

PHOTOGRAPHY THEN

Photography Then is installment one of a three part essay devoted to the practice of photography and its relative place in popular culture and the art world over the last several decades. This essay is a bit different for me in that it isn't about technological innovation or aesthetic issues per se. It's about the evolution of the practice of photography—what it means to the lay person, how it's faring as a profession, its impact on society. I'm focusing on an evolution that's happening so slowly it isn't perceptible day to day, but the evolution reflects huge changes once you look back over several decades and project forward into photography's potential future.

My personal history with photography began seriously when I bought my first SLR in December 1972. I decided almost immediately that I wanted to be a photographer. By the late 70s I had a fledgling commercial photography practice in San Francisco. I've been at it ever since, monetizing my photographic pursuits in a wide variety of ways, adapting to market conditions, changes in media and technology, and the whims of the buying public. It's been an intriguing ride that's taken me further than I ever thought possible. In many ways, this essay is a reflection of those years and all the changes along the way. But, I didn't want this to be just about what's happened to me and the things I've observed along the way. I'm just one photographer. Other photographers have had other experiences, their practice has been different, and most importantly, they may have different opinions about where photography is now and where its headed. So, in putting this essay together, I reached out to a handful of photographers I've known and worked with over the years. They have all had, and in some cases continue to have, very successful careers in photography. You may not have heard of them, but they are representative of the practice of photography in a broad spectrum kind of way. Because they've shared their observations and opinions with me expressly for the purpose of this essay, it's important for you to know a little bit about them so you can better understand and appreciate their perspectives, which will be spread across all three segments of the essay. Depending on when they started their careers

and what their insights were, and also the directions the interview took, their commentary is distributed asymmetrically. Some are more prominent in segment one. Others will be more prominent in segments two and three. There are five photographers, in all. In alphabetical order here they are:

Mike Blumensaadt *began a lengthy photographic career in 1960 working in a camera shop while he was in college. He graduated with a BFA in photography from Rochester Institute of Technology in 1967, when RIT was one of only four schools he could find in the U. S. that offered such a degree. Mike became an editorial and corporate photographer first in Atlanta in the 1960s and then in San Francisco beginning in the late 1970s. In the early 80s, Mike and I were briefly in business together in San Francisco. He is now retired.*

Alex MacLean *is a Boston-based photographer who began his career in 1974. He has a graduate degree in architecture from Harvard and is also a licensed pilot. He photographs the natural and built environments from the air. He has authored and/or photographed 11 books; has a worldwide client list; and in 2004-05 was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome. One of Alex's book contributions was a collaboration with yours truly. He did the aerial photographs for my book Vestiges of Grandeur, which was published by Chronicle Books, San Francisco, in 1999. He upstaged me in a number of ways in this project. Alex is still practicing photography today.*

David Rae Morris *is a photojournalist and documentary filmmaker, who began his career in the mid-1970s. His father is the noted writer and editor Willie Morris. David Rae is a neighbor of mine in New Orleans. We have exhibited alongside each other at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans and we have competed against each other for a New Orleans Press Club award. In recent years David Rae has transitioned from a stills photographer to a documentary filmmaker.*

Myko is a New York photographer who goes strictly by his nickname in both his personal and professional life. He was born and raised in New York, where photography is an industry, more than anything else. He came up through the ranks in a city that was the center of a vast, and vastly competitive, photographic marketplace. In addition to his photographic practice, Myko has developed and marketed Multistitch, a stitching back, which enables digital backs and cameras to be used on traditional film view cameras. I met Myko through Luminous Landscape when I wrote a review of Multistitch. We have had many conversations in recent years regarding how digital technology has impacted the commercial practice of photography.

Carter Tomassi had a lengthy photography and film career working primarily in post-production in Atlanta, New York, and San Francisco, and is now retired. In the late 60s and early 70s Carter worked in a non-paid capacity (as everyone did) for The Great Speckled Bird, the storied underground hippie newspaper of Atlanta. Carter received a National Endowment for the Arts photography grant in 1977. He ended his career in 2001 as the last operator of a film animation camera in the San Francisco Bay Area, and with his retirement the digital transition was complete in that market. Carter was the first person to give me a full time job in photography.

