



**Ed Kashi**  
PORTFOLIO

This issue of PHOTO METRO is an exploration of the documentary mode of photography. Ed Kashi is a young, talented professional in the areas of photojournalism and editorial photography. His creative commercial work has brought him assignments from major magazines nationwide. The personal imagery presented here is testimony to the professionalism, commitment and social concern with which he approaches his work. The techniques used are innovative, exciting and an attempt to broaden the scope of traditional documentary photography. ▶

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Typography: Metro Type  
Printer: Crain Press, Reno Nevada

Volume 2 Number 13  
October 1983

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The November issue of PHOTO  
METRO features the work of Peter  
Stackpole.

**What we know about ourselves and the world we inhabit is mediated by our senses. And in our efforts to know and understand what we call objective reality our sense of vision is primary. The degree to which we depend on our eyes is evidenced by numerous words and idioms that relate and even equate vision with knowledge and conscious thought. A thought or idea is referred to as an observation, an insight, a point of view. When we understand something we experience an enlightenment and say "I see what you mean". And even when we close our eyes and let our thoughts run free from the material world, we enter the realm of the imagination.**



PHOTOGRAPH OF ED KASHI BY PAUL RAEDEKE © 1981

Our sense of vision depends on the ability of the eye to receive light from luminous objects or reflective surfaces. The process of photography is remarkably analogous. The word photograph is compounded from two Greek root words that mean drawing or writing (graph) with light (photo). The camera itself was patterned on the structure of the eye.

Because of similarities in the two processes, a photograph is capable of producing an image that is extraordinarily real and convincing. Photographs can be so realistic that it took many years to establish the fact that they were—or at least could be—art. Both vision and photography are necessarily and directly linked by light energy to some aspect of objective reality. And to the uncritical mind a simple analogy exists: just as seeing is believing it is thought that the camera tells no lies.

From early on, photographs have been used to document or prove something. Lawyers bring photographs to court as evidence for their arguments. Newspapers provide images to visually verify their accounts and show us how it really happened (television has expanded this application and brings us the image instantly). Advertisers use photographs because they are more real and convincing than illustrations of their products—even if the result is closer to total fabrication. Many cases of blackmail would have been impossible without the aid of a camera. Politicians and performers rely on photographs to create a suitable public image. In the opinion of Susan Sontag, photographs have, in fact, superseded reality in our culture; we live our lives as a photograph. Weddings, vacations, parties and other rituals of our culture have only limited reality unless they are validated by photographing them. Our sense of history is becoming more and more dependent on photographs.

Although photographs, like vision, can provide us with information and knowledge, there are some insidious flaws in the implicit assumption that a photograph is real and true. This is not to imply that a photograph is unreal and untrue, but that it has limitations that require critical evaluation and analysis to decipher its content. The difficulty lies in the fact that a photograph is extracted from its context in time and space. It is therefore ambiguous, and depends on the photographer, the viewer and the conditions in which it is seen to establish a new context and meaning.

The role of the photographer in providing an image with meaning is frequently underestimated. Taking a photograph requires the photographer to select a moment in time (which in some exceptional cases may stretch over hours) that is best. Although intellectual, emotional and intuitive powers may extract a decisive moment that is artful and rich in information, it remains a subjective decision of the one who trips the shutter. Likewise the act of framing and composing (which depends on position and focal length of the lens) are subjective acts that remove an image from its spatial context. In this process, what is left out can be as important as what is included in the image.

There are numerous additional opportunities for the photographer to impose subjective elements into the image. The final product results from myriad decisions involving lighting, exposure, processing and printing variables that are interpretive in nature. Anyone who has seen a trick photo or used an airbrush should understand how tenuous the relationship between image and reality can be.

Beyond the control of the photographer, but yet important in the process of communication through an image, are the conditions under which the photograph is seen. Every viewer brings with him/her a personal nature and history that affect perception. Editorial decisions (cropping, position on the page, captions, etc.) are an additional impingement on the photograph's meaning.

