

Originally from the Bronx, you graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. Has this degree in any way shaped how you photograph?

No – not at all. It was a time when everyone was into science – it was the dawn of the Space Age and I had been a slave to SciFi. I was going to college to learn to build space ships. Within a scan few weeks I decided that the College of Engineering at the University of Michigan – this thanks, in part to the inarticulate ineptitude of the math TAs inflicted upon first year student. I landed in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. The Pysch degree was ultimately incidental. I took courses in a wide range of very disparate fields, from botany to music lit. More often than not I perused the stacks and shelves of the campus libraries and learned as much from what I found there as I did in the library. I'd have to say that what I read and what I saw (and listened to in the music library) influenced –in very nascent ways—how I came to make photography (originally one boyhood hobbies amongst many) and think about what doing photography meant, what photographs were about.

I'm a transplant to Minnesota. I grew up in the Bronx, N.Y. – on the North American mainland. For a slew of reasons and influences, I harbored romantic notions about the Midwest. Also, 1) I like long cold winters, and 2) I had lived in Sweden and had a veneer of Scandinavian culture ... so, yar shoor, ubetcha, Minnesota was a natural place for me to move to.

I read that you began photographing panoramas in 1978 when you bought a Linhof Technorama camera (from a mountaineer?). Since then, it seems that panoramas have become a sort of specialty. What first attracted you to panoramas?

In in the early 70s I started using a camera called the Brooks Veri-Wide – it had an extremely wide-angle lens on it. When the Linhof Technorama came on the market about 4-5 years later, I somehow knew it was for me – same basic lens optics but the aspect ratio of its frame was nearly twice as wide as the very wide , 1:3. It was, by and large, an intuitive decision; the issues underpinned by how such optics subtly attenuate space, how they nuance was they encapsulate with a hint or glint of isotropy.

During this period I had been reading a lot about contemporary, physics, astronomy, mathematics, and related philosophy. What I gleamed became fertile ground for poetic connections and a source for subsuming metaphor in my photography. This, I guess, accounts for how I understood the visual dynamics of the photographs made with these cameras.

I have to stress that though most people who are familiar with my work are most familiar with my wide-field photographs, I do frequently work with a one or a few other cameras in concert with the Technorama. This for reasons that might best be understood as being Talmudic in nature. Making complimentary images in a few different photographic formats (and emulsions; color & b/w) is essential to how I deal with the world overall – looking at things that are seemingly central in counterpoint, in more than one mode of observation and refection.

Furthermore, wide-field images, as I often make them, harbor a ‘statistical’ potential – the line of thought hear copped from quantum mechanics. Within the broad embrace of a single image there can possibly be other ‘sub-images’, options for knowing...

You say: “My work, by and large, is a function of journeying. I go away and come home again. I make passage.” What constitutes a ‘journey’ and where have you been journeying to lately?

There’s a fractal element to making a journey. A journey can be made at any scale; and be comprised of iterative tangents – small or larger detours that are part and parcel of the journey as a whole I can get out of my car, cross the street and land on your doorstep – that’s easily a journey. Transecting an ocean or a continent, well that clearly is another sort of journey. Still and all, the intrinsic dynamics remain the same. I’ve spent quite a bit of time on seagoing vessels and observed the process of navigation. Lines on charts; lines from one way point to the next – it’s the lines that are important; what’s in between the points, what happens during the passage that determines how things will be at the next point along the way. It’s passing through the world that holds meaning, whatever the scale.

To flush out a metaphor here, the waypoints can be the photographs you make; what transpires beforehand can determine what they will be...

How would you describe your connection to Antarctica? When was your first visit there and what keeps pulling you back?

I’ve spent much time over the years frequently talking to grade school kiddoes – after all, I’m the guy who has been amongst all the penguins. When I visit these class rooms, I ask the kids “Who has been to Antarctica?” I get the doofus look. And then I tell them: “When I was your age, I went there” – the super doofus look at this mention. I tell them – in sermon mode here – that I read books about these sorts of places and the explorers who first went to them; explaining that early on I became seriously interested in all sorts of such things. So the seed was planted early on. In my college years my friends and I had mutual interests and a shared passion for remote high latitude places. I was lucky and wound up getting to go to the places I once only dreamed about getting to.

In the mid-70s, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) had a rough plan to send some artists to Antarctica. I applied two years in a row, but the fledgling program never took form. Someone else went instead – Elliot Porter – he got to go twice because the first time he broke his arm.