So, with the backstory out of the way, here is segment one:

PHOTOGRAPHY THEN



*Kodachrome
They give us those nice bright colors
They give us the greens of summers
Makes you think all the world's
a sunny day
I got a Nikon camera
I love to take a photograph
So mama don't take my Kodachrome away
—Paul Simon from his song Kodachrome, 1973*

Eastman Kodak Co. introduced Kodachrome in 1935. The last emulsion was discontinued in 2009. All processing of the film ended in 2010. In January 2012 Kodak filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and subsequently sold off its still photographic film manufacturing business.

My photography career began in the spring of 1975 when I was hired by Carter Tomassi as a black and white printer in a small custom lab at Wallis Kamera Haus, Atlanta's Leica camera dealer. The pay was \$100 per week. I had graduated from Emory University a couple months before, where for a year I had been chief photographer and photography editor for the student newspaper, *The Emory Wheel*. It was a haphazard volunteer endeavor. Just

prior to my first paid photographic gig at Wallis Kamera Haus, I had submitted an application and portfolio to join Nexus Gallery, an upstart, non-profit, co-op photography gallery and the only place in Atlanta where photography was exhibited at the time. Mike Blumensaadt and Carter Tomassi were already members at that time. It was a narrow, contested vote, but I was admitted. This was hardly auspicious, but with no formal training in photography to that point, it was a beginning.

I had grown up in a small southwest Georgia town of 1800 people with no art museums, no art galleries, and there were no art classes offered in the only high school in the county. I knew about photography through the picture magazines my parents subscribed to. There was *Life* and *Look*, *National Geographic*, *Southern Living*, and news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*. They brought the world to my small town door step. I became a photographer largely because of these magazines, and not only that, I wanted to experience the larger world first hand and to photograph it, because of these magazines. Their impact was profound.

By December of 1972, when I was a sophomore at Emory, I decided a good camera was something I really wanted. Many fellow students had 35mm cameras—Minolta's, Honeywell Pentax's, Canonet's, and Nikkormat's. An SLR body and normal lens could be had for as little as \$200. There were camera clubs and magazines devoted to the hobby of photography. It was fashionable. Any campus nerd could get a date with an MGB and an SLR tucked into the glove box. My mother told me a camera could be my Christmas present that year. I should shop around Atlanta and find a suitable camera before Christmas break and she would pay for it. I sought advice from my uncle, who ran the photo lab nearby at the University of Georgia, who told me the camera brand most professionals used was Nikon and that was the one to get if I wanted a real "pro" camera. He also suggested that I avoid a run of the mill "normal" lens for it. I should get a macro lens, which would be more versatile and facilitate a greater range of photographic possibilities. I eventually purchased a Nikon Photomic FTN with a 55mm Micro-Nikkor lens. The tandem commanded the outrageous sum of \$500. By the time I had driven back to my dorm room with the camera and read the instruction manual, I decided I had to be a professional photographer. After

all, I had spent way too much money on way too much camera. There was no other choice. But, it wasn't just about having gone over budget. I fantasized about becoming a photographer because photography held a mark of prestige. It was a career many wanted and few would achieve. I wanted to be on the pages of those picture magazines my parents, and millions of other Americans, subscribed to and perused every week.

There was a mystique to the SLR in the 60s and 70s. They were not just the iPods of their day. They were the professional tools that created the photo essays in the picture magazines, the latest album cover art, the photos on the front pages of the daily newspapers, the fashion ads in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, and increasingly, the prints on the walls of galleries and museums. The modern camera was a cutting edge tool impacting and chronicling the contemporary era. To have one and to know how to operate one, was a mark of accomplishment. It fit right in with the component stereo system, the jazz albums in the cabinet beneath, and the copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* you had never quite managed to get through, but its place on the bookshelf meant you understood its literary importance and were still trying. You may not have mastered black and white printing yet either, let alone be getting assignments for *Vogue*, but you owned the right camera for it, should that day ever arrive. There was a cultural importance associated with a career in photography that had been building for years. By the 70s it had reached a crescendo.

