

## In A Blink Of The Eye – A Resume Of Sorts for Michael Maersch

I can't believe I've been doing this for over twenty years now. All the miles, all those pictures, all the wacky stories, people, schedules, adventures.

Traveling throughout the west, eyes-open to the heart of America just across the tracks and off solitary highways only locals and truckers drive, I see old homesteads vanishing; like bleached cows' bones, each season less and less remains of 'Anttie Em's farm'. Sorry Dorothy. But still there are quirky little towns off the beaten path and weather-weary billboards leaning bow-legged in cornfields. Each summer driving back to Wisconsin from my home here in Arizona I find jewels scattered along my path.

What a wonderful life, helping filmmakers and photographers locate their perfect road, a more breathtaking landscape, *the right "funk"* when I'm asked to come up with a "funky old bar"; what a kick to be hired *specifically by some clients* to, in a sense, collaborate on their projects.

The summer of 1991 I had the opportunity to work on a film being made in Denmark because I was able to understand the essence of what the filmmakers were intent on having to work with in order to best tell their story. The production designer, a life-long resident of Copenhagen, shook his head one day as we were reviewing my latest finds and said, "I have lived here my entire life, walked past these apartments and alleys a thousand times and never saw this until you hand me these pictures! Perhaps it is best to have someone who doesn't live here look with a fresh eye..." Maybe so, but each time I drive more familiar roads out west here *there is always something new* I was too busy with other thoughts to notice the last time I passed by. I believe instead, it is within the process of collaborating with someone that I am provided a new set of lenses through which to see the familiar – *through their ideas, at this time, this day.*

I sort of stumbled into becoming a location scout by having started out as a photographers' assistant back in 1982. I was working with various shooters here locally in Phoenix trying to learn enough to enable myself to build a book that I would feel comfortable showing anyone, in any marketplace. One day I met Susan Volk who was in the studio styling a project I was assisting on. She needed someone to help her out on an upcoming television commercial she was booked to do art direction for.

I found the production of moving-pictures absolutely fascinating: the scale, the attention to detail – most importantly to me, the profoundly different use of lighting. (And I must admit, being used to having brown-bagged it for lunch most days on the photo projects I had been part of at the time I was simply amazed by the spread on the craft service table, the fabulous catered meals – 3 a day! Then, at the end of the day, at least back in the '80's, a big cooler full of brewskies was rolled out to help the crew mellow after a day of busting butt!!! That tradition has long-since gone away.)

I learned so much by observing the gaffer and the cameraman while helping Susan in the art department dressing sets during production that my work took on [an entirely different look](#). Keep in mind, this is the early '80's: Flash! Flash! Flash! was the rule of the day, indoors and out – ring-light, 5 packs, 8 heads, light-box... Stop action baby! White light, yeah. Films were 'hot' lights. Silks. Gels to warm or cool, to balance multiple light sources or create something altogether new. Shoot *into* the sun! (**LINK TO:** [locationswest.com/blink/rocketscience/sketchbook10.html](http://locationswest.com/blink/rocketscience/sketchbook10.html))

After a couple of years working in the Art department with my friend and patron Susan I decided to go out on my own, start my 'Arizona Land Company' location scouting service. I quickly decided to 'specialize' in what folks from London and Los Angeles, Toronto and New York came Out West for – not swing-sets and kitchen countertops but phenomenal landscapes,

amazing performance roads, 'funky', 'border town', 'rustic', 'Route 66' looks and '[The Last Picture Show](http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/28358/The-Last-Picture-Show/trailers)' towns. (LINK TO: <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/28358/The-Last-Picture-Show/trailers>) I drove throughout this amazing State, Arizona. I made A TON of great pictures. And then, because I wanted more Levis and Chevy truck, investment bank and ATT spots to take the place of all those Fruit Loops and Fruit of the Loom and Crest toothpaste projects, I decided to take The Next Step. But I'm getting ahead of myself here...

My next 'angel' came in the form of Marol Butcher, a production manager I met one lucky day. She was from L.A. working with a production company from Chicago. She sounded nice over the phone. (What a lame description I suppose. What I mean is that she was sharp, not ditzzy; friendly, not condescending – and not at all one of those Valley Girls that generally precipitated the conversation with lengthy hosannahs about how 'brilliant' the director was we all were about to have the life-changing opportunity to work with.) Marol on the phone was a breath of fresh air.

