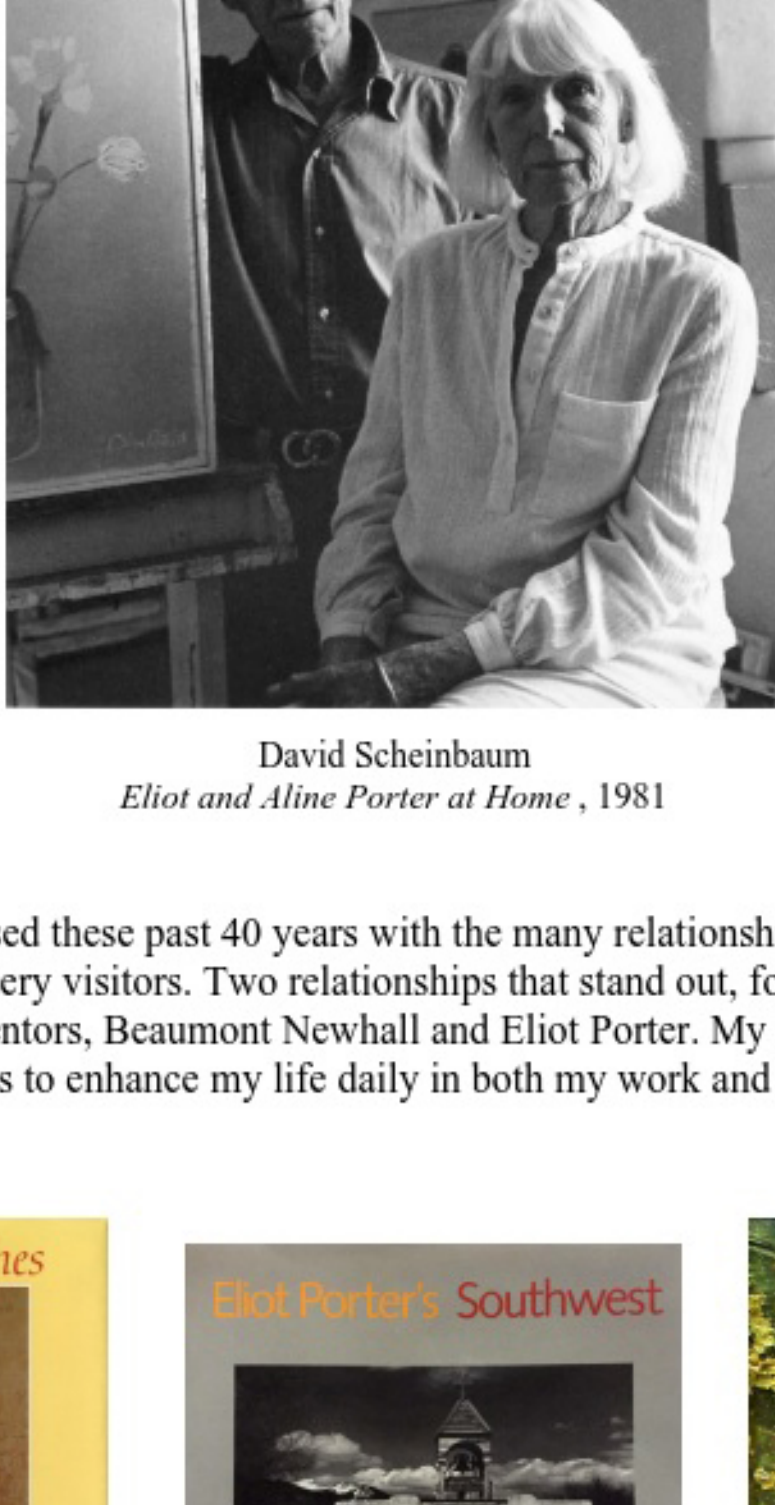


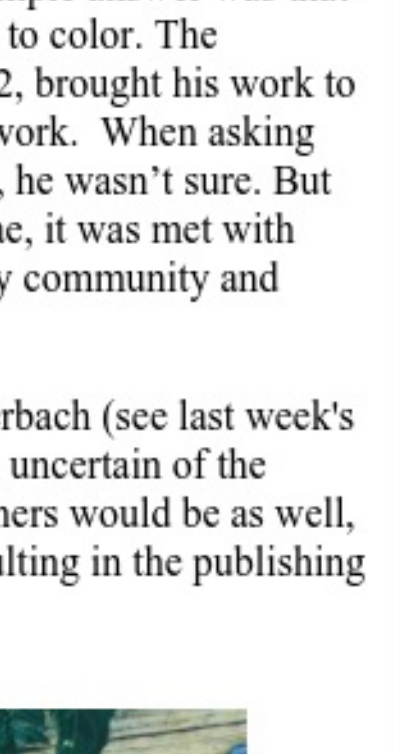
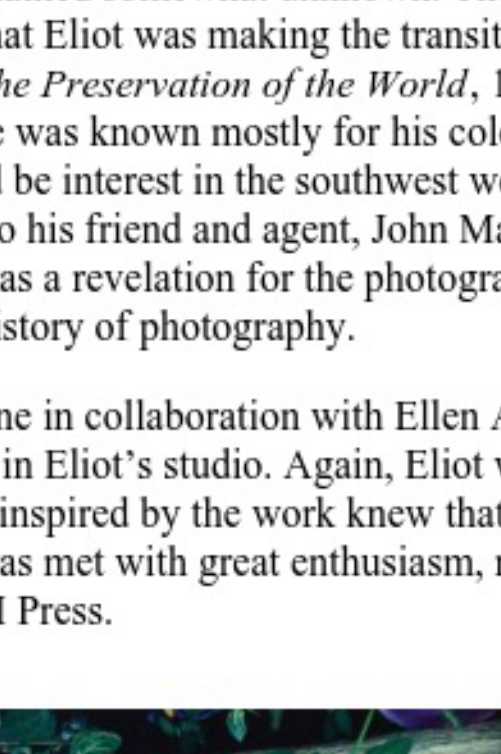
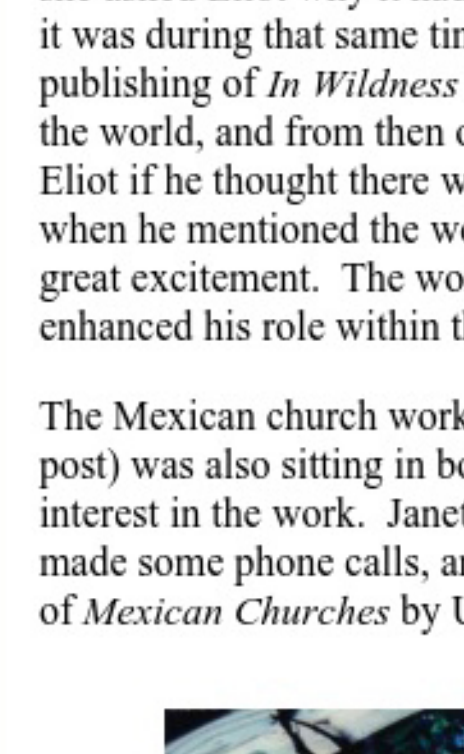
**ELIOT PORTER**

We have written a number of emails about Eliot Porter regarding his life and work (see our [website](#)). Today, rather than focus on his place as the father of color photography, we will talk about our relationship, mentorship, and friendship with Eliot and his wife, Aline Porter, and how that came about.



