Post-Visualization and Combination Printing: The Influence of Photographic Process on Contemporary Photography

Kerri Harding

Catherine Pagani, Ph.D.
Professor of Art History

Artist and teacher Jerry Uelsmann pioneered the theory of Post-Visualization. By examining the work of Uelsmann and applying his theory to the work of Mike and Doug Starn, Tamara Smelley, and the author, a connection can be made linking Post-Visualization to the creation of combination prints. Post-Visualization allows photographers to rethink images and manipulate them in the darkroom according to their needs, in order to express themselves—refuting the commonly held belief that photography is simply a mechanical process that does not allow for creativity.

In "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image" Hubert Damisch wrote, "Theoretically speaking, photography is nothing more than a process of recording, a technique of inscribing, in an emulsion of silver salts, a stable image generated by a ray of light."[1] This definition of photography strips away many of the implied attributes of the medium. It is not necessarily the truthful recording of a particular object at a particular moment in time. Many artists defy the conventions of the medium by using combination printing to address complex ideas and emotions. By printing multiple images on a single sheet of paper, they challenge the idea that one negative equals one photograph. Using these techniques, photographers can move beyond simply recording the world around them to express internal concerns.

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[1] Hubert Damisch et al., "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image" *October* Vol.5, Photography. (Summer, 1978), http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0162-2870%28197822%295%3C70%3AFNFAPO%3E2.0CO%3B2-F

Post-Visualization theory encourages photographers to be open to re-visualizing the final image at any point in the photographic process.[2] This theory is integral to the creation of combination prints and is a counterpoint to Previsualization, developed by Ansel Adams (1902-1984), who believed that the photographer should be able to visualize fully the finished image at the time the shutter is squeezed.[3] Post-Visualization is more concerned with the creative process than a given aesthetic and allows photographers to use the process that fits their artistic goals best.

Photography since its inception has had two branches, the first being "pure" or "straight" photography and the second being "creative" or "experimental" photography. The first group of creative photographers were hobbyists who explored the medium shortly after the invention of the Daguerreotype in the late 1830's. The second wave were the Photo-Secessionists who were in vogue during the early 1900's. The third wave was centered around the Bauhaus and image maker Lazlo Moholy-Nagy in the 1920's.[4]

Although straight photography has long been the most popular form of photography, this is not to say that there were not creative photographers in periods other than these. Throughout the entire history of photography, there have been artists and hobbyists working with experimental techniques. Creative photography did, however, enjoy periods of immense popularity in which artists received much critical attention and financial gain from working with experimental techniques.

Edward Steichen (1879-1973) and Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) made significant contributions to the advancement of photography as an artistic medium by founding the Photo-Secessionist group and publishing the magazine *Camera Work* in 1902. While other artists of the time saw photography as an aid to painting, the Photo-Secessionists saw it as an art form in itself. Lyle Rexer states in *The Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave in Old Processes*, "The Photo-Secessionist declared photography's artistic self conscious and independence from documentary reality."[5] The Photo-Secessionists laid the groundwork for photography as an art form and set the aesthetic standards. The images they created are visually dense and painterly.

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2 Jerry Uelsmann. "Post-Visualization" 1967.

3 Jack Watkins, et al., "Visionary Creator of the American West" Geographical 74, no7 (July 2002), http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=7&hid=123&sid=d5726983-563b-4dec-8a9d-38fcf4d0b27e%40sessionmgr106

4 erry Uelsmann. "Post-Visualization" 1967.

5 Lyle Rexer. The Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave in Old Processes (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc 2002):13.

As a reaction to the Photo-Secession, Group f.64 was formed in 1932. The name of the group comes from the smallest possible aperture setting on a large format camera. Setting the aperture at f.64 would create an image in which the most clarity is possible, with the greatest depth of field. Group f.64 advocated the use of "straight photography" which attempts to depict a scene as realistically as possible without the use of manipulation. Steichen did not believe objectivity could be produced in a photographic image, stating, "In fact every photograph is a fake from start to finish, a purely impersonal, unmanipulated photograph being practically impossible. When all is said and done, it still remains a matter of degree and ability."[6] Even Ansel Adams, a founding member of Group f.64, heavily manipulated his images in the darkroom and developed a system for printing images based on grayscale called the Zone System.

