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PHOTOGRAPHER MARY LOUISE RAVESE

Blurring the Lines

THE ESSENCE OF NATURE | BY SALLY PFOUTZ



Mary Louise Ravese
Photograph by Neil Steinberg at Photoworks

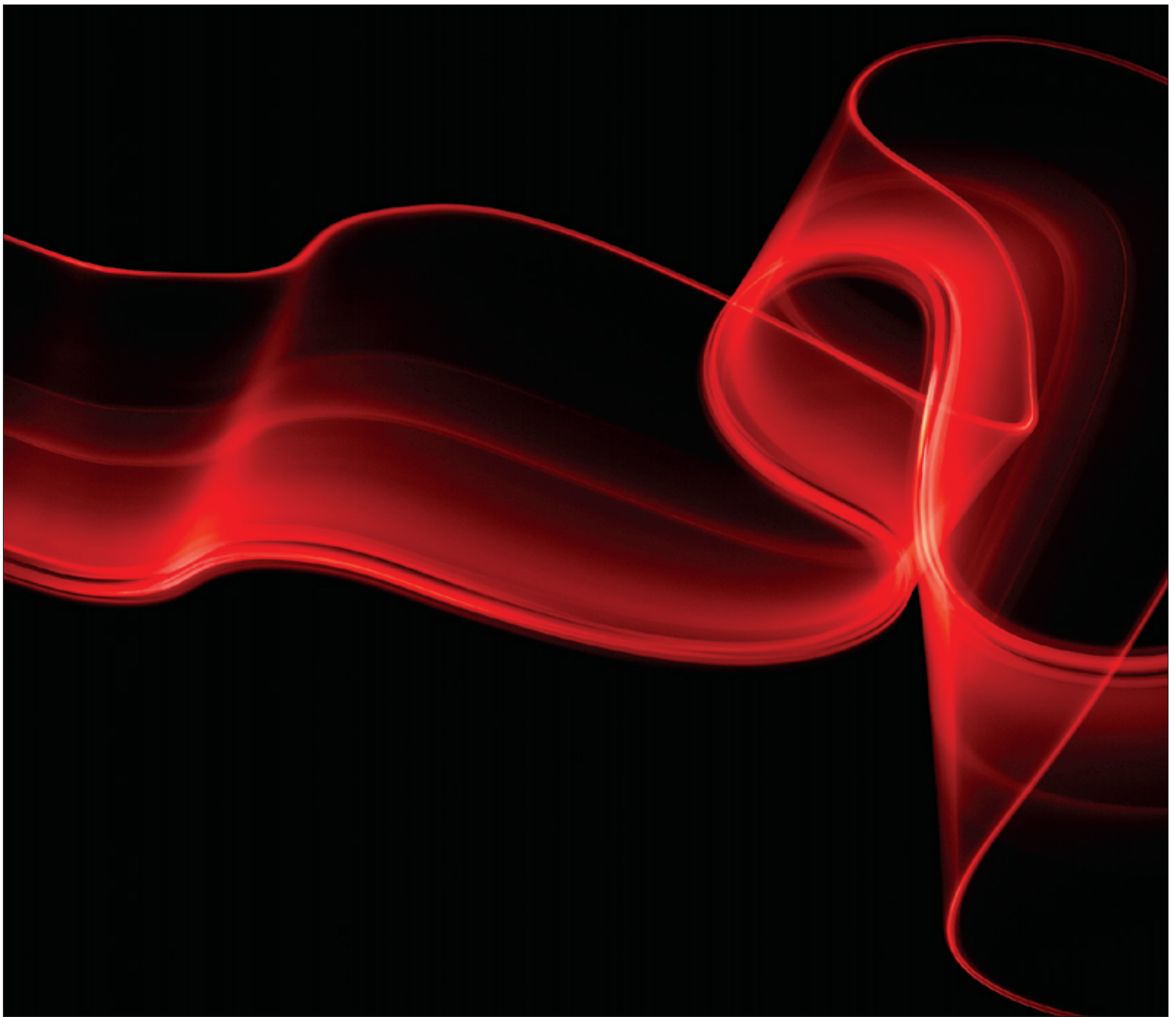
Visit Bella Vista Photography and prepare to be surprised. Many of artist-owner Mary Louise Ravese's images are not what they seem. When looking at her work, people often ask, "Is it a photograph or a painting?" Often the subject itself is a mystery. The striking abstracts in her *Enigma* collection, for example, are true-to-life images of light patterns streaming through a Monet-inspired stained glass window in a cathedral in Vernon, France, and reflected in a hammered brass baptismal font.

