

ON THE PATH TO THE PERFECT PHOTOGRAPH

ABIGAIL FOERSTNER

Fire Lane #10 pulls off from Blue Star Highway near Covert, Michigan, and winds through a forest banking the deep ravines. The gravel road weaves past one hideaway after another and then turns up the driveway that belongs to artists Barbara Crane and John Miller. Their rustic cottage rests like a tree house on a steep wooded dune with a wide deck where a stairway brushes past an ancient beech. The beech tree grips the earth in a giant spider's clutch of exposed roots. "I'm still trying to figure out how to photograph that," Crane says casually, with a passing nod at the roots. She heads up the stairway to the smaller cottage of the compound, one with a breezy screened porch, baskets full of rocks and twigs, a guest room and her own darkroom and studio.

Miller, Crane's husband, broils lamb chops on the grill and makes a pickled cucumber salad with a hint of cinnamon and sugar. His father was a chef and he loves to cook. The savory food with bread and white wine, served in the candlelight of the screened porch, invites long conversations that ebb as the candles burn down into the pitch darkness. Lush and green even in early October, the forest filters a velvet tapestry of sunshine and warmth during the day. But the darkness turns the atmosphere somber, even menacing. The ravines fade into a blinding void, branches tear seams across the sky and bats rove through the air.

Then Crane turns on the lights, a ring of floodlights as bright as fireworks that she installed during the years when she first bought the place and came here to face the forest alone in a rendezvous with her photography night after night. The lights created the surreal illumination for Crane's nocturnal landscapes and abstracts. Often, small bursts of flash from handheld strobes turned branches into ghostly white skeletons reaching through the darkness.

Mice, birds and butterflies of this mystical world danced before Crane's camera, curiously animated for creatures that had perished in the woods or flew into her windows. Crane collected them. Neighbors called to offer them, treasures that included a hummingbird caught by the beak in the mesh of a screen door during its final flight along Fire Lane #14. Crane's photographs cast them all in quirky tableaux where they seem to cavort across 8-by-10-inch sheets of film. Between photo shoots, a chorus line of rodents sealed in plastic bags share the freezer with the butterflies and birds, operatic actors for a phantasmagoria of Crane's whimsical yet discomfiting fables. The unappealing little carcasses undergo a luminous transformation in her images. Humor and mortality ignite conflicting emotions as these menageries redeem the unforgiving beauty of nature and probe the nature of vision.

Like the crushed cans and urban street debris reincarnated as sculptural objects on Crane's lightbox in *Objet Trouvé* (plates 97–104), the assumed realism of photography and the grace of graphic forms make the animals and birds believable, even congenial companions. Crane worked the same magic with kinetic, chance encounters as she staked out the ritual of Chicago's rush-hour commuters in the 1970s. The trail of such images traces Crane's own pilgrimage as an artist and as a person, a social discourse radiating a rhythmic record of her journey and ours through a subconscious landscape assembled from myriad bits of stray experience. It is a world collected from random possibilities, just as Crane collects the twigs, shells, stones and pinecones stowed in baskets at the cottage. She lines up the smallest collection—stones carved in the sand and surf of the nearby beach to resemble the shapes of hearts—sixteen such stones found over twenty years.

Crane abandoned conventional photography in the early 1960s. Her forty-five years of innovative art after that resulted from an alchemy of influences—girlhood days spent with her father in a makeshift darkroom, Asian aesthetics, musical cadence, visual exploration and soaring imagination. She calls the world to order in diverse but reliable formations of doorways, forests, grids and scrolls, only to cast reality into doubt. Whole rolls of film, printed as a unit, deliver mesmerizing patterns rather than solid documentation. Crane taps the everyday world for the tumultuous undercurrents of her unifying themes: chance, accident, chaos, contradiction and mystery playing out before our eyes. Her selective focus and changing camera angles offer a symbolic fire lane of altered perspectives that wind through just the right paths for challenging vision. Like all works of art, these mirror self-revelations about her playfulness and her driving compulsion to explore the aesthetic and psychological boundaries of seeing.

