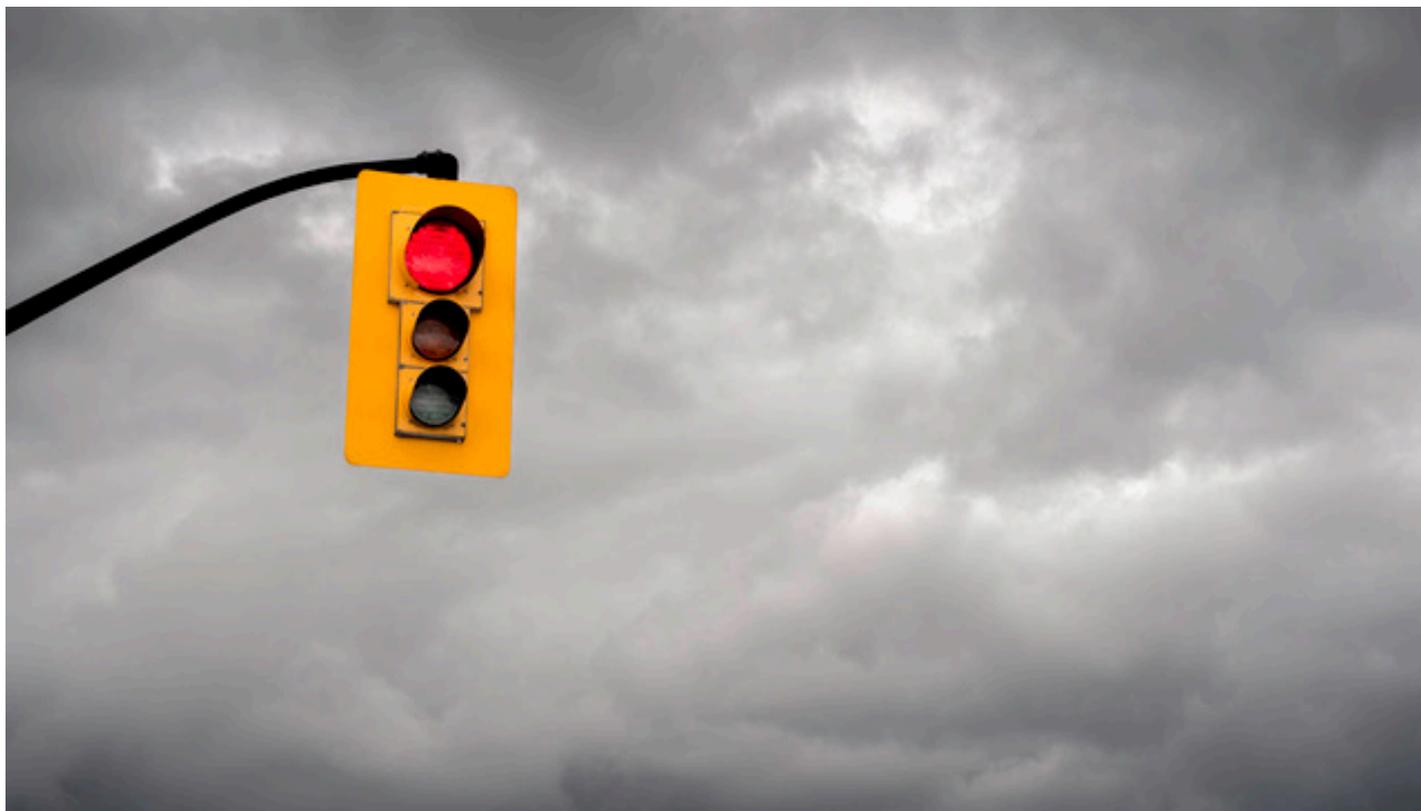


Snapshots

2019-2020
issue 5
for meeting of
November 13
editor
Matthew
Robertson



Looking But Not Seeing, by Bruce Macaulay

How does the sky know when it's Wednesday? Whatever the mechanism, the rain was well timed to catch our third October meeting. Undaunted, many of our stalwart members attended, including some who had recently returned from overseas. This balances the scales nicely, as that is also where several of our regular members were tonight, undoubtedly building new material to present to us.

