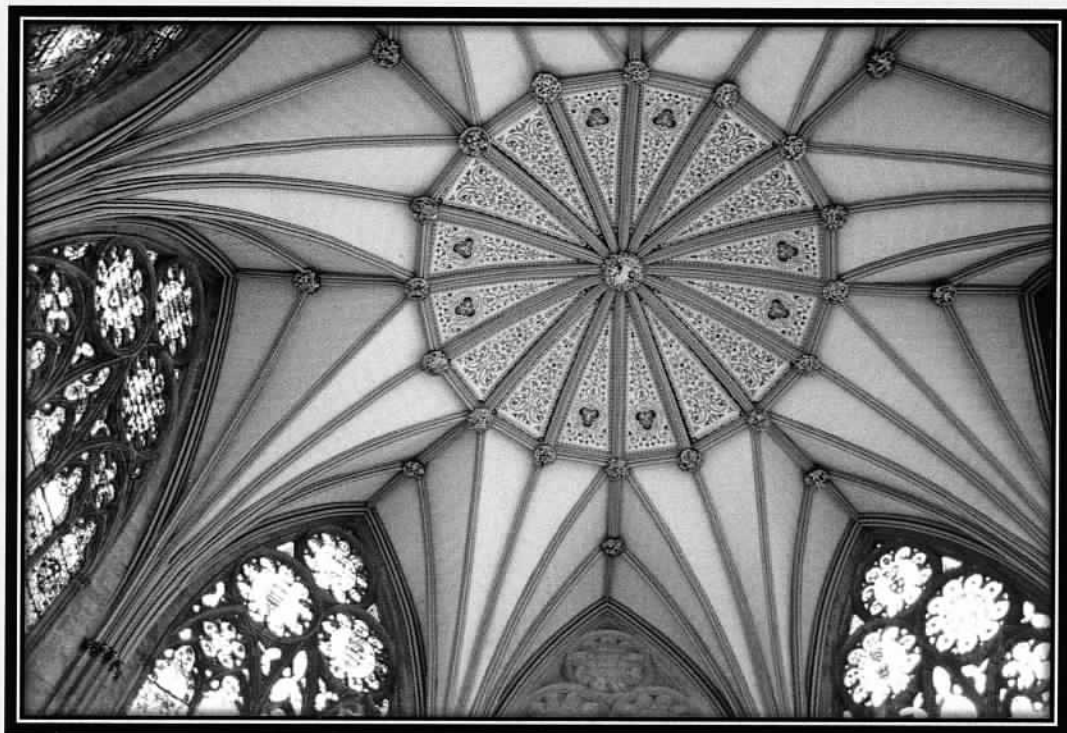


Architecture Across the Globe: The Photographs of Walter Denny



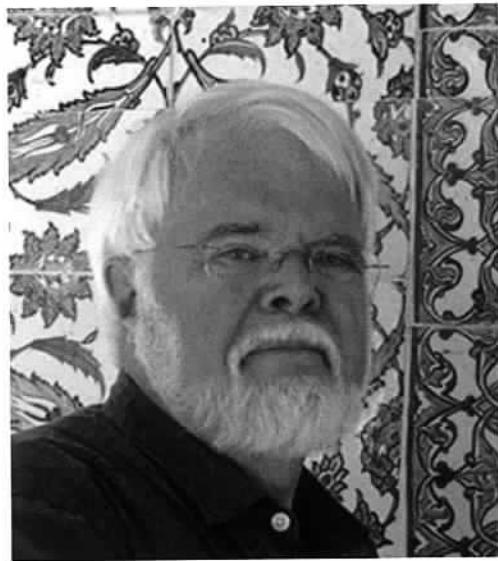
Greenbaum Gallery

December 6th 2019

The Life and Art of Walter Denny

Walter Denny grew up in Grinnell, Iowa, where his father was a professor of physics at Grinnell College. During his junior year in high school, Walter lived in Istanbul Turkey, where his father had a Fulbright teaching appointment. He began taking photographs of Istanbul and bonded with a Turkish photographer three times his age, who taught him many of the basic skills of photography. During his senior year at Oberlin College, he traveled with the Oberlin College Choir to the Soviet Union and Romania as part of a cultural exchange, serving as unofficial photographer. Some of his black and white photographs of concerts and interactions between idealistic American students and curious local people, sent back via diplomatic pouch, were printed in the New York Times, his first published work as a photographer.

