

OVERTURE CENTER PLAYHOUSE GALLERY



Landscapes & Mindscapes



PHOTOGRAPHY BY STARLIGHT TEWS & JOHN RIGGS

Landscapes & Mindscapes:

A PHOTOGRAPHIC SYNTHESIS OF TWO DIVERGENT RESPONSES TO THE NATURAL WORLD

Dane County's gentle landscape and the Great Plains and Mountains to the west serve both as primary source material and a source of inspiration to Madison-based professional fine art photographers StarLight Tews and John Riggs. The work of both photographers share the common assumption that the meaning of our lives is largely formed and framed by the shapes, colors, weather, and geography about us.

Through the work of these two photographers we are provided the opportunity to compare and contrast a fundamental difference between two apparently divergent world views, one essentially Eastern, the other Western.

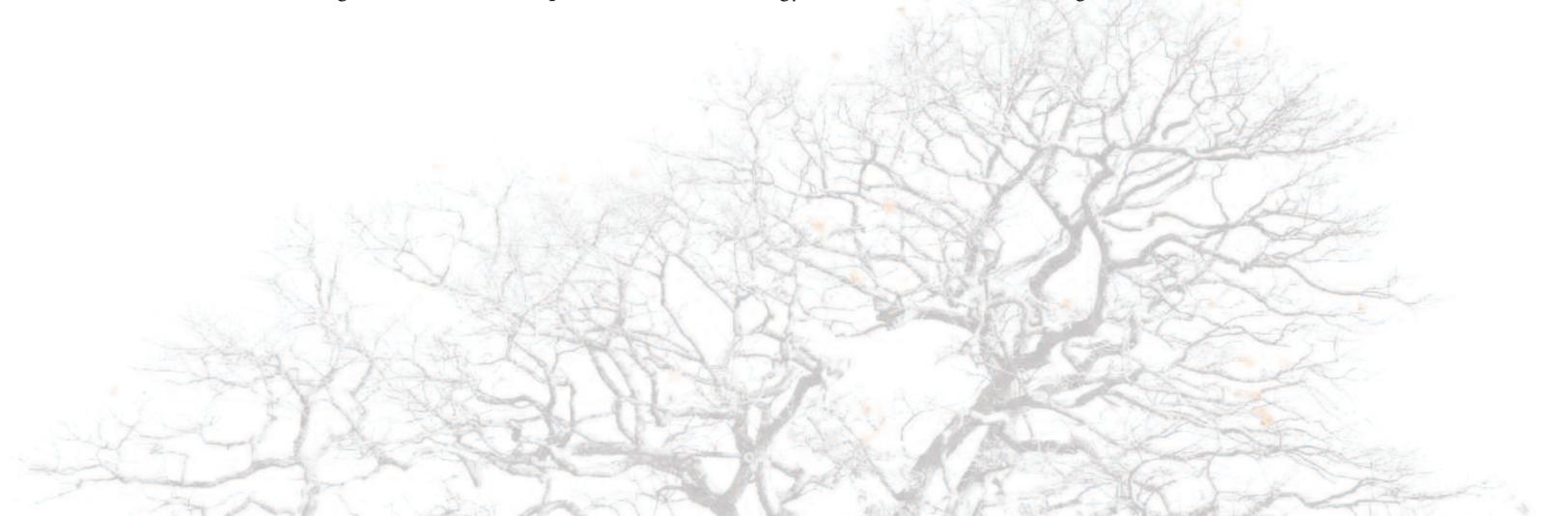
StarLight Tews' work is a brilliant example of the former. Deconstructing the world through her camera lens, she extracts bits and pieces of her experience of the natural setting to build vast mental/emotional landscapes, or "Mandalas." Be it in the journey around the circumference or the pathways that lead us to the center, these stunning circles of meaning and beauty evoke a meditative reality, leading us into new internal and subjective depths. Underlying this approach is the view that what we know of the real world outside of ourselves is a mental construct: to discover real meaning we must dive deep inside to create our own.

