

MOMENTO is a collection of human experiences and technological dreams triggered by our cameras. With each camera is a story told by its owner. The cameras were photographed using 19th century wet plate glass negatives, emphasizing how quickly the technology of past image-making has been made antique.



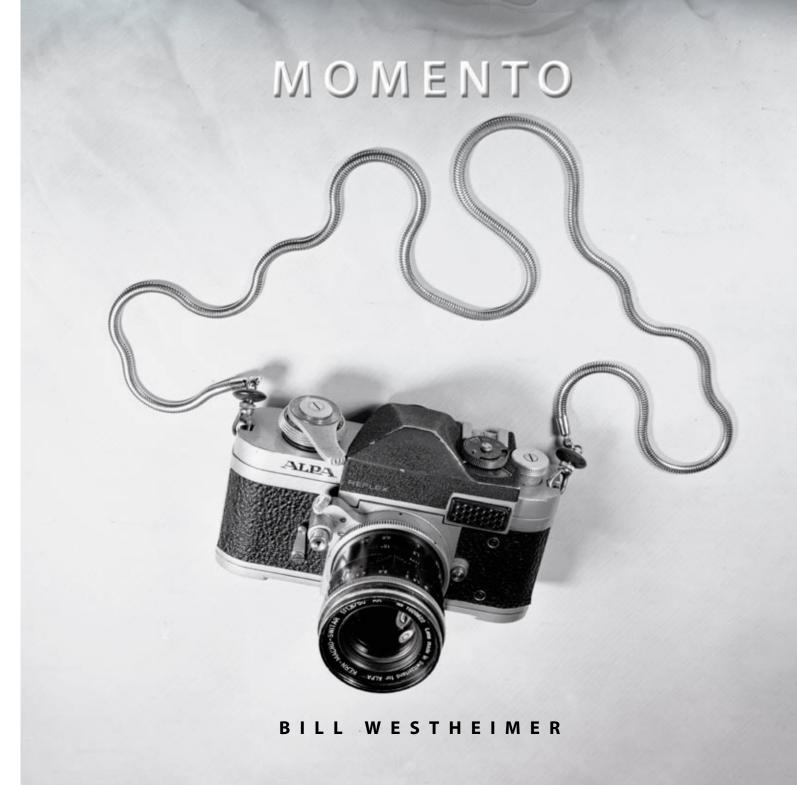
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Cover: Leica - Emmanuel Faure, pg. 14 Previous page: Kodak Brownie Bulls-Eye - Mary Byer Opposite page: Alpa 6C - Anita Douthat, pg. 28



Dedicated to my grandfather

J. Robert Orton

who never stopped believing in his dreams.

MOMENTO - Capturing Moments and Memories

Since photography was invented in the 19th century, people have captured and recorded their experiences, ideas, and environment. Photographs of births, deaths, weddings, picnics, holidays, wars, joy, and agony and the quotidian events of our lives have created a rich record of the human condition of the past century and a half.

The images capture our experience in fractions of seconds, but the cameras themselves have also endured long enough to reflect the technology and aspirations of their era. The memories we connect to the cameras are significant, sentimental and cherished. The cameras themselves trigger memories of meaningful moments in our lives that are as vivid and vital as the pictures they captured.

Initially considered almost magical, the technology of photography is a reflection of human imagination and ingenuity. From the early daguerreotype cameras, through the wet plate behemoths, to the rapid development of advanced films and miniature cameras, and on to digital, the cameras themselves provide insight into the technology, ambitions, and trends of their era. The old cameras may be discarded for the latest and greatest modes of capture, but they remain talismans of their time.

As technology advanced, the enthusiasm for recording our lives has grown and expanded. The evolution to digital picture-taking has accelerated the recording of our lives, dreams and ideas. While the archive of culture accumulates, the old technologies remain as important artifacts which reveal social trends, dreams of the future, and how we lived our lives. In many ways, the cameras reflect how we imagined the future as we used them to capture the present.

Even the names of the cameras and their lenses provide glimpses into the eras when they were created. "Brownie Bull's Eye," "Action Sampler," "Spotmatic," and "Realist" were more than marketing phrases – they were and remain symbols of the technological ambitions and dreams of mankind.

