

# Just Beyond the Frame

by Walt Stricklin



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## Commentary

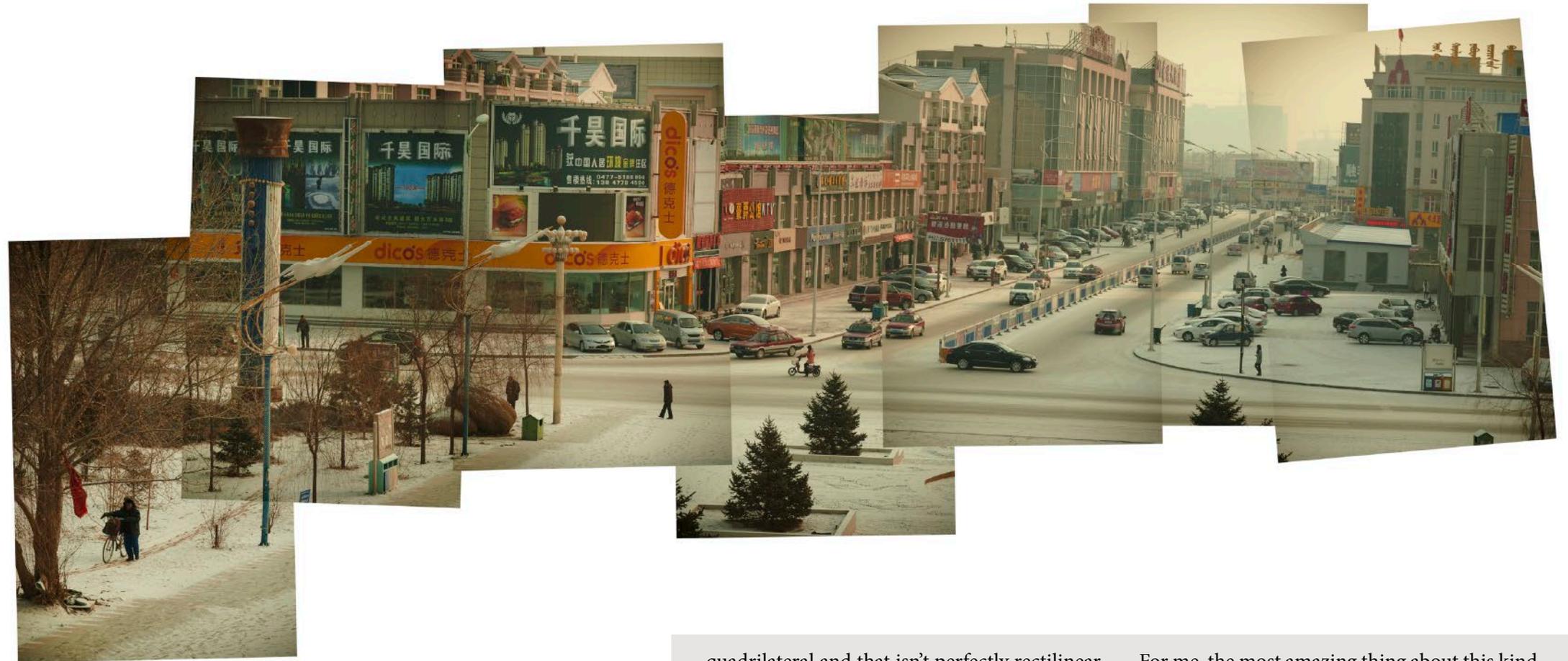
The first and most fundamental challenge of any photograph is to engage us, to motivate us to look more closely, to seduce us to spend a little of our precious time looking at something the photographer has decided is important for us to see. Why else would they make the photograph and present us with their artwork? There are, of course, a thousand ways to grab a viewer's attention, and presenting something that is both unusual and engaging surely must be one of the best.

I doubt Walt Stricklin is the first photographer to create these kind of multiple image montage assemblies. In fact, I know he isn't. David Hockney did this kind of work decades earlier, and I'm not even sure he was the first one to do it. Like all such unusual techniques, it runs the risk of being merely a gimmick, but Stricklin has moved far beyond the initial gimmick images and developed a real talent for these complex constructions. We were delighted to publish an entire portfolio is of his work in *LensWork Extended* #93.

One of the key elements that makes his constructions so successful is the way he so adroitly pulls us in. In this example, he does so with the use of exquisite timing. Notice the individual in the third frame from the left, captured in mid-stride, and isolated against a fairly empty backdrop of the snowy street. Our eye is pulled immediately to that individual. We

are hooked. We scan the rest and assemble the scene from all the component parts. It doesn't take long before we see the individual with a bicycle in the lower left corner, other people on the streets, even some very distant individuals crossing the streets. We are engaged. The color balance of this project is also intriguing. Recognizing (because of the store signs) that this is China, we suspect the tint is from the ever present smog of Chinese cities. Dingy snow, and distant haze provide additional clues.

But most importantly, there is Stricklin's composite construction that catches our eye. How lovely to find a photograph that isn't that isn't a regular



quadrilateral and that isn't perfectly rectilinear. Why is it so comfortable to look at such a disjointed image? Perhaps it's simply because this composite presents the world to us in a way that is compatible with the way we actually see the world. As photographers, we all know that we simply cannot see an entire scene simultaneously. We see in snippets and our mind assembles a completed image from parts stored in our visual memory. Essentially, a composite image like this extends what happens naturally in our visual process. We construct the scene from his construction parts. We still have to scan each area for individual bits of information and reassemble in our mind's eye, but it seems so perfectly natural to do so from these seven aligned components.

For me, the most amazing thing about this kind of photography is why I don't see it more often! Perhaps it's because it's not easy to do without thinking ahead and employing a little planning and purposeful image making. Stricklin's body of work is a great place to start learning how to think and see in this wonderfully unique way. Be forewarned, however. Once you start playing with this idea and making some of these images, you'll find them a bit addicting. And don't be surprised if you need to rethink your framing budget. You will find that assembled images like this can become quite large — but that is definitely part of their charm.