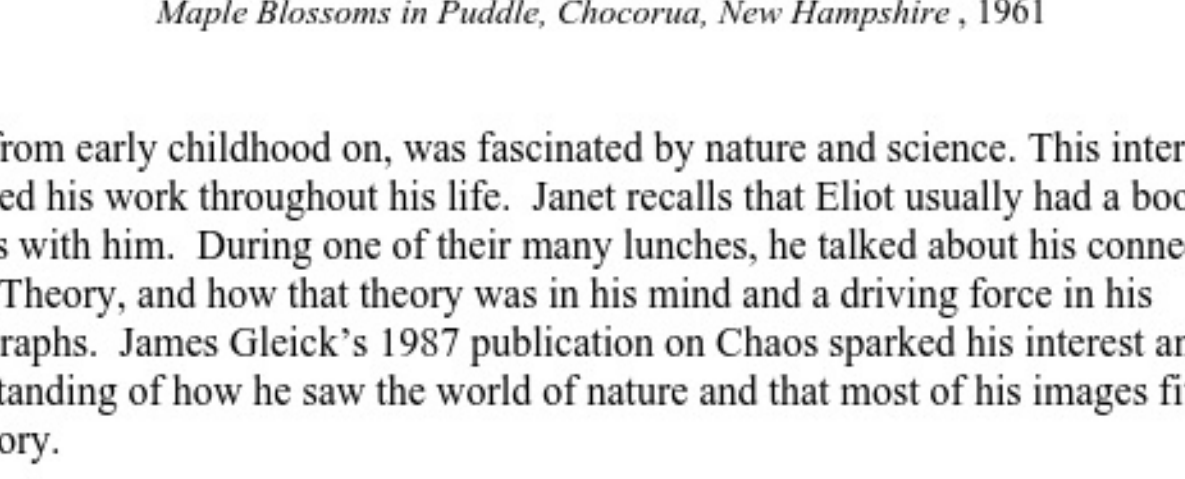
David Scheinbaum  
*Eliot and Aline Porter at Home , 1981*

We have been blessed these past 40 years with the many relationships we have formed with artists and gallery visitors. Two relationships that stand out, for obvious reasons, are our with our mentors, Beaumont Newhall and Eliot Porter. My years with Beaumont continues to enhance my life daily in both my work and as co-executor of his estate.



Janet's time assisting Eliot encompassed cataloging his over 7000 prints, (with pencil and paper), curating, conceiving, and assisting with the publishing of several books: *Eliot Porter's Southwest*, *Mexican Churches*, and *Nature's Chaos*. While cataloging Eliot's prints Janet discovered large bodies of work that were unknown to her and the general art population. The first "discovery" was of Eliot's early black & white work, mostly done with an 8 x 10" view camera, of the Southwest from the early 1940s through the 1950s ending with a few images in 1961. Impressed with the work she asked Eliot why it had remained somewhat unknown. The simple answer was that it was during that same time that Eliot was making the transition to color. The publishing of *In Wilderness Is The Preservation of the World*, 1962, brought his work to the world, and from then on he was known mostly for his color work. When asking Eliot if he thought there would be interest in the southwest work, he wasn't sure. But when he mentioned the work to his friend and agent, John Macrae, it was met with great excitement. The work was a revelation for the photography community and enhanced his role within the history of photography.

The Mexican church work, done in collaboration with Ellen Auerbach (see last week's post) was also sitting in boxes in Eliot's studio. Again, Eliot was uncertain of the interest in the work. Janet, so inspired by the work knew that others would be as well, made some phone calls, and was met with great enthusiasm, resulting in the publishing of *Mexican Churches* by UNM Press.

