"The Girl in the Yellow Dress" by Michele McCain

Portrait of an Artist (page 4)

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News and Views of Poly Photo Camera Club Members
May, 2016   Volume 7, No.4

From the Editor

We've changed one of our main features for this month. Instead of our standard "Featured Photographer" article, we are presenting a more in-depth look at one of Poly's best photographers, Michele McCain. I have been wondering how someone goes from casual photographer to photographic artist so quickly, and thought you might be interested in that journey too. So I asked her, and she agreed to write about her experiences and show some of her images as examples of her personal growth along the way.

Mostly, what we have seen from Michele so far is in the "*five second impression*" and subsequent commentary of Poly's typical monthly competition environment. But this month's feature demonstrates that there is much more to her images than the attraction to her "different" style. There are deeper, more subtle messages that only become evident with some study and deeper reflection. You can read more about what I mean in the short commentary following her article.

Lately, I've been thinking about how we define the various forms/goals of photography – from snapshots to "Photographic Art." I think we all know how to take "snapshots." You know what I mean – those simple record shots of a place we've been, a kid's party, a group of relatives, our child's first (whatever), etc. They are the pictures that are valuable only to us; even though they are well-exposed and have good composition.

We who are "more advanced" photographers aspire to create more important/artistic images. In my personal studies of well-known and succesful photographers, artists, critics and judges, I have found that they usually discuss **Three Classes** of "serious" pictures.

First, there are "representative" images, wherein the photographers show us competent images of beautiful people, things, and/or places. These are the pictures that non-photographers and non-academics like (and often buy) to hang in their living rooms.

The next category is "interpretive" images. These require some contemplation and thought to understand what the artist was trying to say or communicate to the viewer. They often have non-obvious meanings or subtleties in their message that we only "get" after some quiet viewing time.

The last important category is "emotional" images. These pictures reach out and slap us in the face (or punch us in the "gut"). This is what most authors and teachers say we should strive for. We need to look at a subject, examine our response and feelings, and highlight those parts that promote those feelings. That way, the viewer of the finished picture may feel some of those same things and be "moved" by our work. Everyone seems to agree – that is a worthy goal.

But that's as far as most authors and teachers go. That array of artistic goals is rooted in photography's past. It focuses totally on taking the picture and presenting it in a way that illustrates selected and edited elements of reality to communicate an idea, view, and/or feeling.

Class Four – Mind's Eye Images.
Modern digital photography and post-processing have enabled us to produce pohotographic images that never existed in objective reality. We can tell stories and elicit emotional responses with images that previously existed only in our imagination or "*mind's eye*." We can change colors and textures, add or correct distortions, add or subtract picture elements, or create a totally new picture from different photographs and/or individual picture details.

So, to the dismay of the classical art critics and academics, photographers have now overcome the last "advantage" more traditional artists have enjoyed until now. The images we can produce and the responses that they elicit are limited only by our imagination, and not just by what we see.

Musings from the President

As we are nearing the mid-point of 2016, it's time to check the "pulse" of Poly. When I was teaching, we would do a Needs Assessment of our classes. The results of this would aid in our lesson planning to best help the students.

Poly is made up of a diverse group of photographers with various levels of skills and needs. In order to grow as a club and be helpful to its members, we need to provide an opportunity for our members to express their hopes for the future of the club and for their personal growth. To this end, a questionnaire will be made available to everyone at the May competition meeting. Please take the time to fill it out.

It has been suggested that Poly join the Photographic Society of America as a club. Some of the benefits are that:
1. A certain number of our members would be allowed to enter some of PSA's photo competitions. This would be wonderful opportunity for members who would like to participate in a higher level of competition.
2. We would have access to PSA judges for our end-of-year competition.
3. All members would have access to the online PSA Journal and tutorials.

The cost to the club would be $45 for a year. The Executive Board is currently discussing taking this step.

It's fun to see pictures of Poly's past events and activities displayed at our meetings. Instead of using a poster board with printed images, we're going to try out a digital picture frame. Thanks to Pat Flanigan and Robin Stern for sharing images they took at the End-of-the-Year Banquet. These will be on display at the May Competition Meeting. Thanks to Scott Skinner for the donation of the digital frame.

Happy Shooting!
Dee

2016 San Diego Exhibition News

Mad About the Fair (San Diego County Fair)
The Jury process for Tier 1 of the submitted (electronic) images is now complete and those selected will submit their work as finished, 16x20, matted and mounted prints, ready for hanging. Traditionally, almost all of the pictures selected at this point are hung in the exhibition, but recent exhibition managers have allowed some reconsideration of the printed works, causing consternation among the entrants. Poly has done very well at this point; 16 members have over 90 acceptances.

