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SEVEN DOLLARS AND NINETY-FIVE CENTS

VIEW CAMERA

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PHOTOGRAPH BY KENNETH PARKER

Portfolios - Kenneth Parker, John Delaney, Polly Chandler
Photoshop for Photographers - Part 3
The 7x17 Experience
Comprehensive Lens Charts 47-180mm
Scanning



Flaking Mural (Dhritarashtra with Lute), Cho Dzong Cave Temple, Mustang, Tibetan Plateau

Kenneth Parker

...it happens best from a *stillpoint*...

*Photographs and Text by
Kenneth Parker*

Khalil Gibran wrote, “We live only to discover beauty. All else is a form of waiting.” For me, beauty is an argument that refuses dismissal. It arouses a fire stirring dormant in the innermost recesses of my soul. I am forever listening so intently to my own inner voice.... like a melody softly soaring through my atmosphere. It brings opposites together. It brings glimpses of the unrelenting ocean-love which will not release the enthralled artist. I endeavor to capture these gentle little alternatives to the fearsome insanity and insensitivity of a chaotic world. With the right concentration, it sometimes seems we can create the very light we are looking for. But it happens best from a *stillpoint*, the calm center of ourselves, that place the Buddhist mind must ultimately come to occupy within our own hearts... indeed when we surrender to grace itself flowing through us.



Luri Cave Temple, School, Mountains, Mustang, Tibetan Plateau

Inspired by the lucid, compassionate vision of their ever-forgiving, ever-inspiring, ever-humorous and disarmingly elfin leader the Dalai Lama who fearlessly shows us all The Way, much of the world knows in their hearts the embracing truth the Buddhist paradigm holds in the realm of human spirituality. Our respect and ineffable affection identifies His Holiness as a rare jewel in the world's swelling seas of madness.

High atop the Tibetan Plateau lies the extremely remote and mythic kingdom of Mustang, Tibetan Buddhism's sacred birthplace and last authentic vestige of an unfathomable culture... as yet untouched by the brutal Chinese or modernity. It is an ancient land of high wild Himalayan valleys, perched among the world's most unspoiled and distant wildernesses. Monumental 14th century monasteries at its heart have been the site of a

decade of insanely painstaking restorations on what are being recognized as the most spectacular giant Tantric fresco wall murals yet uncovered in the Tibetan world. Prior to being restored to their former glory, the magnificent temples of Lo Monthang (as chronicled in NOVA's superb *The Lost Treasures of Tibet* on PBS) are soon to be presented within their forbidding high desert landscape and culture in a massive coffee-table volume.

I have also been profoundly immersed in the spooky mysteries of Cambodia's 1000-year-old temples at Angkor... religiously arising in pre-dawn blackness to chase the preciously elusive trickles of glowing sunrise. These images were possible only amid the merciless heat and sweltering humidity of rain-splashed monsoons, when the rich near-phosphorescence of moist multi-hued swaths of lichens and algae are revealed awash in a