For the most part, pure photography has been the dominant form, with creative photography coming into fashion in cycles. However, this began to change in the 1960's. Professor and photographer Gay Burke says "[n]ow in photography anything goes."[7] This open attitude toward photographic possibilities is due in part to the work of Burke's teacher Jerry Uelsmann.[8]

Uelsmann was born in Detroit in 1934. He first became interested in photography while working on his high school newspaper. After receiving a BFA from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1957 he went to Indiana University to obtain a Master's of Science in Audio-Visual Education. By the time he completed this degree he was disillusioned with the field of creating education films. He stayed at Indiana to complete an MFA in photography, and in 1960 he began teaching in the art department at the University of Florida.[9]

Uelsmann first gained critical acclaim in the early 1960's with his photomontages, combination prints built and layered in the darkroom. The use of photomontage is almost as old as photography itself--and was pioneered by artists including Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901) and Oscar Rejilander (1813-1875). To create a photomontage, several negatives are assembled and printed on a single sheet of photographic paper. Often the words "photomontage" and "photocollage" are used interchangeably, but

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6 Ibid., 25.

7 Gay Burke, interviewed by author, digital recording, Tuscaloosa, Al., 16 July 2007.

8 Ibid

9 Jerry Uelsmann. "Jerry Uelsmann." Available from http://www.uelsmann.net/. Online; accessed 12 04 2007.

they refer to different processes. A photocollage is the cutting up and gluing together of photographs which technically does not require the artist to have actually taken the photographs. While the processes are different, the artist in both cases disregards the rule of straight photography. A. D. Coleman says of these artists, "Regardless of which approach they embrace, they all alter or combine photographic imagery in ways that require a healthy irreverence for the documentary integrity of the original negative or the inviolability of the print."[10]

Uelsmann's photographs are often described as being surreal, and in them he creates a world which is both realistic and irrational. Figure 1 is an example of his work. His masterful printing techniques seamlessly blend together things which cannot actually occur, to create what he calls "personalized realities."[11] In his photographs, boats hover above water, people walk on clouds, and faces emerge from rock formations. The images are believable because of Uelsmann's masterful printing and the implied documentary qualities of photographs. Uelsmann creates a world in which the unexplainable can occur. His images confuse the viewer and prompt questions to arise: How is this happening? What does this mean? The break from the expected reality of a photograph occurs because "[m]ost people

Figure 1: Jerry Uelsmann, *Untitled*, silver gelatin print, 1969. Copyright © by Jerry Uelsmann. All rights reserved. Printed with permission of the artist.

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[10] A.D. Coleman, foreword to Photo Synthesis by Jerry Uelsmann (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992).

[11] Jerry Uelsmann, interviewed by author, digital recording, conducted on phone, Tuscaloosa, Al., 24 July 2007 (see appendix for transcript).

tend to think that when photographers make pictures, they must depict something that could in principle also be described in words," Peter Bunnell says in *Silver Meditations*.[12] Viewers of photography are used to being able to assess a picture and say "That is a wedding" or "This is my house." Uelsmann's images defy the characteristic of straight photography and leave the viewer at a loss for words to describe the scene.

Uelsmann wants his images to be responded to on an emotional level primarily. When asked if it is important to create a sense of mystery in his work, he replied by saying "…it is not the task of the artist to resolve life's mysteries but, if anything, to generate more of them."[13]

Uelsmann uses photography to explore the world and questions surrounding him. Themes and images recur in Uelsmann's work. Humans' place in nature presents itself through his combinations of the nude and the landscape. His use of the play of light and dark and of solarization is often interpreted as a preoccupation with death. The use of hands in his work alludes to common themes such as "holding the world in one's hands." He has also paid homage to artists and teachers who were influential in the development of his creative career.

Uelsmann rarely talks about the content of his photographs and prefers to leave interpretation up to the viewer. He has quit titling his work for the most part, because he found that people looked to the title for insight into the meaning of the image. He says that "In the visual world, a lot of the time you are creating things that are very hard to articulate, very hard to say exactly what's going on, or what it means."

For Uelsmann, the techniques that he uses to create photographs are akin to the way that a writer would use grammar. When a person reads a story, he or she should be focused on the content rather than being impressed by the author's ability to spell. Likewise, when a person views art, he or she should respond to the image rather than the technique. Uelsmann, however, is not shy about discussing technique and even outlined his methods in the book *Process and Perception*.

Uelsmann employs up to eight enlargers to create his combination prints, a process he envisioned while waiting for some of his prints to wash. He realized that he could place negatives in separate enlargers and move his paper from one to another instead of using only one enlarger

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[12] Peter Bunnell, introduction to Silver Meditation by Jerry Uelsmann (Dobbs Ferry: Morgan & Morgan , Inc, 1975).

[13] Jerry Uelsmann, interviewed by author, digital recording, conducted on phone, Tuscaloosa, Al., 24 July 2007.

and changing negatives between separate exposures, as he had done previously. This allowed him to speed up the process of printing.