Crane, at eighty, still works constantly, obsessively. “I keep chasing perfection—the perfect negative, the perfect image, the perfect group of images; it's the chase that is so exciting, so all consuming,” she wrote in a 1960s artist's statement that remains just as revealing today. Such creative momentum reaps results but also reflects Crane's relentless demands on herself to grow as an artist. The art is also a sanctuary, her “dependable friend through highs and lows,” and through personal triumphs and sorrows.

Winter-weary Chicagoans noted the return of spring flocks of birds on March 19, 1928, the Monday when Barbara Dell Bachmann was born. The little girl spent her first years in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood on Paxton Avenue, not far from Burton Bachmann's Automatic Paper Box factory near 28th Street and California Avenue. He took over the business from his father, who had developed a line of automatic folding cartons delivered flat to stores but easily assembled for hats, dresses or cakes. Barbara liked going to the factory with the noise of the presses and smell of ink. At home, she played in the backyard with her older sister, Iris, climbing trees and serving tea in tiny china cups in the play-house their father built. They were comfortable but not wealthy—even as head of the company, her father took a conservative salary. Her mother, Della, taught her to find nice things for frugal prices in places such as Marshall Field's

basement, Chicago's premiere bargain haven in an era before discount malls.

"My grandparents owned a dry goods store in the South Shore area of Chicago. As a little girl my mother would go through the bolts of fabric as they came in and feel them. She loved the quality of fabric and she used to sew," Crane recalls. This deep-rooted physical pleasure of tactile sensations that the mother brought to making clothes for the family, the daughter brought to making photographs.

The Bachmanns soon joined the waves of city dwellers relocating to the "countryside" of the suburbs. They went from South Shore to North Shore, settling in the lakefront village of Winnetka when Barbara was four. The family wasn't particularly religious but Burton and Della took their daughters to temple on holy days. School and friends played a more important part in Barbara's life, especially her best friend Ann Bannard. She and Ann lived at the end of a cul-de-sac right across the street from the New Trier High School football practice field. The bleachers became their jungle gym with a secret fortress of tunnels beneath the seats.

Early on, her parents introduced both Barbara and Iris to different paths in the arts. "Iris got art lessons. I got piano lessons. After six years of piano, I remember slamming down the cover of the keyboard and saying, 'I've had enough,'" Crane says. "It took me years—really years, way into adulthood—to say I was an artist." Yet the medium she would discover lay right at her fingertips, though photography wasn't considered an art form at the time. Barbara and her dad, an amateur photographer with a basement darkroom shoehorned near the furnace, began to make photographs together. Barbara placed the exposed prints in the developer, fixer and rinse.

"Abracadabra," her father would say. And, like magic, an image slowly appeared.

"I still think it's magic," Crane says. "My studio and darkroom are my private spaces."

She continued to help her father in the darkroom as she started at New Trier in 1941. She liked swimming and sports at school and helped organize fundraisers such as hot dog sales at the football games. The World War II era meant that her family, like everybody else, rationed food and gasoline and even saved tinfoil for the war effort. "You'd make a ball of it, and make it larger and larger and then drop it off at the butcher shop," she recalls.

Crane came home most evenings to prepare the family dinner as her mother's health failed. She dated but dutifully followed the rules—nice girls had to be home by midnight. Eager to venture away from home after graduation, she chose Mills College, a women's liberal arts school in Oakland, California. Mills inspired students to ambitions ahead of the times. The earnest attitude toward women's learning freed

Crane from the prevailing social pressure that set pursuit of a husband as the primary goal for coeds. Instead, there were professional women throughout the faculty and staff, who served as role models such as artist Imogen Cunningham, the photographer for the college. These women expressed passion about their work and urged students to consider their education as preparation for careers. They nurtured Crane's lifelong obsession to commit completely to a project, to avoid the dabbling that relegated women's achievements to hobbies. Mills reinforced Crane's sense of taking herself seriously.

An equally pivotal turning point followed her sophomore year when her parents gave her a twin-lens Kodak Reflex camera. "Once I developed my first roll of film in 1948, nothing else mattered," she says. A design professor offered a course in photo technique and composition that she took. But he went beyond the basics. Art expresses an idea, he emphasized. To help her think visually, he introduced her to the important texts *Language of Vision* by György Kepes and *Vision in Motion* by László Moholy-Nagy.