As a graduate student at Harvard between 1964 and 1970, Denny began the systematic photographing of works of Islamic art in western museums and Middle Eastern sites. With the generous support of Harvard, he started to create an archive of color slides of Islamic monuments and surveyed entire museum collections such as that of the Louvre. In the ensuing fifty years, these photographs have sometimes become artefacts themselves, as they show buildings and works of art that in subsequent years have often changed, sometimes for the worse.



Arriving in Amherst as an Assistant Professor in September of 1970, Denny confronted extremely meager photographic resources for teaching of Islamic art at the University and had to increase his travel and photography in museums and the Middle East to make it possible for him to teach effectively. Eventually many thousands of his slides were digitized by ArtStor, at that time a program of the Mellon Foundation; these became the foundation of many a University course in Islamic art world-wide, at a time when the field was rapidly expanding. He also donated rights for several thousand images to ArchNet at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, started giving duplicate original slides to UMass/Amherst, and some of

his archived work is also now freely available through the University of Washington's library in Seattle. Recent original digital work in particular is rapidly becoming available through the LUNA program at UMass/Amherst, where scanning of his slides also continues.

In 2007 Walter joined the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art part-time as Senior Consultant in the Department of Islamic Art, moving over to full-frame digital photography, and, along with his UMass colleagues, undertaking the difficult and time-consuming transition from slides to digital images in teaching. At the Met, for the first time he began photographing the interactions between museum visitors and works of art; these digital images have become an important adjunct to his Museum Studies teaching at Amherst, and for his museum consulting work. In addition to photographic Islamic subjects, his archive includes a wide range of art works and monuments from Europe to Japan.

Professor Denny feels that under most circumstances, photos of works of art and architecture should be free for anyone to access. In his museum photography, he also feels that edited photographs should demonstrate appropriate lighting and color, correcting for the fact that many museums tend to show works of art in warm orange light that skews their actual palette. He sees his photography as a way of giving back for the support he has received over many decades, both as a student and as a faculty member at the University. Himself a product of the elite private educational system (where he was supported by scholarship aid), he is a resolute believer in public universities, and in the role of the visual arts in producing educated and productive citizens and enabling them to lead fulfilling and satisfying lives. To him, images of works of art and architecture should not be items for purchase, but instead available free of charge to all. And they should be good images, giving justice to the beautiful things they record.

One of his greatest pleasures is working with colleagues both at UMass and in the wider academic community, and in sharing his photographic resources, especially with younger colleagues and graduate student researchers. He attempts to keep pace with new technology, and while many of the works in this exhibition were scanned from Kodachrome transparencies, his current work involves digital images as large as forty-eight megapixels. As both educator and photographer, Walter Denny inspires those around him who teach and study the history of art and architecture. His generosity and guidance with this process has made this exhibition possible, and all those involved thank him for his time and support.



Rievaulx Abbey, England

This impressive ruin was once composed one of England's most powerful Cistercian monasteries. Situated in North York Moors National Park in North Yorkshire, England, the structure was founded by 12 monks from the Clairvaux Abbey. The striking ruins of the monastery remain a popular tourist attraction today. During the 1130's, the abbey grew to nearly 150 monks and 500 lay brothers, and by the time of its dissolution in the mid 16th-century it is believed the structure consisted of 72 buildings.

Upper: Rievaulx Abbey, England, 1132-1160. *Full side view of abbey from the south.* Photo taken in 1986.

The ruins of Rievaulx Abbey are memorialized in the landscape through the aerial perspective of this photograph, depicting the interactions between the structure and its surroundings. Professor Denny captured this view from a higher perspective and included the countryside buildings beyond the abbey to show the Medieval structure in its broader and current context. The lush foliage in the lower right corner frames the composition and suggests a sensation of secrecy as it partially obscures some of the monastery. The ruins seem to fall into the rest of the landscape, as they are so well integrated into the environment after standing for nearly 900 years.

Lower: Rievaulx Abbey, England, 1132-1160. *View showing interior of chancel.* Photo taken in 1986.

The interior of the chapel is one of several photographs showing the unique perspectives of the abbey's interior which Professor Denny photographed in 1986. Instead of placing the viewer in a location to experience the abbey as one would in person, Professor Denny framed the photograph with a deliberate, almost telescopic effect, enhancing the magnitude of the figures within the image interact with the architecture. The direct view of the chancel provides a striking spectacle with the elongated gothic arch that frames the almost ethereal landscape beyond. The lost roof does not box the space in either, as the open air above the gothic point heightens the sublime nature of the ruins. The multiple figures in the photograph are dwarfed by the massive stone pillars, which reaches out of the frame of the photo. The people provide both a reference on how to react to the architecture, as well as a scale for how grand this monastery is.