



Above: Elizabeth Vienneau, *Lookout Mountain*, 2001. Below: Blythe Jamieson, *Sally Clam*. Facing page: Russell Joslin, *Self-portrait*, *Empty*, 2004.

# Hot Shots

*Shots*, a locally produced photography magazine, is getting worldwide exposure

BY TIM GIHRING

THERE ARE CLASSICALLY beautiful photographs—misty mountains, lovers kissing in Parisian cafés—and then there are the pictures in *Shots* magazine. ¶ The pattern of sleep marks on a young man's chest, the noses of two 1970s cars poking out beneath half-closed garage doors, a man kneeling at a railing in a ruined church—these are some of the images that distinguish *Shots* from mainstream photography magazines or anything you might have hung in your dorm room. *Shots* will make you think, and not necessarily pretty thoughts. ¶ “It’s definitely not commercial or slick,” says *Shots* editor and publisher Russell Joslin, who distributes the quarterly publication worldwide from his home in Minneapolis. “I like photographs that reveal something about the photographer, take risks, or are vulnerable, personal.”





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Actually, everything about *Shots* is intimate. It began in 1986 as a zine, a handmade magazine, photocopied and stapled, that was more or less the personal journal of Daniel Price, a Kentucky photographer. Along with Price's photographs and accompanying commentary were images from emerging artists, photographers who for one reason or another—obscurity, point of view—weren't getting published in mainstream outlets. Joslin is the third publisher of *Shots*, having taken over in 2000 from Robert Owen, a Dallas man who moved to Minneapolis. Yet after all this time, not much has changed. The magazine is still a forum for those who see the world through a slightly skewed lens, and it's still a one-person operation—"pretty much a computer, scanner, and a box full of mail," Joslin says.

Joslin's home is filled with photographs—on the wall, tabletops, anywhere and everywhere. He owns photographs, he says, that trigger his curiosity every time he passes them. Many of the images reflect his taste for the surreal. This may run in the family. His brother is a painter who's done a series of works featuring circus oddities, and his sister-in-law makes sculptures using animal skeletons, metal fixtures, and musical instruments. Joslin is friendly, utterly polite ("It's an honor," he says of interviewing photographers he admires), and soft-spoken; he is less able to say just what he's looking for in a shot than to show examples. He best expresses himself, perhaps, in art. Joslin is a photographer and his own best subject. He's been shooting self-portraits for years, his shaved white head in remarkable contrast to his black wardrobe.



Patricia D. Richards, *Hailey at 7*.

In a way, if unobtrusively, *Shots* is a portrait of Joslin. Edited by a single person, the magazine has always tended to reflect a very personal vision. The initial zine was published on newsprint, much of the copy was handwritten, and the photographs had a snapshot feel. It often featured the work of photographers using toy cameras, the sect of art photography that revels in cheap, junky cameras for the unexpected effects of poor focus and light leaking into the picture. The second editor, Robert Owen, continued much of this aesthetic. Joslin's *Shots*—more thoughtful than playful, more professional—is a departure, but it didn't come easily.

"This magazine had a tradition and a history, and I was feeling I had to continue that somehow," Joslin reflects. "I just had to say, 'Okay, this is my magazine now; I've got to let it reflect that.'"

The 1,200 subscribers to *Shots* have largely taken to his vision. They are a small but unusually dedicated bunch. There is at least one subscriber on every inhabited continent, and they are generally all photographers. Their work sometimes appears in the magazine, and they are often in touch with one another. Joslin publishes contact information for each photographer whose work appears

in an issue, and many have made friends in this manner.

"It's a community in a way," Joslin says. "I want the magazine to be inspiring to them, give them something to think about, challenge them."

Joslin receives about 150 to 200 submissions for each issue. He winnows that down to a fraction. There are few ads, though the publication generates enough profit (and is enough work) that Joslin quit his job as a structural drafter. Someday he hopes the magazine, recently nominated for an *Utne* Independent Press Award, will sustain him completely, but he won't compromise its sensibility, what he calls "a photographer's photography magazine."

In the Joslin era, each issue opens with an interview with a photographer. Other than the occasional artist's statement, this is the only copy in the magazine, the only words that might affect how you think about the photographers or their work. "I like photographs that make you think," he says. "I don't want to tell people how to look at photographs." ■■

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