

Legends of the lens

'University Magazine' gets up close and personal with three great photographers

The mid-1950s were exciting years for RIT's School of Photography. The first students to complete the new bachelor's degree program in photography graduated in 1956. Several of the graduates from that era became internationally known pioneers in the field of photography.

Bruce Davidson '54, Carl Chiarenza '57 and Pete Turner '56 are profiled here. We plan to feature other "Legends" in future issues.



Coconut Woman from Pete Turner's *African Journey*

Pete Turner '56: *Living color*

Pete Turner's past caught up with him recently.

"It's crazy," says Turner '56 (photography). "I discovered a treasure trove of work I had done when I was in the Army."

Back in 1957-58, the young draftee was assigned to the Army Pictorial Lab in Long Island City, N.Y., where he was given the run of a "pristine, huge, beautiful lab" and unlimited supplies for making the new Type C color prints.

Turner took full advantage of the facilities as well as the proximity to New York City, shooting everything that captured his imagination. Also about that time, on the recommendation of his former RIT professor, Robert Bagby, Turner connected with the Freelance Photographers Guild.

"They liked my work and started selling my pictures – for big bucks, I might add," says Turner.

Getty Images recently acquired the Freelance Photographers Guild collection and returned original negatives to their creators. "I got this mint set of pictures back," says Turner. He began scanning and digitally adjusting the old images, many of which are now featured on his Web site (www.peteturner.com) in a gallery titled *Discoveries*.

They are as vibrant and arresting as his photos from the succeeding decades, distinctive work that carried Turner to the top of his profession. Turner's photos have appeared in popular magazines including *Holiday*, *Look*, *Esquire*, *Sports Illustrated* and *National Geographic*. He provided cover images for more than 80 LP record albums by John Coltrane, Bill Evans, George Benson, Quincy Jones, Paul Desmond, Stan Getz and others. His advertising assignments included work for ESSO, Goodyear, Timex and De Beers. He's been the still photographer on the sets of numerous movies, including *Cleopatra* with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in 1962 and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1978.

Turner's photos have been featured in numerous shows at venues including New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Rochester's George Eastman House and his work is included in the permanent collections of museums worldwide. He has received more than 300 awards from design and photography groups, including the Professional Photographer of the Year Award from Photoimaging Manufacturers and Distributors Association (PMDA). Several books of his photos have been published, including *African Journey* (Graphis, 2001), featuring works from trips over four decades, and *The Color of Jazz* (Rizzoli, 2006), a collection of his album covers.

Bold, saturated – even unnatural – color has been Turner's hallmark from the very beginning. He's never been afraid to push the limits, first in the darkroom and now with the latest digital equipment.

Inspired by surrealist painters Yves Tanguy and Giorgio de Chirico, Turner began exploring conceptual, abstract ideas from the earliest days of his career. But even before his stint in the Army's Type C lab, Turner was attracted to color photography.

"At RIT, I was kind of an oddball guy because I liked color," he says. "I don't know why, but I just loved color."

Among many notable teachers in the School of Photography at the time were Ralph Hattersley ("an idea factory") and Minor White ("We were all humbled by him"). Les Stroebel '42 gave students a solid technical background in black and white photography.

"I liked them all," he says. Turner's favorite was Robert Bagby,



Madison Avenue, 1958 from Pete Turner's *Discoveries* series

"With photography, you never know what will happen. You never know where it will take you."

Pete Turner '56

who had been a successful commercial photographer in New York City. "What I liked about Robert is that he kind of laughed at the instruction manual. He let me experiment. He liked to go out and shoot, and he'd invite me along. You can learn a lot by watching your teachers actually work."

He recalls his years at RIT as "a wonderful time," but it almost didn't happen. Turner spent four years at Aquinas Institute in Rochester with "a camera in my hands all the time," but RIT rejected him. "My grades were terrible," he admits.