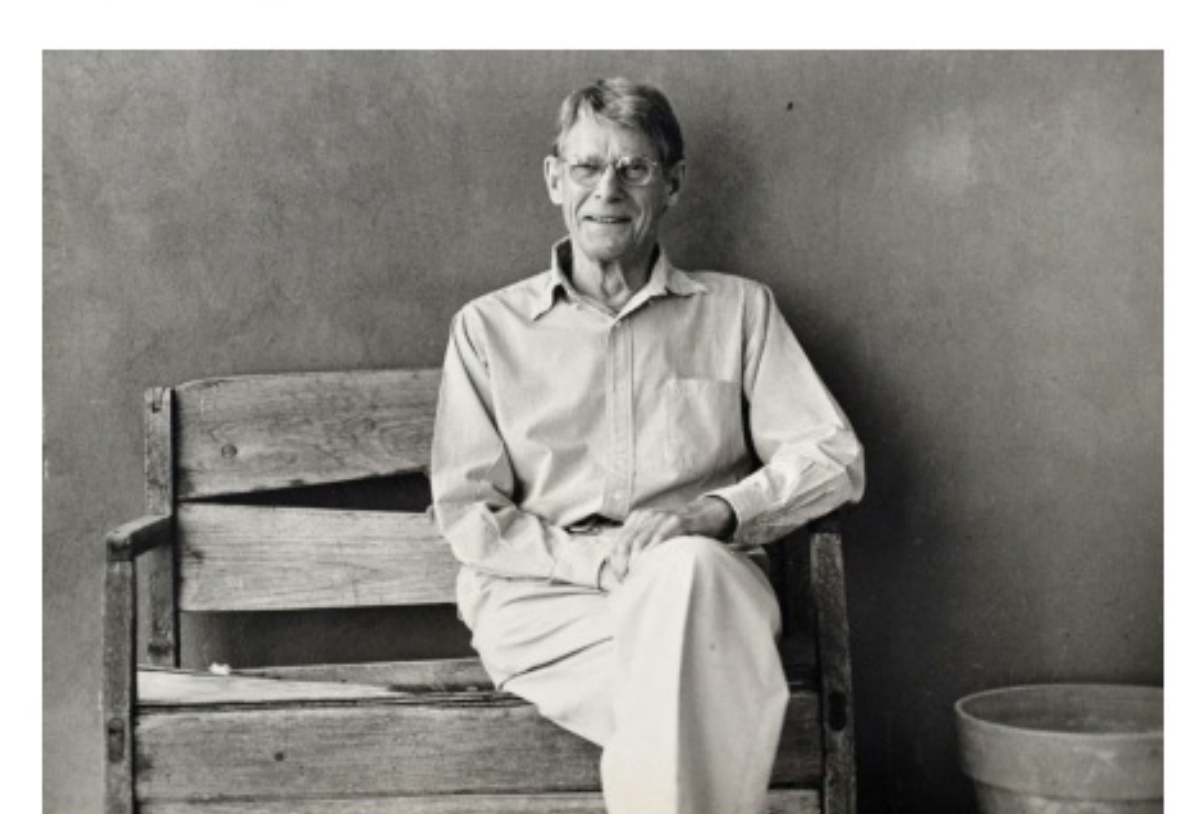


Eliot Porter  
*Rose Petals on Beach, Great Spruce Head Island, Maine , 1971*



Eliot Porter  
*Maple Blossoms in Puddle, Chocorua, New Hampshire , 1961*

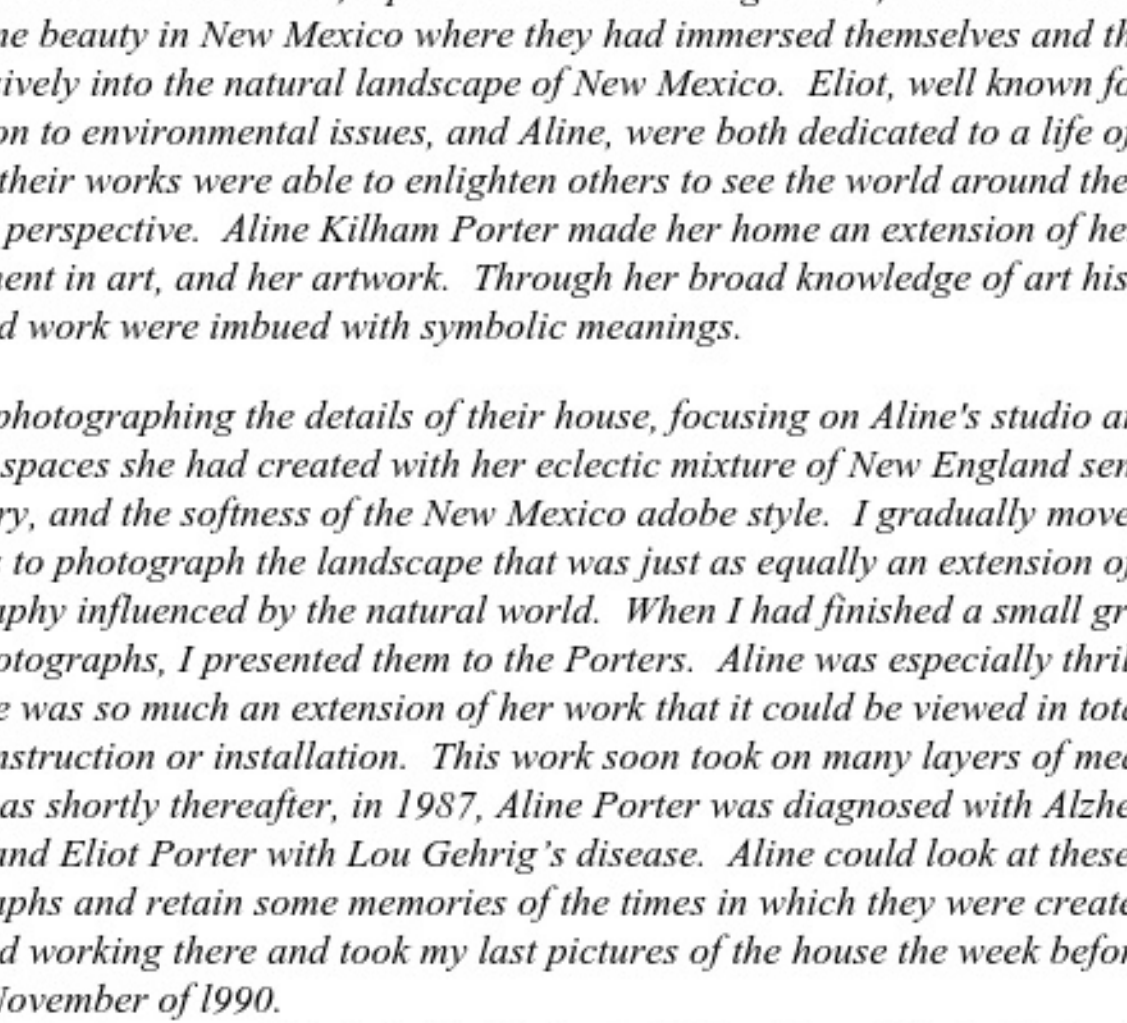
Eliot, from early childhood on, was fascinated by nature and science. This interest informed his work throughout his life. Janet recalls that Eliot usually had a book on physics with him. During one of their many lunches, he talked about his connection to Chaos Theory, and how that theory was in his mind and a driving force in his photographs. James Gleick's 1987 publication on Chaos sparked his interest and his understanding of how he saw the world of nature and that most of his images fit into the theory.



The science of Chaos Theory offered a new way of looking at the seemingly random patterns in nature i.e.: fallen leaves, lichen and moss on rocks, movement of water, the swirl of the desert sands, birds in flight etc. This was a revelation. A few days later Janet had heard that Gleick was coming to New Mexico to give a lecture on Chaos Theory at St. John's College. She approached him with the idea of working with Eliot on a publication. It was pure serendipity as Gleick was raised with most of Eliot's books and was a big fan. Thus began an incredible collaboration, which resulted in the publication, *Nature's Chaos*.

Janet and Eliot had a special relationship somewhat different than Eliot's former relationships with previous assistants. Up until the time Janet started working with Eliot, his former assistants worked with him on the dye-transfer process, helping in the darkroom. At the time that Janet started working with Eliot, Eliot decided that he preferred to work everyday in his darkroom himself rather than take on another assistant. Janet's story is a fun one.