"Music suggests an excellent analogy" to visual expression, wrote Kepes, a pioneering photographer, designer and art theorist. "A musical unit played by an instrument is repeated contrapuntally on other instruments, on the strings, on the brasses, on the woodwinds, even on percussion instruments. Each plastic unit with its specific sensory quality echoes the previous one; light, dark, color, shapes, forms all mutually help one another, one taking over the movement where another stopped, leading toward complete unity."¹

These seminal ideas about light as a rhythmic substance fascinated Crane and brought her intellectually back home to Chicago and the New Bauhaus movement with its emphasis on bringing art and creative design to mass production. Moholy-Nagy, a visionary artist and educator, transplanted Germany's Bauhaus school to Chicago in the 1930s, with Kepes on the founding faculty. By the time Crane encountered their philosophies, the school had evolved into the Institute of Design (ID), soon to become part of the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT).

Crane's photography course at Mills gave her the opportunity to define creative projects such as abstractions of sand on the beaches near Carmel, California, home base for Edward Weston whose artistic abstraction and simplicity of form so inspired her. Her friends in music, modern dance and theater at the college inspired her as well, giving tangible expression to the idea of a flow of imagery and visual impetus to rhythmic, dramatic repetition that built through a series of photographs. But before she could finish college, Barbara married Alan Crane and a job offer he accepted meant a move to New York City where his family had recently relocated.

New York City stimulated Crane's pursuit of art and she fit in perfectly with the Beat Generation. She spent hours in the city's museums and art galleries while finishing her Art History degree at New York

University (NYU). For her senior thesis, she documented three Manhattan churches and compared them to three famous European cathedrals, initiating an abiding interest in architecture. For her graduation from NYU in 1950, her parents gave her a more advanced camera, a twin-lens Rolleiflex, and Crane began taking pictures on the Staten Island Ferry. These close-ups reflected in candid expressions and gestures the choreographic cadence that Crane absorbed from seeing performances by contemporary dancer Martha Graham. A class she took in Asian art from a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art extended her visual language to scrolls, screens and calligraphy. Key themes unfolding from this mix expressed themselves throughout her career.

Crane also took fashion photographs for the *Westchester Life* newspaper while in New York, but she soon had a new model for her work. She and Alan welcomed the birth of daughter Beth in 1951, and then he accepted another job offer that took the young family back to Chicago in 1952. Barbara packed up her enlarger for the move and, with the later births of two younger children, Jennifer and Bruce, it remained packed as she focused on her children. She reclaimed her art photography eight years later in 1960 when four-year-old Bruce started pre-kindergarten.

Crane rekindled her career by taking portraits of children and displaying samples in the storefront windows at a neighborhood dry cleaners. The pictures led to a public relations portraiture commission in 1963 at the Centex Industrial Park in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. The petite photographer put her subjects at ease and brought a candid, roll-up-your-sleeves informality to pictures that made middle managers and executives appear both powerful and approachable. Crane's break into this largely male bastion gave her a professional cachet and she presented a portfolio of these photographs in 1964 to Aaron Siskind, who taught at the Institute of Design at IIT.

Siskind—the pioneering conceptual photographer who captured abstraction in the hyperreal details of paint drippings, peeling wallpaper and graffiti—reviewed Crane's prints. This was the primary application and the only one that really counted in the photography program, and the outspoken Siskind gave her work the nod of acceptance to the graduate program. Crane was one of the first women graduate students at a time when ID served as a driving force in innovative and experimental photography. She was thirty-six years old when she started, on the road to a teaching career and ready to discover new directions in her own creative process.

For her master's degree thesis Crane began exploring sculptural patterns through abstractions of the human body. But the unremitting development of this sustained project marked the real revelation for her. "By maintaining constancy of subject, although variations within each model and situation were many, diversification and new concepts had to stem from me. The self-discovery, discipline and powers of

evaluation that accompany a project such as this are invaluable,” she wrote in her master’s thesis.²

While working on her graduate degree, Crane returned to her alma mater, New Trier High School, in 1964 to teach photography. Students could study several languages, college-level sciences and a long list of art classes at New Trier. But, until she took over the program, photography had been relegated to an after-school club.