The foregoing does not suggest that photography is an innately fallacious medium, but rather that it, like other forms of art or approaches to knowledge, has inherent limitations that necessitate thoughtful interpretation. This issue of PHOTO METRO attempts to explore some of the salient issues of the Documentary mode of photography and attempts to stimulate reader inquiry. The portfolio and interview with Ed Kashi examines some of the ramifications in Photojournalism and Editorial usage; the review of Eli Reed's images at the Focus Gallery continues this inquiry. The work of Robert Rauschenberg at the Douglas Elliott Gallery is essentially journalistic in nature; the interview is concerned with some of the same issues as they apply to artistic creativity.

Letters from our readers in response are invited.

Paul Raedeke

► **N e w** COLUMN

With this issue of PHOTO METRO we welcome the first in a continuing series of articles by Alfred Blaker. Mr. Blaker is a veteran writer on photography with numerous books and articles in publication. The column will deal with technical aspects of photography that are controversial and topical in nature. We are pleased to offer you his expertise and to provide a forum for an additional aspect of inquiry into the field of photography. Your response is welcomed.

► **November panel**

In the month of November PHOTO METRO and the San Francisco Art Institute will jointly sponsor a panel discussion on the Documentary/Photojournalistic mode of photography. The panel will include Peter Stackpole and Ed Kashi. The date and time, as well as additional panelists, will be announced in the November issue.

**INTERVIEW WITH RAUSCHENBERG**  
By Paul Raedeke

PR: Photographs have been an *element* in your work for a long time. When did you start using photographs in your mixed media work?

RR: I think it was 1950.

PR: It was an innovative step at that time. What brought you to use photographs in your collages? You could have drawn things in. Is there something specific about a photograph that motivated you to use them?



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAK TANENBAUM © 1983

RR: Because they were *actual*. They didn't go through any stylistic process. I studied drawing with Albers at Black Mountain, and things always had the look of my inadequacies. Only my weaknesses showed. With the photographs I was able to open up the work with *my* sense of reality, as I perceived the outside world. That's always been true. I've always wanted my work to look more like what's going on outside the window than in the studio. That's a very tricky

maneuver seeing as you *are* in the studio and you're the one who's doing it—to keep that contact up with the streets. The photographs always bring back that objective reality and a sense of information. I seriously believe that photography and painting are the purest act of communication.

PR: What were the sources of the photographic images. Were they images that you have made yourself?

RR: They came from magazines, newspapers and all over—some were my own images. I snuck my kid in there every now and then. (laughter)

PR: When you use a photograph in a collage is it generally preconceived, previsualized? Or do you work more like Jerry Uelsmann who gathers images without a specific use in mind and assembles them later?

RR: Up until a week-and-a-half ago I would have said "never preconception". Right now I'm collaborating with Trisha Brown and Laurie Anderson in a theater event. I'm doing the costumes and the set. I'm lighting the set with four new collage movies that I have to do next week—it's only twenty-two minutes. I told Trisha if she added one more second to that dance, I quit! I don't know how I'm going to do it anyway. I've never even done it before, so that makes it a bit trickier. However, I went out specifically to take photographs to be silkscreened onto the fabric that I'm making the costumes out of. That was one of the first times I went out deliberately to take a piece.

PR: I see the word "transfer" used with some of your mixed media. How do you transfer the photograph onto your collage?

RR: Some are silkscreened, a lot of it is color and regular xerox where the

image is one-to-one. I have solvents, and run it through a press. I can use regular periodical stuff unless it's been coated with some kind of varnish. I can use all the low class stuff. (laughter) It's a bit frustrating, particularly as our economy falls out from under us—magazines are getting smaller and smaller, so the material I can use is getting smaller. You see these enormous, gorgeous posters—I don't know what in hell they do to that ink but you just can't wrench it loose with anything.

PR: What motivated the move toward more purely photographic work? Was there a need to break out of the public's expectations about your work?

