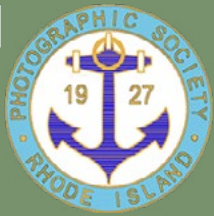


IN FOCUS



March-April 2026

Volume 99, Issue 4

The Newsletter of the Photographic Society of Rhode Island

CELEBRATING PHOTOGRAPHY IN RHODE ISLAND SINCE 1927



Found Treasures. Photo by Helen Lambiase

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Photo by Dennis Goulet

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PSRI is a Proud member of:



President's Message



As we move into March and April, there is a noticeable shift in the air—not just in the season, but in our Club as well. The end of March marks our return to fully in-person meetings after our winter stretch of mainly

Zoom programming. While technology has allowed us to stay connected across distances, it has also brought about a trend of impersonal connections. I continue to believe that face-to-face interaction remains central to who we are. For most of our nearly 100 years, we gathered in person. There is something grounding and sustaining about that tradition, and I look forward to seeing our room filled again with conversation and shared enthusiasm.

We will also be opening our doors to the public at the end of March for an Open House—an opportunity to welcome new faces and share what makes this Club special. I encour-

age you to attend, bring a friend, and help us show the wider community the strength and warmth of PSRI.

Looking ahead, our centennial celebration begins this summer with a booth at the Wickford Art Festival—an exciting first step in marking 100 years of photographic fellowship and creative growth. It is remarkable to think about the continuity of this organization and the generations of photographers who have stood where we stand now. For me, our year-long celebration will be, in part, an expression of gratitude for the foundation laid out by those who came before us.

As my term as President begins to wind down over the coming months, I find myself reflecting once again on how much this Club offers—not just in photography, but in connection. I look forward to finishing this chapter strong and, most importantly, to being together again in person as we continue writing the next pages of our history.

Bob Mattera



Photo by Bob Mattera

Interested in seeing what the Photographic Society of Rhode Island is all about?

Join as a Guest Member for 30 days. Fill out the [registration form](#) and select the 30 day guest option.

Scan QR code to go to our website



PSRI Mission Statement

The mission of the Photographic Society of Rhode Island is to promote photography as an art form and provide a supportive community for photographers of all skill levels. We aim to inspire creativity, improve technical skills, and encourage artistic growth among our members through education, exhibits, competitions, photo outings, and networking events. By creating opportunities to share knowledge and critiques in a positive environment, we hope to advance the craft of photography in our community.

We invite you to join us at one of our meetings to experience this energy firsthand. You will meet people of great photographic talent, and great people to boot.

Calendar March/April 2026

(Check the [online calendar](#) for the latest information)

3 March, Tue 6:30pm BOD meeting

10 March, Tue:

Open Competition #4 Deadline

2-3pm and 6- 6:30pm: Print drop off at the church

10 March, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Jody Hildrith "Seeing Things from a New Perspective: Creating Frozen Bubbles" **Zoom only!**

17 March, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Open Competition #4

24 March, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Mark Battista: "Finding Inspiration: Helping Photographers Overcome a Creative Rut" **Zoom only!**

31 March, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Open House

7 April, Tue 6:30pm BOD meeting

April 14, Tue: Nature Competition #2 Deadline

14 April, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Sarah Lawhorne: "The spiritual Practice of Photography"

21 April, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Nature Competition #2

28 April, Tue 6:30pm Social Time

7pm Women vs Men Competition

In Person Meeting Place

Lakewood Baptist Church, 255 Atlantic Avenue, Warwick

Directions: (From I-95, either north or south) Exit 14 to RI Route 37 connector heading East, go to the very end of Route 37 connector. This will curve you around and place you on Post Road northbound. You should see Gregg's Restaurant on the left just after you go under Route 37 connector.

Continue north on Post Road. Watch for McDonald's and Walmart on the right. About $\frac{3}{4}$ mile further north is a traffic light at Atlantic Ave, turn right. Continue $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to another traffic light at Warwick Ave. Go straight across Warwick Ave. at a slight left angle. Continue on Atlantic Ave. and the Church is on the left and parking lot is on the right.

How We Use AI (Editorial Transparency)

We use AI tools—primarily ChatGPT—to assist with drafting and editing parts of this newsletter. PSRI editors set direction, fact-check, and approve all final text. We also use AI for grammar, clarity, and styling as needed.

Unless noted, all photographs are made by PSRI members. If AI is used to generate text or create/alter an image beyond standard edits, we label it clearly as such.

Upcoming Meetups



PSRI members at Coggleshall Farm in 2025
Photo by Lauren Lambert

Maple Sugaring Day at Coggleshall Farm

Saturday, March 7, 2026

1 Colt Drive, Bristol RI (opens at 10:00 am)

Admission fee: \$10 (free for Sturbridge Village or Coggleshall Farm members)

Meet at the entrance

RSVP to Noreen B. at 401-793-0774

More information about the Maple Sugaring Day: coggleshallfarm.org/event/maple-sugaring/

We Need You!

Be Part of the Next PSRI Newsletter!

Help us highlight the best of PSRI. We invite you to contribute your favorite images, personal narratives from the field, or helpful insights to our upcoming newsletter.

Email submissions to PSRI-newsletter@psri.us

Coming soon: A special edition of our newsletter In Focus dedicated to AI and photography—focussing on exploring creative possibilities, practical tools, and how emerging technology is reshaping the way we imagine, make, and analyze images.

Competition Dates 2026

Special Competition	January 13, 2026 Entry due date: January 9, 2026
Open Competition #3	February 10, 2026 Entry due date: February 3, 2026
Open Competition #4	March 17, 2026 Entry due date: March 10, 2026 2-3pm and 6- 6:30pm: Print drop off at the church: March 10
Men vs. Women Competition	April 28, 2026 Entry due date: April 14, 2026
Open Competition #5	May 26, 2026 Entry due date: May 19, 2026

To compete in the PSRI Image Competition, your membership must be current and you have to log in to the website (psri.us). For more information about the specific competition rules, visit the [competition page](#) on the website. There you will also find the forms to enter your photos.

