

# Wall Street International

## The photography of Ben Larrabee

Light, rhythm, and texture

9 MAY 2021, NOELLE NEWELL



Ben Larrabee is a fine art photographer who captures essence of people. His photographs are a part of numerous private collections and in museums such as the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

Born in Philadelphia and raised in Roger's Hollow, a small town in upstate New York he is the son of a Quaker minister and he continues to practice his Quaker faith. His wife Trudie shared that his mother would heat water on a wood-burning stove for their baths in a galvanized tub in the middle of the kitchen. In the mid-seventies, he developed a transcendental meditation (TM) practice which brought him to Switzerland where he studied TM for four months. Meditation continues to be an important part of his life and he and Trudie meditate together daily.

Ben earned his Bachelors of Fine Art from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) 1962. When Ben was at RISD he met the acclaimed American photographer Harry Callahan who became his mentor. This led Ben to change his major from graphic design to photography and prolonging his graduation by a year. In 1980 he received his Master's Degree of Fine Art from Yale University.

Prior to dedicating his career to photography, he had a successful career as a graphic designer, he was a principal corporate designer for Westinghouse Corporation, and had a successful consulting corporate identity business.

Ben creates visual poetry. His photographs have a quieting effect perhaps because he works solely in black and white. The absence of color allows the viewer to focus on the subject matter, see the shapes, patterns, and texture of the photographs without the distraction of color. He captures people when they are in the moment, and no one is staged, and no one is posing; everyone is spontaneous. His portraits of children capture the innocence of youth, and in his family portraits the love for one another. I met up with Ben and his wife Trudie to learn more.



### **How did Harry Callahan inspire you?**

Harry was a philosopher. He was authentic. He thought the important thing was to find my vision and to not pay too much attention to what others were doing but find my way of seeing. Callahan would say, "Photograph to learn something new."

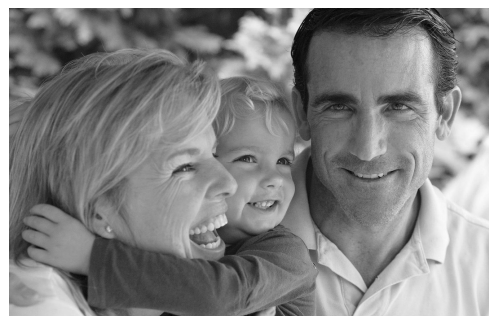
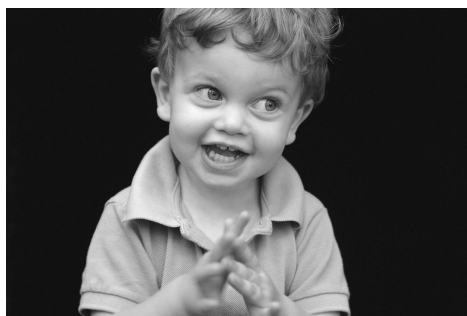
### **What is your reason to work in black and white photography over color?**

I grew up in black and white. I come from a tradition of masters who worked in black and white. It's more abstract, more exacting. I limit the use of color for personal work. However, I'm cautious about color lulling me into a false sense of success. The composition might not be working but the color can make it seem successful. Callahan once said, shooting in black and white has enough issues going on without color. Once, in a while, I'll be curious to see if a particular image would look good in color. I make a deal with myself to be flexible, to allow myself to experiment. As Le Corbusier once said, "I reserve the right to break my rules."

### **Do you have a favorite book or poem?**

Yes, I'm glad you asked because I believe the books listed are a good roadmap to understanding life and staying in love:

- The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupery;
- Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke;
- I Am That*, Srinisargadatta Maharaj;
- Art and Fear*, David Bayles and Ted Orlandos.



### **Which living person do you most admire?**

Dalai Lama, because he represents the healing quality of love.

### **When we can travel again, where are you going?**

We've recently talked about going back to Petit Saint Vincent a private island in the Grenadines. We love the intimacy and the privacy where we can be naked in our bubble, all day. We've been there six times already.

### **What's the best way to look at a photograph?**

Look at photography with your heart. If you're moved, it's successful.

### **Any advice for the photography collector?**

Invest in photography with your heart. Buy what you love. The images will enrich you as you live with them. Pick a few photographers you like and follow them. Buy their books, buy a print, learn from their ideas.

### **What is the best type of paper for photography to be printed on?**

I prefer Hahnemuhle print paper, a one hundred-percent cotton fiber paper from Germany made for ink jet printing. I love the feel and the texture. I can appreciate images printed on silver gelatin paper, but I'd rather not print on it. It's stiff and less sensuous.

## Do you have a fantasy photography project?

I'd like to publish two books. The first is *The Artist's Muse*, a collection of images I've taken over a twenty-one-year period of Trudie. I continue to be inspired by her. Nudes of everyday life without pretense, neither planned nor staged. I want to show how she has changed over time and how her beauty has endured. My second book is a collection of images of my clients showing love, and connection, the human condition.

## Faces of Light

The Larrabee's frequently gift their photography services to various charities, and in the mid-two-thousands, they were sought out by breast cancer survivors Pam Zangrillo and Sharon Kratochvil to help with their breast cancer awareness campaign. The campaign aimed to highlight that early detection can save lives. Ben photographed each of the twenty breast cancer survivor participants in one day outdoors at his home with one black drop, and one light diffuser. The posters that Ben designed include a portrait, a concise medical history, and experiences gained of each breast cancer survivor. Initially, the campaign was called *Faces of Cancer* but Ben and Trudie suggested a name change to *Faces of Light* and it was accepted. I found these portraits particularly moving and inspiring in the willingness of each of the participants to share their experiences. Ben wanted to capture the light and energy of each survivor, and in each portrait, he did just that.

Ben's kind and thoughtful approach are apparent in his photography and he captures the humanity in each person he photographs. I imagine that Ben's approach to photography is a window to how he sees all of humanity.

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