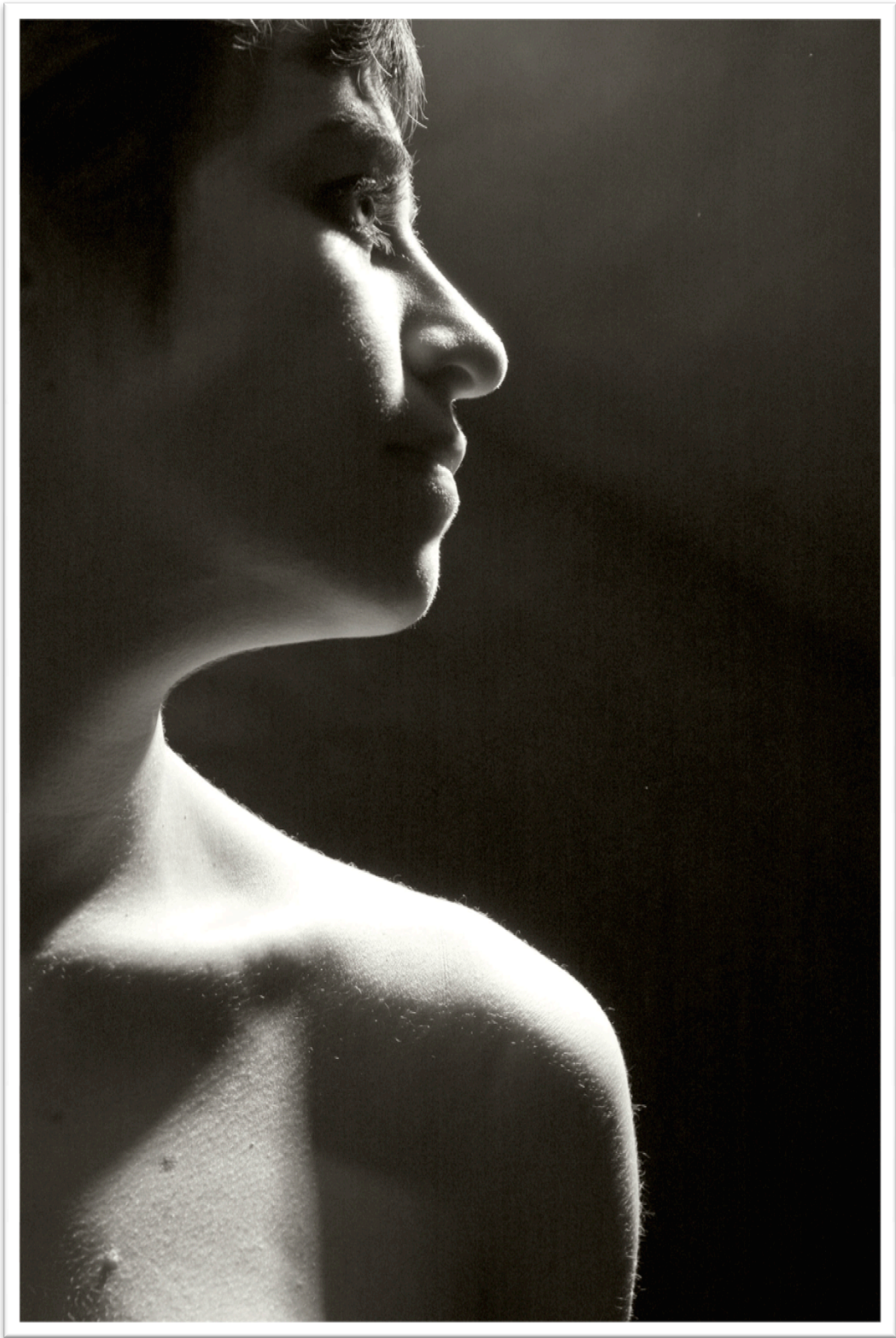


Illuminating Form
Sculpting the Figure with Light

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It was about four-thirty in the afternoon. I sat on my front lawn, just starting to squint as the light of the sun began to stretch away. With the strap of my mother's 1992 Canon EOS Elan twisted around my forearm, I waited, scanning the yard to see if anything had escaped my notice. At the age of fourteen, I was nowhere that I hadn't been countless times before.

I was restless. I'd wasted half a roll of film on nothing but some suburban shrubbery and a few shots of my porch. I was too young to drive, and my mom was an hour deep in gossip with her sisters, so the chances of getting a ride were slim to none. The front door of the house swung open and my cousin Rachel, fresh off her 3rd birthday, toddled down the steps. In an Irish-Catholic

family with easily a dozen first cousins, this was also nothing out of the ordinary. She sat down in front of me, and in a moment of some sort of cathartic bitterness, I asked her to smile for me.