Turner took his case to C.B. Neblette, head of the School of Photography. "He gave me a chance. Boy, was I excited because all I wanted to do was photography. After that, my grades were never a problem."

He can't imagine a different path. "With photography, you never know what will happen. You never know where it will take you."

Kathy Lindsley



To learn more about Pete Turner and his work, visit www.peteturner.com.

Carl Chiarenza '57: *In the abstract*

There was a time when Carl Chiarenza took pictures of trees, buildings and people. Recognizable subjects.

"I never felt quite at home with that," he says. Even in his early photos, Chiarenza would aim his lens in such a way that rocks, doors and plants, for instance, would be transformed into compositions of pattern, texture and tone. "The abstraction was always there," he says. Realizing that all photography is essentially abstract, he left realism completely behind by 1960.

In 1979, he discovered the subject matter that has occupied him ever since. He began photographing collages he assembles in the studio out of assorted materials including metal scraps, foil, bits of paper, lids from tin cans and such.

"After that, I never made another picture outdoors – or indoors, except for the collages."

The critically acclaimed black-and-white images have been displayed in more than 80 one-person shows and more than 250 group exhibitions. The sixth book of his photos, *Pictures Come From Pictures, Selected Photographs 1955-2007* (David R. Godine Publisher) was published in September of this year. Chiarenza's photos are in the collections of important museums worldwide including the National Museum of American Art (Washington, D.C.), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art (New York City), Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), The Getty Museum (Los Angeles), George Eastman House (Rochester), Museum of Art (St. Petersburg), Bibliotheque Nationale de France

(Paris), Art Gallery of Ontario (Canada), and Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts (Japan). A 5-by-14-foot quartet of his photos is permanently displayed in the lobby of RIT's Gannett Building.

His work as an artist parallels another distinguished career: Chiarenza taught art and art history for more than 35 years at Boston University and the University of Rochester, where he is now artist-in-residence and Fanny Knapp Allen Professor Emeritus of Art History.

When he entered RIT, he could not have predicted such a life.

"I was born on North Goodman Street (Rochester). We were poor. I went to RIT because it was inexpensive, and it was here," he says. He had been interested in photography since childhood, and RIT's photo program offered the means to a job, probably at Kodak.

