

Improvising for Art

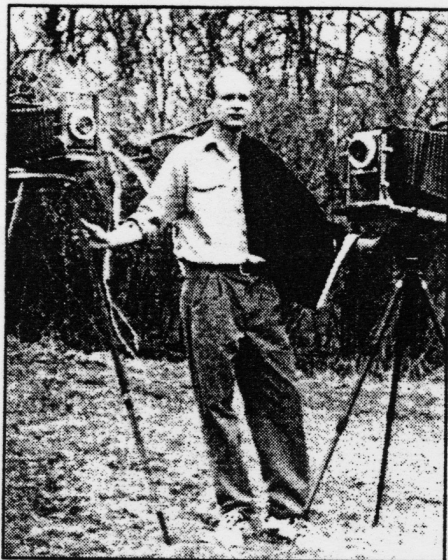
A local photographic artist uses unique equipment to capture authentic images from the Southwest and Appalachia. His work is now displayed at Kitty's.

by Jud Yalkut

It all started with a high school photography class. That's when, at age 17, Richard Malogorski of Kettering began making photographs. He worked with black and white 35mm and his father, a well-known watercolor artist who was also a photographer, allowed Richard access to everything he needed, including a Leica camera and an enlarger.

His early photographic travels involved color work in 35mm, but his true calling of larger format photography only materialized four or five years ago. A range of his recent work is on view into the month of June at Kitty's Celebrations in the Citizens Federal Center at Second and Main Streets downtown.

Just 20 years ago it seemed the art world undervalued photography as a valid medium. Now we exist in a world where Bill Gates has acquired the rights to electronic transmission of the photographic works of Ansel Adams. Malogorski recalls an interview with Adams where he stated that the future of photography would be electronic.



Richard Malogorski and cameras.

"He didn't mind people improving on his photographs," says Malogorski, "unlike Brett Weston who burned all his negatives."

The public library is where Malogorski was exposed to his earliest influences. He immersed himself in the extraordinary technical books by Adams, and studies of the works of masters like Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand and Edward

Weston. One aspect of their work that captivated him were many of the locales they chose to capture.

"I used to do back packing by myself," recalls Malogorski, "and I would go to really remote wilderness areas, national parks and up into Canada, for long periods of time. The work I admired most was primarily large format, and I really liked the technical quality. It's

a different approach to photography because it takes so long to set up the camera that you're more inclined to study the subject first."