The foundation for photography's stature and relevance of the 70s was laid in the 50s and 60s. Mike Blumensaadt began his career during that time. Before he enrolled at RIT, he was a student at Georgia Tech, and that's when in the early 60s he worked part-time as a salesman at Wing's Camera. From behind the counter he met many of the working photographers in Atlanta, including Jay Leviton, whom he would eventually work for. Leviton was one of a handful of Atlanta photographers doing freelance work for the major national magazines, as well as local corporate and advertising clients that were emerging in a city that before WWII only held the prospect of portrait and wedding work, or a staff position at the newspaper. By the late 60s Mike was doing freelance editorial work himself. The typical day rate was \$150, plus expenses. Rights issues were still being worked out. By the 70s, with

the help of professional photographic organizations like ASMP and NPPA, rights were sorted out in the photographer's favor. The photographer was the owner of the work created and the commissioning magazine had first-time or one-time rights, after which the photographer could re-market the work at will. Stock photography would become a major source of additional income for working photographers thereafter. Photographer friendly ownership rights held sway until the 90s when they began a slow erosion.

David Rae Morris, who began his career as a photojournalist in the 80s, was working as a freelance photographer for Associated Press in the early 90s. By the late 90s, he terminated that relationship, primarily because of rights issues. The new AP freelance contract, which came out in 1996, was the beginning of the end. In summary, this contract stipulated that AP owned the rights to all the work. Though they didn't use the dreaded "work for hire" language that's what the terms amounted to. David Rae recounted that when he began at AP his editor called him aside and said that the vast majority of the work he did for AP could be resold at will, but that if he got an image that was highly newsworthy, then that one belonged to AP. The editor went further with a hypothetical example: If the president comes to New Orleans, and you photograph him, do what you want with the photos. But, if the president is shot while he's in New Orleans, and you get a photo of it, that image belongs to AP exclusively. You can't re-market it, or profit from it, directly. In a nutshell, this meant photographers could keep the lower value work for themselves, but AP wanted the high value stuff exclusively. It was an onerous deal that reversed hard fought gains from the 1960s. It was the handwriting on the wall foretelling the death of traditional media, which was making less and less money. AP continues to struggle financially today. As rights agreements for photographers became more problematic, the balance sheets for major newspapers were tanking. Magazines began closing up shop at an alarming pace, as well.

In happier times, when magazines were flourishing, Mike's narrative of learning about photography through the big picture magazines, was much like mine, and was, I'm sure, replicated 1000s of times in other places. It wasn't just about the feature stories either. Magazines were filled with illustrated ads, all shot by freelance photographers. They were virtual

