

The Photojournalism of Steve Larese

Chasing stories for *New Mexico Magazine* has had Steve Larese in southern New Mexico, interviewing a woman who runs a cockfighting operation. His job has also put him in the saddle with a group of cowhands, on the trail of wild mustangs near Mount Taylor. That trip, however, took longer than Larese had expected. He began to realize that he wasn't dressed for the weather.

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RSF 2006: Photo Album

Review Santa Fe 2006 was a rousing success. The reviewers came away with very positive feelings about the future of photography, as they thought, collectively, this was the best aggregate showing of photography they had ever seen. Many photographers, as well, came away with positive feelings about their future, with many of them having made concrete contacts for future publication, shows, or books.

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Tracey Hogan and Santiago Vanegas

All creativity has a beginning and seeks inspiration. The Land of Enchantment draws and holds many artists in its magical grip. That power to draw and hold is the connection that keeps photographers Tracey Hogan and Santiago Vanegas coming back to New Mexico. The couple recently spent eight months in Santa Fe while their home in San Francisco was being renovated.

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NEW! Destination at Large

Driving from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Durango, Colorado several years ago, I was especially fascinated by one particular sight. Somewhere along US 84, the two simultaneous views—through the windshield and in the rear view mirror—were an epiphany. I parked on the shoulder to savor it.

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Spotlight: Albuquerque Photographers Gallery

On arriving in Albuquerque, a traveler will likely develop a fast impression of the city—one of daily hustle on wide avenues that intersect in giant grids. A quick turn off Route 66, however, shows quite a different side to Albuquerque, one of 18th century buildings, quiet shopping pavilions and winding alleyways.

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Sofia Lee Moran: An Unlikely Photographer

by Tim Anderson

Sometimes you meet the nicest people coming out of your local Wild Oats. A couple of weeks ago, just as I was leaving the store, I bent down to get a newspaper from the free racks at the exit. As I picked up abqArts, the woman next to me told me the image on the cover was hers. That was my introduction to the photography of Sofia Lee Moran, who has done covers and other work for many of the area's regional newspapers and magazines. When we met, she had recently returned from a trip to Mexico.

TA: Tell me about your trip to Mexico, why you went and what were the results?

SM: I went to Mexico to shoot for myself, to increase my portfolio of images. I took my Nikon F2, because it is lighter than my digital camera, and went to Zacatecas, it's about two hours away from Mexico City. Beautiful architecture, details, and real nice people. I got a tremendous new body of work that is very exciting

TA: How long were you there?

SM: 10 days. (We are looking at her albums from the trip). Look at the colors, aren't they beautiful?

TA: Tell me a little bit about your photographic background. What got you started, etc.

SM: I started in photography when I was 14 and in my first year of high school. During my first semester, it was the only class I passed. I had a hard time in school, and didn't want to go to any other classes. But I was very much intrigued by the printing process, it was like magic. And I still find it almost like a birth.

TA: Where did you go from there? When did you become a professional photographer?

SM: I actually let go of it for awhile, because I was very inhibited. Also, at that time, I was seeing a professional photographer who told me that I didn't even know how to hold my camera. So, that comment made me feel like I didn't even know what I was doing, that I was very good at judging myself very strongly.



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So I put it away.

But then I picked it up, again, and started shooting quite a bit when I lived in Europe. I was about 23 at the time. Then I had a friend (Herb Jepson) who was one of the Chouinard Art Institute, in LA, and he was looking at my images and kept putting a couple aside, looking through others. Then he put his hands down, and looked at me and said, "You need to have a show, and you need to enlarge these pictures and have a show. These are very good images."

I thought that he didn't know what he was talking about. After all, he was 82! I put all the images in a pile and was ready to go out of the room when his wife, who was 60 suggested that I should listen to Herb.

"You know," she said. "Herb really knows what he is talking about. You really should take his advice. This could be something really important to you."

So I took those images and blew them up and had a show at Dartmouth Street Gallery. I sold some prints and I was shocked. I really didn't want my own business, but people kept asking if I did weddings or portraits. It really kind of grew, naturally, from there.

Then I went to UNM and took some photojournalism classes because I didn't want to study in the art department, itself. I felt like I was so tender-hearted that any kind of criticism would put me under. If somebody would have told me that a certain image wasn't any good, I probably would have put my camera away, again.

TA: Have you ever reviewed or been reviewed?

SM: I was teaching some children, an elementary class, where I had them take some photos: portraits or landscapes. They went and asked their families if they could take a picture of them. Once the project was done, I reviewed their work, and they were shaking. I told them I knew exactly how they felt.

I was reviewed once when I was at UNM. I wasn't the best, but I remember being very apprehensive during the process. The pictures were of sports events, of which I had absolutely had no experience. I did fine with everything else I had to shoot, and did extremely well with architectural photography.

TA: How did that work for you without any experience?

SM: I was very afraid of it because I really liked to photograph people and wondered how I was going to photograph buildings. But I did fine. What I did was I went to Chicago almost eight years ago for my midterm project over spring break. It was really cold, but I shot every day I was there. I got some very nice photographs. I exhausted myself, but when I got back I was the only one who got an "A" in the class. Kirk Gittings was the instructor. I was really afraid of the class when I first went into it because the first thing Kirk said was, "I hate teaching. Nobody gets an 'A' in my class." But, when he gave me that grade, he wrote on a piece of paper A+, A+, A+. I couldn't express how I felt in front of the class because I didn't want anyone in the class to think I was "kissing up to him."

TA: Why did you decide to go to Chicago?

