

State Of Grace

The photography of Lois Greenfield is an exploration of time as well as stunning images of dance. Performers frozen in space preserve a moment, and lead the viewer to ponder the moments before and after the fraction of a second captured by her camera. Greenfield's work inspires us to reevaluate how we see the world, and movement, in particular.

During the early years of her career, Greenfield saw the photography of dance differently than her contemporaries. However, the limitations of conventional photography and circumstances prevented her from creating the types of images she hoped for.

"At first, I was frustrated by the limitations of photographing dress rehearsals," Greenfield explains. "The lighting was almost always low and changed constantly. I could barely eke out an acceptable *f*-stop and shutter speed to produce at best a very grainy picture. The dark backgrounds didn't



Combining photography and dance,

Lois Greenfield reveals the elusive beauty of movement

By Ibarionex R. Perello >> Photography By Lois Greenfield



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help either, nor did the fact that the dancers were often not dancing in full costume or with full energy.”

When it came to dance, Greenfield recalls, photography was used as a documentary device. The images were meant to portray the precisely choreographed movements of the dancers. Yet even with the best results, the photographs were always secondary to the dance. Seeking the ability for greater control of choreography and lighting, she moved into a studio. Her epiphany occurred in 1982 when she photographed dancer David Parson.

“This was the first time I was asked to photograph a dancer outside the context of a specific dance,” says Greenfield. “This experience of liberating the dancer from the dance and privileging improvisation over choreography was what really captured my imagination.”

That opportunity has led to an extensive exploration of “the unseeable”—the slivers of time that, in total, create the beauty of dance—which has been published in her two books, *Breaking Bounds* and *Airborne*.

A recent adopter of digital, Greenfield has enjoyed viewing those captured moments immediately after photographing them using a Sinarback 23 and a Hasselblad 500cm. Although she had some trepidation about the technology, she readily acknowledges the benefits of a new way of shooting.

of whether she has captured the fine and all-important details of a subject.

“I was very reluctant to get involved with digital technology because everyone has always assumed that my images were digitally manipulated, which they are not,” says Greenfield. “But digital ‘capture’ is different from digital ‘manipulation,’ and since everyone scans everything anyway, purity isn’t protected by shooting film.

“Nothing can compete with the excitement of the photo coming up on the computer screen. For me, it’s a much better indicator of what’s happening. It’s the small details that make the difference in an image and, for me, that’s crucial.”

The use of digital technology has made a significant difference in Greenfield’s commercial work, where the immediate access of the photographs is a boon to her clients.

“Commercial clients love to fit the images right into their layout and walk out of the studio with virtually set ads,” she says. For Greenfield, the image, when displayed on her computer screen, eliminates any doubts of whether she has captured the fine and all-important details of a subject.

“If I’m photographing hosiery, for example, there would be no way to see if I captured the texture of the weave on a Polaroid,” she says. “Shooting digitally prevents unhappy surprises later; you see exactly what you shot.”

Although Greenfield often intends to use the digital system as a “Polaroid,”



OPENING SPREAD: Greenfield’s collaboration with professional dancers and her skills as a photographer result in a testament to the drama of movement. By working with a performer’s choreography and by including costumes and props, Greenfield adds the additional factors of tones, shapes and forms to her images.

THIS SPREAD: By including fabrics in their performance, Greenfield reveals the power and the beauty of the dancers’ movements.

After the success of her first book, the images of her second, *Airborne*, explored



not only movement, but also the storytelling quality of both the dance and photography.



THIS SPREAD: Carefully controlled sidelight (left) and the enveloping of subjects in near-transparent material results in images that are as striking for their color and contrast as they are for the figures themselves. A recent adoptee of the technology, Greenfield often uses digital capture to ensure that she and her subjects are on the right track in their collaboration.

THIS PAGE: Greenfield's use of digital capture not only ensures that she gets the image she's striving for, but it serves as tool to improve the confidence of the dancers she's photographing. The instant results provide the affirmation needed for a successful session.

NEXT PAGE: The carefully choreographed movements of three dancers amidst the apparently floating spheres add an element of awe and fantasy to the image.





she sometimes finds herself shooting an entire session digitally. She worries that the instant display of the images on a monitor can be problematic, however.

Says Greenfield, "I find that when shooting digital, the focus turns to the monitor rather than the movement itself. The dancers want to immediately look at the monitor and I believe that they lose a bit of their energy,

74 | Digital Photo Pro

their concentration. It's very important that the focus not be misplaced."

