

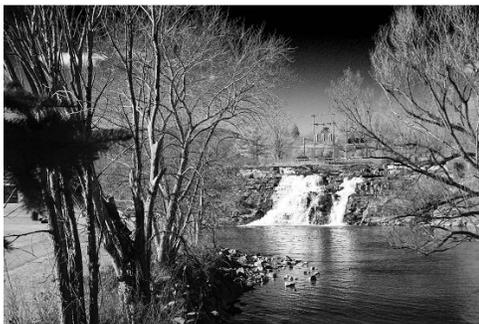


***Beautiful Tools: A Photographer's Evolution*, presented by Charles Baldwin
Sunday, January 4, 2026, 7:30 P.M. EST, via Zoom**

Photographers develop not just through experience, but through the tools that shape their vision. Cameras — from simple point-and-shoots to modern digital hybrids — inevitably become companions, mentors, and sometimes even co-authors in the images we create. In this month's presentation, photographer and multimedia storyteller Charles Baldwin will take us on a journey through the cameras, techniques, and visual discoveries that have shaped his artistic evolution.

Baldwin's talk, *Beautiful Tools: A Photographer's Evolution*, explores the idea that tools are more than equipment — they are catalysts for curiosity. From the early film cameras that first sparked his fascination with light, to the digital compacts and specialty gear that refined his voice, he traces how each tool opened a new doorway into the world of creative seeing.

A central focus of the program will be the Olympus TG-6, a surprisingly powerful, rugged camera that has become one of his primary creative instruments. Baldwin will discuss how its unique strengths — macro capability, point-blank focus, fast optics, underwater resilience, and exceptional durability — make it an ideal partner for fieldwork and spontaneous image-making. Members will see how a compact, go-anywhere camera can produce images that rival far more complex systems, especially when placed in skilled and imaginative hands.



Falls of the Chute River, Ticonderoga, NY

He will also explore light painting, a practice that merges long exposure photography with gestural movement, performance, and improvisation.

Baldwin will

share how he uses handheld LEDs, optical toys, environmental reflections, and spontaneous motion to create luminous forms that feel both scientific and

dreamlike. These images become collaborations between photographer, tool, and environment — a dance between control and happy accident.

Along the way, Baldwin will weave in stories from his diverse background in media production, antique photography, and documentary work,



Pentas K500 (pseudo infra-red)

including his NASA-archived short film *Rocketman John Glenn*. His experiences photographing historical artifacts, working in challenging field conditions, experimenting with unconventional light sources, and blending old and new technologies have all contributed to a perspective that treats tools as partners in discovery.

Members will come away with a renewed appreciation for the instruments in their own hands, whether large or small, simple or sophisticated. Charles's presentation reminds us that photography is ultimately a dialogue with our tools — and that the right tool, used with curiosity and intention, can open worlds of possibility.

Charles Baldwin is a photographer, media producer, and visual storyteller based in New York's Southern Tier. His documentary *Rocketman John Glenn* is preserved in NASA's official archive, his music video *Dakota: leaves You Sitting There* received a Bronze Medal from the Global Music Awards. He has worked extensively in antique photography, historical image restoration, product photography, and location-based visual studies. His creative practice spans traditional cameras, digital hybrids, light-painting techniques, and experimental optical tools. He is also active in multimedia, radio, and narrative development, bringing a unique blend of technical precision and artistic imagination to every project.

***Faces in the Crowd: Street Photography* On Display at the MFA**



MFA Press Release

The Herb Ritter gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston is currently hosting *Faces in the Crowd: Street Photography*.

The exhibit “explores the

evolving techniques photographers have used to record the human experience as it has played out in populous urban spaces—from Harlem and Los Angeles to Tokyo and Istanbul—over five decades” (<https://www.mfa.org/exhibition/faces-in-the-crowd-street-photography>).

The images date from the 1970s through the 1990s. Garry Winogrand, Helen Levitt, and Yolanda Andrade are among the many photographers represented, along with recent artists like Luc Delahaye and Katy Grannan. The images “create a compelling visual conversation that encourages visitors to consider developments in photography as well as changes in cities and societies at large.”

The exhibit runs through July 13, 2026.

PHSNE Membership

New members are invited to join for half the rates for the first year. Regular PHSNE membership (U.S. and Canada) is \$30 for students, \$50 for individuals and institutions, and \$55 for a family; foreign membership is \$60. Join or renew online at <https://phsne.org/join> or <https://phsne.org/renew>, or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to PHSNE Membership Chair, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453, email membership-chair@phsne.org, or use the Web form at <https://phsne.org/application>.

Snap shots, edited by Beverly Regelman, is published monthly, September through June, by the Photographic Historical Society of New England, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453. Volumes 11-29 are available at <https://snapshots.phsne.org>. The current volume is only available to members.