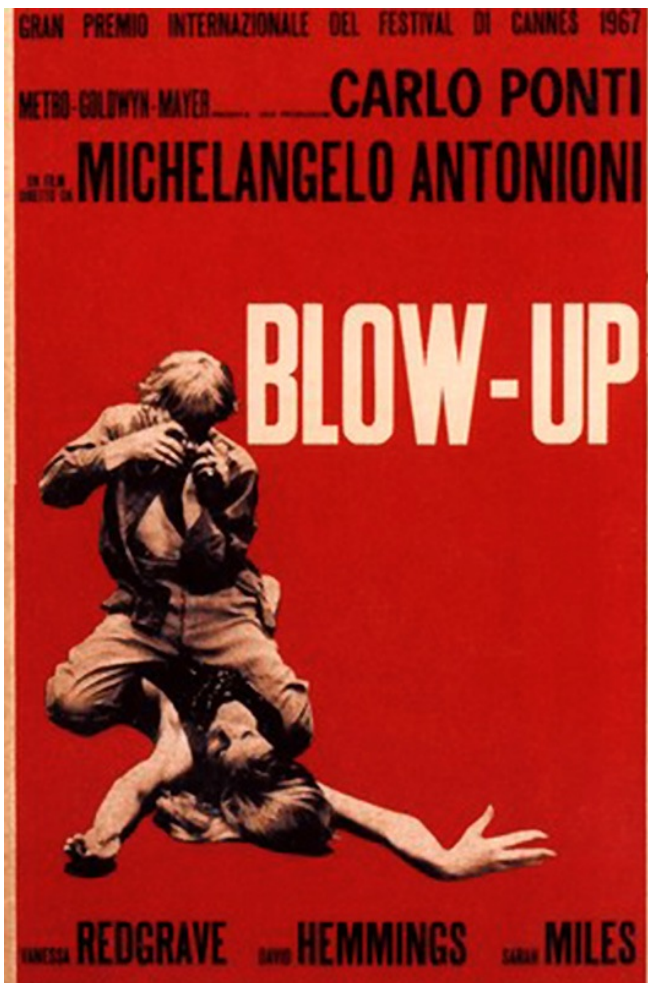
advertisements for a career in photography. Mike also talked about how the picture magazines weren't his only youthful inspiration. He recalled that twice a year, Rich's, a local Atlanta department store, held a book sale. He



purchased a copy of Cartier-Bresson's *The Decisive Moment* off the remainder table for \$1.99. He still has the title in his library today and has never been seriously tempted to sell it, though a signed first edition recently sold at auction for £13,750 (over \$21,000US). Even as early as the 70s, this seminal classic was sought after by book collectors willing to pay well over its original retail price. Mike's stories about photography in the 60s prompted me to ask him if he'd seen Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 classic *Blow Up*. "Three times," he responded

immediately. "It's the only movie I ever saw three times in a movie theater." In it actor David Hemmings plays Thomas, a London fashion photographer, based loosely on the actual London photographer David Bailey. And, as I recall, Thomas drove an MG (a British sports car at any rate) and he certainly carried a Nikon F in the glove box. He shot and shagged beautiful models by day and stayed up late at night making prints under the eerie glow of the safelight. He was hipness incarnate, in what was at that time, the hippest city on the planet. This was the height of the British invasion. Carnaby Street fashions were the rage. Twiggy, Penelope Tree, and Jean Shrimpton defined feminine beauty. And, on

the silver screen, a photographer was at the center of it all. Photography had



arrived on the pop culture map in a big way, however superficial and stereotypical the depiction might now seem in hindsight. The plot of *Blow Up*, unlike its lead character, was hardly superficial. Between trend setting fashion shoots, Thomas pursued what all serious photographers do in their spare time— personal work. When he happens upon two lovers in the park he obsesses over capturing their trysting without interrupting the event itself. However, the woman notices him and seems particularly upset they are being photographed. She wants the film, but Thomas deceives her by giving her another roll of film than the one from the camera. He then processes the actual film, makes an enlargement, and sees in the grainy, not truly discernible detail of the shadows what appears to be a shooter and a dead body. What follows is a crisis of self-doubt combined

with a sense of discovery of what had actually been going on while the lovers were frolicking. The seen and the unseen, art and reality, good and evil, become entangled in an indecipherable way and the act of photographing and the medium of photography were the embodiment of the existential entanglement.

Myko's experiences in the early days of his career in New York were not that different from the London fashion scene portrayed a few years before in *Blow-Up*. It was high pressure. There was big money involved too. And a veneer of glamor coated the entire experience. Myko related the story of a

