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Table With Lamp and Telephone Carl Shubs

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ON THE COVER

Table With Lamp and Telephone by Carl Shubs

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on December 14, 2017, as well as <http://www.carlshubphotography.com/about/>.

Sometimes a table lamp is not “just” a table lamp. Carl Shubs, a psychoanalytic psychologist whose *Table With Lamp and Telephone* forms this month’s cover art, might argue that there is always something below the surface, whether in art or life. He describes himself as being focused on reality, subtext, context, and intensity.

Shubs’s interest in Freud began early. While growing up in New Haven, Connecticut, he recalls reading Freud’s *New Introductory Lectures* in 10th grade. He no longer recalls whether it was a book assigned for class reading or whether he picked it up on his own, but he does remember that it seemed very readable and made sense to him. Shubs completed an undergraduate degree at Columbia University and then traveled to California for graduate school: a master’s degree from the California School of Professional Psychology and a doctorate from United States International University. He has been in practice since then, in Beverly Hills, California, integrating contemporary psychoanalytic psychotherapy and somatic (bioenergetic) psychotherapy.

Shubs started taking photographs during college. The expense of shooting with film, along with little control over processing, diminished his enthusiasm, however. When Shubs went on his “dream vacation,” a safari in Africa, he used a film camera, but for technical reasons, was disappointed with many of the shots that he took. Switching to digital gave him “the freedom to take as many photos as I wanted, to do the editing on my own without significant cost—and it allowed me to learn and experiment. That’s when things took off.”

Shubs joined a number of photography groups. When three of his photos were accepted for the 30th anniversary show at the Museum of Neon Art, it “lit a fire under me to say ‘you’ve got something here, go with it.’” Subsequently, he has become a (juried) member of the Los Angeles Art Association and the California Art League and has exhibited widely, both in the United States and Europe. He describes himself as a self-taught contemporary art photographer.

I like to capture the moments that surround us and that we often overlook in the mundane of everyday living. I want the viewer to reach beyond the obvious, feel an emotion, or think about something in a new way.

He also notes that he prefers “to shoot whatever catches my eye as I go out into the world.... I call these ‘found images.’”

This orientation toward “street photography”—capturing the unmediated spontaneous moment—is exemplified in *Table With Lamp and Telephone*. Shubs came across this “classic still life” during the reopening of a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Hollywood, when cameras were allowed inside the building. While taking photos of the architecture, he also noticed this particular configuration of books, lamp, flowers, and phone, each exemplifying aspects of a Victorian set piece. He writes, “I love when someone thinks that an image is set up rather than captured or is made by some kind of photographic manipulation when actually it is what the camera saw.”

Shubs has been influenced by the photography of the late Vivian Maier. *Finding Vivian Maier* (2013) is an interesting documentary film concerning this unassuming nanny and housekeeper whose oeuvre has come to some prominence following her 2009 death. Her compositional style, Shubs says, had a particular impact on his own work. Whereas the standard compositional instruction is to stay within the “rule of thirds,” dividing both the horizontal and vertical frames into thirds and putting the focus along the places where they intersect, Maier centered her focus slightly off of those central visual elements. Shubs finds that this shift “forces a visual dynamic within the image. It forces you to look for and find balance within the photograph.”

At first glance, this photograph looks supremely symmetrical and balanced. As one looks deeper, what is striking is the way in which the various elements and their (natural) placement compel the eye to move around the image: The dark horizontal of the bottom of the shade bounces the eye both up to the light of the lampshade itself and down to the glow below, which itself pulls the eye down further to the stripes of the tablecloth; the rectangularity of the books moves the eye across the painted lamp base flowers to the real, spiky chrysanthemums and, almost lurking, the candlestick telephone behind. Each is balanced by the dark, negative space above. Further observation illuminates the myriad textural variations, almost like a Dutch 17th-century genre painting.

Reflecting on the intersection of his photograph and his psychoanalytic stance, Shubs sees both as

looking below the surface, whether that involves the aesthetic elements of a photograph or attending to all of the deeper meanings of what a client is telling me. The photographic process is more intuitive, the therapeutic, a more conscious process.

Kate F. Hays
Art Co-Editor