

Curious Visual Fun— Photo Arts from a Scientist

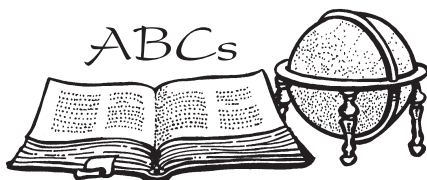


Underwater Life on Europa



OOPS

Stephen F. Ledoux, Ph.D.



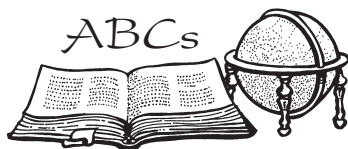
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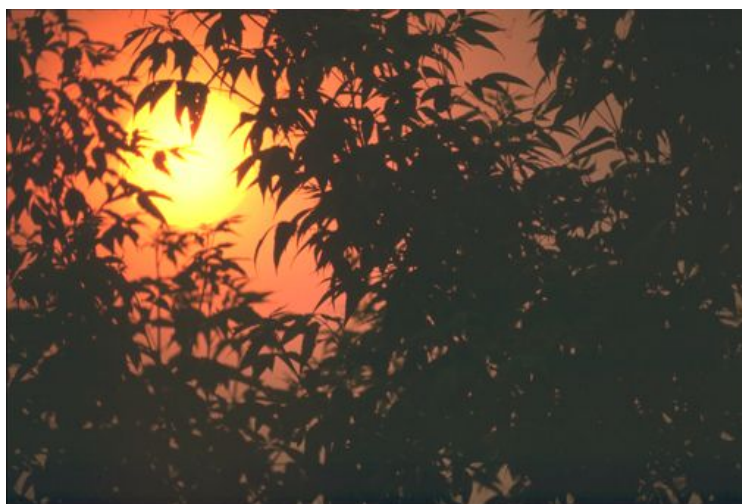
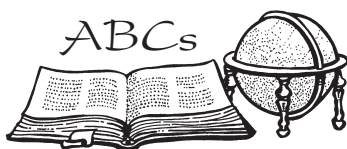
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Curious Visual Fun— Photo Arts from a Scientist



Burning Bush

Stephen F. Ledoux, Ph.D.



Coy Sunset

Chapter 1 Introduction

This book displays a selection of my composed photographic arts from visual endeavors accumulating across my lifespan. However, I took most of these compositions between the years 1975 and 2000, after which science writing took increasingly more of my time and energy than did photography.

As context for these images, this chapter summarizes the photography-related descriptions of

life events and circumstances as presented in more detail in my autobiography (*Work Takes a Holiday—Confessions of a Natural Scientist of Behavior*, which the publisher, ABCs, released in 2022 on www.lulu.com). The photographs presented herein appear broadly organized by topic into the nine other chapters, 2 through 10, of this book. They appear with titles and related information but without any

identifying numbers, because in 2019 ABCs released a thin volume, *Catalog of Select Art Photographs by Stephen F. Ledoux*, with such numbers. While this 2019 booklet only featured large “thumbnail” images of the photos, it also included an “ID” (identification) number for each photo *either* that combines the number for the photo with the number of the “Kodak Photo CD” that contains the photo, *or* that gave the label for the image’s file on the commercial photo CD, titled *PhotoPro1*, that Wayzata Technology released in 1991. This CD contains 100 art photos by four artists including 31 of my images.

By design, my composition for nearly all of the photographs in this book envisioned them as printed *full frame* (i.e., without any cropping) most commonly as at least 8–inch by 12–inch pictures, in either “portrait” format (i.e., vertical) or “landscape” format (i.e., horizontal). This holds generally, but not exclusively, because the occasional photo composition specified a different format (e.g., square).

Trade off

All the photographs in the category chapters of this book appear at the largest size possible for the size of this book. The trade off to achieve this, with one photo per page, involves turning the landscape-format photos on their side, which requires that the book be turned on its side to see them properly. You can handle that, right?

Some Backstory

In a sense, this book approximates the catalog for a museum exhibit. Early in his article, “Exhibit creation: From curator’s vision to finished product,” Marcus Monenerkit (Comanche/European–American) describes a connection between artists and exhibit curators. “Both work to communicate and make a statement about a chosen subject or cultural phenomenon. [Each] engages a vision, a history, and knowledge, and in turn creates a human expression of a chosen theme” (p. 30, *57th Annual Heard Museum Indian Fair and Market Guide*, in partnership with *Native Peoples* magazine, 2015). The theme of the exhibits in the chapters of this book concerns some vision, history, and knowledge about a range of art topics in which anyone can share.

Herein begins to appear some of my related vision, history, and knowledge by mainly considering the various origins of my photographic interests. First, however, defining art should increase understanding not only of the images herein but also of all art.