very successful product photographer in New York, who chain smoked beneath the focusing cloth. One of the assistant's most important jobs was to clamp an ash tray to the camera stand in a very precise position, so all the photographer had to do was reach out and flick his ashes into the tray without having to take his eye off the ground glass. When on one occasion, this wasn't done properly, and the carpet was burned by errant cigarette ash, the assistant was fired on the spot. In another incident, the art director on the scene, aka the client, received a tongue lashing by the chain smoking photographer for inadvertently referring to product photographers as "vendors." In no uncertain terms, the offending art director was informed that product photographers were not salesmen, but were artists. Salesmen, or not, come Christmas time the most successful advertising photographers lavished extraordinary gifts on the art directors who had hired them. Myko recalled how one photographer gave an art director a case of very expensive Scotch. A competing photographer gave the same art director a boat, delivered to his house on a trailer. The following year the agency issued a new policy: No art director could accept a gift of greater than \$400 value from a "vendor." A lot of money was being made in advertising photography and for good reason. Lighting highly reflective objects was difficult. Doing so in such a way that made them look opulent and as precious as fine jewels, was an art. You had to do everything on film and it had to be flawless. The piece of film that came out of the camera was delivered directly to the client. No darkroom finessing. No retouching. Add to this, the fact that color transparency film could be exceedingly difficult to work with, had very limited latitude, did not reproduce certain colors well, yet in large format had sufficient detail to reveal every flaw in the product, the lighting, the set up, etc., and one is left with a task very few practitioners could master. If you were one of them, you could charge a king's ransom for your expertise. There's a maxim here that applies to far more than photography. Difficult, demanding tasks are rewarded handsomely for those who do them well. Easy tasks, which anyone can do, are rewarded meagerly. As an established task becomes easier, thanks to technology or any other reason, the reward is likely to go down. The level of appreciation for the accomplishment is lessened too.

The commercial practice of photography in the 70s was not confined to globe trotting editorial photographers on assignment, or highly paid advertising and fashion photographers bribing art directors with gifts in exchange for the plum assignments. There were many of what I would describe as “workaday” jobs. Every town of even modest size had commercial labs running E-6 and C-41 lines and they offered printing services too. Traditional color photography fostered a completely different process culture than black and white. During the black and white era, photographers had their own darkroom. They prided themselves not just on their camera skills, but their darkroom skills too. Once color came to dominate the printed page and client expectations, very few photographers did their own color processing or printing. The technology was just not conducive to that. The transition from black/white to color in commercial photography resulted in the need for thousands of labs all over the country, not just in the main media and publishing centers like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. These businesses provided tens of thousands of jobs for photographers. They were not the most glamorous positions perhaps. Work was 9 to 5, many of the tasks were tedious and repetitive, and employees were working on other photographers’ images, and not their own. Nonetheless, lab work is how many photographers could support themselves and hone their skills. It’s how I started in the business. Carter Tomassi, who was photographing rock concerts for no pay in the 60s and 70s, supported himself with full time lab work. He also exhibited his work at Nexus and other galleries and received an NEA fellowship for his work as a photographer, but actually supported himself via post-production lab work, culminating in special effects work for feature length movies. He operated an animation camera for Colossal Pictures and then his own FX shop. Today, virtually the entire network of film

and print labs, and all the jobs that came with them, have evaporated. They still exist in the major media centers and there are some print service businesses based on the new technologies of scanning and inkjet printing. But, the critical mass of lab businesses that thrived in the 70s through the 90s, is not there anymore. Neither are the jobs for freelance photographers where the requisite skill is “camera operator.” Everyone can operate a camera now. Everyone can take a competent photograph. You have to offer

more than that. Hybridized interests and skills have long been a formula for a successful photographic career. Visual storytelling, travel, unusual obsessions, unique life experiences, writing and linguistic abilities, proficiency in other art media, and a host of other skills have been successfully folded into photographic careers. In the future, they are likely to be mandatory. Alex MacLean is a textbook example. If you have good camera skills, are a licensed pilot, and have a degree in architecture giving you a refined, trained perspective on the built environment, you have a uniquely marketable skill set. Alex has used this trifecta of skills to define himself as a photographer. In his entire career to this point, he has only one published photograph, which wasn't taken from the air. A corollary to my theory that compensation decreases as the task becomes easier, is that success as a photographer is reliant not just on the relatively easy task of camera operation, but on the strength of your skills and obsessions beyond the world of photography, which can be combined with photography skills.

