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**Special
reprint from
the Night
Photography
Issue**

INTERVIEW Tom Paiva

Tom Paiva is one of the most prolific night photographers in the world. This interview took place over the course of a phone call in the late spring of 2007. Tom is a most animated interviewee — full of quick jokes and insightful observations, as you will find out by reading this most enjoyable interview.

Tom's work can be seen at: www.tompaiva.com



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MAGNACHROM How can you explain the recent — relatively recent anyway — craze for night photography? It seems that everybody's doing it.

Tom Paiva It does seem that it's become extremely popular. I noticed that it's in the media and in the press, especially in the last year or so. It's a new discovery for many. Personally, I like the nighttime and I've always been enamored with it. So for me, it's not a big surprise.

MC When did you first take your very first night photographs?

TP When I was just a teenager. I got my first 35mm range finder camera — a Leica knock off — I was about 15 and took pictures of almost everything as everybody did at the time. Exploring yourself

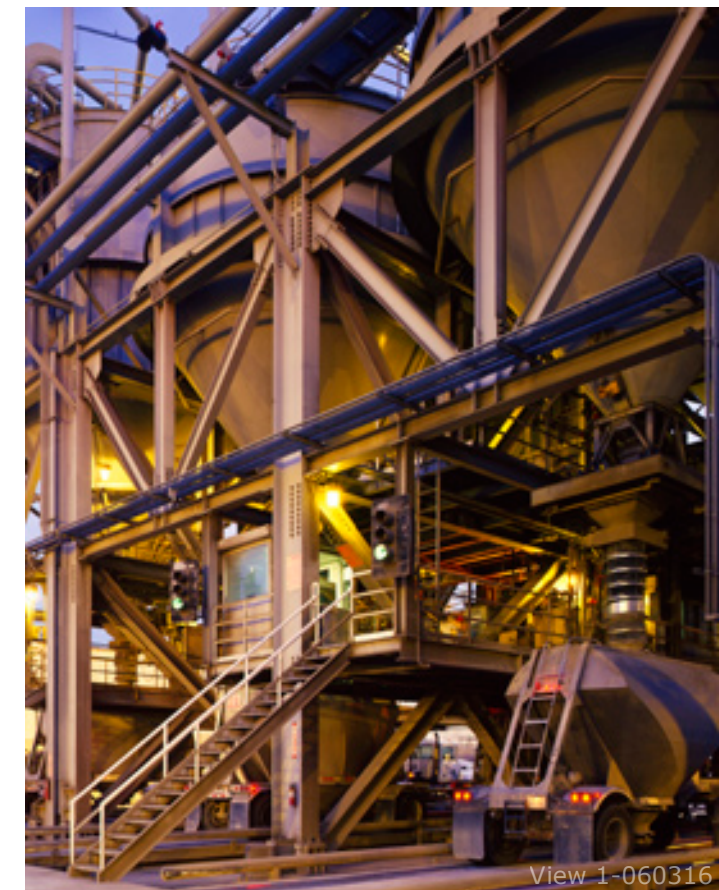
kind of thing. I decided to take some pictures of the neighborhood at night but I just didn't know what I was doing. I started with one-second exposures which was the longest shutter speed the camera had, but it wasn't enough. Someone told me about "bulb" and I started to play around with that. I tried several second exposures and even minute exposures and all of a sudden I got airplanes streaks taking off at the local airport in the background, I couldn't figure out what they were first... obviously that goes back a long time ago. I started doing my serious photography in the mid-eighties at the Academy of Art in San Francisco.

MC None of this was commercial work at that time? This was just for your own fulfillment?

TP Not commercial at all. Definitely for my own fulfillment. I was figuring out where I wanted to go and I think that's one of the toughest things for young photographers. I'm working with an intern right now who is assisting me and he's fascinated with the night stuff I do but I don't think it's what he wants to do. He wants to try to find his niche and I said "you're twenty-six years old, it takes years to find your niche and your direction". As for me, I decided that I liked the man-made environment and shooting at night. I find it peaceful and contemplative and that's one of the reasons why I do it, but it took me years to find that niche. Night photography is sort of like working with a blank canvas, as all the light is added, usually by man-made lights.

MC You must have originally shot in black and white, is that true?

TP Yes, I shot in black and white. I started processing my own film in my teens. I got a cheesy little how-to book on it and bought a few basic things, and started processing 35mm roll film. After a while I started making prints through a



View 1-060316

local darkroom. You joined for a small price. You bought your paper and negatives and then they included all the chemistry and such. I did that for years because I was living in little apartments or shared with two or three roommates and there was never any room for a darkroom.

MC So it must have been quite a surprise when you put color film in for the first time.

TP Yes, It was about 1970/71. I still have some of those images. I moved to San Francisco in the sixties. One of those early photos is at night in the fog in San Francisco of the Transamerica Pyramid under construction. I date that from about 1971. It was shot with Kodachrome with those nasty green night skies. But at least I was able to get exposures with it, not really knowing what I was doing. I did pictures in New York at night, too. I did a shot

out the window of my grandma's place in Brooklyn with the snow coming down, a long exposure with a single car going down the street with lights on. That always fascinated me and it definitely has a mood to it with a single street lamp. You can probably imagine what that image looks like.

MC Probably tungsten back then. If we were to look back on your portfolio we would see the technology of city lighting change over time, wouldn't we?

TP Yes. That's very true. In fact I know of just three city street lights here in Los Angeles that are still tungsten. They're very rare nowadays on city streets worldwide. I was at a cocktail party about a year ago, and the conversation went to night photography. One of the guys turns out to be a lighting designer for the City Planner's Office for the City of LA. So I told him I knew about this one light that's tungsten. We're having this intense discussion and by that point everybody's leaving our conversation because it was so boring for most people. I told him the street corner. He said,

"if you go down another mile, there's another one, and then there's a third over in the East LA". They call them 'acorn lamps' which are rare today. They are hung by a criss-cross wire that goes across the center of a busy intersection. They were at every major intersection at one time. Those light fixture-shave no adaptors for sodium or halogen lamps.

MC Those must date from the sixties or the fifties?

TP He told me they're from the sixties. I've actually shot under them. They definitely are tungsten lights. And it does have a different look but

nobody seems to notice.

MC When you're walking around at night, is your eye trained so that you can immediately say, "oh that's sodium and this is that" or do you need equipment



to tell you what the color temperature is?