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Here We Stay at the ICA

In its brief press release for *Here We Stay*, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston quotes Joseph Lee, Aquinnah Wampanoag author of *Nothing More of This Land* (2025), “American education and popular media have taught: Indigenous people have largely disappeared, their way of life incompatible with the modern world” (<https://www.icaboston.org/exhibitions/here-we-stay/>).

The photographs and stories in the exhibit proves otherwise, documenting the indigenous people, more than 11,000 of them, who live, thrive, and contribute to life in the Boston metropolitan area.

The exhibit is a collaboration with the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB). Running concurrently through March 9, 2026, is *An Indigenous Present* featuring art from the indigenous community.

And Two Exhibits in New York—

Man Ray: When Objects Dream

“The rayographs’ transformative, magical qualities led the poet Tristan Tzara to describe them as capturing the moments ‘when objects dream’ ” (<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/man-ray-when-objects-dream>).

Man Ray: When Objects Dream is a major exhibit that runs through February 1, 2026 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Sixty rayographs are on display alongside paintings and other works by Ray. The showstopper is *Le violon d’Ingres*, purchased by the Met at \$12.4 million, the most expensive photographic image ever sold.

The *New York Times* printed an extensive description and review of the exhibit (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/06/arts/design/man-ray-metropolitan-museum-exhibition.html>).



Lines of Belonging

There are only a few weeks left to catch *New Photography 2025: Lines of Belonging* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City; the exhibit closes on January 17, 2026. “Marking the 40th anniversary of *New Photography*, this exhibition brings together 13 artists and collectives who explore sites of belonging and forms of interconnectedness” (<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5757>).

Univex Mercury II

Univex (the Universal Camera Corporation), founded in 1932, initially specialized in inexpensive snapshot cameras, starting at 69 cents, with film costing as little as 10 cents for six exposures. Film was a key to Univex's sales strategy. Their cameras used unique, patent-protected film rolls that no else made. The company began moving upscale in 1938, producing more sophisticated and expensive cameras. The Mercury I, from 1938, their most expensive camera to that point used 35mm film, but in unique Univex cartridges.

When its Europe-sourced film supplies ceased during World War II, Univex faced serious reputational and financial problems. They stopped camera production and built binoculars for the military. When camera production resumed after the war, Univex introduced the Mercury II, a half-frame 35mm camera that dates from 1945. Its basic specification is similar to the new (2024) Pentax 17. It modified its cameras to use standard film sizes, so the Mercury II uses standard 35mm cartridges, but is otherwise similar to the original model.

The most unique feature of the camera is its shutter, a design derived from movie cameras. It consists of two disks with a variable width gap between them set by the shutter speed dial. The disks spin at a constant speed. Different shutter speeds come from the size of the gap. This explains the circular extension on the top of the camera which covers the disks. The top shutter speed is 1/1000 of a second. Among contemporary cameras, only the Leica and Contax had a similar top speed, at more than four times the price. Cameras with a price similar to the Mercury II maxed out at 1/300. The lens is interchangeable. Three coated standard lenses were available, 35mm f/3.5, f/2.7, and f/2, focusing down to 18 inches, and two telephotos, a 75mm f/3.5 and a 125mm f/4.5.

The camera was assembled from die cast (as opposed to machined) aluminum alloy parts. Depending on conditions for storing cameras - humidity, temperature, etc.—the metal surfaces of cameras may deteriorate, and the surfaces of Mercury II cameras tend to deteriorate more than other cameras. Most available on eBay are badly corroded.

The camera operates very similar to a more modern still film camera. To load, make sure the rewind knob (at 7 o'clock around the lens) points to 10 o'clock. The hinged back pops open with a button on the bottom of the camera. The film clips under a spring on

the take-up spool. After winding the film on once or twice (with the left knob above the lens), pressing the shutter after each wind, close the back and manually turn the film counter to point to the highest marked number (65), then wind the film 4 more times. The film counter now points to 1, and you are ready to shoot.

Check or set your shutter speed (the right knob above the lens, pressing down to turn the knob), after winding the film. Set your f stop (on the f/3.5 lens it is at 3 o'clock on the lens, other lenses may vary).

And finally focus by turning the distance scale with the knob shown at 9 o'clock in the picture. You are now ready to frame your picture through the viewfinder and take your shot.



To a modern film photographer, the most unfamiliar aspects are the location of the wind knob on the front of the camera, and the requirement to focus by guessing your distance and setting it on the lens. One other quirk is that the camera does not have eyelets for a neck strap. If you don't have an "ever-ready" case made for the camera, you do without, or attach something to the tripod screw at the bottom.

There is a complicated exposure calculator dial on the back. It has three dials, factoring together film speed, subject type, season of the year, weather conditions, and time of day into its calculations. You can ignore it and use a "Sunny 16" calculation instead.

