

# **DARK RADIANCE**

**A JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY  
JANUARY 2020**

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of Dark Radiance is to highlight interesting and innovative projects by photographers working primarily in black and white. In our media-saturated culture, it can be a challenge to get viewers to slow down and really *look* at images. Our aim is to provide a vehicle for artists to present new work, and get it in front of an audience that is eager to explore new ways of understanding the relevance of photography.

Please subscribe using the contact form on the website <http://darkradiancemag.com/contact-us/>. And don't forget to include some comments about the work, if you are so moved. Feedback of all kinds is important to people who create art for its own sake. We can be reached at

[DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com](mailto:DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com)



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the first edition of Dark Radiance in 2020. We have timed the release to give you some relief from a barrage of red and green; if you're like me your rods and cones have shorted out from overdoses of those two hues. Feast your eyes on these glorious gray-scale images.

This month's issue features three contributors: Shirley Braley's series "Inanimata", studies of stone angels; Bill Elder's "The World Unseen", infrared desert scenes; and new work by Rimas Zailskas entitled "Vacation Photos", which (trust me) is NOT a slide show of scenery. Rimas's unique style is fast becoming a Dark Radiance favorite.

My monthly "I've Been Thinking..." column is titled "What does it say to you?", a response to recent (and ongoing) discussion around the topic of looking for "meaning" in art.

Last month's article on Intentional Camera Movement by Susanna Euston set off an email thread with some provocative back and forth. The subject speaks directly to what happens when new techniques get adopted, so I am including a portion of the original letter to the editor and a response by Ms. Euston. If you would like to join the discussion, please share your thoughts! Use the email below.

Happy new year, and best wishes for a creative surge and new energy. Let's raise the bar with our art this year.

Comments and responses are always welcome. Our email is: [DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com](mailto:DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com)

If you enjoy reading Dark Radiance, please forward the email to your friends, or direct them to <http://DarkRadianceMag.com>, where you can

view back issues as well. 

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### W.B., Hendersonville, NC, writes:

Although I admit that some of Susanna's images do have a certain attraction, I have some fundamental disagreements with her "abstract art by chance". For one, "abstract" in the general world of art means "lines, shapes, form and color" which are generally very hard and delineated. Blurry, soft images belong more into the world of impressionism.

Yes, there is a thing called "abstract impressionism" which may look similar to Susanna's work but is a very deliberate creation. And that to me is a basic concept, that art is the expression of an idea/vision that is unique to the artist. When the element of chance is the main source of something then I would neither represent it as "art" nor as "my work", even though the practice of rolling the dice has something to do with the outcome.

### Susanna Euston responds:

I welcome the opportunity to express my thoughts on abstract photography—more, specifically Intentional Camera Movement—in response to the views above.

The keyword in the phrase "Intentional Camera Movement" (ICM), is **INTENTIONAL**. Authentic ICM is NOT about just waving one's camera around, or spinning the lens barrel, in hopes that a coherent image will materialize. Nor is it "abstract art by chance." It's about visualizing the desired outcome and **INTENTIONALLY** choosing camera settings – ISO, aperture, shutter speed – and

camera movement techniques, to capture one's vision. **Intention** is key to my work (both abstract and classical), and is what I teach in my workshops. And, yes, it's possible to produce an ICM image that is intentionally conceived and captured.

The Tate Museum of Modern Art's definition of abstract art is "art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead uses shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect." My emphasis on those features, plus light (the quality and distribution of which is critical), when I compose an image is central to every photograph. The assumption by the reader that ICM images are purely by chance is incorrect.

Additionally, I do not believe that abstract art is "... generally very hard and delineated." That distinction by the reader limits abstract art and photography to a very narrow definition.

Abstract art and photography embrace many more techniques these days than in the past and continue to be an experiment. For me, it is fascinating and a joy to create images that are unique interpretations of nature and the urban environment.

Readers are invited to participate in the discussion via email

to the editor at: [DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com](mailto:DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com)



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## INANIMATA; A SERIES BY SHIRLEY BRALEY

A favorite photo subject of mine is stone angels. Any figure with symbolic or fantastical elements is pretty much something I obsessively seek out. So this month I have put together a series of new treatments of angels, and a few store mannequins that I just couldn't walk away from.