Defining “Art”

Any dictionary provides a range of definitions of “art.” These are the definitions that ground

most discussions and books on art. The realities of my “career” life, however, induce a different kind of definition. This writing happens during my retirement from a career–life as a Professor of Behaviorology, the natural science of human behavior, the discipline that studies why behavior happens (and which is not a part of, nor any kind of, “psychology”). Behaviorology can provide definitions of art that, while not in any way inconsistent with the standard definitions, are also consistent with the findings of natural sciences.

One such definition of art would state that, scientifically, art is the novel products of, and the conditioned production of, responding induced by a wide range of environment–behavior contingencies (i.e., connections between “causal” environmental and genetic independent variables and the dependent variables of “effects” on behaviors) in an equally wide range of media, that may or may not produce reinforcing effects from its uses (i.e., its functions) but that indeed produce emotionally reinforcing effects, for others as well as the artist, that typically evoke the human verbal response of “beautiful.” Yes, that *is* quite a mouthful. (Making it a bigger mouthful, the term “reinforcing effects” in this context refers to effects that make the art–production responses and art–appreciation responses occur again later under similar conditions.)

Of course, all that was already too much to say, when many readers may have lacked the opportunity to become even minimally familiar with the behaviorology discipline. So we will not pursue the matter here, even though this discipline can say so much more, not only about art and life but also about scientific answers that begin to address many ancient human questions, and that can contribute to solving global problems as well. Instead we have other points to pursue (while those readers ready for more on the natural science of behavior can consult Ledoux, 2014, and other books in the bibliography).

About Color

Before proceeding, while my photo–art images never undergo any software manipulations (beyond pre–software sizing and designed cropping) a comment about color will be helpful. Color contributes much to the appreciation of art. However, the color in books about art remains an art in itself, and a potentially expensive one. To keep the cost of this book accessible, the publisher has not taken the expensive extra steps to keep colors perfect. Instead the publisher finds accepting the risk of slightly imperfect color—essentially always unnoticeable—to be a reasonable way to avoid a many–fold price increase, and hopes that you agree.

Details from an Autobiography

Many kinds of reasons recently prompted producing books in which different natural–scientist–of–behavior authors tell their life stories. Applying their natural science to their autobiographies provides examples to the wider culture of the kinds of real variables that science demonstrates as actually responsible for the behaviors, directions, and products of lives. Such examples would differ in helpful scientific ways from the sadly far more common, and as yet little questioned, attributions of causality to mysterious magically acting agents inside the body as the causes of the behavior, directions, and products of a life, the kind of attributions at work in most traditional biographies and autobiographies. These kinds of “inner–agent” attributions have proved quite misleading and in some ways actually harmful (as discussed in Ledoux, 2014 or 2017, listed in the bibliography). My story appears in one such book, because our culture would benefit from such stories with real variables that can help readers understand and better deal with the world around them.

Those stories were “short” (i.e., in the range of 4 to 40 page long). They emphasized the scientific circumstances (i.e., [as a little repetition can help] the *contingencies*, the relations between the measurable independent–variable “causes” and the behavior dependent–variable effects) that led to, or contributed to, the conditioning of the authors’ natural–science behavior repertoires, along with the various directions, outcomes, and products of those contingencies over each author’s lifetime.

In the process of writing my chapter, however, additional art–related and science–related recollections, documents, and information kept surfacing, and piling up, about other operational contingencies, circumstances, developments, activities, and so on, none of which could fit into my chapter without exceeding the 40–page limit that my chapter had already reached. Clearly, while my *vita* had always been my best approximation of an autobiography, the time had come to confess the previously mentioned, fully examined and documented account of my life. The resulting autobiographical volume included the contributions that art made to my life, enabling me now to tell the stories behind my efforts at the photography displayed in the book you are holding.

Early Photography Developments

Contingencies began producing interest in photography early in my life, starting with earning my first camera by getting lots of subscriptions to



Aussie Sails

The Sacramento Bee for my paper route as a pre–teenager. This camera was an inexpensive, 120–film format, twin–lens–reflex affair. It went everywhere with me, satisfying exploratory contingencies about photography in general and multiple exposures in particular, not all of which came from planning.

By the time my travels took me to Australia and China, from January 1975 into July 1979 (at 24 to 28 years old) my camera travel companion had changed from the old 120–film camera to a smaller, more travel friendly 110–format, point–and–shoot camera. It could produce slides, but these were not really of adequate resolution, a problem later solved by upgrading in 1981 to a 35–mm, single–lens–reflex (SLR) camera, with a variety of interchangeable lenses, while attending Western Michigan University’s doctoral program. This SLR camera and equipment served me and my “artistic” inclinations well, right up until my switch to digital cameras after they adequately matured (i.e., when their resolution finally exceeded the resolution of ASA–100 slide films).

