

This work represents the past 26 years of my life. It begins at a time when I stepped off into the fog of a void and it follows the pursuit of a dream. I have been fortunate to encounter extraordinary people who were able guide me when I could listen.

I have always been interested in Photography and spent a great deal of time looking at photographs as well as making them. Early on I encountered reproductions of the works of Edward Weston, Cartier Bresson, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Josef Sudek, Wynn Bullock, and Dorothea Lange. The power of their images and their ability to transcend the subject moved me. They presented the thing and a sense of something beyond the thing. I was a young, naïve romantic. Somewhere along the way I overheard someone say that if a person knew how to do photogravure (heliogravure) he could live and probably always have work. At 20 years old, I faced the problem of finding my way in the world. I made photographs for myself but I knew that almost no one could live from that kind of photography regardless of whether it was interesting or not. I knew from my basic shyness and timidity that I lacked the aggressiveness and showmanship to become a commercial photographer; nor was I gregarious enough to be a portraitist. Photogravure fascinated me at a very mundane level. The things we do when young and ignorant! I set out to discover as much about it as I could. There was very little to be found in 1973. Aside from the history of Camera Work and the Curtis Gravures of the North American Indians, the how, when, and why of photogravure was a great mystery.

I was away from school from the fall of 1973 to the fall of 1975 getting some experience of life. During this time I lived in the mountains of Idaho and worked as a laborer for a company of stone masons building fancy houses. While there I started working with one of the masons, Stubby Street. I became his assistant/laborer/apprentice. Stubby had a rather individual view of life and work. He had been a Marine and had learned about toughness, but he and his wife had given up their life in the city to move to rural Idaho to live a quieter (but not less intense) family oriented life. Stubby's daughter, Picabo, eventually became the women's world champion downhill skier and an Olympic medallist.

I returned to the University (**Antioch College**) in the fall of 1975. I applied for a postgraduate fellowship (*bourse*) to pursue a year of independent study and travel abroad. This was my way to pursue the great mystery of photogravure.

I was selected as one of 75 Watson Fellows in 1976. In November I flew to Zurich with my stipend of \$7,000, a few books that I had found on

photogravure, and some materials. I hoped to find someone in Europe who was still practicing dust grain photogravure ( *heliogravure au grain*). I began by talking to Allen Porter, the editor of *Camera*, in Lucerne. He sent me to Braun S.A. in Mulhouse. They gave me a nice tour of the factory. When they learned that I was interested in flat plate dust grain gravure, they were truly amused and sent me on my way. My quest continued in this fashion until I gave up trying to find a teacher and began looking for a print shop (*atelier de gravure*) to work in. I found the *Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine* and set up a little area in the basement where I could make my trials. So it began.

I worked until I couldn't then I would go into the mountains to hike or ski. After a few days I would return and work some more. The beginning was not very encouraging. I would have a plate that worked and then I would go for months where it wouldn't work any more. But I kept at it. After about a year in Geneva my friend Susan Litsios and I went for a visit to the legendary Atelier of St. Prex. We just showed up, timidly knocked on the door, and walked in. We said *bonjour* and I think it was returned but everyone was working in what seemed to be concentrated silence. The atmosphere and the concentration in this world of ink awed me. Eventually someone talked to us, probably Edmond, and after a little while we left and returned to Geneva. I was marked by this experience!

A few weeks later I telephoned to St. Prex and asked if I could come for a visit. I was interested in learning how to print there. I was a photographer and knew about lenses, light, and film, but I knew very little about paper, ink, or presses. I met with Pietro, Edmond, and Luce. I spoke very little French at that time so communication was difficult. I showed them my work and explained my project to learn photogravure. I must have been able to communicate something because I ended staying a few hours and going to the bistro on the way to the train with Edmond. I was able to come to St. Prex for a "stage" from January to June, 1978. As it turned out Pietro was doing a little research into photogravure himself. They had a little atelier where it was possible to sensitize tissue and make plates. I had some pieces of equipment to add and together we had a workable little shop. I was a nonstandard "*stagiaire*." No one knew what to do with me and all of the presses were occupied with various projects. I helped out where I could and spent my free time continuing my experiments into photogravure.

After a couple of weeks in this environment where only French was spoken I started speaking as well. For me it was a great life! I loved the energy and milieu of the Atelier de Taille Douce, working and eating together, and the discussions at lunch that I could barely comprehend. I

watched the work being done, quietly asked questions, and discreetly continued my own work. I met Albert Chavez there, Pierre Tal-Coat and Albert Flocon, and quite a few others. The spirit and vision of work at St. Prex profoundly influenced my work and my sense of community and shared values. My previous education in the United States provided instruction in technique and discussion of “concept,” but there was a diminished importance placed on the object or the picture. I was never fully comfortable with that approach. At St. Prex I found affirmation of my inner view of art.