Best of Nature (Ordover Gallery at the Natural History Museum)
There were a total of over 1250 images entered and 73 were selected for hanging in the fourth floor gallery. Three members are representing Poly in the exhibition. Dorothy Mildice hung two images and Jim Mildice and Joan Harris each had one. Dorothy has an Honorable Mention and Jim has won Third Place.
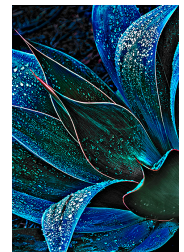
Michele McCain – a Personal View

People frequently tell me that they recognize my images when they see them. I am always a bit surprised by this, but I have come to realize that it is actually a desirable quality to possess, a distinctively unique style to my art. That isn't to say that I do not wish to push myself further refining my style. This is one of my most successful images – so far.

"Raven's Last Call"

I have discovered that this thing called photography is not a destination in itself, but a journey, a path through learning, of constant refining and stretching myself to reach beyond what is comfortable to me in order that I may develop my style to a level that is always just a bit beyond my reach.

All of us who pick up a camera are on some sort of journey into the world of art. For me, the journey so far has been a great adventure with a surprising number of dry desert experiences of uninspired waste, followed by the occasional calm meadow of contentment, pleased with where I am at for the moment. Then there are the high cliffhanging experiences of stress and fear about how much I don't know yet and how much work I need to get completed if some project deadline is looming.

Less frequent are the mountain highs that thrill, excite, and fulfill, giving me the sense that I am doing the one thing that I so greatly love.
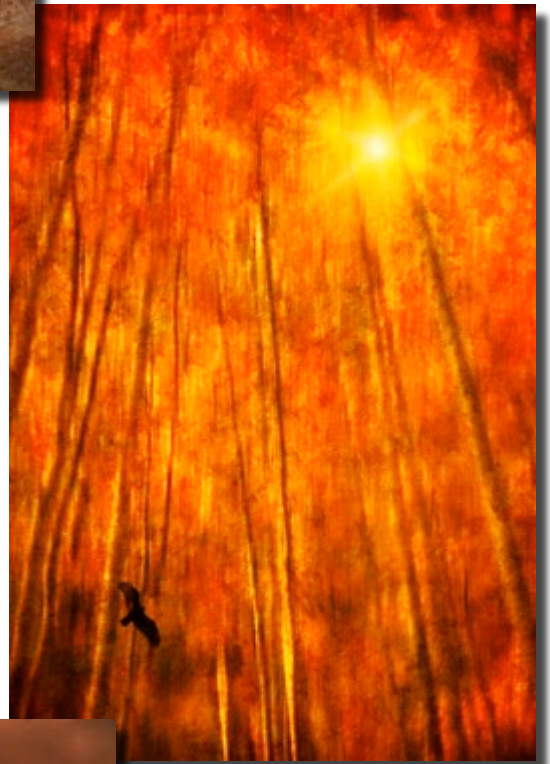
My personal journey as a photographic artist has not been a life-long endeavor. When I became a widow in the Fall of 2009, I realized that I needed to re-create my life. Being on my own for the first time, without a constant companion, was new to me. It was the first time in my adult life that I was responsible only for me.

So, I decided I would be an independent world traveler and take great photos. However, I would need to have a better camera. Up until then I had only owned point and shoot cameras to document my family as they grew up. I bought my first DSLR in the Spring of 2010 in preparation for a trip to the Canadian Rockies.

I came home from that trip frustrated as I realized being a great photographer wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. Owning a good camera was no guarantee that I would now be able to take great photos! So, I determined that I would learn. I signed up for my very first camera class in January 2011 and became completely hooked. My life has not been the same since.

The first thing I learned was how to use my camera. Every day I would practice, and I got better. I took a composition class in February that year. I joined my first photo group in March. In April, I met Alan Haynes (who I just married, by the way). He has been a great encourager and motivator. He is also my greatest constructive critic.

I learned how to catalog my growing photo library and do minor adjustments in Lightroom. I did not know what a workflow was and I certainly did not know what a creative process was. At Alan's prompting I bought Photoshop, installed it where it sat on my computer's desktop for over a year before I had the courage to open it up. I was deathly afraid of Photoshop. Slowly but surely that began to change.

