

# TIMESLEADER com

## **Fraser Stables: The image of a genius among us**

**Dennis Gold**

Sept 1, 2010

What must a photography show do to a viewer?

First, it must engage the eyes. For if the photographer cannot capture the viewer's eyes, we need proceed no further.

The photographs must impel the eyes to engage the brain to its highest capacity. Rare thoughts, those that seldom appear and that enter realms that are the center of creativity and depth, emerge.

Let the momentum of curiosity carry the mind to the subtlest crevices into which trickle the deepest truths. A journey to Paper Kite Galleries in Kingston to view Fraser Stables' one-man show will provide an opportunity to achieve all of the above and more.

Mr. Stables is an assistant professor of art at Smith College in Northampton, Mass., where he teaches photography. He agreed to be artist in residence at Paper Kite Studio and to act as a "recorder of dreams" for our community during the week of Aug. 16. The blurb in the arts newspaper read, "The public is invited to have their portraits taken or to bring objects to be photographed. Results will be displayed at a reception at the end of the week."

Many answered the call of participation. The phone rang on, appointments were made, visitors arrived, and pixels were inscribed. Location shoots were arranged. Some danced, others worked, and many sat or stood while a process unfolded; the connection between the photographer and the subject. Dancer may be the best metaphor because Mr. Stables was in constant motion between lighting, viewing, directing and, most important, listening to the subject. The best photographs are the result of collaboration between all parties. An image is created that is engaging, balanced and captures a brief moment of truth that synthesizes all of the elements into a coherent reality that is universal and resonates deep within.

Mr. Stables has enough depth and life experience to be able to relate to his subjects on as many different levels as one might require, from chef to EMT, from bricklayer to musician. Each subject appeared with a need to be

preserved, to pass on something of their essence to those yet to come. Mr. Stables, through dialogue and the ability to engage and connect to people, is able to create an atmosphere in which such an essence can be preserved in an image.

As I began my visual journey of the show I saw a mason's trowel, one that had joined mortar and bricks for a generation. It resembled an object that an archaeologist had unearthed, which told of village life 10,000 years ago. But, rather than a tool that could be purchased at Lowe's, this one was etched with miles of bricks and lakes of cement. The user's hand was imprinted into the trowel's handle. A young lady resting in a park, lost in a dream as young ladies are wont to do. A ballerina pirouetting on a knoll at Kirby Park. A family assembling for a portrait that is not yet completed. Everyone almost in place but not quite yet. The public persona not quite exactly in place. A chef between courses, calm, direct, unafraid and willing to engage.

Mr. Stables is able to capture people being themselves, being real, not projecting some image that we each try to construct. Three people in a living room, after a scrumptious repast and substantive dialogue, capturing the moment with the dog completing this jigsaw-puzzle picture in a most satisfactory way.

Fraser Stables is able to capture these moments at the most auspicious time, when the greatest depth is revealed. He creates not just wonderful photographs but jewels that are treasures of human stories.

He welcomed us to the studio as we welcomed him to our hearts and bared these truths to his lenses. I called to arrange an appointment so that he might record my precious objects, both musical and photographic. But what I received was a lesson in patience, perseverance and listening. Mr. Stables captured my objects and illuminated a hidden aspect of myself. He wanted me to think about what I wanted to say with my own images. What do I want people to see?

I thought I just wanted to create engaging images, but I needed to look a bit deeper.

Fraser Stables was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He earned the first B.A. in photography in 1995 that Edinburgh College of Art was to grant. He earned an M.F.A. in 1998 at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He has been teaching photography at Smith College for the past six years. He has had solo exhibitions in such varied locations as Rice University in Texas, Seydisfjordur in Iceland, Aix-en-Provence in France and Toronto, Canada, and Kyoto, Japan.

Mr. Stables is interested in image/narrative identities that one constructs and assumes. When I brought in my 73-year-old Gibson guitar for photographing, he wanted to examine it in a new context. He put it down on the floor in a

shaft of bright light. He had me stand in a way so that my shadow left the headstock in sunlight and cast the background in shadow. The viewer of the

final photograph saw my sneakers, dark pants and the illuminated guitar. Certainly not the way one might imagine photographing a precious instrument, yet it worked. All the elements coalesced into a wonderful gestalt that drew the viewer toward a deeper meaning.

The exhibit displays the culmination of five days of collaboration between a highly skilled photographer and teacher and members of our community who connected with Mr. Stables. You will see people from all walks of life, colors, ages and sizes, a representation of the spectrum and palette of the Wyoming Valley. Come and see what has been created in the meeting of a master with our people. The skill and dedication to the art of photography that Mr. Stables demonstrates in the quality of the images displayed is only superseded by his humbleness and ability to connect to people at their core. You just might receive some unanticipated inspiration