



Gifts from the Garden

by Charles Grogg



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Commentary

I suppose I should confess that I love images that purposely break the rules — and do so successfully. When it comes to botanicals like this one, there are a standard set of expectations that define most portfolios; everything must be tack sharp, the main subject should occupy the center of the frame, the main subject should not be cut off by the edge of the frame, etc. Grogg simply ignores all of this and presents us with a lovely photograph that I have no doubt would score rather low in many photo club contests. Artmaking is not about rules.

Why do I think this works successfully? There are several reasons, first of which is the obvious beautiful rendition of tones. These highlights are silvery and delicate and wonderfully contrasted against the black background, but such tones alone would not make a successful photograph. Looking more deeply, Grogg presents us a two-dimensional image that succeeds in communicating the three dimensionality of this Hosta leaf.

The out of focus stem in the upper right is rectilinear, formal, perfectly aligned with the camera frame. But then organic biology takes control and the leaf curls and swirls in multiple directions at once. To my eye, this image is almost *defiant*, refusing to be controlled photographically — just like life itself. Every gardener knows that plants refuse to obey the higher intelligence of the gardener's logic. Plants have a will of their own and that chaos of nature is visible in this photograph.

I also think that by positioning this leaf so tightly to the left side of the frame Grogg creates in the composition a visual balance. That powerful lower left corner is offset by the strength of the rectilinear stem and the right leaning leaf at the top. I would bet that 99 of 100 photographers would not create this composition — and that is precisely why Grogg's interpretation is special.

And one final comment: notice the film marks at the top of the frame. Of course we know this is a photographic convention, but in this case I think it's more than a mere gimmick. It becomes easy to imagine this leaf attempting to break out of the visual confinement. The film marks visually become a transparent lid positioned *above* the leaf, thereby adding to the sense of three dimensionality which in turn adds to the sense of confinement.

I will admit that all of my comments are a personal interpretation of this image that may not make any sense to you. Artwork is often open to different interpretations. But, however you think about this image you must admit that it is more interesting than a rule-inspired two-dimensional representation, in sharp focus throughout, plopped in the middle of the frame, with an equal and generous border surrounding on all sides.