



Aftermath

by Christina Heliker



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Commentary

One of the most interesting trends that I've observed developing since the introduction and widespread adoption of digital photography is the blending of full-color and monochrome within the same image. Before digital photography, of course, the decision to photograph in monochrome or color was made by the choice of film we loaded into our cameras. After that, chemistry itself determined the rendition of nature's colors into our photographs, at least mostly. Sure, color printing always involved a delicate balance and the possibility of psychedelic color renditions, but images that combined monochrome characteristics and color characteristics were rare. In fact, few come to mind off the top of my head, and most of those involve hand-coloring of black-and-white images with Marshall oils.

But with the introduction of digital capture and digital rendition tools, the idea of blending monochrome and full-color areas in the same image has become a relatively easily-achieved aesthetic. Although this image by Christina Heliker is not, strictly speaking, divided between monochromatic processed areas and full-color ones, it achieves the same aesthetic by using nature's own monochrome tones. This example shows that such a visual approach was always possible with color films, which begs the question why we so rarely see it in film photography. Perhaps we are just learning to see this way more easily with digital tools.

a photograph like this because it enhances the emotional component of the photograph. Yes, the subject is the salmon carcass and fallen leaves, but isn't it equally true that the real subject of this photograph is *mortality*. Whether fish or tree or (we infer) ourselves, our ultimate fate is undeniable. Even more symbolically, Heliker uses color — or the lack thereof — to communicate something about the process of transition. Some leaves are green, others yellow, and still others orange and even gray; the salmon carcass is almost entirely monochromatic gray; the rocks below are monochrome fading to black. This color transition progresses from the topmost layer to the very bottom under the water.

Okay, but let's be honest. Did Heliker think through all of this about color, monochrome, layers, and mortality at the moment she clicked the shutter? Perhaps, but does it make a difference to us as viewers? The very fact that *we* can do so makes this an interesting image. Our ability to do so is facilitated by the dark and monochromatic areas. Just imagine this image rendered entirely monochromatic black-and-white. How different it would be! I find these new capabilities to combine color space renditions in the same image opens some very exciting possibilities and an aesthetic that can add a great deal to the viewer's interpretation of our subjects.

This aesthetic rendition is particularly important in