MOMENTO is a collection of human experiences and the technological dreams connected to our cameras. The cameras were photographed using 19th century wet plate glass negatives, emphasizing how quickly the technology of past image-making has been made antique.

I hope these stories and photographs share memories as vivid as the photographs taken today.

Bill Westheimer Llewellyn Park, NJ 2009

Contax II - Bill Westheimer



My grandfather J. Robert Orton was born into the wrong family.

He desperately wanted to be a British nobleman, but alas, he was a Jewish businessman in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was in the scrap business and bought and sold waste fibers for industrial purposes. It didn't suit his self image. He knew who he was even if people didn't recognize it. His home was a solid brick house with overstuffed walnut furniture and English gardens.

Before World War II he invested in a scrap fiber business in Germany. As the war approached his German business partner warned him that as a Jew his stake in the company would be confiscated. The war was starting and it was impossible to travel to Germany to get cash for his investment. The partner quickly bought the most valuable item he could find and shipped it to the USA as a payment.

It was this Contax and a telephoto lens. The war was fought and won. He never went back to Germany to find his partner. Grandpa Bob is long gone, his English hunt prints and British furniture are dispersed among his grandchildren. I got the camera and the memories.

Kodak Instamatic 104 - Dan Person



I purchased this Instamatic camera while stationed at Chase Field Naval Air Station, Beeville, Texas in 1965.

Our little family used it to chronicle the growing up years for my daughter who was 4 at the time. It stayed with us for about 10 years until we upgraded to a more current camera. This camera recorded family, friends, pets, military station, vacations and various homes as we moved about with my employer (Prudential). We literally took hundreds, if not thousands of pictures which were made into slides and they all exist today in carousel slide trays.

My favorite of all the pictures was of my daughter and me, she at age four, me in full military dress and she is looking up at me as if I am really somebody. This camera never failed us, took good pictures, probably still works today. I found the flash bulb attachment during our move, you know the one which holds four bulbs and rotates. I still treasure the fond memories provided by this camera and it resides along with my father's camera and Mary's family camera on our bookshelves.

Leica IIIa - Emmanuel Faure



This Leica IIIa was owned by my wife's great aunt and her husband Kate and Ernst Biehl.

They immigrated to the US from Germany before the rise of the Third Reich. They settled in Buffalo NY and opened up a photography studio. In time they developed a specialty in macro photography and founded Biehl's Microfilm which is still operating today under a different name.

My mother-in-law remembers Ernst photographing her and family members. It would always take him quite a bit of time to set up the camera so everyone would get a little frustrated and he always managed to snap the picture at that time. They have many family shots of people making strange faces!

Kate passed away at 99 years of age in August 2007

Honeywell Heiland Pentax - Andy Foster



This Pentax 35mm camera was an engagement present from my mom to my dad in 1961.

It cost \$261. Bill took thousands of memorable photographs of people, places and family, always capturing beauty and paying special attention to the natural environment of his subjects. His most famous series was of Roger Maris hitting his historic 61st home run at Yankee Stadium.

My father used this camera until he gave it to me in 1982, which officially jump-started my career as a photographer. I ended up using it all through high school and college, creating many memorable photos of my own. Beyond my father's knowledge of photography itself and gift for teaching it, this was probably the single most important gift I ever received.

Minolta Weathermatic - Lisa Anna Godlewski



I bought this little underwater 110 camera in 1980 because all my friends had 110 cameras and this one stood out.

I was in college at the time, still living with my parents in New Jersey and commuting to NYU during the day. I had no friends at NYU and all my high school friends were away at college and I was pretty lonely.

I joined a gym, the kind that was more of a social hang-out than a gym, thinking I'd meet people, but I never really did. The first picture I took was of some guy in the whirlpool at the gym. I asked him it he'd go under water so I could try out my new camera. In the picture he looked really pained to be doing this.

I never saw him again.

Nikon Hologon - Jay Maisel



When I first saw some images in a photo magazine taken with a Hologon I was blown away by the crispness and lack of distortion.