Men vs. Women Challenge

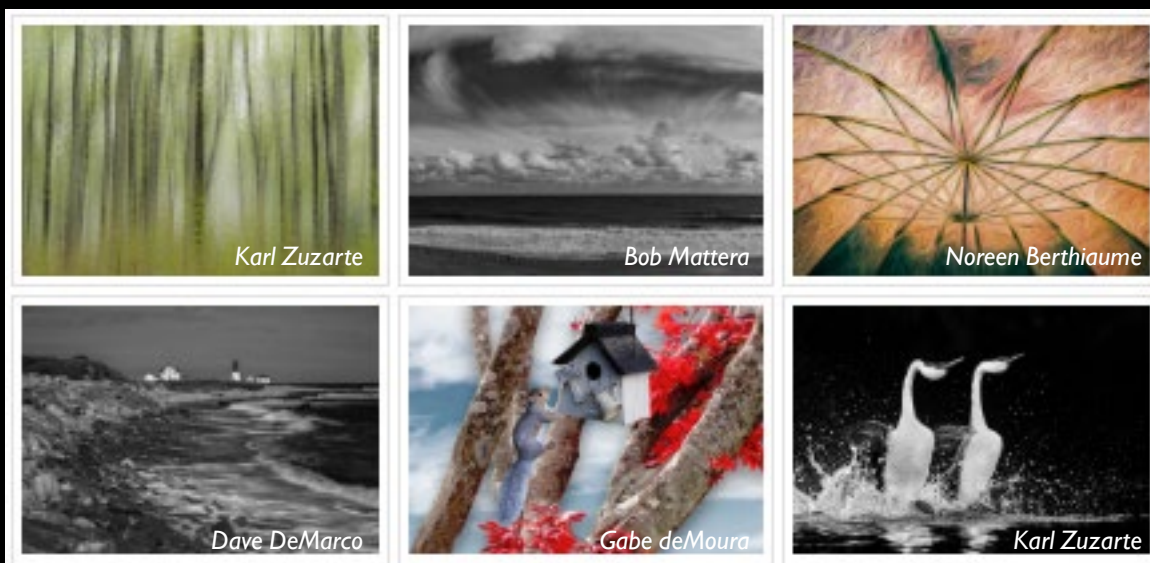
Join our friendly "Battle of the Sexes" photo face-off! Men and women are paired up to compete in unique, randomly assigned categories. Submit one digital image (new or from your archives) to be scored by our male and female judging duo. The gender with the most points at the end of the night wins bragging rights for the year!

To Join: Contact Tara Marshall.

Submission Deadline: April 14, 2026

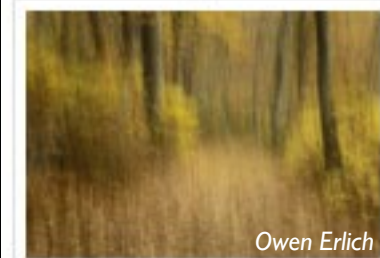
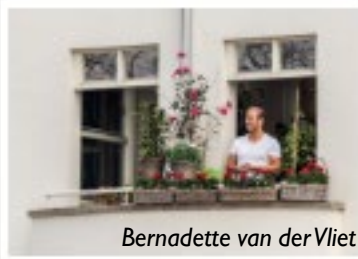
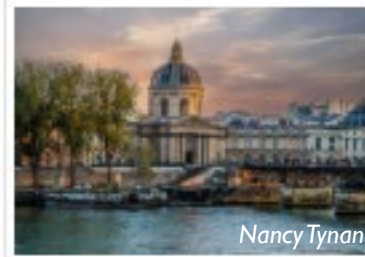
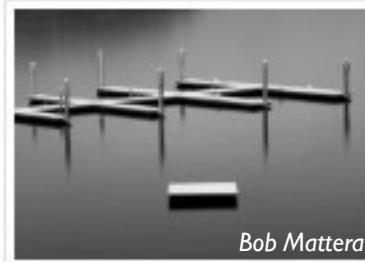
The Big Event: Tuesday, April 28, 2026 (During our regular club meeting)

Special Competition Winning Images *Black & White and Abstract*



To see the winning images in full size, [click here](#)

Open Competition #3 Winning Images

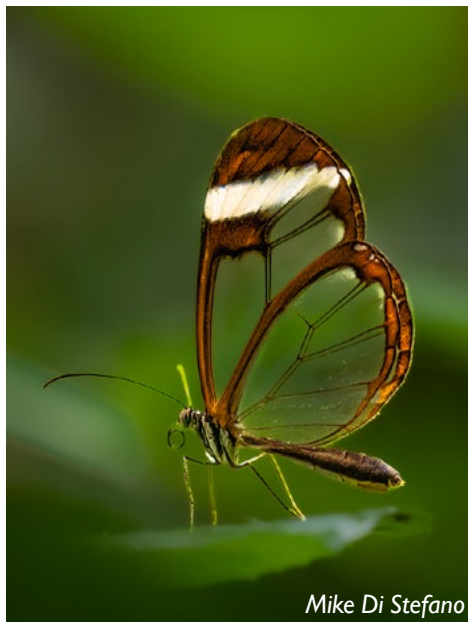


To see the winning images in full size, [click here](#)

MAGIC WINGS BUTTERFLY CONSERVATORY

meetup *January 15, 2026*

By Lauren Lambert. Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory in South Deerfield, CT, was the perfect place to spend a cold, winter day! PSRI members found many subjects to photograph as they explored the 8,000 square foot indoor space which is home to some 4,000 domestic and exotic butterflies. The Brown Clipper, Cairns Birdwing, Rice Paper (which took a shine to one of our members), Glasswing, and the Lacewing, were only a few of the many beautiful butterfly species flying throughout the warm enclosure. The Madagascar Moon Moth, which only lives for four to five days, was also another treat to view and photograph. Other subjects photographed inside this tranquil place included a gray treefrog, Akbar the parrot, various reptiles, Koi, exotic birds, free-roaming Chinese Button quails, and beautiful orchids. A hummingbird was also spotted flying high above! Wolfie's Restaurant, down the street from MagicWings, was the location where the twelve photographers gathered to enjoy good food and conversation.