The following day found me in the dark room with plenty of hazardous chemicals and very little expectation. I lifted my contact sheet from the fixer, anticipating nothing of consequence. This image, as shown above, of my young cousin looked back at me, and from that point, my perception of photography

was permanently changed. I knew I had become forever captivated by humanity in all its contexts, and would always be obsessed with capturing its nuances.

Since that time I have been compelled to capture the human figure in all kinds of attitudes. I've acted on this compulsion mostly in the form of photojournalism, especially in the past few years. I have been inspired by work covering some of the most intense moments of global significance; moments of gravity that showcase the bleakest sides of humanity. These photographs are important, and without exposure to them even the shallowest depths of human compassion might remain untouched. Yet these images can also be alienating, especially when seen by an audience that can't empathize, as much as they may want to, with the severity of their content. As I thought further about this notion, an idea crossed my mind: If we want to be able to relate to an image, then why not look more closely at the things we take for granted, particularly the faces and forms of those around us?

For my integrative project, I used photography to explore the beauty in the physical attitudes of the human body, especially the quiet spaces of the figure. I challenged my previous notions and branched off my previous work history by delving into the realm of studio-based photography. I'm drawn to the beauty of the human condition and how it is reflected in the human form, from the fleeting facial expressions to postures and attitudes. At first, I couldn't help but feel that work of this nature seemed a bit shallow, especially when one

considers all of the political turmoil, violence, and social injustices that are far too easily found in our society and are begging to be photographed. Yet as I further reflected on this sort of dichotomy that I was encountering, I realized that there is no shame in glorifying the beauty of the human figure. Is this form not something we all can relate to in some way or another? Whether it be love or hate, each of us feels something for our bodies, or for the bodies of others.

As final pieces, these photographs are printed in black and white, so as to highlight the qualities of the form itself as well as the light quality of each image. They have been printed on a large scale to glorify these collected moments and impact my viewers with the power and poise of these physical moments. These large prints (twenty inches by thirty) hang matted in simple black frames within a gallery space to allow the impact of the work to have full resonance. The presentation of these prints is deliberately very clean and simple to make sure that the work itself is the main focus.

As far as my materials for this project, I'm using a variety of lenses including a 50mm, 70-300mm, and an 18-55mm. I make a conscious effort to push the boundaries of these lenses, yet also to embrace their strengths depending on the situation. For years, I only worked in black and white film, developing my own negatives and photographs. As I drifted away from the darkroom, (mostly out of necessity), I became much more interested in the

intricacies of *taking* the pictures, instead of just developing them. With the freedom of a memory card, without a limited number of frames on a roll of film, I became less conservative with my technique, playing with levels of exposure and off-kilter framing. As I progressed with my project, I continued to remind myself how much of this new freedom digital photography has given me. I began to push myself when it came to the physical matter of composing shots as well, through continued creativity with lighting and framing. The final pieces I selected all have a shared element of high contrast. I deliberately used intense narrowed light to chisel out the parts of the figure that I wanted to explore. Between designing my images in this matter and manipulating my camera's settings, my images obtained the expressive manner I had been searching for.



