# Kokoro

Brooks Jensen Arts ~ January 2026, Vol 11, No 1

# KOKORO

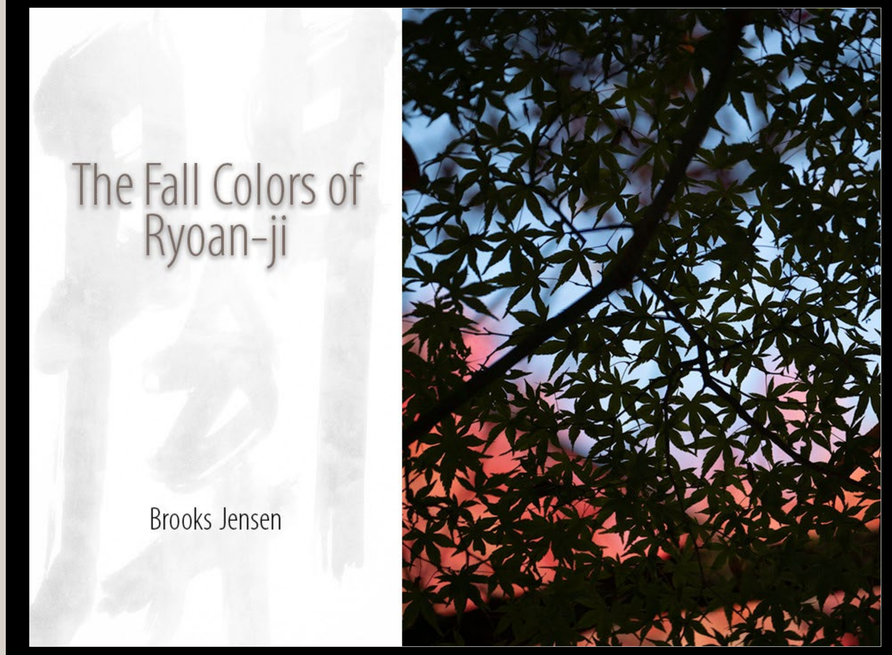
*Wandering Through a Photographic Life*

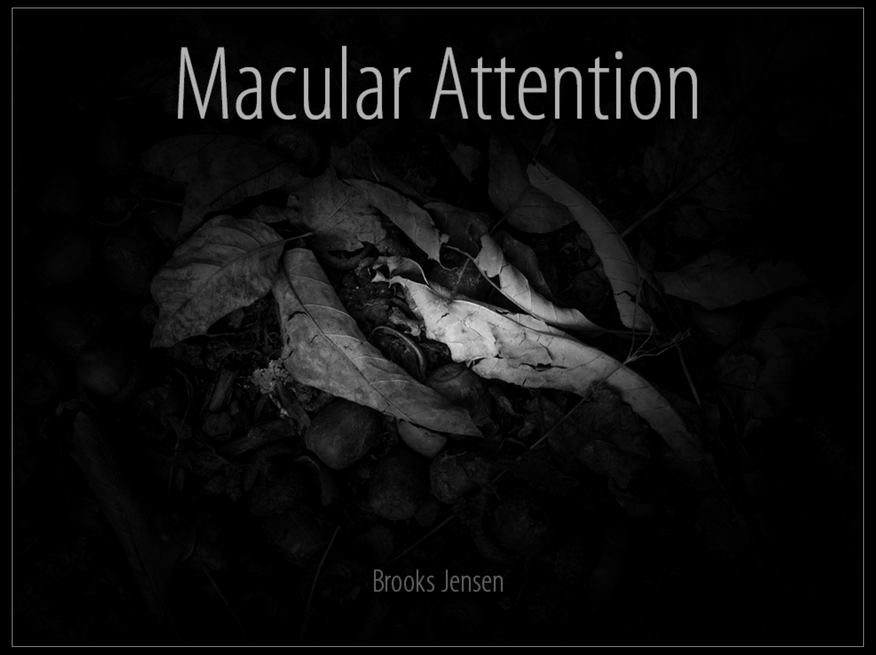
An Image Journal
with Commentary, Meditation, Philosophy,
and Unanswered Questions