TP No, my eye tells me what's going on. I have a color meter, but it rarely works with high-discharge lamps. I sent you a few images that are with sodium vapor as well as mercury vapor lights. There's the weird green spike that you can't really filter out, but you can get much of it out with magenta filters.

MC So you learned to embrace your color friend, huh?

TP Yes. I remember Steve Harper at the Acad-

emy of Art back in the eighties and he would rag on about color balancing and how difficult it had become with the new lamps and he hated them all. Mostly because he was used to tungsten film and shot under tungsten light at night and everything was white. Of course, we don't have mercury vapor or sodium vapor balanced film. So for those we have to filter, either in the field or in the darkroom or Photoshop.

MC I look at your pictures and it seems to me that you celebrate color. You don't hide it.

TP No, not at all. However, some of these views were also shot in black and white.

MC When you shoot black and white, you'll stick another sheet of film and just tag on a second exposure using the same focus and everything, right?

TP Right. It's the way I work when I shoot at night. I always keep a box of Fuji Acros film in the camera case just in case I do want to shoot black and white. Sometimes I'll go weeks without using any of it. At other times I'll shoot three, four or five sheets in one night, if I think it's really a monochrome or graphic image. I'm not really known for my black and white work so I don't really play it up. I don't process it anymore. I recently got rid of all my black and white darkroom equipment, I gave it all to a friend of mine who still shoots 4x5 and 8x10 black and white.

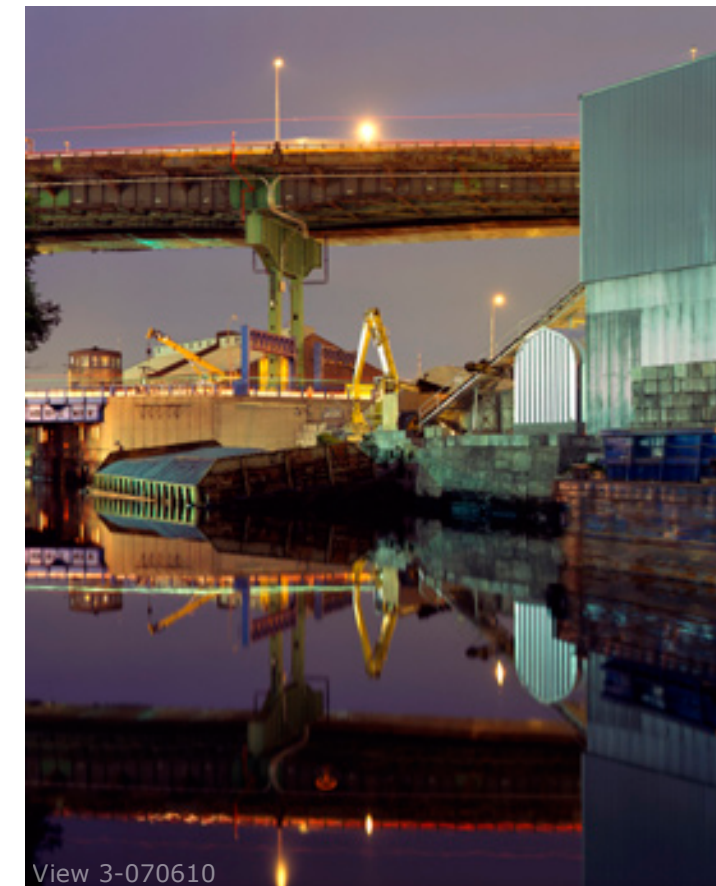
MC When you have your film processed, do they also scan it for you or do you do your own scanning?

TP I do my own scanning unless I need to go very high resolution. I have an Epson 4990 and I find that with 4x5 I can get a decent 20x24 print. Beyond that it starts getting a little soft. So if I'm going larger, I'll have it scanned at one of two labs that I work with who use an Imacon or drum scanner.

MC Do you find that the Epson can keep up with the dark areas or does it tend to have a little problem down there when it gets shadowy?

TP For some reason, the Epson doesn't do as

well with black and white. I don't know why. I'm not an expert on this, but in general I find that with transparencies it does a great job. A color negative also seems to show some extra grain.



MC Well maybe it's because the noise tends to be in the dark areas and with a negative, dark areas represent the highlights, which are more readily visible to the eye.

TP That's a possibility. Even in a creamy sky, like a twilight sky, which is basically close to a Zone V, there is still a little noise in the negative. I've got a continuous smooth tone and that's where the noise seems to be. That and the highlights. In the shadows, I make sure the shadows are black, so you don't have a full scale when I scan black and white. I've had things printed up in magazines with black and white images that I've scanned, and they look just fine.

MC These days a lot of the high-end digital cameras are capable of doing some very

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long exposures. Have you tried them?

TP I currently have two digital cameras, a Canon 5D and 20D. I didn't want to spend the big dollars for a fancier camera. I feel it's a poor investment unless you're shooting a lot of commercial work or have very deep pockets, which I don't. The 'noise' is there, but not objectionable unless you go large. My personal work is all large format film and the digital cameras are for commercial work. I've just heard that Pentax will be coming out with a medium format camera for their 645 series. I have Pentax 645NII gear with a wide variety of lenses: 33mm to 300mm. Their optics are right up there in my book. So it kind of excites me, the idea of them coming out with a camera with a large sensor to match those lenses. Because I have too much money invested in those lenses to sell them on eBay for next to nothing.

MC Aren't you lucky you didn't dump them like everybody else seems to have!

TP Right. I dumped a lot of things in the last few years. I have kept the auto-focus 645 gear, but

it is very sad, Michael, but I have not shot with them in over a year. The only thing I shoot film with anymore is the 4x5 or 8x10. Two major clients of mine that I was shooting tons of film for all of a sudden a year ago said they only wanted digital.

MC This was 220 or 120 film?

TP I used both. I shot 220 mainly for aerial. But now the thing is digital, that's what everybody wants. It's fast and for commercial work, it's fine. I'm not the kind of guy who says "oh the quality is terrible and film is fabulous." No, you shoot

whatever's appropriate. For a lot of things, most things nowadays, digital is good. Especially anything that goes to press. I'm on my fourth generation digital camera. And even the early generation



View 4-051206

cameras, with only five megapixels at ISO 1600, a full-page magazine spread looked great.