By contrast, the landscapes of **John Riggs**, with accompanying textual captions, look outward to discover our relationship to what is beautiful, meaningful, and/or evocative in nature as we observe it. The landscape becomes a mirror, a reflection of an internal spiritual continuum, and to journey across the land is to journey across the emotional landscape of the human heart. To feel deeply is to enter into relationship with the world outside of ourselves and the people and places in it.

These two apparently opposing views of the nature of reality are equally powerful. Indeed, for thousands of years they have disrupted communications between cultures. Some would argue that they have been equally confounding to relations between the genders when the circular, rotating, internal, and essentially subjective female expressions meet the traditionally linear, horizontal, rational, external, or "objective" male world.

By intermingling these two worldviews, coexisting side-by-side in meditative absorption, as it were, the viewer is first given the opportunity to experience the jolt of opposing truths - then guided to experience the pleasure of a resolution of a universal conflict that exists, on one level or another, within all of us.

Inherent in the work of both artists are visual suggestions toward resolution of such apparent opposites. Both are concerned with the primary relationship with the inner and outer worlds. By joining the Yin with the Yang, the inward-looking with the outward-looking, fire with ice, our hope is that sufficient energy for fusion and resolution is generated.





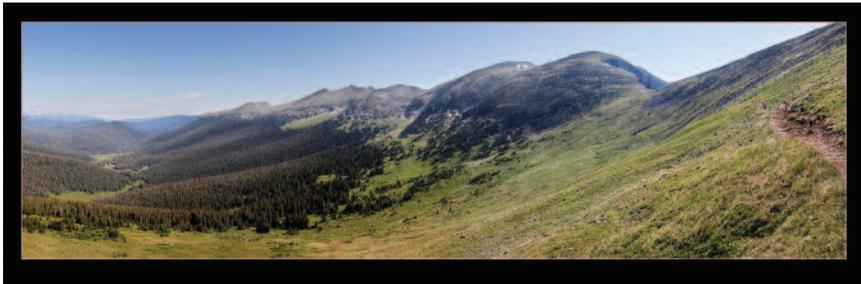
Ponderosa Pines

Climbing to elevation out of the lush coniferous forests of Rocky Mountain National Park is to experience the thrill of emergence. The forest, filled with subdued, filtered morning sunlight and redolent with its thick carpet of needles and rotting bark, gives the sensation of warmth and shelter. But in just a few steps this security gives way to the fierce alertness of exposure, like throwing the blankets off on a cold winter's morning to begin the day.



Tree Galaxy

Floating through space, amidst the spiraling gasses, each with its own atmosphere and inhabitants; on one planet among countless galaxies of others—Life teems! In the center, life is gestating yet more life....Seeds are readying to burst forth into new saplings! And where there is life, other lifeforms will fit into the whole matrix, as we learn to nurture, co-exist and thrive!



Mt. Chiquita Sweep

Tree Line is that place of dynamic transition in our lives when periodically everything we have put together falls apart, comes tumbling down as it eventually must, and we are stripped naked in an unfamiliar landscape of the spirit, afraid. At

Tree Line, whatever it is we must leave behind becomes apparent. We are surprised to discover the landscape of our past littered with compromise, with indignity, with levels of deception we would never have accepted if recognized. The resurgent spirit—with an unfamiliar exuberance and the help of a thousand angels—begins the sacred work of reweaving the elements of our lives into a tapestry rich with unexpected possibilities. We are led to a new freedom, a new happiness. So we grow, so we age. If we can but endure the bracing harshness of Tree Line the possibility of joy in the now becomes no longer a distant dream.

Andrews Sweep

The radical and abrupt transition in ecosystems at Tree Line is the result of a dynamic interplay of all the complex, powerful systems required for life. In this zone an altitude gain of five hundred feet is the equivalent of traveling a thousand miles north. All the factors required to support and sustain life become critical variables in an intense and ever-changing life-and-death struggle, played out in the flora and fauna that one sees on the gentle sunny sweeping slopes of the southwest side of the



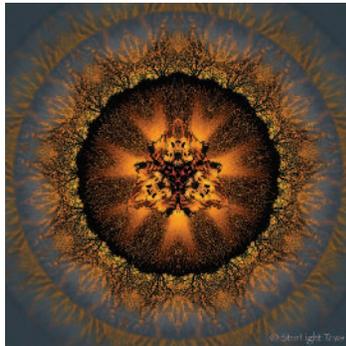
mountains versus the craggy, brutal, cold, melodramatically vertical drops of the northeast side of the mountains.

