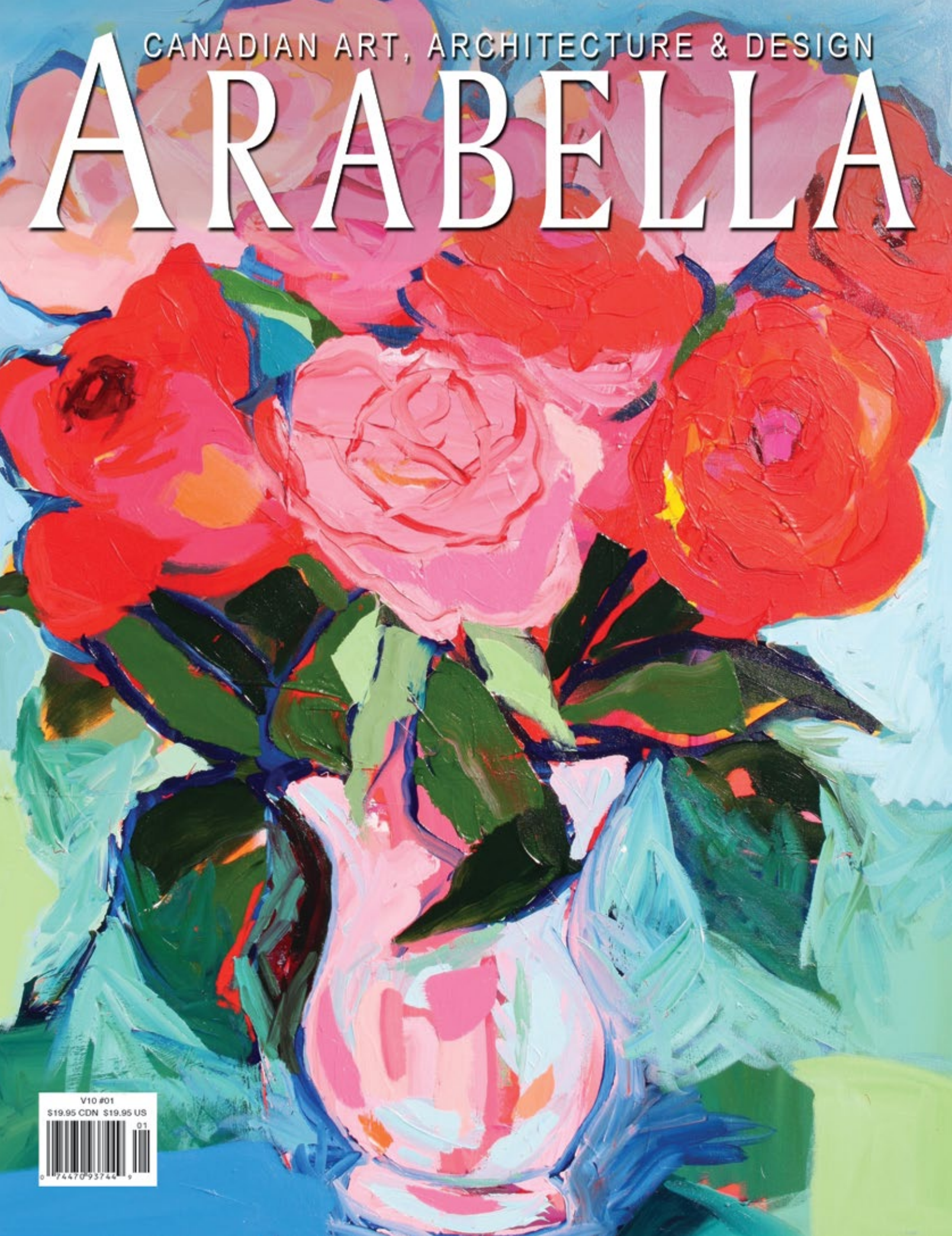


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# Peter Dusek





*Previous Page, Unravelling, photograph,  
right, Three Sisters, photograph*

# Living in the Interval

written by Gary Michael Dault

Photographers invariably find themselves - rather the way architects do - walking a sometimes rather frayed and uncertain line between art and technology. Cameras and camera equipment have grown so dazzlingly complex in these digital years, that you pretty much need a degree in astrophysics to negotiate the programs they embody and offer us.

Award-winning photographer Peter Dusek was born in Bratislava, Slovakia in 1967. He came to this country when he was seven. His first love was music and, even as a child, he was already either playing the organ in church or wielding a saxophone in bands and "playing in the pit orchestra for the local theatre."

He now lives in the beautiful Hockley Valley north of Toronto, where he spends much of his life in the nearby wilderness, taking photographs. He rides a motorcycle, a dirt bike, drives a Jeep - often accompanied by both his wife, Victoria, and his beloved dog, a golden doodle named Daisy - and wields a 50 Megapixel Canon digital camera (and telephoto lens) with the confident







*left, Reaching, photograph*

ease of a child with a box of crayons. For Dusek, technology is no big deal - and certainly no procedural challenge. As he sees it, technological sophistication is a gift, and one that is bracingly eager to cater to our multifarious needs.

