



ARTIST

Michael Greenlar

TITLE

Hmong war veteran, Xieng La, reminisces while holding a drawing depicting the fighting. Primarily a rice farmer, he supplements his income defusing old bombs.

DATE

2003

DIMENSIONS

18 in H x 12 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 16 x 20, from the exhibition Laos - Remnants of a Secret War

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2004.033

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-15B

MICHAEL GREENLAR

BORN

1953

BIRTHPLACE

Rochester, NY

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Light Work Grant, 1992
Light Work Grant, 1998
Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 2003
Lecturer, 2003
Light Work Gallery, 2006
Curator, 2006
Other, 2008 – 2018
Light Work Board Member

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 74
Contact Sheet 102
Contact Sheet 127

BIOGRAPHY

Michael Greenlar is a photographer for The Syracuse Post-Standard in Syracuse, NY. He received a Light Work Grant in 1992 and 1998.

ESSAYS

On August 15th, 1991, Michael Greenlar returned from Haiti and ultimately from a journey through the country's economic relationship with charcoal production. His photographs speak of the hardships of this economy in which charcoal serves as the only source of income for almost all rural families. Greenlar's black-and-white photographs are graphic depictions of those laborers who work the earth's 'blackened branches in exchange for a bare subsistence.' Michael Greenlar is a free-lance editorial photographer working out of Syracuse, NY. He was awarded a Light Work Grant in 1992. For 24 years we have been providing direct support through the Light Work Grant Program to photographers, photo-historians, and critics who reside within a 50-mile radius of Syracuse, NY. Light Work serves many different communities, and our local community of artists is an important link to the artists who participate in our programs from around the world. The Light Work Grant was conceived to show support and encouragement for artists living and working in Central New York and is one of the longest running photography fellowships in the country. Awards are made based on the quality of the applicants' portfolio and decisions are made by three judges who reside outside of the geographic grant area. The judges for 1998 were Bill Gaskins, photographer, writer, and Assistant Professor of African American Studies at the University of Missouri at Kansas City; Margaret Stratton, artist and Associate Professor of Photography at the University of Iowa; and Bill McDowell, artist and Assistant Professor of Photography at East Texas State University. The three recipients each received a \$1,000 fellowship, and their work was exhibited in the Light Work Gallery from June 1 to August 15, 1998. We extend our congratulations to each recipient for their well deserved award and their contribution to the vital cultural community in Central New York. The recipients of the 24th Annual Light Work Grants in Photography: In 1988 Michael Greenlar (Syracuse, NY) began documenting the life of the late Lena Jerome Nottaway, an 84-year-old Algonquin matriarch. The Algonquin people have used the Canadian Ottawa River Basin for over ten millenniums, and Greenlar has been photographing their attempts to maintain a traditional lifestyle in the Canadian bush. To her people Lena Jerome Nottaway was a living example of sustaining self-sufficiency. Greenlar's photographs depict her life as spiritual counselor, mid-wife, medicine woman, hunter, trapper, fisherman, craftsman and caretaker for the grieving and the dying in her community. Michael Greenlar is a freelance editorial photographer, and his work has appeared in Time, Life, and the New York Times Magazine, among others. Dede Hatch (Ithaca, NY) began the series Close to Home in response to a friend's 9-year battle with cancer. During this time the artist began to question life, death, and fairness. As her daily walk with her dog became increasingly important, she realized her home, yard, and the fields around her home were full of life and subtle possibility, and she began to photograph these familiar places and things. According to the artist, "It was a process of escape and connection at the same time, which is what photography is so good at." Through these humble and reflective images Hatch shows us the acute process of grieving and acceptance. Dede Hatch is a professional photographer and her work has been published in several books, including Our Grandmothers: Loving Portraits by 74 Granddaughters, edited by Linda Sunshine, and published by Stewart, Tabouri and Chang, and Happy Motoring: Canine Life in the Fast Lane, edited by Jon Winokur and Norrie Epstein, and published by Abbeville Press. In the series Spaces Between, Janice Levy (Ithaca, NY) depicts quite literally the physical distance that separates houses. After overhearing some intimate conversations across the narrow driveway that separates her home from her neighbors, Levy began to think about the physical boundaries and personal boundaries that define her own space. In searching for a way to articulate this space between she began to photograph in her immediate neighborhood. About the series she states, "...the images reveal a less tangible phenomenon: the implication of the inadvertent blending of lives which takes place as a result of close physical proximity." Janice Levy is an Associate Professor of Photography at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY. Her work has been exhibited widely including CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY, and The American Culture Center, Madagascar. Mary Lee Hodgens When working in the field, Michael Greenlar resembles a chameleon adapting to its environment. Wearing black pants, a vest, and a forest green shirt, he recedes into the background, often standing to the side to watch his subjects as they naturally interact with one another, creating various compositions he will capture. His photo essay, Remnants of a Secret War, is the result of six trips to a remote mountainous region in Laos to document the lives of the Hmong people, who have been forgotten by those responsible for their present circumstances. Greenlar travels through seven airports under the guise of a tourist in order to reach the Xiangkhong Province. Every return trip, he brings along the prints from the last visit and a Polaroid camera to share his pictures with his subjects. Though he's admittedly drawn to people without a voice, the inspiration for Greenlar's work is often "just something that happens. Each trip you come away with a different part of the story," he explains. This story helps us imagine the physical reality of the Hmong people's lives in a land dotted with the remains of over two metric tons of bombs dropped by the U.S. throughout the mountains of Laos during the war in Vietnam. It also tells of the resourcefulness of a people who rely on each other, and on those very bombs, for their livelihood. The Hmong are migrants who have always used natural resources as a means of survival. They are organized into clans, and each household is an