In 1965, Uelsmann presented his theory of Post-Visualization to The Society for Photographic Education. Finding Ansel Adams' theory of Previsualization to be restrictive and impractical, he proposed that the negative is only the starting place for creating a photograph. Instead of using the darkroom merely as a means to a photographic end, Uelsmann sees it as a place to explore the possibilities, much like a painter would approach his or her studio.

Post-Visualization was born out of Uelsmann's experiences at the University of Florida, where he was the only photographer on the art department faculty. He spent time talking with other artists in other media and saw they had a dialogue with their materials. They engaged in in-process discovery; that is, they composed images as they worked. Uelsmann observed that painters and sculptors were free to admit they did not have a complete vision of what they meant to create when they started working but, rather, figured this out as they went along.

Although Uelsmann sought to break with the philosophy of the "purists," he saw the quality of the work they produced as something to admire and aspire to. The Zone System, for example, a technique for printing photographs to achieve optimal tonal value, was developed by Ansel Adams. For Uelsmann, photographers such as Adams and Edward Weston (1886-1958) set the standards for high quality printing.

When Post-Visualization was presented, Uelsmann was the only notable artist working in this manner, so his work was the sole example by which to judge the merits of his theory. This put Uelsmann in the position of a radical although that was never his intent. He simply had become bored with straight photography and the limitations it imposed, and sought to create photographs in which he could express himself.

Photographers Mike and Doug Starn (b.1961) cite Uelsmann as an influence early in their career. Although the work of the Starns looks very different from that of Uelsmann, they have similar theories on how photographs can be produced. Critic Andy Grundberg says of the Starns, "Like Uelsmann the Starns wanted to break out of the confining format of the single image print, and they wanted their work to address issues beyond a precise description of the world."[14] The Starns create composite images and often print a single or series of negatives on multiple sheets of paper.

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[14] Andy Grundberg. Mike and Doug Starn (New York: H.N Abrahms, 1990), 26-27.

They combine traditional processing techniques as well as incorporating digital images and print on a variety of papers.

Mike and Doug Starn are identical twins who have been working together on photographs since they were thirteen years old. As teenagers they took classes at Stockton State Community College with instructor Steve Roberts. The Starns call Roberts an influential instructor who told them to "Think about your paper." Often in photography paper is viewed as merely a support for the image, but that short sentence encouraged them to use their paper as an integrated part of the image.[15]

Figure 2 is a photograph created by the Starns. While it is possible to identify a moth as the subject of this image, it is portrayed in an unconventional manner. The photograph has been printed on several sheets of mulberry paper and then toned. The separated pieces were assembled into this final image. The Starns sought to challenge the idea of art being in mint condition by causing intentional imperfections in the art. These works were also pinned directly to the gallery walls as opposed to being framed.

Figure 2: Mike and Doug Starn, *Attracted to Light 1*, Tea stained sulfur toned silver print on Thai mulberry paper. (c) 2008 Mike and Doug Starn /Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. All rights reserved. Printed with permission of the artists.

When either Mike or Doug Starn exposed the film for this image of a moth, they did not envision the final product but, rather, explored the possibilities along the way. For the Starns, Post-Visualization and in-process

15 Ibid., 24.

discovery are vital components of the creative process. Like Uelsmann, they spend a great deal of time in the darkroom composing their images.

Mike and Doug Starn both shoot film on their own and then work together in the darkroom. Early in their career, they worked primarily with black and white printing techniques and toning. Together, they have developed a method of toning that is unique to their work: they use a sulfur solution which washes away much of the emulsion, leaving behind a silvery and translucent image. They now incorporate digital images and use a variety of paper including Thai mulberry and tissue paper. One critic says of these newer prints, "The end result of this skillful integration of new and old techniques is an object that transcends traditional mediums, poetically embracing the power of a visual language to communicate ideas."[16]

The Starns prove that photography is not simply a mechanical process of recording but, rather, of having creative control over every step of the process. They build custom frames and supports for their images and often hang exhibitions themselves. They tend to arrange their shows in "salon style" with images covering the walls. By doing so, they disregard the modernist convention of framing all of their images in standardized frames and placing them at eye level.

A further example of combination printing is the work of Tamara Smelley (b.1984). She completed a series of portraits of her family during the 2007 summer semester at The University of Alabama and wanted to include a portrait of her grandfather who has passed away. She began doing so by including photographs of her grandfather in still life scenes, but this did not have the desired effect. She felt as though the pictures within a picture were getting lost in the still life scenes.

Several of Smelley's images are straightforward gelatin silver prints. Smelley had also been working on a less conventional form of photography using Polaroid film and, at the suggestion of her instructor, began combining the two. Examples appear in Figures 3 and 4.