"When the sun was behind the clouds, the colors were softer," says Mary Louise. "When the sun shone through, the colors were more intense. What delights me is that this is what it looked like in the camera." What sets Mary Louise apart from so many current photographers is her method of setting up a shot beforehand to capture exactly what she wants rather than manipulating a

photograph on the computer afterwards.

"Aside from auto-focus, I use my professional Canon camera equipment in manual mode, and my carbon fiber tripod is an almost constant companion," she says, noting that the tripod enables her to frame the image precisely.

"I'm trying to blur lines between traditional photography and fine art 'painterly' photography," Mary Louise says. To demonstrate, she places a silk rose against a sheet of textured iridized stained glass and shines a light on it. Suddenly we are no longer looking at a silk rose. "Pay attention to the reflection," she says. "That's what we're photographing, not the flower itself. The texture of the glass distorts the flower's reflection giving it a dreamy, painterly look. Depending on the angle that the light is striking the iridized coating on the glass, different colors reflect off the glass and create a wonderful effect."



Above: "Ribboning Light"

Opposite, left: "Monarch Cascade"; and
"Jupiter," from Enigma Collection
All are color photographs.

Another special element of Mary Louise's artistry is the attention she pays to "completing the mood of the piece." She chooses paper, mat and frame specific to each individual work of art. Photographs in the *Enigma* series were printed on special paper with a metallic quality that enhances the richness of the colors. A silk mat and acid-washed frame bring out the shimmery effect of the colors.

For "Succulent," which at first glance doesn't look anything like the cute little hens-and-chicks that are a mainstay of rock gardens, Mary Louise took advantage of the blue light naturally present in the shade. She then printed the image on watercolor paper and mounted it floating in a frame, the texture of which mimics the pattern of the subject.

In the making of "Mystical Sunrise," Mary Louise discovered "the importance of preparing mind, body

and spirit to make images that go beyond snapshot documentation to images that convey emotion and mood." The image was made on the last day of a three-day photography summit in the Adirondacks.

"The End of the Day" is a powerful portrait of a horse drive in Colorado. Mary Louise wanted to capture the group head-on, so she ran to the open corral gates, climbed up on the timber frames, set up her shot, held her breath and started shooting. "The sunlight caught the horses' manes, the dust created an incredible atmosphere, and I was able to slightly silhouette the cowboy against the horses to create another element of mystery," she says. "As the horses came through, I felt them brush by and I thought, where's the movie camera? I feel like I'm in the middle of a western and man, I hope I get this shot."

Mary Louise, who has an electrical engineering



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degree from MIT, had a fifteen-year career in high-tech consulting that took her across the world. "Along the way, photography played an important role," she says. "Photography is my form of yoga. It helps calm and center me."

A key influence at MIT was Professor Harold "Doc" Edgerton. "Doc invented the strobe light, which made high-speed photography possible," Mary Louise explains. "Doc's photographs were groundbreaking, but I appreciated how they also demonstrated artistry."

While living in California, Mary Louise studied photography at UC Berkeley and Santa Cruz. "Professional nature photographer Barbara Brundage was my critical mentor," says Mary Louise. "She encouraged me to go pro."

Bella Vista Photography is located in Waterford, where Mary Louise lives with her husband Carl Zetie and their son Joey. Several times a year, she teaches an introductory class for digital photographers, as well as classroom and field workshops like "Creativity Lab" and "Painterly Still Life Photography." In addition to offering customized private lessons, Mary Louise conducts photo tours. This spring, she is leading a travel photography workshop on the French Riviera. Summer brings a butterfly photography workshop at a conservatory in Maryland, and in the fall, she is scheduled to teach



Above: "Waves of Grain," Palouse region of Washington State; and "Succulent"

Opposite top: "Rushing Water," Ricketts Glen State Park, Pennsylvania; and "End of the Day," Craig County, Colorado
All are color photographs



at a workshop in California's wine country with photographer Charles Needle.

"Teaching encourages me to continue developing creatively," Mary Louise says. "My engineering background helps me to teach the more complicated technical aspects of photography in a way that can be more easily understood."

Student Marji Grubic says, "If you can't get a shot the way you want, Mary Louise will come over, and no matter what kind of camera you're using, she'll suggest a different setting or angle, and you get what you want."

Another student, Coriolana (Coco) Simon, invited Mary Louise to speak at the Silver Spring Camera Club. "The way Mary Louise approaches communication with a group is clear, lucid and articulate," says Coco. "She is a joy to learn from and she makes an extraordinary contribution to the artistic."

Mary Louise is a regular competition judge and speaker for camera clubs. Her photographs are in private, university and corporate collections. She sells her work in art shows from Massachusetts to North Carolina. Her work can be purchased locally at Applegate Gallery in Vienna.

Mary Louise Ravese
www.bellavistaphotography.com