

LEAP *of* FAITH



HUGUETTE ROE

BY NATALIA MEGAS

There's a certain Gallic quality to Belgium-born photographer Huguette Roe's detailed images, but it's definitely not déjà vu. In fact, her nontraditional perspective transcends all familiarity.

"I'm so appealed by the artistic side of everything," says the self-taught photographer, a resident of Falls Church. "I am a detailed-oriented person, and when I take a photo, I don't look at the ensemble. I just look at the interesting composition in the ensemble and I grab that. Sometimes, I take photos and people stop me in the street and they say, 'What are you photographing?' Then I point to them the 'details,' and then they see it."

Two years ago, Huguette began taking photography seriously enough to start her own business. After dropping out of the Fine Arts School of Perpignan, France, where she was pursuing a graphic design degree, Huguette worked variously as a courier and graphic designer in Belgium and later as a tour guide and graphic designer in the United States.

Then she decided it was time to take a huge risk: "Working in the corporate world was not for me; there was too much manipulation and control—all these things that I can't deal with. I was stressed. I decided, 'I'm just going to do photog-

raphy. I don't know where it's going, but that's what I'm going to do.'" When she saved enough money to buy the materials to start a photography business, *voilà*, her dream of becoming a photographer materialized.

Although photography had long been a hobby for Huguette, she was a bit apprehensive about starting out professionally. But once she landed her first break and photographed a company meeting, a commission that was well-received, her initial misgivings were replaced by a sense of confidence.

It was during her time as a tour guide in the U.S. that she developed her own photography style: "I did a lot of self-training and it was something I was taking seriously." Constant

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communication with other photographers over the years helped her hone her skills and develop her own style. She also attributes her early travels as influential on her work. During a trip to Africa twenty years ago, she began to take notice of lines and repetition, elements that have become signatures in her photography today.

Huguette's thirst for adventure has followed her during photographic expeditions closer to home. Her images of a spiraling staircase came about when she sneaked into a residential apartment building in Washington, D.C., after a delivery man assumed she was a resident there.