Beaumont Newhall received a call one day from Aline Porter, Eliot's wife, asking him for help in finding Eliot an assistant for darkroom work. She went on to explain that Eliot needed someone urgently. Beaumont's first thought was to mention it to me. At the time, I was working with Beaumont a few days a week, doing black and white printing for him, teaching part-time at the College of Santa Fe and Janet and I were in the early days of Scheinbaum and Russek, and we were raising our two children. I explained to Beaumont that I didn't think I could do another job, he immediately said, "let's send Janet". In the very early years of Scheinbaum & Russek, we wore many hats. We did six to eight exhibitions a year and served on a few photographic committees in town. We were also doing mounting, matting, and framing for many local artists. Beaumont was well aware of Janet's work in the Prints and Drawing Department at the Brooklyn Museum and her skills as a photographer. So he called Aline and helped arrange for Janet's first visit to meet Eliot.

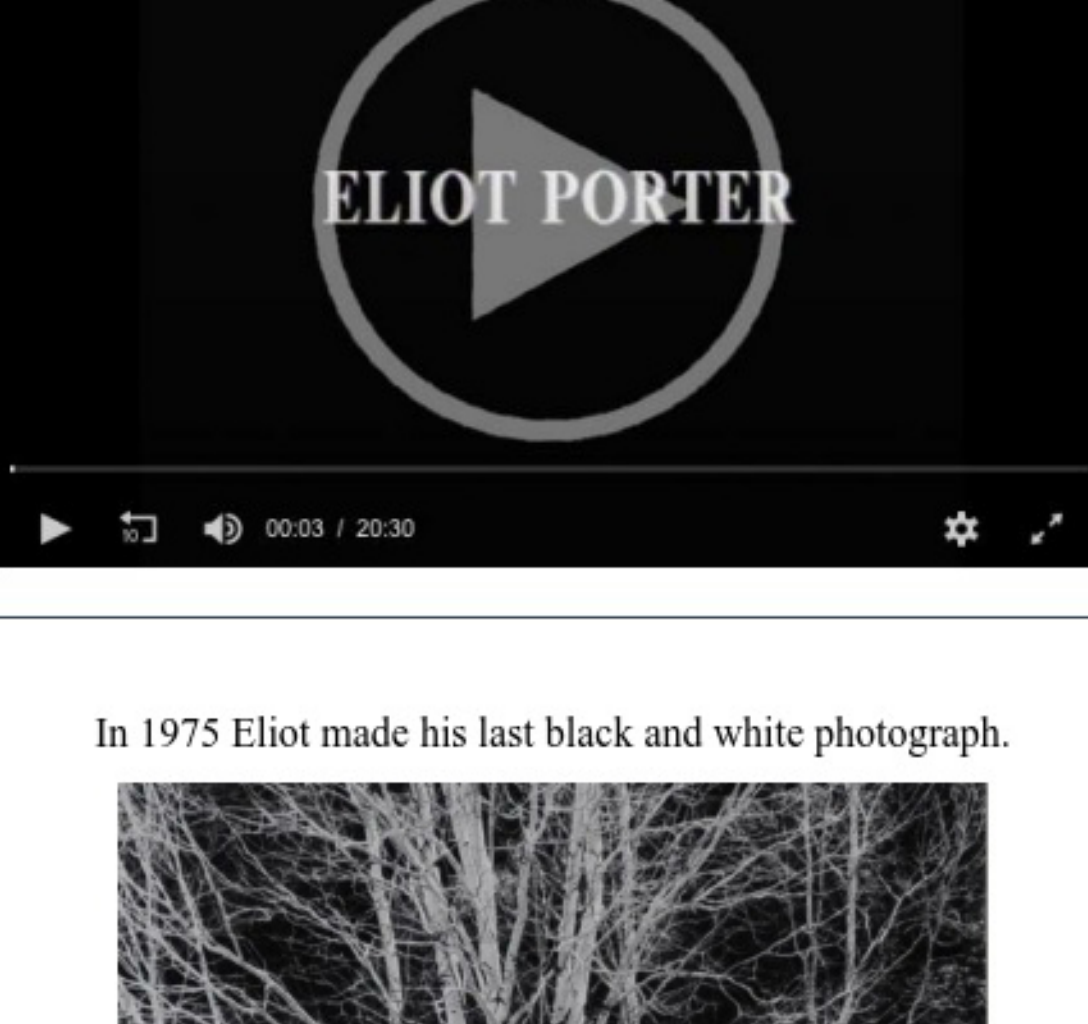


David Scheinbaum  
*Eliot Porter , 1983*

When Janet arrived, and after she and Eliot talked about his needs helping with darkroom work, which she said she could not do, they decided together that it wasn't the right fit. He soon discovered that her work was more in line with paper conservation and studio work, handling of prints, cataloguing, etc. Eliot asked, so as not to waste her time that day if she could sleeve and record some transparencies, which she did quickly. She left with the understanding that he would keep looking for someone who could help in the darkroom. Some days later Aline called Janet and asked for her to return. Janet explained to her that it wasn't the best fit, and thanked her for calling. This scenario went on for the next few weeks with Aline calling and Janet politely declining. It was clear that Aline thought Eliot needed help and Eliot didn't agree. Finally, when Aline called next, Janet said she would come out to the studio again if Eliot called her himself. He did, and for the next 10 years, they had the most amazing relationship.

In my opinion, one of the reasons their partnership worked so well is that Janet's work in the studio freed Eliot so he could spend his days in the darkroom doing what he loved, printing dye-transfer while Janet took care of the everyday work in the studio. Eliot loved to work every day. He did not look forward to the days that were holidays or weekends. Once in a while, he would ask, "can't you come tomorrow". In the 10 years that we worked together there was never a day that he did not say "thank you".

In 1987 Eliot was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and Janet was pregnant with our son Zac. They continued to work daily doing the best they could given their physical limitations. Their last project together was the *Nature's Chaos* book and a portfolio of his early black & white work, *There Is My Own Spirit*. Both these projects were very important and fulfilling as they tied up many areas of his life and work. Eliot died in November of 1990, a few weeks short of his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday.

