

WATERSHED

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Untitled, San Francisco, 1974

DAVID BARBOUR



When I was 18, I travelled to Finland on a student exchange program and worked at the University of Helsinki Botanical Gardens. I dug dirt for 4 months and during this period I started taking snapshots with a camera my mother loaned me. The camera motivated me to go places to take photographs. The camera engaged me in life at a level I had not experienced before. I was truly happy when I took photographs. I built a darkroom when I returned to Regina, bought a Konica 35 mm and announced to my parents that I was going to be a photographer and travel the world. I discovered the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson at the public library, this was the type of photographer I wanted to be.

In 1973, I was accepted to study photography at the Banff School of Fine Arts. After 3 months of photographing rocks, trees and grey cards I travelled to San Francisco with two other students to photograph on the street.

In over 35 years of taking photographs, if I had to choose one photograph that changed my life, it would be this one. This image captured a moment and an emotion that were truly mine. This image told me that I had the abilities to be a good photographer. This image told me that I could see and feel with a camera.

The circumstances of that moment was quite simple. I was wandering Union St. with my two friends and we sat down on a ledge to take a break. The street was busy with people and traffic. I looked to my left and a crowd of people were crossing the street, a young woman with a long coat attracted my attention. It was a warm day and she stood out in the crowd. The light was contrasty and not very good but I stood up, checked my exposure and thought of a quick photo of her passing me by. The crowd did pass by but the girl turned to cross the street, she stopped and leaned against the street light and looked back at me, she smiled and I took a photo. The light was terrible, the streets were full of traffic. She went to the intersection, turned, tilted her shoulder and I took another photo. As soon as the 1/250th of a second shutter was released, I realized that everyone else had somehow disappeared. In that fraction of a second she was a solitary figure on a street corner. One exposure and the traffic resumed and she crossed the street in a crowd of people moving in that direction. I turned to my friends and said that I just got a great photo. They turned and said of what. That fraction of a second not only captured an image but my feelings of what life was like.

The photograph was selected for the first survey of contemporary Canadian photography, "Exposure" at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1975 and purchased by the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board.

Untitled, Havana, 2008

Balancing assignments, teaching and personal projects are my primary focus today. I am at a place where I feel some degree of contentment as well as the usual stress of being a free lance photographer. Two young children ground me in life. Along the way, I made the choice of being a good father. Throughout my career, personal projects have always influenced my assignment work and vice versa. Moving to Ottawa in 1980, I worked for the National Film Board Still Photo Division as a exhibition producer and then for the Canadian International Development Agency. For 10 years, I travelled to over 30 countries for CIDA to document government funded projects and daily life. All the photographs were taken with Kodachrome and are still available today in their photo library. It is hard to explain the impact of this experience on my life. I wanted to do that with my own work. While wandering the streets in Montreal, I photographed a pro and anti Castro demonstration. This event motivated me to travel to Cuba in 1994 and to date I have gone 14 times to photograph for myself, complete assignments and led workshops. Havana is a destination that I choose to challenge my abilities as a street photographer. It is an amazing place to document life and it is very easy to travel to.

This photograph was taken on my last trip to Havana in March 2008. I chose this image as it illustrates my approach on the street to this day. I prefer black and white over colour as it emphasizes subject and I integrate strong compositional elements into the frame as it brings some degree of order and visual beauty to the moment.

Life is interesting if you choose to look for it.

BIOGRAPHY

David Barbour studied photography at the Banff School of Fine Arts in (1973-1976) and has worked as a photographer, photo-editor, curator and teacher. His career has been a balance of assignments and personal projects, highlights of which include: A World Press Award in 1986, and and a Mid-Career Canada Council Grant to continue his personal work in Havana, Cuba in 2000. David recently photographed the September 2005 feature story The Valley for Canadian Geographic and one of his photographs from Havana is featured in the 2006 Magenta Foundation publication, Carte Blanche which surveys contemporary Canadian photography.

Exhibitions

2008 Heritage Canada, group photo, 2 prints

2007 Home-one person, La Petite Mort, Ottawa
Festival X-Home-one person, Ottawa School of Art
Carleton University Art Gallery, three photos, Streetwork-group exhibit
Festival X-City of Ottawa, group exhibition

2006 Magenta Foundation Book on Canadian Photography, one photo
Ottawa Art Gallery Rental Department, three photos

- 2005 La Petite Mort, group
Mississauga, Havana, Courtney Park Library, one-person
Ottawa School of Art, group
- 2004 The Body, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, group exhibition
Bar 56, one-person
Enriched Bread Artists, group
Ottawa School of Art, group
- 2003 Havana, Ottawa School of Art, one-person
Portraits, Ottawa Art Gallery, group
- 2000 New Acquisitions-Ottawa-Carleton Regional Art Gallery
- 1999 Havana, two person with Bruce Gilden, Carleton University Art Gallery
- 1998 Doctors without Borders, photo auction
- 1997 The Ottawa Art Gallery, group exhibit from Canada Council Art Bank
Elmwood Juried Art Exhibition, group
- 1991 Margaret Cameron Studio, group
- 1989 Other Children, Development, two group exhibitions, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography cosponsored with CIDA
- 1986 World Press Award, international traveling group
- 1985 Gallery 101, group
- 1983 Hong Kong Museum of Art, group
Thomas Gallery, Winnipeg, two person with David McMillan
Latitudes ad Parallels, Winnipeg Art Gallery, group
- 1982 Saskatoon Photographers Gallery, group
SAW Gallery, group
University of Ottawa, Visual Arts Department
- 1981 Edmonton Art Gallery, group traveling
Agnes Etherington Art Center, Kingston, one person
- 1979 Five Manitoba Photographers, Winnipeg Art Gallery, group
Manitoba Archives, two person
Three Canadian Photographers, National Film Board, traveling
The Winnipeg Art Gallery, group
London Regional Art Gallery, group
- 1978 Sweet Immortality...Portraits, Edmonton Art Gallery, group
Canadians, Mount Saint Vincent University, group
Clouds and Water Gallery, Calgary, group
Janet Ian Cameron Gallery, Winnipeg, group

- 1977 Three Manitoba Photographers, Winnipeg Art Gallery, group
21 Canadian Photographers, NFB, Ottawa, group
The Winnipeg Art Gallery, group
- 1976 Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, group
- 1975 Exposure, Art Gallery of Ontario, group
- 1974 Gallery on the Roof, Regina, group

Collections

Carleton University Art Gallery, Canada Council Art Bank, National Archives of Canada, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa-Carleton Regional Collection, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, Edmonton Art Gallery, The Banff Center, The Photographers Gallery

To view a visual portfolio, please visit www.davidbarbour.com