Tom Backman - Where Poetry and Photographic Art Met

By Greg Kniseley Tom Backman has been a PSRI member since 2011. He creates photographs that portray the human story—the interaction between people and their relationship with their environment.

Tom is currently showing his sepia photograph, *Mother and Children*, in Art in the Atrium First U's invitational exhibition, Ekphrasis 2026. The show runs through March 6, 2026, in the Atrium gallery at First Unitarian Church of Providence, One Benevolent Street, Providence, RI. Gallery hours are Monday-Friday, 9am-5 pm, and Sunday, 9am-1pm. (Exhibit website: <https://www.aitafirstu.org/ekphrasis-2026>)



Tom Backman
photo by Bernadette van der Vliet

What is Ekphrasis?

Ekphrasis is a literary term for writing poetry in response to visual art. The writer spends time with the work, exploring feelings, memories, and associations before creating a poem. As poet Mark Doty writes, “Whatever the image stirs in your own imagination and from your own life is valid.”

Each artwork in the show is paired with ekphrastic poetry displayed beside it. Tom was one of 15 invited artists and submitted up to three works, from which *Mother and Children* was selected. Poet Marguerite Keil Flanders was randomly assigned to his photograph and given a month to respond.

Marguerite's work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Yankee Magazine*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Comstock Review*, *Poetry East*, *The Main Street Rag*, and other literary journals. She previously served as Managing Editor of *Crosswinds Poetry Journal* and leads a writing workshop at the Men's Medium Security Prison in Cranston.

What was it like exhibiting together?

“I was moved by Marguerite's poem and statement,” Tom says. “The poem sparked a warm feeling.” Marguerite wrote, “This photograph, as most of my muses do, took a visceral hold of me, connecting to an old memory about motherhood and daughterhood. I imagined the girl in the photograph needing contact, and I started from there. The photo seems timeless, except for the cellphone. So, I felt free to go back to 1955.”

Why and how did you create *Mother and Children*?

In 2017, Tom traveled to Berlin to attend operas, hear the Berlin Philharmonic, and take a photography course. Wandering down a side street, he noticed a tightly bonded family—children clinging to their mother as she focused on her cellphone. He captured the scene with a Sony A7RIII and a 24–110 mm lens and later printed it on his Epson printer.

How did you get started in photography?

“At 45, I picked up photography at the urging of my wife, Penny.” Inspired by Henri Cartier-Bresson, André Kertész, Vivian Maier, and Robert Frank, Tom studied street photography with David Wells, Martin Waltz, and Magnum photographer Constantine Manos. He continues to refine his skills through courses, PSRI competition feedback, and learning from fellow PSRI members.

How would you describe your photography?

“I strive to portray the human story—how people interact with each other and their environment.” Tom focuses on urban street and night photography and volunteers to photograph Providence's WaterFire events and protests.

What role does photography play in your life?

“It helps me slow down and really look. It plays a smaller role now that I'm older.”

How has your work evolved?

“After giving up competitive sailboat racing, I moved into photography. Over time, I've become more interested in observing people and the human scene.”

Favorite quote?

“Slow down, look, and work the scene.”—Mike Browne

Biggest risk?

“I have vertigo. Photographing WaterFire at night, the biggest risk is not falling into the river.”

Best advice?

“Let the image speak to me. Be aware of where I am and let the scene pull me in.”

Worst habit?

“Not photographing.”

A missed opportunity?

Tom and Penny once planned a trip to San Miguel Allende to work with a local photographer, but had to cancel when Penny broke her leg.

MARGUERITE KEIL FLANDERS

When I Was Very Little

—after *Mother and Children* by Tom Backman



Shrouded in sunbeams,
my mother works at her desk,
while I sit on the oriental rug
looking up at her.

Later in a store, I lose
track of her, take the hand
of another woman.
We are both shocked
and I rush away to find Mommy.
For the rest of the day
I want to touch and hold her,
keep her close where I can see her.

Even now, seventy years later,
I wish I could take her hand.

Marguerite Keil Flanders is a poet and reader of poems. She was Managing Editor for *Crosswinds Poetry Journal* and helped lead a workshop in the Men's Medium Security Prison.

"This photograph, as most of my muses do, took a visceral hold of me, connecting to an old memory about motherhood and daughterhood. I imagined the girl in the photograph needing contact, and I started from there. The photo seems timeless, except for the cellphone. So I felt free to go back to 1955. I look forward to hearing from Tom where and when he took this beautiful photograph."

BY BOB MATTERA

Ask AI

Q Make your best pitch to our photo club members and friends, roughly 200 people with varying interests and abilities, most are non-commercial photographers, on how you can help them with anything from editing to planning a shoot, or with camera settings or composition? anything else - you name it. Take your best shot.

A Bob — this is exactly the right framing. You're not introducing AI as technology. You're introducing it as a club resource. A quiet assistant in the background.

Here's a version you could run almost as-is in the newsletter:

What could AI possibly do for a photography club like ours?

If you've never used AI—or have avoided it entirely—you might assume it's about fake images, shortcuts, or replacing creativity. It isn't. Think of AI as a knowledgeable assistant sitting beside you at your desk—one that doesn't get tired and doesn't mind questions.

Here are just a few ways it can help photographers of any level:

1. Image Critique (Without Altering Your Work)

Upload a photo and ask:

- Is the composition balanced?
- Does the light support the subject?
- Is the eye drawn where it should be?
- What might strengthen impact?

AI doesn't change your image unless you ask it to. It simply analyzes and responds — much like a judge or mentor offering feedback.

2. Help in the Field

Describe a situation:

"Indoor volleyball, poor light, players moving fast."

AI can walk through:

- Suggested shutter speed ranges
- Aperture tradeoffs
- ISO considerations
- Autofocus modes
- Even positioning ideas

It becomes a portable refresher course.

3. Planning a Shoot

Thinking about:

- A sunrise at Point Judith?
- Street photography in Providence?
- A winter woodland series?
- A portrait of a grandchild indoors?

AI can suggest:

- Timing
- Lens choices
- Composition strategies
- Backup plans if weather shifts
- Creative themes to explore

It's like brainstorming with a patient collaborator.

