



Dancer

2005

GEORGE'S ANALYSIS The human figure has been a central subject of art for millennia. Whether angels or cherubs on frescos or erotic reclining nudes in the paintings of the 1800s (or throughout the history of photography, for that matter), the human figure forms one of the major themes. Despite what would appear to be a relatively limited subject, creative photographers continue to come up with different ideas and compositions; informing, titillating, or moving us in new, interesting, and wonderful ways.

This photograph by Dennis Mecham, simply titled *Dancer*, shows wonderful grace. The position of the dancer is clearly part of movement, of the dancer expressing herself. The exposed breasts and the tonalities of the chest are so beautifully duplicated in the lighting on the flowing cloth that this “nudity” seems entirely natural—why would you have it any other way? The hands are in natural positions that complement the movement, the turn of the head an extension of the turn and sweep of the body. The feet confirm that this is part of a series of movements, in other words, not a pose.

Tonally the photograph is wonderful—the highlights brilliant yet not harsh, the shadows beautifully outlining the folds in the cloth and the shape of the body. Even the comma-like shape of the hair complements the curves of the body and of the cloth. The dancer appears completely unaware of the photographer, wrapped up as she is in the music, the light, and the movement.

In the print that Dennis sent me I can see into the hair, and the background nicely separates from black to frame the dancer with appropriate shadowing.

This photograph is so “right” for black-and-white, removed from the real world of a full color picture. We can focus entirely on the tonalities of the skirt, the



luminosity of the skin, without the distraction of color and the associations of reality.

The composition is superb. The curved lines of the skirt orbit the body of the dancer and provide counterpoint. The parallels of the dancer's left arm and the nearby straight edge of the skirt match the back edge of the skirt. The flowing shape of the hair is an attractive shape and balances the curve in the body and right arm. The folds in the skirt are wonderful, and the "tail" of the skirt separating on the right edge and flowing further is perfect, breaking up too much regularity and adding further interesting shapes and lines and curves. The face appears to be centered on the curve of the skirt and through the dancer's body and that somehow seems just right. That both feet show below the skirt suggests an element of normality, yet the right foot is off the ground, further demonstrating the sense of movement started by the sweep of the skirt and aided by the movement in the left arm.

Look at the lines of the neck and throat, the chest and shoulders, the swell of the breasts—magnificent tones and shapes radiating from the center of the chest.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S PERSPECTIVE I decided to create *Dancer* from a desire to explore further the aspect of movement in a photograph. I love to explore the narrative, and this would be a new challenge. The image was, as in many of my images, previsualized but always leaving room for surprises. This image would be a significant addition to my commitment to photography of the female form. I want to thank my model, Jenevieve Hubbard for her part in creating this photograph.

With *Dancer* I would have much less control than in many of my images as it would be impossible to predict the movement of the silk fabric. I positioned two fans to provide the best flow of the fabric coupled with the model's movement. It was shot, like much of my work, in 4x5 black-and-white in my studio. Even though the model did a wonderful job with her

consistency of movement that we had choreographed earlier, the fabric would be a great unknown. After making Polaroid proofs to check the lighting, I exposed 10 sheets of film and, after processing them in my darkroom, was pleased with this result. But, of course, the great excitement comes when printing, and the silver gelatin prints turned out beautifully on a warm-toned paper.

I felt my challenge was successfully met as I usually create situations in which I will grow as a photographer and artist.

BIOGRAPHY I am a fine art photographer who has photographed for over 25 years, attempting to understand the silent dimension underlying our world as well as ourselves. Having grown up in the high deserts of Utah and the Colorado Plateau, I was surrounded by luminous light. I think, on some level, many artists' lives are a love affair with a special light that touches their souls.

I work mostly with large-format black-and-white and enjoy the journey of creating expressive silver gelatin prints in my darkroom. My darkroom is a sanctuary of discovery. Printing from the large negative always gives me a sublime yet powerful expression of the image. Whether I'm capturing movement or stillness, the grandeur of a space or structure, or the intimacy of the human experience, the large negative gives a fuller experience of the thought behind the image.

I'm always working toward breaking down my own walls. I try to take risks and enter a world of uncertainty in the process. This uncertainty keeps me living in the moment.

I currently live in Salt Lake City, Utah, though I have also lived in California. My interests include the female figure in the studio as well as location, portraits, and architecture. I enjoy creating images that invoke a sense of mystery and passion incorporated into the narrative. I earn my living through my photography, whether it be from print sales or commercial architectural projects. I photograph designs and portraits. I teach

private lessons as well as workshops and do fine art printing for other photographers both in color (Ilfochrome) and toned silver gelatin black-and-white prints.

I'm currently working on a new body of work about eroticism with a sense of elegance and understatement with a more classic style of lighting. I still have a few more images to create in my *Parasol* series as well as the *Skirt* series. I am also working on a series on a completely restored B-17 airplane. I can be drawn into any subject that evokes a sense of mystery and visual wonder so that I can keep my mind open to what may enter my life. My website is <http://www.dennismecham.com/>

I have been influenced by Joyce Tenneson, Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard Avedon, and Helmut Newton, though to be completely honest, I was more influenced by painters like Maxfield Parrish, among others.

My work has appeared in many publications, including a cover for *Focus Magazine* with an article and interview and a *Yorba Linda* magazine cover with interview and article, among others.

TECHNICAL I use a 4x5 view camera and print toned silver prints.