active participant in the cultivation of crops. The children live constantly in the presence of adults, and gain knowledge about all aspects of their culture at an early age. The Hmong are careful to teach their beliefs in shamanism and animism, as well as their customs and survival methods, to each new generation. The ingenuity and resilience of these people enables them to reuse the deadly artifacts they've inherited as a critical source of metal, despite their extreme danger. Greenlar speaks vehemently about the bombs, particularly cluster bombs: "They have been using them in Iraq, Afghanistan, [and] Kosovo. They're really nasty little things. They're everywhere. So these are kind of like little calling cards that we have left all over the world. Cluster bombs are not considered land mines. They fall between the cracks in a lot of treaties and weapons bans." His photographs juxtapose images of happiness and horror, grittiness and innocence, poverty and family. Scenes of blacksmiths converting the bombshells into tools for farming and into large pots for feeding their animals or planting flowers show how strong the Hmong are, and how incredible their will to move forward is. Their use of these shells as fences or feeding troughs represents their yearning and struggle for normalcy. The emotions on their faces, and the emotions we feel when we learn of their story, connect us as humans. Like so many people in our war-torn world, the Hmong ask for no more than survival. Greenlar's use of black-and-white film emphasizes the scarcity in the scenes, which magnifies our sense of the suffering endured by these people. Black-and-white is less intrusive and more direct, allowing the viewer to focus on the content and message behind Greenlar's work. The strong lines construct discreet visuals as they split certain frames, representing the split in people's lives before and after the war. Greenlar's passion and dedication to his work are symbolized by the yellow string he wears around his wrist for good luck and prosperity—a tradition borrowed from the Hmong culture, and related to the photograph he took of an older Hmong woman wearing many similar strings around her wrists. As he looks at the picture he smiles and says, "She's going to have much more luck than me," and one can sense the lightheartedness he enjoys with his subjects. When asked how he chooses what he wants to shoot for the day or what pictures to use in an essay, he says, "Things just reveal themselves to you when they want to." What gets revealed in this series, with the unabridged honesty of a humanist, is the truth being told in a beautiful way. Michael Greenlar lives in Syracuse, NY and has traveled to Laos six times to photograph the resilient people of the Hmong territory. Michael Greenlar's essay was written as part of a collaborative class project by Syracuse University students in Eileen Moeller's writing class, WRT 422: Studies in Creative Nonfiction, Images That Speak: Writing About Photographs. Off Shoots: Post-Standard Staff Photographers is an exhibition of images made during off hours by the photography staff at The Syracuse Post-Standard. Created without the promise of payment or publication, or the pressure of a deadline, this personal work presents us with the unique approach and aesthetic of each artist. Each staff photographer has their own style in their personal work, and each has their own subjects and projects that they like to explore. David Lassman enjoys travel photography, and has recently made trips to India and Tibet. He uses photography outside of the newspaper to "recharge his batteries." Gary Walts has always told people that he was born to take photographs, whether he is doing so at work or on his own time. He finds himself feeling uncomfortable when