

WORKSHOP

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this image. Describe this image as if the person were blind — what am I looking at? You have to first tell me if it's a black and white or color photograph, which orientation it is, what's the subject matter, what's in it, what's the composition. There's a methodology of how you describe an image without judgment, that begins to open up the picture plane.

"In some of my seminars, I have someone write about a painting. And I say, 'You have a half hour.' And they say, 'I can't write that long.' And after they begin writing, they say, 'God, I don't have enough time in a half hour to actually describe a painting!' So seeing is probably the trickiest thing: where's the focus, where's the subject matter, how is it placed, how does it relate to other things?"

Mr. Lopez, director of the Photography/Digital Imaging Program at the University of Miami, will be teaching a two-day workshop on the "Point and Shoot Camera" at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts Oct. 17 and 18. The workshop costs \$150.

Cynics might well ask: why would it take two days to learn how to use a point and shoot camera? How difficult can it be? You do what the name says: you point and shoot.

But these relatively inexpensive cameras come with instruction manuals that are 100 pages long, Mr. Lopez says.

"Digital technology has increased the interest in photography but has decreased the quality of the photographic image, because people don't pay as much attention," he says. "It's so easy to make a photographic image with a camera that people have gotten sloppy. What I spend a lot of time on is actually showing people how to use their camera. The class meets Friday at 10 a.m., and they'll buy their camera on a Thursday afternoon. They'll come in, and the camera will still be in the box. How do you use this little camera that looks so insignificant but has so many goodies embedded in it? How do you make great photographs with it?"

"Most of them don't know how to upload images from their camera to their computer, all the different modes that cameras come with now: automatic, program, average priority, time priority. We go through each one. Many people don't know these cameras allow you to shoot combined images; it's called stitching, and it allows you do this very long, panoramic photograph. The camera aids in doing that."

He discusses color, how to see color, how to compose a shot, and how to begin to see lighting. He also teaches amateur photographers not to make the most common mistake: centering the image. If you do so, "your subject matter is a bull's-eye in the picture plane," Mr. Lopez says. "And that also pretty much stabilizes the picture plane so much that there's no motion for the audience looking at your photograph. So you go right to the middle of the photograph, and that's it."

"If you just move to the right or the left, which is the rule of thirds, then you create what Ansel Adams called the near-far approach. So if you have your subject matter on the right third, and that leaves the left part of the picture frame to be the negative space or space that you fall into, that creates internal motion."

"Just explaining that to people, and having them make both photographs, both centered and off-centered, begins to show them the difference between an interesting photograph and a dull photograph."

Mr. Lopez, a popular workshop in-



JIM MCLAUGHLIN/FLORIDA WEEKLY

Persian Dreams by Miami photographer J. Tomas Lopez. Mr. Lopez will be giving a two-day photographic workshop in Naples this week.

structor at the Phil, will teach five other workshops this season; three of them are already sold out.

Growing up in Great Neck, N.Y., Mr. Lopez fell in love with photography when he was 9, when his family was vacationing on the South Carolina coast for a summer. His father, an amateur photographer, gave him a German camera, "a bunch of film," and said, "Go have fun."

But when he was in high school, a friend's father had a darkroom in his basement.

"They took me down there, and I developed my first roll of film," Mr. Lopez remembers. "And the first time I ever saw a photographic print come up in the developer, it seemed like the image comes up from the bottom of the tray, right through the paper. It was magic. And I just couldn't believe how wonderful it was. So I developed my own film, and I started making my own prints."

After college, he spent two years in the Army, working as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counselor.

"Returning Viet Nam vets had serious heroin and drug use problems," he says.

Mr. Lopez realized that the soldiers had Nikons or Minoltas, which were relatively inexpensive to buy on-base. And every fort also had a darkroom.

"They would come back with these images, and they got really excited talking about this spot and that spot, and the photographs opened up a whole level of dialogue," he says. "That made them go back, and almost with a certain kind of distance, they could look at the issues and their pain and the angst of the war. So I began to understand that photographs have an iconic way to bring people together with the past and the present."