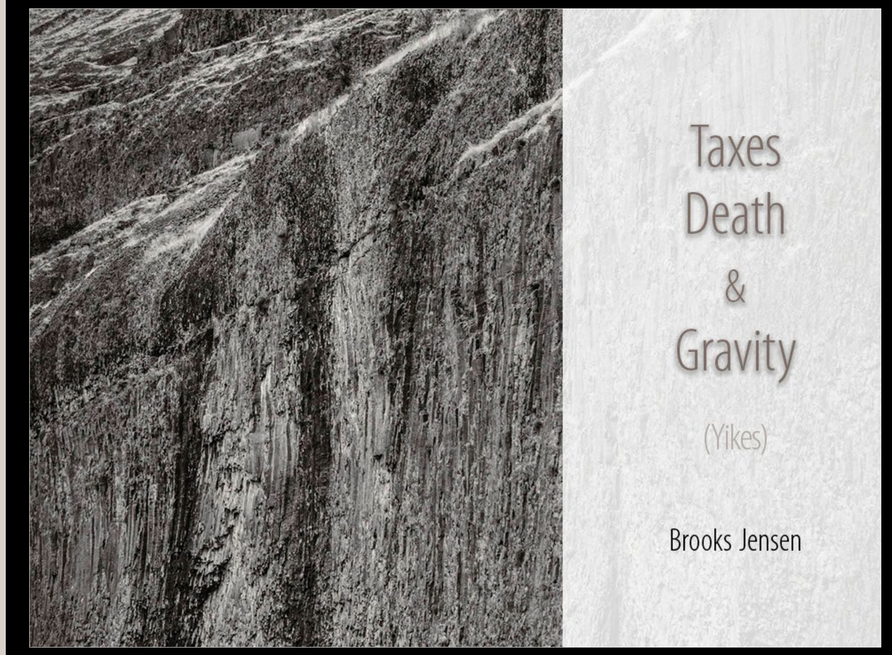
Brooks Jensen

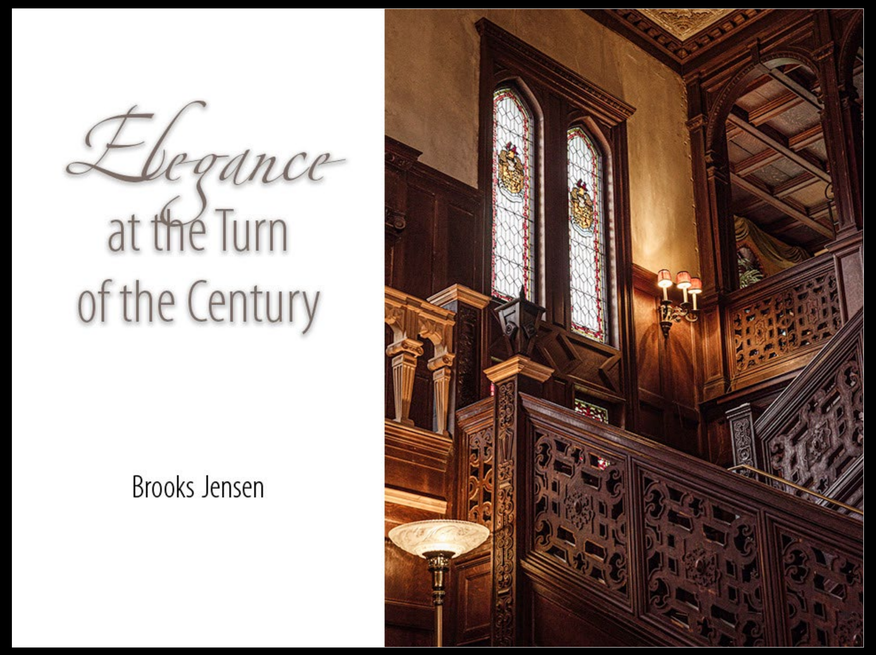
Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:

> The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, – for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, 'the heart of things.'




Notes

Support the Artist

More Issues of *Kokoro*

#177

# The Fall Colors of Ryoan-ji

# The Fall Colors of Ryoan-ji

Brooks Jensen

A visit to Kyoto is not complete until one sees the famous raked-rock temple gardens of Ryoan-ji. I'd dreamt for decades of seeing and photographing them.