he doesn't have a camera around. Even if he just carries a point-and-shoot camera with him, it's like having a sketch book to capture photos he would otherwise miss, and ideas to refer back to later. Of his personal work he says, "Photography is so versatile and has so many applications that it allows you to express yourself in every way possible. That's how I use it. I took photos before I ever got paid to do it—the job is simply icing on the cake. I still photograph for myself daily." According to Michelle Gabel, "Everyday while working for the newspaper I'm documenting the lives of other people. It's also important that I document my own life—my family, friends, surroundings, and the quirky incidents that make life rich. Photography has given me a vehicle to see, and I want to see everything in my life." According to Li-Hua Lan, if you really love photography it is much more than just a job. The daily schedule of these staff photographers can include high school sports, local politics, human interest stories, and weekly features. Within the last two years they have traveled to cover the war in Iraq, cultural history in Ghana, West Africa, the beatification of Mother Cope in both Hawaii and in Italy, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. According to Gary Walts, "The job exposes me to many situations where I make photos that normally would not interest me. Sports is a good example." Enamored with reality, press photographers spend most of their assignment time driving to and waiting for split-second story telling moments. These edited moments are displayed in tomorrow's newsprint and on computer screens, and in the best light bring not only credibility and legitimacy, but also an essence of communication. The job can be viewed by the public with both adoration and contempt, from Pulitzer to paparazzi. Platitudes like "you get paid to do this" and "you are living my dream" can change quickly at a crime scene when you become a hindrance or the brunt of frustration from some public safety official, with the photographer responding "I'm only doing my job, don't kill the messenger." Technically the photographers in this exhibition have made a seamless transition from film to a digital platform, and most recently they are meeting the challenge of web-based publishing. The evolution of technology continually transforms the role of the newspaper photographer. From wet plate to megapixels, there has always been and always will be a learning curve mixture of art, craft, and technology when trying to get the image to the reader as quickly and efficiently as possible. For the first time the newspaper photographer of the twenty-first century has an option of being a phantom, with the possibility of never actually having to step back into the office again. This is possible through e-mailed assignments, direct deposit paychecks, and wireless transmissions from everyone, including the nearest Nice and Easy service station. With an average newspaper experience of more than fifteen years, this group of photographers tells stories everyday with a single image. The photographers featured in this exhibition include John Berry, Ellen Blalock, Dick Blume, Al Campanie, Steve Cannerelli, Peter Chen, Jim Commentucci, Michelle Gabel, Michael Greenlar, Li-Hua Lan, David Lassman, Nick Lisi, C. W. McKeen, Dennis Nett, Carrie Niland, Hal Slate, Stan Walker, Gary Walts, and Gloria Wright. Off Shoots: Post-Standard Staff Photographers captures the stories of their personal lives, creative interests, and passion for their livelihood. Michael Greenlar This exhibition was on view at Light Work from June 1 to September 28, 2006. Michael Greenlar is a photographer for The Syracuse Post-Standard in Syracuse, NY. He received a Light Work Grant in 1992 and 1998.