



BULLETIN
1/24-1

This is the first Defender Bulletin. The Bulletin is a place for updates about equipment, and a place for general answers to questions about products and methods. They'll be all sorts of stuff in here.

I also include pieces and letters I've written to other artists especially (real artists – painters). I'll include bit from those writings in these bulletins too.

Named after an America's Cup racing yacht, the original Defender Photographic was a company on Driving Park Avenue in Rochester that manufactured film and paper. They were founded in 1898. The first variable contrast paper was invented by Defender in 1943. Their factory complex was bordered by "Argo Park." In the 1920's, Argo paper was the largest selling photographic paper in the world.

The new Defender harkens back to some of those great but now obscure Rochester photographic companies of the past. And I've always liked the name . . .

Most of the articles on the Defender website were originally handouts I wrote for students. I've included them here because some photographers may find useful ideas they can use. All of them are the result of experience. I wouldn't write

anything I wasn't sure of. But – I'm not trying to sound like an oracle. I've just been around a long time.

Just about anyone I remember in photography from the 70's and 80's, thought it their heralded duty to lecture. Whenever I asked them a question or made a comment, I braced for the inevitable photography lecture. But sometimes a succinct explanation of something vitally relevant is valuable. So if I can offer anything that can help – products, ideas, or suggestions –, then I'm happy to do it. Verstehen?

When I recall those photography egos run rampant, I wish I'd remained a painter. So I have no desire to put anyone off by playing Grand Vizier. Ja?

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When Defender started, the very first item I wanted to make available was a 4x5/5x7 sheet film washer. There's nothing more dull and tedious than hand washing sheet film – agitate through the pile, change the water, repeat 12 times; ugh, anything but that. And washing in a hose-fed tray with holes at the end doesn't wash well either – some films stick together in there, and they can scratch.

So I wanted a washer that made the job easy – load it and wash. Ideally it would be small enough for modest sized darkrooms, efficient, and save water. Zone VI used to sell a deep tray washer with a separate rack that held the sheet film negatives. It worked, but designed for Fred Picker's voluminous darkroom, it was immense: 13" x 20" inches. It wouldn't fit in my present sink – which is 6 feet long.

(In 1980, I made a sheet film washer out of a dishpan with thread strung through it. The thread held the negatives, and 1/16" holes at the bottom, as well as the thread holes, drained it. Not very elegant, and I had to stand over and watch it; but unlike the Zone VI monster, it fit in my darkroom sink and washed the negatives just as well.)

The sheet film washer is now available. Called a "Sessui," it's designed to for water economy (Sessui means "saving water" in Japanese.) It holds 7 liters of water (less than 2 gallons), and you'll run maybe another 12 to 14 liters through it to wash a batch of film. The Sessui holds (28) 4x5 negatives and (14) 5x7's; that's as many 5x7 films as I can agitate comfortably in a tray. You'll probably never need to wash 28 4x5 negatives at once.



Sessui Sheet Film Washer. "Sessui" means "saving water" in Japanese.

It measures 8-3/8" x 11" x 5-7/8." That's about the same footprint as an 8x10 Paterson tray. The separators are made of slotted styrene. This keeps the size and weight down, and makes it easy to insert and remove the negatives. And film won't stick to the styrene as it tends to with Plexiglas. Each film compartment has 5 fill ports. That's important.

Acid hardening fixer must leach out of prints or it won't wash out. The same principle holds true for film. The fixer must separate from the emulsion, then be rinsed away. It's inefficient to run water continuously. The fixer must "go into solution." Then the water is changed – displaced. After another "cycle," there is very little fixer in solution, and the films are washed. (The same principle holds for fiber based paper, but it takes longer.)

So here is how you use this Defender Sessui washer:

- (1) After fixing, films are rinsed in water, and given a hypo clearing agent treatment (2-3 minutes with agitation, then 2 clean water rinses with agitation;
- (2) Load the washer and let the films sit for 3 minutes – no running water. The fixer leaches out – "into solution";
- (3) Run the washer for 3 minutes. Not much is needed, maybe about 2 liters per minute. You're exchanging the water;
- (4) Repeat the cycle and you're done. Total time – 12 minutes. Put the negatives through a wetting agent and hang them up.

