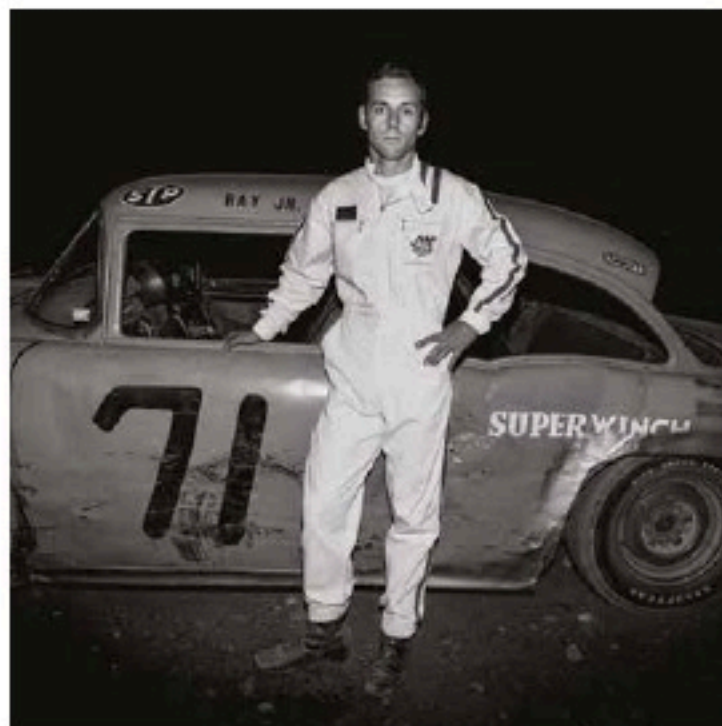


AMERICAN CONNECTION

History and stock car racing collide in **Henry Horenstein's** latest book, aided by a Weegee-inspired 'open flash' approach and a fascination with people, culture and community. Susan Burnstine dons her racing overalls.



Almost 10 years ago I featured the re-release of Henry Horenstein's seminal book, *Honky Tonk*, in my March 2013 column (*B+W* 148).

I was a huge fan back then, and now that I know him, I'm an even bigger fan. No matter what the subject, his portraits of American subcultures rise up as gems plucked from the pages of history. And perhaps most remarkably, the depth, humour and humanity he captures in his subjects allow for every person in his photographs to

feel like a friend, neighbour or family member, which is a true testament to his talent.

I recently sat down with Henry to chat about his latest book release, *Speedway 1972* (Stanley/Barker, 2022), which is another brilliant collection that does not disappoint.

Susan Burnstine: Can you give us a little backstory on this project?

Henry Horenstein: *The background of the series is pretty simple. I was in graduate school, between my first and second years, and I*

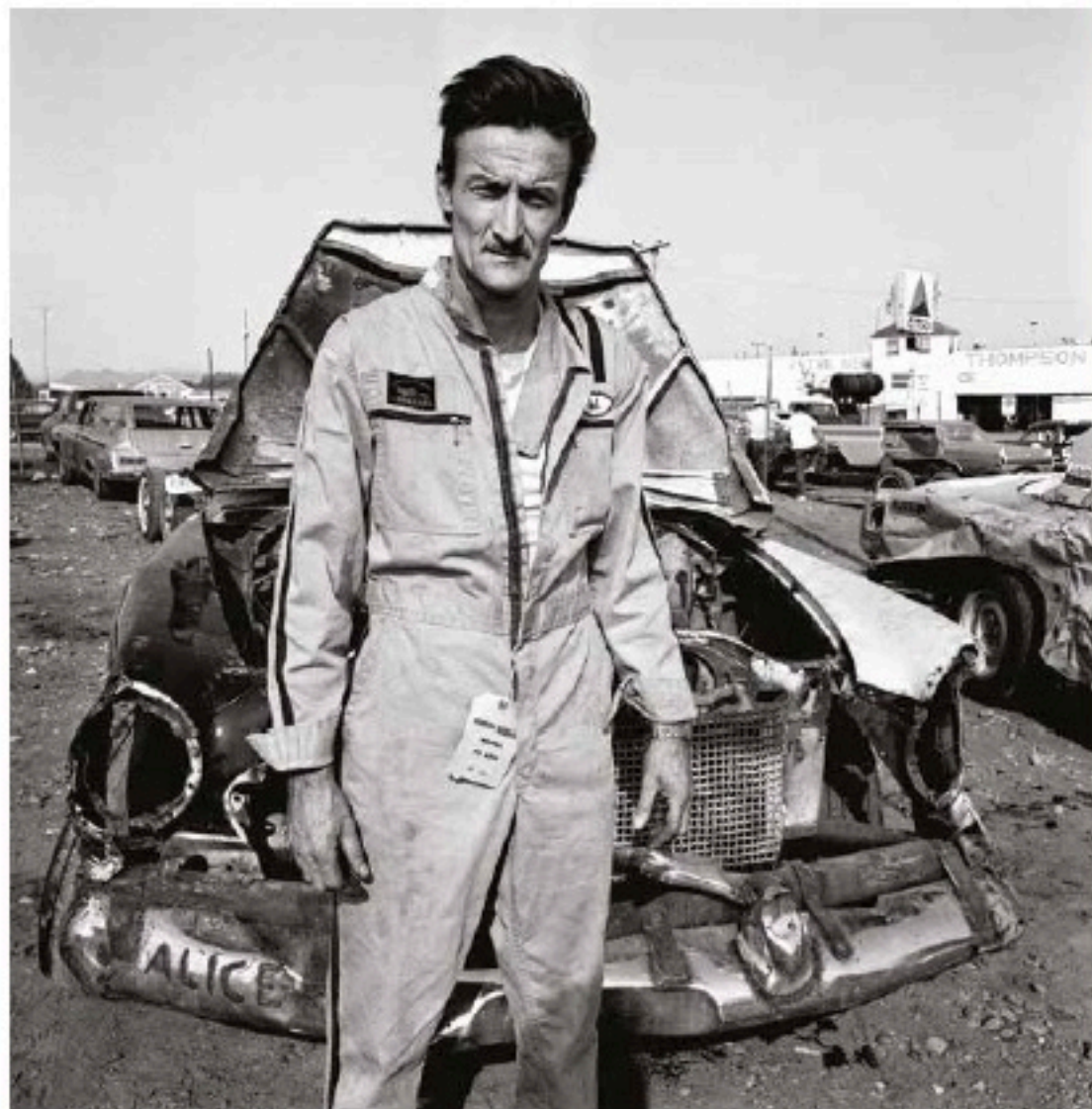
was just beginning to figure out how I was going to become a photographer. I'd studied history originally and had no idea of what it meant to study photography or be a photographer. But in my history studies, I was very aware of the need for preserving certain cultures that would go and disappear from history if I didn't step up. Or some other historian, of course. My teacher at the time was EP Thompson, a real hotshot and a leader of what was informally called the bottom-up school of history. Thompson said you