Little did I know that you really had to "steady eddy", plus to shoot this camera – for the first few weeks the objects in the half the pictures were my fingers. The other half didn't exist as I usually left the lens cap on because I was used to shooting with a single lens reflex and I would work thru the viewfinder and say, "I see it, I can shoot it." Finally, with a little wire I attached a small sign that stuck up in the viewfinder window that said, "shmuck" to remind me to take the lens cap off. I should have known there would be problems because when it was delivered to me I took one look and called Royaltone, my old camera store – I screamed at the salesman, Al Geller, "you idiots forgot to put the lens in the camera." He calmly answered, "look, asshole, take off the lens cap." I did and saw the lens that was deep in the camera body and said to Al, "Never mind." I love this camera, it's one of the sharpest lenses I've ever seen, it vignettes, but if you put on a filter to compensate for the vignette it makes the already slow f/8 into a mind numbing f/16. So I learned to love the vignettes.

The lens cap threading is so fine that after a few weeks it's useless so I put a bunch of special Velcro type stuff on the camera and on the lens cap to attach it.

Marty Forscher made this one of a kind camera by sticking the Hologon into a motorized Nikon As you can see by the photo the battery pack is by Jacobson and was a precursor of the motors made by Nikon. It's the one camera I really would love to use for digital but can't.

Brooks Veri-Wide - Stuart Klipper



I had a colleague back in 1974 or 1975 who was a commercial photographer specializing in architectural and industrial jobs.

One day he I saw him sporting an odd hybrid looking item, which he delectably identified as a Brooks Veri-Wide. My first impression of it was its 'feel' – it just held well.

At the time I was beginning to seriously consider some of the reasons about why I might want to work with a wide-field formatted camera. I was currently devouring a lot of books and Scientific American articles about contemporary physics, mathematics, and cosmology. I'd been a junior scientist as a kid and the passion has never left me. I had also been reading such reflective and innovative thinkers like Jacob Bronowski. He taught me much about the subsuming correspondences between human endeavors such as art and science.

Hardly aware of what was transpiring, I just sort'a fell into seeing the insights I was gaining into the nature of scientific understanding of the physical world as a metaphorical (for want of a better term) substrate to what all I sensed I might then be doing as an artist.

One concept I glommed onto was that of the Universe's isotropy, essentially that at certain scales – immense and infinitesimal – things were effectively uniformly distributed and smoothly spread out whichever way you looked. In turn I liked that the optical nuances of a well-corrected wide-angle lens tended to attenuate the space encapsulated in its field of view, and subsequently, that any of the content within its frame was distributed with some pleasing degree of equanimity and equilibrium. This is all on the high-falutin' side; but, really I just really liked the look of what I was doing with that camera once I bought one of my own and pointed it out into the world about me.

Since the camera truly was a hybrid -- its back was a Graflex roll film back which could be detached from the lens and shutter component. The back came with a dark slide and a slot to facilitate this when film was loaded in the camera.

In the last half of the 70's and into the early 80's, I doctored the camera in a ways that paralleled what John Cage did with his 'prepared pianos'. I constructed a whole variety of customized inserts to go into that dark slide slot. I could thereby modulate the framing, do frames within frames, fabricate an image from constituent exposures made at disparate times and place, build up and deliberately place areas of multiple exposure, add localized patches of coloration, etc., etc. All this basically just stemmed from the unconventional exploitation of a utilitarian attribute of the camera's basic design.

The Veri-Wide and my insights into wide-field imagery's conceptual underpinnings paved the way to my eventual elision to my long term use of the Linhof Technorama. I still use the Veri-Wide on and off, but it has pretty much spent the past decade or so in the drawer becoming venerable.

That name 'Veri-Wide' predicated a buddy of mine christening the Technorama as the Awfully-Wide. I still refer to it with this a/k/a name now and then.

Polaroid Swinger - Rich Pomerantz



I was just a kid when the Polaroid Swinger was introduced. It had a hip caché, perpetuated by the advertising for it and that cool, go-go boot white finish.

It was an integral part of the 60's suburban culture I grew up in.

My dad had an early Polaroid camera, a very technical looking thing with bellows that extended out. To me the Swinger was the perfect kid's version of my dad's amazing camera, and like any good son, I wanted to be a smaller replica of my dad, so when I finally saved enough to buy a Swinger, I rode my bike to the Caldor department store and bought it. I don't know if I was the first kid on my block to have one, but it definitely increased my street cred when word got out that I had a Swinger!

Beer Can - Rich Pomerantz



I found the Budweiser can camera at a flea market on a New York City pier a few years back.

