

A Fresh Lens

Leo Lubow starts his life over again, this time as a photographer.

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F Scott Fitzgerald once said, famously, that there are no second acts in American lives.

Obviously, he never met Leo Lubow, who is well into Act 3, with no end in sight.

We all have the potential to go in various directions, they say — it's just that so few of us ever do. We stick with the hand we were dealt, even if we were the ones who dealt it.

Only not Mr. Lubow.

Mr. Lubow, 54, a lifelong Baltimorean, spent his first act as a successful lawyer, a business trial litigator. He had dreams, though, of being a writer, and finally sat down and wrote a novel. Not quickly — it took him several years. But when it was completed, he started contacting agents.

And amazingly, for a beginner, he got a response. More than one, even. Two extremely well-respected agents were wildly enthusiastic about the book, an "existential thriller," as he describes it, which involves secret tablets, secret codes, a new mathematics. (This was years before the success of "The Da Vinci Code," incidentally.)

Needless to say, he was thrilled. It's almost unheard of for first-timers to get this sort of reaction. He signed on with one agent, and watched eagerly as his book was sent out to 20 publishing houses, waiting for the auction that was sure to follow.

"I thought I was on my way! They sent it to Oliver Stone. I was already casting the movie in my mind," he said.

And then?

Nothing. *Bupkis*.

Not a single sale. Dust in the wind. Hey, it happens.

Mr. Lubow was, of course, horribly disappointed. All that work, all those dreams dashed. It would be understandable, perhaps, had he decided to go back to his law practice. It would be admirable, certainly, had he decided to keep writing.

What he did do, however, was nothing short of amazing. The author dream had tanked? Fine, time to try another one. Mr. Lubow decided to reinvent himself completely — as a photographer.

"It was very hard for me to turn around and start writing another [novel]," he said. "I just didn't have it in me. So little by little, I started to resurrect another great passion of mine, photography."

Luckily, the years as a lawyer, along with some astute stock market activity, had left Mr. Lubow free to, as he said, "pursue my passions." He dived into the world of photography, taking courses, learning all he could.

"Follow your bliss," he mused. "I've read so much philosophy, Western, Eastern, on how you can design and control your own life. I said to myself, 'I can do this.'"

You, of course, have no way of evaluating Mr. Lubow's courtroom expertise or his word-making skill, at this point. But his photos are on a Web site (www.lubowphotography.com) and on semi-permanent display at An Die Musik, 409 N. Charles St., and can be easily accessed.

They make a pretty impressive Act 3.

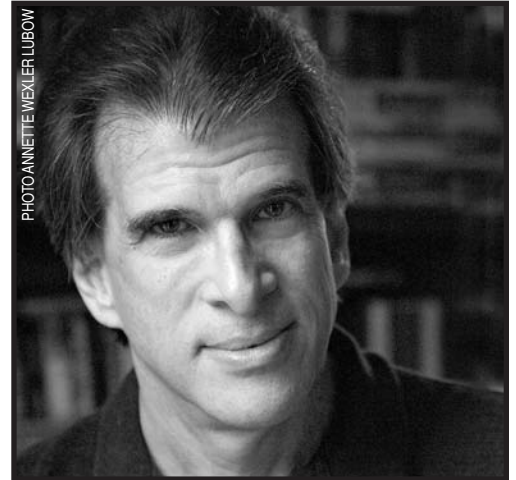
If he has any problem, it might be said to be an overabundance of skills. His portraits of Baltimore jazz musicians, in black and white, on display at the music store, are starkly riveting. (Jazz is, guess what? Yup, yet another passion.) They illustrate his attempt to "capture the ecstatic moment," as he calls it.

But then, there are his on-the-street photos, one of which ("Violinist, New York Subway") won first prize in a juried exhibit commissioned by the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra.

And his gorgeous, dreamy Monet-like shot of an Amsterdam canal. His self-titled Euclidian photos — of walls, of staircases. Even his favorite, which he has promised never to display, a portrait of his wife, Annette. This is not a man whose work falls in one category.

"I'm still in a place where I'm doing everything," he said in a recent interview, half-apologetically. It's not all good, he feels — "There's a synergy ... when you see a bunch of works that have a thematic tie to them together. An energy that's greater than the sum of the parts."

He remembers once entering a gallery



Leo Lubow: "I'm still in a place where I'm doing everything."

room with Rothko paintings on each wall. "It just blew me away, I felt like I was in a force field."

When he decided to concentrate on photography, his first step was to build a fully equipped darkroom, in his Dunbarton home. He has never used it. By the time the room was done, he had gotten so deeply into digital photography, there was no need.

"We're beyond a crossroads, in the history of photography. Digital photography, I truly believe, has surpassed film photography in terms of what you can do. None of my pictures were processed in a darkroom. All were done through my computer," he said.

He still uses regular cameras, as well as a digital camera. But all of his pictures are processed by computer. He is at this point so expert in the use of Photoshop (the computer program he uses), he has been asked to lecture on the skill.

Mr. Lubow was born in Newport News, Va., but came here with his family at age 9, and has never truly considered living anywhere else. He went to the Park School, Clark University, William and Mary law school. Perhaps, if he had it all to do again, he might have gone to film school, he said — yet there's nothing wrong with having it turn out this way.

In May, he got married, for the first time, to Annette Wexler, a writer and TV producer.

As for what's ahead, he intends to continue to capture ecstatic moments, moving his search to two arenas: the world of gospel singers in local churches — and the track ("jockeys, trainers, horses and the world they live in.")

And of course, to continue to pursue his dream — in whatever form it takes. □