

Boston Photography

The struggle for creative survival has taken a toll on Boston photographers, though their work is as vital as ever.



DAN RANALLI

Dan Ranalli, 35, of Newton, remembers his epiphanic discovery of photographic art: a 1968 show at the Worcester Art Museum of works by Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Walker Evans. "I was astounded looking at these objects, being in the physical presence of these luminous silver prints. I bought a used Pentax almost immediately, then went to a view camera because I aspired to the sensuality of Edward Weston's peppers. I made clones of Weston pictures. Clones aren't as good as the real

thing, no matter what geneticists say."

Like many other Boston-area photographers, Ranalli was active in the antiwar movement in the 1960s. But what makes Ranalli unusual among politically active photographers is that he's chosen abstraction for his art. As he tells it, "You couldn't convince people that the Vietnam War was bad if they didn't want to believe it. You needed to change people's consciousness."

Ranalli's objective is akin to the credo of the 1950s abstract expressionist painters: effecting a spiritual rejuvenation in the beholder of the

art. Ranalli says, "The role of the artist in this technological time is to remind us of what connects us with our humanity. I want *content* in my work. Abstraction needs content. I'm interested in marks that the Egyptians, the Navaho, the Chinese make—the zigzag line, for instance, is everywhere in art. Also little openings, whether they are womblike or erotic. Eroticism has appeared in my work for 15 years, because sex is a nonmachine response to the world."

And if people grasp his work? "They couldn't possibly vote for Richard Nixon or support Watt." □

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BY GERALD PEARY

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