The 5 water ports per compartment assure that the hypo is displaced efficiently, and with a minimum of water running.

The washer feeds from the top and drains from the bottom because that's the most efficient way to exchange the water. It's not because

hypo is heavier than water – it’s not. You let the fixer go into solution, and exchange the water. Simple.

Water enters the Sessui from a hose into the feed chamber, but the intake panel is removable, so you can feed it from your darkroom hose, or even under a faucet if that’s more convenient. It’s small enough to store under your darkroom sink when you don’t need it.

For alkaline fixed – pre-hardened – negatives, a continuous water wash of about 6-8 minutes give a complete wash. (Alkaline fixer rinses out, it doesn’t really leach out.)¹

There’s also an 8x10 version of this washer called a “Tide.” It operates on the same principle and washes 8x10 and 5x7 prints, as well as 8x10 film. It’s also hyper-efficient and easily stores under your sink.

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I learned advanced art technique and aesthetics in college – drawing, painting, design. And I had some very good people around me. But my photography wasn’t very good. In fact it was awful. After college I came here, to Rochester.

I was trained by a select group of people, here in Rochester. And they were completely apart from the RIT mainstream. Their influence completely changed my direction. When I came here, my photography was technically very good. But I thought that technique elevated the work all on it’s own. In other words, I thought that “form” could enhance “content.” So, for example, I would photograph a Zone VIII house

against a filtered Zone IV sky, make a pristine print from it, and have “Art”! In truth all I’d made were unexceptional pictures – though they were “fine prints”! (Ugh – I still detest that phrase.)

Of course, photography isn’t made compelling because of technique. Irving Penn’s technically perfect 16x20 pictures of cigarette butts aren’t the least bit enriching. Strand’s statue-like portraits, printed well from perfect negatives, are still nothing but dressed up mug shots. I’ve met a lot of these “emperors.” A dull landscape printed with a black sky and a manipulated white meadow is still just a aggrandized dull picture. Form alone cannot impart life or interest.

The greatest photographer was . . . who? - - Atget? Probably. Why? Because the content is so compelling. (There is a definite reason for this, and its elements can be described in detail. Let’s leave that for now.) Just about all of Atget’s prints are flawed – clamp marks, vignetting, that ugly “blue sensitive” rendering of sunlight, etc. But none of it matters because his experience of the world was so rich. The content is so interesting that it renders the form – the technique - irrelevant.

This is the vital truth that I learned from that Select Group up here in Rochester some 45 years ago: that complete emphasis on technique is inane, and shallow. Another lovely quote I heard back then was this: “Writers don’t get together to talk about typewriter ribbons.”

So many of these bulletins will incorporate writing I’ve done over

¹ See the Print Washing Article.

the years concerning "content." The content in photographs, paintings, music. A lot of these "content" bits are from journals or letters.

So there you have it – an outline of the Defender Bulletin. I hope you'll enjoy it and look for new issues as I write them.

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This is something I notice myself and for me it's something to guard against. I'm just throwing it out there.

Most classical musicians - pianists especially - play too fast. Most conductors have their orchestras play too fast. Conductors and arrangers and solo performers also modify other elements of pieces, exaggerating a pause, or time; or dynamics - the loud is too loud and the soft you can barely hear, much in excess of how it should sound. Why?

They do it because they can, because they have all this glorious virtuosity at their command. And they can't change the notes - the content of the music, so they change the only thing they're allowed to - the form. Why change anything? Why not just play the piece so that it sounds right, correct, pleasing? Because they fear that if they can't personalize it, it can't be personal expression. What's to separate them from the hundreds of others if they don't monkey with the piece? If they have all this virtuosity and knowledge, they must show that theirs is unique and superior.