“I insisted when they hired me that they put the photography program into the art department. I refused to teach a photography club,” Crane says. Her new job, her studies at ID and her family more than filled every waking moment, and the strained relationship she and Alan had tried to mend for several years ended in divorce in 1966. She pressed to finish her master’s degree by the same year and also showcased her own students’ work in a presentation for the Society for Photographic Education. ID alums Harold Allen, Frank Barsotti and Ken Josephson, all photography instructors at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), saw the presentation and recruited her to teach with them starting in 1967. New Trier, one of the top high schools in the country with faculty salaries to match, actually paid more than a starting instructor earned at SAIC. It was a tough choice for a single parent but a college fig. 6 professorship gave Crane a more flexible schedule, professional prestige and time to pursue her own art.

She continued to explore the human form, turning nudes into sensual, layered exposures that she filled with city lights and landscapes. She pushed the concept through several inventive dimensions such as in her *Neon Series* (plates 16–21), juxtaposing neon lights over faces like ceremonial urban masks. The work won her several gallery exhibits, including a 1969 group show with artists such as Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Jerry Uelsmann. And, with the interplay of human form and street scenes, Crane found the settings where the dramas of life burst past her lens through corridors of chance, chaos and radiating light.

In 1970 she started photographing the waves of people flowing through the doors of the north exit of Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry using a large format view camera. Her resulting series, *People of the North Portal* (plates 22–31), populates a sociology of 1,500 images with girl scouts, sailors, families, school groups and old people exiting in a constant stream. The images documented the hippie-gone-disco era of dress and deep sideburns, yet the timeless trail of humanity alluded to both the scope and constraints of everyday experiences. An arbitrary community of visitors connected only by a uniform location and a camera communicated the transcending sensibility of people coming to terms with fleeting, transient contemporary life.

In choosing the best cut of so many images, Crane’s children helped her edit work that she laid out across the living room floor of their Chicago apartment. “And they were right on because they didn’t have an

attachment to the pictures,” Crane says. “So I relied on their instinct, their pure vision. It takes a lot of discipline to turn prints face down, which means I’m not going to use them.”

At the close of the *North Portal* series, Crane began an even more extended study of human form and ritual in the revealing setting of Chicago’s beaches and parks. The cinematic photographs at these public places package the world as theater. Beat, rhythm, a tribal sense of gathering and a visceral code of body language throb through the images as people fold into each other—dancing, hugging, gathering children, creating a personal magnetic field of buggies, umbrellas, boom boxes and coolers. Here was an international crossroads for Chicago’s Irish, Hispanics, African-Americans and dozens of other ethnic groups. Crane returned weekend after weekend for years to capture the social dramas in tapestries of babies, beauties and bodies of every type. She came on an endless quest for self-expression, self-discovery and momentary relief from life’s daily worries.

“I was lonely on the weekends when my ex-husband usually had the children,” she says. “This is how I coped with it. So it fulfilled personal needs but, beyond that, the action of the people brought varied scenarios and scenes that I didn’t expect. They’re kind of my partners.”

Few people seemed to mind her taking pictures along the lakefront runway of exhibitionism. The woman in the safari jacket with the large, clunky camera resting on her arm must be working for the park district or some newspaper. At least, that is what Crane hoped they would think as she sat nearby until people either ignored her or struck up a conversation.

“If people questioned me about taking the picture, I’d explain to them it’s the way they’re holding hands or their hairdo or their children,” she said. “People are flattered that you find them worthwhile for picture taking. It’s one time when being a woman—and a small one—is an advantage. I don’t think people feel as threatened.”

