



- HOME
- NETWORK
- MAGAZINE
- INTERACT
- MARKETPLACE
- ADVERTISERS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- SUBSCRIBE
- RESOURCE CENTER

- Current Issue
- Archives
- FEATURES
- Tradition Meets Technology at Sherwood-Triart Studio by CharMaine Beleele
- Rachael Hale by Patricia Mues
- Anton Brkic by Paul Slaughter
- Mark Berndt by Lynne Eodice
- RfCookbook: by Bob Coates
- Jayne Wexler: Grandmothers by Peter Skinner
- Chris Buck by Lorraine A. DarConte
- Profile: Mauricio Donelli by Harvey Goldstein
- The Portrait Master by Jack Drafahl
- Photoshop CS<sup>2</sup> How<sup>2</sup> by Michelle Perkins
- Jim Herrington by Larry Singer
- Nancy Crampton by Lou Jacobs Jr.
- Portrait Photographer Profits by Chuck Hamilton
- RfCookbook: by Joe Morahan
- COLUMNS
- Insight/On the Cover by Bill Hurter
- Digital Photography by John Rettie
- First Exposure by John Rettie
- Output Options by Ron Eggers
- First Exposure by Bob Rose
- The Last Word by Tony Sweet



***Rangefinder Magazine***  
***July 2006***

[Click Here](#) for printable version of this article.

**The Portrait Master** by Jack Drafahl



## DEPARTMENTS

**Focus**

**Calendar**

**Problems & Solutions**

**Classifieds**

*I can't stand it anymore. I've got a story to tell and I just have to tell someone. If fishermen can tell stories about the one that got away, or show pictures of the keepers, why can't photographers do the same?*

It all started years ago when I was a student at Brooks Institute of Photography. In almost every class I took, the instructors would show examples from the masters of photography. I admit the photos were great, but I never really understood why these masters were so revered. After graduation I remained at the school as an assistant instructor and staff photographer.

I was assigned to photograph dignitaries as they visited the school so the photos could be used for news releases and public relations. One of these master photographers, Yousuf Karsh, came to visit the school for three days of lecturing and a one-man photo exhibition. The school asked me to follow him around for three days and take promotional photos. I've got to be honest—portrait photography is my least favorite subject. When it came to taking portraits, I preferred shooting the profile of a ladybug on a leaf. Needless to say, this assignment did not excite me.

Mr. Brooks introduced us, and for the next three days not more than a dozen words were exchanged between us. Mr. Karsh didn't seem very different from any other professional photographer. He had the answers to the students' questions and told some interesting stories, but I still couldn't see why they referred to him as one of the great masters.

On the evening of the third day, Mr. Karsh had a reception celebrating his oneman show. I photographed

him with several dignitaries and as he autographed his new book. As the event started to wind down and the crowd thinned, he walked over and asked me, "Would you like to take my photograph?" Just what did he think I had been doing for the last three days? I knew he must have had something else in mind by asking me to do a portrait of one of the masters of portrait photography.

I eagerly said "yes," as I correctly assumed you never say no to a master. He took one look at my camera and asked what kind of film I was using. "Tri- X," I answered, while fumbling with the camera controls. "Rate the film at ASA 1200," he answered back. Well, there went the rest of the shots on the roll, as I had rated them at ASA 400. I sure hoped that these shots would be worth ruining my other ones.

Before I could say or do anything, he told me to set the camera at 1/125 at f/4. He leaned against an archway and asked what I saw in the frame. I described the image as best I could, and he then directed me to pan a little to the left and move in a foot. As soon as he saw me fine-tune the focus, he went into a pose and told me to shoot. I have to admit, the shot looked great. In about 30 seconds my film counter read an additional five exposures, and Mr. Karsh quickly disappeared into the crowd.

That's when it started to sink in, and I now understood what makes a true master of photography. Yousuf Karsh had used another photographer to take a selfportrait. He operated all the camera controls, and me, and orchestrated the entire photo session. He didn't even have to be behind the camera. The most amazing part was that the resulting images didn't depict my shooting style, but instead had that distinctive "Karsh" look. Even though I put my name on the photo credits, I will always remember the invisible credit line that reads, "Yousuf Karsh, master of photography."

***Jack and Sue Drafahl make their home in the Pacific Northwest, where they operate the Oregon Coast Digital Center, an enhanced learning facility featuring in-depth digital courses. Class size is limited to four students to guarantee personalized instruction on digital editing and specialized topics. You can contact them at [www.jackandsue drafahl.com](http://www.jackandsue drafahl.com).***

**Magazine | Marketplace | Classifieds | Contact Us | Subscribe  
Rangefinder Guestbook | Media Kit**

© 2006 Copyrighted by WPPI. View [Privacy Statement](#)  
Produced by [BigHead Technology](#)