Boutique windows in Asheville are fertile ground for their owners' expression. Counter-culture is alive and well in this hip city, and it is a joy to experience the constant flux of ideas and new representations on view all over town, particularly North Lexington Avenue, where several of these were captured.

I have started experimenting with pinhole photography and its unusual, ethereal possibilities for manipulating light, so expect to see more of this in future works.



















# PUBLISHER, EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTOR: SHIRLEY BRALEY



Photography allows me to capture the richness of what I see around me, and to encourage a closer vision of it. It is my way of showing the world to myself in new ways. With my images, I explore ways of depicting something essential about a scene, and challenge the viewer to think about what they are seeing.

I like to explore the boundaries between what is real and what is in my imagination. My work often includes elements of the mystical and the fantastic, combined with what is so commonplace that we have stopped looking at it closely. Often the story I want to tell is one of texture, of the impact of time on the subject. The patina of wear can be beautiful as well as thought-provoking.

I mostly shoot with wide angle lenses that get me close to my subject. I frequently capture images with my iPhone, because it is always with me. Any moment can provide an opportunity for me to explore what is around me. 

Photo credit: Rimas Zailskas

## I've Been Thinking...

*What does it say to you?*

**Woody Allen:** That's quite a lovely Jackson Pollock, isn't it?

**Museum Girl:** Yes, it is.

**Allen:** What does it say to you?

**Museum Girl:** It restates the negativeness of the universe. The hideous lonely emptiness of existence. Nothingness. The predicament of Man forced to live in a barren, Godless eternity like a tiny flame flickering in an immense void with nothing but waste, horror and degradation, forming a useless bleak straitjacket in a black absurd cosmos.

-- from Woody Allen's "Play It Again, Sam"

"A photograph has to have explicit meaning, it has to SAY something, or else it is nothing," I was told recently. This set me back for a while, coming to terms with why this bothered me so much. This same topic has come up again and again in the past month or two, in different contexts.

What is the role of "meaning" in a work of art? In photography in particular? For that matter, what does it mean to have meaning? My thinking plunged into the esoteric.

For the sake of the discussion, let's say that a work of art must be designed to convey something to a viewer, to speak a message to them.

Further, let us assume (for now, for the sake of terminology) that the artist should have intended a specific meaning as a foundation for the work.

But, as in the Woody Allen example above, interpretation is subjective, sometimes amusingly so. When a person studies a Pollack drip painting, they are not looking for an encoded message. Rather, they are pulled in to its flow, its energy. When they let go with the interpretative mind, feelings might surface in response to the work. I wouldn't call that Pollack's meaning; the meaning is supplied by the viewer.

The same can apply in photography. In fact, there is an entirely common perception that all photographs convey a particular message by asserting a realistic take on a subject, and a clear statement of the subject is what the image *means*. This is where my thinking slips off the rails of convention. If an image has to tell you what it means, then you will quickly take it in, and then your mind will move on.



## I've Been Thinking

*... continued*

This is just how the mind works. It looks for something it recognizes, determines how much attention to pay to it, and then immediately starts looking for something else to latch onto. With photography, this effect is pronounced. Since photographic images are so pervasive, it takes a lot to get someone to look in a way other than this basic recognition and categorization habit.

However, what, if anything does that say about an actual image? Let's pick apart a couple of examples. A Berenice Abbot photograph of a New York City street in the 30s is a certain kind of experience. We can appreciate it for its historic or journalistic value, for the glance into a world gone by. We might notice how the city has changed.

And then we look at an Ansel Adams image of El Capitan in Yosemite. Again, this is documenting a specific scene - but we often *feel* something more elemental. We could be impressed by the grandeur, feel a longing for more connection with nature, or a realization that there is more to life than the daily grind.

And now we look at an image by Edward Weston - one of those funhouse-mirror nudes, say. Is the image going to say anything? I think that it does not. The viewer is going to automatically perceive in a different way from when they look at the Adams or the Abbot. That impulse to categorize is dropped; instead the viewer is just **LOOKING**.