In 2013 I entered my first images at the San Diego Fair. I had two pieces accepted that year, but did not win any awards. I remember walking around and looking at all the beautiful images and feeling so impressed. But when I came to the digital art category, my jaw dropped. I was amazed by what I saw in that category and couldn't even begin to imagine that I could possibly create anything that even came close to the caliber of the art that I saw that day.

I was set on fire with a desire to learn how to make images that would be compelling, challenging, and inspiring. I set a goal that I would learn Photoshop. The rest they say "is history" and I am more surprised by that than anyone. I was awarded Photoshop World's Guru Award in Illustration in 2015,

and I have been honored to receive many other awards along the way for the art I create. Also, my work has been published in several professional photographic publications.

I think my "creative process" is simple, *I am consumed with a need to create*. I have chosen to find my own photo-artistic voice by developing my own unique style. While I draw inspiration from other artists and photographers, inspiration is not the same thing as imitation. I decided early on that I would pursue my own vision.

I also realized, in order to stand apart from the crowd, that it was important to discover what kind of photography excited me and then throw myself into it. Of course, experimentation is important but I avoid bouncing around from one genre or fad to another so that I can reach my greatest potential in the area I love.

With that goal in mind, I decided to work hard at refining my own style by constantly trying to improve, never satisfied with where I am. I want to be willing to stretch myself by perfecting and learning new techniques and at the same time to be true to the artist inside me.

I usually begin my pieces with some kind of idea of where I want them to go. Some of my ideas are pretty clear in my mind. They can originate from a dream, something I've read, seen in a movie, etc. Sometimes when I am shooting, I have a clear vision of the scene I want to create and I shoot with that purpose in mind. Other times I gather images that I have taken in the past, not realizing that they would make their way into a final composited piece of art.

I love travel and I love photography, but the real fun for me is when I finally get to sit down at my computer and open Photoshop. I can spend countless hours, days, and often weeks on one piece. It is usually hard to know when it is completed, it rarely feels finished. Many of my pieces never see the light of day. I do not follow any prescribed workflow, but am always open to doing something different. I usually learn as I go. Most of my skills in Photoshop have been self-taught out of necessity. I find the best teacher for me is to just get in, play around, and not be afraid to try something new.

If I were to offer anyone advice in creativity, it would be to photograph the genre you love, refine your skill and technique in that area, before moving on to another genre. Focus on learning your gear so you don't even have to think about it when you are in the field. Spend time being inspired by the art and photography created by those that you admire. Inspiration does not mean imitation, so be willing to work hard developing your own unique style.

Editor's Notes (*my personal observations*) – I am constantly amazed at how rapidly Michele's artistic skills and sensibilities are maturing. As we do with other Artists, we can already talk about the phases in her artistic career, as represented by these pictures. Her early work is typically *exploratory*; next, there clearly was her *pastoral* period; which has now evolved into an era of *personalized expression*.

After seeing the last three images Michele selected for this feature (three, above), it is clear that her development is not finished. We saw "The Girl in the Yellow Dress" (on the cover) as a very interesting self-portrait. The girl is traveling down a path, from the dark into the light. There are also Ravens ahead, which could interfere. The books scattered around and behind her are emblematic of the lessons she has finished that taught her so far, helping her move along her journey.

The second, "*Railway Express*" is again about going somewhere, but the journey is becoming more-complicated. The third, "*Where Fear Resides*" is getting near an arrival, but the dark house, guarded by ravens, is kind of scary.

This and That
By Clark Winsor

I don't know if you noticed, but in the January and April competitions no entry received less than seven points. I mention this fact because it is ground breaking. It should be noted for an historical reference. It has never happened before.

Almost all SCACC clubs focus on monthly competitions, and many additional meetings support the competition meeting.

Do you remember the Monty Pyton Flying Circus TV series? Remember when John Cleese would say "And now it's time for something completely different?" Southwest Airlines had a line, "Want to Get Away?"

SCACC does have a camera club that is completely different and offers a lot when you want to get away. The club is the Tuesday Morning Workshop Camera Club. I don't know why it is called that, because in the years that I been a member, it has never had a workshop.

The club meets twice a month, on the 2nd and the 4th Tuesday, January through November. The club only meets in the PAB on the 4th Tuesdays. The 2nd Tuesday is reserved for field trips, taking photographs.

The PAB meeting is reserved for sharing photographs. This sharing can be anything you want to share. We ask that the makers hold it to about 15 images. The club has no competitions, and does not participate in SCACC Interclub, or host any of the seminars held monthly in the building.