4. Strengthening Composition

You can ask:

- Why does this image feel flat?
- How can I improve subject separation?
- Is this stronger in color or monochrome?
- Would a tighter crop increase impact?

AI can explain visual weight, leading lines, negative space, tonal contrast, and storytelling clarity—in plain English.

5. Preparing for Competition

Unsure which image to submit?

Upload three. Ask for comparison:

- Which has stronger immediate impact?
- Which shows clearer subject intent?
- Which might resonate most with a judge?

You remain the decision maker—AI simply gives you another perspective.

6. Writing Help

Need:

- An artist statement?
- A short bio?
- A description for an exhibit?
- A caption that says more than “Sunset I”?

AI can help refine your words while keeping your voice intact.

7. Printing & Technical Questions

Wondering:

- Why do prints look darker than your screen?
- What color space to export?
- Why noise appears in shadows?
- What sharpening settings make sense?

AI can explain technical topics clearly — without needing to dig through manuals.

8. Project Development

Have an idea but not a structure?

AI can help you:

- Clarify a theme
- Develop a shot list
- Sequence a body of work
- Identify visual consistency
- Connect imagery to narrative

For those exploring more intentional, themed work—it can be a powerful planning partner.

9. Historical & Educational Support

Curious about stylistic influences?

You can ask about the visual philosophies of:

- Ansel Adams
- Diane Arbus
- Henri Cartier-Bresson
- Gordon Parks

AI can summarize their approach and even suggest exercises inspired by them.

What AI Does Not Do

It does not replace:

- Your eye
- Your experience
- Your intuition
- Your emotional connection

Photography remains human. AI simply assists.

If you’ve never tried it, consider this your invitation. Start small. Ask one question. Upload one image. See what happens.

You may discover that AI isn’t about artificial intelligence at all.

It’s about amplified curiosity.

If you’d like, I can also craft:

- A slightly shorter version for print layout
- A more provocative version
- Or a gentler version aimed at members who are skeptical

Given where PSRI is right now—approaching 100 years—introducing AI as “another tool in a long tradition of tools” might be the most natural bridge.

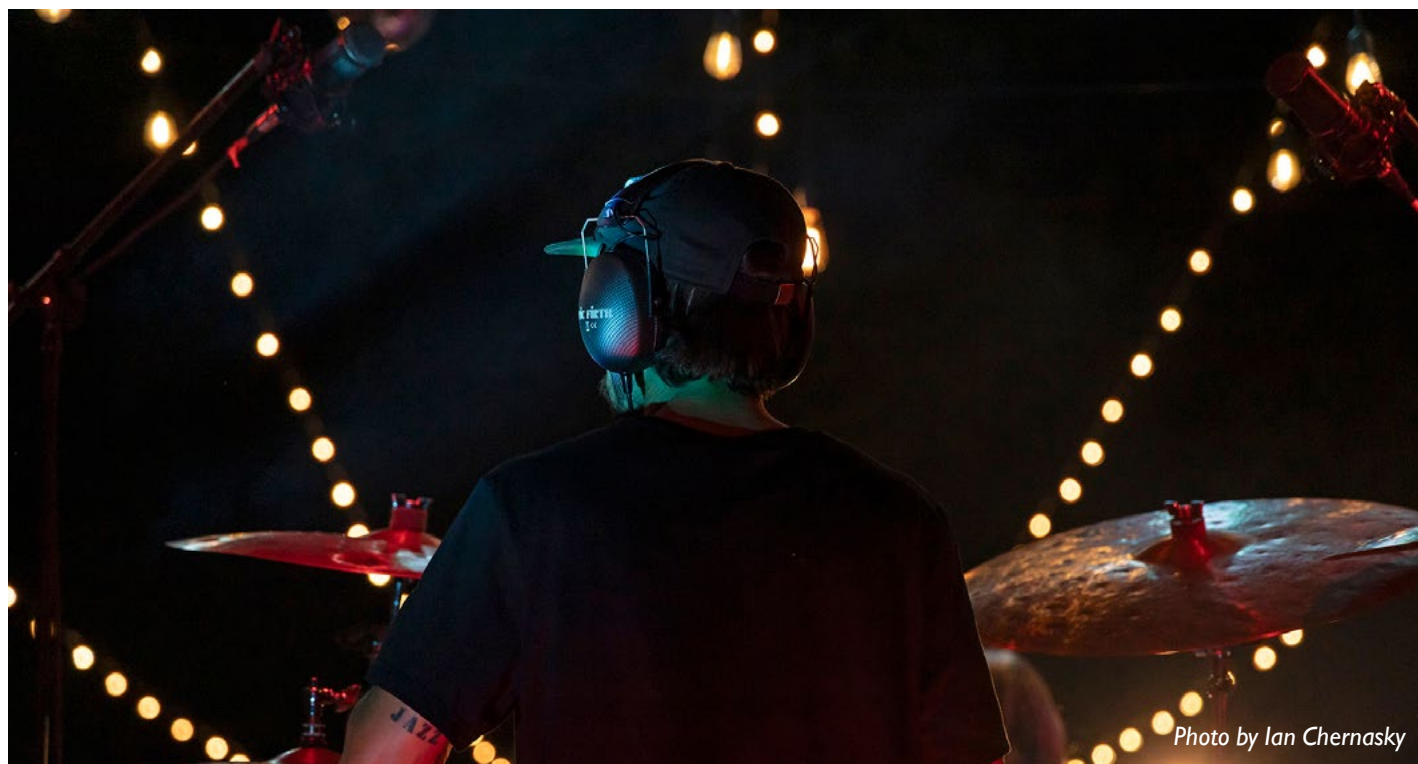


Photo by Ian Chernasky

What the Heck Is Fine Art Photography Anyway?

by Mary Doo

This article almost didn't happen.

The more I read and thought about "fine art photography," the more confused I became. Not that I researched the topic exhaustively, but what I encountered was disheartening in its lack of consensus. At times, it seemed that fine art photography was something processed beyond recognition—photography-plus.

This ambiguity first became personal at a presentation at the Cape Cod Art Center Camera Club. The speaker, from Greater Lynn, opened by asking, "Does anyone know what fine art photography is?"

