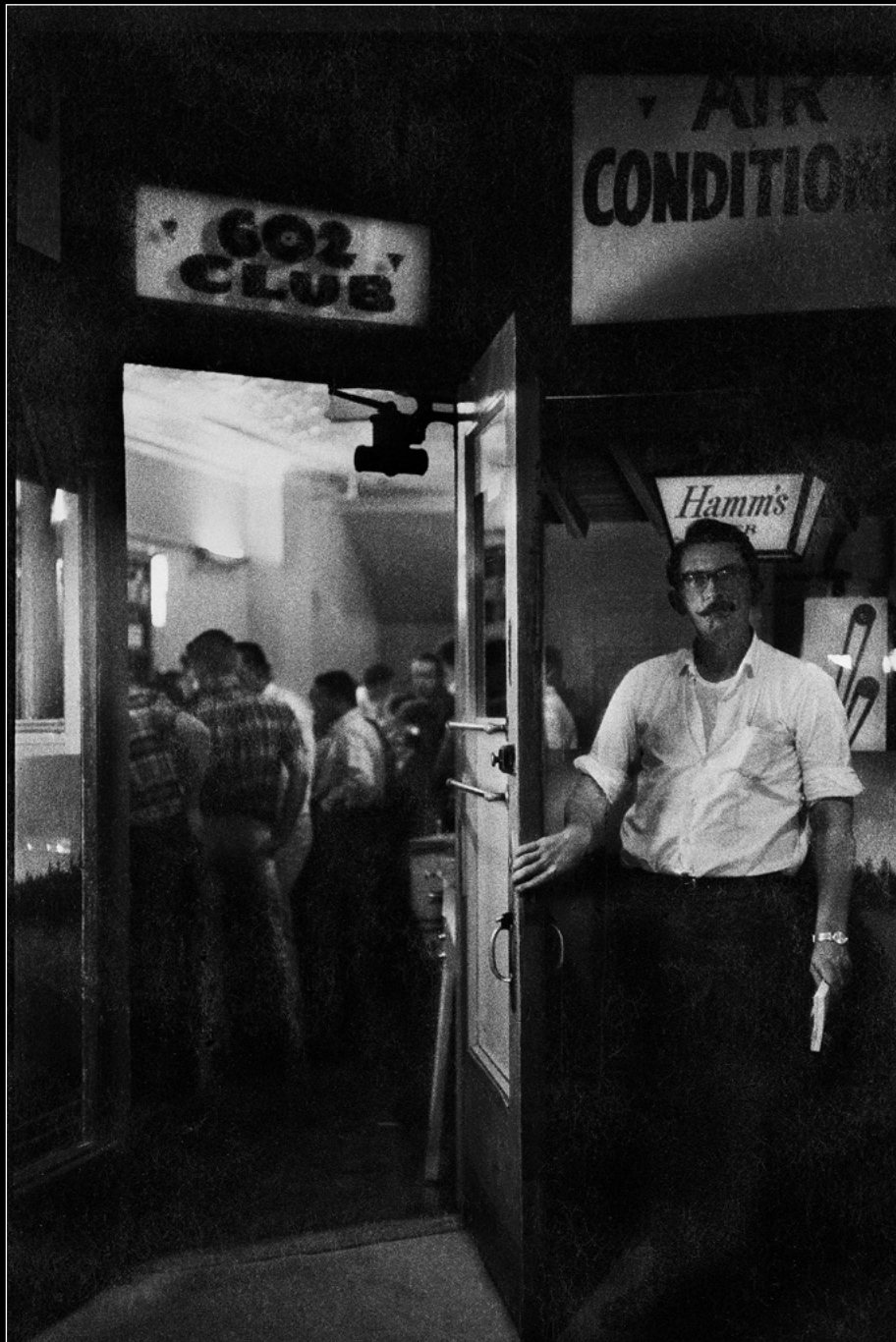


THE 602 CLUB IN THE SIXTIES

A HOTBED OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION

A Photographic Retrospective by John Riggs



June 14th through July 27th, 2018 | The Class of 25 Gallery | University of Wisconsin Memorial Union

