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THROUGH THE LENS OF THE VIEW CAMERA

The general description of the wet darkroom process is not that complicated. . . yet the successful implementation requires a much deeper understanding and dedication to craft than is readily apparent. Large and Ultra Large Format photography requires a dedication and understating of craft, which in turn allows the artist to express themselves in a way that is unique to the medium. All cameras, regardless to size, are only a light-tight box that hold the lens and film. Camera, film, chemicals and process are only the tools used to create the finished product. That finished product is the photographic print. It has to contain and express what the artist wants to say with respect to their feeling and interpretation of the subject.



It is said that amateur photographers talk about equipment, while serious photographers talk about photographs. Certainly it is important to have the proper tools in order to be successful at anything you attempt. Matters not whether you are building a bookcase, fixing a leaky kitchen faucet or making a photograph. But to obsess endlessly over your tool belt is not necessary. When asked how they choose which camera to use, JB or Susan Harlin will usually say, "it is the largest camera I can get into position." This is especially true for landscapes. The biggest obstacle is just how far they can carry any one camera. The 11x14 requires four trips to set up and make a photo. Planning and careful

consideration is required to get all of the necessary tools into place, at the right time, to capture the feeling needed for the suitable interpretation.

JB and Susan take great pride in their ability to design, build, or modify all of their equipment as necessary. Years of working in the electronics business engineering and designing mechanical and electrical devices have given JB the skills required to design and build whatever is needed in their garage shop. Whether it is a complete view camera, or custom electronics for precise printing in the darkroom, most everything they use has been custom built or modified. Susan is an expert seamstress and constructs and sews all of their packs and cases. There is nothing in the world of Large Format and Ultra Large Format that is readily available off the shelf. The ability to customize your equipment makes its use

more transparent when in the field. There is nothing more frustrating to an artist than to have to fumble with, and be distracted by the hardware. Like a good pair of gloves, the tools need to fit your hand.

The Harlins adhere to the idea that photography is about the photograph and not the equipment. Talking shop, discussing the gear is the easy part. Talking about the photograph, and the makeup of an image, is much more difficult. The reason the hardware is much easier to talk about is because it is a real, tangible thing. A piece of hardware is something you can pick up and hold in your hand. It has a name and a specific function. You can learn to use a piece of equipment. Most everything about it is well defined and it works in a particular way. What makes up art is something that is only a feeling. You either like what you see, or you don't. Looking at some images triggers a feeling or memory that touches you deeply, but cannot be expressed with words. What is definitely appealing to one person is completely ignored by another. To express a great piece of art in words mostly detracts from its emotional content. You just can't explain a great image.



What is really interesting is hearing what attracted them to something, which in turn, led them to be motivated to make the photo, rather than the f-stop and shutter speed they chose. There are those times when you just know it is time to expose film. The question is, how do you know? It is in the knowing that great images begin.

The big challenge is finding a suitable subject and then presenting it in a manner that portrays the proper artistic vision, or more realistically interpretation. Most of the time this requires patience. Sometimes there is only one very specific time of day when everything is just right. When it works it is great, if it does not work, you may have to come back over and over till it all happens. There are those times when you stumble upon a situation that you know, without hesitation, will be something worthy of attention. A photographer, especially a landscape photographer, is continually chasing the light. JB and Susan spend a very disproportionate amount of time searching for something worthy of pointing a camera toward and exposing a sheet of film. A good day shooting LF or ULF may yield two to six exposures. A really good day might lead to clicking the shutter over ten times! Other days, the camera is never even mounted to the tripod.

The idea is to create ones artistic interpretation that successfully conveys the correct feeling. When this happens it is true magic. JB & Susan Harlin are always searching for that magic.

JB & Susan Harlin
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