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## FLIGHTS OF FANCY THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH BRAZAUSKAS

ALGIMANTAS KEZYS

Joseph Brazauskas took his first picture when he was eleven years old, and he's had a lifelong love affair with photography ever since.

"The camera is an instrument with truly magical powers," he says. "It not only can capture a moment in time, but can shape our perception of it. The possibilities it offers for creative exploration and discovery are endless."

Although Joseph has primarily earned his living as a writer, photography has been an important part of the stories he wrote. He always carried a camera on assignments and took his own pictures. Sometimes the pictures he took overshadowed the words he intended to write. So he would let the pictures speak for themselves.

"I started out as a military journalist, became a photo-journalist, then gravitated into public relations and advertising photography as a part of the work I did in civilian life," he said. "But I always considered myself a writer first. Now all that is changing."

Joseph has slowly drifted into fine art photography without actually being conscious of it.

"I just started taking pictures that had no bearing on my work or my real life," he said. "Photographically, I indulged myself in flights of fancy - sort of an escape from what I had been doing. The picture-taking process became a form of relaxation and self-expression. It gave me a certain amount of satisfaction because I was taking pictures just to please myself. Unlike other periods in my life, I was not beholden to an employer for a pay check or to a client for his good will and continued business."

Joseph has a fertile imagination, and - he readily admits - "a warped sense of humor." This is reflected in his work. His subjects and his approach to photographing them borders on the whimsical, satirical or irreverent. He is also fond of using his photographic subjects as metaphors for something else. He likes to experiment, and his work is innovative. He feels comfortable working in all the mediums of photography from the disciplined to the undisciplined, and from special effects to computer enhanced.

In "My Secret Garden," one of his recent projects, you'll find strange images such as an ice cream cone made from three scoops of yellow marigolds or two eaten ears of corn that Joseph has transformed into two burning candles.

Joseph also has been experimenting with digital photography to create composite images on the computer. He has been collaborating with a professional photodigitographer on this project, and has achieved interesting results. All of the images he uses are his own, including the concept for the composite.

"As photographers, we've all stumbled across those weather beaten, paint peeling, rusted out, worn down or beautifully decaying objects that have suffered the ravages of time or abuse, and have become irresistible to us as photographic subjects," Joseph said.

"Unfortunately, despite the fact that the subtle colors, interesting textures or degree of decay are fascinating as 'found art,' there's no place to go with the images. Frequently, there's no focal point of interest. There's nothing to give the images lasting impact. In and of themselves, the images have no meaning, nothing to relate to, nothing special to attract attention," he continued.

"If only a dog would stick his head through that hole in the fence/ Joseph would say to himself. "Or wouldn't it be great if a cat would peer through that broken window painted with golden rays of sunshine," he would wish.

As a result, he has been experimenting with digital photography to add that missing element by creating composite images of two or more of his photos on the computer. Although he enjoys mixing incongruous elements to make things interesting, he tries to keep everything within the realm of reality. He tries hard so the finished photos won't look as if they're been digitally altered.

Three of his digital images have won awards in photo magazines, and one of them has been selected for publication in *Graphis Photo 96*, the prestigious international annual devoted to state-of-the-art photography.

Readers of *Lituanus* might be interested to know that the very first experimental digital image Joseph developed involved a color slide of "The Three Muses," Stasys Kuzma's brilliant sculpture at the National Theater of drama in Vilnius.

Unfortunately, the sculpture had been photographed on a dark, overcast day against a gray sky, and was not particularly noteworthy, Joseph said. Then, with the help of a computer, he replaced the gray Lithuanian sky with the sky of a Hawaiian sunset he had taken ten years ago. "The composite photo seemed to spring to life in an artistic way," Joseph said, and was chosen for exhibition at the 24th annual Lithuanian Photography Exhibition in Chicago, whose theme was "The Sky."

Another photo project which Joseph completed recently was entitled, "Experimenting with abstract images in the home," which has been accepted for publication in *Peter sen's Photographic* magazine.

"Experimenting with abstract images in the home is like taking a vacation without actually leaving the house," Joseph wrote.

"It's relaxing and creatively stimulating. It's a way of entertaining yourself with your mind, your imagination, and your full range of photo equipment. It allows you to experiment with subjects and ideas that have no real purpose other than to see how it all works out. And, of course, you have nobody to please but yourself," he added.

"Yet, in going through this process, you're allowing your subconscious mind to express itself and to reveal your innermost thoughts in creative ways. The results of such experimentation may surprise or even amaze you. The images you create might even translate into something called 'fine art,' " he continued.

"While many photographers travel the world in search of interesting and provocative subject matter, abstract photo ideas can be found virtually everywhere you look in the home. The only problem is recognizing them in photographic terms and in meaningful ways," he notes.

Joseph was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was the youngest of three children born to Lithuanian immigrant parents. His mother, Albina Dabru-kaite, came to America from the tiny village of Sankoniu in the Lazdijų region of eastern Lithuania. His father, Juozas Brazauskas, emigrated to America from Grauzeliskiu kaimas, near the city of Kupiškis, in western Lithuania.