I was standing like a meet-and-greet stiff in the airport terminal with a clip-board holding a sign scribbled in magic marker when I caught site of a punk version Olive Oyl stepping purposely through the jet-way door wearing a pair of transparent red plastic-framed dark, *dark* sunglasses – dyed-black China-girl hair, alabaster skin, bright red lipstick, loose black t-shirt over short black skirt and thin legs covered in opaque black tights wearing mid-calf Doc Martins. Oh my. 'Hi. My name is Marol. You must be Michael.' Wo. We ended up really hitting it off. (Not that I'm anything like a hipster or was ever drawn to 'punk' as social cache – well alright, I did, still do, get off on X and The Clash but not so much the style.) We got to be good buds over the short life of the teevee commercial project. She was interested in what I told her I'd like to do in the future, what I had done to make myself more useful to the luck-of-the-draw opportunities that would occasionally tap me here in Phoenix. 'You should come to L.A. Knock on doors! I could tell you who to see, who to avoid. Do it!' So, as I had a best friend who lives there willing to let me come stay whenever I wanted, I decided to put together a best-of dog-and-pony-show mini-portfolio of some really, really cool places I had in my files. I penned an uncharacteristically brief letter of introduction and together with a boarded copy of one of my best locations sent little packages off to all the HOP's and Executive Producers Marol suggested had the best stable of directors to work with, promising to give them a call when I came to town a couple of weeks later. Then I hit the road.

I gave myself a week to make calls, arrange meetings and nail down some beach time if I could and was a bit surprised at how receptive people were to my call-backs. Many were really, really busy. (Of course.) But I kept at it and ended up seeing nearly everyone I set out to meet! 'I'd never been contacted by a location scout before to show me their work and pitch their services', I heard more often than I can count. *I never made it to the beach.*

When I look back now at the people I met, the level of individual at the top of the food-chain I was able to arrange spending a bit of their valuable time with, *I am amazed to this day.* I probably wouldn't even attempt so audacious a plan *now*. But that was then, and sometimes the less you know about The Big Picture the better off you are, the more successful you will be at realizing your dreams and aspirations. Marol was so pleased with my tenacity, I guess, she offered to share her office space with me for the couple of years I decided to live part-time in L.A., bouncing back and forth between that anthill and Phoenix, where my real life is. I came to know Marol Butcher as, not just 'the production goddess' (so many people I met referred to her as), someone who seemed to know absolutely-everyone, but one of the most genuinely beautiful and incredibly cool (without being crass and snotty about it) people I have ever met. I could go on about her but I won't. She wouldn't feel comfortable with all the goo-goo-praise and all. (*Such an anomaly in this business!*)

During one of several marketing blitzes I engaged in over those early years, at one meeting where I sat down with two of the three executive producers at a busy company with lots of directors, one of the ladies suggested I go see one of their principal line producers who just happened to be in Phoenix at the time working on a project. They thought he would be interested to look at the diversity of locations I had shown them and that we might hit it off. When I met Philippe Rivier he seemed to be impressed with my work and during our conversation he told me about an upcoming project he was planning for the next summer; he would produce his first feature film *in Denmark*. (Woo-hoo!) I had been to Copenhagen once a couple of years before and was planning to visit my girlfriend there that summer, *the year before production would begin*. So I may have made it sound like I knew more about the place than I actually did, but listening to his enthusiastic pitch about the project (as producers and directors are so adept at doing) I immediately saw an opportunity for myself to actually – possibly – live in one of the coolest cities I have ever visited, if only for the life of a film's production. While on holiday I ran through Philippe's synopsis with all my friends and each was, of course, familiar with their country's efforts in [saving their Jewish population from the Nazis during World War Two](#). I made pictures of the old docks and warehouses in Copenhagen, back-alleys and dark apartment courtyards, old neighborhood streets and parks – things I thought might help tell a story about people hiding, then fleeing by boat to neutral-nation Sweden. (LINK TO: <http://www.auschwitz.dk/Denmark.htm>)

When I got back from vacation I quickly edited 14 rolls of film and sent the best series of location folders to Philippe with a short note. Before the end of the week he surprised me with a call, 'I showed your pictures to the director, Kenneth Madsen. Without having read the script you seem to have found most of what we need to tell our story! What do you think about working with us next summer?' Bingo! This is what I most-love about this business! If you have an idea and you work hard – most importantly, put your ideas to work in an inventive way – *magic happens!* [I had the best summer of my life working with Philippe and Kenneth and their merry band of Danish filmmakers](#). And because Danes *work to live*, unlike here in America where we *live to work* instead, I had each and every weekend off to celebrate life to its fullest in the party-center-of-the-universe, Copenhagen! (Oh yeah.) (LINK TO: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101646/>)