David Kennedy served ably as our moderator for our first no-seal night of the year. Eight images provided ample time for discussion as we considered the unnamed maker's intent behind the photography. Many of our photographers took this opportunity to reflect on smaller scenes seen clearly, even as we concluded with a grand landscape of a monumental scale. It was an excellent and varied night.

Upcoming Meetings

November 13 - Seal
Michael Anderson
Name and Title Announced

November 27 - Seal
Marvin Cooper

December 11 - No Seal
Tom Yates

At the Toronto Focal Forum we share a passion for the printed photograph: it's our chosen means of creative expression, so we strive for artistic and technical excellence. Our candid print reviews are times for diverse work and different ideas, creating an invigorating, ongoing conversation about our experiences in art and in life. These evenings are times of inspiration, honing our craft of clear vision and communication, enriching our photographic pursuits. This is the measure of our success.

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Prints Shown
30 October

Bruce Macaulay
Looking But Not Seeing

Tom Yates
Fence Post

Matthew Robertson
*A Linear Experience of Speed
and Noise*

Nick Janushewski
Oil Splash

Paul Yi
*A Dream Brush at Dusk, West
Sea, Huangsan Mountains*

Allan Flagel
A Zen Moment

David Kennedy
Calm Evening

Marvin Cooper
Olive Oil, Still Life

Michael Anderson
Perplexity



Olive Oil, Still Life
by Marvin Cooper

Art and Ideas

by Matthew Robertson

We've had two controversial remakes in 2019. Recently we saw a print where nothing but the title was changed, but that title changed the meaning and interpretation of the print. The other was in April, when the title and meaning of the print remained the same, but its execution was fundamentally different.

That both of those prints could be revisited in the previous issue of Snapshots is a triumph of serendipity.

Each contentious remake has sparked great discussions around meaning and art, and that will certainly continue. The Forum's guiding Constitution and Bylaws does define some aspects of our operation with startling precision – the votes needed for a seal, how a remake must be presented, and that this issue of Snapshots must be sent on November 8th – but where it is silent I prefer to err on the side of inclusion. Given a choice between seeing a print and having a discussion, and not seeing a print and not having a discussion, I will choose more art and more ideas every single time.

The context in which a photograph is seen affects the meaning the viewer draws from it.

– Stephen Shore

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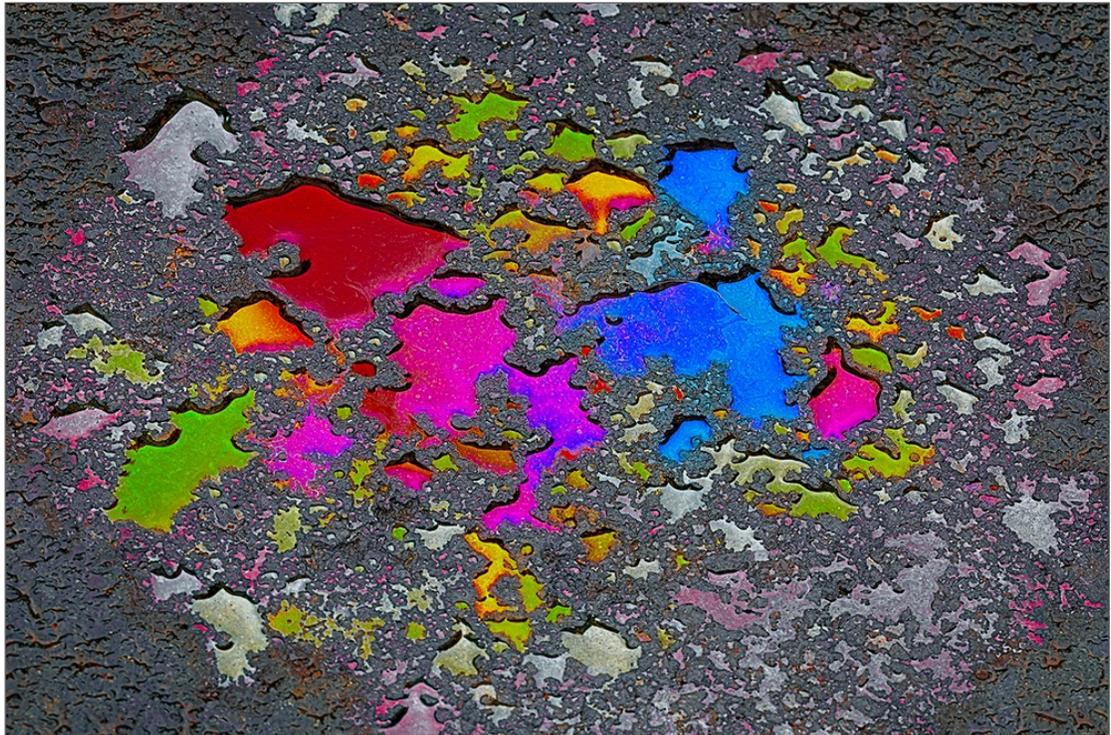