Mt. Ida Sweep

At altitude priorities change. Things that preoccupy us while in the thick forest of our lives dissipate and blow away in the wind, making room for bigger thoughts,



thoughts of love, thoughts of beauty and connection, certainly thoughts of Gods and Goddesses. Waves of unknown energy of uncertain origin move through us during such exertion, making us a little euphoric, even lightheaded. We become so alive every cell in our body feels this expansion to a new level of physical consciousness. Our senses, alert to the ever changing vistas and weather conditions, tell us we have reawakened after a long sleep, and that all is right with the world. That we can relax now and let go, and grow.



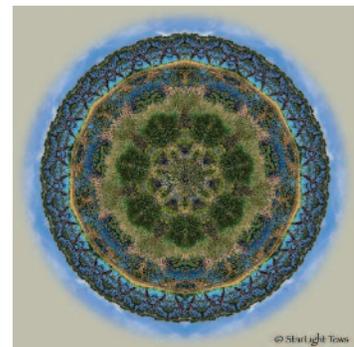
Bonfire at Sunset

The transition between day and night reveals a magical time of reflection and reverie. Being with the energy of a sunset can crack open our minds and help us access life's innermost secrets. Compound this with staring into the flames of a large bonfire for such inward musings.

Lily Pond

There are power spots that we come upon in one's travels that are quite enchanting and transfixing.

This pond is such a place. As a whole little world unto itself, this design beckons one to ponder the natural, and reminds us of a pristine world we desire to live in.



Phoenix

Be dazzled by this transforming energetic depiction of the moving force of FIRE! Starting in the center with the embers, move out with the flames, blast off with the sparks, and soar with the birds of flame, rising from the ashes. So named the Phoenix.....

Haystacks

I was so taken by what I discovered in backwater Nebraska, but found so difficult to photograph, that I return now each year, the proverbial journey now having become part of the destination. But now I travel with a tent, sleeping bag, and provisions in my car so I don't have to worry about finding beds or restaurants. The distances are great and the facilities few, and so outfitted, I let the landscape guide me where it will.

The desolation and loneliness of Nebraska is vast, and like the desolation of a broken heart, seems endless. There is no way around Nebraska, just like there is no way around a broken heart, and one is forced to simply move through it without dying, to surrender in the face of its implacable demands—to learn how to simply stay alive in the face of this overwhelming sadness.

Yet even here one comes upon signs of life. A well-tended farm appears, lucky in rain, like an oasis of the spirit, a reminder of hope. A promise of life after divorce. I tire of the melodrama and self-indulgence of despair, and hit the gas, hard, in a tear-filled determination to get to the mountains before dark.





A World of Their Own—A vibrant look into the life of a horse. These animals live in rich pastures, lucky to be flanked with companions, and can run to their heart's content. This piece is a departure from my usual work, perhaps a reminder that fun and frolicking are an essential part of balance in our harried world.

The Way West I, Straw Fields & Storm

A good deal of life is been spent hurrying, speeding down life's I-80's towards some distant imagined milestone. But while preparing oneself with new information and new skills to become something or someone more; while every moment is spent hastening to the next moment, do we not do so at the expense of the present?



There doesn't seem to be any sensible ending to this story line of endlessly rushing to the next moment. The simple fact of mortality imposes its own ending, overriding and contradicting the inner logic of the story we live. It calls to us to stop this nonsense, that everything we need is already right here, right now. What would happen if we just took the next exit then stopped, dead in our tracks, out in the middle of somewhere, nowhere?

What I found off of life's I-80 was stillness, 106 degrees, and a solitude so intense the dry wind seemed to be the sole remaining significant feature.

Oasis

In the desert, water is a precious commodity—sometimes just a pool from a scant rain on a rock mesa. When one looks closely, we see that life depends on and fully utilizes this, from the snakes and lizards, to the elusive flowers, all living out their cycles amidst this scarcity.



