

The Storyteller's Soul

PASSAGE

Artist's Statement / Curt Richter

Nobody cares what kind of pen Shakespeare used. That may be true but readers are often curious how writers think and work. How does someone write a book? Many novelists follow the same methodology. They begin very early in the day, before the world has awoken. Writing two to four pages in roughly two hours, concluding; "That's all I've got." In the afternoon they may go over what they wrote but only to make minor corrections. After two or three months they have a novel and send it to their editor. It is at this point that writers do something that I doubt many other artists could. They collaborate with another person and rewrite their story. The editing process varies greatly but most writers are grateful for it. Shelby Foote was the sole exception. Like Mozart, he committed his words to paper with a steel point pen and Indian ink. Unwilling to accept any revisions, from anyone. One common characteristic of writers is their curiosity. Writers tend to be skilled conversationalists. Preferring to ask questions, listening carefully and possibly probing the responds with another question. As if every conversation possibly contained the raw material for their next novel. Often American writers have a small group of colleagues who they regularly share their work in progress with. Taking turns reading and then talking it over with the group. If Finnish writers do this, they haven't said so but there is a common trust that writers seem to have. They are more generous with each other's efforts than visual artists. They are supportive in their common aspirations.

My ambition as a visual artist is also to be a storyteller although my medium is very different than a writer's. Looking at an image can take a second but to study one may take hours, a lifetime. Reading a book takes time, you start with the first word on the first page and continue until the last. A great novel or a painter's masterpiece can hold its audience's thoughts and imagination forever. As a photographer I'm always looking for images in everything, trying to find form, balance and content. An optical harmony. I cherish my solitude, I like my own company. Visual artists don't seem to need each other in the same way writers do. Maybe it's because of differences in the mediums, maybe we're not as capable of exposing our vulnerabilities. We present our work when it's finished, as an immutable object.

A good novel will take the reader to another place. I began taking portraits with two ideas. Firstly, a literary approach to the subject and with lighting taken from the 17thC Dutch and Flemish painters so their faces had the brightest value. A novelist doesn't define every event in their characters existence, they describe the moments that reveal them. I intended my portraits to say more about the subject than was visible at the moment the photograph was taken, something more than what was seen visible on the surface of the print. A consciousness of their character and their history, to sense what they had done prior to coming before my camera. A living portrait, as if the photograph continued in time like a film. That hopefully my portrait captured a bit of their soul.

"You begin with the possibilities of the material"; Robert Rauschenberg answered when asked how he approached making art. It's all the same. It doesn't matter which media an artist chooses, I think we're all trying to say the same things. To find a meaning in our experiences. Our existences are confused and confusing. In art we find an accord that is difficult to find elsewhere. It may not answer our questions but it can contain them and that's fulfilling. Art can give meaning to what we can't understand.