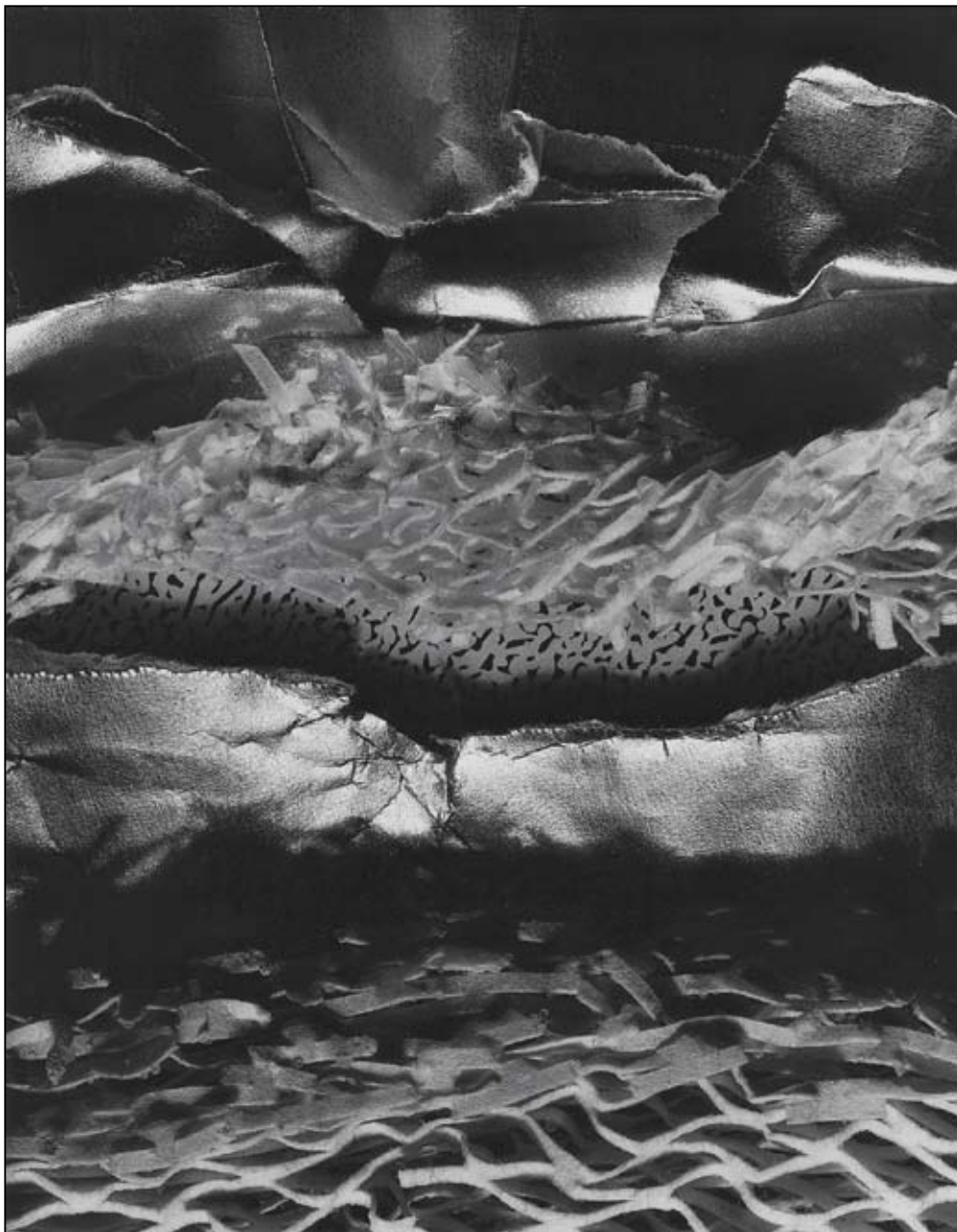
"I wanted to be an artist, but it seemed there was no way to be an artist and make a living using photography," he says.

The atmosphere at RIT's photo department, with a faculty that included Ralph Hattersley, Minor White, Charles Arnold, Beaumont Newhall and others (plus Robert Koch teaching literature and creative writing), was "extraordinarily creative," Chiarenza says.

"Our class, after the first two years, was a very small group," he recalls. "There were only 14 of us. We were quite aware that something different was happening. Ralph Hattersley and Minor White pulled to opposite poles. Both used this medium of photography to express ideas, but they were very different. As you can imagine, there were a lot of discussions, not to say jokes. The mixture was



Peace Warrior (Don Quixote) 188, 2003 from Carl Chiarenza's *Peace Warriors* series



Grotte 152, 1999 by Carl Chiarenza

“The work comes out of the materials and the light. They show me what to do.”

Carl Chiarenza '57

just explosive. It certainly shook us up.”

After RIT, Chiarenza went to Boston University with the idea of becoming a photojournalist. He received an M.S. in 1959 and was promptly drafted into the Army. Just as he was about to get out two years later, President Kennedy froze all discharges. As a way of securing his release from the military, Chiarenza applied for and received a scholarship to study art history at Boston University.

“I didn’t plan to become an art historian, but I ended up teaching in the art history department. Even now, I can’t tell you how it happened but it was just perfect.”

Teaching allowed Chiarenza to pursue his work as an artist, and

being a working artist enriched his teaching. “It takes two different kinds of minds,” he says. “There are art historians who are artists, but they are few and far between.”

At Boston University, he taught the first course in the history of photography ever offered in an art history department, and opened a gallery where he presented the work of noted contemporary photographers including Minor White, Paul Caponigro and Nathan Lyons.