On the fine art side of the equation, photography was coming into its own in the 70s. The elevation of photography to art form, comparable to older media, like painting and sculpture, was built on the impact photography had made on the printed page and that impact was cultural, broad-based, and international in scope. During my interviews, Mike Blumensaadt was the first to recount that his dream in the early 60s was to have a career as a working photographer, making a living with a camera. This was the goal of all the other photographers I talked to, as well. David Rae Morris stated he didn't even think about museum exhibits or print sales until much later in his career—20 years later. Alex MacLean, who would go on to win the Rome Prize and is now represented by galleries internationally, wasn't thinking of exhibits either. He was merely elated that after 4 years of waiting tables at night, and chasing freelance work during the day, he could finally give up the table waiting. No photographer in their right mind thought about a museum exhibit early in their career. That just wasn't a common reality. There was no viable path to it. Mike began his career earlier than any of the other photographers I interviewed and when I asked him about what he knew of photography as an art form in the early 60s, he actually was aware of much of what there was to know at that time. He knew about Stieglitz's New York gallery, 291, where photography was shown with contemporary drawing,

watercolor, and painting. And he knew about *Camera Work*, the iconic photo magazine that Stieglitz published, which was far ahead of its time, pre-dating the large format picture magazines by several decades. Mike also knew about Steichen's Family of Man exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art. It was ground breaking for the 1950s. But, photographs wet mounted to masonite with radial corners, and hung salon style like a presentation at a sales convention, seem not just quaint by today's standards, but disrespectful of the medium. I remember vividly at a gallery talk in the late 90s, Danny Lyon, who upon the mention of MOMA and the Family of Man exhibit from a member of the audience, began telling about his lawsuit against MOMA, which resulted from a subsequent exhibit. When the exhibit came down, MOMA did not want to pay the extra postage required to return mounted work to the exhibiting photographers. So, his 8x10 print was peeled from the masonite and mailed back to him in a mailing tube. As one might expect, peeling a wet mounted print off masonite defied a non-reversible process, and the print was damaged. Lyon wrote to MOMA that his print had been damaged and he included an invoice for \$25, which is the amount he charged for a gallery print at that time. MOMA wrote back that whereas they acknowledged damaging the print, they would not pay the elevated "art" price of the print, but could instead offer \$1.75, which was the typical price charged by a NYC photo lab for a commercial b/w print of that size. Lyon subsequently sued MOMA in small claims court to get his money. This is good anecdotal evidence of what was thought of the value of a photographic print as a contemporary work of art, by one of the few museums in the country willing to exhibit the medium. By the 70s times would change.

The 70s became an epic decade for photography. The big picture magazines were still around, though they were actually dying. Television was killing them off. But, as all the ad men would be telling us in the 80s, "We're keeping them alive with our liquor and cigarette ads." Both products were banned from television advertising, but were permitted to continue advertising on the printed page. Even so, photography was evolving beyond the era of the picture magazines, making its way to coffee table books, gallery walls, and to major museum exhibits.

Photographic education had become a major force in this transition. Beginning with the post-World War II era, art schools and colleges with an art department, had been gradually accepting photography as a new medium and were adding it to the curriculum. This meant hiring instructors to teach it. The opportunities were substantial and since photography had not been taught in art schools or universities previously, the first instructors did not have to meet strict academic credentials. Edward Weston was hired to teach at San Francisco Art Institute in the 1950s though he only had a 9th grade education. Other instructors may have had college degrees, but not in photography since it wasn't available yet. This would need to change and it did so quickly. Graduate degrees in photography became the rage by the late 60s and as fast as they could be churned out, MFA graduates were filling teaching positions all over the country. Photography instructors were in great demand by art departments just getting into the photography game. The demand was two fold. Photography was being added to the curriculum while college education, in general, was rapidly expanding. Baby boomers had reached college age by the late 60s and early 70s and a bigger percentage of them were attending college than any preceding generation of Americans. The prospect of teaching photography at the college level was a boom while it lasted. By the late 70s, most of the positions had been filled by youthful instructors, who have only begun to finally retire over the last few years. The last of the college age baby boomers finished up their college experiences by the 80s. As rapidly as it had begun, the phenomenon leveled off, and today those who want to teach photography full time find themselves in a fiercely competitive environment.