She packed up her cameras at 4 p.m. when the shadows of the high-rises shrouded the edges of the beach. But the same time of day brought jets of sunlight flooding through the canyons of skyscrapers at rush hour when the crowds streamed west from Chicago’s Loop en route to the commuter train stations. Crane’s ideas about light, form and anonymous people bound by a common destination culminated in the 1978 series *Commuter Discourse* (plates 77–84). People and their shadows radiated to the edges of the photographs taken with a 35-mm Leica and a 21-mm wide-angle lens that exaggerated the pulse of legs, arms and torsos. The purchase of the wide-angle lens sent Crane in search of a kinetic hub to fill her picture plane. She found it by centering herself on the sidewalk, facing off the rushhour stampede.

A chance overexposure led to new experiments in her work. Crane often capitalized on accidents

as in the case of the purposely overexposed *Wipe Outs* (plates 143–146), photographs that erase identity into shadowy silhouettes and universal human postures, such as a father carrying a child on his shoulder. “That’s something that happens all over the world,” Crane says.

Her first major grant in 1974, from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), reinforced her commitment to experiment. And working with students at the SAIC gave her constant impetus to try out some of her radical photographic ideas both in the classroom and in her own art. Students visited her office weekly with stacks of prints they laid out across the floor, initiating lively conversations about what gripped the eye and spirit in their pictures. Her inventive work explored shooting entire rolls of film of boats, tar drippings, human forms or mundane scenes, and printing the roll as one unified image that generates pulsing grids of patterns as the eye darts from frame to frame. Contemporary classical music fed other serial juxtapositions, as in her *Repeats* series (plates 38–45), surreal mirror images of mountain peaks, laundry hanging on the line, and traffic on the Dan Ryan Expressway.

“While doing the *Repeats* and the *Petites Choses* series (plates 46–49), I was taking notes at the symphony as visual diagrams of the crescendos, legatos and staccatos in order to widen my visual experience,” Crane recalls. She explored any opportunity to create tapestries of imagery, even throwing birdseed up in the air as she lay on the ground so she could photograph pigeons swooping in against a blank sky. She experimented because her photography was and is about searching. Many photographers searched the globe, but Crane always preferred her own environment. She came of age as an artist while still a young mother who needed to stay in one place. The contemplative and formal “winter work” of, for example, *Objet Trouvé* contrasts sharply with the summer cacophony of *Commuter Discourse*. But both series unfolded a universe from the city just outside her doorstep.

Crane branched off in several other directions in the 1970s, pursuing documentary work for the Chicago Commission on Historic and Architectural Landmarks and her own architectural odyssey of urban geometry. She became a familiar figure downtown, carting around a heavy view camera and related gear in a golf bag on wheels. She also took on corporate commissions. Baxter Travenol Laboratories, a drug company giant in Chicago’s north suburbs, approached her about creating a series of mammoth murals. Armed with a Pop Art flair for graphics and a willingness to take risks, Crane’s twenty-six murals intermixed Baxter’s public and private personas. She montaged multiples of lab equipment and scenes photographed at the company with urban candid photos of “Bus People,” “Boardwalk” tourists and other pharmaceutical consumers headlined in some of the mural titles. Test tubes seem to two-step into a “Bicentennial Polka” of repeated formations that surround a picture of sailors striding through town in one of the murals. A public relations gatekeeper hid away the works in his office for weeks rather than lay his job on the line by presenting executives with such curious pieces of art. But Crane finally rescued the collection and brought it to Baxter Travenol president William Graham, who loved it and hung the entire series at corporate

headquarters in 1975. In the unpredictable climate of changing corporate ownership, the murals can no longer be located but, luckily, Crane has copy transparencies to reproduce them.

Crane had also begun teaching workshops by then. Ansel Adams, linked with landscapes photographed at cosmic f-stops to encompass the vast mountain traces of the American West, constantly kept a lookout for innovative approaches to bring to his workshops at Yosemite National Park. “Believe me, a diamond-sharp glossy print does NOT represent ‘F64’ unless there is that most important something-else in it—the quality of Art in perception and execution,” Adams wrote in 1940 for *Camera Craft* magazine.³ Still searching for that elusive quality nearly thirty years later, he continued his habit of seeing old friends and photographers every day at his home from 5 to 6 p.m. Barbara knocked on his door one evening with a box of prints under her arm. The *Repeats* caught his eye. “See I told you photographers could still do something different,” he told an assistant. He hired Crane to bring her fragmented interpretations of urban forms to nature photography as an instructor at his Yosemite workshops.

