

Ron Salvage – Photography

By Brian Lynch

This is another in a series of interviews with Historic Kenwood artists as part of highlighting our “Neighborhood of the Arts” and our soon to be Artist Enclave Overlay district.

Did you receive any formal training in photography? How has that helped or hurt your work?

Yes. I’ve had a lot of training over the years – mostly at the University of California, San Francisco. I studied with Ruth Bernhard (she was part of the Edward Weston group who focused on shadow and natural light). I studied environmental portraiture there. When I take portraits using natural light, I prefer the subject to be in their own setting.

I’ve been taking pictures since I was a teenager, but sometimes with nearly no artistic knowledge. I think formal training is important for a couple of reasons: an artist needs to come in contact with other artists and to hear meaningful, informed critiques. An artist also needs a trusted source of answers for many artistic and technical questions.

What are the essential steps for an up-and-coming photographer to make a successful living as a fine art photographer?

1. Take tons of pictures and learn from them. 2. Develop your own eye. 3. Consult with and learn from other photographers whose opinions you value. 4. Look at lots of photographs. 5. Find equipment that you get to know and love. 6. Find outlets and peers, and share your work.



Do You Have A Favorite Walk Around Lens...If So, What Is It?

No. I use what I have available. I had a Pentax 35mm SLR that I bought in Germany when I was stationed there and loved it. Later on, I got a Nikon with lots of glass (variable lenses) and didn't like it much. I now have a Sony digital with zoom and love the quality of the lens, but I don't think it's so much the equipment, but rather it's vision-- the way one sees. I honed that vision when doing black and white photography with Ruth Bernhard, and refined it further over the years.

Which one item of equipment would you say is the most important to you?

The most important are my eyes and my brain. Even when I don't take my camera, I see so many possible pictures I'd like to take.

Would you give a brief walk through your workflow?

I take a walk and see something valuable to capture. I evaluate the light as I see it. If it's ok, I make an image. If I don't like the result, I try to decide if other light might make it better. If possible, I return at a better time, with better light. Later on, I look at the results and pick the best photo to assess if it's right for enlargement and printing. Some of these prints are framed for shows. I use the same process when doing portraits or still lifes. The light has to be right – determined by time and location. We can change the location or try again at another time.

In general, during a session, how many photos would you say you take to find "the right one?"

I often take one or two dozen pictures on a walk – then I look at what I've got. I think I normally see a good shot when I am walking, and recognize it. If I see something that's not quite right, I sometimes go back for more. This is so much easier with digital photography. With film, there was so much delay in turn-around, even with your own darkroom.

How do you decide on locations and subjects?

I carry my camera whenever I walk the neighborhoods, when I travel or attend events, or go to special places. In other words, I usually take pictures whenever and wherever I go.



Do you rely on lighting (natural, or artificial), or do you rely on computer manipulation?

I use natural light almost exclusively, and almost always did in the past. I try to see my image full-frame, although with black and white film I did a bit more cropping than I do with digital. I do very little computer manipulation.

Do you prefer making color or black and white photos?

Right now it's color. When I made negatives, I only worked in black and white. We didn't have the money for me to get into color processing of film.



What has been inspiring/influencing your work lately?

I think moving to Florida with its different vegetation and animals have had an immense impact on my vision and interest. New locations have always been attractive to me. I love digital photography for its ease, but I miss the control I had with the camera using black and white film, and the old technology (my own film developing).

Who are your favorite artists in your field?

Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Ruth Bernhard, Edward and Brett Weston.

What else would you like to say?

Digital photography makes the artistry more direct and skill level more significant, and I like that. But, if I had more money, I think I'd still be involved with film, with a decent darkroom -- the chemistry was interesting to experiment with. I liked the extent of the range of speed and aperture. I'd love to shoot large format pictures. I love how much more visual information can be carried in larger film formats. But I think digital cameras (and honestly, automatic cameras) have been amazing developments (no pun intended).