

In 1969, still in Detroit, I studied Photography Todd Weinstein

A Personal Narrative

My life in photography began forty-nine years ago, in 1969, in Detroit. I was a high school student fresh to the technique of cropping and managed to turn what initially seemed a worthless negative into an image that earned a state scholastic award. What follows is what followed: a full and blessed life of, as my mentor, Ernst Haas described photography, "dreaming with open eyes".

Photography at the Center for Creative Studies and supported myself by assisting Dick James, a prominent commercial photographer. James taught me the vital lesson that commercial work, while creative, didn't prevent or injure personal artistic vision. The following year, I became one of the first photographers for Cream Magazine. I also organized a group exhibition for the Detroit Public Library, "Ten Eyes in Washington." The exhibit documented Vietnam War protests and featured fifteen of my photographs.

In the fall of 1970, I left school and moved to New York City. I freelance as an assistant for Mel Dixon, who had been an assistant to Richard Avedon and Hiro. I apprenticed with Harvey Lloyd, an important innovator in multimedia presentation. I met Andre Kertesz and Irving Penn. Most significantly, I met Ernst Haas. I became Haas's assistant in 1972, a post that lasted fourteen years. Haas added to Dick James' 'art coexisting with commerce' lesson by teaching me how to apply a private vision to commercial endeavors. In 1973, I co-established Dove Studios, Inc. to develop multimedia programs for companies. AT&T was an early client. I also founded Todd Weinstein Productions to pursue personal projects. I created multimedia shows for museums and corporations, including 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 reached a crossroads. I either needed to expand the business to guarantee growth and wealth or scale the endeavor back so that I could pursue my artistic vision. Inspired by Ernst Haas, as well as my friends Louis Stettner, Helen Levitt and Kertesz, I chose to seek a better balance between my soul and my wallet and scaled back the company.

The choice immediately proved itself true. After shooting the Winter Carnival de Quebec that same year (1978), I became convinced that slide film was inadequate for fully capturing the vivacity of people participating in outdoor events. With some experimentation, I found that high-speed color negative film allowed me to capture, at close range, the diversity of personal expression I was after. I could record the comedy and desperation of life 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 work is collected in my book, *Personal Journalism: A Decade of Color Photography, 1980-1990*. In the introduction to the book, Ernst Haas wrote, "To capture, within a moment, the essence of [New York's] tragic comedy needs a heart, a soul, and a well-reacting trigger finger . . . The pictures of Todd Weinstein prove he possesses these."

In 1980, I established the Union Square Gallery as an artist-run exhibition space dedicated to presenting both emerging and known artists. The gallery presented scores of shows and served as a social and artistic nexus for an ever-growing community of photographers and artists. Although I raised money from community sponsors, the gallery was primarily funded through my own resources. In a celebration of the gallery's tenth and final year, Gregg Masters wrote, "The longevity of the gallery is a result of Todd Weinstein's devotion to championing work that is beautiful and tough, searching and personal."

In 1994, I was invited by the German government to be an artist in residence. This led me examining my familial and religious histories. I began work on a six year project, "Darkness into Light: Re-emergence of Jew Culture in Germany." The final presentation consisted of fifty-five images and a slide show. The project eventually led my photographing the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps and to further documenting contemporary Jewish life in Germany and Eastern Europe.

In 1995, while traveling in Poland, with stops at Cracow and Auschwitz, I began photographing abstract faces that I saw hiding in the shadows of different locations. These 'ghost' pictures became a set of thirty-six photos titled, "Thirty-Six Unknown" a reference the notion in the Talmud, the oral tradition of Judaism, that world required a minimum of thirty six righteous individuals in order exist. In later lore, the thirty-six hidden ones have the power to save the world. They arrive at times of great peril. I was sure I found them hiding in Cracow and Auschwitz. It's as if they wanted us to know they were there. The "Darkness into Light" project opened me to examining the tolls of history, both communal and personal. The "Thirty-Six Unknown" brought healing. I am continuing this healing by photographing for the organization "One by One" which aid Jews and Christians whose lives have been deeply affected by the Holocaust. Throughout all these years there have been exhibitions, teaching seminars, book publications and collection purchases on the artistic side as well as the building of a strong and noted client's list on the commercial. Here are some stats that give an idea of the breadth of the two endeavors.

On the commercial front, I've dealt with more than 65 major clients. The list begins with American Express, Trish Brown Dance Co. and Canon and continues through to WR Grace and Western Electric. The list includes some serious initials: CIT, DKG, EDS, IBM, NBC and YMCA. My work has appeared in 21 magazines, including Ad Week, Forbes, German Life, Popular Photography, Time and Life. I've also photographed for 17 design firms.

More importantly, on the artistic front, I've had 11 one-man exhibitions. I'm particularly proud that, since 1999, "The Thirty Six Unknown" has been shown in seven different galleries in cities that include Detroit, New York, Vienna and Grobzig (Germany). I've been in 5 two-person exhibitions, one of which was in Paris (2000) and another in Rome (2000). I have been a part of 26 group exhibits. My work has been reviewed in various magazines over 20 times. My work has been accepted by twelve major collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art and the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. There have been 3 books of my photos published.

Most recently I had a major 30-year retrospective exhibition at the Detroit Holocaust Center, which included my most recent work in progress The photographs of the 55 biblical Prophets. I have also continued to teach, 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, Fashion Institute of Technology and doing workshops internationally with the BTK Berlin, Germany and Ostkreuz Schule Berlin Germany.

Todd Weinstein/page 4