



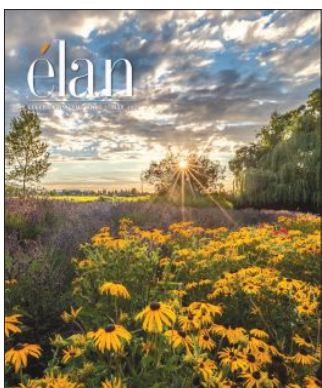
# élan

CELEBRATING THE ARTS | MAY 2021

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# May 2021

BEHNAME | FINCH | PULLEY | SUTTON | THE VIRGINIA QUILTING MUSEUM



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PHOTOGRAPHER VAN PULLEY

# Getting the Right Shot

A MAN OF MANY CAREERS | BY BARBARA MACKAY



Van Pulley

Van Pulley describes his career as a photographer this way: “I’m making up for lost time.”

Educated at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, Van graduated with a degree in International Economics in 1981. “When I graduated from Georgetown, I went to Nicaragua, working there at an agricultural school,” Van says.

“When I came back to the United States,” Van says, “I went to Princeton’s School of Public and International Affairs, graduating with a degree in Economics and Public Policy in 1984. After that, I went to work for Catholic Relief Services. My wife and I lived in Jakarta, Indonesia and I worked on all the Pacific Islands.

“From there, in 1987 while I was still living in Indonesia, I joined the World Bank and was with them for 28 years. I worked in many countries. Our family grew up partly in Washington, but also traveled to all corners of the globe. I retired in 2015.”

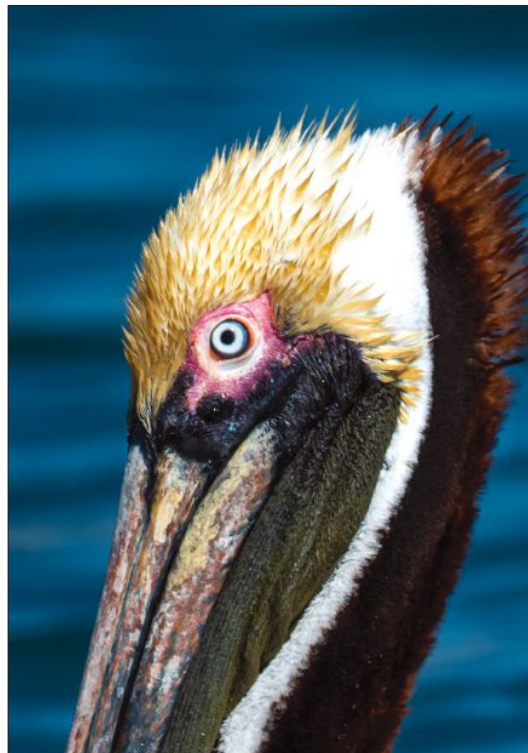
Van had tried photography when he was in high school and college. “But I never really had time to explore it while I was working,” he says. “Photography requires a lot of time. I really couldn’t go back to it until I retired. I do have some regrets that I wasn’t photographing back then. Now I just need to go back.”

When he goes back this time, all those years of adapting to far-flung places will undoubtedly be an asset to Van. The work reflected on these pages—all



*“I try to take unique shots. Something you’ve seen a lot of times, but maybe not noticed.”*

—Van Pulley



created since 2015—shows a remarkable sensitivity to natural landscapes and to the similarities and differences of the people who attract Van's eye.

Van might be best described as a photographer's photographer, one who does his own printing and insists on the best inks and paper. “One of the most important steps in doing fine art photography is the printing,” says Van. “I have high-quality printing equipment and use high-quality archival inks and paper. Producing a fine art photo is not just snapping a moment. It's a lengthy process.”

Van designs his photography outings around where he is and what he hopes to photograph. “You definitely have to plan carefully,” he says. “When you go out you take equipment that is appropriate for the scene or the moment, or for the people whom you are hoping to capture. For landscapes, it would be one set of lenses. For street photography you might take something else. I might take a totally different camera. Depending on what or when you are planning to shoot, you might even need a tripod.”

And you definitely plan around the country you are in. “Morocco's is a culture that does not like to be photographed, for instance,” says Van. “I usually talk to people awhile before asking if I can take their pictures.



Page 30: "Prima Cabana"

Page 31: "Portrait of an Artist"

Opposite clockwise from top left: "Wandering Chefchaouen"; "Strike!"; and "Bird's Eye View"

Above: "Sylvan Reflections"  
All are photographs.

Once I explain what I'm doing, most people react positively.

"On the other hand, people in Cuba are not reluctant to be photographed. With photography, you have to work a scene to find just the right shot. It can take some time. The girl in the photo titled 'Look At Me!' forgot that I was there. She was too busy playing with her friend. I was quite far away, across the street. It took a long time to get that shot, but it was very rewarding."

One section of Van's website, *In Pain and Ink* is devoted to tattoo artists. "What drew me to that subject was not the tattoos themselves but the mastery of the artists," explains Van. "People don't appreciate how difficult tattooing is. The artists shown on my website are the world's best, drawn together in a huge convention in New York. Theirs is all original art, not something you'd find on a boardwalk somewhere. The talent and focus of these artists is really something to appreciate. Their canvas is the body and it's quite unforgiving of mistakes."

Van's images have won distinction in many juried

exhibitions and publications. Van is an Exhibiting Artist Member of Multiple Exposures Gallery, located in the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, a well-known gallery that concentrates only on fine art photography and has been exhibiting for 35 years.

Recently, Van has been experimenting with digital painting using software called Corel Painter 2021. "You can print on paper or canvas," says Van. "It looks like real painting. Painting digitally helps me because I'm color blind. This method makes it easier for me to choose or change color. You have thousands of brushes and an infinite number of colors to choose from." Like photography, digital painting takes a lot of skill and attention to detail. "It also takes a lot of time," Van says.

Despite his interest in a new medium, Van is not giving up photography. He will continue to search for that rarity, a photo no one has ever taken before: "I try to take unique shots," Van says. "Something you've seen a lot of times, but maybe not noticed." é

Van Pulley | [www.vanpulleyphotography.com](http://www.vanpulleyphotography.com)