FINAL WORDS

EXECUTED OFFENDERS
TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY
USA

“At 6 pm sharp, the prisoner is taken from the holding cell outside the execution chamber. He is walked into the chamber and strapped to the execution table, face up, his arms extended on supports... The warden usually stands behind the prisoner. The chaplain stands at his feet, with his hands on the prisoner’s ankle. This is when the prisoner is allowed to make a last statement. He speaks into a microphone suspended just above his head.”
— Texas Execution Information Center
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Welcome to issue 4 of Dotphotozine. The editorial team reviewed over 2,000 images for the magazine, including 97 submissions for our first Dotphotozine Award for Excellence in Photography. With so many ambitious photographers having submitted so many fine, diverse images, a few questions arose.

What do we want from photographs- as photographers, as viewers, and as a culture? For us photographers, the answers vary but it’s safe to say we want our images to mean something, to have an impact on the viewers, to express our ideas and visions. The most ambitious might even want their images to spur social and political action, and outlive the photographer.

For viewers, the pleasure of looking at good photographs is often enough. Beautiful is the most common adjective of approval, and in pictures of one’s self, appearing attractive is the ultimate validation. Photographers know this and flatter and cajole their subjects to relax and succumb to the process. Unfortunately beautiful photographs rarely move people to action, and often rely on the cliché of the familiar- the cute baby, pristine wilderness, and the dreaded sunset. Beauty is a powerful tool to be used sparingly and in the service of something more than itself. A fine example of this is by the winner of the first annual Dotphotozine Award for Excellence in Photography, Jennifer Little, whose images appear on page 38.

Like individuals, culture seems to want photographic images to comfort, console and inspire, as if a visual confirmation of our belief system were enough. And if you plan on making a living from photography, you probably need to be some sort of entertainer, providing constant amusement for an insatiable beast. Great photographs might do all of these things, but more often, they make us uncomfortable and remind us of our flaws and vulnerabilities. Then, with the passage of enough time, they are celebrated for their prescience, and for the courage of their maker.

When reviewing the images in this magazine I see all of the above at work. The photographers have high expectations for their images; some focus on environmental issues, arguably the challenge of our time, and others observe themselves and others with the objectivity of a scientist, the skepticism of a detective or the passion of a lover, and some entertain. Many photographers just want to make clear pictures of what’s in front of them, and to a surprising degree, that is often enough.

Ultimately, photography is a vanity project that states, “I saw this, I thought this, I knew this” and therein is its greatest appeal, whether for the photographer, viewer or culture. Images are the artifacts of our time and we want everything from photography, which it eagerly provides.

Thomas McGovern
Editor in Chief - Dotphotozine
Melissa Sala hides in plain view. Combining design and photography, pattern is her camouflage, revealing a coy gaze while obscuring identification. She balances revelation and obfuscation, two things she and photography do very well.
Daniel Madden makes heroic images of buildings, and just about anything else he photographs. Form takes precedent over everything. If all photography is self portraiture as some claim, Madden is the dignified and ordered man of imagery.
Ashley Woods is a dreamer, and her images take us on a journey into a private world of possibilities within the banality of an imaginary life.
In Anthony Nguyen’s photographs, nature is reduced to a secondary player to humanity; something to be contained and controlled, even admired, but less than an equal partner.
The Salon is a wide ranging group exhibition of work by photographers of all styles and techniques that address issues from the obvious to the sublime. The power of this selection is driven by the individual photographers and their visions, and the effect of juxtaposing these disparate images is often the joy of discovering the subtle narrative implicit in each.
The orange/tungsten cast burned on Michelle Cade’s photographs tells us a lot. She is using film and is perhaps unsure of how to load her camera. The first part is true but the second is a ruse, one to move us beyond the perfection of digital imagery and intended to get us to experience scenes and people as if for the first time. Photography freezes time but these enigmatic images suggest a memory slipping away.
Formalism is finding the geometry among the chaos of life. Cody Reed's photographs invite us to sit and ponder spaces of elegance within our everyday lives.
If you’ve ever lost a dog you know the pain and desperation owners who post these ‘lost dog’ signs feel. Eli Fabro simply walked around his neighborhood and noticed one sign after another expressing that loss, but also the hope of recovery that may never come.
Fast food workers are some of the most invisible in our economy. No longer the first job of teenagers, this grossly underpaid workforce produces billions in profits for multinational corporations. Brianna Livings shows us a bit of this reality with the dignity and care this workforce deserves.
Photography is a tricky medium. It seems to tell us something when it shows us something, but what we see is often an illusion, or as in Vittorio Santiago’s case, an illusion of an illusion.
Part of the wonder of nature is simply seeing it clearly, away from the distractions of contemporary life. Ausencio Fernandez Jr. composes his pictures to accentuate form, and in doing so reveals their function; reminding us of the spectacular joy of careful observation.
Sierra Raine White hung out at a large record store in Los Angeles and asked shoppers what they were buying and why. Her very blunt portraits are simultaneously tender and the hand written text beneath the pictures add to the sense that the subjects, their records, and these gelatin silver photographs represent something that is not so much dying as reviving.