EXHIBITION SPONSORS: University Archives • Madison LGBTQ Archive • The Conference on Madison in the Sixties
The Madison Reunion • University Housing • Student Union WUD Art Committee • UW College of Letters and Sciences

The 602 Club in the Sixties: A Hotbed of Cultural Evolution

If the Beat Generation of the Fifties was the dynamite that blew up the logjam of post-war complacency, it was up to the artists, intellectuals, and hippie generation of the Sixties to explore the cultural implications of that event. And to begin to forge the institutional and political changes necessary to accommodate what we considered a new emerging paradigm. The Viet Nam War provided existential urgency for many (like me) who had no desire to kill others with whom (as Ali so famously said) we had no quarrel, nor to die in foreign jungles in the name of cultural and political hegemony.

Madison in the 1960's was a Mid-west way station between San Francisco, Berkeley, and Greenwich Village for this tidal wave of rebellion, new thought, and cultural evolution. And the 602 Club (so named from its address, 602 University Avenue), midway between the University campus and the State Capitol, was the watering hole for many of those riding the crest of that wave.

"The Six" had, by the early Sixties, become a hangout for artists, activists, literati, intellectuals, and a mixed bag of scholars and misfits from all disciplines. It was also one of the early public gathering spots on Friday and Saturday nights for the gay community of Madison. It was home to the Marxist Drinking Society, and the University Art Department faculty meetings generally ended up there as well. It was an exhilarating scene—the characters were iconoclastic, the mood rowdy, and the conversation heady. Proclamations rang out, and the closer to closing time, the grander (and louder) they became.

I tended bar there during my undergraduate years, very early in my photographic career. While serving schooners, mixing drinks, and making change, I was shooting with a little 35mm Nikon SP in what little there was of available light. I was twenty-two, blissfully ignorant, insufferably arrogant, but idealistic and ambitious. And along with most everyone else, drinking way too much. Just home from two years in

France and Germany studying French and German literature and philosophy, I was enchanted by the diversity of the people and the sophistication of wit and language on all sides. It was this enchantment that stimulated me to record the raw power of the personalities, the physical beauty of the people, and the (to me) exotic ambience of the place.

The 602 in the Sixties project is about looking at local history through the eyes of an aspiring artist, and what is revealed that might differ from looking at history through the eyes of an historian. In other words, not examining the facts of "what happened," but trying to get at "what it felt like" to be there, at that time.

By 1966 I had enough material to prepare for the owner, Dudley Howe, the gift of a book of some 160 images for his 15th anniversary celebration. I had hoped he would keep it at the bar for people to look at, but he liked it so much he didn't want it ruined by spilled beer, so he immediately took it home, never to be seen again. Until, that is, someone (Michael Paggie, I was to learn much later), very early in the life of the Internet, put up a website of the Six and used some of the images from the book on that site.

That is how (very much later) Scott Seyforth —Co-Founder of the Madison LGBTQ Archive—found me. He connected with me through my gallery website (tamarackgallerymadison.com), inquiring if I had any of those negatives left, and if so, they would be of great value to the Archive Project, and would I be willing to donate them to the University Archives? Which is then how I met David Null, the Archives Director.

David felt that the 602 played a much wider, even pivotal role in Campus history, which intensified his interest in these images for the Archives. I dug deep into my storage and discovered some 500 negatives from the era. Together the three of us hatched the idea of mounting a public exhibition of a selection of these images, along with a few pieces of 602 ephemera in Dudley's daughter's (Ja-Ja Howe) collection.

Given the condition of the negatives (see below), and my original skepticism about whether I could coax prints of sufficient quality out of the negatives for a gallery exhibit, I couldn't entrust the scanning work to an outside shop, so I bought a high-res scanner and set out to learn that technology, along with many new-to-me techniques of digital restoration.

Delving back into my deep past on a project concluded over fifty years ago was not initially a pleasant prospect. Life in my twenties was a dark time, as I suspect it was for many of us. With the ever-increasing need for manpower for the colossally misguided war, student deferments were no longer sufficient to protect us from the insanity. My battle with the draft therefore diverted virtually all my attention from my studies. With tear gas and the National Guard ever present, the campus and structure of student life was disintegrating; there were few discernible external standards of conduct that held much meaning for me any more, and I found myself careening full-tilt from my own notions of who and what I was, or could, or should be.