### **The Contrast**

This romantic casualness about hi-tech camera equipment and processes is highlighted all the more, in Dusek's case, by the fact that what he makes with all his cutting-edge equipment are photographs that evoke the productive silences, the generative intimacies, the clarifying ruminations and the emotional nourishment that comes from a radically different approach to the world than is normally provided by the hectic and hapless lives of quiet desperation most of us find ourselves leading.

Asked to encapsulate the essential nature of his art, Dusek replied "My art is a series of toned black and white photographs whose goal is to show the world that exists in the midst of the chaos, busyness and overload of modern life." He speaks of his recourse to "negative space" in his photographs, but hastens to point out that this negative space is not just empty background or useless filler, but is, on the contrary, what he refers to as pictorial "downtime." Without this negative space or downtime, he explains, "we just endlessly rush to and fro and have no time to pause and think for ourselves. Without that space between activities...we all become two-dimensional reflections of what the world tells us to be." What Dusek creates is pause.

### **Ma**

Dusek's "negative space" is closely akin to what Japanese culture calls "Ma," a word which can be roughly translated as "gap," "space," "pause" or "the space between two structural parts." As





left, *Zen Path*, photograph  
right above, *Muskoka Buoy*, photograph

Wikipedia puts it, “the spatial Ma concept is experienced progressively through intervals of spatial designation. In Japanese, ma suggests interval. It is best described as a consciousness of place, not in the sense of an enclosed three-dimensional entity, but rather the simultaneous awareness of form and non-form deriving from an intensification of vision. Ma is not something that is created by compositional elements; it is the thing that takes place in the imagination of

the human who experiences these elements.”

How can this sense of ma-interval be awakened within the experiential imaginations of the viewers of Dusek’s photographs? Only by the artist’s extremely deft and painstaking construction of his work. If you look at a photograph like *Tree and Six Posts*, for example, you may at first see very little. Indeed, you may think there is simply not enough there. Then, when you look longer, you find that while the photo







*Previous Page, Symphony, photograph*  
*left above, Shodo, photograph*



*right above, Cheltenham Badlands, Study 1, photograph*





left above, *Dunedin Crest*, photograph  
right, *Killarney Grass*, photograph

is limited as an event, it is nevertheless long - almost endless, in fact - on vital, energized space. The work is almost a photographic equivalent to the Japanese haiku in poetry. We might even attempt to write the photo as a haiku - thus:

*An ancient tree  
Six fence posts  
Admire it*

Or look at his Cheltenham Badlands Study No.1 and note how the foregrounded tree-like form (betraying no real sense of top or bottom) nestles vigorously (it looks a bit samurai-esque) into its surrounding

“negative space,” not being supported by it so much as having been generated by it.

### **A Poetic Eye**

Not the least remarkable thing about Peter Dusek is that his highly-finessed, poetic eye developed not out of a lyrically aesthetic, artistically-hothouse background but evolved, rather, from a busy and highly successful quarter century working as an independent computer consultant, doing database design and programming. He was already in his late 40s (he is 49 years old now) when he started to make photographs.

He began slowly and even tentatively,







left above, *Three Pines*, photograph  
middle, *Whisper*, photograph



right above, *Tree and Six Posts*, photograph

but a mere three years into his passionate new avocation, he was already staging sold-out exhibitions and selling his photographs internationally. People like living in the still unmoving place of The Interval. Dusek’s sense of exactitude and his appetite for endless patience seems to have been hard-wired into him, born from his long apprenticeship in computer technology. But his abiding passion for the serious study of both the creative power of Japanese Zen culture, and the Chinese traditions of Taoism goes back thirty

years, running parallel to his hi-tech computer life. The two life-streams came powerfully together in his practice of photography.

**Arriving at Your Destination**

Dusek is adamant about how it is not the subject matter of photograph that counts. What matters, at least to him, is rather the feeling that subject matter can be made to (allowed to) express. “For art,” Dusek says, “the subject matter is just the vehicle; the feeling is the destination.”

“I have studied Japanese and other Asian art,” he notes, “and I have discovered that my

work is best described by the Japanese concept of shibumi, which means ‘a quiet elegance.’ It is interesting how that came to be: it wasn’t that I found out about shibumi and then consciously made my artwork to fit the concept; it was rather that I first made my art and then, after studying Japanese aesthetics in more detail, discovered that my work fit the ideals of shibumi. So I hope that means that shibumi is a true reflection of my work rather than my having made myself pursue an external ideal.”

Look, for example, at his photograph, Muskoka Buoy. Can you not feel its stillness

coming upon you? Doesn’t it feel the way the Basho, the Zen haiku master, sounds?

*At the ancient pond  
A frog jumped  
With a splash*



*Your can find the exquisite photography of Peter Dusek at:*

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