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*The
Transportation
Issue*

Framed by the windows on a train

THEO COULOMBE AND STANDARD SPACE GALLERY

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

Theo Coulombe is a rolling stone but, not in the fashion of the Bob Dylan diatribe. He is much too sensitive and aware of the world around him to be “on your own ... with no direction home.” It is rather in a grander scope of “...gathers no moss” that Theo moves comfortably and graciously, perpetually on the move, living as an artist without any pretense.

His newest incarnation, as the gallery owner behind “Standard Space,” an open and inviting art space in the heart of Sharon, CT, provides Theo with the welcome opportunity to open the eyes and minds of his visitors to the world he has been so fond of exploring and to continue to create his own, remarkable photographic art.

Along with his gallery, which is emerging as a magnetic draw for those wanting to explore the invited mid-career and emerging artists, Theo is an accomplished, even daring photographer. A visit to his website (www.theocoulombe.com) will encourage exploration of studio work, landscapes, architectural pieces, and evocative mood images that each ignite their own story.

“The gallery isn’t a representational place. It’s a project space that invites artists to show their work



Above: Standard Space Gallery in Sharon, CT. Below, left: The artist, the gallery owner, Theo Coulombe.

and invites the audience to explore and enjoy.”

Have camera ... will travel

From a childhood filled with an eagerness to explore and to imagine through receiving his undergraduate degree from Paier College of Art in Hampden, CT, and his MFA from prestigious Cranbrook Academy in Bloomfield Hills, MI, into the highly competitive world of professional photography, Theo has allowed his sense of wonder to support his penchant to wander.

“Cranbrook was an amazing experience,” recalls Theo with the sparkle in his eye belying the savory artistic mix of rebel, artist, and genuine friend. “The professors weren’t interested in being didactic ... and I wasn’t keen on listening to someone talk at me. We became engaged with structure and requirements for our art without losing our identity.”

His student travels took him far afield, spending time in Istanbul and using his experience of “seeing landscapes through the windows of trains rolling across Europe” to inspire his graduate thesis – and

continue to whet his appetite for travel. The framing of those train windows – forcing perspective to the horizontal frame – gave Theo a fresh perspective on what his photography could mean.

A man of many talents and skills, Theo worked for a time on the Appalachian Trail in Skowhegan, ME, spent time as a builder and both studied and taught at New York’s New School.

Home may now be Sharon, but his wanderings have taken him across Europe and the Far East, stopping for extended periods in Budapest, where he was perfectly content to “pass through,” but ended up staying and finding gainful employment. “The rent was \$300 a month and my job was working in a stock photo library — researching and cataloging thousands of images. It was an amazing time.”

With dear friends living there, Theo finds the opportunity every other year to spend time in “the Pearl of the Danube.”

The next 22 years

When he eventually decided to leave Hungary and settle into his

chosen profession, it was in a studio loft in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, “the capital of hipster” as he calls it. In the early 90s, Brooklyn was a new frontier: a landscape of loft buildings, warehouses, and the occasional park that provided inexpensive housing for artists and the sense of community created by pioneers.

One reassuring fact about diving into the Brooklyn “scene” was that a close friend and fellow Cranbrook graduate, designer and artist Rafe Churchill and his wife, Heide Hendricks were already there.

It was in a 2500-square-foot loft space that Brooklynphoto Studio took root. Days were filled with working for some of the greatest names in fashion and high end retail. Theo had a gift of creating razor sharp images with creative treatments that brought the likes of Ann Taylor, Major League Baseball, L’Oreal, Ralph Lauren, and Saks back to his studio again and again.

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Art ... but for one night only

But as artistic as his studio work might be, there was the rambling spirit of the artist that continued to drive his imagination. So it was that he created the *One Night Only* Art Series in his loft and invited the collection of emerging artists who populated the area to have a place to show their work.

Twice a month, the shows became a vibrant dialog with the community, and the broader art world. Artists, writers, actors, dancers all found their ways to *One Night Only* shows and Theo's reputation as both an artist and a curator grew, exponentially.

With art hung on the walls, it seemed most logical that Theo would turn his camera to capture the displayed images. He became associated with legendary photographers John Coplans and Paul Garin, photographed art for high end galleries, took courses at The New School and saw his work presented in the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, the Imperial War Museum in London, and The Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield, CT. Then, everything changed.

Rent! ... not the musical

The building that had been home for over 20 years and had spawned so many nights of creative energy was sold and, confronted with the reality of an astronomical raise in the rent, Theo Coulombe became, once again, a rolling stone.

"I knew that the Brooklyn chapter was over, and it was time to move on," he says with the resignation of an individual who may not like what fate has dealt, but realizes that fighting is futility. With friends scattered throughout the Tri-state area, Theo started "connecting the dots" and exploring what might be next.

"I had spent weekends with Rafe and Heide at their home in Sharon and knew I loved the area. The landscape of Northwest Connecticut reminds me of one of the most magical places on earth: the Ardennes Forest in Belgium and Luxembourg." So he looked around.

"This isn't happening!"

Encouraged by his brother, himself a Connecticut resident and insurance executive, Theo explored available properties. It was almost a fluke that one weekend included a visit to what had been, 12 years before, an antique shop. "I had no intention of really staying here ... but in two weeks, we had bought the building," and the rolling stone took another revolution.

"My first reaction was 'this isn't happening!'" But, with the exquisite eyes of Rafe and Heide and his own imaginative streak, an otherwise silently empty building was transformed into living space and Standard Space.

An inquiry into the basis for the name brings a smile to Theo's



Above: *Moon and Barn*, photograph by Theo Coulombe. Below, left: Peter Kirkiles sculpture at Standard Space.

face. "There's a shorthand in the art world. Galleries are often called 'white boxes,' or referred to as a 'standard space.' There are standard lenses in photography, performance standards in acting and dance. This gallery is my effort to cast a wide net and provide access to the art world for a broader community. It's a 'standard space.'"

Settled – at least for a time – Theo has resumed creating art with his camera. He explores the countryside, searching out the barn, the river, the hillside that challenges his view. "My view of this landscape is wide and the best I can do to encapsulate any given scene is place a rectilinear frame with my 8x10 view camera. In the end I'm subverting the landscape to my purposes. Perhaps no one will see it the same way, or choose the same frame, in fact the same elements may not be there a minute, an hour, or day later."

Standard Space on the Sharon Green is open, tastefully appointed and classic in its appearance. Several artists, friends Theo has known for years and newly discovered local tal-

ents have been invited to show their work in the gallery. Recent shows have featured two New York artists, Lisa Warren and Rachel Frank, both award winners and each in high demand as "artist in residence" at schools across the country, and Kent resident sculptor and printmaker Peter Kirkiles.

"The range is eclectic, but that's how the conversation begins," suggests Theo as he approaches the summer and the influx of transplanted New Yorkers familiar with the fulsome gallery world of the five boroughs and ever curious to see what is new, different, and engaging. Pressed to describe his career, Theo acknowledges his penchant for "thinking in a non-linear fashion and having the ability to change and adapt." One might sum it up as celebrating the fact that Theo Coulombe – is a rolling stone. •

To see Theo Coulombe's work, visit his website www.theocoulombe.com. Standard Space is located at 147 Main Street on the Sharon, CT green. Gallery hours are Friday through Sunday, 12 to 5pm or by appointment (917) 627-3261. Visit the gallery website at www.standard.space.net.