MC I'm not surprised.

TP I was actually really nervous when they said we want to run this image for the cover. It's a low light and hand held shot. I shot a half a dozen of those and I gave them the sharpest one yet it looked just great in the magazine. Here we are worried about shooting RAW files and fixing this and that, and I didn't need it. For many publications, it doesn't seem to be necessary.

MC When you print your 4x5's and your 8x10's, are you printing mainly from the scanned output onto inkjet?

TP I like the Fuji Crystal Archive prints. I know it is hard to believe, but I don't have a color printer. I've been dealing with the same color printer in LA for about fifteen years. Unfortunately they tripled his rent and he was really struggling anyway. He had been in business for twenty-one years and he shut the doors just a few months ago. It really saddened me. I did a 4x5 portrait of the owner and his wife in his photolab before they tore it all apart. It's all gone now, the end of an era. Rents have skyrocketed here in Southern California.

MC Ouch.

TP Lately I haven't had the need to make prints commercially. I haven't found a person to replace him with because clients don't want prints anymore. For example, for building contractors I primarily shoot 4x5. I would scan or get it scanned and have a digital print which went into a book that they have on file in the office. But they don't even want that anymore.

MC The rumor is that your brother has moved all digital?

TP Yes he has. My brother, Troy, was so anti-digital just a few years ago. He laughed at me when I got my first digital camera half a dozen years ago, and now here he is and I had just gotten a whole bunch of slightly outdated film for him. He used to like Kodak's 160T tungsten film in 35mm.

MC Unfortunately, Kodak stopped making that, that's for sure.

TP I just finished a semester of teaching color photography at a local junior college and we were doing color printing the old fashion way, using a Kreonite machine and color negatives. Half the students in the class had never shot film before!

MC Welcome to the new world order!

TP It was a big thing for them to learn what an f-stop was. Photography majors in junior college — some second semester and they've never shot

film. That was a shocker for me.

MC How is it possible that a junior can declare a major in photography yet not understand what an f-stop is? Is all the emphasis on composition and



View 4-061101

meaning and not about technique or technology?

TP Very much so. A lot of the students only do the minimum to get by and they have these fancy point-and-shoots. The first thing I asked of the students was to take all the cameras off P, Programmed mode. Some of them didn't like that. I said you're going to understand what's happening from now on. Several of the students really responded to it and they appreciated the extra effort. Perhaps we have to start from ground zero again. I was teaching them more than just color, but basics. I showed them a lot of images in order to try to get them to understand how things were done in the nineteenth century and even the first quarter of the 20th century — when things were pretty primitive. I brought in some of my

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old cameras such as my Speed Graphic Press camera and my Graflex 4x5 SLR. You need to know those cameras exist and how they work.

MC [Fabulous for handheld photography.](#)

TP Yeah, they're great. I do lots of portraits with the Graflex SLR. You want to be able to move around and not have to be encumbered by a tripod. I brought it from a celebrity shooter in Hollywood.

MC [Peter Gowland use to make a lot of those kinds of cameras.](#)

TP Do you know of his twin lens 4x5? I've never seen one but I've seen pictures—what a monster. It was huge. My 4x5 RB Super D which is the top camera that Graflex made. The lenses have bubbles in them but they work great. Can you imagine selling a new lens today with bubbles in it? Who would buy it?

MC [What do you do when you're on vacation? Do you avoid photography or do you actually go on vacation to take photographs?](#)

TP I take a camera whenever I travel. I went to Seattle on business recently and stayed a little longer. I took maybe twenty shots. I visited a friend of mine on the weekend. You're going to laugh but I took pictures with my cell phone! They're kind of fun.

MC [When you travel that light, do you avoid bringing a tripod or do you always bring a tripod?](#)

TP I always bring a tripod, even if it just a table-top tripod. Some of my students were saying they can't afford a tripod. I said, boloney! I brought three little tripods into class, the cheapest of which I bought for two bucks. The most expen-

sive table top tripod I had was thirty five dollars which is a really nice one with a ball head. I've actually mounted a 4x5 on that believe it or not. I told them, "don't tell me you can't afford one".



View 5-051121

MC [You can always place it on a car in a parking lot at night if you want.](#)

TP Yeah, I also told them get a beanbag. A little pillow or similar.

MC [Do you really enjoy teaching? Is this a kind of thing that's turned you on?](#)

TP Yes, I enjoyed teaching. It makes you look at yourself. I find though, that you are working hard for the top 20% of the students. So you have to really want to do it. I realize now that teaching is really underappreciated in this country. You

have to spend so much time outside of the class time preparing.

MC [So whose photography turns you on these days? Besides your own of course!](#)

TP Thank you. I like the work of Ed Burtynsky. He does a lot of 4x5 and 8x10 — a lot of industrial work. He just did a book on industrial China which is wonderful.

MC [How would you compare his work to Robert Polidori's?](#)

TP It's similar in style to Polidori's. I think Burtynsky's work is tighter. Polidori is more "off the cuff". I like his work a lot, too. Polidori's book on hurricane Katrina and New Orleans is inspirational. I was in New Orleans about six months after Katrina and it was a tough place to wander around. I took a panoramic camera with me that trip and that's all I shot. A Horizon, a little 35 mm.

MC [Did you ever do anything with those negatives?](#)

TP No I didn't. I wandered around some nasty areas where there were cars on top of houses — a lot of strange things. It's similar to what I did two weeks after 9/11 in New York City. There I used my press pass which got me into Ground Zero at night. I took shots in there and used my little table top tripod. You could see flames licking up and the eerie glow that we have all come to recognize.

MC [Were these night shots?](#)

TP Yes.

MC [What about New Orleans?](#)

TP New Orleans I did daytime. I also did some twilight stuff. I was there for other reasons, not specifically to shoot. It was a holiday for me and I visited friends. It's tough when you're traveling with non-night-photographers to do night photography. I won't subject people to that anymore.

MC [Do you subject your wife to it?](#)

TP No. No. I've been married ten years and she's never been out with me night shooting. She loves my work. She likes to see the final product.

