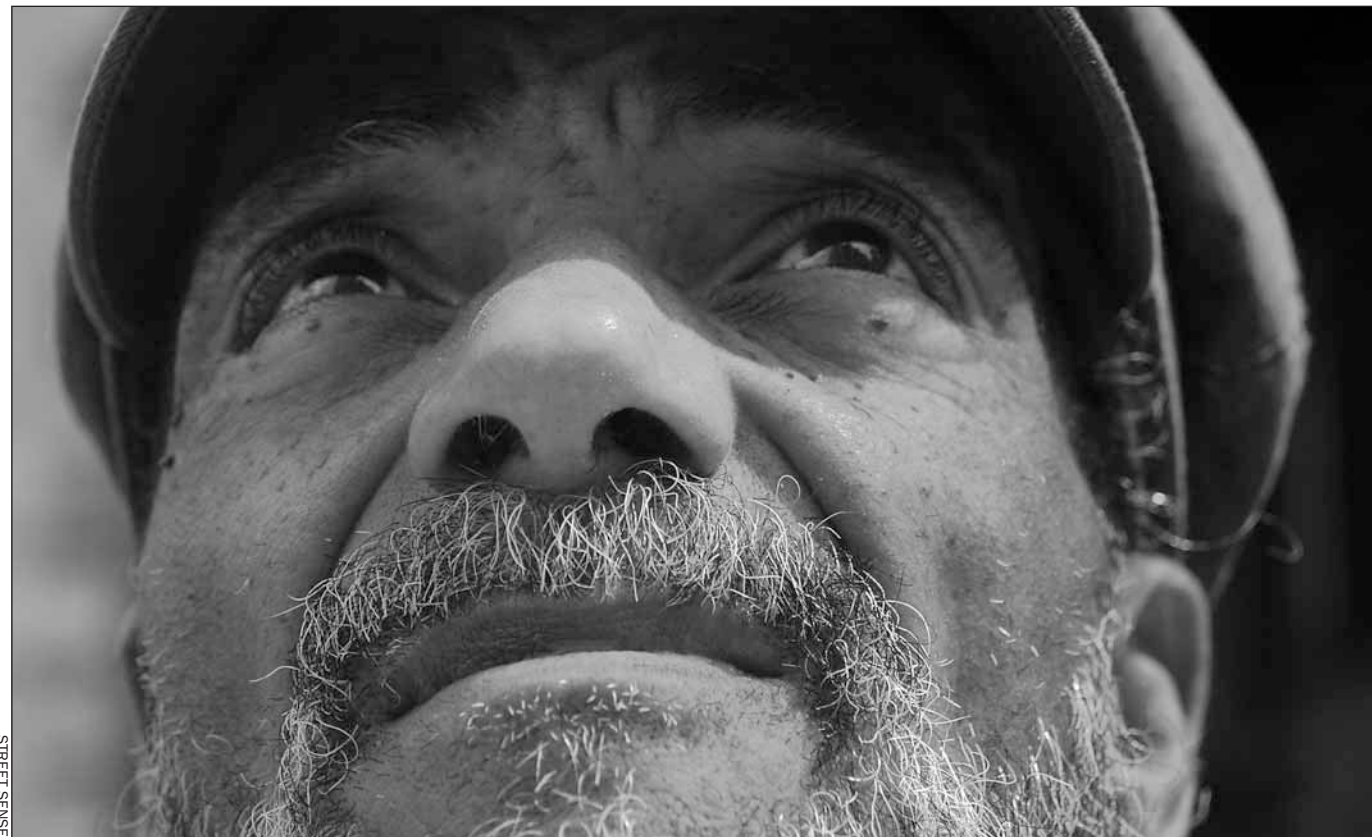


MY TWO CENTS

He Looks Into a Nutshell and Sees Infinite Space



STREET SENSE

By David S. Hammond

Street Sense photographer Cliff Carle is an “Air Force brat” who grew up all over the world. He says of Washington, “It’s sensory overload for a photographer, and I’m loving it!” Cliff has lived in D.C. since 1968 and currently resides at the CCNV shelter at Second and D streets, NW.