"A photograph's more than just a picture: it's memories, it's history. It's lots of things. So I started asking them, 'Why don't you go photograph what you feel like?' And some people would photograph, like, empty benches at night. Most of the photographs were about being alienated. So we started looking at photographs as psychological self-portraits. And that got them to talk."

After the Army, Mr. Lopez received an MFA and began teaching photography. He taught at Rochester Institute of

Technology (RIT), and then, since '94, has served as the director of the Photography/Digital Imaging Program at the University of Miami.

"There's no getting around the fact that in photography you need certain technical skills, but also [to understand] the psychological aspect of it," he says. "A painting is fiction, but a photograph has some basis in reality. For me, a photograph exists within a far broader context than most people think. My background is in how signs and semiotics work in photographs and films."

Mr. Lopez is also an artist in his own right; he's been in more than 150 group exhibitions and has had 25 solo exhibitions, one this past spring at the Lowe Museum in Miami. His work is in many collections, including the Smithsonian Institution, the International Museum of Photography and The Museum of Fine Arts at Florida State University in Tallahassee. The Library of Congress also purchased 16 of his photographs from his Metro series.

The Metro series is photographs shot on subways in New York City, Paris, Rome, London, Madrid and Barcelona. He returns to Paris annually for this project, and next semester will spend five or six weeks there on a sabbatical.

He had certain shots in mind when he went to Paris.

"I wanted to do a couple of really romantic images," he says. "I wanted to do the Eiffel Tower."

He rode the No. 11 train, which crosses a bridge over the Seine bridge. The ride provides a view of the Eiffel Tower.

"On sunny days it's beautiful, and on rainy days, it has this sort of melodramatic, 1930's jazzy, sort-of ex-patriate view, and it's a romanticized version of Paris," he says.

His photograph, "De Passy Metro," shows the Eiffel Tower, mysterious and mystical in the background, while the foreground has plump raindrops against the glass. It's almost as if Mr. Lopez has turned his camera on the past and somehow shot Paris in an earlier century. The Eiffel Tower glows against the gray, stormy sky.

"I shot probably 10,000 shots doing this project so far, and it's gotten really amazing responses from critics," Mr. Lopez says. He wants to expand the project and shoot in Buenos Aires, Moscow, Mexico City and Tokyo, and

if you go

- >> **What:** "Point and Shoot Camera" two-day workshop
 - >> **When:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Oct. 17 and 18
 - >> **Where:** The Toni Stabile Building, Computer Lab at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts, 5833 Pelican Bay Blvd., Naples
 - >> **Cost:** \$150
 - >> **Information:** Call (239) 597-1900 or go to www.thephil.org
- Mr. Lopez's three following workshops are already sold out, but he's offering "Advanced Photoshop Class" on Feb. 27 and 28, and "Photoshop in Black and White: From Shooting to Printing" on March 6 and 7

has applied for a Guggenheim Grant.

Another of Mr. Lopez's series is Les Fauves, photographs of taxidermied animals. (The name, which means The Wild Beasts in French, was the name of an art movement at the beginning of the 20th century.) Forty of Mr. Lopez's Les Fauves photographs are owned by the Bibliotheque Nationale, the national library of France. His interest in the subject matter began at RIT, when he saw a taxidermied elephant at the George Eastman House.

"I was kind of horrified/fascinated by the fact that people would have these faux creatures," he says. "I'm sort of horrified by the idea of heads on the wall — and these were full animals!"

Mr. Lopez shot many images at Deyrolle, a famous taxidermy establishment in Paris, and the photographs are surreal: a horse sticking its head through an inside oval window overlooking a spiral staircase, a mule looking out a window, two zebras standing in a room, looking as if they're mid-conversation.

Mr. Lopez says the place was "like a 19th century art history museum. Every time you walked in there, the staff had rearranged the animals. So one time you'd have a mule looking out the window, another time you'd have a lion greeting you at the door."

Fifty years after picking up his first camera, Mr. Lopez is still in love with photography.

"It's my passion," he says simply. "It's my hobby, it's my living. I do it seven days a week. It's what I do. I'm compulsive and passionate about it. You just have to do it. It's that wonderful desire to make art." ■