These images show part of her family property. The inset images which appear in muted color are Polaroid transfers. The combination of these two processes helps to convey the presence of the family members seen in the Polaroid images. For Smelley, combination printing allowed her to express ideas that she could not address with standard photographic processes alone. When she shot the black and white film, she had in mind how she wanted to assemble the final images, so her work is not strictly

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[16] Visionary Anatomies, http://www7.nationalacademies.org/arts/Starn_Visionary_Anatomies.html

Figure 3: Tamara Smelley, *Untitled*, gelatin silver print and Polaroid transfer, 2007. Copyright © by Tamara Smelley. All rights reserved. Printed with permission of the artist.

Figure 4: Tamara Smelley, *Untitled*, gelatin silver print and Polaroid transfer, 2007. Copyright © by Tamara Smelley. All rights reserved. Printed with permission of the artist.

post-visual. She was open, however, to using creative techniques and embraced in-process discovery. The use of combination printing allowed her to express ideas that were difficult to convey with straight photography. Also worth noting is the encouragement on the part of her instructor to use nontraditional photography to explore personal matter.

While Post-Visualization is a well-structured theory of producing creative photography, it is not necessary for the photographer to be aware of the theory to make combination prints. Figure 5 is from a series that I completed in the fall of 2005. At the time, I was not aware of the theory of Post-Visualization and was only vaguely familiar with the work of Jerry Uelsmann. I was interested in environmental issues relevant to my community and sought to create images that dealt with these issues. I wanted to portray the overwhelming presence of factories and refineries in what once was swampland. I collected a catalogue of negatives of area factories and public parks. While I was shooting the film, I was not sure what my final images might look like. Once I had collected a significant number of negatives, I then began my work in the darkroom. Like Uelsmann, I find working in the darkroom to be an enjoyable experience and was approaching it with openness to the possibilities of in-process discovery.

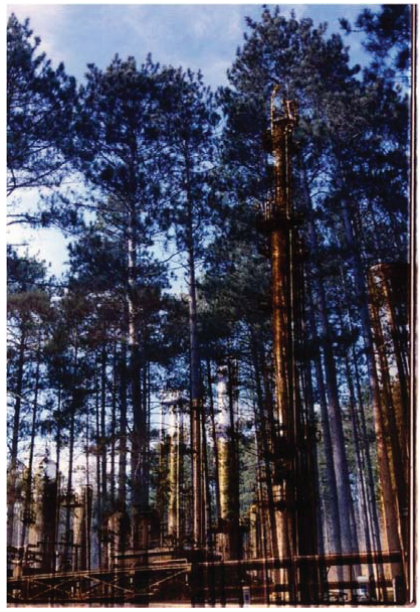

Figure 5: Kerri Harding, *Untitled*, color photograph, 2005.

By layering two negatives together and printing them simultaneously on a single sheet of paper, I was able to bring together nature and industry in a powerful way. At first glance, they appear to blend together seamlessly, but, on closer inspection, it is possible to see where one ends and the other begins. When printing two color negatives together, it is very difficult to get a realistic color balance. However, I did not find the odd coloration to be a problem. It was, rather, an unanticipated benefit to the creative process that I had chosen. I felt that the eerie color helped to underscore my artistic goal, which was to portray my discomfort with the omnipresence of industrial pollution.

The importance of Post-Visualization is that it represents a shift away from the rigid standards of straight photography. While young artists and students may not be consciously thinking about which theory they subscribe to, they are allowed to approach photography as a creative endeavor. They are free to express their ideas. Art is often an intuitive and emotionally based process. Those who post-visualize embrace the idea that photography is not limited to a sort of mechanical representation of the world but can also be used to express their personal realities.

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Appendix:

Interview with Jerry Uelsmann, July 24th, 2007

Kerri Harding: I've recently read your paper "Post-Visualization." In some ways it's difficult for me to imagine your theory as being radical. At what point did your work, both your photographs and your ideas, begin to gain acceptance?

Jerry Uelsmann: It is difficult for me to go back to that time period, but back then straight photography ruled the world, and so the heroes of that time period were people like Cartier-Bresson and Ansel Adams. So, what I was proposing was really revolutionary. Although there had existed in the world of art an experimental tradition from the beginning. People at the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, and others, constantly explored options with photography. It's interesting because right now there are some people who still don't accept the idea of manipulation. Certainly the introduction of Photoshop and the digital revolution that has occurred has generated an audience that is very respectful of the idea that one can invent images that they find personally more meaningful. It's a tradition that comes out of art. All other disciplines don't get their image in an instant, and there is a certain dialogue as they create something. Painters rarely begin with fully conceived canvases. It's an ongoing process, and I was simply proposing that the darkroom had many options. It could be a visual research lab to explore possibilities. I did have a show forty years ago at the Museum of Modern Art. I must say once that exhibit occurred, it did open doors for me in that, I think, other people were more acceptant of photography. There used to be a bias that photography, that somehow photography, wasn't really capable of being a fine art medium. Of course, today much of the contemporary art scene involves photography, usually in a digital form, but it's definitely there.