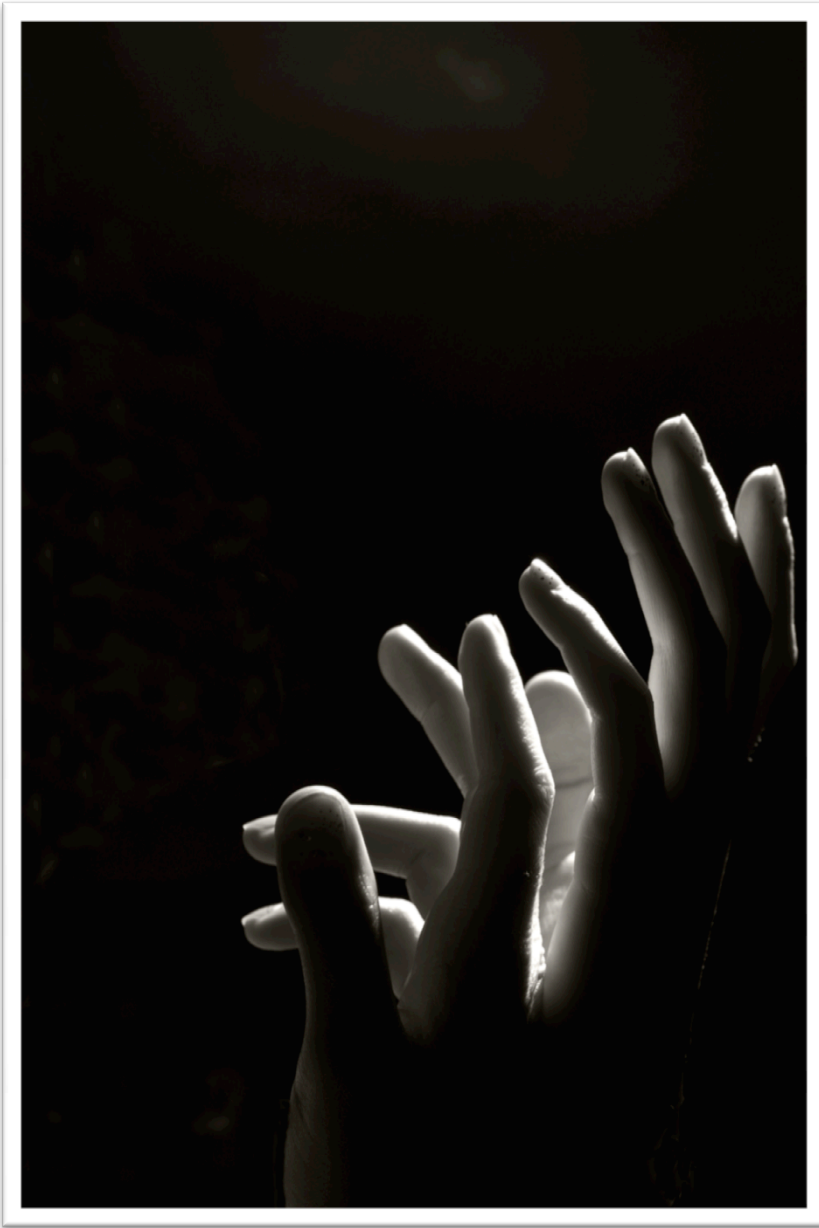
Though photography is still by comparison a very young medium, there is an almost unending source of preceding work to draw inspiration from. I find that I am most moved by work of a classic, somewhat antiquated quality.

Therefore the photographers who I draw from all produced black and white

images, either by choice or because of technological limitations of the times.

Creators such as George Hurrell, Eve Arnold, and Antonin Kratochvil inspire me through various facets of their work.

Hurrell, the master of the archetypal Hollywood glamour shot, uses light to sculpt the faces of his subjects. His style highlights the often-delicate features of his subjects in a way that



makes soft edges glow and hard lines stand out. His concise use of just one or

two lights to create such dramatic results makes the challenge of working from his influence seem much more attainable.¹ Although my work has been most influenced by his style in terms of lighting, my use of human subject matter is much more simplified.

On the other hand, the way Eve Arnold utilizes the figure, even in very brightly lit frames, makes her photographs especially tactile in their nature. The articulation of the human form in Arnold's work is very natural and sincere. She is quoted as saying, "If a photographer cares about the people before the lens and is compassionate, much is given. It is the photographer, not the camera, that is the instrument."² I find this quote incredibly powerful, because in my experience I have found it to be undeniably true. I know that as a photographer and as a human being I am a highly effective instrument in Arnold's sense.

What I particularly love about Antonin Kratochvil is something entirely different, and that is the way he harnesses the light he has to create the specific mood that he wants. While much of his career has been dedicated to documenting various atrocities around the world, I connected especially with his book *Incognito*, (2001), where Kratochvil uses his same graphically compelling style to tackle portraiture of various entertainment moguls. As

¹ Hurrell, George, and Whitney Stine. *50 Years of Photographing Hollywood: The Hurrell Style*. New York: Greenwich House, 1983. Print.

² "Eve Arnold." *Magnum Photos*. Orange Logic, n.d. Web. 12 Jan. 2013. <http://www.magnumphotos.com/Archive/PhotographerDetail/Eve_Arnold>.

described in this book, these images were “not designed to flatter but rather created to reveal something, possibly hidden, below the surface.”³



This project began as a far-reaching attempt to capture all the aspects of humanity through photography. Yet, by narrowing my focus to the expressions, poise, and grace of the human form, I feel much freer in my creativity, and more willing to challenge my preexisting notions. In both creating and capturing these moments, I make my viewers pause for thought and appreciate the grace in their own quiet instances as they go about the mundane business of living.

³ Krovichil, Antonin. *Incognito*. 1st ed. N.p.: Arena Editions, n.d. Print.

