

# The New York Times

## LENS

PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO AND VISUAL JOURNALISM

### About Lens

Lens is the photojournalism blog of The New York Times, presenting the finest and most interesting visual and multimedia reporting — photographs, videos and slide shows. A showcase for Times photographers, it also seeks to highlight the best work of other newspapers, magazines and news and picture agencies; in print, in books, in galleries, in museums and on the Web. Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of Lens.

When Tony Fouhse first exhibited his stylized photographs of crack addicts made on a street corner in Ottawa, Canada, he was unsure what the reaction of the opening-night audience would be. But he knew that some of those in attendance would approve: the subjects themselves.

The corner drug hangout where all of the images were made is within a few feet of Galerie La Petite Mort, where the work was exhibited. Some of the crack users went to the opening. Others would sometimes drop by the gallery, where visitors could glance from the photographs to the corner where the people might be hanging out.

As part of his project, Mr. Fouhse shows his subjects a Polaroid when he takes their picture and gives them a print on his next visit to the corner. He also discusses the photographs with them. They may

suggest the pose. And, he said, they approve the image before it's exhibited. Mr. Fohse said most of the people who hang out at the corner are supportive of his project.

"I'm not trying to be one of them or tell them what to do," Mr. Fohse said in a telephone interview from Ottawa. "I tell them: 'I'm not trying to make you look good. I'm not trying to make you look bad. I'm just trying to take interesting pictures.' That's my only agenda."

Mr. Fohse is certainly not trying to sneak photographs of the crack addicts when they are unaware. He uses medium- and large-format cameras, lights and a generator.

Once, the generator was stolen by people whom Mr. Fohse didn't know. He figured he would have to kiss \$1,000 goodbye. But he gave his phone number to Keith, one of the addicts, just in case. By the time Mr. Fohse returned home, there was a call from Keith saying, "We got your generator back."

"They wouldn't take any money," Mr. Fohse said. "They found the people and got it back. They could've sold it for \$150, but they gave it back to me. That's when I knew I was accepted."

Mr. Fohse, 55, was born in Ottawa. He started taking photographs at the age of 19 but didn't make a living at it until he was 40. Before that, he worked as a pastry chef in restaurants and for the famous Dufflet Pastries. Eventually, he tired of waking up at 5 a.m. and separating 500 eggs every morning and decided to try his hand at commercial photography. His corporate and editorial work support him financially and allow him to work on personal projects.

The addict project started inadvertently when Mr. Fohse almost died

of kidney failure and had to cancel a photographic expedition to Morocco that was supposed to yield an exhibit at Galerie La Petite Mort. When he started to recover, he began looking for a place in Ottawa to indulge his passion for photographing at dusk. After dragging his Hasselblad, light and generator to a few locations, he arrived at the corner of Cumberland and Murray Streets.

In 2007, he took medium-format photos. The next summer, he took pictures of women on the corner, "User Women," in a more direct style with a large-format camera. This summer, he is photographing on the corner again, now concentrating on the men.

When Kim, a disheveled woman with lice eggs in her matted hair, was shown the photograph Mr. Fouhse took, she was stunned. He recalls her saying: "I look horrible. Normally, I get sort of fixed up before I take a picture." He remembers responding: "Kim, you're a crack addict. That's what you looked like that day. But look at your eyes. They're powerful. The picture is about what's inside you." After a long discussion, he said, Kim approved the picture (*Slide 14*).

Mr. Fouhse's photographs put a twist in the ongoing argument about making art out of suffering and making commodities from pictures of misfortune. When his photographs are on view at La Petite Mort, you can see the art inside and the reality outside.