I sat with Cliff in the church courtyard outside the Street Sense office near Metro Center to talk about his work. Cliff had a camera slung around his neck which he used to explain some technical points. He also excused himself to kneel, then lie flat on his stomach, for a photograph of an ant crawling across the flagstones.

How did you start taking photographs for the paper?

Cliff Carle: I got hit by a car back in 2005, and I knew I had some money coming from a settlement for my injuries. I had no job and I was living in a shelter, but something kept telling me “Get a camera.” I thought “Why do I want a camera?” But getting it was the best thing that ever happened to me, and I’ve been having a ball ever since.

How do you work? Do you carry your cameras all the time, or just when you’re looking for subjects?

Cliff Carle: I carry them all the time, as much as humanly possible, although it’s a lot of weight. I’ve done over 12,000 photos, and that’s a conservative estimate. Last weekend I shot over 400. If I see something interesting, I’ll take 10 shots from different angles.

What kinds of things do you like to shoot?

Cliff Carle: I love architecture, and the macro setting for close-ups – things like flowers, bugs, drops of water. It’s a whole other world down there by our feet! I want to get ants on a bivouac, and when they’re on the move. And then I want to get a spider’s web with water misted on it, and also a drop of water just entering a pond or a puddle – that’s a classic. But you’ve got to get everything just right – the light, the angle, everything.

Where do your ideas come from? I’ve seen your work come a long way at Street Sense.

Cliff Carle: My thing is, I like to work with a long depth of field. For example, I’ve always liked how the straight lines of a railroad track seem to converge, going off into infinity. And I like taking photographs of buildings from the ground, because the

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lens makes the lines bulge, and you can’t get everything! Now I’m experienced enough that I can break the rules, and even duplicate interesting effects. I can do wild things with a camera like Evel Knievel could do wild things with a motorcycle.

Your shots of buildings and the D.C. physical environment show a lot of variety.

Cliff Carle: There are so many kinds of buildings in D.C.! Roman, Greek, French, Chinese ...

Cliff “the Moose”

Carle’s photographs have been published in Street Sense every month since 2006.

“Cliff’s Pics” finds beauty in things often overlooked in everyday life. Here, Cliff explains what makes his shutter click.

And you’ve taken some very lively portraits for Street Sense.

Cliff Carle: Portraits, well ... they’re okay. I’m not a big portrait fan. I might see something in a person’s face, so I’ll do it.

Had you used a camera before you started taking photographs for Street Sense?

Cliff Carle: I took about two years of photography courses in college, and one year at the Penn-Lemuel Center on Rhode Island Avenue. I also took mechanical drawing in junior high school and college. That’s where I get the lines from – when you’re learning how to work on industrial blueprints, you take an object apart and draw it to specifications from three perspectives: top, front, and side.

I also have a B.A. in applied mathematics from the old Federal City College. I learned about complex theorems and relationships, so I understand a bit about the process of the lenses.

What kind of camera do you use?

Cliff Carle: I have a Nikon D70S and a Nikon D200. I only use Nikon camera equipment because Karl Zeiss made the world’s finest lenses. It’s the lens that makes the photograph, not the bells and whistles.

What’s it like to use such powerful digital cameras?

Cliff Carle: It’s heaven for the photographer, except it’s no way to learn photography. When it’s set on automatic, it sets the shutter speed, aperture and white balance for you. On a manual or film camera, you have to learn to do all that for yourself. But I love these cameras – love them! It’s like that credit card commercial – “Nikon D70S – \$1,200. Nikon D200 – \$1,500. The experience of using them? Priceless!”

What’s next for you?

Cliff Carle: I’d like to show my work in a gallery and find new audiences.

“Cliff’s Pics” can be found on pages 8 and 9.