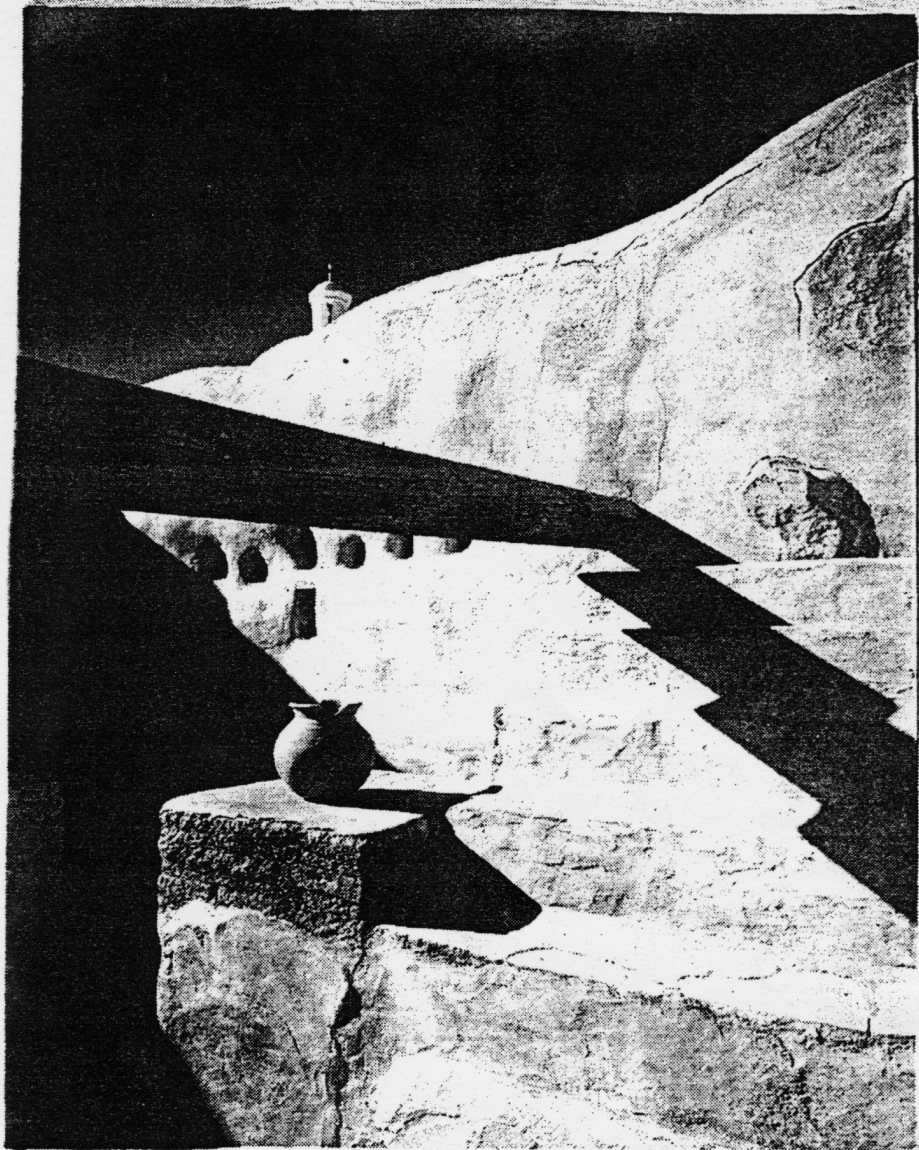
Malogorski agrees with Ansel Adams' premise that the first half of photography "is done during the initial exposure, and the other half in the darkroom." He started his large format work with 4" X 5" cameras, but went into 8" X 10" after a few months. He makes many prints with an 8" X 10" enlarger, an old Elwood, which he found in Indianapolis and which he converted over to cold light. He seeks out the tools he needs, some obsolete and others requiring personal modifications. He designed a glassless carrier for the enlarger, which he installed, and uses it in a home-made darkroom.

His latest work involves a panoramic camera built only from 1904 to 1941, called a Cirkut camera. Other early panoramic photographs were usually pieced together from overlapping shots, like the famous document of the Battle of Gettysburg.

The Cirkut camera, which Malogorski has used for a year, uses flexible film 8" wide and 72" long, and can only be contact

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— Richard Malogorski



"Stairs, Beam and Dome" taken at the Tumacacori Mission by Richard Malogorski.

printed. Malogorski converted this camera, a 1920s model, from its original weakened spring wind motor to electric drive. "It takes a long time to expose that much film because you've only got a 3/8" wide gap, so it can take up to two hours to expose 72" of film. The slowest I've tried to do, which is usually an indoor shot, is perhaps four seconds, which takes about 20 minutes."

He will typically expose for the shadows and develop for the highlights, which essentially follows Adam's Zone System. One interesting thing about Cirkut pictures, he notes, is that "shooting a manmade object will always show distortions, like keystoning in rectangular interiors. Round buildings don't distort, and there's no distortion with natural objects because straight lines don't exist in nature." He relates the panoramic pictures to historical linear artwork like Chinese scroll paintings.

Malogorski travels mostly during the winter, often to the Southwest. He's done

work from Death Valley to West Virginia, and from New Mexico to Kentucky, with subjects ranging, besides Western vistas, from Spanish missions to Appalachian churches.

"Ansel Adams once said that cemeteries are so photogenic," Malogorski says. "We look at them and automatically there is something there to move us, with the concept of death."

The Kitty's exhibition includes three Cirkut photographs, including one of Monument Valley, some Southwestern images, an Appalachian church in Pleasant Hill, a old grocery store in Eastern Kentucky, some Spanish mission photography, and a young girl in front of an old grocery store in Eastern Kentucky. A photograph of a Shaker dairy farm where a huge barn had burned down reminds Malogorski of the Shaker motto: "Hands to work and hearts to God."

Jud Yalkut is the visual arts writer for The Dayton Voice.