He went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1973, where he did his thesis on American abstract photographer Aaron Siskind, whom he had met on an RIT field trip to the Institute of Design in Chicago. “It was the first dissertation ever done at Harvard on a living artist, let alone a photographer,” he says. He and Siskind became close friends, and the thesis ultimately became a book, *Aaron Siskind: Pleasures and Terrors* (Little Brown, 1982).

Chiarenza loved Boston but in 1986, the University of Rochester made an offer he found he couldn’t refuse. Plus, returning to his hometown gave him new opportunities to work with the George Eastman House and Visual Studies Workshop.

“I was pursued,” he says. “I succumbed.”

Now retired from full-time teaching, Chiarenza continues making photos in the studio of his suburban Rochester home. He continues to work with film and makes traditional prints – dark, rich, mysterious images typically ranging from about 11-by-14 inches to 36-by-48 inches.

The collages themselves are surprisingly small – about 4-by-5 inches – and they only exist until Chiarenza has a photo that satisfies him. Using a

Polaroid MP4 copy stand and camera, he moves the bits and pieces around, makes test prints, changes the lighting, exposes again. The process of transforming the scraps into rich, cohesive works of art can continue for days or even weeks.

“It’s chance and discovery and accident,” he says. “The work comes out of the materials and the light. They show me what to do.”

New ideas continue to come, even after 30 years. He developed a series called *Peace Warriors* in 2003, responding to the Iraq War. That was followed by *Solitudes* a year later.

He continues to work. The possibilities, it seems, are endless.

Kathy Lindsley



To see more of Carl Chiarenza and his work, visit www.carlchiarenza.com.

Bruce Davidson '54: *World views*

Bruce Davidson's photos draw us into worlds we have not lived in and connect us with people who would otherwise have remained invisible.

Look at *Brooklyn Gang*, a photo collection of a teenage gang called The Jokers growing up in the late 1950s. Revisit the Civil Rights Era through *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*, revealing that period's crosscurrents of injustice, violence

and defiance. See the dignity and despair on one block of East Harlem in the late 1960s in *East 100th Street*. Bear witness to the gritty subterranean world of *Subway* in vibrant color, or see the layers of life in *Central Park*. These visionary bodies of work have been deemed classic and continue to inspire.

Davidson's lifelong passion for photography was ignited early. As a 10-year-old in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, he was waiting to

get into a pickup game of basketball when a friend asked if he wanted to see pictures develop in the dark. In the dim ruby glow of a basement dark-room, he watched in amazement as images came to life on blank sheets of paper immersed in a tray of solution.

With savings from a paper route, he bought his first camera and developing equipment. His grandmother's jelly closet became Bruce's Photo Shop, and within a couple of years, he was hopping the El train into Chicago to explore neighborhoods through his camera.

"It was OK with my mother as long as I was home by dark," he says.

In high school, he apprenticed to a skilled commercial photographer named Al Cox, who taught Davidson how to enlarge photographs, how to use a Rolleiflex with flash on newspaper assignments, and how to make dye-transfer color prints. His close-up of an owl won first prize in the animal division of the Kodak National High School Snapshot Contest.

At RIT, faculty legends like Minor White and Ralph Hattersley widened his eyes to photography's aesthetic possibilities.

"Ralph Hattersley taught us how to view the work of photographers from Irving Penn to Robert Frank to Henri Cartier-Bresson," Davidson recalls. From other faculty members, he gained a sharper grasp of the technical foundations: "There was Hollis Todd's sensitometry class and Les Stroebel was a technical wizard in the studio demonstrating bounce flash, and William Schumacher, my organic chemistry teacher, opened the doors of scientific understanding."

But Davidson says he learned as much from fellow students like Irving Pobboravsky '62 (imaging science),

Jimmy, Palisades, N.J., from *Circus* by Bruce Davidson, courtesy Magnum Photos