Along with John Szarkowski, Curator of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Siskind and Adams recommended Crane for a Guggenheim Fellowship, though Adams advised her to give him a pass. No one he ever recommended seemed to get the prize, he told her. But win it she did in 1979. The grant made possible her summer move for a year-long stay in Tucson, working with the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. She collaborated with the center on a mid-career retrospective covering her work from 1948 to 1980. But, while there, she faced a major limitation in creating new work—no darkroom. Polaroid Corporation came to the rescue with film and processors. Using Polaroid 8-by-10-inch film in the piercing outdoor light of the Southwest, Crane learned the language of color in found objects and Western cultural icons. The light gave objects a surreal, archeological quality even when she photographed filmy bras or nail polish bottles that she affixed to her patio wall. In smaller instant candid, she captured people at local fairs. Humanity—bandaged, painted, masked and loved—moved past her camera. The playful, one-of-a-kind imagery once again evoked Crane’s sense of the instantaneous rush of life and won her continuing support from Polaroid.

Crane’s relationship with Polaroid began just before the move to Tucson when, early in 1979, she taught as a visiting artist at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She borrowed six camera backs from the company for her students and made an appointment at company headquarters in nearby Cambridge to return them. The corporation didn’t have an inventory plan for used equipment so she networked during her visit and the school got to keep the camera backs.

Crane became one of a corps of international artists with whom Polaroid exchanged materials for prints. Polaroid granted her coveted time to work at its New York City studio with one of several behemoth cameras used worldwide to make instant 20-by-24-inch peel-apart prints. The company provided her with all

sizes and manner of film products over the years. She became adept at making image transfer prints that took partially developed Polaroids and pressed the gelatinous image onto art paper. In a master's hand, the transfer prints have the texture and transparency of watercolor paintings. Crane made large grids of these lyrical works and the Polaroids became one of many paths she pursued into the forest for a major departure from her previous work.

By the late 1980s, Crane turned to area forest preserves and gardens to explore new ideas but people, crucial partners for her images in the parks, kept invading the scene when she sought isolated nature. "And I couldn't control the weather. I'd go there for a day and it would be raining. I finally concluded I would have to get a place in the woods," she says. Barsotti, her colleague at SAIC, introduced her to the spectacular wooded dunes along the Lake Michigan shoreline in southwestern Michigan and even told her about a cottage for sale. Crane bought the double cottage complex almost immediately in 1987. A second grant from the NEA in 1988 allowed her freedom from teaching to pursue the transition that took her work into the woods. Only two hours outside of downtown Chicago, the sand dune woods location offered an easy retreat as she continued to teach at SAIC until she retired in 1995. The deep ravines, densely shaded by sugar maples and silvery-barked beeches, enveloped her in a realm of sturdy natural forms and fleeting illusions.

"It's the primeval forest—black trunks, getting caught in the hanging vines, dark tones, Hansel and Gretel—threatening parts of the forest where branches come out to grab you," Crane says. Over a span of eighteen years she has taken more than one thousand black-and-white, 8-by-10-inch negatives that comprise her extended series *Coloma to Covert* (plates 189–221). The forest retreat became Crane's visual and psychological sanctuary. Yet, she unveiled within it the uneasy sense of walking into lurking dangers. The visual geometry of form and abstraction unify the weave of light, wind and altered perspectives in photographs where out-of-focus leaves in the foreground drift across her images in a ghostly parade. The eye, desperate to find a foothold, falls ever deeper into the chasm of the crystal-sharp trees beyond.

Crane tensed for every shot since even a slight change in wind and light could brush away her composition. Hours of battling the subtle breath of nature made the work exhilarating but exhausting. The result was Crane's epic scrolls, a series of prints of trunks and branches that purposely don't quite match up from frame to frame. The dramatic effect underscores the impact of photography as a medium that fragments each moment it records.