My stage at the Atelier ended in June of 1978 and I returned to the States. I wanted to find some means of continuing my work. An acquaintance in Paris, Nicholas Calloway, who managed the Zabriskie Gallery at the time, had given me the names of a few people who might be interested. For the most part they responded by saying, in effect, “Interesting work but what is the point of this in 1978?” Michael Hoffman, the editor of *Aperture*, was the exception. He responded positively and asked me to come see him in New York. I showed him what I had been doing. He spoke at that meeting of work in photogravure that *Aperture* had been trying to do with little success. He also asked me what it was that I needed and what I wanted to do. Then he called Richard Benson in Newport, Rhode Island, and arranged for me to go see him.

Richard Benson had in his studio all of the equipment necessary to do photogravure. We arranged for me to come to Newport for a couple of weeks at the end of the summer, make some trials, and move on. Back in New York, Michael Hoffman gave me a couple of Paul Strand’s negatives and a few books on Strand’s work. When I returned to Newport, Richard was kind enough to give me a little corner in his “Dark House.” I had no money so he gave me a little room in his house with his family, and I went to work, almost 24 hrs a day. This was my chance, everything was in this moment. A few weeks ended up lasting over two years. When I hadn’t departed after a few weeks, Richard arranged for me to have a spare bedroom in his mother’s house on Newport Harbor.

It was one thing to take one of my own negatives, as I had been doing previously in St. Prex, make a plate, and print it. It was quite another thing to take a negative made by Paul Strand and make a photogravure print that could stand beside the Silver gelatin print that Strand had made from that same negative. Eventually two plates were made that were good enough to be published: *The Gaspé Fisherman* and *Iris, Georgetown Maine*. (The Iris plate was made with Richard Benson, who did the actual etching).

In my mind this work with Benson, who is now Dean of the Yale

School of Art, was the second part of the information that I needed. At St. Prex I learned that ink could be used to manipulate the results from a printing plate through ink composition and paper choice. From Benson I learned that the film response could be manipulated to achieve a desired tonal range in a picture.

At that time I began to see that photogravure really was beautiful in and of itself.

After those Strands I took up the Steichen Portfolio, a project begun in the 1920's by Stieglitz and Steichen, taken up again in the 1960's after the second edition of Strand's Mexican portfolio was done, and pursued again in 1978 by me. No one knew if this could be done, but I was over the abyss in total freefall into the unknown so we went at it. It took about six months to make the first four plates. Once the plate for the "*Heavy Roses*" was made and people saw it I began to earn a little bit of money on a regular basis. Then I had more than just hope that this project would get done. By February of 1980 the 12 plates were made and I returned to St. Prex, where we made an initial edition of 550 copies. We all worked on this project. Different ink was made for each plate; the paper was selected; and we wiped away. The edition took a year to complete and in December of 1981 the *Early Years of Edward Steichen* was published.

At this time Hazel Strand, the widow of Paul Strand, provided *Aperture* funding through the Strand Foundation that would allow me to put together a studio for photogravure in Millerton, New York. It was modest and much of the equipment was constructed by me but it worked. And the work continued: A portfolio of Strand's early work, then a portfolio of early British photography ( *The Golden Age*). For each of these large projects the plates were made in the States and then I would return to St. Prex to work with the Atelier de Taille Douce on the printing. As we learned more we could get it done a little faster, perhaps with less blood, and the work has been good.

In 1984 I moved the studio from Millerton to Hadley, Massachusetts, a little town in the Connecticut River Valley. Here I found a larger extended community of artists, printers, and people interested in what is known as the "book arts." A long tradition of paper manufacturing and fine printing has thrived here through the influence of artists such as Leonard Baskin and Arno Werner. My work has continued with *Aperture* as well as other clients such as the Limited Editions Club, the Whitney Museum of Art, 21st Century publishing, and many others. In 1998 the volume of work permitted me to expand my studio into a 19th century factory building along the banks of the Mill River in Florence, Massachusetts. Here we have an open, airy studio

with large windows and room for two presses as well as space for making plates

In the pages of this catalogue and on the walls of the Musée Jenisch are the results of the work done in these 26 years, more than half of my lifetime. Often I wonder and sometimes I joke that if I knew then what I know now about the difficulties of this process I would never have pursued this work. But in truth, that is not so. The question is not about difficulty, but about beauty. For me ink and paper carry an aura and allure that transcend all of the difficulties and frustrations of the journey. We can speak of the subtleties and richness of the image in three dimensions (an image in *taille douce*). We can speak of the permanence of ink on rag paper (*papier du chiffon*). In photogravure we are drawing these images made by light with soot (*noir de fumée*) and that can only be magic.