The Sixties should not be viewed through rose-colored glasses. It was a time of, as Nietzsche put it: "der umwertung aller bisherege werthe" (the overthrow of all currently held values). To be in the grips of the libidinous and unfocused energy of a 22-year-old student in the chaotic context of a cultural revolution and a vigorous anti-war movement—well, let's just say there were many casualties, myself included. To this day, the proudest moment of my life was when the examining Shrink at the induction center in Milwaukee, with a string of spittle-laced expletives, stamped my draft card 4F. To be sure (omitting the sordid details), the price paid for that deferment does not compare to the price paid, whether by trauma or life itself, by those who served, but it was sufficiently hefty nonetheless to leave a scar for life.

As I proceeded with the scanning and digital restoration of the negatives for printing over the past fall and winter, many of the forgotten names associated with the faces

—and the forgotten memories underneath the names—(slowly at first) came surging to mind. It dawned on me that there must be a reason to undergo this exercise at this time.

Some painful and very private memories arose, revealing to me more of the truth of who I had been at this time of my life—things about my past that had laid dormant, covered over by scar tissue colored in revisionist pastels these many years. Without going into detail, the project became for me an opportunity to examine, accept, and begin to resolve some contradictions within the life story I like to tell myself. A few more layers of mistruth gratefully stripped away as I enter the eldery phase. So, it has been therapeutic, and I am grateful to Scott Seyforth especially, for having made the inquiry that set me on this journey.

Yes, we were struggling with idealistic notions of creating more liberated (and liberating) ways to live life, and yes, we felt a virtuous calling to break new ground towards more enlightened social structures. And to be sure, genuine progress was made in those endeavors. (Witness the strength of the cultural backlash we now are experiencing.) But for myself at least, I need to balance the self-congratulatory, self-glorifying view of myself and my generation with a broader view, a view that includes and reveals a self-indulgent, self-absorbed young man, largely oblivious to the havoc I left in my wake as I rushed headlong into the brave new world.

What more can we do, after the necessary amends are made, and after stripping away the layers of denial of who we have been and what we have done? Well, we can forgive ourselves and come clean. We can then create. We can then teach. As we are transformed by time into the elders of the clan we can find ways to be of service. As survivors of the Sixties we can accept our share of the responsibility of what we as a people and a country have done and continue to do to the planet. We can take our place with those dedicating their lives to restoration and genuine progress in the realm of human and species rights.

Like the attention required to restore

an old and cracked negative, we can put in the tedious time required to get down in the weeds and do the detailed work of learning how to love that we only sketched out in our drug and alcohol-crazed youth. For me, it means cultivating and strengthening my connection to what inspires me to carry my camera into new environments and new situations. To not give up on hope, to not succumb to political rage and despair. To be at peace and continue to strive for those peak experiences that propel me into the next project. To make “peak,” in fact, part of my practice of everyday life.

Everything in this exhibit was shot with Kodak Tri-X black and white film, pushed to an ASA of 1600. In the dimly lit conditions of a tavern at night, with the lens wide open at F1.4 and a shutter speed of 1/15th of a second, the resulting negatives tend to be grainy, blurred, and thin (underexposed).

The negatives themselves are in dreadful condition. Fortunately, they had been stashed in a metal box with a clamped lid or they never would have survived the many moves and poor storage conditions in unheated barns and moldy sheds over fifty-some years. Scratched, dusty, and suffering from spider-web cracks in the emulsions, each scanned hi-res image required hours to days and longer of painstaking digital restoration to print to any size.

The overall result is gritty, somewhat dark, and raw - appropriate, I believe, to the time and the place. It was a different world then, and my goal is to render this work in a way that will reflect the reality of what it felt like to be there, and then. If shot today with current digital technology, the affect would be radically different. More “perfect” perhaps, but I daresay less compelling.

