



R I C H A R D L. S H E N K  
P H O T O G R A P H E R

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artist's statement

“Shadows  
interest me;  
shapes speak  
to me.”

Many think of photography as a relatively passive exercise. For me, it has always been an adventure, and a great challenge. I'm not interested in merely "capturing" an image, but adding something to it. In my process of image making, I aspire to transform the common, or even unsightly, into images that are compelling and attractive. I've always believed that beauty is everywhere and that it is ours to perceive. The idea of creating value out of something that was not there before drives my creativity. In this way, my camera and other photographic tools take on a larger-than-life quality — a magical quality. They allow me to go beyond the day-to-day mode of viewing things, thereby giving others access to an entirely new perspective through my images. In doing this, I am gratified to know that I have created something that is new and unique.



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bio

Richard Shenk has been a photographer for thirty years as well as an avid collector with over 450 photographs as part of his personal collection. Committed to the traditional technique of processing black and white film, Shenk uses Tri-X black and white film almost exclusively, works in medium-size format (2-1/4" square and 4"x5" formats), and prints on double weight, selenium toned and archivally processed paper which are then mounted on four-ply, acid-free board.

Continually fascinated by how the camera can transform a subject — and how using black and white further alters the recognition of an object, Shenk says, "It's a process of selection. It's about photographing, developing and printing that journey. The result is the balance between abstract design and a recognizable object."

A prolific artist, Shenk's subject matter varies between abstract compositions (peeling bark, snowcaps, the shadow-play of lines and textures in the quotidian), to portraits of the rural villagers of Bhutan, India and China, to the many foreign and exotic locales of remote lands (Ankor Wat, The Great Wall of China, Jerusalem's Yad Vashem). Shenk has traveled worldwide, most recently focusing on the people, places and characteristics of Asia. His latest collection records the different tribes of India and China and their respective costumes.

With hundreds of prints to cull from, a visit to Shenk's studio is a marvel and a treasure. You might find yourself poised above the rocky coastline of Point Lobos or gazing into the wizened face of a grandmother holding the hand of her grandson against a village wall. But whatever you see, the images will long resonate after you are gone.

Shenk has owned galleries over his photographic career and has images in the collections of museums such as the Center of Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cleveland Art Museum, Chicago Art Institute and the Israeli Art Museum, in Jerusalem. His book, *A Different Way of Seeing*, is a stunning showcase of abstracts.

"After all these years, I'm still interested in presenting images that others may have overlooked or have never seen. It's just not always represented by texture or abstraction."



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q & a

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**Q** *When did you first get interested in photography?*

I've been interested in photography my entire life. My father used to travel over seas and he bought me a 35 MM camera early on. I had that camera through college at Tulane in New Orleans. The first year I was there they integrated the schools. So I have slides of one little black girl being driven up with the federal marshals and people carrying signs that read: "Integration won't make you white...."

I took pictures of everything you can imagine. I was on the field at football games, baseball games, various women that I would meet, faces, fairs. Then somebody suggested I take a course on black and white photography.

**Q** *And after all these years, you have stayed faithful to the original printing process when digital is faster, less toxic and with Photoshop you can (supposedly) achieve the same results. Why?*

I do not think you can achieve the same results...maybe close...but not the same. I do not dismiss digital photography and with air travel security it is appealing. But as long as I can keep producing what I consider to be some wonderful images in the traditional way I guess I will. I have offered to go out with friends and make the same image both on film and digitally to compare the results but they have not taken me up on the offer.

**Q** *In all your travels, is there any one place that's had a special affect on you?*

I have been to many moving places...many of which I could not record properly. Point Lobos is right up there at the top, since I always revel in its myriad splendor and varying scenes. Bagan is a wondrous site with its 4,000 temples in ruins. Ankor Wat of course. Kyoto. But I guess that I would have to say that Jerusalem is the most magical and I have made a few good images there.

**Q** *Yes, the photograph with the two negatives.*

This is outside of Yad Vashem, the memorial to the 6 million. It speaks for itself. The other negative is from a mural inside the memorial museum that was taken at a concentration camp. I didn't take these two pictures with the idea of putting them together. That happened in the dark room.