KH: Do you think that your photographs helped to create an audience for creative photography?

JU: I don't know. The bottom line to that question is that the photographs have sort of an independent social life. It's not like a performing thing where I'm there to get feedback. You send them out into the world and they come back, and it's not like you heard what people said about them. But the fact is that they did get exhibited, and people obviously responded to them in some form. My hope is that was part of it. I've always said

my concern is when people see these images that they have an emotional response initially. I don't like it when the first question is "how did he do that?" I don't mind that being the second question. It would be like if you read something and said "Well, gee, how did they write that? Look at all of that good spelling and grammar!" That is secondary to the content of the image. Of course, in the visual world a lot of times you are creating things that are very hard to articulate, very hard to say exactly what's going on or what it means. Yet, at the same time, there's a power that the image can have, that alters your consciousness. The classic example for me would be Edward Weston's photograph of the pepper. Once you see that, you cannot walk by the counter in the grocery store without suddenly seeing these normally edible things as aesthetic objects. It expanded the vision of the way we view the world. My hope is that some of the images I've created have done that very thing.

KH: Do you think that photographers and non-photographers view your work differently? Maybe people who aren't familiar with working in a darkroom would probably have the emotional response first, whereas people who have used a darkroom might have the technical questions first?

JU: Yes, I think that's a good point. In certain cases, my work has been more widely accepted when I have been part of a gallery that shows painting and printmaking and other media because they, as you had mentioned, respond essentially to the imagery. But people who have been brought up in a technical photographic tradition, they tend to think in terms of craft. But, that, the whole mythology is that if you know all of the techniques you can make the amazing image, but it's like if you knew the paintbrushes and the color paints that the artist used, it doesn't mean that you would create the painting. You wouldn't ask a writer, "What kind of typewriter or word processor are you using for this?" I think that partly it occurs because technique is much easier to talk about. There are specific answers to questions about technique, whereas when you get into the realm of feelings and ideas, it is much more difficult to talk about.

KH: That's an interesting idea. I've also read that when Mike and Doug Starn first started showing their photographs there were a lot of people who said that their work would be better off in a gallery that deals with contemporary art other than photography. It's interesting that would still occur years later.

JU: What happened historically, back in the sixties there were no photo galleries. So, the emergence of photo galleries or photography museums

was to give a way in which photography could present itself to a broader-based public. But what is happening today is that photography has gained such an acceptance that every major museum in the country has photography exhibits and has sections where they show photography. There is no longer quite the need that we once had to have photo galleries. I think that they are going to fade from the scene. The ones that are still "photo galleries" are stretching the limits of what photography can be. There are photographs that are ink jet prints or different processes, be it even daguerreotypes that they're exploring. It's a changing time.

KH: I think that your work has allowed photographers to think about the darkroom in different ways. Do you think that you have changed the relationship between the darkroom and creativity?

JU: On one hand, I'm still in the darkroom, and I enjoy it. It's a meditative space. It's like alchemy to me. At the same time, I'm totally aware of the digital revolution. I just think the future exists there. Young people, if they can learn that technology, they have many more options than you can provide in the darkroom. The problem you have is that—I have actually been a keynote speaker at some Photoshop conferences and the one thing I usually say--Something good about Photoshop is that it gives you an immense number of visual options. Something bad about Photoshop is that it gives you an immense number of visual options. Part of the problem is that too many choices is almost counter-productive to the creative process, and it's much more limiting. But this is sort of post-rationalization on my part. In reality, I do see the future existing in the computer, but I still think that people are fascinated by the kind of alchemy of watching the print come up in the developer. To me, it's still a mystery. It's magic on some high level. The computer has got its own life. My wife is a digital artist and she creates amazing images. It's not a skill that I have or probably will ever have during this time on the earth.

KH: Do you think there is a strong connection between images that are built, such as photomontage, and post-visualization?

