



Garlic, Dancing

by Lydia Goetze



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Commentary

We've all sat through countless photographic lectures in which the speakers drone on about success formulas for photography — the rule of thirds, the Zone System and key tones, the Golden rectangle, and the magic of *bokeh*. Perhaps it is my reaction to so many lectures like this that makes me love an image that seems to violate all the rules so successfully. Although this photograph follows none of the normal rules of composition, it does exhibit two characteristics that I find frequently appear in especially successful images: *relationship* and *gesture*.

If photography has an Achilles' heel, it is that it is a static medium. Compared to the vibrant movement of film, dance, or even live storytelling, a two-dimensional and static photograph has serious limitations to overcome. Photography does so by freezing the moment so that we can see something more clearly than we could at the speed of life. But what is it we are supposed to see? I would propose *relationship* and *gesture*. I would go so far as to say that without relationship and gesture, the subjects of most photographs will have little to communicate in their frozen timelessness.

I suspect it was not necessary for Lydia Goetze to title her project *Garlic, Dancing*, but I can think of no better title that would prepare us for what we see. With that title to set the stage, how could we see anything other than relationship and gesture in this image? Those tall curved shapes rising to the top of the image feel so much like the graceful motions of

a ballerina. The two circles described near the base of each gesture feel so much like dancers' heads, arched back, while those arms reach as high as grace will allow.

In truth — and we all know it — this is a botanical still life. Nonetheless, I seriously doubt that very many people would look at this image and fail to see the *pas de deux*. In fact, all the images in this portfolio carry forward this idea of a botanical dance. I think it would be pretty safe to assume that her selection and editorial decisions were based on this idea. Said another way, I suspect she has lots of photographs of garlic plants that are *not* dance forms that were simply excluded from the project. At some point in the process — perhaps before she photographed, perhaps part way through the process, perhaps after the photography was concluded — she connected with the idea that this project was all about relationship and gesture. I would simply propose that keeping the idea of relationship and gesture in mind at the *beginning* of the project will often help us see the possibilities more quickly. Relationship and gesture may not always lead to *dance*, but searching for the themes of relationship and gesture can be a useful framework for bringing a group of images together into a portfolio with interconnectedness.