

## **Photographers Market**

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### *"Fresh Photographers"*

by Megan Lane

More than anything else, it is the desire to be successful that keeps young photographers struggling with their craft, agree five relative newcomers to the worlds of commercial and fine art photography.

Artistic expression is what led Bill Davis to major in fine art photography in college. It also led him to travel to Czech Republic and spend two years working as an assistant for a fine art photographer in Prague. But Davis embraces commercial photography as well. Before he went to Europe he worked as an assistant in Chicago for a commercial photographer and now he teaches photography at Antonelli College in Cincinnati. "I've always been a combination of both and that seems to be the best for me because they scratch each other on the back."

Commercial work, helping shoot for catalogs like Spiegel, Montgomery Ward and Sears, taught Davis how to light dimensional objects as well as the realities of studio work. Fine Art photography taught him about himself. It was a learning process made possible by an incredible mentor. "I got really serious about photography and I met someone twice as serious as me. That was Eva Enderlein, and at first she tore me apart. She was a very good mentor and brutally honest. I found her to be very atypical for a professor because she was absolutely blunt. After breaking me down she built me up, gave me lots of encouragement and lots of feedback." His mentor showed Davis all the natural strengths he had as a photographer and taught him how to control them. She also legitimized fine art photography in his mind. "Fine art photography is an absolutely legitimate pursuit because it is the perfect mode of expression. It has a certain quickness or efficiency that I appreciate and respect. The fact that it can also be machineless is seductive to me."

Much of Davis' recent work incorporates machineless photography, photograms, with traditional portraits and landscapes. "The photogram helps to interpret the rest of the image that I can't get in the studio." He also makes images through straight photography that appear to be photograms. The Stranger was created by backlighting a black paper figure posed in front of a white paper cone. The mysterious image evokes very real emotions through nothing more than paper dolls.

Such seemingly simple techniques are a result of his stay in Europe when equipment was hard to come by. "I had to learn how to use light instead of how to use equipment," he says. "Half of my students don't understand how their cameras work." Davis is afraid this lack of understanding will end up hurting them if they refuse to learn. "I try to help people use what I was taught and what I've personally experienced. I want people to transform their complaining and their anger into art."

While Davis settles into his new teaching job, he is also trying to re-start his American freelance career. "I had a better freelance career in Prague than I have here. I got published in magazines in Australia, Slovenia, and Germany." However, he has started to make contacts in Cincinnati and is developing new marketing strategies. "The key for

self-promotion for me right now is to go and photograph the building or interior of the place to where I would like to send work. This takes a lot of time but if you show them something they are doing, as long as you get the right shot, then that is undoubtedly the tightest, most returnable self-promotion." This approach led to an assignment shooting interiors for an art consultancy and now the owners are interested in staging a show of Davis's fine art work.

It has been a struggle for Davis to reach this point but he can't imagine himself in any other profession. "It's all about personal competition. I compete against my own failure and myself. The only success we have is through past failures. It's entirely necessary." This attitude is what led Davis half a world away to study his craft. It's also what led him home to put what he had learned into practice.