

Artist's Corner: Jim Hultquist

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Jim began his artistic career as a theatrical and architectural lighting designer, working in places such as New York, California, France and Finland. While he continues his work as a theater professional, his main artistic objective has become the study of light through photography; using dramatic lighting to explore and re-vision objects. Last year's show, "Cognitio Inluminaire," explored the relationship between books and light, emphasizing both the architectural structure of books as well as their intellectual and inspirational powers (these can be seen at www.jhld.com). This year's exhibit, "Ashtanga," is on display at Pekara Bakery until June 12. It began as an investigation into the placement and structural lines of the body and evolved into a visualization of a yoga practice. Jim has attempted to capture not only the movement of yoga, but also its mindful quality. He has an M.F.A. in lighting design from Rutgers University and a B.A. in theater from California State University, Stanislaus. He grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



What drew you to yoga and when?

In 1998 I started practicing yoga at a health club in Brooklyn as a remedy for back pain. That year I was designing lighting all the time and the stress and long hours were getting me down. Yoga not only helped the back pain, it was also a wonderful respite from the stress that filled the rest of my life. At the end of class we would chant, 'Om Shanti' (Shanti means peace) and I would walk home humming the chant, which really surprised me later. I have a really intense personality and NYC tended to amplify this intensity; yoga took it back a notch and helped keep me more centered.

How were these photographs created?

The 'Ashtanga' images were produced by shooting several yoga poses onto a single negative. The visualization of the images started in my sketchbook. Rough drawings of the overlapping poses helped me understand what the final photograph would look like. Then the models and I would rehearse the sketched sequence, tweaking the placement of the poses, changing the symmetry and modifying the order in which the poses are shot. I would then photograph each arrangement without advancing the film, imprinting all the poses in the sequence on to the negative. Each of these prints was exposed using a single negative.

What was the hardest part of creating the illusion of movement?

These images were created by shooting several yoga poses onto one negative. The illusion of movement comes from the fact that some parts of the body precisely overlap, while others move. For instance while shooting 'Sattva Mudra,' (Balancing Gestures) Jenna Cameron's lower body needed to remain perfectly still while she changed the position of her head and arms for each exposure. The challenge comes from the fact that we move all the time (even when we are sitting perfectly still) and the human body is quite asymmetrical. For instance, Jenna's left shoulder would lift when her head turned right, and we would need to see this and adjust her shoulder before shooting. For every photograph you see in the show, there are several nearly identical negatives that could not be used due to this challenge.

What are your plans for the future?

I plan to continue adding to the 'Ashtanga' photo collection. The 12 photographs in the show are really just the beginning of the project, and I've been sketching and researching some new ideas to start shooting as early as this summer. I also plan on continuing working on the book photographs I started last year, and I have two more ideas that I've been collecting material for; one includes still lifes of glowing light bulbs (which is much more interesting than it sounds).

What is your greatest strength and weakness?

My greatest weakness is that I sometimes under-utilize and occasionally over-utilize my strengths. My