MC [I find that when I travel with my wife,](#)

[we basically have to go our separate ways, it just doesn't work.](#)

TP When I travel with my wife, I'm not going to go out there and hustle and try to do a lot of



things. At the holidays, I did a family portrait with the Graflex 4x5 SLR in black and white, it's wonderful. I did 8x10 prints for the whole family and they just loved them. Black and white at the holidays is so old school! I did some night photography over the holidays, too. It was fifteen degrees at night and blowing snow. Here I am with the only camera I had with me, my Graflex with only black & white film. I did some night shooting, some twenty minute exposures. They came out great. But who's going to want to be out in fifteen degree weather for twenty minutes standing around?

MC [That's cold – I know.](#)

TP You walk around with your hands in your pockets. You have a coat on and gloves and you're cold, and the camera's out there doing its thing.

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MC The Norwegians have a saying that there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.

TP So true.

MC I've only shot once at night when it was twenty degrees or so and windy, and it was so uncomfortable. It takes a certain kind of person to really, really, really want it.

TP My brother rendezvoused with a Canadian night shooter, Larrie Thomson. Larrie goes out in ten, fifteen, twenty below zero, doing his night stuff and popping flashes. He shoots in the Canadian and American Midwest at night, even in the winter. He keeps the engine running in the car all night. A great night photo he has is of a low shot of this icicle coming out of the tailpipe, attached to the ground. Ice coming out of the tailpipe of a running car!

MC It seems as if there is very tight knit group of people centered around the Nocturnes website and all these offshoot sites. They seem to all know each other.

TP I went to the Academy of Art with Lance Keimig and Tim Baskerville and we are all still shooting at night some twenty years later. Unfortunately, with family, businesses and geography, we don't really talk as much as we used to. The web has shown us all that there are more people out there doing the night thing than we ever could have imagined. Just check out the site, www.thenocturnes.com and see that there are literally hundreds of night shooters out there working.

MC That's such a fabulous resource.

TP Things change, times change. I think that

over time the night photography fad will wane. Some people are going to get upset at my saying that. So many people are into it — just check out flickr. We'll see somebody's experimenting, they



get images that they like, put them all online. You have the TV screen on the back of the camera. It's the new Polaroid— instant feedback. If a scene doesn't work, you shoot again. If you don't like the color, you fix it later with Photoshop. But that's exactly the problem.

MC I think it comes down to a recipe that involves a little bit, quite a bit of luck, but also in the end, patience. And the whole technical side has disappeared because it used to be that that was the most onerous aspect of it. You really did have

to know your film, know your processing, know your reciprocity and now you don't have to.

TP Right. And once it becomes easier, it loses its charm and its mystery.

MC Alas. Easy seems to be what everyone wants these days.

TP I've been in a doldrums earlier this year and had a difficult time getting pumped up — I haven't shot nearly as much as I did in '06. But I'm starting to get back into it.

MC What helped you out of this doldrums?

TP One thing was figuring out ways of reducing the physical challenges of schlepping gear, especially with all the "security" requirements at airports.

MC Give me an example.

TP I'll take a 4x5 with me to New York for a couple of weeks for a shoot, and ship the film ahead. Then I'll ship it home. I'll carry the lenses and field camera with me just because I don't want to ship them — too much invested in the set the lenses that I have. The airlines have been unfriendly to photographers lately — and most everyone else, too.

MC When you ship film, you mean via FedEx?

TP Yes, I FedEx the film to the hotel and write "hold for (my name)-future guest" on it. With better hotels it's in my room when I arrive.

MC Do you also FedEx back to your processor?

TP I use to do that but I don't anymore, as the new lab I'm working with is uneasy processing film without explicit instructions. I just ship it back to myself. My old E6 lab shut down in January, so I have to drive quite a ways now. Even though it's only eight miles away it can take forty five minutes with traffic. It's part of life in LA.

MC This might then explain another reason you like night photography: There's less traffic late at night.

TP Yes, but the labs have cut their hours back. You used to be able to drop your film off at a lab at 10pm. When I moved to LA, about a dozen years ago, there were three or four photolabs in LA open

twenty-four hours. I could go in there and drop film off when I finished shooting at two o'clock in the morning. And if I needed more film, I could get it there, too. It was great — very handy.



MC Do you tend to shoot with an assistant or do you still tend to shoot solo?

TP I like to work alone, I can concentrate more and twilight is a key thing for me which takes a lot of concentration and you have to move fast. Twilight is really only a few minutes for the camera. I really like twilight. You'll see that in my images. People say: "oh it's so hard shooting that time of day" but when you get the work back and it works, it's great. I like to be able to see nice warm tones mixed with cool ones. Eight months ago I tore a rotator cup in my left arm — a typical photographer injury. All the fifty pound camera cases that have been shouldered finally takes its toll. I have this hard case with wheels on it with handles. It's great but it weighs seventy pounds when full. People said:

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well it's got wheels on it, what's the problem? But you've got to lift it in and out of the car!

MC Exactly.. I myself need to be careful about my back — chronic back pain.

TP So if you have to go anywhere without the car you might have to go up and down a short flight of stairs or you've got to lift this thing up and carry it up and down, up and down. Camera cases and bags are a very personal thing. That is why there are hundreds to choose from. Currently, I am using several 15-25 pound cases to ease the weight per case. I transfer what I need to a small shoulder bag and work fast and light. It's a lot easier to maneuver and I bring a little dolly which I pile everything onto. I have a soft sided bag. I bought an old Zone VI white bag on ebay popular in the seventies. Remember those?

MC Of course! They were great.

TP You can see the white bag easily at night, too. They're perfect for a field camera, two or three lenses, the light meter, and accessories. And then what I do is I take the field camera out, I put it on all the holders right where the camera was. And that's very easy to transport.

MC Don't you use a Toyo Field?

TP I've owned a Toyo Field. I found it did not have enough movements for me. I'm now using a Canham DLC45, as my field camera.

MC That's a sweet piece of machinery there.

TP It's a nice camera, with virtually unlimited movements and only about 4 ½ pounds. It can take my 58mm lens to my 450mm lens with the same bellows. All told, I have about a half dozen large format cameras. The Canham is the one I travel with, since it is so compact and light. I already mentioned the Graflex, which is a working camera — it's not a toy. I also use Toyo G mono-rail cameras, one with a short rail and bag bellows and another with long rail and pleated bellows. These cameras are heavier but very sturdy, especially in any sort of wind. I also have a Toyo G 8x10. It can be a challenge keeping a view camera



perfectly steady for an hour — wind or not. I also don't mind heavy tripods, so I use studio ones, both Gitzo and Slik.