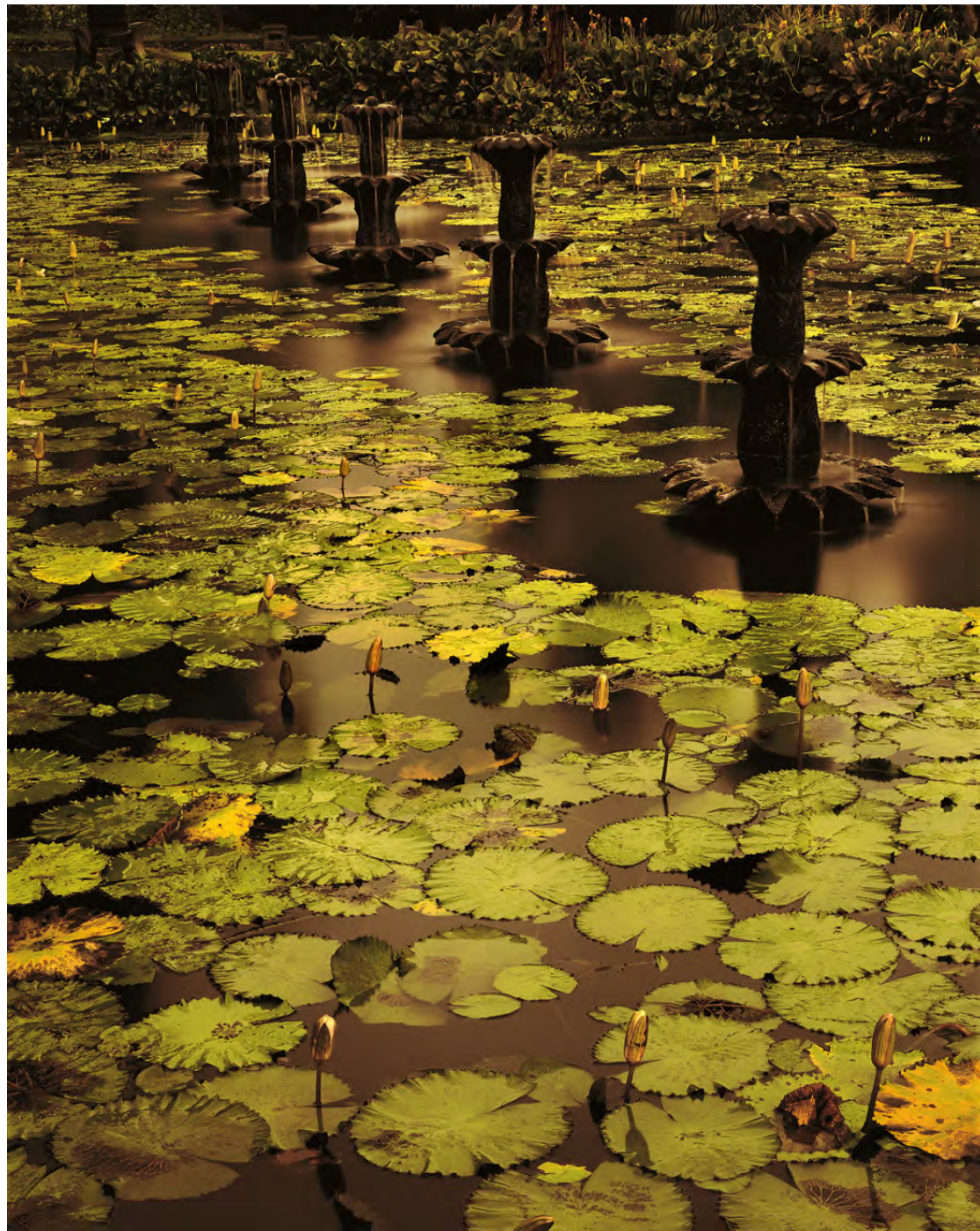
Old Prayer Flags, Cho Dzong Cave Temple, Mustang, Tibetan Plateau

shrouded softness of light. As if to reclaim these mind-boggling creations back to the earth from whence they came, the great ruins appear inexorably riddled with magnificent old silk cotton “spong” trees whose massive hawsers of tangled roots encroach irresistibly through colossal stone walls and towers. Supremely treasured examples of Earth’s rapidly disappearing sacred sites, they are thereby graced with a profound sense of ageless obscurity: nature and art entwined.

But it is the nearly stone age and equally intense Buddhist culture of Myanmar (Burma) that breaks my heart at the pitiable injustices suffered by one of the most engaging and personable peoples I have encountered anywhere on Earth. A powerful re-immersion into the same spiritual theme spawned for me in Tibet gave rise to imagery of yet more, if strikingly different, ancient monu-

ments of worship. Never missing a breathlessly mystical sunrise to climb atop one after another of these eerie, castle-like temples, I marveled at how proudly they nestled in the tall grasses and trees among a veritable sea of towering spires – many of shimmering pure gold – that seemed to spawn across a legendary plain. Like some lost kingdom in a magical land, grand sacred Bagan was mesmerizing, indeed spellbinding. I can still sense the gorgeously glowing magic-hour golds and vermilions gracing its magnificence... as long stately herds of seemingly fairytale white oxen loped through an utterly surreal landscape.

