick to one film format, I find myself becoming repetitive and predictable. Moving from 8x10 to small format for a little while makes me see differently and take pictures in a way that I haven't for some time. I love pinhole photography, but there is usually a five-year gap between intense weeks of pinhole shooting. The reason I do this is to encourage myself to play. When I pick up a camera I haven't used for a year, I'm excited — I want to play and experiment with it again. When I am next inspired to get out my cyanotype chemicals (I can't even remember the last time I used them), I know I will have loads of fun and fresh ideas.

This kind of play is not like sport; it is not competitive in any way, and it doesn't matter if it is a failure. Actually, there are no "failures" in play! It should be full of curiosity for its own sake. All outcomes are fun and teach us something. When something is learned this way, it can feel more rewarding than learning from a book. The gradual discovery stimulates imagination, and making mistakes as you go along is a part of that learning. In fact, I believe that in photography you learn more from your failures than you do from your successes.

Play reduces cortisol and releases endorphins, and studies have shown that play facilitates insightful, divergent thinking. When you give yourself time to play you must resist the urge to look at the clock. It will take a while for you to get into the play frame of mind, especially if you are not used to it. Don't give up after 30 minutes because nothing creative has happened yet; play without expectation. If you are stuck for ideas, here are some you could consider.



Wire, leaf, shell



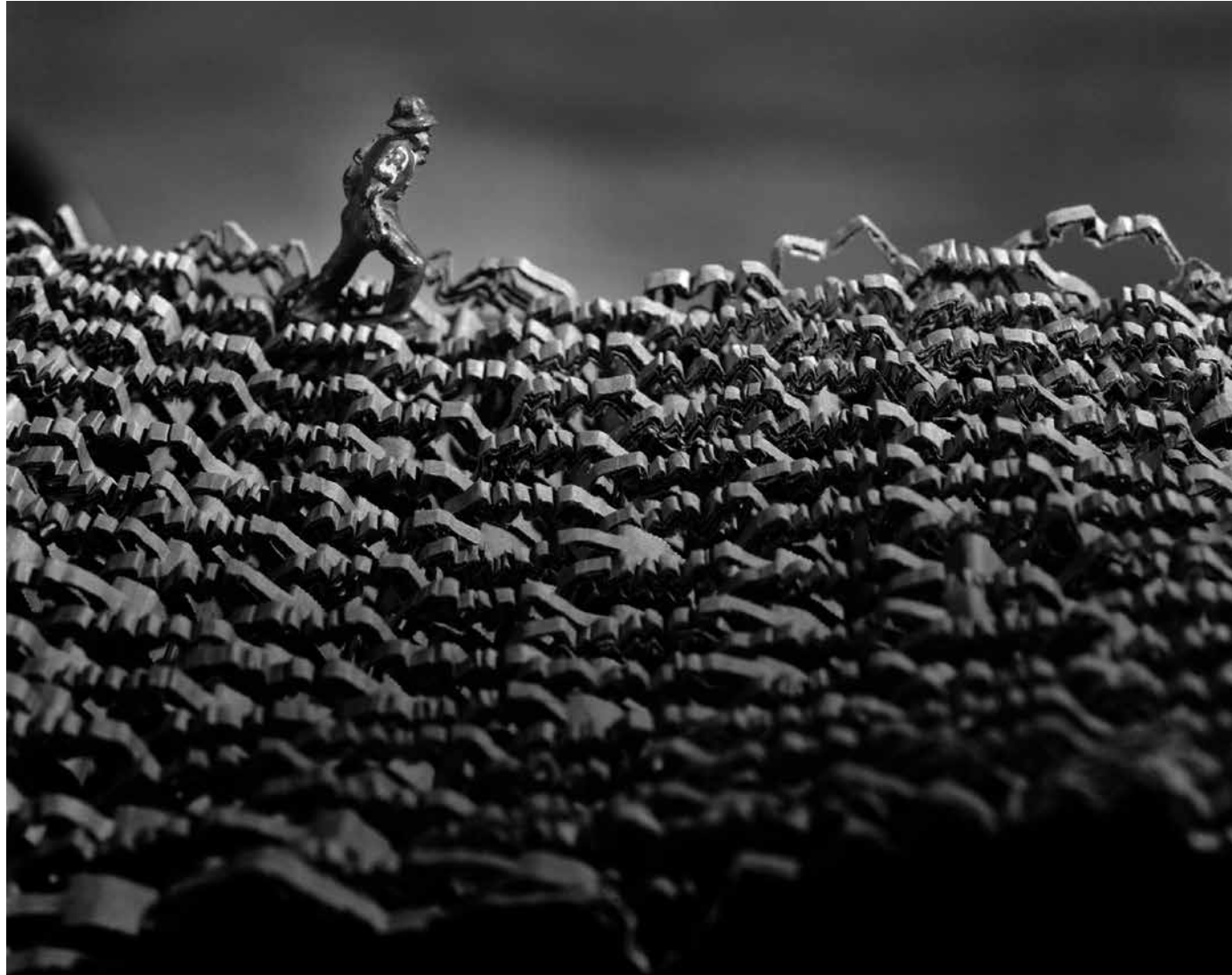
Dancing ringpulls

Start in your own space. Pick up a camera and think about positioning it somewhere in the room where you have never taken a picture before. Put a super wide lens on, set it on auto exposure, and put it in the back of the cupboard looking out, or under the bed. Or put the camera on a tripod one night, set the aperture somewhere in the middle of the range, f8 or so, then turn out all the lights, lock the shutter open, and walk about in the scene with a lighted match. Do you have a large magnifying glass? Set your lens on infinity, hold the magnifying glass on the front of your lens and look through, moving close to things until they come into focus. Try it with droplets of water on a leaf, or the face of a toy bear.

Be willing to do photographs outside your normal style and don't be concerned about what other people think. I don't label myself and I don't let others label me, either. If I were known as a landscape photographer, it would be harder to show people still lives or multimedia images with stitching and paint. I would be closed off to those things and the fun that I could have.