MC Your pictures seem to have a certain kind of view. Neither seriously wide nor very long. You seem to prefer a middle ground. It would appear that you're shooting a lot of, somewhere between 90 and maybe 210 and that seems to be the bulk of your work.

TP You got it. The 90mm is probably the most commonly used lens for me. I travel light. Next month I'm going to be sailing on a freighter — what they call a bulk carrier: a thousand foot long ship full of sand.

MC This is a project for yourself then?

TP Yes. It starts as a commercial job, but I use it to shoot a lot of personal work. The client is

giving me full access but they want to see what I shoot. They said, "if we like it, we'll buy it. If we don't, we won't". I like working that way, because it lets me shoot what I want, rather than being encumbered with a long shoot list. Clients don't really know what they want until they see it anyway. But most importantly, I am getting access to a very interesting and rarely seen industrial environment; a working ship at sea. I'm paying for my own airfare and expenses. I'm going to be taking a 4x5 and my most common, lightest set of lenses. It will be in a carry on bag the same size of most serious 35mm photographers. Digital equipment, too, of course.

MC I guess where I was going with this is I don't sense that you use a lot of movements other than your normal architectural ones of rise and that

kind of thing. But maybe you do much more.

TP I do a lot of architectural work. Shooting, working with architects, lighting designers, contractors and landscape architects. I do use movements. With the Schneider 90 XL, for example, I can shoot a ten story building from across the street, architecturally correct. That's pretty impressive to be able to do that. Photographers from the 1950s (or earlier) would be envious of such capabilities. And I use movements in other work where the viewer might not be aware of it.

MC I particularly like the image of train wheels in the foreground.

TP That image has front fall and front tilt.

MC Now the pictures that seem, I don't know if I could use the word typical, but the ones that I've come to know you for are these images where you embrace color. In particular View 8A-061019, which looks like some sort of... I don't know what the heck it is. But it's got a sunset and night skies, it's got green lights and orange lights. It's fabulous.

TP That's a ship loader. That thing runs back and forth and that's the conveyer system you're looking at there. People look at that, they ask: what is this? It looks like some sort of space ship.

MC Oh it's wonderful. It's so mechanical; Great composition, beautiful coloration. It's a treat for the eyes to look at.

TP It was a fun shot to do. And I do like the mix of colors and saw it as such just before I shot it. There's no filtration on that either.

MC Again you're not trying to correct anything. You're just embracing it for what it is. However, when you do color correction, are you doing it with filters or are you doing it processing or a combination?

TP Most of them are done in camera. I'm an in-camera kind of guy. It has always been my goal to get as perfect a transparency as possible to begin with. But you rarely get it right on the

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money. It's almost impossible to get the last five points because you have variables such as the age and brand of the bulb, or even how dirty the light fixture is. And all that's going to affect the coloration. So I usually get it within five or ten points. And then when I scan them, I'll fix it with Photoshop. Take, for example View 8b-061017.

MC Okay, yeah, that's more of a foreground piece with the ship in the background.

TP That one, for example, has CC30M magenta filter to fill out the sodium vapor green that would cast on that and I wanted to make it look natural. Well I was off by a few points and it was a little greener than I would have liked, so I added a little magenta in Photoshop when I scanned it. If I were to reshoot it, I would use a CC40M filter.

MC Do you ever use graduated filters?

TP I use those quite a bit.

MC Perhaps the foreground's too dark, too bright, you'll try to darken that a little bit?

TP I have 1, 2 and 3 stop neutral density filters. Two is by far the most common. I've had them for years. I use Lee Filter Holders most of the time. But I do have other brands because they have different densities and different characteristics that I like.

MC Do you shoot Polaroid?

TP I do one sheet of Polaroid for almost everything. I use Type 55. It helps to see glaring problems, such as forgetting to stop down, the bag belows obstructing the view or whatever.

MC Sure.

TP But really what I'm looking for is not the exposure per se. Instead I use it for composition or to check for critical focus with the negative.

MC Maybe something your eye couldn't see quite well.

TP Yes. Also I can check for flare or to check for an objectionable object you did not see on the ground glass. It's difficult to see everything on that ground glass at night.

MC You'll look at the 55 negative itself then?

TP Exactly, I look at the negative. And then I



View 1a-070108

save the print. It also gives me something to write on, such as exposure info, or any particular important data.

MC Do you throw the negative away?

TP Yes, I throw the negative away, but it served its purpose.

MC Makes sense because you're not going to bring the sulfite bath with you.

TP Well I've actually done that before. But the exposure for the print is different from the negative, so you have a stop, stop and a half more exposure for the negative, which means you really have to burn two Polaroids — but if you have to do that, then you could just as easily shoot traditional film. Type 55 Polaroid is now about \$5 per sheet.

MC In order to make the view, do you have a little light table that you can put this wet negative

on or how do you do that?

TP I carry at least a half a dozen flashlights of all sorts. It seems you can never have enough flashlights. I have a really nice flashlight with twenty little LED bulbs in it. At the moment I'm driving an old Volvo wagon and I work out of the back. I shine an LED flashlight on a white cardboard and that's my light box which I can use to check the focus and anything else that I want to see. I have portable light boxes too, but that's just another item needing batteries.

MC And you'd also have to deal with clearing of the negative.

TP It's a hassle in the field. The right way to do it is to shoot the Polaroid, and after making your exposure, release the film from the holder using the tab on the Polaroid back, pull it out and pro-

cess it when you get home.

MC Process that separately, right?

TP Yes when I get home, I peel it apart and throw the print away because it's over exposed, but now you have a good negative. I've done that many times. It's a great film. If it was good enough for Ansel, it should be good enough for the rest of us.

MC Well it's an amazingly tight negative — practically grainless.

TP It's old Kodak Panatomic-X film.

MC ASA of 50, isn't it?

TP Yes, I rate it at 50.

MC Accounting for reciprocity, your 160 films are likely rated lower?

TP When I shoot Fuji NPL (rated 160 ISO) for a color negative, I indeed shoot it at ISO100. Modern films have gotten so much better. It holds shadows better and gives a more colorful negative because of a bit more saturation. Reciprocity is really not as important an issue as it once was. Up to a minute or two, there really is no problem with reciprocity with the modern films. At night, I recommend Fuji Acros for black and white and Fuji Provia, and Astia or the Kodak E100 series of films for chrome. All are excellent with reciprocity.