I would like to thank both the University Archives and the Madison LGBTQ Archive, along with the Conference on Madison in the Sixties, University Housing, and the WUD Art Committee, who have all agreed to officially sponsor this exhibition with grants of either money, encouragement, space, and/or enthusiastic moral support and really good ideas for which I am most grateful.

—John Riggs

Statement from the Madison LGBTQ Archives

The little bar at 602 University Ave. was called “The House of Sparkling Glasses” when Dudley Howe bought it in 1951. He changed the name and eventually got rid of the juke box, wanting to create a place for conversation. No music, with the television off except for the 5:00 o’clock news.

Customers used a buzzer system to call a bartender to their booth or table to take their drink order. Howe could be found most days serving up both beverages and his own brand of humor to his loyal customers. During the long afternoons he loved to play cribbage, dirty clubs, or euchre with the regulars.

An open-minded man who had a way of countering bigotry with humorous personal stories of tolerance, Howe welcomed all into the club, creating a warm hospitable space for a diverse clientele. This included welcoming the gay male community when few would.

The photos in this exhibit include several rare images of gay men gathered at the bar in the small hours of a Sunday morning prior to bar time in the mid-1960s. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were few public places LGBTQ folk could gather in Madison. The Madison LGBTQ community existed largely of a series of private social networks and house parties. The few public places that welcomed LGBTQ individuals were a limited number of bars—The 602, The Three Bells, The Kollege Klub, The Belmont Hotel Bar—where LGBTQ folk mingled in groups with straight patrons. The unpublicized arrangement at the 602 was that the tables at the back half of the bar were for straight patrons, while the front half, along the bar, was for gay male patrons. The images in this exhibit provide a rare glimpse into a Midwestern gay male gathering place in the mid-60s—prior to the Stonewall Rebellion.

Howe ran the club for 41 years until his death in 1992. Having brought his daughter Ja-Ja into the business as a partner in the 80’s, she continued the tradition until the Club was sold in 1994.



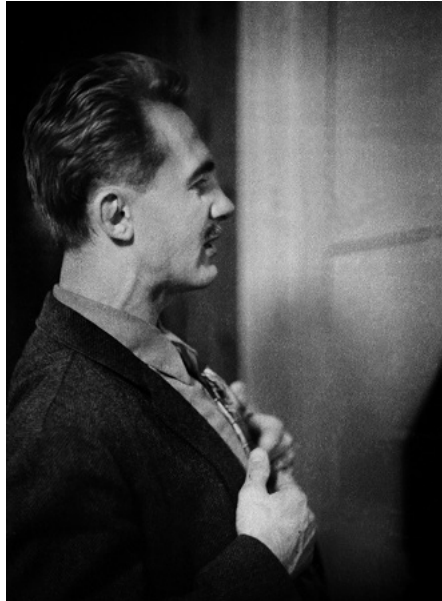
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▲ 602_52: 12x9"



▲ 602_42: 12x9"



▲ 602_30: 9x12"



▲ 602_38: 12x9"



▲ 602_19: 9x12"



▲ 602_17: 9x12"



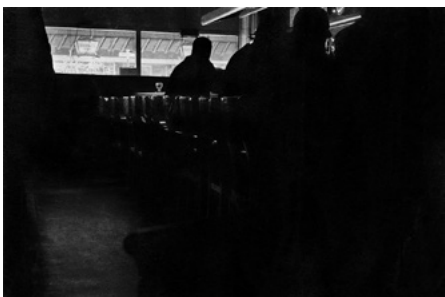
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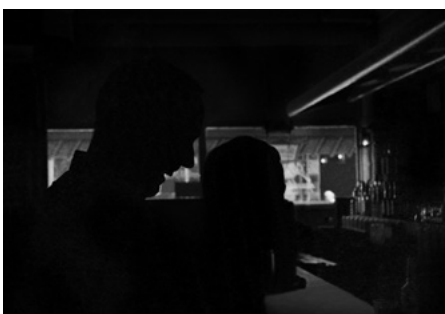
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▲ 602_46: 12x9"



▲ 602_47: 12x9"