I often see beginners posting on social media groups, asking if a particular film will work with a certain filter, or if it can be shot under artificial light, or similar questions. If you are trying a new type of film, do the things that other people do with it, by all means, but also try it for things that other people *don't* use it for and see what happens. If you find a new film, or a new lens, and you want to know how it performs, don't take boring test shots; take fun pictures, take interesting pictures, take chances! If you're not happy with them, you should be able to work out why and your next shots will probably be closer to something you'll like. If they do come out, that will be fun and exciting, and you will always associate that film or lens with fun when you use it next.

Last month I found a box of X-Ray film that had a really low ASA/ISO. I did some test exposures out of the window next to my darkroom and established that it was four stops below 1.8 ASA/ISO, equivalent to using a ten-stop ND filter with a roll of Pan F.



Farmer on cardboard



Face hand

Although it was new to me — I didn't know its response to colors or its contrast — I was excited to find all that out by playing and experimenting with it. I went into the woods with a homemade 4x5 camera and an old aircraft lens from the second world war, and shot six sheets. My exposures were around 15 seconds with the lens wide open in good light. I was curious to see how a combination of shallow focus would look with obvious movement in the branches. The first shot I took was the negative I decided to print to 10x8, and I put it on social media to see what other people thought of it. The response took me by surprise — I had three times more likes than my previous highest post!

If this article has you thinking about putting more play into your photography, I have another recommendation for you. There is a very interesting video on YouTube where John Cleese talks about creativity and play. The whole talk is superb, and I urge you to seek it out. It is titled: John Cleese on Creativity in Management.

I will leave the final word to George Bernard Shaw. **“We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing!”**

From Issue #15 (2022)

<https://shop.silvergrainclassics.com/products/silvergrainclassics-issue-15-summer-2022>

Welcome to *SilvergrainClassics*



We hope you've enjoyed reading this sampler as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you.

It gave us the chance to look back through our magazines, over 2,800 pages in total:

- portfolios, from masters of film photography to new voices
- in-depth photography techniques from creativity & exposure through developing & scanning
- film cameras from Minox through 35mm to large format
- fascinating stories from the international analog community

We're proud to offer *SilvergrainClassics* in print, 100 pages per issue—the best way to experience the work of our featured artists—but having content available in digital form, too, lets us connect to even more film shooters.

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Whether you've just discovered *SGC* or are a long-time reader, we look forward to sharing the entire world of film photography with you into the future.

Marwan El Mozayen & Charys Schuler
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