

Black & White Fine Art Photography Magazine

ADORE NOIR

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PORTFOLIO
CONTEST
ISSUE!**

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FEATURED

ERIC KELLERMAN



"I consider the act of photography a social event first and foremost. I enjoy the interaction with my photographic partners."

AN: Please introduce yourself. Where do you live?

EK: My name is Eric Kellerman. I'm a Brit who moved to the Netherlands in 1974 to take up an appointment at a Dutch university. My partner Keiko and I live in a quiet wooded suburb of Nijmegen called Berg en Dal (Mountain and Valley). 'Mountain' is a relative term in the Netherlands of course, but the terrain, which borders

on Germany, is definitely hilly. I'm a linguist by training, and I researched adult bilingualism. I retired in 2008, a year earlier than I needed to in order to spend much more time on photography. Although I loved and still love teaching, my interest in research declined in inverse proportion to my burgeoning enthusiasm for photography.

AN: How did you get started in photography?



EK: Like most people, I took pictures for fun. I remember an Agfa Optima camera I took over from my mother, I must have been 17 or 18. I knew I loved black and white slide film. When I moved to Yorkshire to do postgraduate study I became passionate instead about landscape architecture and spent hours and days travelling to photograph England's great historic country houses and their gardens. I remember being inspired by the work of landscape photographer

Edwin Smith, so I bought a Pentax Spotmatic and lenses, and off I went. My time at the university in York was somewhat wasted, I fear. However, I soon realized that I did not like getting up early to 'catch the light', I hated lugging equipment over muddy or snowy fields, and I would never be Edwin Smith, however hard I tried.

When I moved to the Netherlands in 1974, I



converted one of the rooms in our house into a darkroom. I had swapped my Spotmatic for a Nikon F and bought a Mamiya 645 and a Bronica S, all second-hand. However, I really did not like developing and printing with the smelly chemicals and the need for precision and darkness, and so gradually gave up photography.

When Apple announced one of the earliest consumer digital cameras, the Quicktake (1994),

I felt that if this was the way that technology was going, I would become interested in photography again. At the end of the 90s, I bought an Olympus D600L and made my first attempts at serious nude photos. In 2001, I bought a Nikon D1.

A key moment in my photographic life was moving to a new house in 1999. It had a cellar suitable for conversion to a small studio (8m x 5m, 26' x 16') with plenty of additional storage



space. With my D1, and then a D1x, I began to 'professionalize'. Now I use Elinchrom lighting, a Canon 5DII, a third-hand Hasselblad H3D-39, and a Canon S95 for fun.

AN: What do you enjoy most about photographing nudes?

EK: I could waffle here about painting, sculpture and history. I could say, as one fellow-panelist

once said when answering a question about why he photographed nude women, "I am 200% heterosexual", as if he needed a pretext. I don't think one's sexual leanings are really relevant. Bodies are interesting in all their shapes and varieties and, like many others, I consider young female bodies particularly beautiful. So, let me see, I consider the act of photography a social event first and foremost. I enjoy the interaction with my photographic partners—I



don't call them 'models', as that suggests they are cast in a passive role. They are not—there's a lot of give and take. I like to build working relationships that go on for years. It is very rewarding to work with someone who knows what you want photographically and who has an understanding of how light and shadow work in conjunction with the body. Of course, there's banter and gossip and fun as well. Best of all is the frisson one feels when all the variables

come together to produce unexpected poetry—I am convinced that the best poses come between poses!

I'm very much an improviser and I encourage improvisation in my collaborators. I don't plan a shoot in meticulous detail and I rarely take notes about lighting set-ups and such. This is partly because I'm lazy but also because I don't want to be able to mechanically reproduce what I did in



a previous shoot. This is a luxury afforded by the amateur, and it suits my temperament.

AN: Tell us about *The Box*. How did this project come about?

EK: For studio props, I built three bottomless boxes (1m x 1m x 50cm), with holes in the sides for lifting. Once I tipped one up on its side to slide it out of the way. Somebody climbed inside

and I saw the athletic possibilities. The lifting holes could serve as hand and footholds, for instance. Of course, I'm not the first person to use this idea, nor will I be the last. I started seriously on the project in 2009. Working with the Box fits very well with my 'social event' view of photography. There's a strong element of performance about it, and it's no accident that dancers, acrobats, practitioners of yoga and martial arts people are drawn to



it. It demands suppleness, stamina, and inventiveness, a degree of risk-taking, a sense of space and a feel for elegance. I think an enterprising choreographer could use *The Box* as the basis for interesting contemporary dance.

AN: You have a book in the works. Did you photograph *The Box* series with a book in mind?

EK: No, I didn't think about a book till last year.

I'd been getting good feedback from people about the photos I had posted on various sites, and the young women I worked with were enthusiastic. Then I bought a book of Alvin Booth's photos, *Osmosis*, by Edition Galerie Vevais in Germany. It was beautifully produced, as are all their publications. I submitted a concept, and it was accepted. It's been a genuine pleasure working with Alex Scholz, the publisher, as production values are so high. The book will appear



during this year's Frankfurt Book Fair in October.

AN: What inspires you?

EK: Female grace, natural light, human anatomy, wonderful photographs, classical music after 1840, Gershwin, Kern, Porter, Leonard Bernstein the composer, and contemporary dance.

AN: What are your influences?

EK: I have thought long and hard about this, and although I like and respect many photographers, I am not sure many have influenced me in any tangible sense. I think I am more influenced by painting, if only semi-consciously. I feel a strong affinity with certain artists like Tamara de Lempicka, surrealists like Delvaux and Dalí, the Canadian Alex Colville, the Pre-Raphaelites,



and Victorian painters like Lord Leighton, James Tissot and Laurence Alma-Tadema. I also admire Japanese woodblock artists like Utamaro and Yoshitoshi. Among photographers, I admire Ruth Bernhard, Drtikol, Koppitz, Chema Madoz, Stieglitz, Steichen, Horst, Hoyningen-Huene, Avedon, Penn, Gorman, Christian Coigny, my friends Andreas Heumann and Emil Schildt, Lynn Bianchi, Flor Garduño, Serge Lutens, and many, many others.

AN: What is your final say?

EK: A painter friend of mine, with a worldwide following, once made the following comment after scrutinizing my earliest nude photos. He said, "Find your own voice, Eric." That's the best advice I can pass on to any aspiring photographer of the nude. It's a worthwhile quest. ♥

See more at: erickellermanphotography.com





