Congratulations, Mike Cochran, recognized by the Big Country Athletic Hall of Fame with its Lifetime Achievement for Media Award

Reporter quits NY Post after being ‘ordered’ to write false VP story

How TaraOsDew documents the intimacy of loss

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In these times when journalists are disrespected, condemned, ridiculed, assaulted and constantly faced layoffs, pay cuts and worse, let it be known that we honor and support journalists and journalism. Keep at it. Your work is important to the people and essential to democracy itself. – Roger Summers

In the days of hot types, a chaser was a late edition of the newspaper for which the presses were not stopped until the plates were ready. Those pages were said to be “chasing” a running press.

Aaron’s Frogs & Flies — May 4; Self-Care Workshop: Bring on the Sun!, May 15; Texas Bee Oasis, May 27-Nov. 28. Info.

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In the days of hot types, a chaser was a late edition of the newspaper for which the presses were not stopped until the plates were ready. Those pages were said to be “chasing” a running press.
Byrd Williams IV, left, and Mark Birnbaum on the Denton square

There's the story ... and the story behind it

Documentary filmmaker Mark Birnbaum likes to fade into the shadows and let his subjects tell their story. Photographer Byrd Williams IV eliminates personalities entirely and freezes his subjects stock-still for five seconds. Together, the visual artists are chronicling 21st-century North Texans in a manner that should endure for millennia.

Williams and Birnbaum shared the story of the massive Walking Dead Project, which will eventually yield an estimated 600 images, and the documentary that tracks it in a video interview with Fort Worth SPJ board member Sarah Macias and a Zoom Q&A session Jan. 27.

The pair also collaborated on “Proof,” both a book and a documentary that encompasses 100 years of Williams family prints, negatives, equipment and journals. University of North Texas Special Collections bought it all in 2014.

In early 2020, Williams took his great-grandfather's 19th-century camera and plowed proceeds from the UNT sale into funding The Walking Dead. “I've made them (prints) all of the most permanent materials I could find,” he said, “where you soak in gold and soak in silver and selenium (a chemical element for toning). That way, they have not a hundred-year life like digital prints (but) as long as 400 to 800 years.” UNT will keep the photos temperature perfect, “and after we're all gone, everybody who's in the collection is gone,” anthropologists will get to examine “how we dressed, our faces, population movements. This is pure social science, not vanity or art or any of that.”

Williams is producing 12-by-14-inch plates for faces and 16-by-20-inch plates for full-length images of each subject, dressed in everyday garb. (“Our clothes end up marking our culture and saying a lot about what we are and what our culture is.”)

The plates can only be developed a few at a time, and the process requires three days. The black and white images, taken with a five-second exposure (much quicker than in the 19th century), are stark and revealing. His subjects can't smile and can't move. “They stand against the wall, exactly like they shot them in the 19th century. It's why everyone looks so grim in those photos. That big camera turns it into a ritual.”

When Birnbaum heard of the project he knew “here was this amazing visual part of the story that was just there for the taking.” He approaches his craft the opposite of Williams as he chronicles his subjects acting and reacting. "Byrd's exposure is for five or six seconds, and mine can be for 45 minutes. And I can allow whatever it is to unfold, and then I edit." His demeanor never changes once he begins shooting. “In about 20 minutes I'm translucid, and in a half hour I'm transparent. Nobody sees me anymore.”

Birnbaum said he's careful not to get in people's faces. “That's what works for me, and it has worked for me for a long time. And the fact that the cameras get smaller and more light sensitive makes it easier to be there and record what's happening.”

The technology enabled Birnbaum to record the development process for The Walking Dead in real time. “(Photography) has always been magic to me. As Byrd says, they're always talking about the print coming up in development. That's the magic. I was able to bring 21st-century video technology to Byrd's 19th-century technology. I could shoot in his darkroom as it was yellow daylight and watch print after print after print come up.”

The Walking Dead Project sprang partly from Williams’ appreciation for European portraiture that offers a visual history of several hundred years. And he wanted to create a record of life in the 21st century. He said: “It was time for me, I'm at an age where I have to give something back.”

— Robert Bohler

among the faces in Byrd's world...
...Recyclable alternative to Styrofoam made from paper waste

... Good vibrations: bladeless turbines could bring wind power to your home

... Missbehaving, secretive, arrogant: That's ERCOT for 20 years

... A first-of-its-kind investment in home care is in the works; will it be enough?

... Could further warming make vital Earth systems spiral out of control?

... With violence surging, these states want to make it easier to carry guns

... Could women’s sports get the same boost that men’s have received?

... A striking newspaper campaign supported by the Minnesota Women’s Political Network and other groups has been running for some time.

Tom Hourigan created the website and social media feed for the campaign. He was more interested in the feedback than he was in the numbers of signatories. He noted that since the campaign launched, there have been eight meetings about how to address the issue with the legislature.

“A strategy for growing huge swaths of bamboo in North America is going to change a lot of things,” says Jose. “The bamboo plant is a natural crop that can be grown on abandoned farmland, and it can be used for biofuel, building materials, and other products.”

Jose is excited about the potential of bamboo as a sustainable resource. “Bamboo is a fast-growing plant that can be harvested every three to five years,” he says. “This means that we can use it as a renewable resource and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.”

Jose has been working with a team of researchers to develop a method for growing bamboo in North America. They have been experimenting with different varieties of bamboo and different methods of cultivation. They have also been testing the plant’s potential as a biofuel.

Jose believes that bamboo has the potential to change the way we think about sustainable resources. “Bamboo can be used to create a circular economy,” he says. “This means that we can use the same resources over and over again without depleting them.”

Jose is optimistic about the future of bamboo in North America. “I think that bamboo has the potential to become a major player in the sustainability movement,” he says. “I am excited to see what the future holds.”