RR: No, my big weakness is that I feel I have to move into everything. I never give anything up.

PR: But the renaissance is over! (laughter) Do you think that the fact that your work blurs the lines between established media . . .

RR: I hope it does. I've been trying to do that all my life.

PR: Does it make it any more difficult for the public or the critics to understand it?

RR: I hope so too. It's awfully hard to keep the public awake. Their main direction is to assume that their main purpose in life is to understand what you're doing. And understanding means that they can go back to sleep. To understand what you're doing is one of the lowest priorities. Anything that you say that's coherent as an explanation is already obsolete. All you're doing is burying the work.

PR: Your painting and drawing are experimental, iconoclastic, even revolutionary. Your photographs seem to operate more within the framework of traditional concerns, closer to the mainstream. Is that something that is occasioned by the medium itself?

RR: I find it tougher. You see, my *forte* is collage, which means I can crop and all sorts of things. That's where I can get embarrassingly sharp. My risk at being traditional in taking pictures is the gamble of hitting on that precise moment without cropping, without collage, without any tricks.

PR: You print all full frame?

RR: Yes. One thing, a bird landing on my picture, is enough to make it not be mine.

PR: So you have less control over the resultant image.

RR: Yes, by being traditional I have much less control.

PR: Does that change your approach to image-making? It's certainly a very different act to make a collage than to make a photograph.

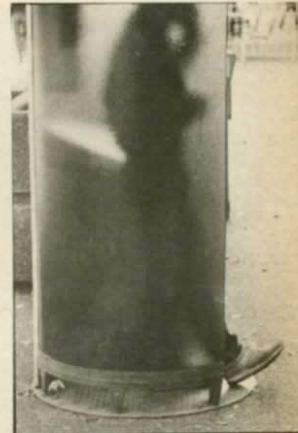
RR: I get so annoyed sometimes. You no sooner get honed in on an image and everybody turns and looks at you or something like that. (laughter)

PR: There is a certain amount of luck involved.

RR: Right, and that's part of the gamble too.

PR: But there are elements of luck in any art form, they just take different forms.

RR: But there isn't that time element, which is a risk. A photograph can get up and walk away from you, a cloud can change, anything. It's not just pigeons that sit on your pictures. (laughter) I used to delude myself that I could come back the next day at the same time and get a picture I missed—well *forget it!* It just doesn't work that way. But I can affect



it in a painting studio. It doesn't really matter because there's not the original record there anyway. It comes together in a much different sense of time.

PR: But the danger you feel in the studio is the loss of direct contact with reality?

RR: That's right. That's the affectation that has to be maintained—there is no affectation when you're on the spot taking photographs.

PR: Are the concerns you deal with in photographic art different than those in your collage?

RR: I don't think so. It's all just to try to keep everybody aware of as many differences in our life as they can stand.

PR: Someone wrote that you are more of a journalist than an artist.

RR: I said that. I'm more interested in being a reporter than in being an aesthete.

PR: Didn't you once, early in your career, conceive of a project to walk across the country and photograph every inch of it?

RR: Yes, and I've kind of renewed that idea with a little more general scheme in the In and Out City Limits work. A lot of this work comes from that. I have portraits of different cities. I have nearly the whole East Coast now. I have hundreds of photographs of each city, and along the road—that's why it's called In

and Out City Limits. I just haven't had shows of all those things. I wanted to do the work and then come back to the town and show them what the town looked like. I've only done Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Fort Meyers. I'm half way through Chicago and Miami . . .

PR: So you're doing something like the original idea but with more spaces in between.

RR: Right. And I've expanded it to Sri Lanka, China and Bangkok which were not in the original plan. I may be the last American photographer that ever does Sri Lanka.

PR: Do you process and print your images yourself?

RR: Yes. I have an assistant who follows through—we work very close together.

PR: I take it you are not hung-up on technique, that it's secondary. You once stated that you "didn't necessarily desire a perfect photograph, if by perfect photography one means maximum contrast, light and darks and extreme focus."

