

## LARRY SNIDER

■ **The developed eye** of a photographer can be immeasurably useful when that photographer becomes a collector. Larry Snider, featured in *Black & White* in a 2001 *Spotlight*, has that advantage. A lawyer by profession, Snider stopped buying the high-profile images of the photography market after he retired from practice. He admits that his collection of Penn, Frank, Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, Kertész, Arbus and Callahan, among others, would be beyond his reach in today's market. But he is happy to be living with such objects today.

Collectors rarely stop collecting when what they love becomes inaccessible for whatever reason. Instead, they change their focus. Snider made the decision to buy photographs that were no more than \$100. Having such a strict criteria does not limit a collection, but concentrates it. In addition, it proves that collecting can still be serious and affordable on all levels.

■ **B&W:** Why \$100?

■ **SNIDER:** It's a sum that you're certainly not going to miss. Collecting, for me, should just be fun.

■ **B&W:** How often do you buy photographs?

■ **SNIDER:** Usually two to three times a month.

■ **B&W:** Where do you find your photographs?

■ **SNIDER:** When I was initially collecting in the 1970s and early 1980s, I usually bought from one dealer: the Halsted Gallery in Michigan. Later, Tom Halsted would buy at auction on my behalf. I never went to the auctions myself because I was afraid of

getting swept up in the excitement and over-bidding on a piece or buying too many photographs. I think that it's important for collectors to establish a relationship with a dealer. A dealer is in the field all the time, and if your dealer knows your collection, he (or she) will know what you will be interested in owning and what



will be good for the collection as a whole and can point you in the right direction.

■ **B&W:** Where does one find good photographs for under \$100?

■ **SNIDER:** I buy mainly in flea markets and antique shops. I travel a lot and I have found that vernacular photographs are less expensive in Europe. I like shopping in Berlin and Paris particularly, where one can find great photographs from the 19th and early 20th century for 20 to 30 Euros. I also buy a lot on the Internet and eBay.

■ **B&W:** Is there a particular subject or type of photograph that you collect?

■ **SNIDER:** Most of my under-\$100 collection are full-length *carte de visites*. I've traveled extensively in China, India and Asia, so my interest in indigenous people is reflected not only in my own work (I make mostly ethnocentric portraits) but in my portrait collection as well.

■ **B&W:** How has being a photographer helped you in your collecting?

■ **SNIDER:** I know first hand how difficult it is to make a photograph. I'm mainly a portrait photographer and a collector of portraits. My fascination with other cultures is reflected in what I make and what I collect. The 19th-century ethnic portraits are a record of cultures that are being diluted by western influence. The diversity is being homogenized so those things that defined a culture, its arts and crafts, its language and style of dress, are being lost. I like to find old photographs in which I can see the past of the present I'm photographing when I travel in the East.

■ **B&W:** You are also on the advisory board of the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago. How has your collecting and your own photography assisted you?

■ **SNIDER:** When I moved to Chicago in 1992 I began attending openings at the museum. Eventually, I was asked to serve on the board in order to help the museum raise the much-needed funding that all museums struggle to find. The museum has an acquisition budget and the advisory board must approve, or disapprove, the acquisition requests. We sometimes give the curators a run for their

money. Being a photographer, I think that I can judge a work on its technical qualities. Being a collector and being familiar with the museum's collection and the acquisition process, I can understand the curator's position when asking to acquire particular photographs.

■ **B&W:** What are your thoughts on today's prices for contemporary photography?

■ **SNIDER:** Contemporary photography reaching such high prices is confusing but also thought-provoking. Such sums raise questions in everyone's minds. It forces us to reassess not only the market, but the idea of what photography means to different people. This can only be a good thing. Not necessarily the high prices, but the attention—even if it is controversial—that is drawn to the photography market.

■ **B&W:** How do you take care of your photographs?

■ **SNIDER:** The photographs are all framed and hung in my apartment or are framed and on the floor. The only thing I do is keep them out of direct sunlight. The \$100 photographs are kept in drawers in my studio, although some are displayed.

■ **B&W:** Which books do you think it is important for a new collector to read or have in their library?

■ **SNIDER:** That is difficult to answer. I have been collecting for 30 years and I must have 2,000 to 3,000 photography books. Every time a new book comes out on someone whose work I like or admire, I buy it even if I don't have any of their prints. ■