Upon entering the temple grounds, I was not prepared for the colors. A sense of vibrant calm engulfed every nook and corner of the temple complex. I photographed the rock gardens, but was swept away by the fall colors.

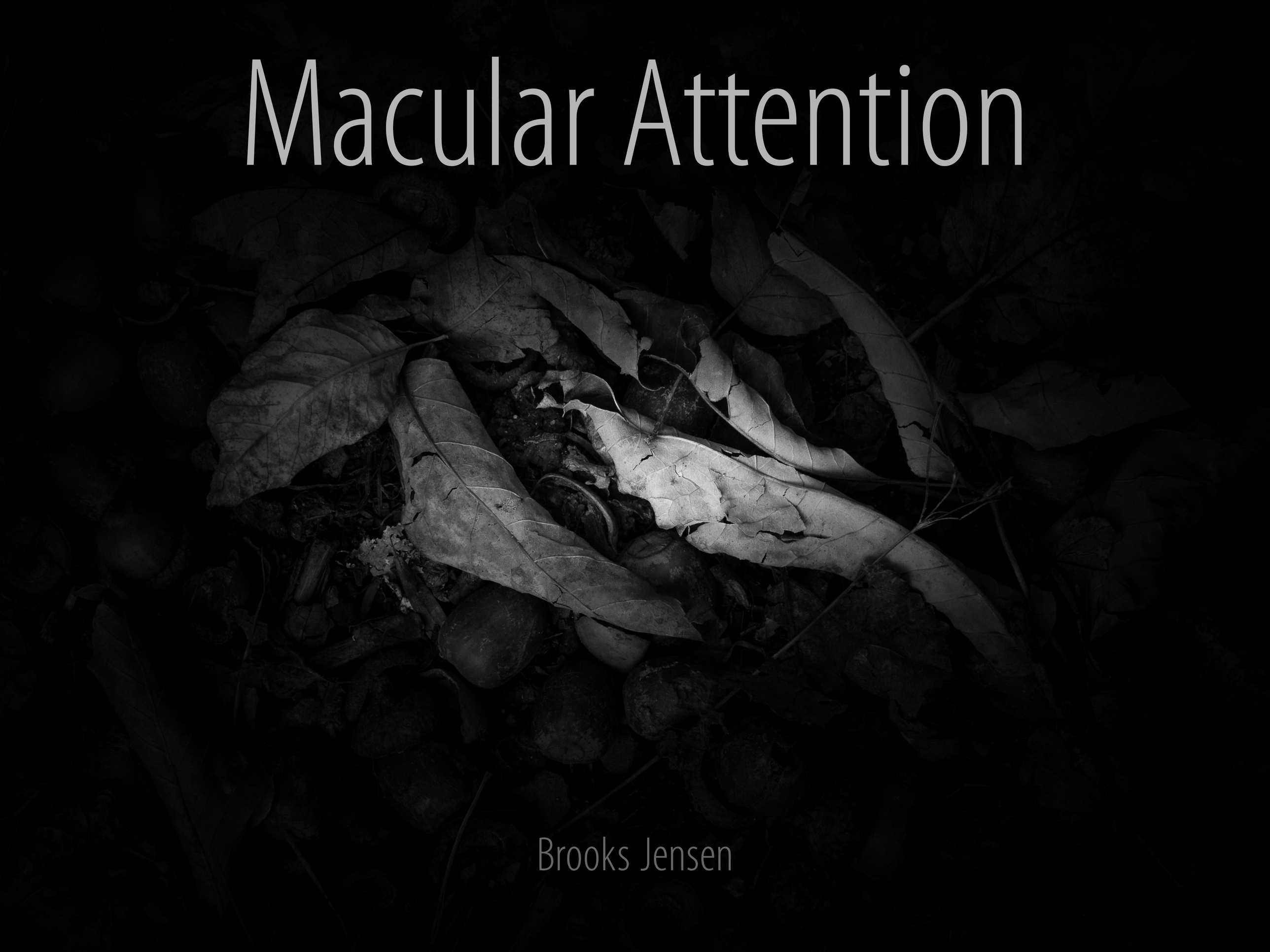
Sometimes what we find is more precious than what we seek.