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**Q** *In most of your portraits, it seems as if your subjects are in the midst of their daily rituals – do you ever pose them?*

Sometimes I do pose the people...mostly to get the right background or to include something in the image that I want...such as the girl in the dance costume over looking the rice fields.

**Q** *After 30 years of continually seeking and looking closely at things, you must have some personal insights?*

I'm not sure it's really autobiographical. It's more like an affliction. I see things and record them on film. But I don't know if it has anything to do with what I'm thinking or being. It's more like your extra body. When I start taking pictures I can't stop. I'm just like a machine. I keep going. There's something in it that interests me, but I don't know if it's related to the rest of my personality.

**Q** *They say the camera never lies. What do you think?*

If you took Abraham Zapruder's film of the Kennedy assassination and you stopped frame by frame, I'm sure there were some people in the picture who were smiling. That doesn't necessarily mean they were happy Kennedy was killed. They just happened to be smiling – for that tenth of a second or that 60th of a second. The camera can lie. And maybe the photographers lie too. Maybe it's not at all related to them.

**Q** *(Looking at an astonishing picture of trees and mist he took last year in China, I observed how the tonalities and hues appeared hand-painted.) What kind of paper is this?*

"Portrigo is a paper made by Agfa that has been discontinued. It was a warm tone paper. But it takes a selenium tone in a peculiar way. It's not entirely predictable – from piece of paper to piece of paper it can change. But the image it helped create was incredible. I couldn't possibly have created it. The greens. The blues. At the time, I have no idea how I knew to use it for this particular shot. I have no idea.

*Call it intuition from years of experience...*

q & a  
cont.

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Skirball — *A Different Way of Seeing, The Photography of Richard L. Shenk*, March 6 - April 8, 1994 — Cincinnati

Cincinnati Art Museum — *China: John Sexton, Photographs by John Sexton, Richard Shenk & Elaine O'Neil*, Lecture by John Shenk, "A Different Way of Seeing", March 12, 1989 — Cincinnati

Images Gallery — *Photographs by Thomas R. Schiff and Richard L. Shenk* July 7 - Aug 6, 1981 328 W. Fourth St. — Cincinnati

1979 — Cincinnati

exhibits

Jewish Community Center — *Photographic Art*, March 4 - March 31, 1979 — Cincinnati

Images Gallery — *Photographs by Richard L. Shenk*, June 14 - July 11, 1977 — Cincinnati



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Archives

*Shenk's Photos Transform The Commonpace Into Compelling Images*, Joan Porat, Staff Writer, *The America Israelite*, March 24, 1994

*Richard Shenks Photos Like Small-Scale Poems* Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1992

*Portfolio: Photographs by Richard I. Shenk*, The Rotarian, March 1991

press

*Art Of Photography Continues To Develop Through The Ages*, Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1986

*Photos Give New Perspective to Ordinary Places and Things*, Margaret Josten, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1981

*Kertesz Captured Life of the Cities*, Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1981

*Photographer William Clift does Things His Own Way*, Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1981

*Photography: Art's Stepchild Grows Up*, B,J, Foreman, *The Cincinnati Post*, January 24, 1981

*Lohre Mixes Art, People and Fantasy*, Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1981

*Arnold Newman Is Portrait Photographer And Artist*, B,J, Foreman, *The Cincinnati Post*, 1981

*Callahan Committed to Color Images*, Owen Findsen, Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* Jan 11, 1981

*Gallery Openings Aren't for Select Few, They're for You Too*, Owen Findsen Enquirer Art Critic, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Jan 8, 1981

*Photo Exhibition to Open* March 4, 1979

*A Mint in prints*, Mary Jane O'Donnell, year/publication unknown



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Richard Shenk has deep philanthropic ties to the Aspen Community Foundation as well as the United Jewish Appeal, for whom he has served as Vice President and Campaign Chairman.

philanthropy

Funding has gone toward social services inside the state of Israel, as well as support for Jews around the world.

A share of the proceeds from his upcoming Aspen exhibition will go toward the Aspen Community Foundation.