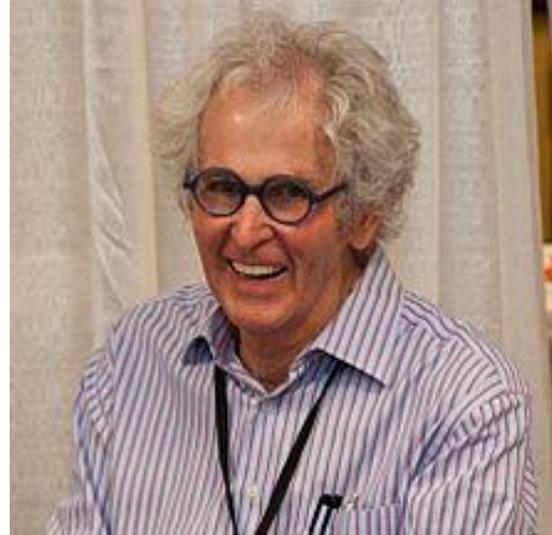**#49 April 2020 Cameraderie**
Jerry Uelsmann (1934-)

Jerry Uelsmann is a highly creative photomontage artist. His work, using multiple negatives and multiple enlargers in a traditional darkroom, anticipated Photoshop manipulations.

Here is the Wikipedia article on Uelsmann:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Uelsmann

Here, from the Wikipedia article, is a description of Uelsmann's creative process—I suspect he wrote it himself—I think it has an autobiographical ring:

> Uelsmann produces composite photographs with multiple negatives and extensive darkroom work. He uses up to a dozen enlargers at a time to produce his final images and has a large archive of negatives that he has shot over the years. Uelsmann does not carry multiple attachments, but only one camera, "Most photographers carry many cameras with multiple attachments. Most photographers have one enlarger. I have half a dozen." When beginning to create one of his photomontages, he has a strong intuitive sense of what he's looking for, some strategy for how to find it, and an understanding that mistakes are inevitable and are part of the creative process. His process begins after a day of shooting. He returns to his workstation in his home and covers a large drafting table with hundreds of proof sheets. He folds and overlaps various contact prints, explores the visual possibilities, then brings the options into his darkroom. He then sets his selected pieces into the large number of enlargers that he owns in his darkroom, and moves the photo paper progressively down the line, building up an image. The negatives that Uelsmann uses are known to reappear within his work, acting as a focal point in one work, and background as another. Similar in technique to Rejlander, Uelsmann is a champion of the idea that the final image need not be tied to a single negative, and may be composed of many. During the mid-twentieth century, when photography was still being defined, Uelsmann didn't care about the boundaries given by the Photo Secessionists or other realists at the time, he simply wished to share with the viewer the images from his imagination and saw photomontage as the means by which to do so. Unlike Rejlander, though, he does not seek to create narratives, but rather "allegorical surrealist imagery of the unfathomable". Uelsmann subsists on grants and his teaching salary, rather than commercial work.

Here is a selection of Uelsmann's work. I Googled "Jerry Uelsmann" and then selected "images" to see these and many more—please do the same if these few intrigue you.

Tree House   1982

This is of course a clever play on words and images.

Handy Shot [my name for this]

Uelsmann composed many photomontages on this basic theme of a pair of hands holding a surrealistic assemblage. I think he reused this pair of hands over and over again in different finished images.

Self Reflection   2009

You may recognize the technique here: the room image is the same left-for-right, so this space does not exist in reality, but one half of the photo was used to create a doubled space ("copy and flip"). I use this technique myself, and will point out that it results in unreal light sources. In this case, you can't really have outdoor light streaming in from opposite sides, casting shadows in opposite directions. Oddly, such inconsistency does not seem to much matter in most such photomontages.

Transition

Uelsmann blends nature with a human form, suggesting a surrealistic mythological fantasy. The recent painter, Rob Gonsalves (1959-2017), worked almost exclusively with surrealistic

compositions based on this sort of transition. Here is a sample of his work. He surely would have been aware of Uelsmann's work.