Lightbox Photographs
from October 30, 2019

This issue features images
from our fourth meeting
of the season.

A Zen Moment,
by Allan Flagel

Oil Splash,
by Nick Janushewski

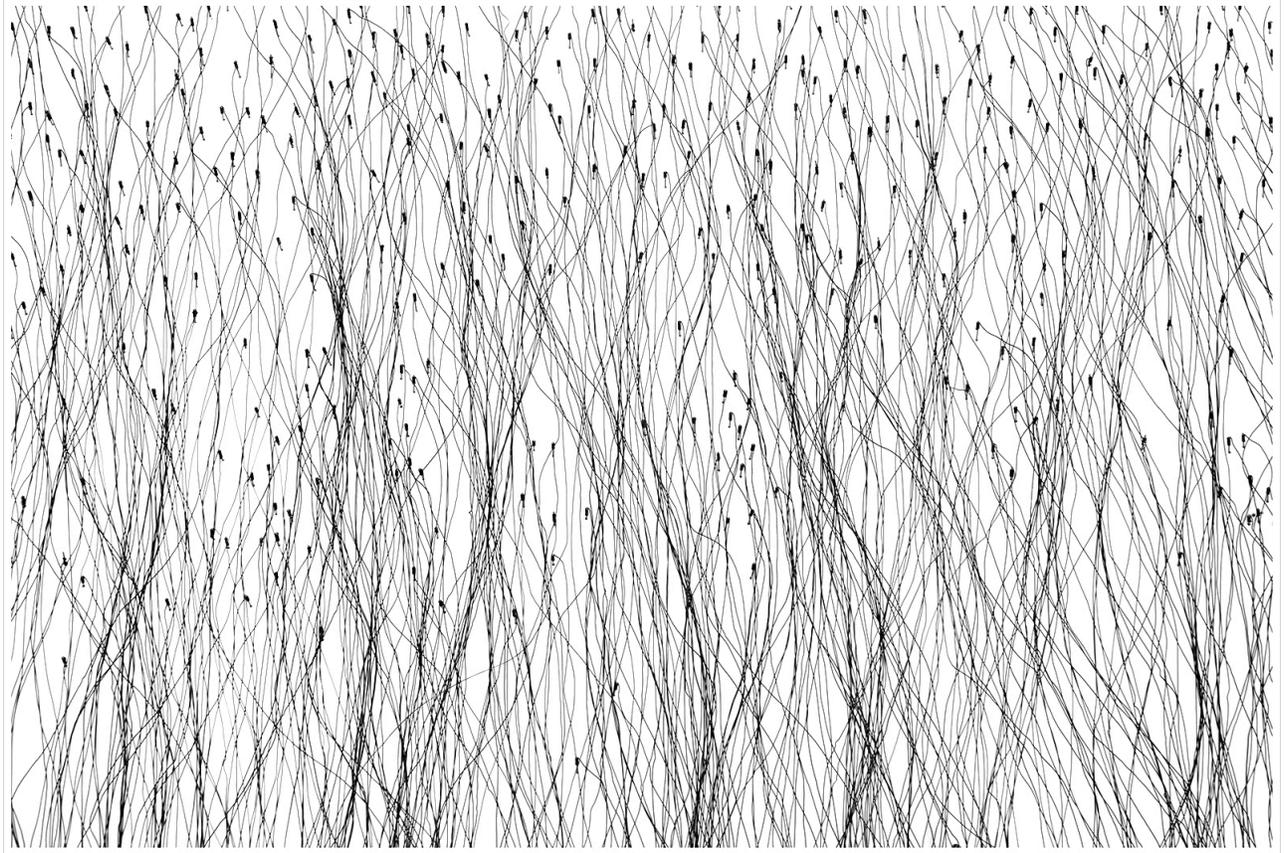


In meditative art, the artist embodies the viewer as well as the creator of the works.

