



Beyond Words

by Paul Crosby



Published in *LensWork* #42

Commentary

Bill Jay once made an incredibly astute comment. Okay, he made *lots* of them, but this one comes to mind more often than some of the others. He commented that in all the years he taught photography at the university level, he never once had a student bring to him a photographic portfolio of *student life*. It seems that everyone wanted to pursue some photographic subject that was loftier than what surrounds them every day. He would often suggest that they try photographing what they lived. What a concept.

Every photographer I know loves books; it is such an important medium for us. It's odd then, don't you agree, that so few photographers would use books as a source of inspiration for a photographic project. Up until *LensWork* (#98, Jan-Feb 2012, *Lotus & Pyramid* by Marco Marocco), we'd only seen one project that focused on books — this project, *Beyond Words*, by Paul Crosby.

Crosby uses shallow depth of field, mottled lighting, lots of angles and perspectives, and the content of the pages of the books he photographs, all to create compositions that clearly demonstrate the book as an object of affection. That is, he evoked a style of presentation that in itself communicates mood and emotion independent of the subject (boos).

We published Crosby's project in 2002, long before the age of the Kindle and other eReaders. In retrospect, his project seems a prescient foreshadowing

of the lament that electronic books portend. It is a testament to Crosby's creativity that he tackled such a common and easily accessible object and turned his photographs into such an interesting and engaging portfolio. Photographic creativity is often a topic engaged in the geometries of composition and technical discussions, but in my way of thinking the most creative part of this project is that he recognized it as a potential project at all.

What do you love? Have you photographed it? Can you photograph it in a way that makes artwork that all of us can relate to? It's one thing to love your pet, for example, but another thing to photograph it so that we see it as an archetype for that love. What is it that is a part of your life and passion that is not photographic? As far as that goes, I wonder if it's possible to photograph your photography gear in a way that makes an artistic statement? If so, have you done it? If not, why not?

If great photographs come from our love of the landscape, or the still life, or the nude, then why not of anything else that we feel deeply about? Why not golf? Or, fishing? Or, woodworking. Wait, there was Al DaValle's portfolio in *LensWork Extended* #89. You get the idea. It's not easy, but it can be done — as Paul Crosby so deftly demonstrates.