The seller was a former professional photographer turned camera dealer, who chatted me up for a while. I was fascinated by this little camera but I was not inclined to spend good money for a novelty item. After talking for a few minutes though he realized I was also a practicing photographer, so he practically gave it to me, and I could not resist buying it. For me his gesture was a small but potent reminder of the camaraderie professional photographers used to enjoy much of, but seems to be in scant supply today.

Nikon D300 - Mike Zawadzki



I only somewhat understood the basics, but every time I raised a camera to my eye, I felt like I was on a mission.

From Technical Pan to Portriga Rapid, I wanted to use all the long extinct stuff I heard my professor Klaus Schnitzer and my father mention when I peppered them with questions. I spent hours outside in the winter exposing sheets of 4x5 film with a runny nose and fingers so numb I could barely trigger the cable release. All the time I was thinking to myself, "Those guys on the internet who argue about digital SLR specs and test charts are losers. I want nothing to do with them or their digital cameras."

Klaus approached me with requests he received from people looking for photographers for their events, birthday parties, reunions, etc... I knew I couldn't show up to photograph a wedding with a 4x5 and pin-striped focusing cloth to match my suit. Sure, I had taken a digital photography course, but I had convinced my instructor to let me scan Velvia 50 4x5 film and have the output be digital prints. Soon enough I was stumbling around with a borrowed Nikon D70. Begrudgingly I began to experiment more until I decided, "Hey this is actually really useful."

So there I was standing in the camera store picking up my brand new D300, only months after promising never to purchase a digital camera. It wasn't long before I fell in love with photography again. With a heavy tripod and a lot of patience, I entered the world of long exposures and wild color shifts that occur during night photography. At the same time I felt like I was cheating on my girlfriend, the D300 went everywhere with me while my poor 4x5 sat jealously folded up in a camera bag at home on these surreal summer nights. Sometimes it made it into my trunk, but never onto the tripod, the focusing knob on the back was loose anyway. Another lame excuse not to bring it out.

I spent an entire year prowling around at night with my D300 and was very proud of my work. Another professor mentioned to me that my work was impressive, but some shots would look even better on large format film. I started to argue about the merits and advantages of digital photography for a bit, but then I realized I had become just like those guys on the internet.

Today I use both of my cameras happily for my personal work. The D300 makes it very easy to explore an area quickly, while 4x5 film captures all of the small details and subtle tones that I want to show. Everything in photography has a technical upside and downside, but how long can you truly remain passionate about lens comas, diffraction, and chromatic aberration? My personal vision and the itch to just "get out there" will never leave me no matter what camera I have bouncing around the back of my car.

Wirgin - Bill Westheimer



The early sixties were an innocent time, and I was a very innocent teenager.

I was just barely a teenager and the concept of being a virgin didn't even enter my consciousness. So having a camera named Wirgin didn't bother me. For a macho boy today it might be a problem, but I was oblivious.

I was also thrilled to have a real 35mm camera made in Germany. It had to be great, and my photographs would be too. I can't remember how I got it, probably a gift from someone cleaning out their attic but I was excited to be using a real camera. I saved up my allowance and bought 100 feet of Plus-x film and a bulk loader and some cassettes. I got some D-76, stop and fixer, found an "autoloading" developing tank and I was a photographer.

I wandered around my "Leave It To Beaver" style suburban Cincinnati neighborhood looking for likely subjects.

I photographed my family, the dog, the neighbors' houses. Broken fences, cast iron gates, bugs and even footprints. I was hooked.

I ran back to my bathroom, struggled to "autoload" the tank, developed the film and entered my own image of nirvana. Every day and every picture was an adventure. I was no longer a virgin. I was a photographer.

Nikon L35AF - Bill Westheimer



It was a turning point in my life when I moved to New York and became a photo assistant to Dick Durrance II.

We traveled the world shooting for high profile advertising campaigns. I was just the second assistant, but this was the big time. Dick shot with a big camera - Mamiya RZ67 – but I noticed he always carried a point and shoot camera on his hip. I decided to do the same. This Nikon L35AF was state-of-the-art at the time. But my life was different. I never could make myself pause to take a picture. I was always going somewhere and doing something, too busy to stop and see and take a picture. Stopping to smell the roses just wasn't the way I lived.

