

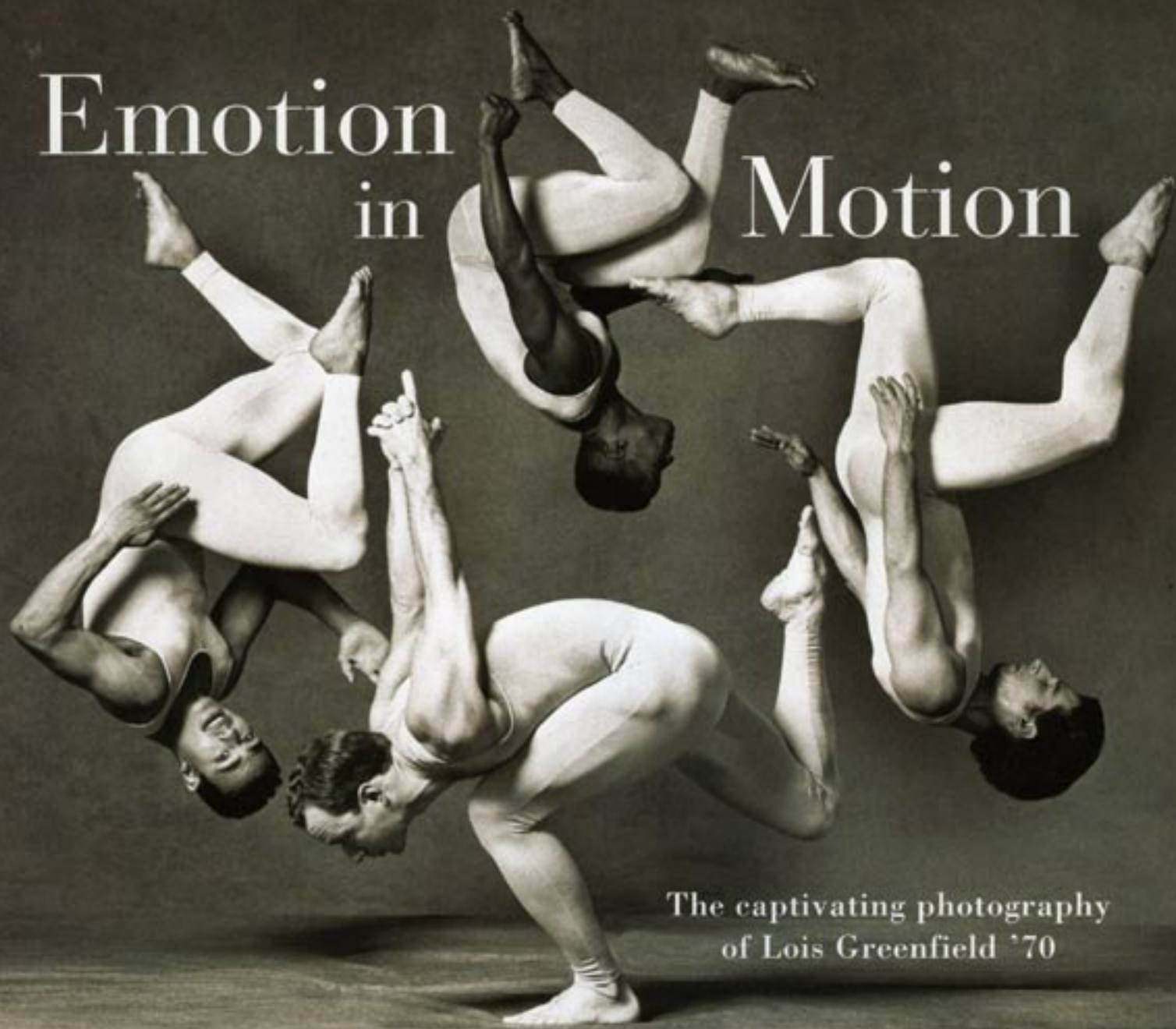
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# Brandeis