Crickets.

That was surprising because many in the room were seasoned photographers. She mentioned that the GLPA even has a special group dedicated to the topic. So I thought, "Great—tonight we'll get an answer."

We did not.

The meeting proceeded with images submitted by members and from the speaker herself. I tried connecting these photographs to "fine art," but it was difficult. At one point, I commented, "I suppose we'll recognize a fine art image when we see it."

How wonderfully vague.

At an art workshop, I saw an image of a man hanging upside down, echoed by the same figure awkwardly standing upright. Visually, it was not conventionally appealing; the composition felt deliberately unsettling. Its power did not lie in beauty, but in tension.

Another image under discussion was intricate, dark, and fragmented—almost like pieces of a body. I didn't understand it. It did not appeal to me. That may say more about me than the image. It appears that not all fine art photography seeks harmony. Some images are less concerned with pleasing the eye than with provoking thought, discomfort, or controversy.

Ask a group of photographers what fine art photography means, and you may get a range of answers.

Some will say it's about form: composition, structure, and visual harmony. Under this view, an image becomes fine art because of how it is constructed. The subject could be a butterfly, a dune, or a lighthouse; what matters is the choreography. Others will say it's about intention. Fine art photography, they argue, is created primarily as a mode of personal artistic expression.

Some will say it's about presentation—the print quality, the mat, and the frame. A museum-worthy print, hence museum-worthy art.

Then there's the conceptual camp. Here, the image serves an idea or vision. It may be staged, symbolic, ironic, socially critical, or even controversial. In some academic circles, beauty alone is viewed with suspicion and risks being dismissed as merely "a pretty face."

And then there are those who post-process extensively, building intricate images with fifty or more layers. I know some of them. I used to think that if an image required fifty layers to look "right," perhaps something went wrong at the moment of capture.

Now, I'm not so sure.

Historically, photography has reinvented itself repeatedly. Early pictorialists tried to prove photography was art by making it resemble painting—something we still enjoy doing in camera clubs. Modernists later emphasized sharpness and purity.

At one point, I worried that my reluctance to land on a firm definition meant I was being indecisive. Photographers pride themselves on decisiveness; we choose exposure, aperture, and timing. We don't usually say, "Well, maybe f/8... or maybe not."

But this feels different. There is a difference between not knowing what you think and refusing to oversimplify.

I am decisive about this much: I choose not to reduce what is clearly larger than any one theory. I choose not to reject plural answers.

Art is not containable, and it should not be locked in a tidy box. The sheer number of thoughtful definitions suggests something important: no one owns a precise definition of fine art photography.

For those of us who photograph landscapes and wildlife, the debate can feel personal. There is a subtle suggestion that photographing something that already exists in nature is somehow less "artistic" than constructing or staging it. But the camera merely records; what to capture is the photographer's decision.

In Yellowstone, winter strips the landscape down to essentials. Snow covers distractions, much like it does in my normally unruly backyard. The resulting image becomes less about geography and more about structure, form, and space.

In Africa, an elephant at dawn can be rendered with full detail—magnificent and textured—or reduced to a silhouette against a rising sun. Same elephant, different emotional resonance. Along the shoreline, when you move the camera deliberately as waves break, the ocean ceases to be just water. You are capturing motion, rhythm—maybe even music.

These are not accidents. They are choices. You choose what to include and what to exclude within your 360-degree freedom.

Which brings me to the two words that matter most: intention and interpretation.

Intention shapes the frame. Why are you making this image? Are you seeking structure, mood, story, or documentation? Interpretation shapes the feeling. Why choose silhouette over detail, minimalism over complexity, or motion blur over sharpness?

When intention guides vision and interpretation shapes emotion, the photograph moves beyond simple description. Does this solve the definition problem? Not really. But perhaps that's okay.

Here's something interesting: I doubt anyone would argue—or dare to argue—that Ansel Adams' landscapes or Dorothea Lange's documentary work are not fine art. Anyone?

I remember an old Chinese parable. Several blind men wanted to "see" an elephant by touch.

The first man touches the side and says, "An elephant is like a wall." The

second feels the tusk. "No, it's like a spear." The third grabs the trunk. "You are both wrong—it's like a snake." The fourth wraps his arms around a leg. "It's tall and round—like a tree trunk." The fifth touches the ear. "Thin and flat—like a fan." The sixth holds the tail. "It is like a rope."

Each man was sincere. Each accurately described what he felt. None grasped the whole.

Perhaps, just as those men described different parts of the elephant, photographers describe different parts of "fine art." One sees it as post-processing, one as technical perfection, one as conceptual depth, and one as

presentation. They are simply touching different parts of a very large animal.

This reflection takes me to Bette Midler's song "The Rose," in which love is described through multiple metaphors—a river, a razor, hunger, a dream, a flower, a seed. Each description is partial. Each is poetically true. None is complete.

If defining love has kept songwriters busy for centuries, perhaps defining fine art photography will keep photographers debating for a while. And maybe that ongoing debate is not a weakness, but a sign that the medium is alive.

Here I attempt to dabble in "fine art" with the four images that follow. You may see my intent and interpretation beneath each one.



Skater at the Louvre - The crowd becomes an anonymous audience



Salmon in Alaska struggling upstream to spawn - Persistence



Fox in Yellowstone - Winter reduces the scene to form, space, and movement



Yellowstone in winter - A choreography of arches

Behind the Scenes



A member of PSRI since 2012, Tara Marshall brings the same "behind-the-scenes" precision to photography that she applies to her career as a Lead Software Engineer. Since 2015, she has served as the Print Competition Chairperson, managing the complex logistics—from print logins and judging sessions to publishing digital results—that keep the club's competitions running professionally.

Print Competition at PSRI

By Tara Marshall, Print Competition Chairperson

I've been a member of the Photographic Society of Rhode Island (PSRI) since 2012, and in 2015 I took on the role of Print Competition Chairperson—a position I've held ever since. Over the years, the print competition has become one of the most rewarding aspects of my involvement with PSRI, and also one of the most "behind-the-scenes" roles in the club.