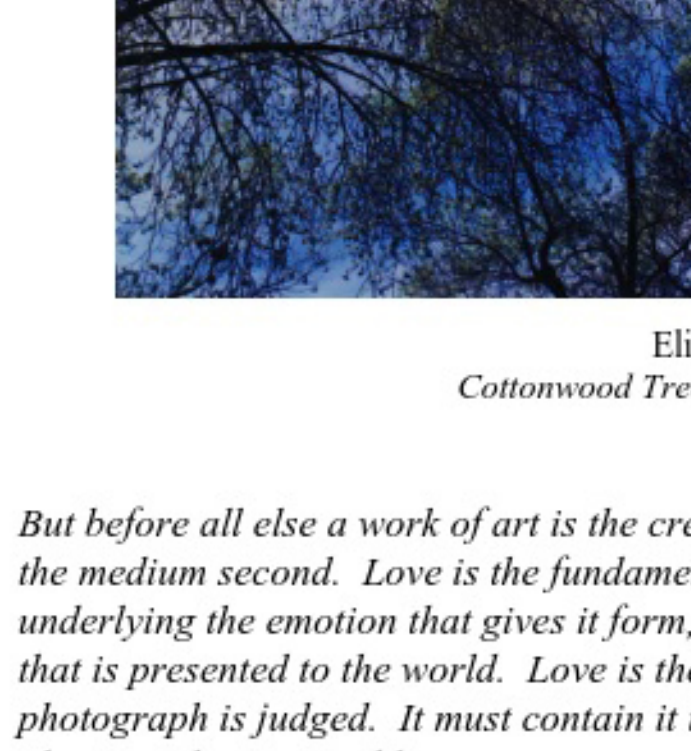


Janet Russek  
*Road to Porter House with Stephen Porter's Sculpture , 1985*

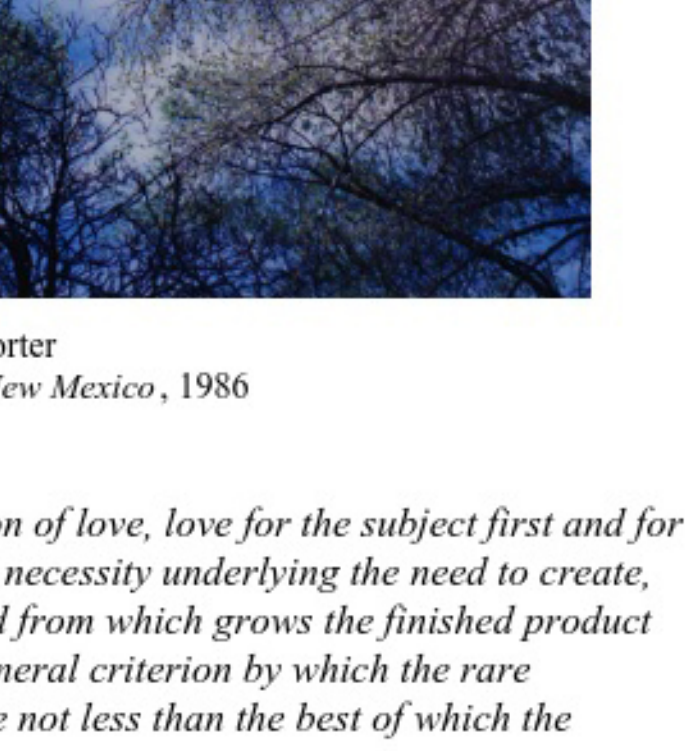
Janet wrote the following for a lecture she delivered in July 2009 about her time with Eliot:

*I worked with Eliot Porter from 1980 through the time of his death in 1990. He and his wife, Aline Kilham Porter, a painter and assemblage artist, lived in an environment of genuine beauty in New Mexico where they had immersed themselves and their home unobtrusively into the natural landscape of New Mexico. Eliot, well known for his dedication to environmental issues, and Aline, were both dedicated to a life of art and through their works were able to enlighten others to see the world around them from a different perspective. Aline Kilham Porter made her home an extension of herself, her involvement in art, and her artwork. Through her broad knowledge of art history, her home and work were imbued with symbolic meanings.*

*I began photographing the details of their house, focusing on Aline's studio and the intimate spaces she had created with her eclectic mixture of New England sensibility, art history, and the softness of the New Mexico adobe style. I gradually moved outdoors to photograph the landscape that was just as equally an extension of Eliot's photography influenced by the natural world. When I had finished a small group of these photographs, I presented them to the Porters. Aline was especially thrilled, as her work was so much an extension of her work that it could be viewed in total as a giant construction or installation. This work soon took on many layers of meaning for all of us as shortly thereafter, in 1987, Aline Porter was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and Eliot Porter with Lou