Then, I did get to go – on a private sailing expedition in 1987 – under wind power, ‘historically correct’. A few years earlier, when I was teaching at Colorado College, I had an exhibition of photos I made in far northern precincts. A junior girl told me she had been way up north on a rocky little island far above Norway. I asked how she got there and she replied: “On daddy’s sailboat. He’s going to Antarctica in two years.” So I

wrote him a letter, and two years later, I was going to Antarctica. It's a watershed event in my life.

When I came home an author on a book about all things Antarctic told me that a new version of an artists program was in the process of being formulated – he had been its guinea pig. Its run by the NSF's United States Antarctic Program; the Antarctic Artists and Writers program – operated on the order of a grant operation. I've been to The Ice five times over under its aegis – between 1989 and 2000.

After numerous visits, how has the way you see and photograph the continent evolved?

In many ways, it is the most homogenous terrain on the planet – even amongst the planets. Its just about made up of all one physical material, frozen H₂O with only minor variations from one place to the next. I spent a lot of time at sea; and, in turn amidst endless congestions of sea ice – one of the Earth's most fantastic topographies. Fraught with innumerable icebergs to boot ...and I think I've photographed everyone I've seen. Though I've returned several times over, I do not find myself doing the same thing again and again. There's always a new and another possible place to stand; to contemplate. There are always a lot of things to do there – things beyond contending with the nature of the physical place and its constituent terrains. And there always seems to be blanks to fill in. I've been fortunate and privileged in getting to probably more points on its map than almost all the people who have been there.

The presence of humanity there is very small, slight, and meager. People have only been there for 100 years or so – a phenomenally tiny blip of time. Our presence is marginal, and tangential – and perhaps even fleeting.

Here too is the flesh of a profound metaphor. The same should be said for all of us on Earth. It's the only place we know of that is life containing and life giving. We're all on this one solitary rock, floating out in space....

Among your travels, Louisiana is a place you've frequently returned. The New Orleans Photo Alliance said: "It's the themes of permanence and change that has continuously infused Klipper's work..." Do you find this a fitting description of your photography?

I've been getting down to Louisiana on a very regular basis since 1988 – I am a dancer and that was the lure and draw. I'm absorbed by and into Cajun culture – it's the reason I've been going down. By now I have become part of the place and its people; I have made many friends, Cajuns, Creoles and transplants...

My Louisiana photos are part of a much larger body of work – made in all 50 states; all about gaining a handle on the defining characteristics of American regions. Its comprised of innumerable inventories and categories- and tallies in at, I would guess, around upwards of 30,000 photos. Basically, since I had been spending so much time in extremely remote spaces, I needed to find balance, tension, and counterpoint. So I set about dropping anchor in home ground my exploring through all to the USA.

I'm not sure who all made the NOLA observation, but I have often photographed throughout that city over the course of the years. In New Orleans, sadly, a lot of things I photographed were washed away during the storm and the flood. But, even, say in Minneapolis, I have made 100s of images of stuff from the 1970s onward that doesn't exist any more.

Why photograph what is about to disappear?

Some much of what I light upon is vestigial now, but that wasn't always the case. They are the things and places that were where lives were lived, livelihoods were gain, consequent and immaterial events transpired, &tc. Things that I photograph – though not exclusively, hail from and are indicative of, in Grier Marcus' term, "an older, weirder America." Non-generic stuff, unselfconscious setting, places hanging on to a true, original, and authentic identity. For instance, I have made pix everywhere I go of hundreds and hundreds of houses – the ones that bare characteristics of tight, little precincts, of 'local-ness' and homey identity, &tc.. I usually wind up looking at smaller, out of the way places. Many things in them are like time capsules, intended or not – where things ring true, free of nostalgic glosses.

How do you find balance between being photographer and businessman?

I've gotten lucky really. Knowing a lot of people -- before it was called networking – has come into fortuitous play. Friends helping out friends. I'm greatly put off by aggressive promotional types. A peeve and pain in the ass more than anything else -- why bother with more? -- there are only so many hours in a day. I most admire those that follow a vision and plug on as best they can without a direct focus of goals of recognition and approbation.

There are a lot of sacrifices along the way and there is no guarantee of any livelihood; that plugging on is clearly a form of courage.

I have rarely had a regular paycheck; most of my income has been spasmodic and unpredictable.

Grants have been of inestimable help; I've been lucky with them, but there is no implicit guarantee. I still apply for them – most recently for the McKnight – but didn't get it. Income, in whatever form, keeps you working. By definition, you never want to stop working. For an artist, as I see it, retirement is not a concept that applies.