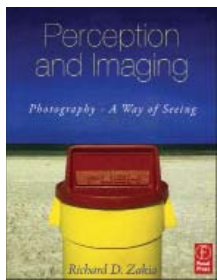


Words on pictures

A look at two new books and two new editions by photo alumni and faculty

Book helps image makers discover 'a way of seeing'



A great photographer needs more than expensive equipment and exceptional technique.

A thorough knowledge of perception and the visual process is crucial for any image maker, Richard Zakia '56 (photogra-

phy) believes. Professor Emeritus Zakia, who taught courses in photography, graphic design, and advertising during his 34-year teaching career at RIT, shares what he's learned in the newly revised and expanded third edition of *Perception and Imaging: Photography – A Way of Seeing* (Focal Press, 2007).

"I have spent my entire teaching career trying to better understand and appreciate pictures, regardless of the medium used," Zakia says. "My journey has led me to study and apply ideas from other disciplines: perception, personality theory, semiotics, and visual rhetoric. I am still on that journey and my book is a culmination of where I have been thus far."

The book has evolved substantially since the first edition came out a decade ago. It has grown to 410 pages, with 300 black-and-white and color illustrations including diagrams, line drawings, illustrations, posters, and reproductions of well-known artworks as well as photographs. Enriching the text are some 400 insightful quotations such as this one, from Aristotle, that opens the book: "The soul never thinks without an image."



Leslie Stroebel '42, left, and Richard Zakia '56, second from right, professors emeriti, attended a reception for the publication of *The Focal Encyclopedia* (fourth edition). Michael Peres, center, is the book's editor in chief. Stroebel and Zakia were the editors in chief of the 1993 third edition. Gordon Brown '72, far right, holds a copy of the new encyclopedia, which weighs 11 pounds.

"My journey has led me to study and apply ideas from other disciplines: perception, personality theory, semiotics, and visual rhetoric. I am still on that journey and my book is a culmination of where I have been thus far."

Richard Zakia '56

Ever the teacher, Zakia suggests exercises to help readers better understand the material in each chapter.

Despite the subtitle (*Photography – A Way of Seeing*), the concepts are not limited to

that discipline.

"The book is not just for those who capture and create images, but also for those who use them and write about them," Zakia says. "It is an intellectual approach touching

on themes that permeate communications.”

RIT connections are sprinkled throughout. For example, 28 of the photos are by alumni, including the cover image by Zakia’s classmate, Pete Turner ’56. A photo of the Eastman Building lobby showing one of two *Homage to a Square* murals by Josef Albers is found in Chapter 5: *Contours*. A vintage RIT poster promoting a presentation by Gordon Parks and James Van Der Zee illustrates a discussion of “Poster Rhetoric.” There’s also a reference to RIT’s Munsell Color Science Laboratory.

Zakia, who has written or co-authored a dozen other books, spent a year working on the new edition and says he’s happy with the way it turned out. It reflects his passion for the subject, and reflects well on another topic that remains dear to his heart.

“I’m proud of the book,” he says, “and I’m proud to be an RIT graduate.”

Kathy Lindsley

Professor documents Mexico’s Day of the Dead

The people of Oaxaca, Mexico, commemorate the dead each year during a three-day spiritual festival known as Day of the Dead, or *Día de los Muertos*, in which they believe the spirits return to visit. In a new book, *The Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos* (TCU



The cover of Denis Defibaugh’s book shows costumed stiltmen who perform for the *comparsas* street theater on Nov. 1. Above, women shopping at the enormous open market that takes place before the Day of the Dead holiday.

Press, 2007), Denis Defibaugh ’77, ’97 (photography, graphic arts publishing), RIT photography professor, documents the people and their rituals as they honor their antepasados — family members who have died.

Defibaugh’s interest in the Day of the Dead began in 1993 when he received a Fulbright/Hayes Fellowship for Mexico and met author/historian Ward Albro. Over the past decade, Defibaugh and Albro, professor emeritus at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, have been welcomed into people’s homes and taken part in the public festivals. The Day of the Dead holiday, All Soul’s Day, coincides with the Catholic tradition of All Saint’s Day and resembles the United States’ more commercial Halloween.

The book features street photography and intimate portraits, both in color and black-and-white, shot in medium and panoramic format. Along with Defibaugh’s photography, Albro writes an essay about the background of the beliefs and practices of the *Día de los Muertos* observance. Mexican communities remember and celebrate their deceased relatives through altars, crafts and festivities at cemeteries, in their homes and at the marketplace.

“The response to the book has been overwhelmingly positive,” says Defibaugh. “I’m very proud of it. Some of the people of Oaxaca were initially hesitant about me photographing them, especially at the festival in the cemetery. On my subsequent visits, I would give each person a copy of their photograph, and it would change the entire situation. People would line up to have me photograph them. The whole idea of giving photos back to people opens up a dialogue because they feel they are part of the whole experience. That’s reflected in the book.”