“
This is Novena.

She picked this album because it reminds her of her family, especially her grandfather and mother.

Tim Maia

"
Jelly chose this album because she saw the band perform this year, and thought it was the best live performance she has seen. The XX

“I just really love Death Metal”

Dismember

This is Scott.

“This album makes me think about Joshua Tree”

Gram Parsons

This is Avelaka.

Avelaka and her grandmother love this album and listen to it together. She was actually buying it as a birthday gift for her grandmother.

John Coltrane
Travel photography is usually associated with the tourist, and the viewpoint of the casual observer. Steve Beswick’s images transcend place, and continue his exploration of the humorous, odd, and wonderful. His restless eye scans the landscape for points of personal recognition, whether in the California desert or waiting in Heathrow Airport.
The women in Edward Montgomery’s photographs are not happy— they’re concerned, anxious and definitely disturbed by something just outside the frame. This tension is heightened by the tight framing, and often confining spaces the subjects are in. We have to wonder what is about to happen, or if the photographer is provoking this anxiety.
Eugene Tuntunaru is a scientist, preparing for a career in medicine, and comes from a family of photographers. A love of technical challenges led him to find a way to photograph fruit flies with the most basic equipment and no professional guidance. His results combine the wonder of seeing with the precision of careful observation, and are worthy of both *Scientific American* and *Art in America*.
Elisenda Castro takes mug shots. Not really, but whether her subject is wet, dry, with or without make up, her stare suggests the dread of one who has been caught, and is preparing for punishment.
Jennifer Little is the first recipient of the annual Dotphotozine Award for Excellence in Photography for her project on Owens Dry Lake. This lake began to dry up in 1913 when Los Angeles diverted the Owens River to the Los Angeles aqueduct, allowing for the tremendous growth of the city, but at a huge cost. According to Little “By 1926, Owens Lake was a dry alkali flat, and its dust became the largest source of carcinogenic particulate air pollution in North America. In 1998, the Environmental Protection Agency mandated that the LADWP take steps to minimize this dust pollution, which was 100 times greater than federal air safety standards. This dust mitigation program has cost $1.2 billion to date and requires so much water that it may not be sustainable as climate change results in a drier climate for California, which is currently experiencing the worst drought in recorded history.”