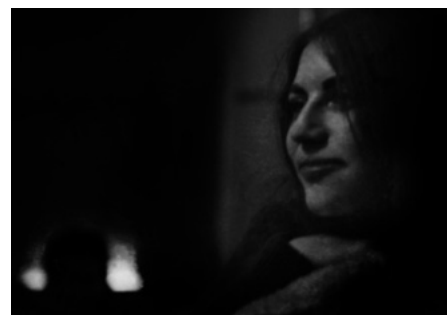
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▲ 602_11: 24x18"



▲ 602_44: 9x12"



▲ 602_25: 12x9"



▲ 602_41 : 12x9"



▲ 602_24: 12x9"



▲ 602_56: 12x9"



▲ 602_06: 24x18"



▲ 602_07: 18x24"



▲ 602_29: 9x12"



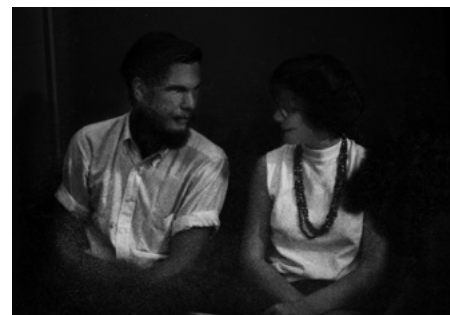
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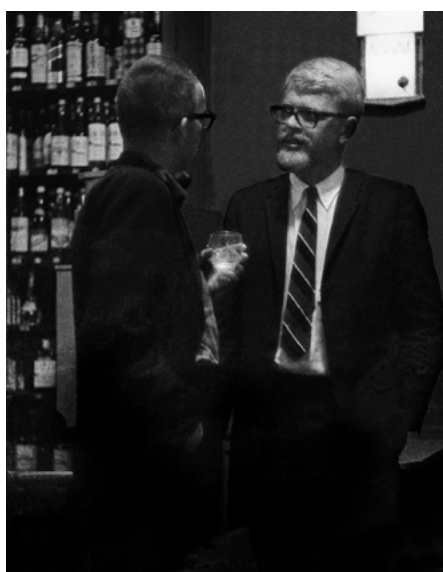
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▲ 602_23: 12x9"



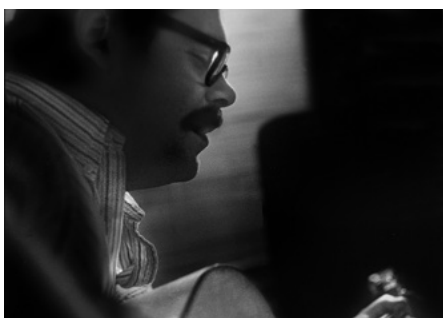
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▲ 602_20: 9x12"



