



MYOPIC PROVINCIA

Paul D. Van Hoy II

By Michelle Perkins

Having recently completed the MFA program in fine art photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Indiana native Paul D. Van Hoy II currently operates a broad-based business in the Rochester area, offering everything

from stock photography to weddings and portraits. Despite the challenges of running a business, he continues to pursue his interest in fine art photography through a number of ongoing projects exploring existential questions of life and creativity.

For Van Hoy, one of these issues is the paradox between intellect and intuition. "I find that as much as I like to think about images, it seems to poison the well of passion that I once had for photography," he says. "I used to think of that well as





bottomless, but the more I think about images, the more I paint myself into a corner sometimes. I feel like I can't really justify my reasons for wanting to make an image. That's a difficult place to be as an artist because it shouldn't be about justifying your work. It should be just a process of exploration, innovation and spontaneity."

One of Van Hoy's recent projects, entitled *Myopic Provincia*, explores the inabil-

ity to resolve such concepts, which are intrinsically linked yet inherently opposed. In his artist's statement, Van Hoy writes, "These images are imaginings, questions in the form of color, shape and line. The work exudes an aura, an enigmatic alterity embedded within the layers of each constructed image that is both impossible but yet familiar."

Van Hoy had originally entitled the

work the *Mise en Abyme* series, from a French term (literally, "placing into the abyss") used to describe the interrelationship of stories within stories that prevents us from reaching the foundation of reality. "We are always buffeting off of these surfaces of reference and representation, but never coming to a precise, critical principle," Van Hoy says. "I realized the only way to realize principle is to get outside of consciousness—but this is quite impossible; it requires being in two places at one time. I want to make images that represent unconsciousness, but I do that with a conscious mind. So the images, from the very beginning, were about futility." Van Hoy ultimately settled on the title *Myopic Provincia* to reflect this futility, referencing the inability of the viewer to see what is directly in front of them.

It is perhaps well in accordance with this humbling mindset that he selected a humble subject: the egg. "The selection wasn't steeped in concept and theory," says Van Hoy. "I eat eggs every morning for breakfast, and I simply looked at it and thought, 'What a great place to start. It's white on white. What could you possibly do with that?' I started manipulating the egg, playing with it and really studying it. At first glance, it is this bland, trivial object that we discard without ever really looking at it. But it does have all these different textures and surfaces and colors and nuances.

"What I found out is that there are different ways you can take an egg apart. Eggs have a hard shell exterior, but they also have this very thin, pliable inner membrane. When you break the egg a certain way, you can pull on it and manipulate it. Based on the wetness or dryness of the membrane, it can actually create all kinds of colors and textures," says Van Hoy.

The eggs and their parts were rendered abstract by photographing them at extreme magnifications—views that defy the ability of the human eye. "At the time, I was taking a microscopy course at RIT, and I had access to photography equipment and techniques I hadn't used before.



I was photographing spaces as small as five to six micrometers [one millionth of a meter] at times," he says.

This made lighting a major challenge for Van Hoy. "I'm used to lighting rooms," he says. "Products are sometimes difficult when they are small, but when you're dealing with a really, really small space, it becomes quite tricky." Van Hoy ended up using an Elinchrom fiber-optic accessory kit. He would light the scene from one side, then make an exposure. Without moving the subject, he would adjust the light in tiny increments around the subject until it had moved 360 degrees, making a separate capture at each position. By doing this, he created a series of images with shadow in every possible position.

From these exposures, shot in RAW mode, Van Hoy selected a base exposure. Then, working in Photoshop, he placed additional exposures from the same series on discrete layers—working with anywhere from 20 to 60 layers in each image file. From that point, he says, "It's very much like working in the darkroom and trying to create the perfect Zone print, from the blackest black to the whitest white and everything



in between. That was where my concern was focused. Looking at an image on the computer screen, I would isolate one small area at a time and make the perfect exposure for that one square of the photograph before I moved on to the next square. It's almost an inch-by-inch process."