Gehrig's disease. Aline could look at these photographs and retain some memories of the times in which they were created. I continued working there and took my last pictures of the house the week before Eliot died in November of 1990. This work has become a tribute to the Porters' relationship and their life together and for me, a way of remembrance.*



Janet Russek  
*Chair on Portal, Porter House , 1988*



Janet Russek  
*Aline Porter's Studio , 1988*



Eliot Porter  
*Aspens and Cliff, Beaverhead, New Mexico , 1975*

In 1986 Eliot made his last color photograph of the trees outside his house.



Eliot Porter  
*Cottonwood Trees, New Mexico , 1986*

*But before all else a work of art is the creation of love, love for the subject first and for the medium second. Love is the fundamental necessity underlying the need to create, underlying the emotion that gives it form, and from which grows the finished product that is presented to the world. Love is the general criterion by which the rare photograph is judged. It must contain it to be not less than the best of which the photographer is capable.*

Eliot Porter

We again want to thank you for the feedback. Your emails and calls mean the world to us and continue to motivate. We have had some wonderful responses.

Many of you have also asked about accessing our previous emails. We have added a new page on our website entitled "[History of Photography](#)". All our past and future weekly mailings will be located there for viewing. Please feel free to share them and encourage interested parties to join our mailing list under "[contact](#)".

Thank you, please stay safe, healthy, productive, and involved.

Please visit our website [www.photographydealers.com](http://www.photographydealers.com) to view our current inventory.