The Way West II, Road & Green Sand Hills

Perhaps it is due to the incessant wind, in combination with the intense heat and the absence of features other than the vast rolling sands, that gives the Sand Hill country its characteristic feeling of solitude and privacy. The eye attaches to a lone, distant windmill like a cow to the water trough below it.

Most landscapes I wouldn't dream of trying to photograph without living in them. But Nebraska is different, I don't want to live here. I want to wander around for a few days exploring this loneliness, then get on quickly to the mountains. Though I find the solitude comforting and seductive, here there is an underlying anxiety that keeps me moving. The frontier men and women who settled and tried to forage a livelihood in this rigorous windswept isolation seemed in many accounts prone to depression, if not outright insanity. The few who remain are connected to the world by satellite, and carry cell phones in their pockets and short wave radios in their six wheel pick-ups. I do not experience warmth or friendliness, and in my occasional encounters with them they seem distant, distracted, and disconnected.





Tree Spirits

One can get lost in the trees, so to speak. Spending time in nature's lacy limbs, we recognize the very branching that happens within our own bodily matrices. Using the concept of bilateral symmetry and mirroring the images, little 'spirit beings' are born, as we can see two arms, legs, eyes etc., in the patterns, and feel the structures of the trees come alive. Trees always have a vital and stimulating effect on me. I acknowledge and salute their resplendence daily!

Coal Train

Nebraska was always the dreaded state to hurry across while heading for the mountains. Perhaps it was the occasional pale green-blue strip of the distant Platte River willows that filled my imagination with vision of covered wagons and star filled nights. Wolves howled, and the native Americans massed in the silent pre-dawn to fend off the invading intruders into their land—us.



During idle winter hours the memory of these images haunted me, causing me to want to photograph them. But this seemed impossible because in my mind I always saw the river from a perspective of several hundred feet in the air, and along the Platte River I had never seen any hills. In fact this child of the dendritic drainage patterns of Wisconsin idly wondered how, with no apparent change of elevation for it to flow from or to, it could even be a river at all? I gave myself the assignment: "Ok smartass, you think you're such a hotshot, go photograph Nebraska!"



Long's Peak Basin

Like many, I have come to rely on this annual trek above Tree Line for nourishment, for the opportunity to throw off the covers of all the accumulated

habits, events, and emotional detritus of the past year. To climb out of the protective dark stillness of the forest and reach this exposed, brilliant, sun-filled zone of glacial-chilled, rarified air, sweeping vistas, and windswept saddles is to take a breathtaking leap into a new mindspace. The shortage of oxygen helps, as does the heart-pounding exertion required to ascend the endlessly steep trails. The past, with its successes and failures alike, drifts away to the east like so much insignificant dust in the ever present wind, and I am opened to the gifts of the munificent present—joy, beauty, and a small measure of peace. I am brought gently into relationship with all that is not me, and achieve some much needed perspective.

Everything we see "out there" is but a reflection of an internal spiritual continuum, and to journey across the land is to journey across the emotional landscape of the human heart. To feel deeply is to enter into relationship with the world outside of ourselves and the people and places in it. To photograph this landscape while connected thus is to express our deepest humanity and add our voice to the choir in praise.



Desert Renewal

Nature shows us that even in the shadow of destruction, chaos and ruin, LIFE is so powerful as to renew itself and flourish once again. Here I've highlighted a burn, with the sun coming through the flames and smoke, the trees being consumed by fire. This image is a metaphor for life after death, our pick-up after a fall, the very energy of continued growth despite our hardships. I felt particularly surprised and blessed with the appearance of the 'angels,' as I was simply working with the smoke to fill the four corners.

JOHN RIGGS

Student: Attended Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio; L'Universite Besancon, Besancon, France; and the Universities of Tubingen and Berlin in Germany before graduating from the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a BA in Comparative Literature in 1969.

Photographer: Held various Solo Photography shows in Chicago, UW Madison Memorial Union, and University of Minnesota Mankato Art Department Galley 1967 through 1976, plus hung in a dozen various juried exhibitions long forgotten. During this period specialized in large format (up to 8') black and white landscapes, nudes, and candid portraiture in nature.