– Chögyam Trungpa

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Dealing With the Inevitable

by Michael Anderson

Unlike some members of the Forum, I have fewer years of making photographs in front of me than the many years I've enjoyed so far. This has had some interesting consequences.

First, I'm increasingly reluctant to spend gobs of money on new equipment. I think it highly unlikely that future cameras will allow me to make significantly better images than my current Nikon D750 – there are only so many pixels you need to make the big prints I like. My Canon printer is sufficiently good and sufficiently expensive that any talk of replacing it would result in some serious marital discussions. And there are fewer years over which to amortise expensive capital acquisitions. Sorry, Matthew, but I'm unlikely to be heading your way anytime soon.

A more critical issue concerns the disposition of the images I've accumulated over the years. I started making photographs in the 1960s, and still have the negatives from that far distant past. Some of you will remember my 'Portrait of a Monkey' – that was made in 1975 or 1976. I don't know the exact number, but I'm blessed with something like 150,000 images in my files.

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Robert Frank managed to distill those 28,000 images into an astonishing 83, representative of an intimate gestalt of his cross-America trip as filtered through the eyes of an outsider.

– Craig Mod

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Dealing With the Inevitable – Continued

by Michael Anderson

What to do with them? That's the question. Without getting morbid about it, there's an inevitable day coming (but not too soon, I hope) when my children will be faced with the impossible task of deciding what to do with this treasure trove. Having thought about this, usually with a glass of wine in hand, I've concluded there are just three options. First, I can walk away from the whole problem. That means that the boys will, with heavy hearts, toss the binders of negatives, the boxes of slides, and the Forum prints in the basement into the dumpster which they're going to need. (They may keep a print or two, but I'm not counting on it.) Then they'll back up the digital files onto a monstrous hard drive which will be left to gather dust in one of their houses until it gets discarded when they've forgotten what's on it or when the technology of the day will no longer read it.

Option two is to make CDs of the images I want to leave them. They can dump everything else, but at least they'll have something, and I've done the work of selecting the ones I want to be remembered by. This is often people's first suggestion, but it's flawed. CDs get put into a drawer or cupboard where they get forgotten as they languish in darkness along with lost socks. Then it takes effort and time to pull them out and load them into a computer so everyone can gather around for a slide show. And computers are increasingly being sold without CD drawers, and tablets never had them, making the CDs available but not accessible. A variant of this is to stick the whole lot on the cloud, but that costs money for the amount of storage we're talking about, and suffers the same disadvantage of requiring an occasion for their viewing.

The option I've settled on is marvellously old-fashioned – books. Books are great. They don't obsolesce, and don't depend on technology that may or may not last as long as they do. They're random access, so you're not forced into a serial slide show. I can include some pretentious prose if I want, which people are free to read or ignore. Once made, they are free to use. And they can be left in the open (on a table or bookshelf), making them available for casual, spur-of-the-moment browsing by family, friends, or the cleaner coming in to vacuum the floor. No set up necessary. And I've done all the hard work; there's nothing left for the boys to do but throw everything else away, knowing that what I wanted to leave is what's in the books.

I've already made two books like this, one a collection of images organized by genre, the other a collection of portraits, the result of a specific project. It's time to make another collection, and with any luck I'll have time and material to make a third. The mechanical aspects are relatively straightforward with services like Blurb or Lulu, nothing to worry about. But designing a book is an interesting process, a good one for winter.

First, you have to select the images that represent the best of what you can do, the ones you hope will make people say "Wow" when they look at them decades from now. That's hard enough, but then you have to arrange them in a way that makes sense. What's the organizing principle that takes you from the first to the last page, what page pairs make sense, what arrangement on the page? That's an interesting process in itself – it's also one that made me think about what I was trying to do with my photographs, to make some sense of something that's occupied me for most of my life. Best of all, there's nothing like the satisfaction of holding the book in your hands. If your experience is anything like mine, people will be nice enough to say it looks great. And it's a little piece of you that will last a long time.

I highly recommend it for Forum members of any age.

Photographs are a family-building exercise.

Sontag notes that children who are well photographed are assumed to be well loved.

This is probably why my sister is still indignant that our parents took so few photos of her as a baby.

– Alicia Elliot