The club does pay SCACC dues of $20 per member and it collects that amount for its yearly dues. The club does sit the PAB and the club president attends all the SCACC meetings.

The closest thing we have to any competition is the Monthly Challenge. Our members can enter two images into the challenge and the two favorites are picked by a show of hands. Prior to the photo sharing, we have a short business meeting, followed by a discussion of the qualities of photography and the role post processing plays in development of our art.

So, if you want to get away, and you want something completely different, please check out the Tuesday Morning Workshop Camera Club. It meets at 9:30 AM.

Talk to you next month.

Quote of the Month

"Sell the public flowers … things that they can hang on their walls without being uptight."

– Robert Mapplethorpe

The Photoshop Insider
By Jeff Booher

This month the cross-hairs are aimed squarely at cursors. They show us where we are about to make an edit, apply a selection or drop an object. Without cursors and carets, we wouldn't be able to operate a computer. Period. That's why Adobe has put so much effort into making cursors in Photoshop so powerful and easy to understand.

That is within reason.

The Tab key, located just above Caps lock, gives you a quick way to hide all of the UI panels in Photoshop – a shortcut employed by nearly every Adobe application. I added this feature to Dreamweaver back in 2007 as part of the Creative Suite UI unification effort that went into CS4.

One problem is – the Tab key is located above the Caps lock key; which means you may have hit Caps lock by accident when reaching for the Tab key. If you have then you may have found that it changes the cursor to the Precision or Precise cursor in Photoshop – a not so common workflow. You were probably also confused and frustrated leading you to such drastic measures as reformatting your hard drive and starting your whole life over. Hopefully you were able to call someone for help or Google the problem to find that there are many others who have run into this same problem so you weren't alone.

If you had not previously entered Precision cursor mode, congratulations. You've managed to lead a sheltered life.

So here's a basic overview of what cursors generally look like. You can configure cursors in a multitude of ways in the preferences dialog so your mileage may vary but, generally speaking, most people work in a mode that's pretty similar to what ships out of the box.

You will normally see a cursor that takes on the appearance of the tool you've selected. In this case, the Lasso.

The Precision or Precise cursor looks like cross-hairs, no matter what tool is selected. Unless a precision cursor isn't supported.

So if you get the cross-hairs (or Precision cursor) accidentally, just tap the Caps lock key to get back to your normal cursor. If you want the Precision cursor, just tap the Caps lock key to switch to Precision Cursor mode.

Now you know what to do in the event of an emergency. But why? Why did Adobe give us this option? I mean they must have envisioned a need for it or they would have removed the feature. Right?

Well it turns out that, for certain tools, an arrow indicating where the tip of the brush lives on the canvas isn't ideal for showing you exactly where it will strike. The lasso is one such tool. As are most of the selection tools really. But only the Marquee tool gives you a precision cursor at all times.

The Lasso family of selection tools gives you an arrowhead with the tool. The magic wand is just that – a magic wand with some sparks coming out of the end of it. Brilliant! The quick select tool is a standard brush tip which you can adjust the diameter of to control the sampling region further complicating things.

Toggling to the precision cursor for any of the selection tools can help you get a handle on making selections much more precise. Which can, in-turn, make your masks much cleaner – although I've yet to see how it improves Quick Select or Magic Wand. After all, the Magic Wand should just be "Magical," right?

The Golden Lasso

The precision cursor is pretty effective in helping isolate things because it can really help you visualize where the selection is going to land.

Here I'm trying to isolate the dog's tongue from the rest of his snout and I've started with a Quick Select and have gone around the edges refining the selection using the Lasso tool. I'm also zoomed in super close so I can see where the pixel boundaries are.