JU: Well, there is a tradition that goes way back. Montages, collage, all of these things lend themselves to being able to alter or create an image that the artist finds more personal. I'm basically a modernist. This, of course, has been challenged by contemporary theory. The initial modernist premise was that the individual expressed themselves through art. It was the uniqueness of the individual that allowed them to come up with these personalized realities. You find certainly in the late nineteenth century where

that begins to happen. You look at a painting and you know it's by Van Gogh. Stylistically and content-wise, it just comes together. I guess I'm a part of that process, but now there are other theories that have emerged, post-modernism and things like that. I'm still locked in to the idea that art is self expression. I guess I'm much more excited about emotionally-based art than intellectually-based art. My wife and I collect folk art. I guess we like it because it's almost always emotionally based. Rarely does the folk artist have some intellectual thing. There is either a religious position or something that made them have to do this. I can connect with that, whereas there are so many things happening today in the art world where it's like the wall label is bigger than the piece of art. You're supposed to read this before you can begin to understand what's going on.

KH: I think that's an interesting divide you set up because, as an artist and an art historian, I think that creating art is very intuitive but as an historian there is a tendency to intellectualize everything.

JU: Well, that's a problem. There is a book by an art historian that dealt with emotional response and how some art works literally made him cry. He was criticized for this because we want to be so analytical about these things and have some theory behind it. There is a lot of craziness in the art world. We have a collector-driven market that causes problems. I've been around long enough to know that there are insane political things that go on. As an artist, this is to me one of the more stressful aspects of creating art. Art cannot afford compromise. Why would you compromise on this thing that is coming from out of you? Once you intersect with the gallery system or the real world, there is all of this business and political considerations that do involve a lot of compromises. I'm not a part of that, but I see that happening.

KH: I've read in several interviews that you find the images that you create that you find most successful are enigmatic. I've read also that you prefer not to give responses about what individual images mean. Is there something about creating a sense of mystery that's important to you as an artist?

JU: Yeah. I think it is not the task of the artist to resolve life's mysteries but, if anything, to generate more of them. You can find quotes from other artists that say things like that. Francis Bacon said that the job of the artist is to deepen the mystery. There is a Gauguin quote that is "I shut my eyes in order to see." I have actually a whole collection of these by mostly older

artists. Critical theory is a new phenomenon. When I studied art history, no one was talking about critical theory. There were all kinds of movements, be it op-art, pop-art, that came, and super stars survived and others fell by the wayside. Now there is all of this critical theory that emerges and there are exhibits where they almost schedule ahead of time what the agenda of the exhibit is to be, and the artists are selected that participate in that. You go from up until the nineteenth century art that was essentially outer-directed, and by that I mean that it is art that served the needs of the church and of the patron and the culture, to art that was inner-directed, that became self expression. But now it seems to me that there are forces that are dragging art back to outer-directed art. There are biennials where they establish a particular theme and they have some curator come in and they, basically, by the artists they select, really are directing what the statement is going to be in the overall exhibit. That's a lot different than individual self expression. It's confusing to me because when I meet people who are cutting-edge artists and they're trying to be part of this scene, they still want you to know that their work is specifically by them. They still want that individual statement to be a part of it, even though a lot of issues they deal with come from other sources.

KH: I've read a lot of articles that describe the importance of Minor White as an influence of yours, but I have also seen that Henry Holmes Smith was very important to your work.

JU: Yes, he was incredibly important.

KH: I'm not very familiar with his work. I could only find a few images of his. What was it about his work that you found to be inspiring?

JU: It wasn't so much his work as his presence as a teacher. Some people are great teachers. He had studied with Moholy-Nagy in Chicago. Henry Holmes Smith made images by pouring syrup on glass and refracting the light through it, so it was very abstract. This is not an accepted form. At the same time, he was one of these emotional, passionate intellectuals, who read all kinds of things and cared about all kinds of photography. Studying with him was intense. I guess the interesting thing for me is when I went to graduate school and encountered him, it was sort of a love-hate relationship. In retrospect, he was my most important teacher. He felt that I had all of these technical skills from Rochester Institute of Technology. He wanted to know more about it. He was envious. It was like it was a craft. At the same, time he badgered me endlessly because, suddenly, he

was saying "What do you believe in? What do you care about? What do you love?" It was all talk about images. He would be intense on that. It altered my perception of photography and really pushed me out into the deep water. I could tell endless stories about this man.

I did a documentary project on my own. I decided that I would go to a slum district near Indiana University that is actually still there, called Pigeon Hill. Well, it's just outside of town. I thought for one day a week for a whole semester I would go and photograph this poor housing area. After I had worked on it for several months and I'd show him contact sheets, Henry Smith says to me, "Go back and photograph every house on the block." I said "No, I've got this one area I'm working in." He just exploded, and he could swear. He made me mad and I thought, "God damn it." So, I took my camera and I went out. I had an old Rolleiflex, and I just walked down this street, every house, I'd just point the camera and take a straight-on shot. Boom, boom, boom. I used to work at the photo lab to help support my going to school there. I developed that film and dried it. The next morning I had the contact sheets, and I went back over there and flung them on his desk. We went and sat down and looked at them. What was happening was, I was photographing this slum district, and there were some houses where people had mowed the lawn and kept things nice, and I was walking by those. The point was, the myth of objective documentary was something else. I suddenly became less enchanted of that as an option. I still have great respect for documentary photography.

