

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Photography of Russell Carpenter

Roni Keller · Thursday, January 10th, 2013

For the next few months, the photography of cinematographer Russell Carpenter will be exhibited at EFILM in Hollywood.

The exhibit is an intensely personal explosion of moments captured from the lives of people and flowers. If you think you have seen photos of flowers before, think again. Each of Russell's flowers gives voice to a unique and charged emotional moment.

The mingling of the photos of flowers and what Russell calls "street photos" (photos of human subjects) gave me the sense that I was being invited into an inner sanctum of emotions and spirit. The photos are a revelation on how private and mysterious people are, always leaving one guessing. The flowers, at least Russell's flowers, wear their hearts on their sleeves, or, er, petals.

Russell, who won an Oscar for his cinematography on "Titanic," also has rendered the cinematography on many other great Hollywood films including 'True Lies,' the 'Charlie's Angels' movies, and the upcoming film about the life of Steve Jobs. He talks here about his also stunning, must-see work as a photographer.



Cultural Weekly: Russell, why photography, now at this time, in the course of your celebrated and demanding career as a cinematographer?

Russell Carpenter: I have an opportunity to use my eye in a very different way than I use it on the set. In my still photography I can work on my own schedule without any feeling of the pressure of time. It is a mind-cleansing meditation for me. I can work from my garage, nothing grand or elaborate. The work is simple and serene – and quite different from life on a busy set where many many people have points of view.

CW: A few of the photos in your exhibit are of people in India. What took you to India?

RC: I was in India doing a couple of days of work on an independent film about Steve Jobs. He had spent time there, looking for a Guru whose work he had read. My sense in being there, in shooting there, in India, was that this was a world that I needed and wanted to know. The colors and photographic images that India present might as well be from another planet. There is a chaos there, way beyond the chaos that we in the West call chaos. But somehow it works.

CW: And what about the flowers?

RC: When I first started to look at flowers I'm sure that I tended to anthropomorphize them, however it seemed to me that flowers didn't exhibit the same conflicts I had. I came from a background where the sensual had to be repressed in favor of the spiritual. They seem both openly and unapologetically sexual and spiritual – able to unify what we mere humans consider antithetical.

Instead of shooting them in shallow focus in the manner of many birthday cards and wedding announcements, I shot them in deep, deep focus to capture more of their sculpture and powerful form. Flowers are not fragile. They are monumental beings with terrible as well as beautiful faces. Also, like humans, flowers age and pass. Her again, they do it more gracefully and without equivocation and angst. From bulb to flowering and on to middle and old age, there are lessons there.

My favorite flower was white and translucent in color. She had been in a vase in my garage for about ten days before I had time to shoot her. Usually flowers wilt but she had just become beautiful if paper-thin. I did not want to breathe on her because she was so frail. Like when people get old, she was so translucent I could see her veins. After three or four shots, the petals began to fall off and I knew the shoot was over. The one of her in my exhibit is one of the luckiest photos ever. I was filled with gratitude that I was able to shoot her before she “passed on.”



The photograph of this flower that Russell captured is “seventeen” in the exhibit.

Russell decided that the photos in the exhibit should not be titled. Instead they are numbered from “one” to “fifty-two.” This choice seems to allow each photo to have its own voice rather than be limited by a superimposed label.)

Website Gallery: <http://russellcarpenter.sites.livebooks.com/>

The EFILM exhibit is available for viewing by private appointment only. To attend the exhibit, send your name, telephone number and time that you want to attend to roozle3@gmail.com and an invitation will be arranged for you.

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