



## *Pictures Come from Pictures*

by Carl Chiarenza



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### **Commentary**

There is a school of thought I occasionally find in photographic circles that insists on creative isolation. These photographers simply refuse to look at the work of other photographers. This is usually stated with the authority of pabulum about not wanting to be unduly influenced by someone else's work. I suppose their assumption has something to do with creative or artistic purity. As my grandmother used to say, "It takes a lot of nuts to make a batch of cookies."

I've always felt that art is a grand conversation. It involving art makers in all media, art viewers in all cultures, and extends across all epochs. To insist on creative isolation is to walk away from this grand conversation — which seems to me to go against the very nature of art, whose purpose is to foster connections between people across time and space.

Which brings me to Carl Chiarenza. From the moment I became aware of his work, Chiarenza has been one of my "go to guys" for inspiration. More than almost any other photographer I can think of, viewing Chiarenza's work always makes me want to pick up the camera and respond. Perhaps it's simply that he is a fellow traveler in the relatively small world of photographic abstracts. More likely, it's because he is one of his generations truly great masters of photography.

Part of the inspiration I always find by looking at his work is his singular focus on *content* rather than

*travel*. If I'm not mistaken, all the images in his numerous books were photographed in his basement. As far as I know, he has never (unlike me) wasted his valuable artistic time by traveling halfway around the globe in order to photograph abstracts in some exotic location. Travel is certainly fun, but Chiarenza demonstrates with certitude that it isn't necessary in order to make great photographs.

What is necessary? Well, a keen eye and sensitivity, to start with. Patience and skill help tremendously. An energetic work ethic is useful. Longevity makes an important contribution. But, reviewing Chiarenza's work I would suspect that an unrelenting curiosity combined with a willingness to play with ideas might be the most important ingredients. Mix with a healthy dose of imagination and you end up with Chiarenza. If his example doesn't inspire you, look again at his image. Give them time.

For years now, I've said that if I were to be stranded on the proverbial desert island, the two photographers I would like to have with me would be Josef Sudek and Carl Chiarenza. If they were busy elsewhere, I'd bring with me every book of theirs I could find. I can only feel sorry for those photographers who would deny themselves such great company — and conversation — on their creative path.