Sometimes the Refine Edge command on a selection just won't work and you have to go full-on manual mode...
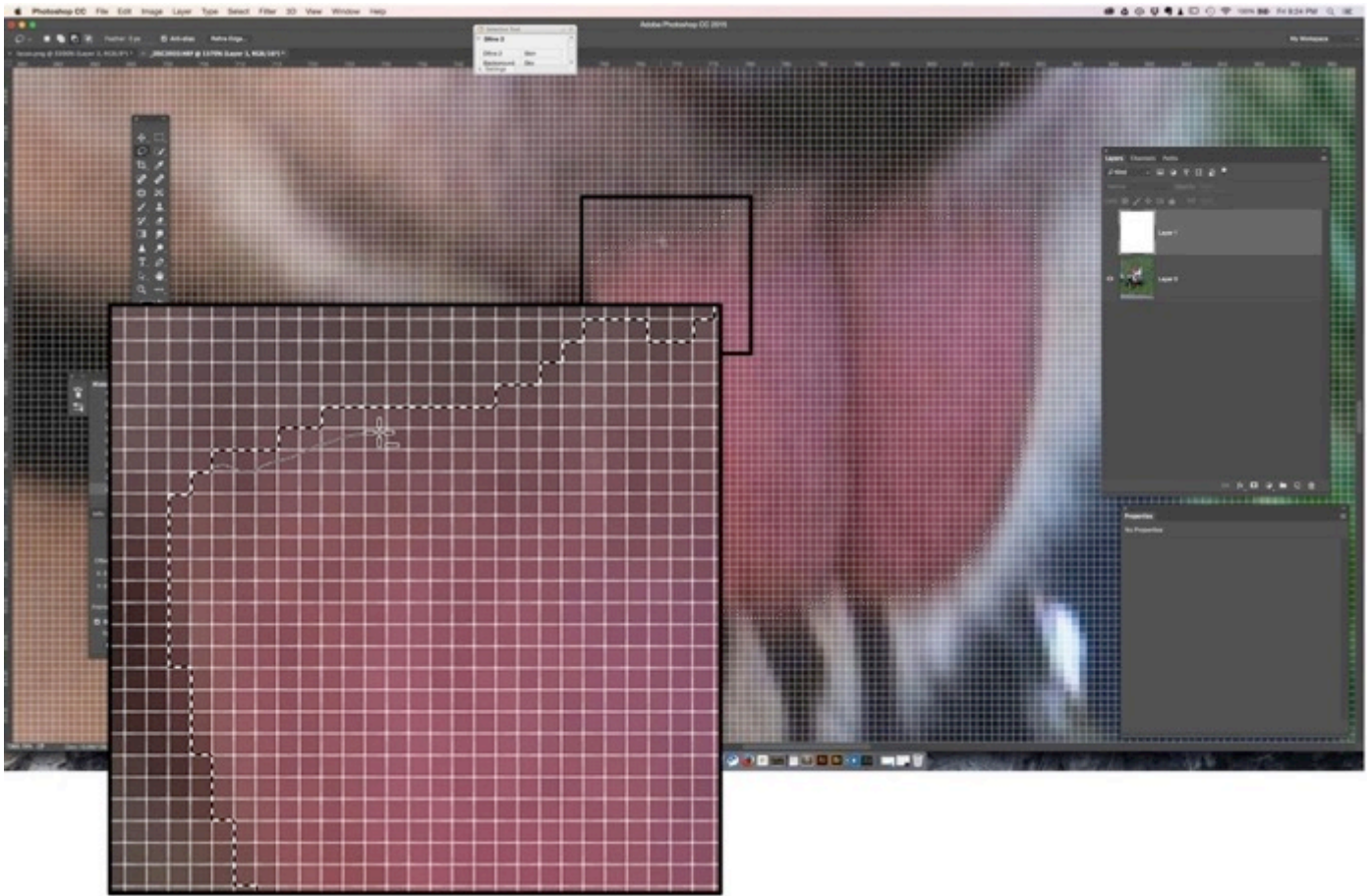
Straight as an Arrow

Here's another quick tip – something that's impossible to do with a Wacom tablet which is why I use both a mouse and a Wacom to edit photos in Photoshop.

To draw a straight line, make a straight selection or draw a square marquee selection, hold down the shift key.

To paint a straight line, click at either end of where you want the line then shift+click the endpoint and, viola, straight line.

Constraining gradients to a straight line? Forget about it... Shift plus drag the gradient tool to draw a straight and even gradient.

For square Marquees or perfect circle Marquees – hold down the shift key when starting your drag with either the rectangular or elliptical Marquee tool selected.

Unfortunately these tips don't work with a pressure sensitive device so you have to either disable that feature or just keep a mouse handy and use it for these types of operations.

Letters – **May 2016**

I hope you didn't miss our wonderful program on stacking given by our own Jim Mildice. I want to explain how he presented his subject rather than give details about his "how to do it" program. He started with a preview of what he was going to cover. He said this could be called "Stacking in Layers." Then he explained that he would cover six different ways that images can be "stacked" and he would give examples of each technique.