拜觀謝絶
西源院

#178

# Macular Attention

# Macular Attention



Brooks Jensen

My mother-in-law had macular degeneration. I asked her what that was like. She said, “I can’t see what I look at. I only see the world in the periphery.” I know she was talking about her biological vision, but I couldn’t help but hear her wisdom as a caution for all of us – especially us artists.

Looking directly at them, she would not be able to see these photographs. Do we? Are we sufficienly appreciative that we can experience the world with macular attention?

#179

# Taxes, Death, and Gravity

# Taxes Death & Gravity

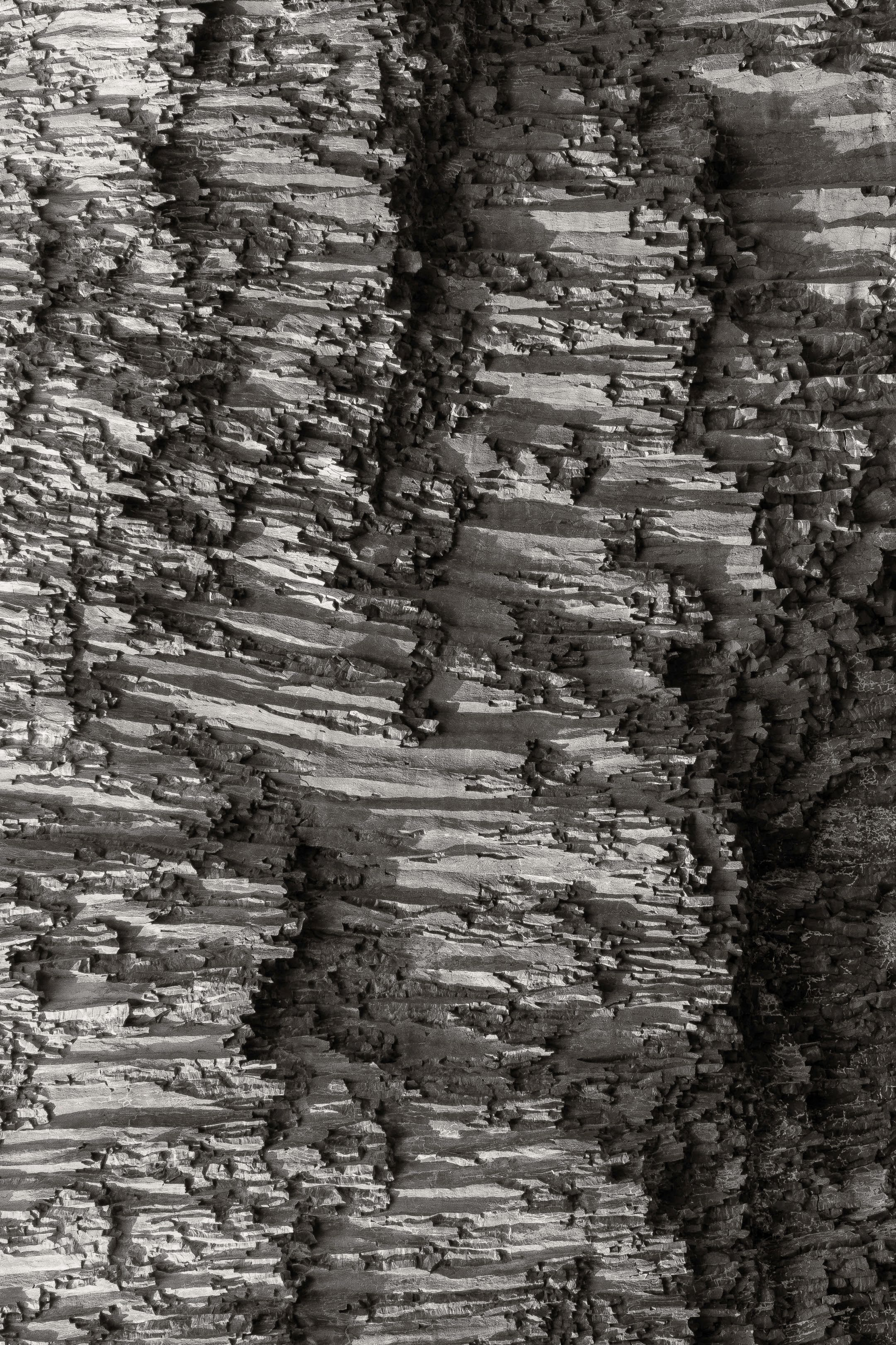
(Yikes)

Brooks Jensen

In *The Princess Bride*, the giant scales the Cliffs of Insanity with ease. I can't watch that scene because my terrors are just too visceral.