These photographs challenge us to look beyond the beauty of the natural landscape to see the environmental devastation looming before our eyes, while there is still time to act. Learn more about Jennifer Little at: www.jenniferlittle.net
Family can be very difficult to photograph, even when we make nice pictures, but even more so when we seek out the complex relationships between members. Notice the lines of sight in Jamine Salley’s family portrait, the expressions and gestures of the subjects, which suggest family dynamics that resist easy answers or easy pictures.
Living a sober life after one of inebriation often requires special care and support. Haylie Roche visited a sober living facility to see what it takes to regain control over one’s self, and to reintegrate into society. She found men bonding over friendship, and living lives of accountability and order, at the start of a new journey.
Truth and photography have an uneasy relationship, especially in self portraiture, when one is always tempted to flatter. Being truthful takes courage that many of us just don’t have. Heather Dunker courageously exposes herself when she exposes film. Her images can be grainy, blurry, poorly focused and exposed, but with a direct gaze and honesty that cuts the viewer to the bone.
Mayte Escobar is twirling on a border, blurring the lines of her transnational identity into a single, new persona that she consciously constructs. She explores this with gusto, a lively energy full of hope and promise and deep affection.
Photographs are infinitely malleable and wonderfully resilient. Allison Linder scratches, burns, paints, tears and marks her photographs as if to exorcise their spirits, and in doing so finds her own.
Jennifer Montenegro is a spiritual artist, finding communion with like-minded people wherever she goes. Bohemian, hippie, yippie and other terms are often used derisively, but her incisive portraits delve into the honest quest to better one’s self, and by extension, humanity.
The idea of an orphanage conjures images of abandoned children left to fend for themselves. While this is probably true a lot of the time, the Mexican orphanage photographed by Cynthia Lozano is different. Apparently some parents of these children have not abandoned them, but placed them here for a better life, and they visit with each other on weekends. There is a sense of order and kindness not just from the supervisors, but between the kids themselves, providing a hopeful contrast to our idea of the typical orphanage.
We are well aware of the difference between nudity and nakedness, which Meganne Krewson uses to her advantage to make awkward photographs of people undressed. Stark studio lighting reveals body hair, moles and bumps as well as luscious skin textures and tone. But the clumsy attempts at modestly provoke mostly laughter, leading us to wonder if the subjects knew they were going to be photographed without their clothes, and if so, why on earth did they agree?
Justin Healy likes dive bars, those funky places free of restraint and judgment, when a few too many drinks are not quite enough. Even as we age and leave behind some behavior for the respectable life, the nostalgia for an indulgent time is hard to resist.
Patricia Miller’s concert pictures bring us up close to the performers as one would expect, but her crowd pictures do even more. We see scores of cellphone cameras and the blurry little images on their screens. We live in a time where the live action in front of us is less important than the image we might make to share with our friends, and have to wonder if the audience would remember this night if not for their pictures.
The cliché ‘the eyes are the window into the soul’ might need a reboot after seeing Olivia Favela’s pictures of lips. Other than a dental hygienist, who would know they were so individualistic and would suggest so much about us, while hiding so much at the same time?
Melissa Avery’s photographs of welders and her images of a freshly burned hillside examine fire for its creative and destructive energies, how it can be controlled and what happens when it cannot.
How can the richest country in the world allow children to live in poverty, or worse, on the street? Gabriella Casasola’s images provide no answers, but sting the social conscience by clearly and compassionately showing that reality.
According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, there were 16,238 homicides and 39,518 suicides in 2010*. We hear daily news reports about murders but rarely about the tragedy of suicides unless the victim is a celebrity. Travis Cicchetto’s images are all the more shocking for portraying this tragedy through stylish compositions that suggest film stills. We wonder why this subject has become the focus of his work and even fear this might be something real for him. Contemporary culture is steeped in images of violence to the point that we read them as intentionally provocative, and droll, but with so many suicides touching so many lives, these images bring the reality of that tragedy uncomfortably close.

*2010 was the most recent year for data.
La Mark Milan's smoke filled photographs are fantasies of his imagination, which may be at least partly cannabis induced. As marijuana rapidly gains mainstream acceptance, the artist is free to explore not only its psychoactive properties, but its aesthetic as well.
Religious faith is a tough thing to photograph without reducing it to simplistic clichés. Kendra Allen makes picture of LDS (Mormon) church members during blessings, missionary work and socializing. It’s wonderful to see into worlds one knows little or nothing about, and even better to have the opportunity to show one’s own world to outsiders.
Keen observation and juxtaposition are hallmarks of Jerrall Thompson’s photography, regardless of subject matter. His images of a friend with whimsical tattoos are funny and irreverent, and complimented by the juxtaposition of a hideous green velour chair and skateboard deck portrait smirking out from between the legs.
Andrew K. Thompson makes unique objects from photographs, cutting, sewing and directing our attention to selections within his images, always reminding us that these photographic objects are connected to both real and imagined worlds.
It is hard to reinvent something so ubiquitous as a photograph but Andrew K. Thompson is on a path to forget everything he knows about the medium and to see it with the fresh eyes of a naïf. By sewing, bleaching, painting and doing just about everything but following the rules, he is seeking a new way to see the photograph and the world.
Jose Contreras Jr. photographs the city of Redlands, California with a sense of awe, as if he’s never walked down those streets before. His fresh eyes remind us of the power of vision and the joy of making pictures, even of the most ordinary and familiar places.
Well made photographs are full of signifiers, a configuration of symbols representing our culture, community, and individuals. These are not always obvious and we train ourselves to read both the overt and the hidden clues to what a photograph shows us. Maeghin Stockwell’s photographs are densely packed with code but also function on the visceral level where they are a pleasure to view. Her formal compositions juxtapose and contrast chaotic elements, subtly reveling in a passing bus through a canyon of skyscrapers, a parking lot glowing orange under a leaden twilight sky, and the jumble of graffiti on a wall perfectly framed by two triangles, one from the structure’s pediment, and the other from the sky. These clues not only tell us about these places and communities but about the artist, whose vision is finely honed and transcendent.
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