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## Emotion in Motion



The captivating photography  
of Lois Greenfield '70

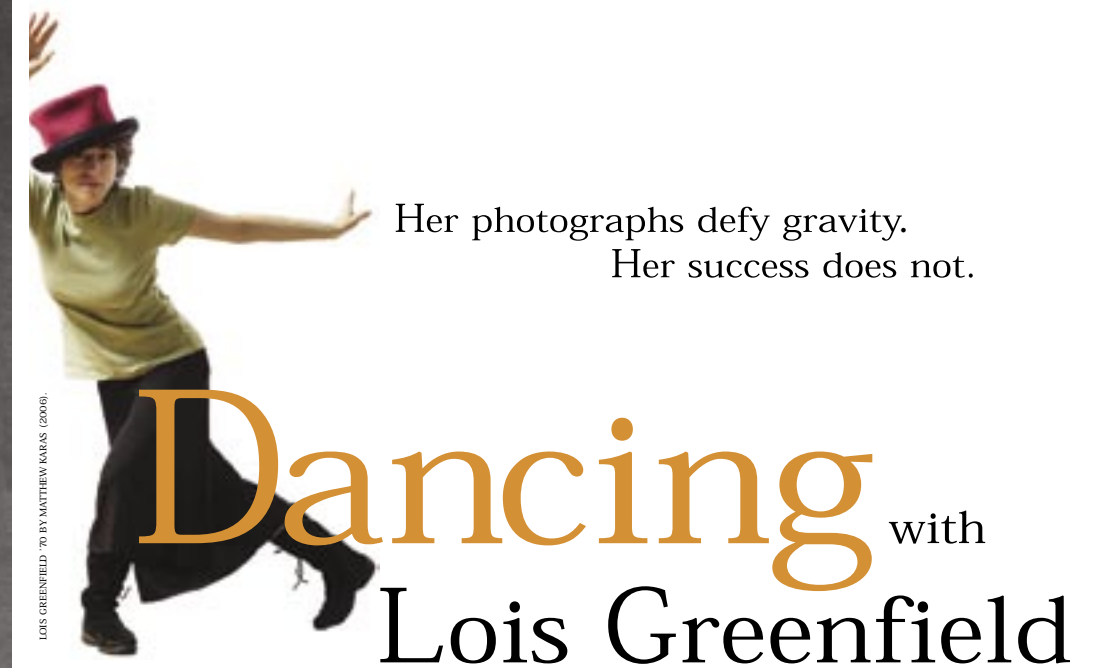
Judges without Borders

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LOIS GREENFIELD '70 BY MATTHEW KARAS (2009)



Her photographs defy gravity.  
Her success does not.

# Dancing with Lois Greenfield

By David A. Nathan

**Y**ou need to know this about Lois Greenfield to fully appreciate the work of one of the world's best-known dance photographers: What you see on paper is what she saw through the lens.

"I never, ever, ever Photoshop," says the 1970 Brandeis graduate. "I don't even know how to Photoshop."

So when you see one of her images of a calm-as-can-be dancer hurtling horizontally through the air destined for a certain meeting with a hard floor, you can be assured that's just what Greenfield saw through her camera lens. Or when you see a dancer who appears asleep in a strange bush, you can be certain that he is very much awake—and moving—the optical illusion a byproduct of Greenfield's skilled eye. She does her manipulating—of dancers, props, and lighting—before snapping the picture, not after.

Greenfield's pictures have appeared in publications from A to Z (*American Photographer* to *Zoom*, with the likes of *GQ*, *Newsweek*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, and *Vanity Fair* in between), while her client list nearly stretches the alphabet, running from A to X (Adidas to Xerox). She is at work on a third monograph—she published *Breaking Bounds* in 1992 and *Airborne* in 1998—and produces an annual calendar. This year, Greenfield's work

has been exhibited in France, China, Japan, and the United States (Colorado and Alaska).

Although the New York-based Greenfield is considered by many to be the world's most important dance photographer, she is passionate about dancers, not dance. She's interested in exploring movement and its expressive potential.

"There are no rules for capturing the peak moment, it's a matter of instinct," Greenfield says. "What often interests me more, however, are the split-seconds before or after the so-called peak. There are very subtle emotional nuances in these micromoments. A dancer going up, for example, connotes striving, whereas coming down suggests release. A completely different narrative can emerge from the same series of jumps, depending on my timing. I am fascinated by these subtleties."

She works to create seemingly impossible configurations in order to confound the viewer.

"My rule of composition is that if you understand what you're looking at, then it's boring," Greenfield says. "I like pictures that defy a rational, logical explanation—when the viewers can't understand what exactly is going on and what will happen next. That's my challenge."

At Brandeis, Greenfield studied anthropology and film, and hoped to combine the two

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Flipper Hope, Jack Gallagher, Daniel Ezralow, Ashley Roland for Raymond Weil Watches, 1993

"I didn't direct the dancers' movements, but I guided them. I made sure their faces were relaxed, but still connoted some emotion. They were all on separate planes, but the camera compressed them to look like they were on the same plane."

to become an ethnographic filmmaker. But circumstances led her in another direction. During the summer after her freshman year, Greenfield traveled to South America on a community service project. She brought along a camera to photograph the people and their landscape. Two summers later, traveling across North Africa, photographing was central to her experience.