Science–Art Repertoire Balance

Even within the first semester (fall, 1980) at Western Michigan University (WMU) the nagging feeling kept arising that something seemed to be missing among my activities. While part–time jobs and other forms of education helped (e.g., more



Dragon Wall

flight instruction, ultimately extending my Australian private pilot's license by earning my U.S. private pilot's license) the rest was all science effort, thoroughly worthwhile and enjoyable but incomplete. What seemed missing was some supportive but alternative artistic activity. The feeling began to subside after contingencies engaged my improving on my long-standing photography hobby through photography books, and visits to a focused (pun intended) camera store in Kalamazoo in 1981. The outcome of those books and visits gradually improved the extent and quality of my photographic knowledge and equipment. This proved relaxing in a nicely balanced way while also producing regular, though of course not continuous, reinforcements. Now, with my first interchangeable-lens, 35-mm SLR camera and a small selection of lenses, color slides began to accumulate in a growing range of artistic subjects. This continued for decades even beyond 35-mm equipment and on into the digital-photography age (i.e., after digital equipment matured enough to replace slide films, with slides placed on "Kodak Photo CDs").

As an example of one kind of my artwork, see the art photograph titled "Underwater Life on Europa" (on the front cover and on page i). How did this photograph happen? Briefly (with more details in Chapter 3) in addition to earlier contingencies that generated and maintained photography-related activities, some behavioral vacuum occurred due to some college administrative constraints that reduced my research options. Some of that vacuum got filled with art activities instead, particularly photography. An early professional photo series included this "Underwater Life on Europa" picture.

That art photograph happened in the middle 1980s. Then, shortly after it was taken, some further study and experience, as in a few more decent (Good!?) art photos, got me an additional, part-time teaching job for four weeks twice a year for a few years. The clerk who ran the well stocked photo counter at the local drug store in Canton, NY, hired me to teach photography courses for them (for fun, but she did pay me a little).

Those beginner's photography courses appealed to people who bought good 35-mm cameras from the store and wanted to get the most out of them. In these classes, students wanted to know how to get photos like "Underwater Life on Europa." My answer included information that was not entirely reliable, such as "You can rent special purpose lenses. Renting the biggest one possible enabled me to get this photo of the life in the water under the ice on Jupiter's moon, Europa..." That kind of information was *not* really appropriate for my photography students. Why not? Because some of them believed me! And,

yes, of course, they got it all figured out, after a more accurate "how to" description.

So, "how to?" In reality that photograph records a large section of a very early-morning winter frost (i.e., ice) film on the inside of an east-facing, single-pane window. And yet this image, in this section, instantly and always struck me, seeing it and photographing it, as an image of life forms like what could be in the water under the ice on Europa, hence its title. It continues to strike me this way. How does it strike you? Don't you think a good biology observer can see three, possibly even four, different species in the image, some "plant," some "animal," with Jupiter shining fuzzily through the ice behind the upper right corner? How many species do you see? That is what makes this a perfect image to be opposite the science words about life originating "anywhere—on this planet or others, outside or even inside a laboratory—... *without requiring contributions from magical or mysterious or spontaneous events.*" (These words start at the bottom of page 262 in the Law of Cumulative Complexity paper in my autobiography.)

As an example of one of those additional art photos that got me invited to teach photography classes, another frost-film photo is titled "Debate." While the original size of the frost-film area that the "...Europa" photo recorded had covered about 10 by 15 inches, the original size of the frost-film area that the "Debate" photo recorded only covered 1 by 1.5 inches, the same size as a frame of 35-mm film. Nevertheless, the parts of the image that rise ever so slightly from the frost-film surface, exceeding the photo's "depth of field" and so seeming slightly out of focus, impart an artistically necessary three dimensionality to the image. Also, "Debate" is but one of a progression of five related frost-film photos titled "Discussion," "Debate," "Majority," "Super Majority," and "Silent Majority" (see Chapter 3, which also includes the "Burning Bush" frost-film art shown on page 1). The series resulted from the continuously changing light from the rising sun while capturing frost-film photos on that early winter morning before the frost melted.



Debate

This constant movement of the sun (really, of course, from the Earth's turning on its axis) proved a constant constraint during these early morning winter photo sessions, not only for the changing light conditions but also for speeding up melting. One had to be up early, awake, observant, and quick, all together!

Many of those details about ice-film photos get repeated in the context of related photos in a later chapter. The same happens with some of the details provided here about some balloon photos and some Amish quilt photos. A little repetition never really hurt anyone...

One of my other early photo categories includes balloon photos. My teaching photography classes got me invited to take some balloon photos for the college yearbook. And that enabled me to get a ride in one of the hot-air balloons that for several years in the 1980s helped the college celebrate its annual Family Weekend in October. Having the Yearbook use some of my photos was nice, but the real fun was the balloon ride, as well as the challenge of setting up various kinds of balloon shots.

