



## Lick Creek Line by Ron Jude

Written on January 5, 2013 by [Bryan Formhals](#) in [Books](#)



80 people like this. Be the first of your friends.



I've owned [Lick Creek Line](#) by [Ron Jude](#) since March of last year. After I first browsed through the book I was going to write this article. There was a problem though. I had no idea what I wanted to say. I didn't know if I liked the book or hated it. I couldn't articulate how I felt about it. This wasn't indifference. No, this was something else. This was one of those rare encounters with a body of work that forced me to ruminate on it for a much longer period of time.

I often get annoyed when people preach that you need to take your time to appreciate a body of work. That's bullshit dogma. I can browse through a book in 2 minutes and know whether I like the photos or not. That's one of the beauties of photography in my estimation! It's not like reading a novel or watching a film. The time it takes to consume a photobook is completely subjective. Some may like to take an hour, some may take 5 minutes.

So I put the book down and didn't open it again for a few months. In that time I had a few brief conversations with people about it. I read some reviews. I saw images pop up on Tumblr. It was consistently re-appearing on my radar in one form or another.

When I sat down to review the book again I was determined to come to a conclusion about the book. It was time to formulate an opinion. I slowly paged through the book. Taking my time, soaking in the images and the narrative. I knew what was going on. There's a trapper. He lives a solitary life in the woods. It's a quiet existence. Nothing much happens. He's a zen trapper. Who is he? I don't know. We can never get a good glimpse, and when we do, it's almost by accident, as if it shouldn't happened. We aren't meant to really know this man.

As I started to get to the end, the dread started to creep in. No modern existence could be this harmonious. No,

something awful has to happen. And then that photograph appears. We see the construction workers. They're working on a lodge. One horrifying image. So mundane, and yet so powerful in the right context. Progress can not be escaped. Civilization will find you in one way or another.

Now I was pissed.

"SCREW YOU RON JUDE! You're messing with my mind and I don't like it."

I determined I didn't like the book. "What a bunch of garbage," I thought. "I'm not falling for this crap!"

I was doomed though and I knew it. Whenever I have that strong of a reaction toward a body of work I know I won't be able to stop thinking about it. It'll be with me until I understand why I'm so agitated. Over the years, I've come to realize that when I get frustrated with a work of art, especially photography, it's because intellectually I know I'm not getting it. It's the type of mental roadblock you can't get pass no matter what. I don't think all works of art need to work this way though.

Most of the time when I look at a book or series of photographs I'll get what's going on right away. When it's good, or *very good*, I simply allow the artist to take me on the ride. I trust them. I might have some questions, but I know they're not trying to dupe me.

Was Ron Jude trying to dupe me? I thought so, but I wasn't about to give up. The book was gnawing at my mind. What the hell was I missing? So I did what I always do when I can't solve a problem. I tried to forget about it. I went outside to make photographs. I worked. I worked some more. I allowed the book to sit there in plain sight as I fucked around on Tumblr. At times I contemplated picking it up again, but I would always catch myself. "Nope, not yet. You're not ready."

Lick Creek Line sat there for a few months. I was about to give up on it. I just didn't have the energy.



This year Joerg Colberg wrote an article about how to make a photobook. One particular passage stuck with me throughout the year (bold/italics mine.)



“ My personal approach is the following: When you look at your photographs – what experience do you want people to have when being exposed to them? This aspect is where it usually gets a little iffy talking about details, since there is such a large variety of photography. But ask yourself, if your book already existed – regardless of what it might look like – what is it that you'd want people to take away from it? **What is the experience?**

---

I thought about this all year, especially as I was editing and laying out my own book. It was something I thought about in relation to Lick Creek Line too. Then Joerg, followed up that article with a series on 'How to tell a story with pictures.' For experienced photographers and book makers much of this might be common sense. For me though, it hit home. The series articulated much of what I've always thought about photobooks.

I'm an internet junkie and enjoy looking at photographs online but there certainly is a dark side to doing that habitually. The internet is generally about stripped down edits and photographs that grab you right away. Most photographers limit an edit of a series to about 10-25 on their website. A book might contain anywhere from 40-60 photographs. So what exactly are we viewing online? I've touched on this in the past (sorry, don't know the exact article!) and have said that edits on the web are often the equivalent of a movie trailer. Not a perfect analogy, but it's in the right ballpark. Naturally many photographs work as singles and can be enjoyed that way. Context is crucial, right?

After reading these articles my mental block over LCL began to loosen. I was ready to look at it again, hoping to experience the book in a different way. The opening sequence knocked me over this time. The trapper walking away, followed by the four images of turbulent water. Then we get into the book. Beautiful.

I focussed less on individual photographs, allowing the sequencing and my pacing to carry me through the book. It started to feel less like a book of photographs and more like a piece of cinema. Malick, Altman, Jarmusch, Gordon Green, The Coen Brothers, oh yes, some of my favorites. I started to dread that one photograph I knew would eventually arrive. When it did, I quickly finished the book. What just happened?

It was a new experience. I allowed it to remain enigmatic and just out of reach from full comprehension. Photography fucks with you that way. You might experience photographs in a completely different way in December than you did in March.

One of the first thoughts I started to have was that it was basically impossible to represent this book on the web in anyway. You have to experience the book. There are certainly some single photographs that are very beautiful and would get OMG reblogged like a hundred times, but that has nothing to do with what I believe Jude is communicating through the book.

After browsing through the book several more times I started to feel differently about my own work and the book I was editing.

“To hell with focussing on a handful the killer images!” I thought. I started to tell myself, think about the book, not just the individual photographs.

More than any other book I've looked at this year, Lick Creek Line and Ron Jude have kicked around my mental furniture. It's in disarray and now I'm finally starting to figure out where I want all the pieces to settle. This doesn't always happen with art and you never really know when it will occur. You just need to be ready and willing to allow it to happen.

*Lick Creek Line, photographs by Ron Jude, essay by Nicholas Muellner, 112 pages, MACK, 2012*