RR: I like a good, honest photograph, as rich as you can make it. But if it doesn't come out that way and the image is great, then it doesn't matter. In focus, out of focus, that's not what makes the moment.

PR: You work mostly in 35mm and some 2 1/4. Do you work with normal length lenses or do you use wide and telephoto also for effect?

RR: That's my favorite one [pointing] and I don't even know what it's number is.

PR: It's a zoom, isn't it?

RR: Yes. I started using the zoom in the South. If I hadn't had it I would have had an ass full of buckshot! You can be photographing somebody's clothesline and they'll come out and scream at you

and cuss you and call the police. People are so paranoid nowadays; they either think you're setting up a robbery or reporting them to the IRS. It's nothing so romantic as invading their privacy or stealing their spirits. (laughter)

PR: Have you had any formal photo education or did you teach yourself?

RR: I studied it at Black Mountain College.

PR: Wasn't Aaron Siskind there?

RR: Yes, and Callahan and deKooning too. Siskind was a friend of mine already from New York. He loves being a painter with his photographs, doesn't he.

PR: Have any of these people influenced your photography?

RR: Oh, I hope so! Actually all of them. The integrity and seriousness necessary to be an artist is something I learned from photographers before other painters. Painters seem to be a lot vaguer about values—intrinsic values and ethics.

PR: Does this exhibition herald a new direction in your career? Are you moving more toward photography? The fact that you came here personally might suggest some particular importance in this work.

RR: No. I always hang my own shows if at all possible, and meet the people who look at it. That's my input. I give what I can, but don't think I don't take from what they say. It's not superficial. It's very difficult, in fact harder as a successful artist, to maintain some one-to-one relationship with your work and its purpose. I could stay in New York or Cap-tiva and just do work and ship it around

and that would be perfectly acceptable. But I would be starving. If you're trying to communicate you have to have some kind of feedback.

PR: Speaking of success, does it ever concern you that a lot of the people who come tonight [to the reception] will be coming to see Rauschenberg rather than the photographs?

RR: I don't think they're coming here to do that. You never know when there might be a breakthrough and somebody might actually look at something. Early on I said there was no bad reason to buy a painting. A lot of painters get very paranoid about that, and very prissy.

PR: Not even if it's just to match the color of a sofa? (laughter)

RR: Even if it's the most corrupt collector. Once that painting is out being seen, you never know what its influence is going to be. If somebody's maid goes home and talks to her children about it, something has happened.

PR: Do you feel the expectations that go with being a legend have helped you or hindered you? There are people who will ask why you're exhibiting photographs. You're a painter, after all. Why shouldn't Ansel Adams exhibit his paintings then?

PR: Let him try! (laughter) I'm not a professional record album man either [a reference to the recently released limited edition Rauschenberg cover for the new Talking Heads album]. And Laurie's piece is the first time I've ever

printed fabrics. I think it's marvelous, all these things you can use. If you just get a rich enough palate of activities you can break down all of those hierarchies.

PR: Do you think your photographs, given your reputation, will be difficult to judge objectively?

RR: I hope so. I know for a fact that I could have sat back someplace in the late 60's or early 70's and just held my ground and raised the prices. But that's not what life is to me. This show should make it clearer that I'm working for me and not for me. I'm just a vehicle here, just the carrier. The only reason I'm in this business is to change people's minds about something or open their eyes.

PR: One article I read recently began with a quote to the effect that "although known primarily as an artist, Rauschenberg has recently begun to work as a photographer." Do you find that disconcerting?

RR: I don't know what that means. I think photographers are artists, I think musicians are artists . . .

PR: I find the statement rather provincial.

RR: I'd say "retarded"! (laughter)

PR: I thought we'd gotten over those debates about a century ago.

RR: But obviously we didn't. We missed a few.

PR: Was there any particular reason you chose San Francisco for this exhibition?

RR: I came here just so I could get into PHOTO METRO! (much laughter)

The exhibition runs through October 28.

