



PORTFOLIO

CRAIG VARJABEDIAN

A SENSE OF GOOD FORTUNE



West Mitten Butte, Monument Valley, Utah

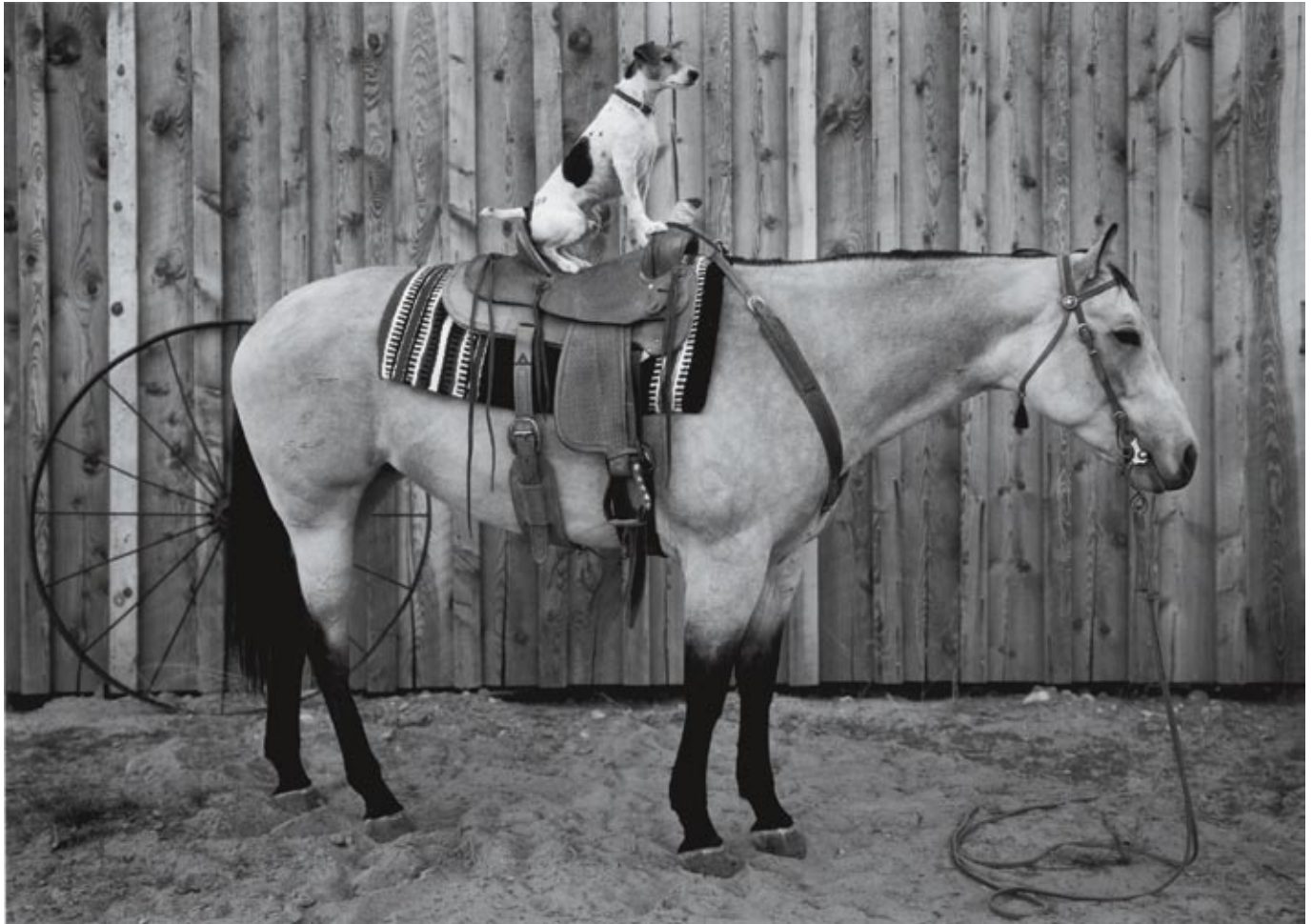
I remember with particular clarity a moment last summer while in the field making photographs. The sky was a mass of rolling clouds, the type that promise a thunderstorm in a few hours. The hills around me were the red, bone, and brown that comes from wind, rain, and time. In the afternoon light, the twisted and fluted shapes of juniper trees were dark, mysterious and grand. Even the smallest, most convoluted tree seemed to stretch into the dry clear air; each needle etched clear and distinct; the rough, sensuous bark molded on trunk and branch. I was struck with a profound sense of awe for how beautiful this place was and how incredibly lucky I was to be there making a photograph. I have photographed many places over the last 30 years, but the Southwest is home and where I make my best pictures. When I photograph these skies and hills, I pay homage to this Southwestern land.