There are no people in these images, yet their marks of ceaseless toil and ebullient spirit are everywhere present. To me, this poignantly forebodes a haunting sense of how it may all soon be taken away. We feel it in the half-



Lotus Pool Fountain at Dusk, Tirta Gangga, Karangasem, Bali



Dzong Ruin, Cliffs, Dhakmar-Meh, Mustang, Tibetan Plateau

closed towering sacred edifices of beleaguered Myanmar, and in Mustang's previously-crumbling temples. I witness their brave hard-bitten Tibetan souls embracing such astonishing art and landscape with all the love in their sweet untrammelled hearts... knowing in their core the poignancy of impermanence. There is an almost ironic purity and innocence in their kind, compassionate eyes. While such words are tossed about all too frequently in our lexicon, their aptness within context of such an extraordinary tradition is often too painful for me to bear. Just this very week the Lamas who grace us at this opening stared straight into their own Buddhist transience as wildfires raged all around their sacred mountain retreat from where they've been evacuated – which was indeed

singed. And then a few days later the nation of Nepal that still protects the precious last forbidden kingdom of Mustang depicted in these photographs bids goodbye to one of the oldest monarchies that still remained. It must now write a new constitution for its emergent democracy.

With enough time and care, one sees the purity and serenity of Buddhist consciousness and culture forever etched into the very muscle fibers of the heart. Moved as much as by any wilderness I have ever happened upon, the light and form of their lands have the power to evoke in me an arresting image that can make one feel immersed... as if actually willing to climb deep inside its own special world and somehow inhabit it.

For info on how Kenneth Parker travels with his equipment see page 10

KENNETH PARKER'S NOTES ON FIELD EQUIPMENT, TRAVEL AND APPLICATION TO THE ASIAN WORK

As many heavily-laden professional photographers and filmmakers already know only too well, travel to the Third World countries of Asia and Southeast Asia can be a rather daunting if not altogether harrowing affair. Faced with the ever decreasing

limits on baggage allowances, the sheer weight and quantity of pieces alone creates anxieties over excessive charges and keeping track of everything at all times... especially if one travels alone, as I quite often find myself doing when forging out into remote locations.

Certainly the most trying aggravations are encountered during the ubiquitous security X-ray scanning. The one thing I definitely never do is pack film in my checked baggage, as X-ray blast levels in there can simply be off the charts. So with all that hand-carrying regardless of what any attending agent or sign tries so hard to insist" those generally unregulated detectors unleash a potentially catastrophic 'black box' assault on sensitive color transparency film. Both Fuji and Kodak have made it quite clear in warnings on the subject that the cumulative effect of such radiation will absolutely produce fogging of the film regardless of its speed. While the more modern and carefully monitored technology in American airports is less threatening, it is the frequently old, outdated or indiscriminately adjusted devices in poorer Asian nations that force the photographer to demand only hand inspection of both exposed and unexposed film at each and every juncture. This can be frightfully time-consuming, tedious and most unnerving to say the least particularly when security agents refuse to allow it and insist on its 'safety'!

My present toolkit consist exclusively of large-format film gear, as it's largely gotten to the point where for me any picture worth taking deserves that level of treat-



Ken Parker with his 4x5 in Asia

ment... lest I wind up disappointed with anything smaller. While I do retain my Canon EOS-1 film body and L-glass lens series (which I rarely use), the only digital camera I even own is my cellphone. I keep absolutely everything quite incredibly fitted into a single

Tamrac padded daypack (which also straps atop my enormous Osprey backpack for wilderness outings), with a trusty K.B. Canham 4x5 and four lenses (Schneider Symmar-S 210mm, Schneider Symmar Technika 150mm, Rodenstock Sironar-N 150mm, Nikon Nikkor-SW 90mm and a healthy complement of color-corrected B+W or Heliopan 81-series filters), Gossen Color-Pro 3F color temperature meter, Asahi Pentax digital spotmeter, Polaroid back for Fuji QuickLoads (and extinct but precious Polaroid B&Ws), Gitzo Mountaineer Reporter carbon fiber tripod and my indispensable Leica Trinovid 8x20 BCA binoculars.

The key advantages of the view camera approach are indeed essential for my approach to this body of work, particularly as it so often entails architectural and multi-positional elements within temples and ruins that go beyond the more traditional landscapes I am long accustomed to. So many of these images require camera movements to correct for perspective and tricky depth-of-field challenges that I simply cannot imagine working without them. And over the years I have also grown quite attached to the use of simple black-and-white Polaroid tests to check critical focus, exposure and composition. These are particularly advantageous in the complex artificial lighting schemes that the cave-black Tibetan temple interiors always demand, thanks to a Hollywood gaffer I retained. So I now live in dire fear of the demise of this powerful, convenient, instant film media!

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