Crane navigated the ravines by pulling along a red wagon that held her cumbersome view camera along with film holders, tripod and other gear. Often, she dropped to the ground for an "Alice in Wonderland" perspective that created the sensation of standing only inches tall in the gaping, yawning mouth of the earth. Mushrooms, photographed close-up and purposely overexposed, glow like flying

saucers in the ambiguous galaxy of *Fleshy Fungi* (plates 189–192). Shot with a wide-angle lens, tiny flowers and fallen leaves lurch over scenes, dwarfing the horizon and tunneling the viewer's eye along hidden paths to a parallel galaxy of rabbit holes and wormholes.

Life changed significantly for Crane as she pursued her work in the woods. She had shied away from any serious relationships as she raised her children and for years afterwards. But in 1995, she and Miller fell in love. The pair rarely crossed paths for the nearly thirty years when they both worked at the SAIC where Miller had taught painting and drawing since the 1950s. They met at a student exhibition where he was talking with friends that Crane also knew when she approached and suggested the group get together for dinner sometime. Miller called her the very next day to follow up on the dinner plan, only he cooked for her. The evening went so well that they both asked themselves, "Why didn't you think of this before?" Miller proposed to her on an escalator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City a few months later. By the time they got to 57th Street and Park Avenue, Crane suggested they shop for rings. They married on Aug. 26, 1995, with their blended family of three grown children each, the children's spouses and grandchildren all in attendance.

Crane and Miller consolidated their city households into a highrise condo with southern and eastern views of Chicago. They bought studio space in the renovated Singer Sewing Machine factory on West Jackson Boulevard. A kitchenette connects their separate but adjacent studios where they work every day, all day, with breaks for a quick lunch or to seek out each other's opinions of ongoing work. Miller transitioned his work ten years ago from large, abstract paintings to digital abstractions in multiple panels with sweeping glazes of kaleidoscopic colors.

In Crane's studio, thousands of prints cover the walls, fill the map drawers and encompass over sixty separate bodies of work. From start to finish, her chance encounters with found objects and multitudes of people found their way onto film, transparencies, photograms and prints, including Polachrome film, platinum prints, silver prints, and metallic-toned prints. Her daughter Beth is helping her catalog and organize it all, no easy task since Crane, restless herself, never really lets her work come to rest. More recently, she juxtaposed and fused color prints from the forest to create dynamic pairs titled *Schisms* (plates 247–252) that appear visually rooted in each other. Working with her grandson Jeffrey Smolensky, Jennifer's son, she revisited the 4-by-5-inch Polaroid candid photos taken at Chicago festivals in the 1980s. They paired the images into connecting currents of bonds between friends, lovers, parents and children for *Private Views* (plates 135–142), a book that Aperture Books is publishing as a monograph.

Some six major surveys and approximately eighty-five solo exhibitions across the globe have featured Crane's work, held in the collections of museums and institutions worldwide. The Society for Photographic Education selected her as the organization's "Honored Educator" in 1999, and both the

Union League Club of Chicago and Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, named her a distinguished artist in 2006. As Crane enters her eighties, her diverse imagery retells a personal art history of photographic processes, materials and visual ideas across that forty-five years since she abandoned the conventional photograph and never looked back.

She and Miller continue to make frequent visits to the cottage, still at the heart of Crane's continuing work. She and her childhood friend artist Ann Bannard found a dead opossum on the beach one summer and brought it back to the cottage. They cleaned it, axed off the skull and dried it in the oven. Bannard, a sculptor, carted it home to Tucson for an art project. She returned it to Crane for a wedding present with a note that said, "You are the only person in the world I could send a dead animal skull." The gift sat unused for years among Crane's treasures but she finally picked the opossum skull for the Still Lives series, a quirky work of talking heads (plate 231). She laid the skull on black velvet and photographed it twice, turning alternate sides to the camera to create an animated illusion of two animals yelling at each other. A monkey's paw, a gift from former assistant David Carroll, found its way into images as well. The symbolic link to human touch connects the paw with the fragile, wondrous environment reaching out from Crane's sand dune woods of myth and metamorphosis.