Juozas Brazauskas worked in the foundry of Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation in Pittsburgh, and made castings out of molten steel. He was seriously injured when one of the open hearth furnaces exploded, killing three of his fellow workers. Juozas was pensioned off and eventually died of his injuries when Joseph was eleven years old.

Joseph graduated from St. Casimir's High School on the South Side of Pittsburgh in 1948. Although he was a bright student, college was out of the question following his father's death. He decided to join the Navy, and ultimately became a journalist. Journalists are enlisted Navy public relations specialists who are trained to serve as combat correspondents in wartime and as writers and publicists in peacetime. Joseph covered significant Navy news events and matters of historical importance, and enjoyed some measure of success in getting his stories and pictures published in the news media. By the time he was 25 years old, he had been promoted to chief journalist, the youngest man in the Navy to achieve this status in his rating.

Joseph also served as a journalism instructor, collaborated on the writing of two training manuals for the men and women in his rating, and saw some of the world from the pitching decks of a heavy cruiser and two aircraft carriers. Prior to his retirement from the Navy in 1968, he was assigned to the Navy's west coast office in Hollywood where he served as its media chief and acted as an enlisted military advisor on Navy-oriented motion pictures and television productions.

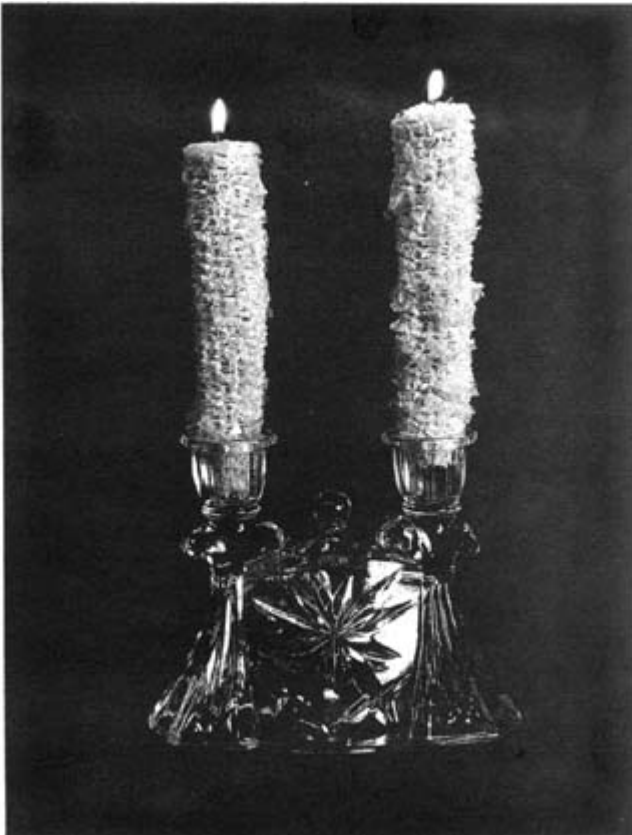
In 1972, Joseph founded Impact Public Relations, a small PR/advertising agency. He frequently worked 12 hours a day, six days a week to make it succeed.

"There's no job in the company that I couldn't or wouldn't do," he said. "And in the beginning, I did it all. I was the writer, photographer, graphic artist, and account executive. I went out and got the business, then did all of the creative work myself. My wife, Annele, of course, helped out with the secretarial work and the bookkeeping. We were a great team, and the work was very satisfying."

Now that he's retired, he has all the time he needs to do the things he wants. "I've set some goals for myself, and, initially, I would like to establish myself as a freelance writer-photographer of photographic essays and picture stories on off-beat subjects," Joseph said.



*St. Joseph d'Coors - Self portrait*



*Corny Candles*



*Untitled*



*The cat in the window*



*Untitled*



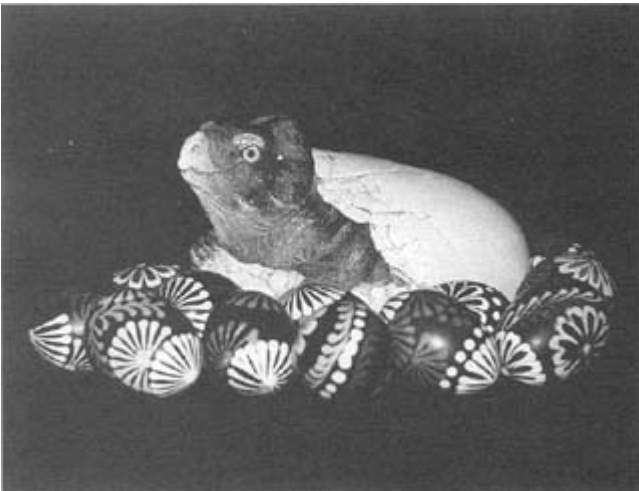
*Calamity Janes*



*Watch dog*



*Serenade to lost limbs*



*Easter surprise*