During the 70s photography appeared on the radar of the intelligentsia, art collectors, art writers, and artists working in other media. A compilation of essays Susan Sontag had written for New York Review of Books saw publication in 1973 by the prestigious New York publishing house Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Titled simply *On Photography*, it was a major hit and by 1977 was a Dell paperback and the recipient of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism. Beginning in the 60s and continuing to the 70s, photography critic A. D. Coleman's reviews, most notably in the New York Times where he was their first photo critic, and also in the Village Voice, and the New York Observer, had a substantial following. Coleman also authored a

number of photographic books beginning with *The Grotesque in Photography* in 1977. The year before he had been the first photography writer to receive an NEA fellowship. The critique of photography in prominent and respected publications, alongside the major exhibits and publications of more established art media, should not be underestimated. This was a necessary step before contemporary photography would be widely exhibited and collected. That was already happening in the 70s too. Sam Wagstaff, who came from a prominent New York family, was in the 1960s, curator of contemporary art at the Wadsworth Atheneum and later at the Detroit Institute of the Arts. He was, like his father before him, a notable collector. By the early 70s he had turned his eye to photography and began seriously collecting it. He was convinced that photography was unduly unrecognized and he began selling off his substantial collection of paintings to buy it. By 1984 he had amassed over 2500 19th and 20th century photographic works, which he sold to the Getty for \$5 million, an unheard of sum for a photographic collection at that time. This purchase became the cornerstone of the Getty's world class photography collection today. Ironically, Sam Wagstaff was as well-known in the pop culture of the late 80s as the partner of Robert Mapplethorpe, as for his recognition of photography as an art form worth investing in. Wagstaff died of complications of AIDS in 1987, two years before Mapplethorpe.

Just as significant as the criticism, collecting, publishing, and exhibiting, was the iconic status conveyed to photographers. When, in 1975, Walker Evans died, it was on the front page of the *New York Times*. Evans had a pantheon career. In the 1930s his photographs for the Farm Security Administration defined the Great Depression. When we remember that era now, those of us who didn't live through it, know it through the lens of Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, and many others who chronicled it. The list is long, but Evans is at the top of it. Evans went on to co-author, with James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. This classic about white tenant farmers in Alabama stands alongside Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as an epic chronicle of the injustice and exploitation during a sad era of American history. The power in Evans photographs and Agee's words have only intensified with time, as they have for Steinbeck. After becoming the first photographer to have a solo exhibit at MOMA in New York,

Evans became the photo editor at *Fortune*, holding a helmsman's position through the halcyon era of the big picture magazines from the mid-40s to the mid-60s. After that, he was old, but rather than sit around twiddling his thumbs in retirement, he directed the photo department at Yale School of Art. He did it all. If his obituary didn't merit the front page of the Times, no one's did. Then on September 3, 1979, near the end of the epic decade, a living photographer was on the cover of *Time* magazine. Ansel Adams, posing with his Linhof Technika, was photographed by David Hume Kennerly, who in 1972 had won the Pulitzer Prize for his photos of the Vietnam War. The caption beneath the portrait read, "The Master Eye." Long before he made the cover of *Time*, Ansel Adams was a household name, as recognized as that of movie stars and major political figures. He was also a millionaire and his fortune had been made from his photographic art.

