ROLFE HORN

There is a quiet solemnity in the photographs of Rolfe Horn. He looks for simple and unique subjects, and renders them with surrealistic undertones in an attempt to share his enthusiasm for the natural world. "I don't have any political agenda," he explains. "We are bombarded with enough strife and conflict in the daily news. I try to find pictures that make me feel good. I want people to look at my photographs and be reminded of the remarkable and wondrous things in this world."

Cameras always fascinated Horn. As a teenager he started photographing his skateboarding friends, shooting various tricks and stunts they would perform. His interest just grew from there. Always something of a loner, it was natural for him to hike into the woods by himself taking pictures. Eventually he stopped doing sports photography and kept going with the landscape work.

This was fortuitous, for Horn has carved a distinctive niche for himself and his luminous silver-gelatin prints. Following a three-year apprenticeship as Michael Kenna's assistant in the late 1990s, he struck off on his own. He now makes his way strictly as a fine art photographer, represented by a number of prestigious galleries.

In addition to his quiet, austere landscapes, made in the Western tradition in his native California, Horn has also photographed extensively in Japan, a country he first visited in 2000. Through repeated trips he has grown to appreciate the Japanese sensibility for simple scenes rendered with restrained and elegant aesthetics.

"I think the Western attitude towards Japanese sensitivity is a little bit one-dimensional," Horn says. "I find their culture to be a real dichotomy. On the one hand, we Westerners regard Japanese art as serene, with simple design elements, and this *is* what you find when you get out into the countryside. But in reality, most Japanese live in huge cities, which are completely chaotic. Sometimes it seems like there's only Pachinko parlors, neon lights and flashing bulbs—it feels more like Las Vegas."

Horn spends most of his shooting time wandering the bucolic back roads of Japan's hinterlands. He loves the fact that he can explore unimpeded—the Japanese are very accommodating to a visiting *gaijin* (foreign) photographer. "When I'm shooting there I have the freedom to stop wherever I find something interesting, or take detours. Then the detours become the main road, so to speak." This is in stark contrast to the welcome he sometimes finds up and down the U. S. Pacific Coast, where he was once jailed for trespassing near an oil refinery in California, and another time threatened by a shotgun-toting Oregonian who took exception to Horn's camera aimed at his farm. "I've had to do a lot of trespassing to get good photographs. Sometimes you just have to break the rules."

It is when he is breaking the rules that Horn often finds himself turning in new directions, photographically. Always a square shooter (with his Hasselblad), he discovered a need for a wider vision when shooting seascapes in Japan. Since he doesn't own a panorama camera, he started making diptychs and triptychs to include more peripheral elements in his photographs. These have proven extremely popular to his gallery clients.

Another new direction draws on experiments he made back in high school. He tried pushing ASA3200 film to a grain-busting 50,000, and liked some of those early enlargements. "I got some really interesting results," Horn remembers. "In the right light I get a very pointillistic effect. I think if I make really large prints at this film speed, there might be some interesting images."

One of the remaining confirmed film enthusiasts, Horn insists on sticking to tradition. "A digital print is not a photograph," he insists. "It's a pixelgraph. When you go digital, you convert light into "ones" and "zeros" and then output to an inkjet printer. No disrespect, but I consider those to be high-quality posters. It's not hand-crafted. In the darkroom you are manipulating the image with burning and dodging, and working with a negative image. It's a lot more work to get a great print. And every print has its own unique qualities, especially when you go back to reprint an image.

"Another difference is in the way a print ages. Traditional silver-gelatin prints from the 1800s and early 1900s acquire a lovely patina over time. That's part of their charm. There might be fading, or chemical stains, or the muting of tones and print values. I don't think digital prints will have the same kind of patina after 200 or 300 years. Of course, digital photographers will just run off new prints in the future and make them look old. They'll probably have a new Photoshop filter—the aging filter."

—David Best

■ PRINT INFORMATION

All the prints are traditional gelatin silver, toned in sepia and selenium.Single image prints are available in:10x10 inches, over matted to 18x20", prices start at $600, edition of 25; 20x20 inches, over matted to 28x30", prices start at $2400, edition of 10. Triptych prints are available in: 7x21 inches, over matted to 15x30 inches, prices start at $1700, edition of 12;15x45 inches, over matted to 30x60 inches, prices start at $4600, edition of 6.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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—For a complete list of gallery representation in the United States and in Hong Kong, please visit Rolfe Horns' website.

CREEK, IZU, JAPAN—2008

PORTRAIT BY MAKI ISHIWATA

DUSK, TUNNEL PARK, MICHIGAN—2004

DAWN, STUDY 2, IZUMO, JAPAN—2004

REDWOODS, STUDY 20, OAKLAND HILLS, CALIFORNA—2004

TERRACED HILLSIDE, NOTO, JAPAN—2004

WATERFALL, MOUNT HAGURO, JAPAN—2008

MORIYA BEACH, STUDY 2, CHIBA, JAPAN—2008

CASCADE, IZU, JAPAN—2008

WATERFALL, ZAO, JAPAN—2008

LOOKING NORTH, ISE BAY, JAPAN—2004

KUMOMI AT NIGHT, IZU, JAPAN—2008

THREE FALLS, YAMAGATA, JAPAN—2008

CAPE INUBOSAKI, CHIBA, JAPAN—2008

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