When I make a photograph, I form a relationship with the subject of my picture (be it tree, cloud, building or person) and that subject's environment. Good relationships take

time and patience. This was especially true of the Morada Photographic Survey, which took over 7 years and culminated in the book, *En Divina Luz: The Penitente Moradas of New Mexico*. The Penitente Brotherhood is a two hundred year old Catholic lay organization of Hispanic men. Members known as Brothers pray and practice personal penance in order to have a direct experience with the Divine. My photographs present moradas, the chapter houses in which the Brothers meet. I searched for these buildings throughout the state, meeting many Brothers in my travels, learning the history and meaning of the Brotherhood. Standing in front of these buildings asked of me a reverence and respect that I worked hard to reveal in the images. It was very important to respect the wishes of the Brothers—who are very protective of their identity and their moradas. They did not want to see their chapter house photographed simply because they were picturesque or attractive. The Brotherhood understands their beliefs to be something much greater. Creating close relationships with several members of the



Pueblo Ladder, Bandelier National Monument, New Mexico



Miles and Belle, Ojo Caliente, New Mexico.

Brotherhood humbled and enlightened me while enriching the meaning and depth of the photographs.

My current project is to photograph Ghost Ranch, located north of Santa Fe in Abiquiú, New Mexico. Most people associate Ghost Ranch with Georgia O’Keeffe, and rightfully so. I often hike the land and have found places where she sat and created some of her most famous paintings. But Ghost Ranch has its own history and its own spirit. This land was here and in use before O’Keeffe or Arthur Pack (who bought the then dude ranch in 1933). My plan is to photograph the the Ranch (22,000 acres) in all seasons, to capture the change and beauty of this amazing place. I’ll see through my camera new aspects of the ranch—both majestic and intimate—I will form relationships with people associated with the ranch (I already have friends in this area from my previous explorations). These people will share their experiences with the land, guide me to new sites for photography, and inspire me with their appreciation for the ranch.

While the process of exploring and photographing the

ranch will satisfy and engage me, an end product will be a book—which will include a set of essays that discuss the history of the land itself, from the dinosaurs to movies (Billy Crystal’s *City Slickers* was filmed here) and a selection of photographs from an expected large body of work. The book will be published by the University of New Mexico Press in the fall of 2006.

I am frequently asked about the camera and lenses I use. My photographic equipment is chosen to best realize my particular photographic vision. I photograph in black-and-white to portray the essence of place or person: light, shadow, depth, and texture. I use a 5x7 inch (negative size) Ebony Field view camera and a set of Zeiss Protar convertible lenses of 1930s vintage. A larger negative permits a level of image control and the capture of important detail not possible with a smaller format. I use older lenses. My current set of lens elements took me several years to accumulate. For me, today’s modern lenses do not record a sense of space or quality of light the way older optics can. Modern lenses

...and how lucky I was to be there making a photograph of it.



Moonrise over Penitente Morada, Dusk, Late Autumn, New Mexico.



Low-rider Cadillac named "Chimayo," Chimayo, New Mexico.



Mozaun McKibben, Horse Trainer, with Smoking Gun, Galisteo, New Mexico.



Miss Sadie, Horsewoman, near Santa Fe, New Mexico

have been corrected for color to such a high degree that they minimize flare, but as a result, they accentuate light's harsher qualities, transforming the subtle into the obvious. Older optics avoid this trap, offering aesthetic choices with black-and-white film not possible with modern lenses.

Teaching is an important part of my life as I feel it is important to share what I have learned from many years of making photographs. In 1986 I began the New Mexico Photography Field School in Santa Fe. The Field School offers hands-on field photography workshops inspired by the history, character and beauty of New Mexico. My goal is to teach people to photograph through their hearts and minds, to help them realize their own talents and skills. I believe when I teach others to make photographs, I open up ways for them to present their own unique view of life—and by doing so make the world larger by their visions.



Sunset and Evening Storm, Canoncito at Apache Canyon, New Mexico.



Aeromotor Windmill, Garden of the Gods, Cerrillos. New Mexico.



White Sands Study No. 1, Alamogordo, New Mexico

Craig Varjabedian is a fine-art photographer of the lands and peoples of the American West and Southwest. He photographs in both black and white and colour using a 5x7 inch view camera with vintage 1930 lenses and the latest digital camera equipment.

Craig is also the Director of the prestigious New Mexico Photography Field School, a photography workshop program started in 1986 and based in Santa Fe New Mexico.

Current books of his photographs include *En Divina Luz: The Penitente Moradas of New Mexico* and *By the Grace of Light: Images of Faith from Catholic New Mexico*.

Craig's luminous photographs are included in the public collections of the William Benton Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and Southern Methodist University, where an archive of his morada photographs has been established.

He is the recipient of grants and awards from the National

Endowment for the Arts, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the McCune Charitable Foundation and many others.

Forthcoming books of Craig Varjabedian's photographs include:

- *Four and Twenty Photographs*, is an eloquent examination of his 30 years behind the lens. The book presents 24 photographs and the stories behind them by author and historian Robin Jones. (Captured Light Editions, Fall 2005)
- *Ghost Ranch* presents a collection of photographs capturing the spirit and essence of a place made well-known through the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. The book includes essays about the Ranch by author and historian Robin Jones. (University of New Mexico Press, Fall 2006)

Craig Varjabedian is represented by the Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe and the Afterimage Photograph Gallery in Dallas.

CRAIG VARJABEDIAN *Photography*

903 WEST ALAMEDA NO. 115 SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501 TELEPHONE: (505) 983-2934

E.MAIL: info@craigvarjabedian.com PHOTOGRAPHS: www.craigvarjabedian.com TEACHING: www.photofieldschool.com