

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

By selecting her moments carefully, **Lois Greenfield** creates ambiguous images that can only be experienced as still photographs, yet feel as though they are moving

LOIS GREENFIELD has been one of the most prolific photographers of contemporary dance in the last 40 years because she takes a very different approach to her genre. Most dance photography has traditionally been about documenting positions or choreographed moments from a dance, but Greenfield's first book, *Breaking Bounds* (1992), was already a radical break with convention because it was based on improvisation. It wasn't the dance and choreography, but the movement itself that interested her. Her split-second images of athletic and acrobatic movements mid-air looked surreal, because the human eye can't register a 2000th of a second.

With her new book, *Moving Still*, published 17 years after the last one, Greenfield has pushed her concept further. "After all these years I wanted to take a different approach, so I introduced props, mirrors,

reflective surfaces – all kinds of things that had intrigued me since my early days as a photojournalist. I found that adding commonplace elements, such as styrofoam balls or shredded paper, became conceptually transformative to the shot. It added new and unpredictable dimensions," Greenfield says.

The enigmatic and ambiguous scenarios in Greenfield's new images are photographed in the way she has always shot her work. Every photo is a single in-camera image. There's no digital manipulation. "It's literally a snapshot of what happened in front of the camera," she says.

Pieces of fabric or balls that appear to levitate are thrown in by an assistant or by the dancer, and Greenfield awaits the decisive moment with the Hasselblad C/M she's used since the 1980s.

A surprising choice of camera, some might think,



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given that the C/M doesn't have a continuous drive mode. But that's exactly why Greenfield likes it.

"If you shoot continuous, you're giving over your personal, decisive moment to the machine. You might get more moments, but you didn't select them yourself." In that regard, the shutter of an old Hassy beats the latest models hands-down. "The split second I shoot is crucial to giving that floating feeling, and by the time a new, automated camera has done the focusing, measured the light and so on, the moment is gone. The old manual cameras have a more responsive shutter."

The decisive moment is, of course, crucial for any artist working with the paradox of capturing motion in a still image, but Greenfield's approach is different from that of most other dance photographers.

"Most photographers would shoot peak moments in the dance, and I almost never do that. For me, the

timing of the shot is instinctual. I find that if I analyse the moments I shoot, they're most often moments after the peak, when the dancers are coming down and are more relaxed. Even though the dancers have to work incredibly hard, I like them to look as though it's effortless. I never want to see the muscles and the strain and the sweat, which a lot of other dance photographers appreciate. I want them to look like angels with invisible wings blowing them around."

Although Greenfield is sticking to her 'old-fashioned' setup, one thing that's changed is that she now shoots with a Leaf digital back. It's more practical, but more importantly, not having to fit subjects into a square has pushed Greenfield to express herself in new ways.

"I used to always retain the negative black border around the square, so none of those pictures were cropped. And actually that black border became a compositional element because it defined the space the dancers were in – the composition of their forms within the square was somehow related to the square, Greenfield says. "The digital back, on the other hand, is a rectangle, and there's no black border as there would be on the negative, so I ended up shooting in a horizontal or rectangular format, which opened up a different compositional strategy."

Having previously shot entirely in black and white, the new digital back also changed Greenfield's approach to colour. "When you shoot digitally, you de facto work in colour, and then you can desaturate

it to get black and white, which is what I thought I was going to be doing. But I ended up liking the colour images more. Not that my pictures are about colour. Most of them are neutral flesh tones or accent colours. For the most part it's just real-life in colour, it's not about colour."

The digital back has also helped Greenfield to communicate more effectively with the dancers. "It's great that instead of having the dancers look through a magnifying loupe at a 2x2-inch polaroid, I can actually bring them over to the monitor and give them ideas or ask them to do something in a slightly different way."

But that's not to say that the digital back has changed the way Greenfield shoots. "Most photographers will take the picture, look at the monitor, and make corrections. But in dance photography, you can't get that moment twice. So I still have to look at the subject. I don't even look through the camera. If I looked through the camera, I would wait until the dancer entered my frame and I'd shoot, but then it would be too late. I have to anticipate that the second after I push the shutter, a miracle moment will coalesce." ✕

Kathrine Anker



Moving Still: The Exhibition is a three-year travelling exhibition. Visit www.loisgreenfield.com/exhibits for information. *Moving Still* by Lois Greenfield is published by Thames & Hudson, £40 / \$60

[Page 30] Dancer Ha-Chi running in a silver ribbon, 2013.

[Page 31] Andrew Pacho, shot for the JVC Jazz Festival in 1999. Greenfield's idea was to have the dancer fly like an angel providing the music

[Left] Dancer Paul Zivkovich captured in 2014 recreating an Australian dance theatre performance called *Held*

[Above] Dancer Jennie Clutterbuck throwing a scarf up in the air and arching her back, 2002