And that, I contend, is the role of art. It is what distinguishes a good picture from an artistic one: it's what happens in the viewer's mind. Art short-circuits that mental process of searching out patterns and significance. It coerces the viewer's mind into stopping for some period of time so that their imagination can take over.

People crave this: something to break their attention away from what they always see. A healthy mind wants to be sparked by curiosity, by novelty, and by challenge. That's what art does: it takes us to a different place in our mind.



## I've Been Thinking

*... continued*

But, I hear you asking, after that moment of different mind-space, won't the narrative mind kick in again? Isn't it natural at that point to start figuring out what it means?

Yes, of course it is. Different kinds of thinking will be sparked. Exactly my point! The viewer's imagination gets engaged. The meaning coalesces in their mind's eye - because they are subjectively responding to it. They are creating a meaning. The meaning is not in the image at all: the viewer creates it, by interacting with it.

I recently watched a friend squirm with embarrassment when a relative looked at his abstract painting and said "I see cute little snowmen!" Not what he intended; but that person was creating their own experience of the work.

I have had people point out metaphors in my work that were completely unconscious. For instance, a friend looked at my image of a statue of a native American, wet with rain, and to her it symbolized the bloody violence inflicted on a proud people. I was floored, because that hadn't been the intention, but it rang true.

So, to go back to the statement that kicked off this whole train of thought, must a photographer intend a meaning, or else be producing nothing at all? Frankly, I've seen plenty of images which seemed to intend the meaning: "I paid \$5,000 for this lens!!!" And I've seen images as simple as a lonely beach scene, taken with an iPhone, that made me shiver with emotional recognition. In both cases, my imagination has provided both the meaning, and the value of the work.

Photographic images will have meaning if they mean something to the viewer. An artist does not have any responsibility to beat their viewer over the head with an intention. The viewer, on the other hand, is bearing a lot of responsibility for observing deeply enough that their creative mind can get to work.

In conclusion, if our work is not providing that kind of stimulus, we are robbing our viewers of the magic that happens when their imagination is allowed to lift them

