

My First Photograph

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Self Portrait with Popsicle, The Cummington Community, 1968

In the late 60's, a perfect and dangerous time to be 21, a group of invisible patrons, inspired by the seductive idealism of that era, and perhaps a little bit by the romantic notions of Robert Rimmer's book, *The Harrad Experiment*, spent the better part of a year interviewing art students around the country. Their intention... putting 14 of them together in a commune, life and supplies on-the-house, with the single rule that we make work in a medium that was unfamiliar to us... presumably to determine how darkness was illuminated. I was tagged and became part of that tribe. I sold my BSA 500 Goldstar motorcycle to buy a very old VW with painted white angel wings, refrigerator tubing for brake lines and clothespins for throttle adjustments, and moved into a barn with everyone else in western Massachusetts called The Cummington Community. — We listened to Dylan, did improvisational theater, built salt kilns, made music, used barns as canvases, and I constructed what I thought a darkroom might look like... with my only reference being Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* — in crooked donkey shed walled with opaque black silage plastic. My plumbing was an elderly green hose hooked up to the main barn where we all lived on a single open floor. My mom had given me an ancient Russian enlarger that would set a negative on fire for any exposure longer than 9 seconds. My safelight was a caver's headlamp with red cellophane... saved from a caramel apple wrapping on a run-a-way to New York, with barn-mates, Martha and Tony, where I had made exposures with a very used camera that I was eager to see if it worked. I also had a manual, *Enlarging Is Thrilling – Or the Joy of Making Big Ones Out of Little Ones*, by Don Herald; a book printed in 1945 to serve as a manual for the Federal Model #269 Enlarger in a Suitcase for \$39.50. — After processing my very first roll of film in a tall Galliano bottle found behind the barn, I set up the donkey shed for printing, selected a mysterious frame, placed it shiny side up in the Russian enlarger's negative carrier and exposed one of my 10 precious pieces of Agfa Portrigras 111 paper, held flat with masking tape, until I smelled the smoke of my burning negative. A deep breath in the darkness, I immersed my first paper exposure in a Pyrex baking tray that held the Dektol developer. Nothing... nothing at all... and a lifetime of seconds later... my first photograph... of a

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carefully dressed man, eating alone in a Hayes-Bickford, at the intersection of 8th and 34th in Times Square, emerged. In that very moment, in the midst of my satori, i knew without hesitation where the rest of my life would be centered.



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