Everything has a shelf-life. For the first 16 or 17 years I was involved with the production of pictures I worked as a location scout and a location manager. Instead of looking for an opportunity to segue into the camera department and work towards one day becoming a cinematographer I just kept jumping from one teevee commercial to the next, occasionally landing a couple of days scouting for still photographers as well. Hey, I got to make wonderful pictures of intriguing places someone else paid for me to travel too. I got comfortable with the work. I know that many location managers have gone on to become producers. That would figure. There is much organizational skill involved and, especially with regards to commercials, LOTS of last minute – I mean *last* minute – changes! If you can land on your feet more often than not then why not look at producing? But as much 'fun' that challenge can be, pulling rabbits out of a hat, I *much prefer* the more right-brain activity of getting my head around what a creative team wants to produce as a picture and then find the right place to do it in or at. *I wouldn't want to be a producer* – too much politics! Money isn't everything.

For the past 5 or 6 years I have been working almost exclusively in production for print ads – less stress. Unfortunately, in that photo-shoots are nowhere near as complicated as film productions, scouting on a photo project doesn't necessarily move on and into actual production-day work as location manager. The 'location manager' ends up being the photo producer – unless the concept has called for a site out in the middle of nowhere. I make great maps. And besides putting together government and tribal permits I provide an abundance of pertinent information that allows for a producer to make all arrangements or changes to their

schedules on the fly. However, there are times when it actually saves time and headaches having the scout along during production as both guide, and – if he or she is capable – an extra production-hand to 'put out fires', do some building and/or rigging and be depended upon to allow for the producer to attend to keeping The Agency happy and out of the photographer's way as they do their thing. It merits mentioning once again that, while I do not intend to nor have the desire to transition into becoming a photo producer, two decades of experience on film production in various capacities is a terrific addition to a still-photo crew, especially when that team is working out of their home base, wherever that may be.

When I look towards the future I am excited to be more free to once again focus on my past work as an artist printmaker. Thirty years ago I made pictures in the studio by stone and plate lithography and silkscreen; then I transitioned into making prints from film in smelly darkrooms, enlarging onto paper and processed in trays of chemicals that used to chew away at my fingertips. Today I can do more on a computer screen with applications that allow me to imagine and create *anything*! My fingertips have healed.

With this, the final version of my location scouting services website in-the-can, no more redesigns for me! This third iteration, my 'picture-book' will be my last '*locationswest*' site – I can always upload additional, new content to it from time to time. *This site make-over process took forever!* I look forward next to designing a presentation of my own photo illustrations as Art.

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In the past I have worked on commercials projects for **directors** Michael Bay, Peter Bloomfield, Marco Brambilla, Steve Chase, [Harry Coccio and Geordie Stephens](#), Bruce Dorn, Alan Fuchua, David Fincher, Michael Givens, Michael Grasso, Hugh Harkness, Carl Harvey, George Jecel, Peter Kagan, Marek Kanievska, John Komnenich, Grey Liple, Robert Logevall, Dennis Manarchy, Jim Manera, Joe Pytka, Nick Rafter, Jim Sonzero, Bill Timmer, Allan van Rijn, Rupert Wainwright and Curtis Wehrfritz among others. (LINK TO: [http://adsoftheworld.com/media/tv/oakland\\_as\\_the\\_jones](http://adsoftheworld.com/media/tv/oakland_as_the_jones))

Some of the **photographers** I have worked with include Jim Arndt, Joel Baldwin, Mervyn Franklyn, Cristophe Gilbert, Rolph Gobits, Rick Graves, Jim Haefner, Don Johnston, Doug Menez, Wayne Rainey, Marcus Wendler and Jimmy Williams. (LINK TO: [photographers' pages](#))

(edited 8 '08)

**Synopsis:**

- 1970 – 1976:

University of Wisconsin, Madison/University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee – Art degree.

- 1976 – 1981:

Life – Art, travel, smoke (unlike Bill Clinton, I did inhale), drink, enjoy.

- 1981 – 1984:

Found work assisting photographers; transitioned into assisting with film production.

- 1984 – 2003:

Created the Arizona Land Company; focused on location scouting services as life's new adventure; built a company that grows each year and provides great new challenges and fascinating opportunities.

- 2003 – present:

Focusing more on photo production location scouting services while still working the occasional television commercial; experimenting with website design; re-introducing myself to making Art.

- Ongoing:

Focusing on making pictures of my own – like back in the glory years, '76 - '81.