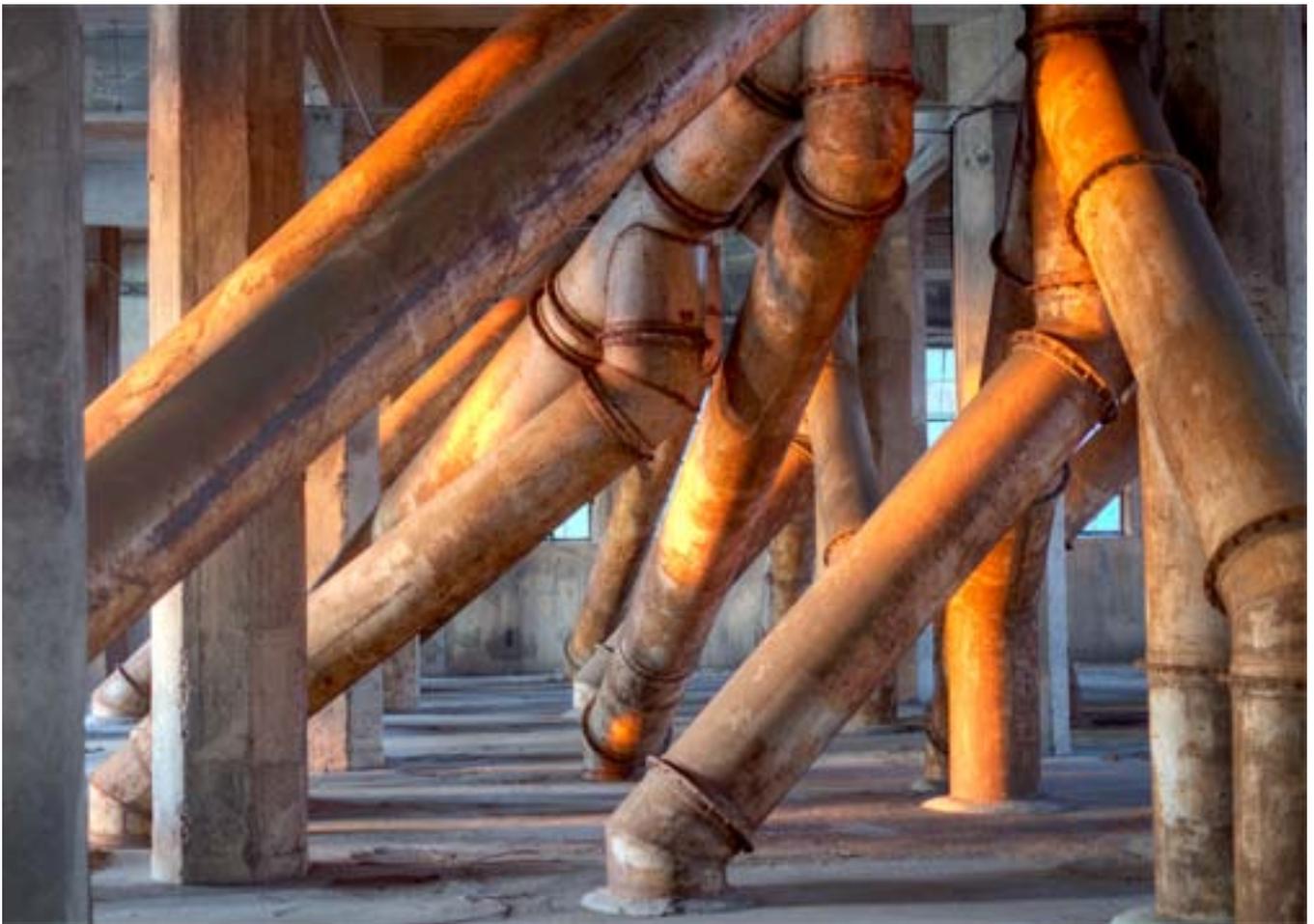
In addition to photographic themes revolving around France, Travels and Architecture, Huguette's versatile body of work includes her latest endeavor, images of recycled matter. Although obtaining access into the centers has posed some challenges, she remains determined to get the photographs she wants, and the *Recycle* series is well worth the ride. "I'm very driven," she says. "You have to grab [the artistic view of the scene] in your mind. I want to move people by showing them some everyday objects that I take in a different way than they see them."

Drawn to images of yesteryear, Huguette says, is very im-



portant for the history. It's an imprint of history. I think it's very interesting. You just have to find the subject. I like the old stuff.... I don't like what's going on now. I'm kind of sad when I see an old, cute house destroyed by a huge, big mansion. My eyes go to the past."

Huguette maintains that she is unafraid of feedback, good or bad. "I'm open to critiques," she says. "Critiques are good because they help me improve. But Americans don't critique. It's a polite society."



Just as practice, experience and a willingness to accept criticism have transformed Huguette into a skillful photographer, she is now more discerning about what defines a photographer: “Some photographers, I appreciate and I say, ‘Wow, this photographer is an artist.’ But I see too many photographers who go to [tourist attractions], and if they are lucky, they might get an unusual sunset to make their photo stand out. But [that’s too] easy for me. It’s like taking a photo of a beau-

tiful woman—the subject gave [the beautiful photo] to you. It’s no work. To me, it’s not enough. I’m looking for an eye on something else—more than just making beautiful stuff.”

Huguette, whose own work has received three International Photography Awards in the past year, urges students of photography to “be different. You have to get away from the *déjà vu*. *Déjà vu* is done,” she says.

So what does the future hold? “It’s a big question mark to me, and it’s very exciting,” she says. “I know something will happen, but I don’t know what, and I love that. I don’t like to have routes where I know in ten years where I’m going to be.”

For the next few weeks, however, the Greater Reston Arts Center is exhibiting twenty of Huguette’s images in a two-person exhibition (see Calendar). For more information about her work, visit www.hrophoto.com. **e**

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