By trade, I am a registered pharmacist, though I transitioned into an IT role in 2003. Today, I work for Kyndryl as a Lead, Software Engineering – Technical Specialist, specifically supporting Care New England Health Information Systems. While healthcare IT and photographic print competitions may sound unrelated, both demand organization, precision, process management, and a calm approach to problem-solving—skills that translate remarkably well.

As Print Competition Chairperson, I am responsible for scheduling the five Open Print & Digital and two Nature Digital Competitions held each PSRI season. On print login nights, I arrive at the meeting hall approximately 45 minutes before social hour to set up, accept print drop-offs, and ensure the login process runs smoothly. Because PSRI offers three print classes—Black & White, Color Class A, and Color Class B—I require the help of two assistants to log in prints accurately and efficiently. Lincoln Smith consistently assists on print login nights, and in past seasons I have also been fortunate to have help from Noreen Berthiaume, Marjorie Lamphear, and Jacqui Nye, who generously stepped in as a second assistant when needed.

I also work with members who are unable to drop off their prints on the designated dates, making alternate arrangements whenever possible so everyone has an opportunity to participate.

Before members arrive on competition night, the prints are pre-judged. I work directly with the judge to display each print on the lightbox, track scores electronically, identify top-scoring images, and assist with tie-breaking when necessary. During this process, I'm supported by Doug Ray and Lincoln Smith, who display each print on the lightbox and manually record scores on the back of the prints using entry forms. Their help is absolutely essential; I truly could not do this without their dedication.

After the competition concludes, the work continues. Within the following two weeks, I obtain digital copies of the winning prints and post both print and digital competition results on the PSRI website and Facebook page. While this task is technically outside the formal responsibilities of the Print Competition Chairperson, I volunteered to take it on several years ago after the member previously handling it stepped away.

While members see the finished prints, hear the judge's critique, and celebrate the winners, there is a great deal of coordination happening behind the scenes. My goal has always been to ensure that the print competition runs smoothly, fairly, and professionally, allowing members to focus on learning, growing, and enjoying the experience of seeing photography in its physical, printed form.

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"WE FOCUS ON SERVICE" PROUDLY SERVICING CAMERAS SINCE 1978

Forget the Camera: A Different Way to Think About Photography

By Mike Dooley For as long as I've been photographing, I've been asked the same question:

"What were your settings?"

It's a fair question. Photography has mechanics. Aperture, shutter speed, ISO — these matter. They are the tools of our craft. A carpenter needs to understand a tape measure. A musician must know their scales. A photographer must understand exposure.

But I've noticed something over the decades.

We often get stuck there.

We talk about settings more than we talk about seeing.

We debate gear more than we discuss feeling.

We ask how instead of why.

And somewhere in that noise, the heart of photography can get buried.

Light: More or Less

When I teach the technical side of photography, I simplify it as much as possible.

Exposure is not mystical. It's not a triangle to memorize. It's simply light — more or less.

Too bright?

Too dark?

Better?

Worse?

It's not unlike the eye doctor flipping lenses in front of you.

"This one... or this one?"

The goal is to master manual exposure so thoroughly that you stop thinking about it. When you understand light instinctively, you stop being intimidated by your camera.

And once you're no longer intimidated...

You're free.

The Camera as a Translator

Over time, I've come to think of the camera not as a technical device, but as a translator.

A tool for finding feelings.

When I'm out photographing — whether it's a quiet shoreline or something simple at home — I'm not chasing a dramatic scene. I'm paying attention to what's happening inside me.

We've all heard the saying, "A picture paints a thousand words." It's true. From cave drawings tens of thousands of years ago to prints made with today's latest cameras, images have always spoken.

The question is: what words are you trying to share?



Mike Dooley, mikedooleyphotography.com

To answer that, you first have to question yourself.

What drew me here?

What am I responding to?

Is it calm? Tension? Space? Nostalgia?

The settings respond to that feeling. They don't dictate it.

The sunset I photographed yesterday cannot be replicated by copying numbers. Even at the same location, at the same time of day, the light is different. The wind is different. I am different.

The real question is not, "What were your settings?"

The real question is:

"What did you feel — and why?"

Real Places. Real Feelings. Real Images.

We are living in a time of extraordinary technological advancement. Editing tools are more powerful than ever. Artificial intelligence can generate images that are technically flawless.

But photography, at its core, is still human.

It's standing in a real place.

Feeling something real.

And choosing to frame it honestly.

Not to shock.

Not to impress.

Not to outperform someone else.

But to express.

When photographers stop performing and start noticing, something changes. Their work becomes more personal. More grounded. More authentic.

And interestingly, more powerful.

From Mechanics to Meaning

There are amazing technical teachers out there. I respect them deeply. The mechanics matter.

But I believe there is space—and need—for another conversation.

A conversation about perception.

About slowing down.

About trusting your instinct.

About forgetting the camera long enough to actually see.

When photographers gain confidence in the mechanics, they stop blaming their gear. They stop chasing the next lens. They stop asking for the secret settings.

They start asking better questions.

They start asking what the image means to them.

And that's where growth really begins.

Photography is not just about capturing what we see.

It's about translating what we feel.

If we can master light — more or less — and then move beyond it, the camera becomes lighter in our hands.

And the work becomes more honest.

Maybe the next time someone asks, "What were your settings?" we can smile and answer...

"That's not the interesting part."

An Invitation to See Differently

This isn't a rejection of technique. It isn't a dismissal of craft. The mechanics matter. They always will.

But what if we let them serve us instead of lead us?

What if we mastered light — more or less — so thoroughly that we stopped thinking about it?

What if we picked up the camera not to impress, but to translate something honest?

Photography has given me decades of growth, challenge, and meaning. Along the way, I've learned that the most important images I've made were not the most technically complex—they were the most sincere.

So consider this an invitation.