"My interest in photography arose from my interest in other cultures," says Greenfield, who is married to former Brandeis classmate Stuart Liebman and has two sons.

**"When I look back at my career, I see this straight line that has bent into a circle."**

Despite no formal training, after graduation Greenfield started working as a freelance photographer for newspapers in Boston. She snapped pictures of everything from prisons to rock concerts to dance performances. In 1973, she returned to her native New York and fell into dance photography quite by chance. She worked regularly for the *Village Voice*, the *New York Times*, and other publications.

As the late 1970s grew to a close, Greenfield fully rebelled against being a dance photographer. She opened her own studio in 1980, driven by the desire to create her own art rather than document someone else's.

"I wanted to impose the medium of photography on my subject matter, to produce images of dancers that captured the feeling and excitement of the movement, even though that moment may not exist on stage," she says.

In her latest project, Greenfield is collaborating with the Australian Dance Theater in *Held*, a production in which she shoots the

performance from the stage itself and the images are transmitted immediately onto two nine-by-nine-foot projection screens that are part of the set. The audience sees the dance and its representation at the same time.

The conceptual framework for *Held* was developed with her associate, Henry Jesionka. The choreography grew out of a photo shoot Greenfield did with the company in Adelaide.

She had been invited to collaborate on the making of a dance with Garry Stewart, the company's artistic director. *Held* has been performed at the Sydney Opera House, and Greenfield has toured with the group for subsequent performances in New York, Paris, Monaco, and Alaska. She will be on tour with *Held* in fall 2006 and spring 2007.

"One of the reasons I find this experience so rewarding is it is so unexpected," Greenfield says. "Who ever thought I'd be on stage performing with a dance company?"

Greenfield is also working with filmmaker Jodi Kaplan on a feature film, *18 Degrees Latitude*, about dance as prayer. They chose to focus on ceremonies along the 18th parallel because it crosses thirty-two countries with diverse cultures and terrains, more than any other latitude.

For Greenfield, *18 Degrees Latitude* and *Held* bring her back to her roots, when she studied anthropology and film at Brandeis, and then her years as a dance photojournalist.

"When I look back at my career, I see this straight line that has bent into a circle," Greenfield says. "I have come full circle."

To view more of Greenfield's photographs, visit [www.loisgreenfield.com](http://www.loisgreenfield.com).



**Johanna Boyce Dance Company, 1982 (p h o t o g r a p h e)**

"This photo was taken for the *Village Voice*. I wanted to represent a dance by re-creating moments of it in my studio rather than going to the actual performance. I love chaos and the chance factor that all these disparate elements—the figures, the shadows, and the balls—come together in one fortuitous moment. The chaos coheres into a magical moment."

**Teal Marx of the Danscompany, 1976**

"This is one of my earliest shots, taken while I was covering dance performances. It doesn't have the technical qualities of my later work—I couldn't use my own lighting—but it reflects my current preoccupation with time. I'm really photographing the passage of time as much as I'm photographing movement."



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Daniel Ezralow and David Parsons, 1987 (fr&e ft)

"This reflects my interest in depicting contradictory realities within a single image without the benefit of Photoshop."

Daniel Ezralow and Ashley Roland, 1989 (e ft)

"This image became the cover of my first monograph, *Breaking Bounds*. Dan and Ashley would jump and entwine themselves. It can take on romantic connotations, but in between each jump the dancers were fighting. Like many of my pictures, this is a uniquely photographic event. It exists for one-two-thousandth of a second."

Sham Mosher, 1993

"I saw a picture of Sham Mosher in a newspaper, called him up, and invited him to the studio. We experimented with a Jute sculpture that he made. He looks like a bud that is about to blossom. There is an illusion of support—it seems as if he's resting in the ropes. But he's not—he's jumping."





Mia McSwain, 2004

"Mia is improvising with a large piece of cloth. The fabric doesn't trace her path of movement, but gives the impression of movement. It looks as if she is in a flower or a cloud."

Sham Mosher, 1995 (p e t e r s e n)

"I started with the idea to create the effect of sand flowing through an hourglass. I wanted it to look as though the sand, for a split-second, made the form of a person. My collaborator, Jack Deaso, made a mixture of flour and sugar that he poured through a tube on to Sham as he jumped."

To read more articles on Lois, click below to go to her website:  
<http://www.loisgreenfield.com/about>