

INTERVIEW BY LORRAINE ANN DAVIS

TUCSON'S ETHERTON GALLERY CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY



■ **B&W:** What prompted you to open a photography gallery?

■ **ETHERTON:** In 1981, on a visit to Tucson, I saw a sign in a storefront window: For Rent \$230 Per Month. I signed a lease on the spot, sold part of my photography collection for seed money, and hung my first show in January of 1982. But my second show, a 20 year retrospective of the work of Danny Lyon, established me as a serious contender alongside the successful galleries in New York and Los Angeles.

■ **B&W:** What had you been doing until that time?

■ **ETHERTON:** I was a full time documentary and commercial filmmaker in the San Francisco Bay Area. Between film shoots, I took photography workshops and visited dealers, galleries, auction houses and museums. I began collecting in 1974, when I bought my first print—a Danny Lyon.

■ **B&W:** How did you go about developing your business?

■ **ETHERTON:** I quickly learned that there was more to running a gallery than white walls, track lighting and writing press releases. I decided to close during the

slower summer months and take my photography stock on the road. I'm a baseball fan, so with a road map, the Eastman House Guide to Photography Collections, and a baseball schedule, I would time my visits with Anne Tucker at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston when the Astros were playing. I would then drive to the Amon Carter to show images to Marnie Sandweiss while the Rangers were at home. Keith Davis, curator at the Hallmark Collection, usually expected a visit when the Royals were playing in Kansas City.

I also visited as many galleries as possible, such as the Andrew Smith Gallery, Santa Fe; the Robert Klein Gallery, Boston; the Kathleen Ewing Gallery, Washington D.C.; and others. The galleries seemed impressed with me and began to consign inventory and refer me to collectors, curators and dealers. I loved these epic road trips that combined the best of everything and helped me build a network.

■ **B&W:** You still go on road trips?

■ **ETHERTON:** No. Trade fairs and the Internet have replaced them. In 1985, I joined the Association for International Photography Art Dealers (AIPAD), and served on its board for 12 years. Road trips are no longer necessary since I attend five trade shows a year: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and London. At these fairs I network with clients, galleries, museum curators and collectors all at the same time.

■ **B&W:** How big is your space?

■ **ETHERTON:** In 1988, we moved to a 4,000 square-foot space in the historic Odd Fellows Hall in

downtown Tucson. I have four long-term staff—the greatest staff, I might add, that anyone could work with. We mount five to six classical and contemporary exhibitions per year, and often host shows in conjunction with events at the Creative Center for Photography.

■ **B&W:** What is the fine art photography market like today?

■ **ETHERTON:** The most difficult thing is finding great material at affordable prices. Last fall's auctions proved that the market is booming. Knowledgeable collectors are now buying at auction, turning the wholesale auction market into a retail market. At Christie's, I was bidding on behalf of a museum client and I now hold the inauspicious title of being the under-bidder on a complete set of Curtis's *The North American Indian* at \$1.25 million—a record for the work.

■ **B&W:** Who are some of your major artists in the gallery?

■ **ETHERTON:** We have major holdings of Ansel Adams, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Danny Lyon, Brett Weston, Paul Caponigro, Mark Klett, Wright Morris, W. Eugene Smith, Kate Breakey, Holly Roberts, Flor Garduño, Graciela Iturbide, Edward Curtis, Timothy

O'Sullivan and many others.

■ **B&W:** Geographically, isn't Tucson somewhat out of the loop?

■ **ETHERTON:** Absolutely not. The Center for Creative Photography is here, which brings a tremendous amount of photography oriented traffic. In 2003, we were ranked one of the top 10 galleries in the U.S. by the American Express magazine *Departures*, and we've been voted the best art gallery in Tucson for 12 years straight by readers of the *Tucson Weekly*.

■ **B&W:** What are your future plans?

■ **ETHERTON:** It's hard to say. After 25 years, it's tempting to think of becoming a private dealer or moving to a larger city to open a gallery. But the truth is that I will probably still be running my gallery here in Tucson for at least the next decade—unless someone makes me an offer I can't refuse!

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