When I came to Florida in 1960 from graduate school, I did not want to come to Florida. I was born and raised in inner city Detroit. So, suddenly here is this state that has segregation, and I thought "This is wrong." I initially thought I could do something photographically with that. In the early years here, I photographed people living under what I thought were relatively primitive conditions, and I would go back and give them those prints. There was a point in my mind when it felt more exploitive. I've shown some of these photographs. There was one day that I followed a street singer around, and I still love those images. I love the way that the community responded too, because he would go up and down these streets in this black community. He was blind and played the guitar and had a guy helping him. People would put money in his cup. It was authentic and real. I still cherish that. At the same time, I felt that for me to be helpful in changing the situation down here, and we were fairly liberal faculty, it was much more important for me to show up at protests and other events and sponsor things. Not through my photography. Other photographers came in from other places in the world to try to deal with that. There is a way in which it is helpful when people can see some of the horrific things that

went on. Today most documentation has far greater impact when you experience it on television or on some video form. If you show a photograph dealing with it in an art museum, you are really talking to an audience that is ninety-nine percent in total agreement with whatever cause, if you're a liberal, that you're promoting.

Henry Smith was an incredibly intense guy. It was life-altering to me because I had initially gone on in Audio-Visual Education at Indiana University. I became disillusioned. They were making films on how to treat the American flag, and they were boring and stupid. Minor White had told me to seek out Henry Smith. When I wanted to get into art, he said, "What will you do? You have to be independently wealthy," which is probably true today. There aren't many teaching jobs. In Indiana's art department, art history was in control. Then he said, "Look, you've got to be able to do art history. If you can pass Creighton Gilbert's Early Renaissance in Italy with a B or better, I will let you enroll in the MFA program." I had never had art history at RIT. It turned out that Creighton Gilbert is one of the leading scholars on early Renaissance in art history. I spent the whole summer working. I didn't have the language skills to talk about art. I have to say that this man was very tolerant. I was intent on getting into this program so after a lecture I would go seek out the books that had reproductions that had paintings that were discussed. Then, because I had access to the photo lab, I would go copy them on film and make little prints that I could put in my notes to make references. I worked very hard on it.

I've been quoted as saying art history was the crabgrass on the lawn of art. But it really is the crabgrass on the lawn of art, if it is taught in a way that focuses on the date it was done, in the style, and the name and dates of the creator. There are other ways to teach. Albert Elsen did a book called *Purposes of Art* and did books on Rodin. People were talking about art because they loved it. I did a book recently, about four years ago now, where I pay homage to a lot of artists that have inspired me.

KH: I find that as an art history student, it is taught in a very standardized way, and the canon is adhered to without any deviation. This is sort of a shame because there is great art in everybody's back yard, but there is an unwillingness to look at it.

JU: It is such an open-ended situation in a way. I remember one time I was at some party where I probably had too much to drink, and there was a leading historian there and I ended up in a group talking to him. Finally, I said, "Well, what is history?" And he just looked at me and said, "Well, history is those things that you chose to remember." This is a simple an-

swer but it cuts to the point. There are so many histories of art out there. I now look at a lot of books that deal with the history of photography. Many of those books, they sure don't mention me. There are some that do in a favorable way. John Szarkowski, the former curator at the Museum of Modern Art, just died, I guess, two weeks ago. He was a wonderful man. He is the one who gave me my show in 1967. The same year he gave shows to Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus. In all of the obits that were in the *New York Times*, they mention Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus, because that is the type of photography he eventually felt stronger about. But at one point, I was cutting edge. He showed me the same year.

There are a multitude of histories. There is really yet to be a definitive history that explores a kind of experimental tradition from the beginning of photography. Even in the nineteenth century people were working with gum printing and different photographic processes emulating other arts. It was still very experimental throughout the nineteenth century and even into parts of the twentieth century. There was a point at which media consciousness was set so that you had to define what a media was. Painting was strictly oil on canvas. Photography was the straight silver gelatin print like Ansel Adams and Cartier-Bresson. Sculpture was traditional sculpture. All of that has changed. There has been a reinvestigation of means throughout the whole art world. This is before we have digital art and printing options. It is a very expansive time now in terms of the craft options that are available.

KH: I had a history of photography class a few years ago with a great teacher, at The University of Toledo, and I think she did a really great job of including the lesser-known type of photographs. Do you think that there is a movement now to include creative techniques?