MC Are you pulling your film in order to keep the contrast down or are you just shooting it normally?

TP I pretty much shoot it normally seventy five percent of the time and otherwise, I wind up pushing it a quarter stop.

MC Oh, pushing. Really?

TP I like to push it a quarter because I like that "snap" in the transparency. Unless I have an exposure issue, then I'll pull it a quarter or a half or something at that time. Anything more than that, the transparency gets muddy and dead. But of course in Photoshop you can bring things back. Because of you, Michael, I now shoot a color negative almost always with each view. You taught me that. See I listen to you, too! Back in

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Massachusetts [at the View Camera Conference] you said: shoot a color negative because sometime in the future that's what you're going to be working from. So now I do shoot color negative. There are a few images that print up better with the negative than with chrome film. The View 8-060903, which is an 8x10 shot, on Fuji NPL.

MC Well I'm a big fan of color negatives. The only thing that is always a pain is you have to scan it before you can "see" it, even though I've learned to look at a color negative, it's still not the same thing.

TP I find that I can look at a negative and at least see that the exposure is correct, by seeing details in the shadows and you can still check it to see if something's out of focus. Another one is View2-060831.

MC That's stunning.

TP I used a split neutral density filter with this shot to darken the top because I knew there would be contrast issues. I used Fuji NPL negative and I scanned

then I brought up the green a little bit more on that section. I don't know how to use layers or channels in PhotoShop, but I have people do that for me when I need it. But this one I did myself. And I like the way it came out; it's so much better than the chrome. The foreground is way too dark in the chrome. There's a nice latitude with Fuji NPL. As I recall, it was about 7 stops between the foreground and background in this image.

MC Well you can get nine or ten stops with a color neg.

TP Wow, that much? I figured about seven or eight stops.

MC Yeah, chromes are generally six or seven. But then, as Lance pointed out, there is no such thing as a bad exposure at night. It just looks different, that's all.



View 8-060903

TP Chromes are a lot less forgiving.

MC It's not clear to me where color film is going to go. Clearly professionals are moving completely to digital because they have the clients who demand it and they have the return on investment because they shoot enough volume.

TP Digital is the future whether we like it or not.

MC So that leaves amateurs with either doing black & white which there'll always be somebody to provide black & white materials. Then there's that big question mark over large format color materials and it's not clear which way we will go.

TP What's happening is that the view cam-

era market is moving to serious amateurs and fine art. There has been a resurgence in large format, which I find fascinating and contrary to the digital-only crowd. Your magazine and View

Camera prove that the niche is thriving. I have a friend who shoots architecture commercially one hundred percent. He stopped shooting film over a year ago. He really has no passion for photography. He got into it, and makes a very good living, and has a fancy house. He's done very well. A couple of years ago, I had a one-man show at the Long Beach Museum of Art. All the images were 30x40 inch prints from 4x5 film, beautifully framed, everything first class. My friend came to see the show with me about and said "you really like doing this, don't you?" and I started laughing. I said it's my passion. He said, "you are very good

and you are a lot better photographer than I am". I said, "but you make more money than I do". He said that's beside the point. There is a fine line between commercial and fine art photography and it

is not about the subject, but how it is done and why. When you make 30x40 inch prints, if there are any flaws in that original image, it's going to be right there. Even though it's 30x40 inch print from a large format negative or transparency, people get right up close in a gallery or museum. In one 30x40 inch print in the exhibition, there was with a 6 inch person in the shot. You can read the name tag on his shirt. There's a lot of information in a large format chrome or negative. People are not used to seeing that much detail; they are mesmerized.

MC Sure. I think this is why we shoot large format.

TP Commercially, it's all about money. "Processing" is now done in-house. One person is chained to his desk and they do Photoshop all day: day

in, day out. Processing all the RAW files, burning CD's, whatever the client needs.

MC What other shots do you feel passionate about?

TP View 8-060903, a Fuji NPL color negative shot. The assignment was to shoot a dramatic 2.5:1 panorama.

MC Is your idea is to crop off the bottom?

TP Bottom quarter and the top quarter. They wanted an 8x20 FOOT print.

MC Yikes!

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TP They wanted it for a presentation on stage for a board meeting with the press. I suggested shooting it 8x10 and the client did not know what it was. I told her it's going to cost a little more for the film, but we're only going to do three or four views. I had a drum scan made but they had the print done locally. I never did see the large print, but I heard it was quite spectacular — that size with virtually no grain. You could read details on the ship from a half-mile away. This was shot with a normal lens, 300 mm.

MC Sweet. I hope someone noticed!

TP They told me that people came up on stage after the conference, to look at the print up close. It was actually more information than they wanted. They simply wanted something in the background. Like you see behind a talk show host, where they city skyline view in the background. But I wanted to go all out. They loved it.

MC There's nothing like a little quality.

TP I find quality works well. This was my first assignment with 8x10 in three or four years. Nobody seems to want to do that anymore. Maybe it's the cost.

MC How is business this year?

TP Business wise, this year started out slow for me and I got in kind of a funk. It became hard to get motivated and get out and shoot. It was probably the shoulder injury. Then things picked up and to handle it while my shoulder healed, I've used assistants or interns.

MC Do you like it? Are you just being practical?

TP It's nice. You have probably heard of Julius Shulman, the architectural shooter.

MC Pretty famous.

TP He is ninety-six years old and I see his by-line in the LA Times every couple of months. He's still shooting commercially! And it is hard to believe, but I know that he has a full time person that's glued to him that does everything. And he probably has another assistant that loads the film holders or does the schlepping.



MC Are you describing your vision of how you will retire then?

TP No, I'm not going to be shooting commercially when I'm ninety six years old, sorry.

MC You're going to be sitting on a beach somewhere, maybe surfing, huh?

TP Yeah, right! I can't imagine that! But, I've really learned about the benefits of having an assistant. I think I'll do that more often.

MC You've been working a long time. Do you have many images stored digitally?

TP I have these old dental file cabinets I picked up somewhere that are full of 4x5's, thousands of them, and I have standing metal cabinets with roll film that goes back some twenty years. I have external hard drives, that are 400GB and they are full of photos, too.

