

Seeing Through

by Kathleen Pickard



Published in *LensWork* and *LensWork Extended* #129

Commentary

I hope I'm not simply projecting into photography at large a personal experience that I had in my youth, but I'll risk it nonetheless. Sometime after my first exhibition of *Made of Steel*, my photographs of garages and machine shops, a fellow photographer complimented me in an unexpected way. He had a flat tire and his car was towed into a local garage. While his tire was being repaired, he had time to wander through the garage and just look. Later, he said to me, "You know, Brooks, for the first time in my life I found myself really looking at the greasy tools and workbenches — as result of having seen your photographs. You taught me how to see them!" I've always considered his comment one of the highlights of my photographic career.

I remember someone once proposing that everything in the world had now been photographed and there was no such thing as new subject material. I'm not sure how we would ever know this with statistical accuracy, but I can honestly say I've never seen a body of work like these abstracts by Kathleen Pickard. What makes that a particularly startling statement is that, having seen her photographs, they now seem almost obvious. Clearly they aren't, or we'd see lots of these photographs from lots of photographers. Try doing a Google search for "rippled water abstracts". You'll find hundreds of images, but none of them that look like these. Pickard's fundamental creative act was not the one of *photographing* these images, but rather *seeing* them. How did all the rest of us miss this wonderful subject matter?

Of even more significance is that her body of work is *extensive*. She submitted 37 images to *LensWork*, virtually every one of which was terrific and publishable. There is a curious thing about this that is worth noting. Once a photographer learns to see something in a new way, it's not uncommon that a prolific explosion of creativity follows. It's as if a veil was lifted from our creative eyes. I have no doubt Pickard has many more of these creative abstracts that she did not submit for our review.

I recall talking to Huntington Witherill for *LensWork Extended* #92 about his project called *Photosynthesis* — highly manipulated and creative abstracts that began as photographs of simple flower bouquets. He had developed a new way to see them and created fabulously wonderful and imaginative constructions with heavy Photoshop post-processing. I asked him how many such images he had made. He said, "So far, about 500 images, but I'd only be comfortable showing about 85 of them." I immediately thought of how many photographers would struggle to come up with 85 exhibitable photographs of almost any project they'd ever done.

I experienced the same thing with the abstracts I created from Fort Worden that became part of my project called *Wakarimasen*. Once the creative



vision took hold, I saw a new photographs *everywhere*. I have roughly 800 images in that body of work. What does one do with 800 images in a single body of work? This is not a rhetorical question, at least not in my case. I have no idea.

So much of photography is about the single image and what I have often characterized as the "greatest hits" approach to photography. I suppose it's counterpoint is represented here by Pickard's project and the explosive creative result of seeing in a new way.