Many of Defibaugh’s photographs in the book have been part of a solo exhibi-

tion, *Family Ties Do Not Die, The Day of the Dead*, that has traveled to Miami, San Francisco, Montana, Niagara University’s Castellani Art Museum and various city museums in Texas.

Kelly Downs

Updated text offers expert overview of imaging

With the evolution of picture taking and making over the past decade, RIT faculty, staff and alumni have revised a comprehensive photography encyclopedia to reflect the changes in film and digital technologies.

Michael Peres ’81, ’82, ’91 (photography, instructional technology), chair of the biomedical photographic communications department, served as the editor in chief of the comprehensive reference book, *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography* (fourth edition). Peres oversaw an international team of more than 100 photographic and imaging experts in rewriting and revising the book’s 1993 edition. The George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film collaborated on the revision.

The *Focal Encyclopedia* is designed to be a reference for students, practitioners, and researchers of photography as well as digital imaging practitioners in business, industry, publishing, advertising, science and the visual arts. This new edition contains 880 pages of essays and photographs.

“This encyclopedia was created not to simply be another academic text, but rather to appeal to those with broad interests in photography seeking authoritative information about the myriad branches of photography and imaging and issues associated

in this dynamic era when both film and digital technologies co-exist,” says Peres.

More than 35 current faculty members from RIT’s School of Photographic Arts and Sciences, School of Print Media, Image Permanence Institute and the Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science served as editors, authors and image contributors. RIT alumni and industry professionals also contributed.

Topics covered in the encyclopedia include photographic practices and themes of the 20th century, digital photography, the history



and evolution of photography, 20th century material and process essentials, photographic companies and applications, and major themes and photographers of the 20th century. Images from world-renowned photographers such as Ansel Adams and RIT alumnus Jerry Uelsmann '57 are among the more than 450 photographs in the book, including some never-before published from the George Eastman House collection.

Kelly Downs

Shedding light on the photographer's vision

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but sometimes there's more to an intriguing image than meets the eye.

That's the premise behind a new book by Craig Varjabedian '89 (MFA, photography). In *Four & Twenty Photographs: Stories from Behind the Lens*



Craig Varjabedian '89

from Behind the Lens (University of New Mexico Press), the Santa Fe, N.M., fine-art photographer presents 24 images and explains how they came to be.

This is not a technical manual; Varjabedian rarely mentions aperture settings, shutter speed or such. Rather, he talks about the emotional background of his portraits and landscapes, the human content, history, physical circumstances, insights and other factors that culminate in "something wonderful." Nor is Varjabedian the only narrator; many others contribute commentary, and writer Robin Jones co-authored the book.

His notion that people are interested in these back stories dates from early in his career.

"When I was a graduate student at RIT, I saw Paul Caponigro's exhibit 'The Wise Silence' at the George Eastman House," Varjabedian recalls. "At a presentation, he talked about the stories behind the photos and people were mesmerized."

When Varjabedian gives presentations on his own work now, people invariably ask for that kind of background. The journals he began keeping when he was an under-



"Cottonwood Trees No. 5" by Craig Varjabedian '89

"I am fortunate to be able to photograph, teach and write in order to answer a powerful voice that compels me to make images."

Craig Varjabedian '89

grad at the University of Michigan help him recall the details.

Varjabedian developed an early interest in photography and vowed to become a fine-art photographer at age 15 after meeting Ansel Adams. Although he grew up in Canada and Michigan, "When I was a student in Rochester, I found that the weather was not very kind to me."

He moved to Santa Fe in 1985 and completed his graduate thesis, *Places of Power*, a study of locales in the West that have drawn people throughout history. (Professor Richard Zakia '56 was his thesis adviser.)

The landscape suited him, he says. "I felt like I had come home."

Life as a full-time artist was not always easy, but Varjabedian remained committed to his decision "to do the kind of photography I was interested in." With the help of his wife, Kathy, "I found my place in the world."

Varjabedian was hired to teach photography classes for retreats at the fabled Ghost

Ranch. In 1986 he founded the New Mexico Photography Field School. In 1991, he worked as a darkroom assistant helping Paul Caponigro produce his book, *Masterworks from Forty Years*.

He has won grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the McCune Charitable Foundation, the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities and the Peter and Madeleine Martin Foundations. His works have been featured in national magazines and Varjabedian co-produced an Emmy-winning PBS documentary related to his work with KNME-TV, Albuquerque. His photos have been widely exhibited across the United States and acquired by prestigious museums. He has published two books and two limited edition portfolios of his photos. His current project is photographing Ghost Ranch for a book to be published in fall 2008.

"I am grateful for the incredible support I have received for my work over the years," he says. "I am fortunate to be able to photograph, teach and write in order to answer a powerful voice that compels me to make images."

Kathy Lindsley

See www.craigvarjabedian.com for more information about Varjabedian's work.