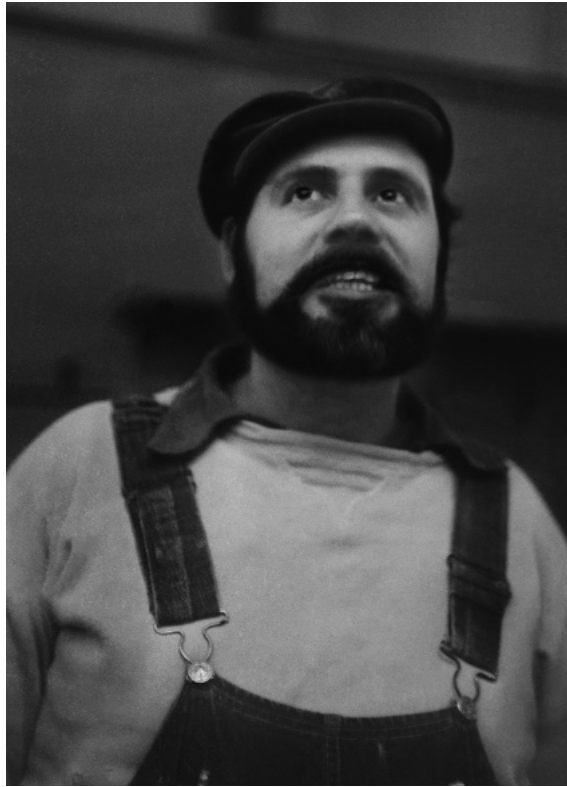
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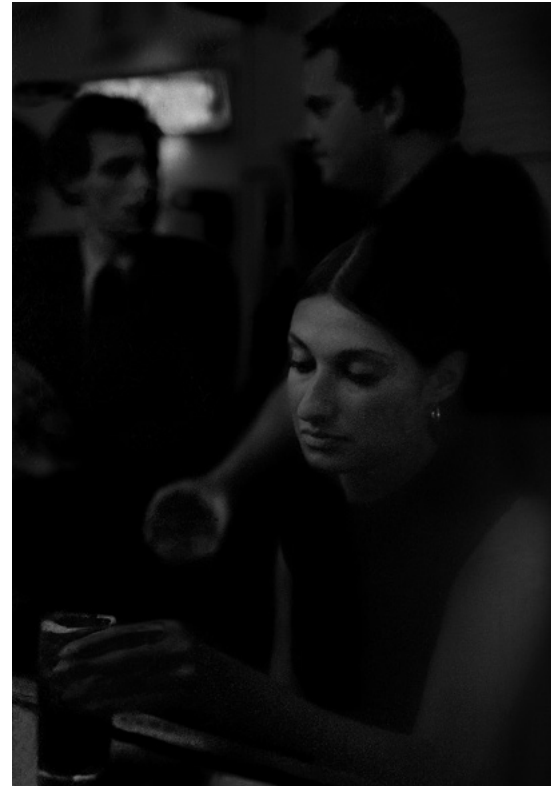
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▲ 602_18: 12x9"



▲ 602_08: 18x24"



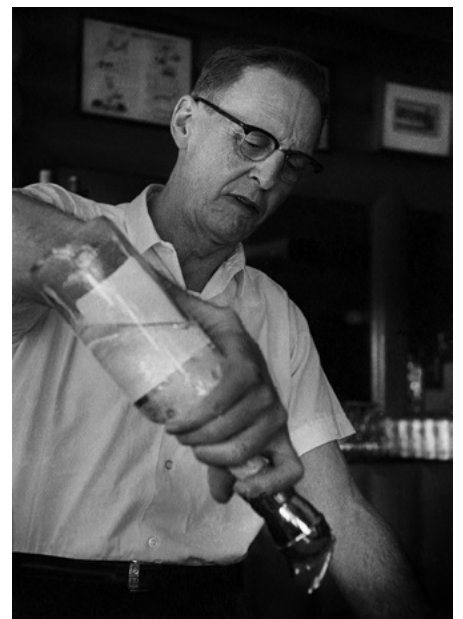
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▲ 602_14: 12x9"



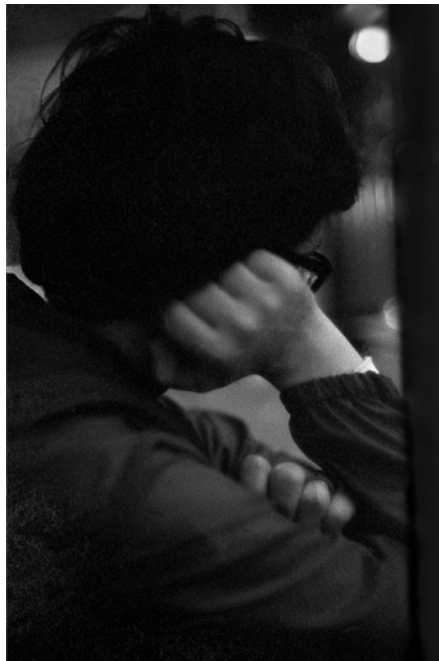
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▲ 602_32: 12x9"



▲ 602_43: 9x12"



▲ 602_59: 12x9"



▲ 602_58: 12x9"



▲ 602_51: 12x9"



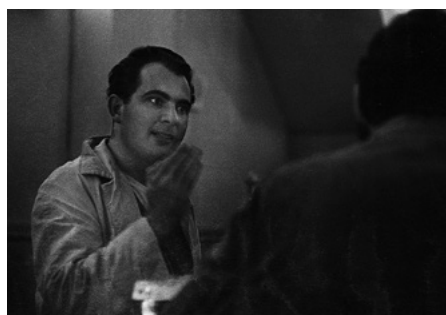
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▲ 602_55: 12x9"