So ended the epic photographic decade of the 1970s. It's gestalt would charge the 80s and even carry forward to the early 90s. Then as the 90s wound down and a new millennium approached, changes in both information and photographic technology converged to fundamentally change the medium of photography. There's an ebb and flow in the evolution of all media. Photography is no exception. In the next segment, *Photography Now*, I'll look at the period from the advent of digital photography to the present. From this background synopsis of the recent past it should be clear that progress has been made on many fronts. More galleries exhibit photography and represent photographers. Museum exhibitions of photographic works are common, rather than extremely rare, as they were in the 70s. Prints sell in greater quantity and for more than the equivalent of \$25 or \$50 too. But, has the progress been uniformly this positive on all fronts? I don't think so, and that's what segment two of this essay will attempt to clarify. In the meantime, I'll close this segment with a few questions, which aren't intended to be rhetorical: When's the last time a photographer was on the cover of *Time*, or any other news weekly of similar readership and stature? When's the last time you read a photographer's obituary on the front page of the *New York Times*? When's the last time a photographer was the lead character in a major art film from the likes of Antonioni? These events may not be the core matrix from which to assess the health of a profession, but they are indicators of how significant and prestigious the profession of

photography is valued by the whole of society. They are measures of relevance, clout, influence. For me, the most important metric to explore in *Photography Now* is whether the profession is as relevant, prestigious, financially lucrative, or desirable, as it was in the 70s. And I want to examine that on both the commercial and fine art fronts.

Richard Sexton

*Many thanks to the photographers who were interviewed for this essay.
More information about them and their work is available via the links below:*



Canterbury Cathedral; Canterbury, England for Etak, Inc., A Unit of News Corporation © Mike Blumensaadt

Mike Blumensaadt

www.matrixphotographics.com



Pink Tulip Strips, Luttelgeest, Netherlands © Alex MacLean 2015

Alex MacLean

<http://www.alexmaclean.com>



**Search and Rescue on Humanity Street. September 8, 2005. ©David Rae Morris
2005**

David Rae Morris

Website: <http://www.davidraemorris.com>

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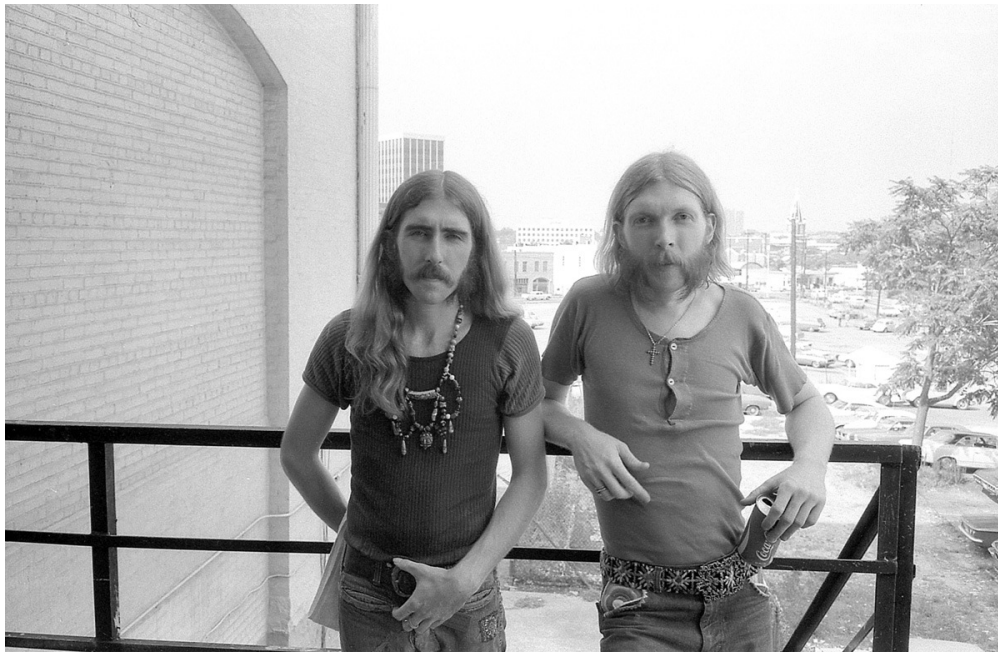
"Drive for COPD" for New York Agency BioSector 2 © MYKO Photography, Inc.

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Carter Tomassi

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