Still I kept it in a pouch on my belt and always had it with me. One time we were photographing a sailboat in Bora Bora at sunset. I accompanied Dick to shoot standing in the water. I carried the equipment, reloaded film backs like a banshee and thrilled in the excitement of our adventure. After the magic evening light was gone, Dick and I trudged back to shore through waist high water looking out for sea urchins. I had the camera and the exposed film in the bag around my neck. If I fell in the water the camera and film would be ruined. The shoot would be ruined, the trip would be a disaster – there was no backup camera if I dunked this one. It was dark as the inside of a cow, I was terrified of stepping on some poisonous sharp undersea creature in those 50 yards to shore. I worried about sharks and moray eels. We could hardly see where we were headed. But we made it ashore without incident and the camera and film stayed dry. I thought we could relax once we reached the beach. I was about to set the camera bag down to give my neck and back a rest when we realized the ground was covered with big land crabs scurrying underfoot. We hopped and jumped around them and waited until the dinghy came to pick us up. I was exhausted with tension from all the responsibility.

When we finally got back on the sailboat to motor back to our base at the hotel I finally could relax. The crew and models were joking and laughing not noticing that the French crew was struggling to find the channel through the coral heads in the dark. "sacre bleu!" and "merde" and lots of other French that I didn't understand was going back and forth between the captain at the helm and the mate perched on the bow with a flashlight peering into the crystal clear water looking for the coral. They did well and we were headed home until "wham" - we hit a coral head and the boat stopped dead. All the joking ended instantly. We were stuck. More unintelligible French. Consultations in broken French and English between the captain and Dick.

Everyone was ordered to climb out on the boom which would be swung out to the side to heel the boat and hopefully dislodge the keel from the coral. The tension was thick and we dutifully took our places sitting out over the water. Being the littlest guy, I was at the far end of the boom. I took out my little camera and clicked one flash shot of the crew aligned like birds on a fence sitting in the dark stuck on a coral reef in a lagoon in Bora Bora.

As the boat backed off the coral my boss flew into a terrific rage at my indiscretion – how could I do anything that might interfere with getting off the coral, getting the boat and crew and camera and film back safely? Just do your job, no slacking off, no distractions from the job, How could I take a picture at a moment like that?

To this day I still find it hard to stop what I'm concentrating on long enough to savor the moment, to smell the roses and to take that grab shot.

Seagull - Nadia Estrada



I was shopping online for 35mm film when I accidentally bought a pack of 120mm film instead.

At that time, I had no idea how I could use this strange elongated film. When I showed my professor Klaus Schnitzer, he laughed and allowed me to borrow his Twin Lens Seagull camera.

At the very first sight of this camera, I fell in love! I would go on long walks around Hoboken and Jersey City with my eyes looking only through the view finder.

The world was backwards, it was perfect!

Minolta Autocord - Gary Gladstone



It's 1956 and I was staggering through the motions of becoming a newspaper photographer when I had a streak of good luck.

I managed to capture a series of spot news events which were useless to my employer, a local suburban weekly. My Managing Editor advised me to sell them to the New York Daily News, the largest daily paper in the country, which was paying top dollar for any freelancer's news images. With plane crashes, a Park Avenue shoot-out, assorted catastrophic auto accidents and strikes and shootings, all captured as they happened, I was on a serious roll. The Daily News hired me to work as a stringer. With my newfound wealthier status, I bought a twin lens reflex camera and start shooting with it. It was a Minolta Autocord roll film camera, the cheaper Japanese version of the famed German Rolleiflex.

The "Fotogs," as the News called their staff shooters, scorned and belittled this unorthodox camera. They all insisted that only the giant 4x5 Speed Graphic, an icon of which is part of the Daily News' logo, is appropriate for news work. The Graphic is the badge that allowed them to pass police lines. To newspaper readers of the era, the 4x5 symbolized the highest level of professional news photography. If you didn't haul a 4x5 around with a big, heavy leather case of loaded film holders, you weren't a real photographer. The staffers at the news called me "the rich kid from Westchester with his toy camera." They were jealous of all the front page space being awarded to this "outside" photographer. Staffers all treasured the Speed Graphic as the gold standard for news photography. This giant contraption allows an image to be made, leisurely, once every ten seconds because of the need to change the film holder manually after each exposure.

