

UPSTREAM CREATORS

By: Sally Gordon-Mark

Profile: William Abbott, Photographer

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This is the first of a series of articles on freelancers: those who swim against the mainstream so as to live and work according to personal visions of their existence and the world around them. They are all creators: not only artists, musicians, composers and writers, but photographers, architects, artisans, designers, entrepreneurs, small shop owners, hair and makeup stylists, instrument builders, cobblers, cooks, and have chosen an independent and unpredictable life, requiring resilience and courage.

Born in Fort Bragg, California on February 29, 1944, William Abbott is a freelance photographer who chose to ride down this difficult and sometimes dangerous road, full of steep curves, ups and downs, thunder and lightning, surprises and epiphanies. His images are imprinted with the people and places that have given shape to his journey.



"Snow on Panamint Mountain Range." Death Valley, Ca. 2008 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

Many of the subjects of Abbott's photographs are the dramatic and fantastic landscapes he has seen in North America, and more particularly in California, which may have influenced his way of seeing everything. After growing up in Carmel on the Monterey Peninsula, he went to live in Hawaii for ten months in 1969. That year, when he returned, he moved to Southern California to study fine art at the Laguna School of Art and Design in Laguna Beach, and then in 1971 at the Choinard Institute in Los Angeles. While taking classes in fashion design where he "couldn't make a pattern to save my life," he realized that it was the art of photography that intrigued him.

Watson Cross was my instructor and saw more potential talent in me than I saw myself. He got me into Choinard's where I learned a lot of different ways of making art, including painting and print making.

The fine art classes that Abbott took helped "develop his eye for balance, color and design, and optimized his grasp of line and balance. "



"Study in Patterns No.89, Anaheim, CA, 1988 (Film) (© William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Three Windows," Monterey, CA. 2007 (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

Abbott changed from using a 110mm to a 35mm camera in the late '60s, wanting to document the many different media in which he worked. His career in photography actually started while he was still a student at Choinard's:

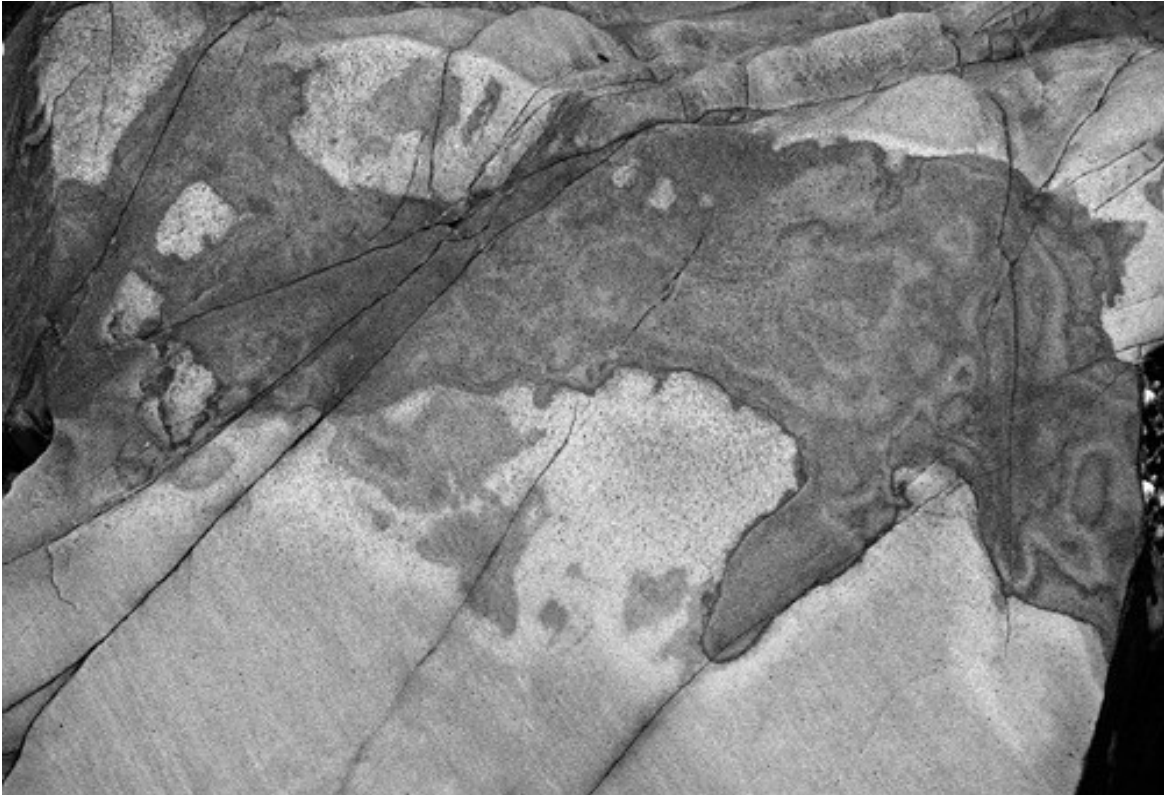
I would take photos of the models at school, not really knowing much about cameras at that time. I knew if I had the needle of the meter in the middle, I would get a decent photo, so I dropped off the film that I had shot during the day at a FotoMat and pick them up on the way to school the next morning. I would go through the photos and decide what was good and bad, teaching myself a lot that way. I gave the prints to the girls and soon after that, one of them came to me and asked if I would do a portfolio for her. I ran off to the library, looked up the word "portfolio," then went back and said "Sure"... and so started a career as a photographer. But the girls being very attractive, I did more trades than make any money!