MC It's an amazing time because everybody who's any good at all has gigabytes of imagery and it's not just one or two people, it's not one or two thousand, it's one or two hundred thousand people who have the same problem of storage and volume around the world.

TP A photographer friend and I joke that maybe some day some kind of ion rays or something will be caused by a sun flare and it'll wipe all the hard drives and all electronics will crash. It would be very interesting what would happen then. You embraced digital right from the beginning, which I've always been impressed with. I had a neighbor, a young woman in her twenties. A number of years ago, she photographed a wedding for a good friend of hers. When she was downloading the images, they disappeared. They came off the

card, but didn't go into the computer. The card was empty, the computer was empty. The poor thing was in tears. I wonder if the digital images ever existed?

MC Well truth be told, in our day did you or did you not take a whole roll of film with a range-finder with the lens cap on it?

TP But that lens was protected!

MC We've done the same thing before and tears came with that, as well.

TP Many years ago, I was lucky enough to have lunch with Alfred Eisenstadt when I was in college. There were just six or eight of us. He had such a droll sense of humor, even though he was a rickety old man in his 80s. I asked him "what is the biggest mistake you made in photography?" He looks at me and smiled and said there are so many of them. His favorite was during a portrait session of Queen Elizabeth for Life magazine back in the fifties, and he forgot to put film in the camera. We all burst into hysterics. We have all made these sorts of mistakes, but Eisenstadt had an open, matter-of-fact attitude. He also said you will have to make the same mistake at least three times before you really learn it. So true.

MC I myself had a similar situation. First time I used Fuji QuickLoads, I said this is great and I went out to Santa Fe to shoot. So here I am shooting QuickLoads convincing myself that I was pulling them out correctly. And I get back and literally half of them were blank. I spent the next week practicing ruining films, saying to myself: okay, you have to grab it this particular way. I guess I wasn't prepared for it because I had been used to ReadyLoads.

TP The double sided Kodak ReadyLoads were horrible. Like you, I was losing, between a third a half. And it was driving me nuts. Do you know what I wound up doing? I had several boxes of them. I wound up going in the darkroom

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and taking them all apart and just loading them into normal holders.

MC Oh there you go, sure.

TP I wouldn't buy them for years until they went to the single design like Fuji did. Now I have a Fuji back and a Kodak back. I shoot regular sheet film when I'm in town, ninety percent of the time. But when I travel, where I have to get on an airplane and go, then I will shoot QuickLoads and ReadyLoads because it's more convenient.

MC So if you're not going to be doing commercial photography, might you move more towards art photography?

TP I am Michael, I am. I moved towards the art scene in the last couple of years. Commercial photography is leaving me cold, but having the commercial work is a necessity. It gives me the access to the types of environments I shoot for my art.

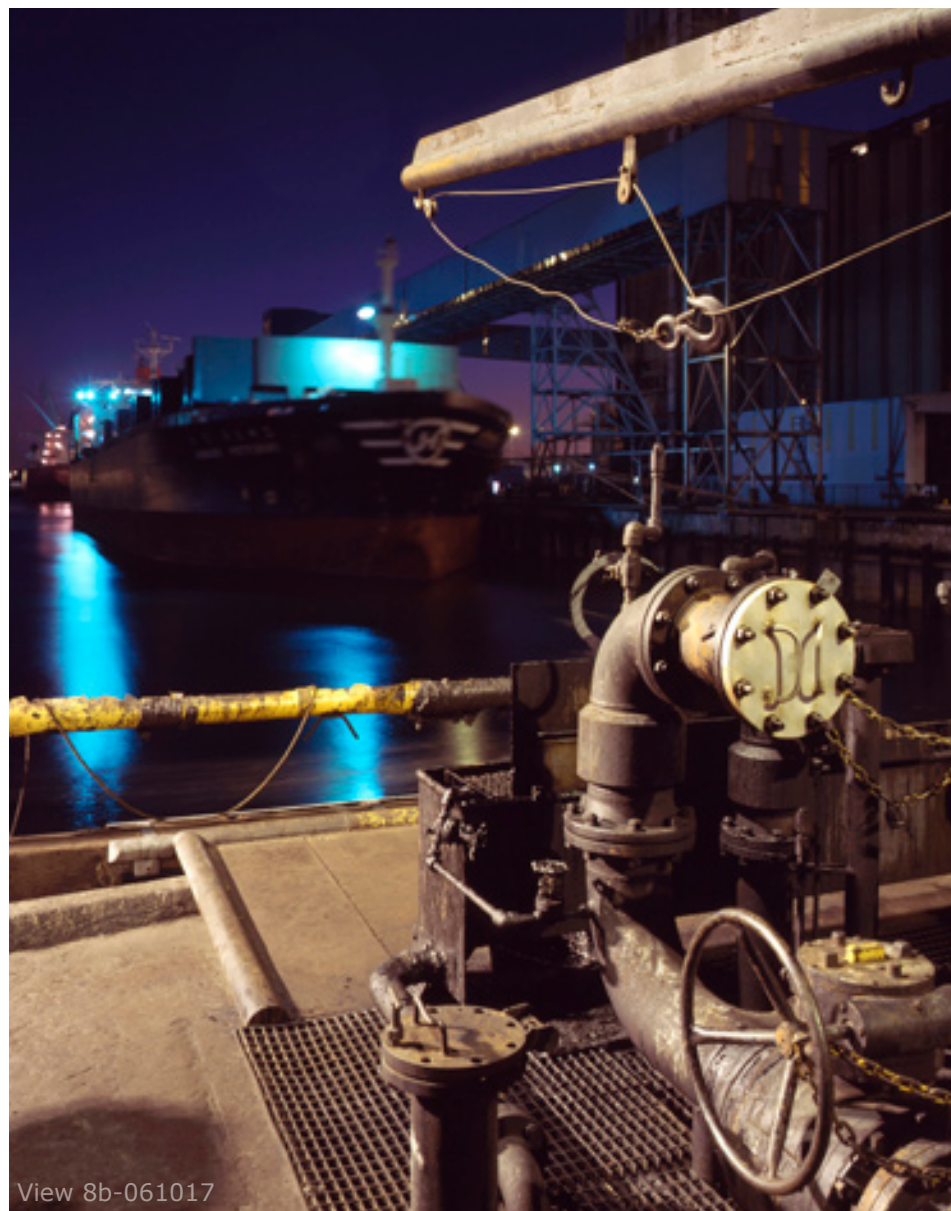
MC We all have our crosses to bear.