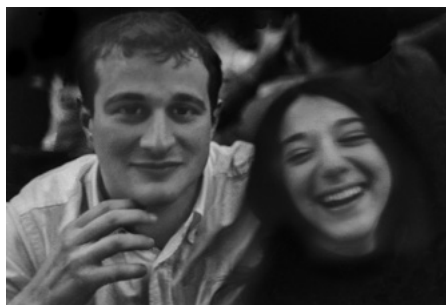
▲ 602_04: 24x18"



▲ 602_13: 12x9"



▲ 602_33: 12x9"



▲ 602_45: 12x9"



▲ 602_39: 12x9"



▲ 602_10: 24x18"



▲ 602_50: 9x12"



▲ 602_31: 12x9"



▲ 602_09: 24x18"



▲ 602_57: 12x9"



▲ 602_22: 12x9"



▲ 602_53: 12x9"



▲ 602_16: 9x12"



▲ 602_48: 9x12"



▲ 602_60: 12x9"



▲ 602_62: 24x18"

John Riggs

In the nineteen sixties and seventies I mounted various solo photography shows in Chicago, UW Madison Memorial Student Union, and University of Minnesota Art Department Gallery at Mankato, plus hung in dozens of various juried exhibitions and group shows long forgotten. During this period specialized in large format black and white landscape, nudes, and candid portraiture in nature.

In 1980 I hung up my camera to go into the Engineering Business and raise a family. Founding member/partner in **Isthmus Engineering and Mfg. Coop** in 1980, and in 1999 started my own business, **SourceOne Solutions LLC**, which I sold in 2007, allowing my return full time to my original love, photography.



Recent Shows

Solo exhibit entitled **Succession—Overlooks & Perspectives**, Steenbock Gallery in the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, Jan/Feb 2009.

Solo Exhibit, Madison Mayor's Office & Conference Rooms, Jan/April 2009.

CPM juried group show, PhotoMidwest 2008, Pyle Center, October/November 2008

CoPA (Coalition for the Photographic Arts) two juried Group shows, PH Dye House, Milwaukee, WI April 2009 and 2010.

Duo show with StarLight Tews entitled **Landscapes/Mindscapes**, Playhouse Gallery, Overture Center, Madison WI, July/Sept 2010.

Succession0365 published in the book *First Look*, a publication of PhotoMidwest.

Solo show entitled **Goose Lake—Wintering Over**, University Arboretum Steinhauer Trust Gallery, Madison WI. Nov/Dec 2010.

Retrospective duo show with StarLight Tews at American Girl Gallery, Jan/March 2011.

Group show w/ nine photographers, entitled **Inside at Night—Origins of an Uprising**, Tamarack Studio & Gallery, Jan/June, 2012. 38 images published in book by the same name.

PhotoMidwest Festival juried show, Sept/Nov 2012, University of Wisconsin Student Union Main Gallery. Image purchased by Wisconsin Union for permanent collection.

Solo show entitled **Letting Go—A Meditation on the Tamarack Tree, its Environment, and the Meaning of Loss**, Tamarack Studio & Gallery, Nov/Dec 2012.

Solo exhibition **From Pisces to Aquarius—a New Look at the Temperate Rain Forest of the Pacific Northwest**, at Wahe Guru Gallery and Yoga Center, Seattle WA, August 2015,

Solo show entitled **Entering Old Growth—Meditations from the Ancient Rain Forest of the Pacific Northwest**, Oct/Dec 2016 at Tamarack Studio & Gallery, Madison WI.



TAMARACK STUDIO & GALLERY

All framed prints from the **602 in the Sixties** Exhibition will be donated to the University Archives after the show closes. Unframed duplicate reprints are available for purchase through the WUD Art Committee.

Price for all 9 x 12" prints is \$110.00, unframed. Price for all 18 x 24" prints is \$220.00, unframed.

Please visit our gallery website at tamarackgallerymadison.com to view this and all past Tamarack shows.

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