Abbott supported himself during the 60's in many incongruous ways: driving 24-foot flatbed trucks, being a machinist for Rockwell and a painting contractor, working in a company that heat-treated skins for napalm bombs in Vietnam. But his most pleasant and reliable experiences have been working as bartender, chef, cook, and waiter:

For the most part, the restaurant business was good to me over the years, and in the 60's, 70's and 80's, it was easy to get a job in a restaurant. In the early 80's, I had my own art supply shop and did photography for the local newspaper, graphic design, and that is when I first got into computers. In the 90's, things changed and I did more things in the computer field: desktop support, IT administration, consultancy for such companies as McGraw Hill, AT&T, Lucent Technologies, and others.



"Shadows on Building," Savannah, GA (Film) 2015 © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Patterns in Rocks," Point Lobos, CA, 2007 (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

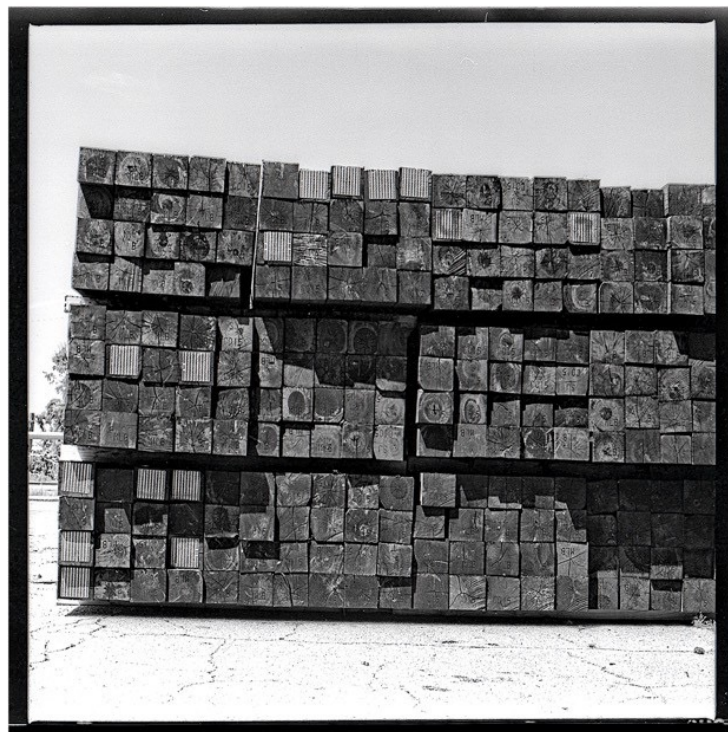
Moving back to Northern California, he majored in photography at the San Francisco Art Academy (1973) and the San Francisco Art Institute (1974). Before that, he had applied to Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, CA ...

... but there was a four-year waiting list, so I applied at San Francisco Art Institute and got in. I took photojournalism, studio lighting and darkroom techniques. One of the instructors and I just didn't get along at all. I would shoot a photojournalism story, go home, process and print the negatives either being late or not showing up for the class that day. When I showed my work, all the students were very impressed with what I did, but the instructor would only look for ways to put my work down. After two semesters, I left the Institute and applied at the Art Academy, where I got in. Who did I have for instructor the first day of studio lighting class? The same guy...! 1974 I moved back to the Monterey Peninsula and needed a job, but couldn't find anything. Someone said to me, "Why not pick lettuce in the Salinas Valley?" So for a season, I did just that and let me tell you, it was the hardest job I ever had. Won't do that again...



"Pier Pilings," Outer Banks, NC, 2014 (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

To supplement his income in the '80s, Abbott got work doing technical support for software and hardware companies. Still more room on his head for more hats, he also drove delivery trucks, framed pictures, and worked in construction. In 1980, Abbott exhibited his work for the first time, in Carmel, California.



