

Todd Weinstein photographer

A Personal Narrative

In 1966, while still a high school student in Detroit, Michigan, I turned what I thought was a worthless negative into an image that won a state scholastic award. Through the technique of cropping I discovered new ways of seeing, new ways to contemplate and explore an image. In 1969, I was accepted to Detroit's Society for Arts and Crafts (now the Collage for Creative Studies) and supported myself by assisting Dick James, a prominent commercial photographer. He taught me that good commercial work is creative and need not interfere with one's personal artistic vision. When I received a scholarship for my second year, I made a decision regarding my future artistic growth: I traveled to California and New York City to investigate other art schools, only to discover that they were either too commercial or too elite for my taste. I stayed in Detroit where I became one of the first photographers for *Cream Magazine*, a national music publication. I also organized a group exhibition for the Detroit Public Library, "Ten Eyes in Washington," that documented the Vietnam War protests and featured 15 of my photographs.

In the fall of 1970, I left school to come to New York City. I wanted to study with the best photographers and to immerse myself in the creative energy of the city. I freelanced for Mel Dixon, who had been an assistant to Richard Avedon and Hiro, and I apprenticed with Harvey Lloyd, an important innovator in multimedia presentation who had worked with Alexei Brodovitch, one of this century's most important art directors. I also met Andre Kertesz, Irving Penn, and most significantly, Ernst Haas, whose friendship and professional taste was a major influence. Through Haas I attained a balance between commercial and personal work, as he helped me apply a private vision to commercial endeavors.

In 1973, having completed my apprenticeship, I co-established Dove Studios, Inc. to develop multimedia programs for clients like AT&T. I also founded Todd Weinstein Productions to pursue personal projects, creating multimedia shows for museums and corporations, such as the Detroit Institute of Art, Rockefeller Center, New York Telephone, and the New York State Department of Parks and Recreation.

In 1978, owing to the success of my commercial work, I was forced to make a decision regarding my future direction: either enlarge the business or scale back to allow room for artistic expression. Influenced by the balance exemplified in the work of Ernst Haas, as well as by friends like Louis Stettner, Helen Levitt and Kertesz, I chose the latter path.

It was becoming apparent to me at this time, that slide film severely restricted the growth of my personal expression, which was focusing more and more on the spontaneous. It was my experience shooting the Winter Carnival de Quebec in 1977 and 1978 that convinced me that slide film was inadequate for fully capturing the exhilaration of outdoor events with people in motion. Experimenting with high-speed color negative film, allowed me closer to the diversity of personal expression I was after. I was now capable of recording the comedy and desperation of the human condition in all its colors, textures and immediacy, at all times of day and night, in any light situation. In short, I could live with my camera.

Throughout the 80s, I refined this mode of expression and exhibited my work regularly in such places as the Midtown “Y” Gallery, New York University, the Joseph I. Seagram & Sons Collection, Pace/MacGill Gallery, Avery Fischer Hall, and in my own Union Square Gallery. The essence of this street work is collected in my book, *Personal Journalism: A Decade of Color Photography, 1980-1990*. My work is also in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Public Library, Museum of the City of New York, Detroit Institute of Art, and the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. A calendar I was commissioned to do for Canon in 1990, “Windows of Dedication,” served to show how I could combine my personal vision with a commercial project.

I established the Union Square Gallery in 1980 as an artist-run exhibition space dedicated to presenting emerging and known artists working in various media. The gallery offered an alternative to the commerce aspect of other galleries. In its 10 year existence, the gallery presented scores of shows and served as a social and artistic nexus for an ever growing community of photographers like Louis Stettner, Sid Kaplan, Ed Grazda, Eugene Richards and other emerging artists. Although I raised money from community sponsors, the gallery was primarily funded through my own resources.

I have been working in Germany for the past 20 years on a project Darkness into Light: Re-emergence of Jewish Culture in Germany, which consists of 55 photographs and a computer generated slide show. another exhibition called The Thirty-six Unknown consisting of 36 images which is more abstract, symbolizing the thirty-six righteous people who live in every generation and who keep the world together. My work can add insight into the Jewish culture that is moving forward in post-Holocaust Germany.

I have also continued to teach over the years, carrying on the “inspirational critique” I learned from Ernst Haas, encouraging individuals to develop their own personal visions. Among the places I have taught are the Tisch School of Photography, the Maine Photographic Workshop, the International Center of Photography, Queens College, the Pratt Institute, and the Fashion Institute of Technology and Berliner Technische Kunstschule in Berlin, Germany.

For over 40 years as a photographer, my personal vision has developed in response to the world around me. For me, photography is a way of seeing, or as Ernst Haas said, “It’s dreaming with open eyes.”