

Getting Water
Wellington Lee
American (born China), 1964
Accession #: 2000.278.13



Getting Water

medium: photograph, gelatin silver print

culture: China

physical description: figure wearing short pants and carrying a yoke with 2 buckets, walking into a body of water at LLC; triangular land formations on opposite bank; Li River, Peoples Republic of China

Life dates: 1918 - 2001

on view: Globalization Exhibition

Other pictures by Wellington Lee

We have 48 images by Lee at the MIA. About 16 of these are either of or inspired by the limestone mountains and the Li River like our photograph in the exhibition. Here are three from our museum:



Fishing in Pair, 1984
MIA, 2000.278.16



Connecting, 1964
MIA, 2000.278.25



Day Dreaming, 1956
MIA, 93.35.20

From the MIA exhibition: Facing the Lens

Wellington Lee was one of the world's most exhibited and beloved pastoralists, working from before World War II until the 1990s, long after the pictorialist movement had waned. He moved to the United States when he was about eighteen, and settled in New York for the rest of his life. Lee won a large cash award for his first-place color photograph in a *Popular Photography* competition, with which he opened a portrait studio in Chinatown in 1950. Lee was most revered for his posterized color images, for which he used an original process, and his pictures of female figures, both nude and clothed. The latter were highly fabricated fantasies, using strange props and exaggerated poses.

Wellington Lee has been active in his pursuit of photographic expression for over 60 years. His photographs have been accepted at over 15000 juried salons worldwide and his name and work are legendary among camera clubs throughout Asia, Europe, and North America.

From Lee website:

Wellington Lee moved to the USA in 1935, where he began an active interest in photography. He was founder of the Photo Society of New York and chaired many committees both in America and over seas regarding the expansion and promotion of photography as a fine art. His photographs of New York, the nude figure and ballet

dancers have received over one thousand awards, and have been exhibited internationally. Lee is also known for his development of the color printing process known as Addacolor, a creative color printing process generated from a black and white negative.

In this gallery of the Globalization exhibit the theme is water.

A Drop to Drink, US Bank Atrium (G280), Ken Krenz

Throughout history people have struggled to obtain clean water. For thousands of years people literally took their water pots down to the river, lake, or well, filled them, and carried the heavy containers home. Artists have always been able to find inspiration in the activities related to our necessary relationship with water. Becoming aware of the issues relating to the demand for clean water, looking back to historical solutions, and thinking creatively about new ways to conserve existing resources will allow us to address the continuing need and growing demand for water in the future. [from the MIA introduction [Art in the Age of Globalization](#)]

The 'A Drop to Drink' gallery is further divided up into mini-themes. In the corner of the Wellington Lee photograph Mr. Krenz has placed several images of people gathering water. In one photograph, *Garbage Picker* by David Parker, a boy goes through garbage seeking water - risking disease from contamination. In another, *Rwanda*, by Gilles Peress, a woman in the middle of a deadly war pauses to collect rain water demonstrating water's importance to life. Others show people fetching water in time honored traditional ways.

Wellington Lee's photograph, *Getting Water*, shows a man with two buckets in a surreal picture of extreme beauty collecting water using a means that has been employed for thousands of years. According to Ken Krenz, throughout the world the average human requires about 13 gallons of water per day. (But in America we use an average of 180 gallons per day for drinking, bathing, and washing.) One seventh of the world population gets its water by porting it in buckets, on average three miles each way from the water source to home. Then it must be boiled and prepared for use.

This image depicts an idealized, romanticized image of the process. The man with his buckets is silhouetted by the flowing river. It is quite beautiful. What is river? what is mist? what is real?

The photograph below is of the same Li River in the Guilin area of southern China. It is a very popular tourist area noted for the strange vertical limestone mountains. I took this picture on a visit to the area and imagine that it was taken near the site of Lee's famous picture.



History of Photography

The pinhole camera has been described by both the Chinese and Greeks (Aristotle and Euclid) in the 5th century BC. The camera obscura was used in 1490 by Leonardo Canello to do the Grand Canal in Venice (not to be confused with our Canaletto – Giovanni Antonio Canale - *Grand Canal from Palazzo Flangini*, in 1740). But these processes did not fix images. No permanent picture on a piece of paper resulted.

That light is capable of darkening certain chemical materials has been known for hundreds of years, but we were not able to fix an image so that it lasted. (Johann Schultz discovered in 1724 that silver nitrate, the compound used until recently to process film, darkens when exposed to light). However, all the images created this way would turn black when left out in light. It wasn't until 1826 that we were able to 'fix' the image and make it permanent. This insight is attributed to French inventor Joseph Niepce. The exposure of the first photograph, 'View from the Window at Le Gras', took 8 hours.

The term photograph was coined in 1839 (by Sir John Herschel).

Louis Daguerre (famous for creating large dioramas, and initially working with, Niepce, who died young) refined the process, calling the results daguerreotypes. His exposures were now only five seconds. Still, any movement by the subjects resulted in a great blur. But the quality of stationary objects was very good and very sharp. Later, images were improved by creating a negative image on a glass plate, and then transferring it to a positive image on paper. This technology also allowed the creation of many prints from

one image. The process, however, of creating a print was messy, wet, and laborious; and was generally performed only by professionals.

In 1888 George Eastman, the creator of the Eastman Kodak Co., put the camera in the hands of amateurs. He loaded his camera with film. The photographer took the pictures and returned the camera to Kodak for development. The camera was reloaded and returned with the processed prints, ready to go again.