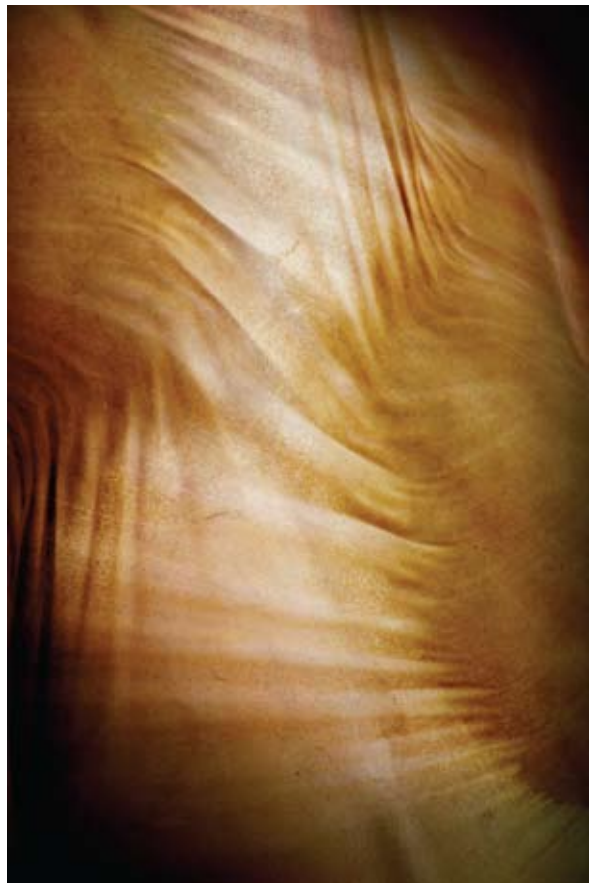
Subtle edits to each of the layers ultimately made it possible to create a very complex lighting situation that couldn't exist without compositing. "It would be like having 20 studio lights the size of a pinhead," he notes.

The original captures displayed much more subtle colors than those reflected in the final images, ranging from yellowish to red. In some cases, the color cast was caused by light passing through the shell or accounted for by the overall condition and moistness of the egg; in other cases, the origin of the color was less obvious. "The colors are a really interesting thing that happens here. The colors seemed to become more saturated, more exaggerated—they would shift tremendously the farther I would push the image beyond its viable threshold," Van Hoy says. "When you're combining images, doing overlays and all kinds of layer blending modes—really




jamming these images together and pushing the limits in terms of levels and color adjustments—sometimes the colors would just come out of nowhere.” Van Hoy never did any selective coloring of the images or conscious addition of color at the outset. Seeing his initial results, however, he tried a few gels and even dyeing the eggs but was never happy with what he achieved. “It seemed that whatever was naturally occurring there was definitely more favorable than when I was trying to control it,” he says. As a result, none of those images made it into the final series.

Creating the series was an eye-opening experience for Van Hoy. “I realized how—even as a photographer who considers himself to have a very critical eye and a very sensitive palette in terms of color, shape and form—I was discarding things within my day-to-day existence that had tremendous potential and nuance residing within them. It was very jarring. How many other



opportunities have I missed?”

Van Hoy now plans to take the project further, moving on to different eggs (such as alligator and crocodile). “As the characteristics of the eggs change, the pictures are going to change as well—because it is all about nuance,” he says. “It’s a very intuitive process, letting me get back to taking photographs without thinking about everything I did before I actually made the image. I wanted to return to that sense of adventure. That’s what photography was to me when I began.”

To learn more about Van Hoy and see his work in both fine art photography and other genres, please visit www.fotoimpressions.com. 

Michelle Perkins is a professional writer, designer and image retoucher. She has written for PC Photo and is the author of Beginner’s Guide to Adobe Photoshop, The Practical Guide to Digital Imaging, Color Correction and Enhancement with Adobe Photoshop, and her latest book, Professional Portrait Lighting: Techniques and Images from Master Photographers (all from Amherst Media).