JU: There is a book by Keith Davis on twentieth-century American photography. He is now at The Kansas City Art Institute. I talk to people that are authentic scholars like Keith Davis, who did this wonderful book that I have great respect for, on this history of American photography. He says the problem is that there are these younger art historians coming along, who for them photography begins with Cindy Sherman. I've seen literally in major art magazines, respectable ones, they talk about manipulation of images and they begin with Cindy Sherman. Even if they want to talk about it from a female point of view, we've got Julia Margaret Cameron, and other people who were doing this in the nineteenth century. There is no awareness of that kind of history. I'm happy that there are some people that embrace it. I wish everybody did. Again, it's those things that people

chose to remember. Maybe it will change now with the digital revolution. I don't know. I'm not creating these images to be a part of history. I'm creating them because this is my way of connecting to the world. They are coming out of me. I'm the initial audience for these things. I'm happy that other people can respond to them.

This past year I've had shows. My wife and I did an exhibit in Korea at the Seoul Museum of Photography. I was just overwhelmed at the extent to which these images travel, because they're not political. They are emotionally-based primarily. Any culture can connect with that. I've had shows in Turkey, India, all of these different places. The work travels well.

KH: Sometimes looking at your images reminds me of literature. It reminds me of T.S. Eliot's' "The Wasteland." I think there is so much complexity and symbolism that it is difficult to understand. Do you think there is a connection between photography and other arts?

JU: Yes, but what I like to tell people is that the work is obviously symbolic, but not symbolically obvious. It's sort of open ended. I have trouble understanding Derrida, but the one thing certainly I agree with, there are multiple answers to these images. There are ways in which, people find ways of connecting with them on personal terms. I have an early image done in 1965, and the title of it is "April is the Cruelest Month," which happens to be the opening line of Eliot's "The Wasteland." The reason it had that title, is a friend of mine here in literature, when he saw that photograph, that's what it reminded him of, because it goes on to talk about the seeds beneath the earth. I remember being forced to read, to try to read, "The Wasteland" but I certainly didn't remember those opening lines. In the world of creativity, I think there is a lot of overlap.

People ask me if there are scholarly books that I've read that have had an impact on me. Occasionally I find articles and a couple of books that deal with emotionally-based art. I've always felt that I should tell people that I listen to the Brandenburg Concertos but, in reality, I love the blues and that is basically what I listen to in the darkroom. When I taught, I tried very hard to make a case for all kinds of photography. You can do it on the basis of why the individuals during each time period come up with some of these appropriations or whatever the concept is. But, as an artist, you really have to see what you're doing as being central to your existence. It is foreground. It's not that it is better than what other people are doing. It's based on the way that you connect with the world.

KH: I've looked at a lot of your images, and I've only seen a few which include any color, by toning. Why is that?

JU: Well, it's simple, and this is post-rationalization [chuckles]. There are two key factors. When I was studying photography, back in the fifties, the color processes were not only incredibly expensive, but they were also non-archival. Any color photograph that you could take then, if you taped it to a window and let the sun hit it for a day, it would be gone. Museums did not collect photography until, finally, the Art Institute in Chicago built a vault. An undertaker had to do it because it had to be chilled and dark to store color prints so they would last. Well, in the meantime, we now have color process that is incredibly archival. The other factor is that black and white implies a more thoughtful kind of imagery. I'm not against color. My wife works in color and her images are exquisite. But in my case, I worry about when I have done a few things involving the toning, people responded so much to the color, and I'm not so sure. This is all rationalization on my part, mind you. I couldn't do color photography if I had to. I do collect color photographs. Also, technically, if I had to do combination printing color material, it would be so hard to balance the color between various elements. It's much easier with black and white. That's my excuse.

KH: I've found a lot of articles that deal with your work have a very standard introduction. It starts with "Uelsmann was born in Detroit and then went to RIT..." It chronicles your educational and professional life. Do you think that leaves certain elements of your personality out? Do you think that is a fair introduction?

JU: I think that is something that people can connect with. It's much harder to deal with emotional and other factors. You don't know what role they play. I guess if you're a Freudian analyst, you can go back and try to analyze why some of these things occur. I think it is for convenience's sake people start that way, because it seems logical. I just had a show in Beijing, China and it was a major retrospective, and the one thing that they did that I would never advise doing is that they hung the whole show in chronological order, starting with a print from 1955 going all the way up to 2006. When I saw this show, it was amazing to me because I had never really looked at my work this way. It shows that time and time again, I would go back to the same theme and do it a little different. It's always exciting to me when I see people put things together in creative ways. The idea that a chronological presentation was any good was at the bottom of my list. It turned out to be quite exciting for me to experience the work that way.