

Profile

Tim Wolcott - "Mediocrity is not a Standard"

By Harvey Goldstein

Tim Wolcott says that photography must run through his veins because the Wolcotts have been in photography longer than any other family in the world. Alexander Wolcott received the first patent for a camera and had the first exhibition of photography in 1840 as well as the first studio. Tim got his start when he won a blue ribbon and a Gold Key Award in a high school competition sponsored by Eastman Kodak. He later apprenticed with George Phillips, a friend of Ansel Adams and the Westons, "I guess you could say I'm an apprentice to every piece of art I have ever seen".

Tim is a perfectionist, with an extremely high work ethic, creating images exactly as the master photographers taught him. His interest in fine art landscape photography began many years ago when he and his grandfather would walk through the woods. "I found a particular fascination with nature and its surroundings and having a darkroom in the house since I was six years old, I guess osmosis was molding me."

Because Tim believes that one is only as good as the last image created, he is driven by wanting each photograph to be perfect. "I can't wait to go out and find the next great image nature presents to me. I search a whole mountain just to find a dogwood that has exactly what I am envisioning. It must have the right shape, tonality and background to represent nature at its finest. Nature creates perfect moments all the time; you have to go out and find them."

Tim scouts the locations days and sometimes weeks before he plans to photograph, seeking the perfect location and perfect flower, plant or tree. He returns to the chosen location before sunrise wearing a headlamp and doesn't leave again until after dark.

Every photograph is printed with exacting standards on the finest exhibition paper, with a delicate balance between technical achievement and artistic beauty. "Each image is meticulously printed and massaged to ensure that all of the subtle tones are printed to perfection while holding the colors accurately. It takes a great deal of precision to hold the highlights and shadows without disturbing or distorting the colors. A great color image is a black and white image in disguise; the color just has to be there."

Being a purist, Tim's intent is to capture the image he wants as he wishes it to appear. He is not a hard-line believer in Photoshop. "A photograph is all about lighting, composition and depth of field. If you screw up on any one of these factors, you cannot fix it in Photoshop. The masters who came before us never had Photoshop."

Tim believes that the art of pre-visualizing, visualizing and post-visualizing an image before creating it is a lost art that needs to be resurrected. He often uses past images and experiences to create new ones. He also believes that lighting is what makes a great photograph; he even asks, "...how many of us have been stopped in our tracks when nature reveals her magic?" His attitude regarding composition is that if it is perfect, the subject will sing - he often likens photography to music. If there is too little space, the image will appear crowded and unable to breathe; too much space means a lot of dead space. Continuing in the musical vein, Tim states that, "Picking

the right angle to photograph is like a good song - your eye flows through the image without any effort."

Tim is considered a pioneer in pigment photography and as an eco-friendly photographer. When he was learning about carbon pigment printing in 1988, a popular process at the time was Cibachrome, which was toxic, faded easily and did not properly represent nature. Working with Bill Nordstrom, they developed Evercolor, the first environmentally sound and virtually non-fading process. In 1995, he was asked to see if inkjet prints could be made with pigment. He was able to make it work after several attempts; it was crude in the beginning, but the potential was there. He has been consulting on inkjets from its origin; his goal was to make it better, faster and less expensive.

As the father of technology and printing for a number of years, Tim became frustrated trying to teach companies where they should go with their technology and what to do. He has invented new processes, theories of processes as well as papers and equipment needed to make photography better. Tim has consulted for six companies in the inkjet world and has served as the head consultant for the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress where he has both invented new photographic processes and created new ways of photographic restoration. As the longest showing photographer in the world using the pigment process exclusively, Tim was setting the standard for real works of art. "Photographs only have an investment power when they can last a long time; dumping chemicals into the earth while creating a photographic print of nature is hypocritical."

Tim began making his photographs using 8x10 and 4x5 cameras. Today he chooses to use only the Phase One P 45+ medium format camera system (a 39.4 mega pixel capture),

with Mamiya lenses and Capture One Pro software and uses only Apple computers. He exhibits his work using only American made products. This unique combination of superior image quality and old world techniques offers the viewers a truly remarkable experience. He refuses to use Plexiglas to mount his photographs because it is not archival and will destroy the image by the toxic out-gassing. Tim only believes in using the very best archival and non-toxic processes.

Tim's advice to aspiring nature photographers is "to be ready, nature's most intimate moments are here for a fleeting moment." He also recommends that they make a framing card, which will allow them to see the image in real light and find the exact composition (and then wait, wait and wait some more).

He further advises to know what lenses to choose for your subject; turn off auto everything - you should decide what you are doing, not the camera. Learn to push the lens to the limit; this will help an image become three-dimensional. Pick the right depth of field to emphasize or de-emphasize your subject. Slow down. It is not about how many images you take, it is all about getting it right the first time; don't rely on Photoshop because it doesn't fix the main elements of a photograph.

His last piece of advice is to study the masters - painters, sculptors and photographers - who came before us. They are the teachers that will influence your work and your growth as an artist. "Keep redefining and critiquing your work as well as the work of others. Learn from everyone. It is not about technical aspect; it is about creating what you need to know about the technical aspect."

Tim plans to teach some classes in 2009 in Utah, Sequoia, on the east coast and the California Coast. These classes will be about "The Art of Shooting" focusing on lighting, composition and creating a final exhibition image. For more information, please visit Tim's website, www.galleryoftheamericanlandscape.com.

Harvey Goldstein from Branford, Connecticut has been in the photographic industry for 35 years. He is a former studio owner and presently edits numerous association newsletters and magazines, as well as being a freelance writer.