When this happens, a major shift takes place. Playing the music becomes about playing the music, rather than revealing the emotional content of the piece - playing it as it

was originally intended. And the aim becomes to show how dazzlingly you play it, rather than playing to express it properly. That's being a bad mosquito isn't it?

(In any case, trying for "personal expression" is a waste of time. All work has a personal stamp - you can't avoid it.)

Orson Welles's movies after Citizen Kane are atrocious, all of them. They desperately strive to convince the audience that "this is Art!" – rather than to tell a story. They fail completely to effectively tell a story. The writing especially is often arbitrary and confusing, the sound garbled. You can't follow the plot. In Kane, all that cinematic magic supported the story, it helped "tell the story." In the later movies, there's very little effective "form" – and with it, no content either. Why? Because you can't follow the story. (My wife knows nothing "The Cinema as Art!", but if she can't follow a plot, and the actors are doing pointless things, she leaves the room.)

As in music, as in cinema, so painting (or photography) must never be about anything but the picture - what you ultimately see on the canvas. It must never be about the process. The paint on the canvas is only the vehicle. The vehicle gets the passenger to the destination. When the viewer gets to the destination, he's different - enriched, changed, reaffirmed. No different from understanding the plot at the end of the movie. A painting should hang like a soul refresher you can walk up to anytime and immediately feel better, like a massage or sauna.

Photographers especially often use the vehicle as the destination. Fred Pickers' work was nothing but the act, not the result; the result only serves to display that he did the act. Versteheren? For all of Ansel Adams's dazzling print quality, dozens of lenses, cameras, 11x14 horizontal enlarger, mural sized prints, gigantic darkroom, and voluminous technical books - his Yosemite pictures are never about photography (a lot of the others are). Look at the Yosemite work and you know what sincerely beckoned him. Atget? Didn't much care for magnificent form. You don't need it if the content is breathtaking (quietly breathtaking in his case).

Yesterday I was before this wooded area in a clearing. There was a little skinny tree about 8 feet high, almost a weed. I thought it looked neat. Then I thought it might get lost in front of that background of woods. Then I thought, well it might still look okay. A critical point in the process here. If I looked for another way to frame that little tree, or used a "trick" to isolate it, that would be going too far. Take the picture, proof the negative, and if it doesn't work then throw it away. There are plenty of others. The mouse eludes the cat, the cat paces, cleans it's paw, and lays down to sleep. No analysis. No recanting of the "why" behind catching mice. Catching mice is catching mice, not analysis of the how and why to catch mice. In Yosemite, Ansel Adams only wanted to catch the mouse. Picker very, very rarely did - although he could fill volumes about the optimum technique of catching a mouse. But, sadly, even if you love driving you don't go into a parking lot and do figure 8's for half the day.

What about Braque and Picasso with their dueling cubist paintings and collages in 1915-16 (not sure of the exact year.) You know, "Ma Jolie" . . . Wasn't that work about painting? To some degree, yes, but incidentally. Maybe . . .

Modern jazz musicians especially do a lot of demonstrating; the content is to demonstrate the technique, the form. But Bill Evans wasn't concerned about form though he had beautiful technique. Thelonious Monk had so-so technique - didn't matter. It fit the content just fine.

Sometimes looking through the ground glass, I lose sight of what the picture is about. The bright ground glass, the excitement of being out there - *seduces* me. So I step away, look at the scene again, maybe through a format viewer, and ask "what's the picture here? Okay, right, yes - it's those leafy branches between the two trees." I'm always on guard. Like a wanton woman, the process itself can tempt and arouse you. Influence is fine, history of painting is fine, but ultimately you're a child picking daisy after daisy, fascinated.

You know exactly what to do. The primary concern is not to get seduced or psychically led astray. Your instinct, your intuition will tell you; the cocktail is then very strong.

Am I lecturing? Sorry. Carry on. Enjoy the rain. I must come and see it sometime . . .

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Thank you - Anthony.

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