

## **Guy Mendes - Background**

I am an old school, black & white, wet darkroom photographer. I use small, medium and large format cameras to photograph the landscape and some very interesting people who have lived and worked on it. I process my own film and make archival prints on silver gelatin paper. When people ask me what kind of photographs I make I like to quote a bumper sticker I've seen: "Straight But Not Narrow."

I'm continually fascinated by the way a camera and film can see the world in more detail than the human eye. And while I use old techniques, I want to see the world anew every time I look through the lens.

Wendell Berry and Gene Meatyard changed the way I thought about words and pictures. From Wendell I learned that words could be used for so much more than the who-what-when-where-why-and-how I'd learned in journalism classes, that they could be used for poetry. And Gene showed me that photographs could be used for more than a dispassionate representation of the world, that they, too, could be used for poetry.

After college I lived for a year above James Baker Hall's Dogrun Darkroom in South Windsor, Connecticut. Jim liked to say that a good portrait is given as well as taken. For 40 years now I have made portraits of family and friends, and a wide assortment of seers, soothsayers, spirit guides, mentors and muses, and it's been my great good luck that all of them have been very giving. Now that I'm old enough to have lost family members and close friends, I want celebrate those whose lives shine like lights for me across the fullness of time.

From 1974 through 1990 I was a tenant on a farm in Woodford County, which helped me to focus my attention on the incredible Kentucky landscape. At one point I was the proud owner of 12 cows, a bull, a horse and a mule, and I had to be out in the landscape several times a day, even on days the dogs wouldn't leave the house. But it afforded me a unique opportunity to look long and hard at the landscape on a regular basis, and to see things I might not have seen otherwise.

Besides the classical genres of landscapes and portraits I have been drawn to images that hinge on irony and humor and offer visual commentary on contemporary shortsightedness, like the destruction of

our world-class environment by suburbs, strip malls and mountaintop removal.

I'm a card-carrying, tree-hugging environmentalist who likes to pay homage to and give thanks for this place that has been put in our hands for a very short time. I want to make photographs that are like prayers offered up in the face of the disregard and disrespect and outright exploitation of our natural heritage.