We may be able to resist and even conquer gravity – for a while – but eventually gravity wins. We all know it. Taxes, death, and gravity.

It seems the very planet cautions us against going one step too far. We call this knowledge "fear of heights." Cliffs of Insanity, indeed.



Yikes

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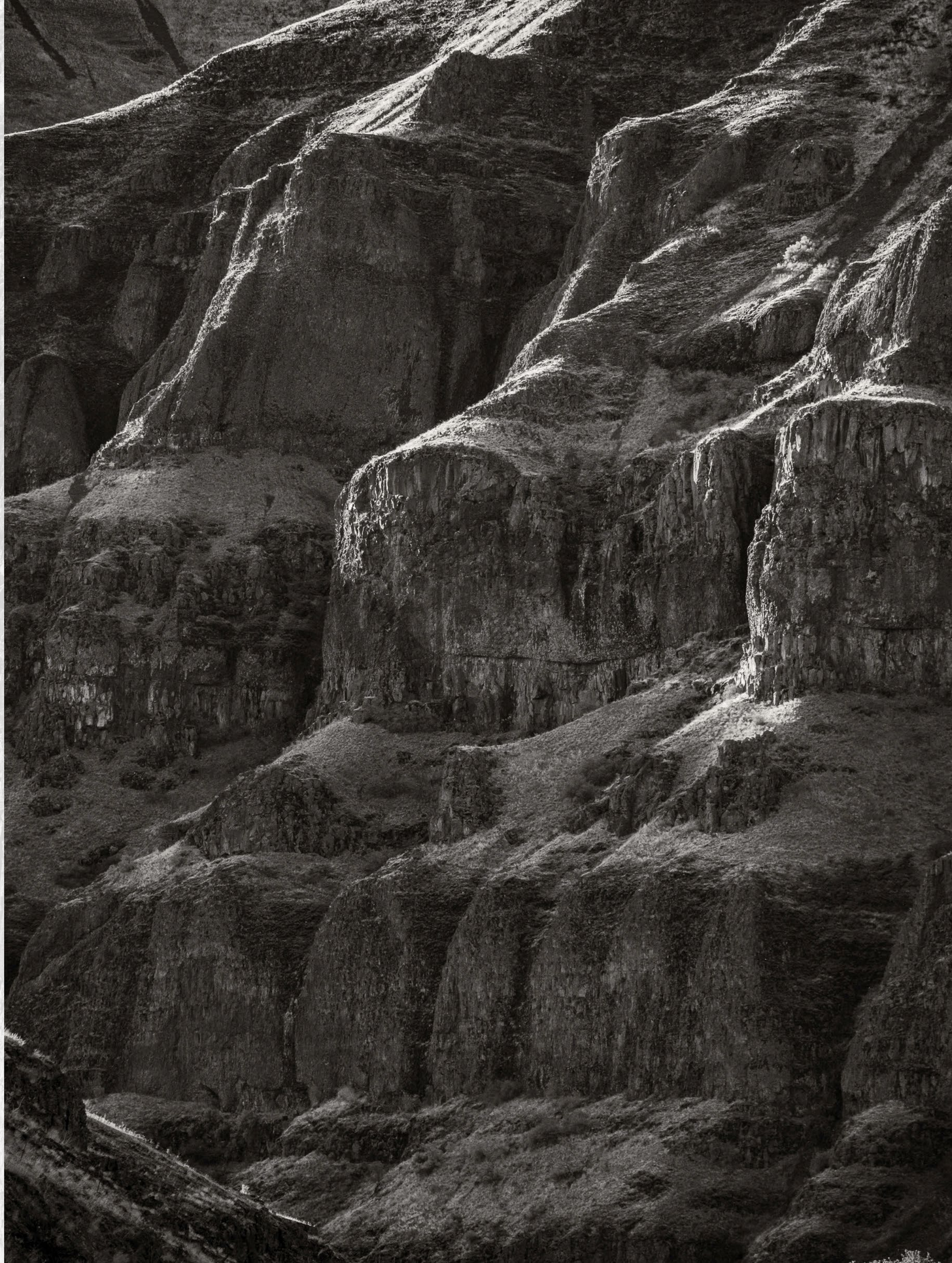

Yikes

Yikes

Yikes

Yikes

Yikes

#180

# Elegance at the Turn of the Century

# Elegance at the Turn of the Century

Brooks Jensen

Before television, before radio there was the parlor piano.