One of the shots that the Yearbook staff liked—although they ultimately used other shots—was the “Shadow Balloon” shot. As the balloon carrying me and my camera began to ascend, its shadow tracked along the ground in a direction that would predictably put the shadow onto one of the balloons still on the ground. The prediction prompted me to be ready and waiting, which got the shot.

A different balloon shot took me years to get, because no balloon pilots like it when their balloon gets turned upside down (on the rear cover and on page i). When a balloon gets loose like this, everyone get out of the way... “OOPS!”

Actually, the real reason why this “OOPS!” shot took years to get, even though the plan for the shot was fairly simple (i.e., balloon framed by “upper” tree branches) is that the shot required that the usual pattern of “cloudiness on the horizon with clearer sky higher up” had to be reversed, which does not happen often. Being prepared when it did got me the “OOPS” shot. (Chapter 4 features more balloon art, while Chapter 10 shows more “sun” art, including more about the “Coy Sunset” photo on page 1.)

Rare People Portraits

People portraits provide potent problems for photo artists, even after receiving some substantive “how-to” training as I have. Thus very few of my people “portraits” get much appreciation. And they do not rate inclusion in this book as a category (even if only because so few exist). Hopefully you can enjoy at least two of them, these two.

Sometimes our children provided fun portraiture occasions. One happened when our daughter seemed



Shadow Balloon

sure that she had discovered, at a very young age (in about 1996) who is boss. She certainly looks sure (in the photo of her with her mother) that she is!

At an even younger age, our son provided a “formal” portrait occasion. While my extensive comments—with photos and documents—on aircribs appear in my autobiography, here let me provide the portrait that distills those materials in a fun manner. As a “formal” portrait, the photo even has a formal title, “Scientific Gothic.”



Guess Who Is Boes



Scientific Gothic

Amish Quilt Portraits

Non-people “portraits” worked well enough to get their own category. This fun, artistic category development centered on Amish quilts.

Like Amish virtually everywhere, the Amish in Northern New York and Pennsylvania and Ohio all make quilts. In Pennsylvania and Ohio, however, the traditional, rather dark shaded, “plain” quilts, the ones that the Amish traditionally made for their own use, have become rare—available only as antiques—and new quilts, not that different from the ones made for tourists, have replaced them. On the other hand, the Amish in Northern New York still make the traditional, rather dark shaded, “plain” quilts for their own use as well as for sale along with the brighter colored quilts that tourists like.

A friend of mine in Potsdam, NY, about a dozen miles from our pre-retirement home in Canton, often helped the Amish quilt makers move the quilts they had to sell. At one point she was storing nearly a hundred quilts, some traditional and some just for tourists, and we took the time to create portrait photos of all of them, and often of their thematic parts as well. The idea, which never got completed, was to produce a book documenting all these quilts and their makers.

That experience, however, prompted me to design an Amish “crib” quilt (i.e., a small quilt that could be used in a baby’s crib). Many different motifs appear on Amish quilts, and one motif that always intrigued me, perhaps due to its similarity to artistic renditions in oriental art, involves fans, hand-held fans. So my simple design for an Amish crib quilt repeated a fan motif. My design responsibilities included most of the color selections with the exception of the colors

for the ribs of the fans. When my friend arranged for a capable Amish quilt maker to make my design into a real quilt, my only constraint was that she use shades of materials for the fan ribs such that if something happened to me, and no one ever picked up the quilt after she finished it, then it would be traditional enough for her to feel comfortable keeping it for her own use.

After some months, she completed the quilt, and her completed quilt made me very satisfied. (Chapter 7 features more quilt art.)

About the Signature Seals

The art of the Chinese signature seals, at the end of this chapter, have their own interesting origins (the surrounding circumstances of which, again, my autobiography covers). In 1979, during my earliest teaching interval in China, my department chair, Prof. Shi Mingde, helped me with cultural as well as administrative considerations. Chinese history had made signing documents with a seal the more respectable method. Consequently he helped me obtain a seal using, not the standard, off-the-shelf renditions of character sounds for my name, but rather using a set of appropriately sounding characters that retained some relevant meaning with respect to my identity. This effort produced the smaller seal.

Then in 1990–1991, during my later teaching interval in China, when Prof. Shi noticed my photographic art that came with me as apartment decorations, we designed an art name and signature seal (the larger seal) which is something that the art culture in China expected. Later, upon departure, these art photos became gifts to other artists and faculty. (For the full story of this year in China, when my spouse was the official foreign-exchange faculty for her university and our then five-year-old son accompanied us, see *The Panda and Monkey King Christmas—A Family’s year in China: Case & Ledoux, 1997*, in the bibliography at the back of this book.)

But enough talk. Join me now as we embark on a mostly visual tour of a wide range of photographic topics. May your viewing of these images be as enjoyable as was my creating them. ☺

