



# Creative Point of View

Photoshop from the creative to the practical

■ BY KATRIN EISMANN

## Your World in Focus

For many photographers, sharper is better; but for quite a few the softness, unpredictability, and serendipity of toy lenses and alternative processes appeals on a deep emotional level that may be difficult to express in words but is wonderful to explore and learn from.

Discussions, articles, tests, and comparisons on lens quality, sharpness, and resolving power have been a mainstay of photography magazines and passionate discussions for decades. As a reader of this magazine, however, you've dedicated yourself to learning the ins and outs of Adobe Photoshop with much more than a passing interest.

You probably stay up late at night delving into layers, masks, and filters; you imagine Photoshop images as you daydream or drift off to sleep; and you happily devote hours to nurturing an image from initial exposure to final print. But for me, when dedication evolves into compulsion, I have a tendency to overwork an image, which saps the joy out of the creative process. I can't tell you how often I've tried to create believable motion blurs, shallow depth-of-field effects, or dreamy images with Photoshop—only to be unsatisfied and finally closing the file without saving it. A computer cannot believably re-create genuine optical distortion, blur, and softness that alternative camera lenses or an extreme shallow depth of field does much more easily, effectively, and spontaneously.

### Exploring and discovering

This past spring in New York City was a picture-perfect season of blue skies, warm days, and brilliant colors. And although it's only too easy to be too busy to enjoy the change in seasons, I couldn't pass up the chance to photograph in Central Park as it exploded with waves upon waves of blooming trees, tulips, and daffodils.

You'd think that photographing a beautiful scene would be easy, but I found myself wandering the park looking for a new point of view and a way to express the beauty of so many flowers without producing tired clichés. I stumbled onto Shakespeare's Garden—an informal four-acre garden that follows a Victorian tradition—where only flowers mentioned in Shakespeare's plays and poetry are planted. The challenge for me was to photograph what I felt, not just what I saw. Here's one example where I intentionally threw the focus way out to create an image that's about color, light, and purity.



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Incidentally, I was shooting with a Hasselblad medium-format camera with a Hasselblad macro 120mm f:4 CFE Zeiss Makro-Planar lens—one of the sharpest lenses ever produced. The image is sharp: it's just not in focus. Seeing the color and vibrancy on the LCD screen made my heart jump with the feeling of spring: the color, the joy, and the vibrancy of each flower reaching for the sun.

I continued to push the lack of focus. Admittedly not all of the images were as successful, but the seed had been planted and I continued my exploration of Central Park and focused in on the individual flower in the masses of flowers shown here.



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Kneeling down to the level of the tulips, I shot wide open and pushed the camera deep into the flowers, which transformed the tulips in the foreground into swaying soft-focus filters.



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The beauty of these images relies on the fleeting moment and the ability of the lens to abstract and express my joy in the color and beauty in the heart of Manhattan. When I came home with dozens of files, I had to take a moment to clean the pollen off the lens and camera body, but not the smile on my face.

### Surprise!

The Lensbaby, a selective focus lens for digital SLR cameras, has a similar invigorating, playful effect on image making. I always carry a Lensbaby in my camera bag and have learned that it takes practice



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to use it effectively. In other words, just slapping a Lensbaby on a camera doesn't create successful images. The appeal lies on the emotional expression of shape and form rather than a highly detailed rendition of the world.

[For more information on the Lensbaby, see *Photoshop User*, June 2005, p. 68 and p. 86 of this issue.]

For many years, photographers have used Diana and Holga toy cameras to reenergize their passion for photography. These cameras have cheap plastic bodies, truly inferior lenses, inaccurate viewfinders, and require that the photographer tape the body closed after loading the film to ensure that the film isn't unintentionally exposed. The appeal of these cameras is how unpredictable they are as

they vignette, blur, and distort the image. The serendipity is refreshing and liberating, as the photographers loosen their grip on predictability and control.

Seán Duggan, who photographed this image with a Holga camera, writes in his blog ([www.f1point4.com](http://www.f1point4.com)), "Taken at the Lake of Constance (Bodensee) in southern Germany in August of 2005. I took a series of shots at this beach, both Holga and digital. I just sat myself down on this mat leading into the water and let summer life at the lake happen around me. Eventually I sat there long enough that I became invisible, even with my cameras. That's when the magic happened. 'Mohawk boy' was one of the more magical moments that afternoon."



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More recently, I discovered an online tutorial on building a Holga lens for a digital SLR ([www.litratista.org/2006/04/29/homemade-lens-part-1-eos-holga/](http://www.litratista.org/2006/04/29/homemade-lens-part-1-eos-holga/)) and I look forward to building a toy lens with all of its quirkiness for my digital cameras.

### Letting go

I'd rather be out exploring and taking pictures than working in front of my computer. Software can't create the warmth of the sun on my back or the joy of learning from mistakes and experiments. Sharper isn't always better and manipulating every single pixel isn't always appropriate. Letting go, losing control, and playing is essential in today's analytical, multitasking, binary world. ■

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