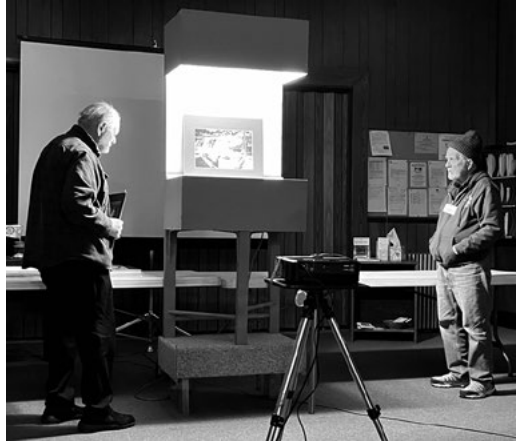
The next time you go out to photograph, pause before you raise the camera. Ask yourself what you're feeling. Ask what drew you there. Let the answer guide your frame.

And if this perspective resonates with you, I invite you to explore further. I share my work and thoughts regularly, reflecting on the connection between light, emotion, and honest image-making.

There is room in our community not only for technical excellence, but for thoughtful seeing.

Come and see what happens when the camera becomes a translator.

Some IMPRESSIONS OPEN COMPETITION #3, FEBRUARY 10, 2026



PSRI FLASHBACK: Capturing Moments, Reviving Memories!

Charles T. Miller Most Valuable Photographer Award

By Lincoln Smith. The author of this article was Jim Barbieri (he and his wife were publishers of the newsletter at this time). This was written in the fall of 1999 and was published in the "In Focus" newsletter of PSRI, Volume 73: No.2, Nov/Dec 1999.

This award started to be given out in 1997, and it is presented at the annual banquet to PSRI's MVP or "Most Valuable Photographer." It is given to someone for "Excellence in photography as mentor and artist" and who regularly gives of their time and energy to see that PSRI operations are tended to and carried out.

Who was Charles (Charlie) T. Miller, and why was an award established in his name? He was a PSRI member for over 30 years. He was a past president, mentor, and friend to many people over the years. He died at the age of 92.

He exemplified the qualities that are possessed by those who have received the award. They are:

- Commitment to the art of photography
- Demonstrated qualities of friendship
- Fulfilled a role as mentor to other photographers
- The ability to inspire
- Demonstrated leadership
- Volunteer contributions to PSRI and photography in general

Mike DiStefano received the very first award in 1997. He stepped in and took over the presidency when Al Churilla had to resign because of job commitments. This was not an easy task, but one that Mike was more than capable of handling. Mike has been involved in numerous other activities and remains one of our most committed members.

Lincoln Smith, the 1998 recipient, has been President, Vice President, and Chairman of the Annual Salon, as well as holding many other positions. He joined the club in 1983 and has contributed a great deal to our growth.

The recipient for 1999 is Marsha Long. Another member of long standing, Marsha has been a friend and mentor to many over the years. She is always ready to volunteer and step in to help when the need arises. In fact, she was the friendly voice that answered the phone when I first called to inquire about the club six years ago. She then went out of her way to make that first meeting I attended a lot less intimidating.

Mike, Lincoln, and Marsha, as well as all the others that volunteer their time and energies to make this club the vital and growing organization it is, deserve our appreciation.

And remember: they started out just as we all have... as new members.

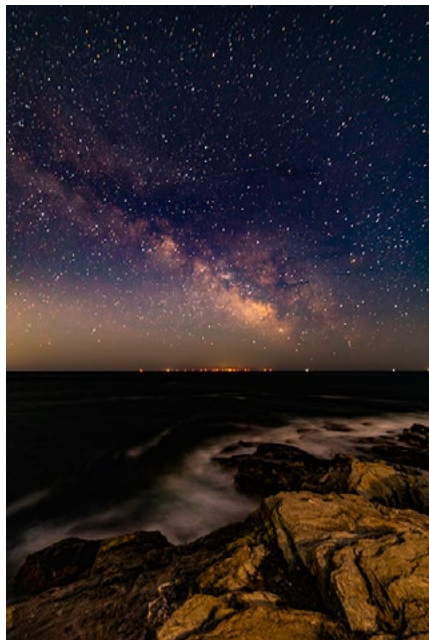
A side note: It was an honor to have received it back in 1998.



HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH THE MILKY WAY

By Ronald Zincone Have you ever glanced up to look at the night sky? Have you noticed that cloud-like hazy band of light arcing across the sky? What you are seeing is our Milky Way galaxy that contains our solar system. The Milky Way contains an estimated 250 billion stars. From Earth, the Milky Way appears as a band because its disk-shaped structure is viewed from within. Now, have you ever wondered if you could capture our galactic arm in a photograph? Yes, you can and here is how.

The best time to capture the Milky Way is from April through October, with the summer months being optimal. This is because the **Galactic Center** lies in the direction of **Sagittarius**, where the Milky Way is brightest and is most seen during June through September. Because the Milky Way arcs across the night sky and covers a wide area, camera-on-tripod, wide-angle imaging is best for this type of astrophotography. The positives of wide-angle Astro imaging are that all you need is your basic gear used for daytime photography to capture the Milky Way.



SMW over Beavertail Jamestown

First off, because night-sky photography involves extreme low light and very dim and distant celestial objects, astrophotographers use “long exposures” to soak up as much light a.k.a. “photons,” as possible. Although astro imagers can use exposure times anywhere from 1/500 sec to several seconds, minutes, and even hours, general exposure times for the summer Milky Way average around 25 seconds if you are non-tracking your gear. More about that later. So, a sturdy tripod is a must. Any kind of vibration from wind or kicking the tripod will result in a blurry image. The best camera for night-sky photography is your 35mm DSLR that can interchange lenses or a “mirrorless” DSLR. What is important here is a camera that has the “manual” and “bulb” modes so that you can set your exposure times. The “manual” mode will allow you to set exposure times from 1/4000 or 1/8000 sec to 30 seconds, the extreme ends, while the “bulb” mode will allow you to open the shutter and lock it so that you can capture exposure times of 30 seconds and beyond.