First, he showed how stacking can <u>eliminate noise</u> in long exposures. Second, he covered <u>motion</u> - how a group of pictures could be combined in Photoshop and made to show motion as, for example, misty waves at the beach. Third, he showed how stacking can be used in <u>selective focus</u>. Fourth, he showed how to use stacking for <u>exposure,</u> which is combining several images to eliminate over and under exposure in shadows and highlights. Fifth, he showed how to stack images to create a <u>panorama</u>. Lastly, he showed how to stack images to <u>eliminate</u> moving people or objects in an image. All the examples he used to explain these various techniques helped to demonstrate the effectiveness of stacking.

He ended with a review of all the subjects covered. He pointed out how simple stacking is to do and how we all could use stacking to make our images better. I hope that all of you in attendance at Jim's program will use this new technique of "stacking" in photographing and processing your images. I think you will see that stacking can be fun! Thank you, Jim, for your inspiring program and your excellent teaching methods.

Byron Aughenbaugh
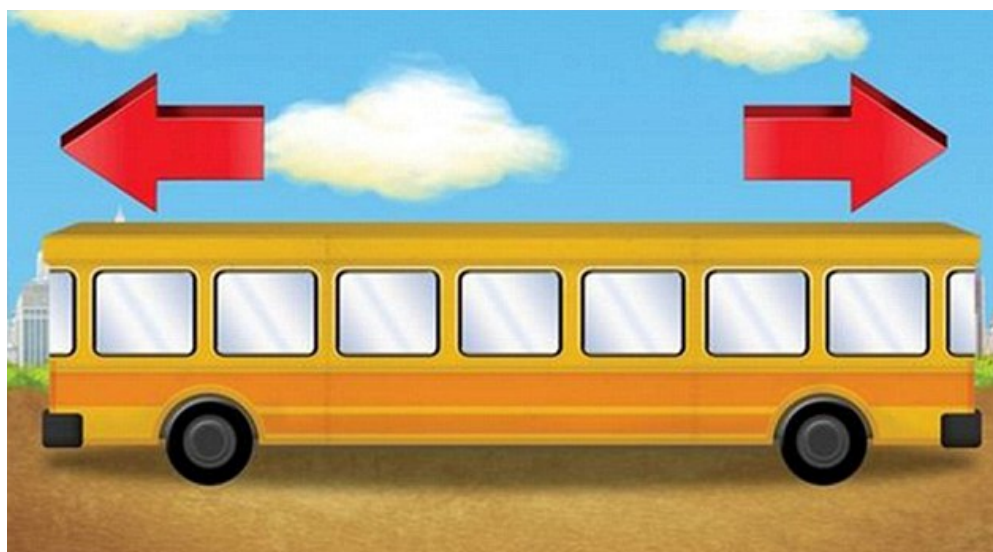
Here's a little puzzle to test your observation and logic skills.
Which way is the Bus going?

Programs and Coming Events
Sue Cerise & Barbara Fletcher

May 7 - Competition
March's Project Theme is "Shadow"

There must be a podcast available for the old radio program "*The Shadow*". . . one of the greats for bed time listening, under the covers, as a child. Conjure up all the darkness that exists in your mind and transfer it onto our screen for this project.

Our judge for this month will be **Steve Gould.**

Steve spent most of his professional life as a chemistry professor at Oregon State University and The University of Connecticut, but always pursued his love of nature and photography. Since 2004, photography has become a full-time career.

Over the past forty years, Steve has made numerous trips to many parts of the world, always taking pictures - both above water and below. Photography has allowed him to capture the special sense and flavor of each country: the novelty of the scenery, the personalities of the people, the different ways they have of interacting with their environment.

Since turning pro in 2004, Steve has become very active in the San Diego photography and art world. He is a member, and has been President, of The PhotoArts Group, is a Board Member of the Allied Artists Association of San Diego, and is active in the Digital Art Guild, the San Diego Museum of Art Artists Guild, the San Diego Photoshop Users Group, and the San Diego Underwater Photographic Society. He has won numerous awards for his images.

You can see more of his work on his web site at www.stevegouldphotography.com

May 21 – Overnight Field Trip: Pasadena Area
This trip is cancelled for this date because Michael Sienkowski (the trip leader) has some health issues. It will be rescheduled for later in the year. Watch for an email about a replacement program.

We will be visiting the Huntington Library and Botanic Gardens, the LA county Arboretum, the Old Mill Foundation, the Norton Simon Museum, and Descanso Gardens. Our field trips are always fun, so be sure to mark your calendar. We will have more information, a signup sheet, and a list of hotels at our next meeting.