Before electric lights, there was the kerosene lamp.

Before today's aesthetic, there was elegance at the turn of the century – the dawn of the 1900s, that is.

These views come from three locations,
now preserved to remind us of what was.

# Ventfort Hall

Ventfort Hall is the 28,000 square foot seasonal Berkshire 'cottage' commissioned by Sarah Morgan (sister of J. P. Morgan) and her husband George H. Morgan, completed in 1893. Today, Ventfort Hall is owned and operated by Ventfort Hall Association, a non-profit dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the estate, sharing its unique and varied history, and creating a community space for arts & culture. (From Wikipedia)

Ventfort Hall is located at 104 Walker St, Lenox, MA 01240

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WALNUT HILL SCHOOL
NATICK, MASS.
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WALNUT HILL SCHOOL
NATICK, MASS.

# Presby House

Constructed in 1902 by Klickitat attorney Winthrop B. Presby (1859-1914), the Presby Mansion was a family residence, a boarding house for teachers, and a boarding house for railway workers. The Presby House was purchased in 1962 by the Klickitat County Historical Society and is now a museum.

The Presby Museum is a three-story, wood-frame structure with 22 rooms. The house is an interpretation of the Queen Anne style with a hipped roof and a wraparound porch. The design of the house originates from a plan book by George F. Barber called Modern Dwellings. The plan is called "A Sunny Southern Home". The house is located on a corner lot in the residential area of Goldendale, Washington. (From Wikipedia)

Presby House Museum is located at 127 W. Broadway St., Goldendale, WA 98620

Loring & Blake Organ Company
ncipal
Diapason
Tremolo
Melodia
Palace Organ

# Olana

In the mid-nineteenth century, Frederic Church (1826-1900) achieved success and fame as an American artist. His skill at aesthetic composition began with landscape painting and extended beyond traditional artistic mediums, influencing the development of this landscape and the spectacular views that make up the Olana experience. Between 1860 and 1900, Church, his wife Isabel, and their four children created a 250-acre living landscape, one of the most intact and well-preserved artistic environments in the United States.

For many years, the Churches called their property simply "the Farm." The name Olana first appeared written "Olâna" as the heading of a letter written by Isabel Church. It is likely that the Churches appreciated the associations this name had to their own Persian-inspired stone "fortress" situated high above the Hudson River with majestic views west to America's promised land. (From Wikipedia)

Olana State Historic Site is located at 5720 State Route 9G, Hudson, NY 12534

Chickering
PATENT
BOSTON, U.S.A.

DON QUIXOTE
DON QUIXOTE
DON QUIXOTE
DON QUIXOTE
EDWIN ARNOLD'S POEMS
THACKERAY
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VOL. 6.
SUN-ZUR
VOL. 4.
LOD-PICK

# Notes

## The Fall Colors of Ryoan-ji

Like all beautiful cities worldwide, there was so much — too much — to photograph in Kyoto, so I narrowed my efforts to temples and temple gardens. To make it easier to stop wherever I wanted to photograph, I rented an electric bicycle. On the third day, I crashed badly. Most of the photography during the rest of the trip was of places I could limp to. Trust me, take a taxi.

**Tech notes: This project was photographed entirely with two Panasonic Leica lenses that are the sharpest and most reliable lenses I've ever owned. The most used one was the 12-60mm, but the 50-200mm was my favorite.**

## Macular Attention

I owe thanks for this project to the late Jack Curran. This heavily vignetted aesthetic is so interesting, but I'd never seen it until Jack introduced me to his work. The aesthetic reminded me of the descriptions from Sue, my mother-in-law.