TP Unfortunately what many clients are doing now is that they go out and buy a little Canon Rebel or similar, with a semi-wide lens on it, and then they give it to the secretary and say, go out and shoot such and such strip mall or office building. The secretary is happy to get out of the office. They get a couple shots of the lobby, a couple shots of the outside and the inside. They get shots back, download it and it's finished. And the work sucks and they know it. But they don't care.

MC Right.

TP That's the part that's so depressing. I give

them beautiful, gorgeous twilight, architecturally correct, razor sharp images and they say, yeah, but you're billing me to do this. They say it doesn't cost us anything to use the secretary and it's good



View 8b-061017

enough for what we do.

MC Well I've got to say, I've heard this before. In the mid to late seventies, that's when all the new 35's were coming out like the Canon AE1. Suddenly everybody bought a 35mm camera, practically overnight. Whereas ten years earlier cameras were still a mystery to most people. By the late seventies, I remember we came to the same conclusion: that we were getting squeezed out by people who had recently bought a 35mm camera. They could stick in a roll of Kodachrome and if

they were in the right spot at the right time, they could take pretty good pictures. It turned out to be false, of course, because there's much more to photography. But there was some truth to it, too. There were some jobs that went to — I guess 'amateurs' is the right word. I think we're just seeing the same thing today. The whole world is being turned upside down and the strong will survive.

TP I have this particular expertise and it has taken a long time to hone. When I assisted years ago in art school, I did it for an old timer in his late sixties. Most everything was shot with a Speed Graphic. For him his Hasselblad was a small camera. We did product shots for his regular clients, and I'd help him with the lights. Here's a guy who would rarely used Polaroids. He rarely used a light meter. He would know his light situation by experience.

MC You were lucky to have such a teacher.

TP Once when we were outside of a building, I would take out my light meter. He asked, why do you need to meter? And he started explaining to me exposure. We're on the shady side of the building, it's two stops less than the other "sunny side". It was just as simple as that. It was about thinking rather than just measuring. He was definitely "old school", in this age of light meters that read tenths of a stop and automatic multi-matrix metering in-camera. When the Speed Graphics company went out of business in the early seventies, he went out and bought six cameras because he was afraid he wouldn't be able to get them anymore.

MC Many people did the same.

TP When he retired he gave me a few things. I still have some of his photo doodads. He had a blood vessel burst in his viewing eye and it became blind.

MC That is so sad.

TP There's little need for a blind photographer.

MC Is there another book coming from Tom Paiva?

TP I've been thinking about that a lot lately. My work since my first book, Industrial Night, is

so much more polished and of a different character. I get tired of older photos, which makes me shoot more. You get into your mid fifties and it's time to do. I've done well. Financially I'm fine, but

Commercially, it's all about money. "Processing" is now done in-house. One person is chained to his desk and they do Photoshop all day: day in, day out. Processing all the RAW files, burning CD's, whatever the client needs.

I can't retire yet. But at the same time it's time for me to be shooting exactly what I want more of the time. My wife Lee says, we should self publish the book again. I want the new book to be photographs shot really recently.

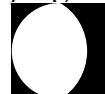
MC That keeps you honest too because in most businesses you're only as good as your last project.

TP Some of this work is weeks old but nothing more than a year and a half.

MC You've been a busy boy.

TP A while back, I did a road trip. I went to a friend's wedding in Portland, Oregon. I decided to drive from LA to Portland, stopping in San Francisco for a job, and my wife flew directly to Portland. I spent three days driving from San Francisco to Portland and I shot every night. Staying in

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little fleabag motels and exploring. At one town, I snuck into a lumber mill. I just walked over a fence that was three foot high and set up my camera in the shadows and I just started shooting. I did a lot of things like that. There are three images on my website from that road trip, so I probably need to do more things like that, but like everybody else who does commercial work, it is tough finding the time to do it.

MC For me it was difficult when I was a studio photographer. I was in the darkroom until midnight every night. And in the studio at eight in the morning. After four years of that, I just got burned out.

TP Wow. I know the head of the department in the school I just taught at, was a food shooter. She did that for about twelve years. All 4x5 and 8x10. She says, "then all of a sudden I just couldn't do it anymore". She started to teach instead as her livelihood and that freed her up to do more shooting for herself.

MC Where do you see yourself heading?

TP I love large format cameras and enjoy the process of film not unlike Spielberg and other similar aged cinematographers who prefer film over digital. There will be a time when you won't be able to shoot color transparency film anymore and the work that many of us are doing now will have a different look and feel than what will be done in the future. My goal is to continue with what I am doing until I can't do it anymore or the film or processing disappears completely. Digital has a long way to go, but it will take over even the fine art market, I predict.

MC Isn't that cool that the same digital revolution that's making everybody pick up a digital camera is also allowing you to self-publish!

TP Actually, I published my first book before the digital revolution, and I would be able to publish a new book regardless of digital camera technology. But the bigger point is that digital is here to stay and is having a profound impact on all of

us. My brother's a graphic artist and his profession is slowly dying for the same reason. People are learning how to use Photoshop and Illustrator in school. They are coming right out of college very proficient in using new technology. It's taken my brother years to learn all this on his own.

MC We've all been there.

TP But now the kids go to college and they take a Photoshop class, a class on PowerPoint, a class on this, a class on that, and they know how to use these programs and when they finish, they're computer savvy. That's why I've come to the conclusion that technology is the new photo school. The photo assistant does Photoshop work now.

MC That's the new darkroom for sure.

TP My daughter's twenty six. Her roommate is a photographer, of the same age, and she does studio work and RAW shooting digital, but she slaves on the computer at night because every image seems to need to be 'fixed' with Photoshop. She does that on her own in her room, on the computer. Between assistant work and Photoshop, she makes a living. It is all about computer now. They are not good or bad, it's just different and it's changing all of our lives, not just for artists.

MC I feel for all of them. My wife and I joke: we both need a wife!

TP Ain't it the truth. But in the final analysis, no matter what the technology or the technical methods, it is about the conveying what you see in a provocative, evocative, and original way. It is about sharing your unique vision through a medium you have mastered and that you push to its limits.

MC