should study and make sure that the people who would otherwise disappear did not.

SB: And the link to the world of stock car racing was your brother-in-law Paul who raced stock cars, right?

HH: *My brother-in-law Paul and his cousin raced stock cars. There were two tracks in the neighbourhood: one in Seekonk, Massachusetts, and one in Thompson, Connecticut. And they raced at both tracks. One day, Paul said to me that the track at Thompson needed a photographer for their weekly*





programme. Was I interested? I was. This is exactly the kind of thing EP Thompson told me to do. Surely the track wouldn't be around much longer and I would have saved it, visually at least. So, every Saturday, sometimes Sunday, I would go out to Thompson, Connecticut, a couple of hours away and photograph.

It was very Weegee and Brassai, who were my two heroes of the day (I dedicated the book to them). I photographed people straight up, often in total darkness with an open flash, much like Arbus. I estimated distance and got pretty good at it.

SB: Do you recall what got you jazzed about shooting this subject? Or was it more of an exercise or job for you?

HH: I was very jazzed. At the time, I was struggling to figure out what my role was in this

thing, photography, that I had dedicated myself to and suddenly I saw a connection between that and my four years of history study at the University of Chicago, which, you know, is very intense. I knew my history; I didn't know a thing about photography or art.

I have very little interest in cars per se and definitely not in car racing, but I was interested in the people and the culture and the community, which is pretty much what I've stayed with for 50 years, with a couple of side steps.

SB: Did this collection of work end up being a graduate project?

HH: Not really a graduate project, as we didn't think in terms of projects so much back then. I probably used some in my graduate portfolio and from time to time in a publication, such as in a Smithsonian book of portraiture.

After the summer was over, I pretty much put the pictures away. I used some for my thesis, I think, but mostly they lived in a box for decades. I found the box maybe 10 years ago and I said to myself: Hey, I have a book here, haha. This stuff is pretty good. Well, at least it aged well.

To date, Horenstein has published 12 monographs, seven tech books, one memoir and a scattering of children's books. He's also edited numerous books.

Currently, he is working on a film about Cajun Louisiana in addition to two books, one about a tri-racial community in Maryland called *Wesorts* that was shot from 1997-2005, and another called *Miles and Miles of Texas*.

horenstein.com
stanleybarker.co.uk

EXHIBITIONS USA

ATLANTA

High Museum of Art

24 March to 13 August

Evelyn Hofer: *Eyes on The City*

high.org

BALTIMORE

Baltimore Museum of Art

Until 19 March

Elle Pérez: *Devoções*

artbma.org

CHICAGO

Art Institute of Chicago

Until 10 April

A Field Guide to Photography and Media

artic.edu

HOUSTON

Catherine Couturier Gallery

1 April to 6 May

Kate Braley

catherinecouturier.com

LOS ANGELES

The Getty

4 April to 9 July

Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems:

In Dialogue

getty.edu

SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Until 7 May

Sightlines: Photographs from

the Collection

sfmoma.org

STANFORD

Cantor Art Center Stanford University

8 February to 16 July

A Change of Scenery: Photographs of Leisure in the Landscape

museum.stanford.edu

WASHINGTON DC

National Gallery of Art

Until 11 June

This is Britain: Photographs

from the 1970s and 1980s

nga.gov