This hasn't kept Greenfield from exploring the different palette that digital photography provides her work. She has been using her digital equipment in a series of images exploring the human body.

"I've been concentrating on closer looks at the body, either by zeroing in

on preexisting shots or culling from fragments of contorted shapes or creating new enigmatic configurations," she says.

The resulting nude studies explore new qualities of tonality, which are a result of the differences in the digital file compared to film, especially when working with alternative light sources.

"The tones seem more continuous

STATE OF GRACE

in the RAW digital files, less contrasty,” says Greenfield, explaining that recent images were photographed using tungsten light sources rather than strobes. “Tungsten has a different quality than electronic strobes. The skin comes out like alabaster, really soft and creamy. I can’t use that kind of light on moving bodies, as the lights’ lumens are too low. But in the nudes, the bodies are holding still and I often shoot wide-open at $\frac{1}{60}$ sec.”

Although film still plays a large role in her work, Greenfield acknowledges the increasing role of digital image-making.

“It may be counterintuitive, but we usually shoot many more images with digital,” she says. “One would think that seeing I got that one good shot would end the pursuit, but I find that never having to change the film back means I shoot more continuously. Of course, you don’t pay for film or lab costs, so



Catching Digital Action

Lois Greenfield's extraordinary photographs capture dancers in motion. She freezes bodies in transitory positions that would otherwise be little more than a blur. She doesn't use digital technology to Photoshop posed dancers—they're in full motion all the way. It might seem odd, then, that Greenfield uses a Sinarback 23 on a Hasselblad 500cm

body. Neither piece of gear is typically associated with action photography. Because Greenfield is using strobes, she's capable of freezing the action. The Sinarback 23 is a single-shot back, meaning it can capture the full frame at one time. The setup has proven very effective for her dance photography.

Greenfield is uncompromising in her demand for image quality and uses whatever equipment will help her achieve her goal. The Sinarback provides high-resolution and immediacy—features that have taken her in new directions as she's shooting. The Sinarback gives Greenfield the freedom to shoot continuously and experiment beyond the shot she set out to get.

you might as well keep shooting.”

Yet as some of the equipment she uses has changed, so has Greenfield's vision. After the success of her first

book, the images of her second, *Airborne*, explored not only movement, but also the storytelling quality of both the dance and photography.

“The photos in *Airborne* have a bit more narrative to them,” she says. “I used elements such as ropes, scarves, flour, cocoa, tubes, plastic bags and the like to transform my dancers into more metaphorical or mythological beings.”

Greenfield dislikes the labeling of her work as “dance photography.” Instead, she speaks of the exploration of time and movement inherent to each of her images.

“I'm most interested in the ambiguity of a given moment,” she says. “Unlike most other dance photographers, I don't try to capture the effort of the endeavor. I prefer to show the dancers in an attitude of grace.”

“The pictures look impossible because people tend to conflate the time they spend looking at the picture. The viewer equates the time they spend looking at the photos with the duration of the photographed event. But what they're really looking at is a split second beneath the threshold of perception. What's more, the thinner

the slice of time that I capture, the more 'solid' its representation seems. Photography fragments time and fractures space. By stopping time, a split second becomes an eternity, an ephemeral moment solid as sculpture.”

Greenfield's growth as an artist and her use of digital technology has led to some unexpected collaborations. She's currently photographing and performing in a unique dance that was designed around her own photography.

“I'm collaborating and performing in a dance called “Held” with the Australian Dance Theatre. In it, I photograph the dance live and, using a Canon 10D, the images are transmitted in real time onto two video projection screens.”

After Greenfield produced some initial photographs, choreographer Garry Steward choreographed the dance, which includes Greenfield moving across the stage photographing the dancers during the actual performance. Although she's familiar with the chore-

ography, it's a challenge to create an image that's immediately displayed without the benefit of editing.

“It can be hair-raising,” says Greenfield. “Yet I've found that it has brought me closer to my roots. I like the challenge. Compared to early in my career when I was shooting live performances, these shots are wild, even wilder because I'm so close up.”

It seems that digital technology and her love of dance have served to enhance and nurture Greenfield's love of photography.

“I can always walk in and take a nice picture, but that isn't enough for me,” says Greenfield. “I feel like I have to create something new each time. It's exciting to take a picture of a unique moment in time. That's one of the strengths of photography. You see it and it will never happen again.” DPP

To see more of Lois Greenfield's photography, visit her Website at www.loisgreenfield.com.