Having a “full-frame” DSLR is advantageous because the sensor (chip) is larger, the pixels are larger, and this will enable you to soak up more light (photons), which helps with what we call the “signal-to-noise ratio”. A full-frame camera, meaning that the sensor covers the full 35mm film format (24X36mm), as we had with film, will also give you better resolution, which is how much detail you can capture in your images. Full-frame DSLRs also tend to have better noise reduction in low light due to the larger pixels on the chip. The ideal camera specs here are one with around 20 megapixels. This is important because celestial photography deals with extremely low light and very dim and distant celestial objects. If you do not have or can’t afford a full-frame 35mm “mirrorless” or “non-mirrorless” DSLR, an APS-C “sub-frame” or “cropped sensor” DSLR will do fine. Some 35mm DSLRs like the Canon 20Da, 60Da, Canon Ra (mirrorless), and the Nikon 810A are optimized for night-sky photography and will do a better job at capturing the red nebulosity within the Milky Way.

Ok, what about lenses? Because the Milky Way is an extremely wide-angle celestial subject, you would be using wide-angle lenses. I recommend the prime lens over a zoom lens. Even with today’s technology, prime lenses still edge out zoom lenses for more sharpness and resolution. Prime lenses are lighter, easier to design and make and are less costly. One of the best prime lenses for astrophotography and very popular among astroimagers is the Rokinon 14mm f/2.8. It is a very sharp lens. Do a Google search, and you will see many images taken with this lens. I recommend the upgraded Rokinon SP lenses I use, 14mm f/2.4, 35mm f/1.2 and the 50mm f/1.2. A great “trilogy” of fast glass! Lenses with a focal length of 8mm (fisheye) and up to 50mm (your normal, standard lens) can be used to capture the Milky Way and many other celestial subjects of the night sky including meteors, auroras, constellations, the moon with an earthly landscape, satellites and more. I recommend focal lengths in the range of 10mm to 24mm for the Milky Way. Prime lenses also tend to be what we call “fast lenses” or “fast glass”. This means that they most often have wider apertures. Apertures such as f/1.2, f/1.4, f/1.8, f/2.0 and f/2.8 are examples of “fast lenses” and wide-open apertures that allow the most light (photons) onto your image during your exposure. Remember to use all your focal lengths! The 14mm will capture the entire Milky Way and then the 35mm and 50mm will allow you to magnify and capture sections of the Milky Way.

These lenses are also known as “light soakers”, and these are a night sky photographer’s “niche” lenses. Yes, you can use a zoom lens, too, but these will cost you more, be heavier, and a tad less sharp. Your goal is to capture a composition of the Milky Way that will capture pinpoint stars, well exposed, little digital noise, and compose for an “earth and sky connection” (adding a nice landscape subject and foreground for more

context and better composition). Lastly, be sure to set your lens focus to “infinity” before your night shoot. You can also use your LCD in “live view” mode and set your focus on the moon or a bright star or better still, use a horizon point in the daytime. Without “infinity” focus, your stars will be soft and not sharp. Remember that astrophotography involves using “manual focus” only!

The last piece of gear you will need is a remote shutter release. You can get these corded or wireless. I like the corded ones. These plug into your camera body so that your shutter becomes electronic, and you can now capture your images without using the shutter button on the camera which induces vibration. Now that you have your tripod, remote shutter, camera, and lens(es), you are just about ready to capture our Milky Way in all its splendor. Our goal is to capture the entire Milky Way’s galactic core but also to capture each star as a “pinpoint”. We do not want any streaking or trailing of the stars.

I mentioned non-tracking earlier. We can purchase and set up gear that will automatically track the rotation of the Earth. This method allows astroimagers to capture pinpoint stars with no star trailing and be able to use exposure times beyond 30 seconds. In this way, you can expose for longer periods of time and capture more detail, such as the red nebulosity, in our galaxy. Be aware that the longer your exposure time, the greater chance for digital noise and capturing the skyglow so it is important to plan for summer Milky Way shots in a dark sky location.

For those of you who do not want to deal with tracking gear and software, you have the basic and more simple option of “non-tracking” of your celestial subjects. This simple approach is just a matter of setting up your camera on a tripod with a remote shutter release, a wide-angle lens, and setting your exposure for no more than 30 seconds. Exposure times of 25 seconds or less will generally avoid star trailing in your images, but there is a method called the “500 rule” that will help determine with more accuracy your long exposure times that will avoid star trailing. The formula is to divide the focal length of your lens by 500, and this number is your exposure time in seconds that should prevent trailing. For example, if you are shooting with a 14mm lens, divide 500 by 14, and your safe exposure time would be roughly 35 seconds. Simple, right? I recommend doing more research on this formula since some sources say that it should be the “600 rule” or “300 rule.” Remember that there are lots of variables in astrophotography and many things can go wrong in the dark under the stars. Here are some further tips and techniques for summer Milky Way imaging:

- Use a sturdy tripod.
- Use a remote shutter release.
- Use a 35mm DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera (full frame is best) “mirrorless or non-mirrorless”.
- Use lenses in the focal length range of 14mm to 50mm.
- Be sure everything is secure and steady.
- Be sure to obtain “infinity” focus before you start capturing your images. This can be done by using your LCD “live view” mode and focus on a bright star or the moon or set infinity focus earlier when there is more daylight.



SMW over Bass Harbor, Maine

- Be sure to set your camera’s shutter to “Bulb” mode.
- Be sure to remove your lens cap.
- Be sure to use your lens hood.
- Clean your optics before your imaging session.
- Capture your images at a dark-sky site.
- Watch for plane trails during exposure.
- Open your lens aperture to f/2.8 or less (1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.0)
- Use the “300, 500 or 600 rule” to determine safe exposure times to avoid star trailing.
- Compose your subject so that it connects with a nice foreground landscape or subject that makes an “earth and sky connection.”
- Bracket your images.

Consider “painting with light,” in which you would use a white or red light to add light and illuminate the foreground to add visual interest to the composition. This is like a painter using a paintbrush to spread paint on the canvas.

I truly hope you have enjoyed reading this “how-to” article on photographing the Milky Way, and remember, if you decide this is not for you, don’t forget to look up and experience one of the true celestial wonders of the night sky, our Milky Way!

Ronald Zincone is a “teaching artist”, amateur astronomer, photographer, and weather bug. He is a certified “SkyWarn” storm spotter for the National Weather Service. His website can be found at ronaldzinconephoto.com

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