When you have finished a roll of film (65 shots on a 36-exposure roll – the space between frames is wider than on a modern camera), turn the rewind dial to point to the word "REWIND", and turn the rewind knob on the top of the camera until you hear the film pop from the take-up spool.

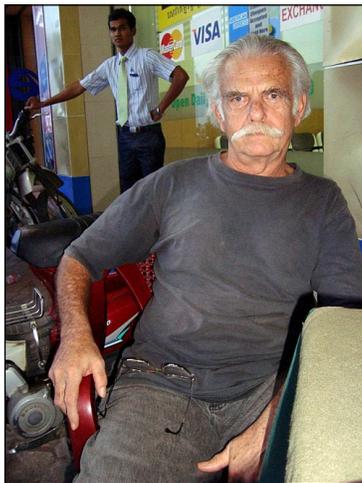
Although it has its quirks, the camera is quite usable, and is surprisingly sophisticated for its age and original price.

A Mercury II that was donated to PHSNE will be included in the *Photographica 93* auction in April. It has much less corrosion than most surviving Mercury IIs, and is in prime condition for its age, with one exception: The three element lens has a crack in the rear element. No photographs from this camera were developed before this article went to print, so it is unknown how the crack would affect pictures. The camera comes with an ever-ready case with the shoulder strap intact, so would make an excellent collector's item.

~Article and photographs by Larry Woods,
PHSNE Board President -Elect

Photographer Struggles to Deal With Killing Field Photographs

American photojournalist Al Rockoff achieved fame when his story was told in the blockbuster film, *The Killing Fields*. While he was dissatisfied by the interpretation of events and John Malkovich's portrayal of him, the film acquainted the public with his extraordinary coverage of the savagery that accompanied war in Southeast Asia.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al_Rockoff_-_Photographer_-_Phnom_Penh.JPG

Suffering from PTSD, tracing to his experiences in the Vietnam War, life has been a challenge for Rockoff. He is currently living in the warehouse among the many boxes that house his negatives and other belongings.

Rockoff also went to Cambodia to document the horrors of war there and the mass killings by the Khmer Rouge. To evacuate from Cambodia, after the fall of Phnom Penh, Rockoff sought refuge in the

French Embassy, hid canisters of negatives in a toilet tank, and later taped them to his thigh to get them safely out of the country.

At one point the landlord threatened eviction over the mess and potential fire hazard in Rockoff's locker. Two friends, Brad Bledsoe and Arch Hall, Jr., stepped in to help organize and clean up, and the landlord relented. Bledsoe convinced Rockoff to turn over to him, for safe-keeping, the negatives that had been stored in the locker for decades. Questions abound over the removal of items and over controlling interest. Bledsoe contends he would return everything, per their verbal agreement, if compensated for the expenses he incurred. Bledsoe and Hall claim they are trying to build a website to sell some images with the proceeds going to build a more comfortable life for Rockoff.

A *New York Times* article has an interesting and detailed account of the circumstances, challenges, and questions that surround this situation. Visit <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/21/arts/design/al-rockoff-war-photography-killing-fields.html>.

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held online on the first Sunday of each month, September to June.

Upcoming meetings:

Feb 1—David Jentz, Kodak Retina

Mar 1—Adrienne Lundgren, Library of Congress

Connect to PHSNE Online and by email:

PHSNE's Web site is online at <https://phsne.org>. See <https://www.facebook.com/PHSNE/> for items of PHSNE interest. Comments are welcome, so join the discussion of photo history. Visit <https://snapshots.phsne.org> for *snap shots* issues Volume 11 (Sept 2005) to Volume 29 (June 2024).

Stay connected to PHSNE via our emails and show announcements. Sign up at <https://phsne.org/emails>.

For information on all available PHSNE publications, see <https://phsne.magcloud.com>.

Corrections

Chuck Fell, President and Treasurer of the Michigan Photographic Historical Society, brought our attention to two errors in the December 2025 issue of *snap shots*. The first is in the caption of the photograph of him on page 1 with a camera that was misidentified; he is holding a Minolta Miniflex (127 TLR). He notes that the Miniflex is rare, with fewer than 5,000 having been produced.

The second error appeared in the page 3 article about the Ansco Memo. The Ilex shutter has instantaneous speeds of 1/25, 1/50, and 1/100th of a second.

Request From a PHSNE Member

Ron Polito, PHSNE Board Member, has the following request:

"I need a hi-resolution photograph of a good looking 8 x10 wooden, glass plate camera and lens for a short article I'm writing and want to avoid any possible copyright issues with those accessible online. I may have space for two views, e.g., front and side/back.

If anyone would be willing to share photographs of such an item in their collection, I would be most grateful. Full credit will be given, or withheld, as desired. You can reach me at ron.polito@umb.edu."