**Tech notes: The interesting thing about this technique is how well it works on all kinds of images. This project is of botanicals from several locations spread over 9 years. In order to preserve sharp focus, several of them use a technique known as "focus stacking."**

## Taxes, Death, & Gravity

Cliffs. It's not so much that I fear the cliffs themselves, but rather that I fear the wind that might blow me off the edge. Or losing my balance. Or the rocks giving out beneath my feet. If gravity would only be forgiving and less insistent, perhaps I'd be more comfortable. I'm not a physicist but I do understand the inevitableness of physics.

**Tech notes: These images of basalt cliffs are mostly from an area near the Columbia River. The cliffs are the result of layer after layer of molten lava flowing over millions of years and erosion from millennia of wind and water. For us photographers, time has created this ideal landscape of verticality. (One of these images was made with a Sony DSC-R1 early model of digital camera. I'll bet you cannot figure out which it is.)**

## Elegance at the Turn of the Century

Trying to photograph in upstate New York has been a challenge for a west coaster like me. After searching for west coast landscapes in the eastern states, I realized I was pursuing the wrong subjects. *Go with the flow.* I came to the obvious conclusion that the east coast has a history I wasn't familiar with. Duh. I turned my attention to that history and found Olana and Ventfort were close, accessible, and the nice folks in both locations were kind enough to grant permission to photograph to my heart's content.

Later, I stumbled upon another opportunity, but this time on the west coast in the small Washington town of Goldendale. Here again, the nice folks were happy to grant permission to photograph there. I discovered similarities to my east coast subjects as well as differences. Most importantly, I found the *era* of these locations joined them more than it distinguished them from each other.

**Tech notes: Amazingly, all three of these locations were photographed indoors, in dark rooms, with very high ISOs and longish shutter speeds. Thanks to DeNoise and camera stabilization advances, I was able to do all this work handheld without a tripod — and that includes lots of focus stacking with multiple shots.**

# Support the artist!

For over 40 years, Brooks has shared his photographic lessons, failures, inspiration, creative path — and more than a few laughs. If you've enjoyed his free *Kokoro* PDF publications, or been a long-time listener to his free audio commentaries (his weekly podcast *On Photography and the Creative Life*, or his daily *Here's a Thought* commentaries), here is your chance to tell him how much you appreciate his efforts. Support the artist!

Choose whichever level of support fits your appreciation and pocketbook. We thank you, he thanks you, and here's looking forward to the exciting content that is yet to come in all our *LensWork* publications and media as Brooks continues exploring this creative life.

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$25 Standing Ovation - You'll receive a signed copy of *Dreams of Japan*

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$500 Friend of the Arts - You'll receive a thank you of a signed original print with wall hanger plus a Full Quarto chapbook

$1000 Patron of the Arts - You'll receive a special thank you of, well, you'll see!

You can donate to support Brooks' creative life using this link. Thanks!

**Brooks Jensen** is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist books, and digital media publications.

He is the owner, co-founder (in 1993, with his late wife, Maureen), editor, and publisher of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 70 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly worldwide. His long-running weekly podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 1,490+ podcasts are available at *LensWork Online*, the LensWork members-only website. He also publishes a daily *Here's a Thought…* commentary with short inspiration for creative photographers. Again, all 2500+ are available to members of *LensWork Online*. Recent posts are available for free at www.lenswork.com

LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with the *LensWork Tablet Edition*, and *LensWork Extended Computer Edition* — a PDF-based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of sixteen books about photography and creativity: *Photography, Art, & Media* (2016); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *Single Exposures* (3 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); *Looking at Images* (2014); *The Best of the LensWork Interviews* (2016); *Seeing in SIXES* (2016); *Seeing in SIXES* (2017); *Seeing in SIXES* (2018); *Seeing in SIXES* (2019); *Our Magnificent Planet* (2020 and 2021), *Trilogies* (2022), and *Light Glorious Light* (2023). He has also published two printed monographs of his photography, *Made of Steel* (2012), and *Dreams of Japan* (2021).

*Kokoro* is a free, bi-monthly PDF e-publication of Brooks' personal work. Each issue of *Kokoro* includes either four or six independent projects. Both current and back issues are available for download at www.brooksjensenarts.com.


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