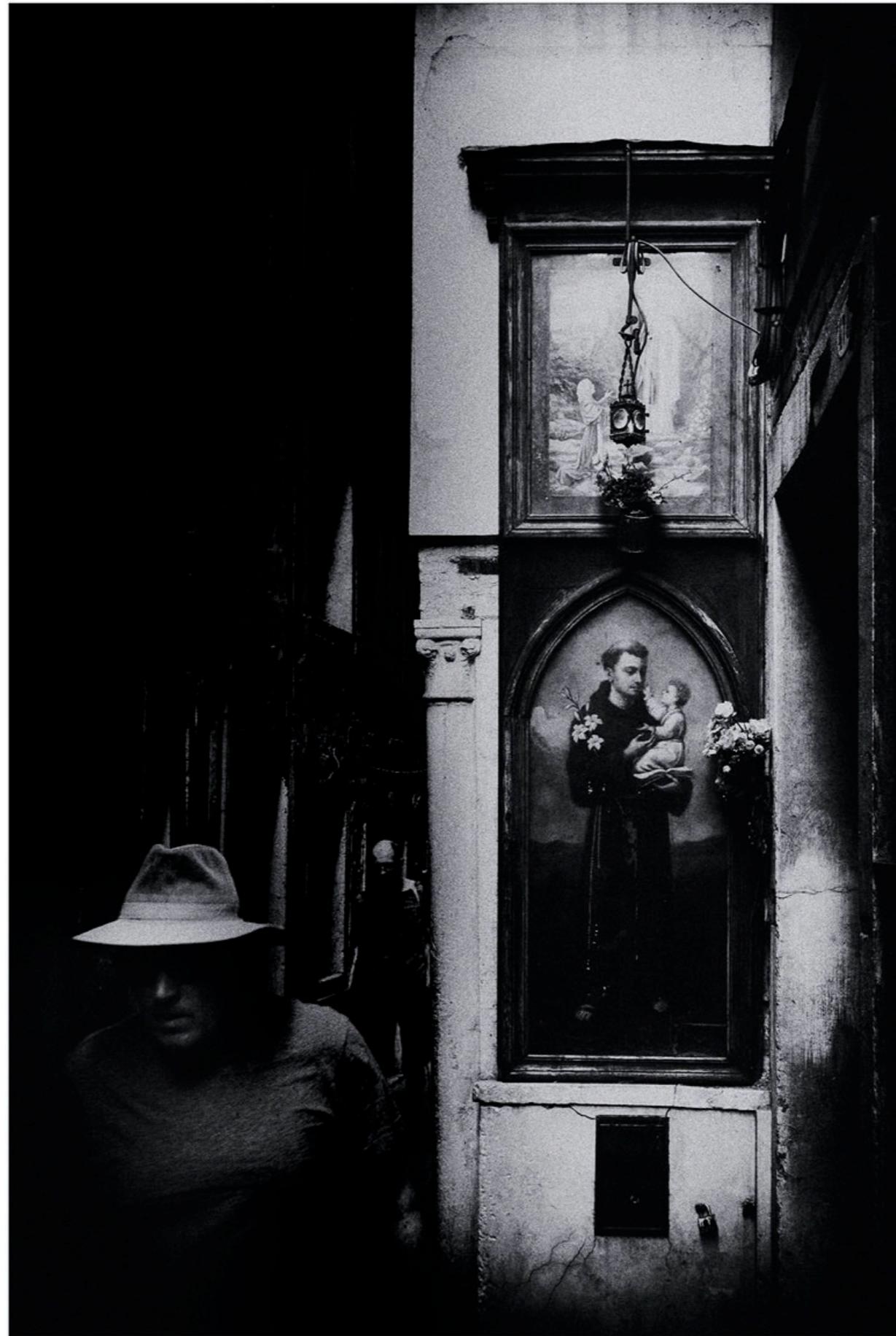
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## VACATION PHOTOS; A SERIES BY RIMAS ZAILSKAS

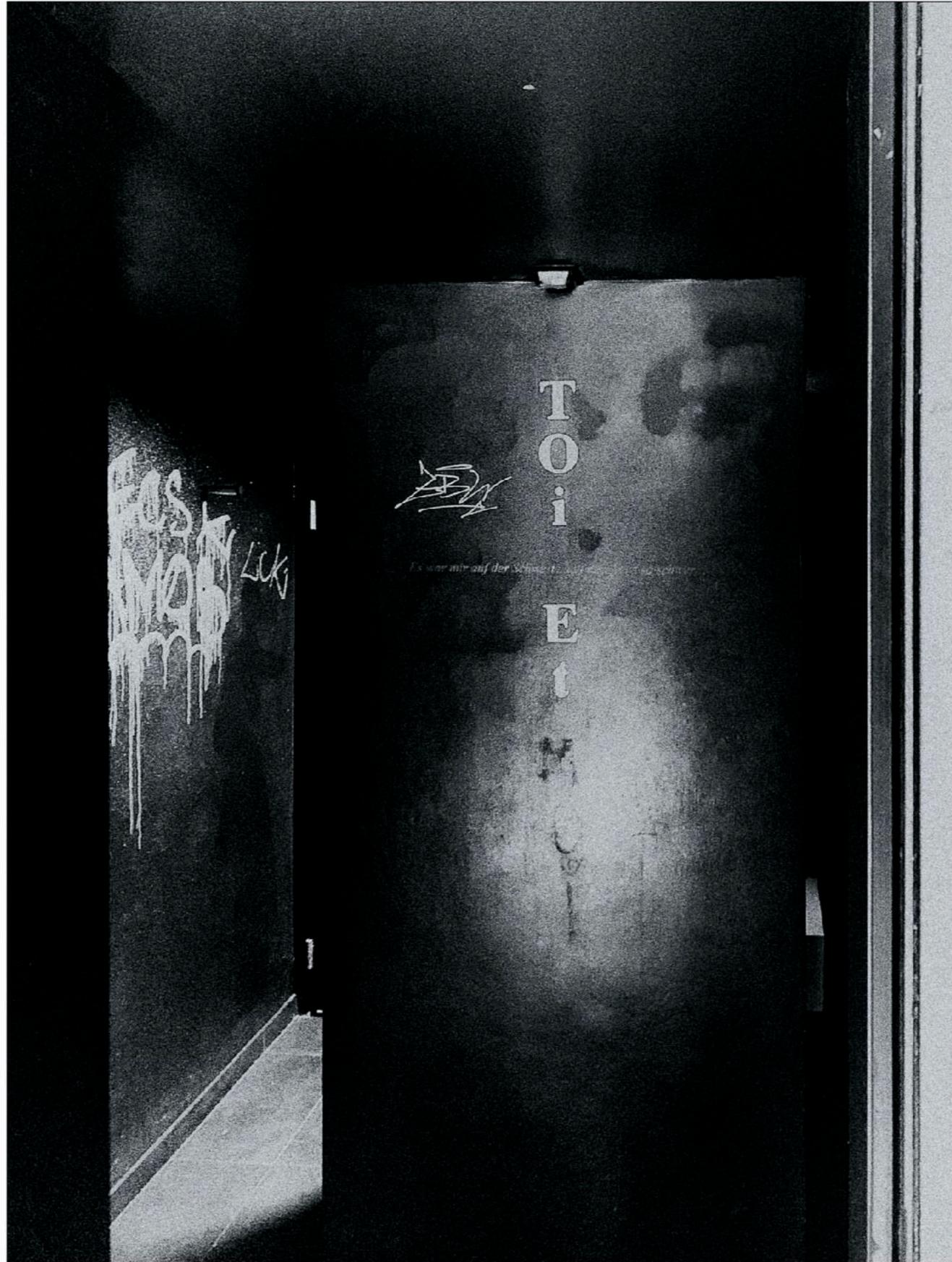
These are vacation photos from the Caribbean, Italy, Switzerland, Maine and Chicago. They are not the ones I will put in the vacation scrapbook - those color photos are much friendlier. If this trend continues, I'll be making a gothic film someday!