"Railroad Ties," Savannah, GA, 2015. '(Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

School behind him, Abbott has explored and developed his art ever since - autodidact - with studios on the Monterey Peninsula and then in Southern California, New Mexico and Arizona. Each gave him new ideas for the next. Once he had acquired the savoir faire required to run a studio well, he then decided to broaden his experience and professional activities. Moving to Lambertville, New Jersey, in the 80's, he opened an art supply shop in New Hope, Pennsylvania, which he called "Abbott Graphic and Art Supplies" (AGAS). Then he changed the name to "Abbott Enterprises," offering services in photography, graphic design and computer assistance. But realizing he had taken on too much, he decided to just focus on photography, calling his enterprise, "Abbott Photography," and he went back to working in a studio, thus coming full circle. Eventually Abbott settled in Greenville, South Carolina, where he found new inspirations for his photographs there and in other parts of the South:



"Lights in the Village, Greenville West End," SC, 2015 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Corner Store," Savannah, GA (Film) 1989 © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Appliance Store," Savannah, GA, 2015 (Film) 2015 © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

A common thread runs through the tissue of much of Abbott's work. He is fascinated by places and objects that go unnoticed because they are neglected or abandoned, no longer of interest or of value to anyone. But Abbott finds poignant beauty in the "unconsidered," and his photographs exude stoic and silent abandonment, tinted occasionally with irony. And out of the many images dating back to the early 70's a series named "Broken and Abandoned: Surviving Traces" has come out of it.



"Favorite Armchair," Huntington Estuary, Huntington Beach, CA, 1986 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Hot Ice," Highway 26, Greenville, SC, 2014 (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

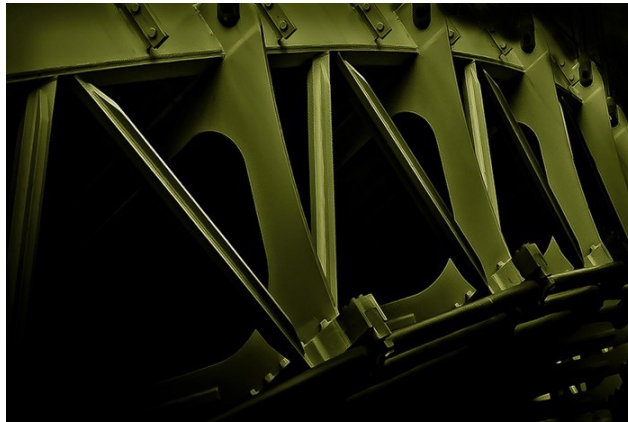


"Lost Sanctuary," Winston, NC, 2014 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Hide-A-Bed, Not-So-Hidden," Everglades, FL, 1985 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

In my work I like to capture visually the essence of moods and transport the viewer to a place in time outside of the present. I choose to photograph from my heart, which is very different than working with your head. When I see a scene that stirs my soul, I photograph it. Since I have been making images for over forty years, I instinctively see texture, light, and shadow with a value scale and composition which create a satisfying photograph to me personally.



"Structure Study No. 8," Liberty Bridge, Greenville, SC,, 2007 (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.



"Disposable Flowers, Kitchen," Costa Mesa, CA, 2008. (Digital) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

Mainly using cameras in large and medium formats,, Abbott prefers the purity of traditional film photography, especially in black and white. He develops all of his film manually and then handcrafts each print, as did the masters of the golden age of photography, in a way that fewer and fewer artisans do today.

Abbott is always concerned with achieving the highest quality possible from the beginning to the end of the process; for his digital images he uses Epson Models 3800 and 7900 to print his digital images, with Epson Ultra Chrome K3 Archival inks and Ilford Gold Fibre Silk papers, that have the same look and feel as traditional Baryta photo papers.



"Abandoned Crane Truck," Bishop, CA, 2003 (Film) © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved.

Abbott's work has been honored with many awards, including:

- ❖ *Best of Show* at the Carmel Artists Fair 1995 (Carmel, CA),
- ❖ *Best of Show* and *First Place* at the Monterey County Fair 1996 (Monterey, CA)
- ❖ *First Place in Black and White Photography* at the Orange County Fair 2006 (Costa Mesa, CA)
- ❖ *Best of Show* in the Orange County Art Fair Showcase Galley 2008 (Santa Ana, CA)
- ❖ *People's Choice Award* at the Architecture Show, Upstate Visual Arts (Greenville, SC).

He has exhibited his photographs in galleries all over California, Arizona, New Mexico, North Carolina, Illinois and in Europe: Germany, Switzerland, and Japan. Since moving to South Carolina, he has regularly been invited to show his work. Abbott draws on the life springs of renewal, freedom, energy, serenity, power and constant change; therein lies the inspiration for his current work:

I'm always glad when my images are well received by others. I hope they create emotions that reach out to people and encourage them to look differently at their surroundings. A photographer's negatives and files are in a sense his autobiography. More resides there than he is aware of; as fragmentary and incomplete as the archaeologist's potsherds, they can be no less telling."



"Wheat, Road with Moon" Salton Sea CA 2007. © William Abbott. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Sally Gordon-Mark.

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