

ALAN HENRIKSEN

Perhaps the highest compliment one can pay Alan Henriksen is to say that his photographs put one in mind of music. Specifically, contrapuntal music, which features two or more independent melodic lines. And, to be even more specific, the contrapuntal music of the composer closest to Henriksen's heart: Johann Sebastian Bach.



"I think my work can definitely be called contrapuntal," Henriksen states. "It is important to me that every compositional element contributes something to the overall statement. An artist in any medium—painting, sculpture, music or dance—would never permit extraneous, distracting elements to remain in a composition, and I feel the same way about my photography. Aside from that concern, I greatly enjoy the challenge of working with complex, visually dense subjects, puzzling out what I hope are meaningful compositional solutions along the way. I realize that in so doing I am walking a knife's edge, the other side of which lies the dreaded specter of multiplicity."

Henriksen needn't worry on that score. No matter how much visual information he gathers within the frame, everything aligns in perfect balance. No single element stands out as being "the" subject of one of his photographs; all the elements work together, like musical chords. This is especially true of his color work, which he began in 2005 after photographing exclusively in black and white for several decades. For Henriksen, chords of colors can create feelings equivalent to the experience of consonance and dissonance in music. "And, as we all know, colors can clash, which can be a good thing," he adds.

His series of images of Super's Junkin' Company, an antique dealer in Bar Harbor, Maine, represents another progression in his aesthetic development. While the vast majority of his monochrome work is focused on the natural environment, these color photographs bear witness to man's presence within that environment. Henriksen's perspective on the human cultural element is particularly revealing: He not only focuses on a repository of obsolete, castoff items, he also photographs the antique shop in such a way as to show nature gradually reclaiming its terrain. In these images organic and man-made forms coexist in equal if uneasy symbiosis.

While the mood thus summoned may shade towards the darker end of the emotional spectrum, Henriksen isn't specifically thinking in terms of growth and decay when peering through the viewfinder. He does accept the idea that ordered systems, such as living things and manufactured objects, represent a temporary bulwark against entropy.

The colors, framing and perspective of these images also suggest hidden depths, both spatial and spiritual, lurking just beneath the surface. Henriksen plays with the appearance of space and scale by the degree to which context is included or excluded. "Ansel Adams was a master of creating a sense of physical dimensionality, which he called presence," Henriksen says. "But these aspects of apparent space are, for me, subordinate to the overarching goal of consciousness-raising. I like to say that as photographers we are limited to the two spatial dimensions of the print, but there is no limit to the number of dimensions of experience."

Yet all of these themes work their way into his photographs in purely subliminal fashion. Henriksen agrees with photographer William Clift's assertion that one needs to be completely innocent when taking photographs. "Words tend to get in the way. I believe that keeping the verbiage out gives my subconscious equal access and opportunity for expression. I just enter an environment, happen to notice something, approach it, walk around it, explore it, and see what happens," he says.

Born in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York, Henriksen began taking photographs at the age of nine, but treated it primarily as a hobby until 1964, when he discovered Edward Weston, Ansel Adams and Paul Strand. "During that period, the greatest influence on the development of my seeing and on my ideas about photography was Edward Weston, through both his photography and his writing," Henriksen says. "Weston and Bach have been lifelong companions, and I hold each of them in the highest esteem."

The visual and emotional rhythms in Henriksen's work not only pay homage to those artists, but also explore contemporary issues related to the future of the planet in provoking and inspiring ways. His ongoing photographic tone poem is one well worth listening to.

—Dean Brierly

■ PRINT INFORMATION

Images are available as inkjet prints. For sizes, prices, and availability, please contact the artist directly.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

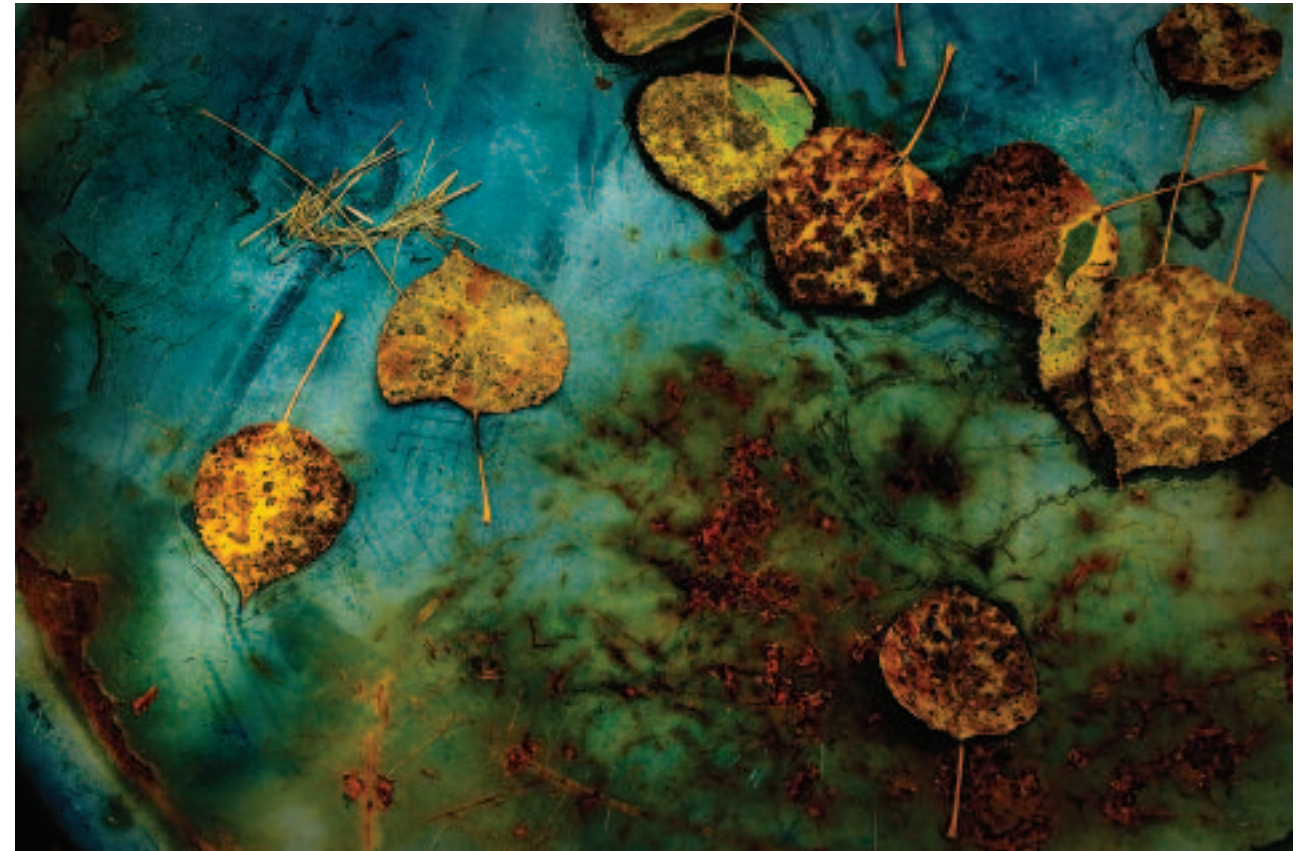
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