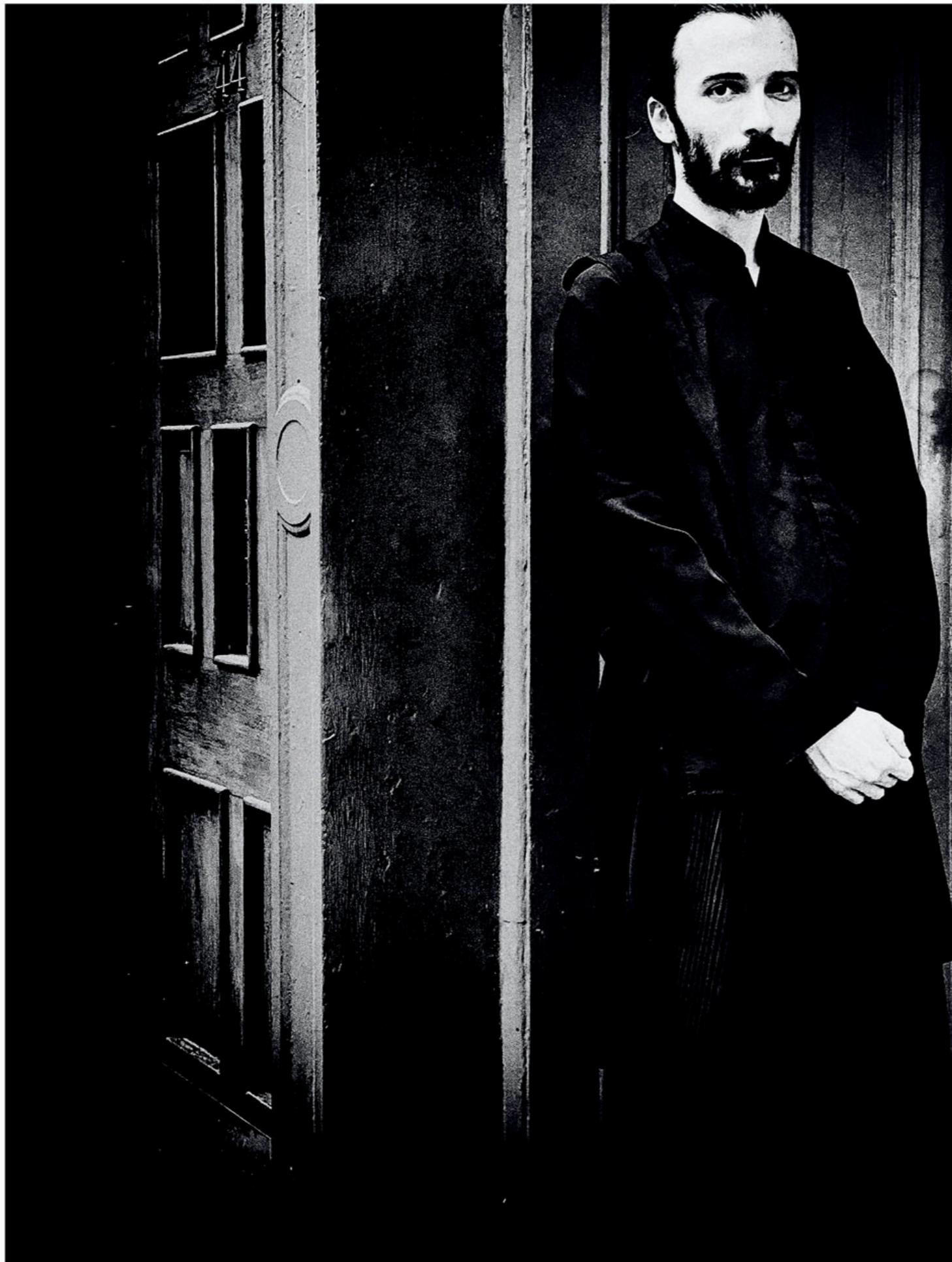












Rimas Zailskas is the co-publisher of *Bold Life*, *Asheville Made* and *Carolina Home + Garden*. He's been a photographer for 35 years, having started as a photographer's assistant at a major studio in Chicago serving ad agency clients. His editorial work can be found in the pages of the magazines. Rimas has exhibited at several galleries across Western North Carolina. 



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## THE WORLD UNSEEN; A SERIES BY BILL ELDER

These images were all recorded in October 2019 in Southern Utah at Capital Reef, Bryce Canyon and Canyonlands National Parks. The scenery is stunning and the color of the red rocks dominates the viewing experience.

Using infrared capture allows the viewer to focus on the forms and the landscape rather than the colors and provides a new way of seeing the surpassing beauty of this rugged landscape.













# BILL ELDER, CONTRIBUTOR



Photography has been my chosen medium for expressions since adolescence, learning imaging skills in my grandfather's darkroom as a young boy. The combination of technology and art has been a constant source of fascination and energy.

As a working and then retired photographer I often work in client driven or self-assigned projects. I have always tried to create images which recognize familiar places, people and themes and show a new way of seeing what we already recognize. I choose artistic projects which combines the motivating aspect of a personal project with new ways of seeing what seems familiar. In 2017, the "Impressionist Photography" met those criteria and in 2018-2019 the "World Unseen" infrared project continued that work.

These projects keep my vision growing along with technical skills and feed the creative fires. 📷

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN DARK RADIANCE MAGAZINE! BE SURE TO SUBSCRIBE SO THAT YOU DON'T MISS AN ISSUE. [HTTPS://DARKRADIANCEMAG.COM/CONTACT-US/](https://darkradiancemag.com/contact-us/)

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## Submission Guidelines

- 10 - 15 images, which should be a series exploring a subject, style, or technique
- JPG format and saved at size 5-7, or medium size
- Has your full name at the start of each file name: jane-smith-UNIQUE-FILENAME.jpg.
- File size should be sized to **300-500K**.
- Converted to black & white

The editor reserves the right to resize images (without cropping) which are accepted for publication.

For more information, contact us at [DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com](mailto:DarkRadianceMag@gmail.com)

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