Engineer and Businessman: Hung up my camera in my thirties to go into the Engineering business and raise a family, designing and building precision automation equipment and distributing machined parts to manufacturers. Founding member/partner in Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing Cooperative in 1980, and in 1999 sold my stock in that business to start my own company SourceOne Solutions LLC.

Photographer: After some thirty years in the Engineering business, bought a Canon 5D and began exploring the brave new world of Digital Color, selling my business in December of 2007, returning full time to my original love - photography.

Other Coming Exhibits:

- Goose Lake, Solo show at the Steinhauer Gallery of the Madison Arboretum, highlighting images captured during a soulful winter spent on Goose Lake, Wisconsin, in the Sand County of Aldo Leopold - an iconic central Wisconsin shallow lake surrounded by marsh, wetlands, Pileated Woodpeckers and Sand Hill Cranes, November/December 2010.

- Opening of SourceOne Studio & Gallery LLC at 809 Williamson Street, dedicated to the exploration of our connection to the visual world through photography, with an exhibit of Time/Life legacy prints, hopefully in time for PhotoMidwest 2010 in October. To be followed with photography exhibits from a line-up of contemporary photographers, both local, national, and international, as well as a permanent, rotating exhibit of Time/Life images, with an occasional show of my own as well.

STARLIGHT TEWS

Working with circles has been a recurring theme for me since childhood—from cutting snowflakes, to creating complex kaleidoscopic textile patterns, living in a tipi, and now using digital photography to create mandala designs. Artistic concentric and repeating geometric patterns have been created and used all around the world, for eons of time, often displayed and used in temples and in native ceremonies for inspiration and meditation or just well being. Circles have a way of making us feel whole. Be it in the journey around the circumference, or the pathways that lead us to the center, one's eyes take in the energy of a circle with a sense of completion.

When I discovered digital photography I delighted in how much detail I could include in each piece! Using a camera as my eyes, playing with nature's colorful organic textures and geometric structures, I further evolve these designs on my computer.

To create these designs, I take a series of photographs, anywhere from a few to literally dozens in my more complex mandalas. I often shoot for elements allowing me to deconstruct reality, so to speak, and put it back together in another form. For example, this might include all pictures from one trip or locale, giving expression to a full range of memories in one piece, or recording a prairie burn, and making a statement about how our Earth renews itself again after some destruction. Always, I weave in the very special Sacred Geometry that our Earth displays everywhere you look, from seedpods and windblown sand, to the fractal nature of veins in leaves and the branching structures of trees. Responding to the concept of bilateral symmetry, I enjoy using mirror images, which bring about the birth of little "beings" with their two eyes, 2 arms, etc., within the trees or rocks. I'm usually inspired by one photo in particular, which becomes the starting point. I play with math to come up with different configurations, both working towards the center, and out to the perimeter of the piece. The finished image often surprises me, as it takes on a life all its own, yielding more dimension than I first conceived.

I currently reside outside of Madison, Wisconsin and travel throughout our beautiful country, capturing images that burst into new little universes. Step into these natural worlds for the wonder and peace it may bring.

SIZE & PRICE LIST

Ponderosa Pines

#Tree Line_0124, 113" x 22" \$1620

Tree Galaxy

60" x 60", \$2500

Mount Chiquita Sweep

#Tree Line_0871, 68" x 23" \$980

Andrews Sweep

#Tree Line_0884, 68" x 25" \$1100

Mount Ida Sweep

#Tree Line_, 68" x 22" \$960

Bonfire at Sunset

60" x 60", \$2500

Lily Pond

60" x 60", \$2500

Phoenix

60" x 60", \$2500

Hay Field & Storm

#Sand Hills_0666

54" x 24", \$820

A World of Their Own

42" x 42", \$1500

The Way West I, Straw Fields & Storm

#Sand Hills_0083

50" x 25", \$820

Oasis

60" x 60", \$2500

The Way West II, Road & Green Sand Hills

#Sand Hills_0728

58" x 23", \$860

Tree Spirits

42" x 42", \$1500

Coal Train & Platte River

#Sand Hills_0721, 64" x 25", \$1120.

Long's Peak Basin

#Tree Line_1092", 113" x 25", \$1840

Desert Renewal

60" x 60", \$2500

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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