Having rejected the heavy camera in favor of the Minolta Autocord, I was expelled from the inner circle of Fotogs. The staffers pressured the News's laboratory guys to refuse to develop my film. They made me process my own Autocord - shot rolls, using reels kept for the occasional amateur who brought in a roll of family pictures containing spot news photos from the street. At this famous newspaper, it was demeaning to be forced to develop your own film. I continued to use the Minolta which allowed me to make eight pictures in the time a 4x5 guy can shoot two. As with the British fleet's defeat of the Spanish Armada, my gear was smaller and faster and more maneuverable. Still, no staffers would even think of using a smaller camera. They sneered at me and I developed a real buddy relationship with this camera. I fondly whispered little compliments to it after a rough assignment. "Nice work, little buddy."

Minolta Autocord - Gary Gladstone



continued...

I loved this new camera. The optics were every bit as good as the Rollei and a focus lever below the Minolta's lens, allowed one-hand operation for both focus and shooting while the right hand cranked the film while cocking the shutter. It was fast and let me keep my eyes on what was happening enough to grab the best moments.

One day, leaving an assignment at the county courthouse in White Plains, NY, I dropped my Autocord on the concrete steps. My stomach clenched as the camera tumbled down four steps before stopping. I raced, with my heart pounding, to pick it up and see the damage.

I knew, way down deep - where it counts, that this camera had taken a mortal plunge and, although there was nothing more than a scratch and a few dents on the outside, I took it to my insurance broker hoping he would somehow understand how badly this camera had been injured and help me file a claim for replacement. I wanted a replacement based on what I figured was serious internal mechanical injuries including lens alignments, speeds and focus accuracy. He looked at it and said "It looks O.K. to me. Not much visible damage. I doubt if the adjuster will give you anything for it. If it looks more beat up, I'm sure they will agree to replace it for you."

I slunk back to the courthouse steps carrying my beloved wounded Minolta. When no one was looking, I energetically flipped the camera down the steps. It made an awful noise.

There was still no obvious damage other than a dented lens shade. This damned thing was built like a safe. I tossed it again and suddenly my chest muscles tightened with pangs of guilt. I had become a murderer and decided I could not continue the attack. I skulked home, feeling miserable.

The next day, I bought a new Autocord, and placed the injured camera in the closet, planning to have it checked and repaired when I am rich enough to own a back-up camera.

Months later, I took it for repair. It needed no work, other than a little touch up paint. The dents were inconsequential.

A few years later I loaded it with film and tried it out. It worked perfectly. Fifty years later, I still periodically take the camera out of the closet and sniff the fake leather grained sides smelling of years of sweating through assignments. I work the controls and they are as smooth as silk. The metal sounds of the crank and shutter release are a familiar voice from the past. Unlike this aging photographer, everything works. I still feel guilty about betraying my trusted metal friend but the Autocord is still humming along and I smile thinking we are, after all, still buddies.

MOMENTO

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Thanks too, for the inspiration and encouragement from the members of the monthly NYC Photo Salon.

Technical

The images were photographed using a Cambo 8x10 view camera and wet plate collodion glass negatives. The collodion process involves cutting and polishing a glass plate, coating it with collodion, and then sensitizing with silver nitrate. The plate is exposed and developed with a ferrous sulfate developer, fixed with sodium thiosulphate, dried over an alcohol lamp, and then varnished. Transition to pixels is done with a Microtek Artixscan 1800F to 8 bit RGB 75 Megabyte files. Digital adjustments were made with dual processor computers running Adobe Photoshop in Windows XP.

More

Additional information is available at www.billwest.com/momento

Limited edition silver-gelatin contact prints of the images are available. Enlargements are available as archival inkjet prints Also available are a small selection of unique "tintypes" made on trophy aluminum.

Contact the artist:

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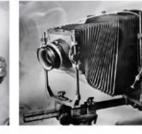




































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BILL WESTHEIMER has been fascinated with alternative processes since making his first photograph at age 14, including experiments in holography, solarization, and high contrast imagery. His works are exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide. Recent work includes photograms made on collodion glass plates, Ilfochrome and gelatin silver media. He collaborated with Charles Schwartz using a camera obscura to photograph the City of New York, and published Manual – The Personalities of Hands. His website is www.billwest.com

Bill lives and works in Llewellyn Park, New Jersey in a converted 1885 carriage house that includes a modern darkroom and digital printing studio along with a collection of cameras and stories.

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