SM: Because Chicago is an amazing city: The buildings and the skyline and the people. So much great architecture, and I had a place to stay.



TA: So many photographers come here (New Mexico) to shoot. Why not just do your project here, like everyone else?

SM: I am kind of jaded about adobe. I was raised here. Everything is just another shade of brown. You know, also, you just don't appreciate it until you go away. Chicago enabled me to have, virtually, a brand new set of eyes. I loved it. I like the details and angles of the buildings. But it was very cold!

TA: So, is architectural photography still in your repertoire?

SM: Now, I am so ready to look at buildings, whereas before I went to Chicago I wasn't tuned into that at all.

TA: When did you turn pro, when you actually thought you could make a living at photography?

SM: I think it was in my mid-twenties, when I started to have shows. I had a show at the Ralph Green Gallery. I did the "Angel" series and sold ten out of twenty prints. That series was designed to have each and every race represented by an angel, you know, their own guiding light, so to speak.

Alan Labb has been very helpful, for me, professionally as well as personally. Professionally because he gives me astute guidance whenever I ask, and personally because he enables me to be more centered toward the personal part of my life. You know, that part of life we have a tendency to forget from time to time.

TA: Besides Labb, who else would you count as mentor(s)?

SM: There is also Kirk Gittings and Miguel Gandert. They have all been my teachers and I still have a tremendous amount of respect and honor for them all.

TA: Who, in contemporary photography, do you look to today for inspiration?

SM: Well, Flor Garduño. I just love her work, it is so heart-felt. When I was teaching those children, I spoke a lot about her, because she is so close to her culture. I wanted them to see that there are people from their culture who have become famous as well as successful.

TA: How often do you have a show, here in Albuquerque?

SM: I will be part of a show at DCAC (Downtown Contemporary Art Center) in June. There are going to be some tremendous people involved. You know, Albuquerque is a funny place. There is so much potential, but it seems as though you are continually running around in circles trying to get a show. There doesn't seem to be a cohesive thread that can keep things together, photographically speaking.

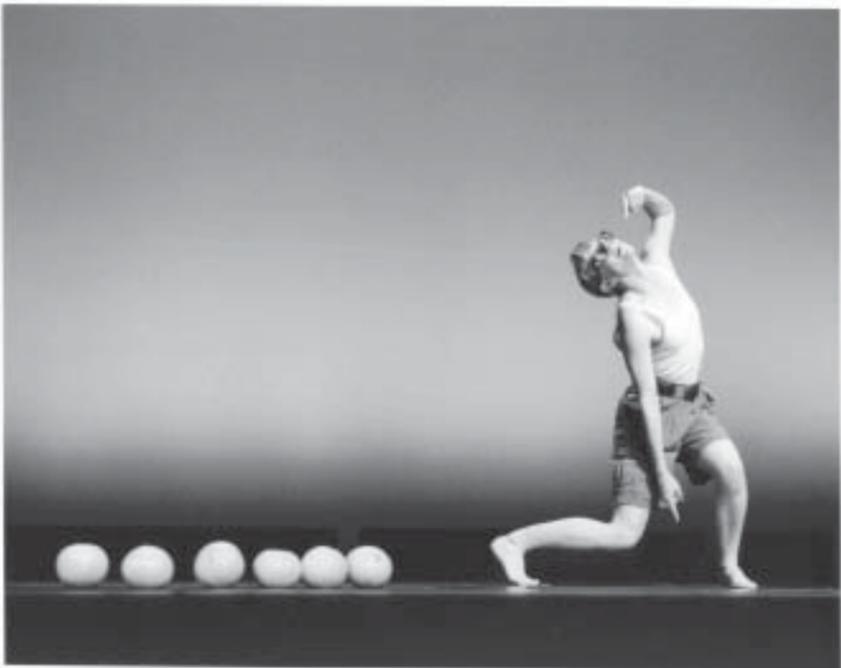
TA: What was your first professional job?

SM: It was probably a wedding I did in 1990, in Atlanta, for a friend. I was really nervous, because I was going to be using some equipment I had never used before. I took so many pictures because I was afraid they wouldn't turn out. In the end, though, they came out OK. From then on, I didn't advertise, unless it was a trade for my work.

TA: Even today, you don't advertise?

SM: Even today. Most of my work is from word of mouth. Maria, from *Prime Time*, called one time and wanted me to go to a press conference to photograph Carlos Santana. *Transmission Magazine* has also called me. They wanted me to photograph Christopher Coppola. Actually, he and I established a very good re-





relationship that led to me making a film with him, *The American Portrait*. It is about a common-day, single mother who lives in Dallas. That inspired me to go back into film work, where I am now doing some independent film projects.

TA: Doesn't working with movies take time away from your photography?

SM: My new movie project is a truly great one that I can't talk about right now. It gives me a lot of energy to do something that's different and that is also a little dark, dark humor. It's just another aspect of photography.

TA: So now, in your own photography, do you shoot mostly digital?

SM: No, not really. The images I did in Mexico were done with film. But most of my commercial work is digital. Many times at weddings, still, people want classic black and white.

TA: What kind of digital equipment do you use?

SM: I use a Canon 10D, with a variety of lenses: 80-200mm, 2.8 zoom; a fisheye, and a 28mm wide-angle. I photographed Coppola with the fisheye and *Transmission* put that one on the cover.

TA: What do you want to be when you grow up?

SM: Just a healthy, simple, and humble portrait photographer. I think I don't know how to believe in myself, but I'm getting there. Maybe that's what I want to do when I grow up... I want to believe in myself. I'm not kidding.

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