

FATALI'S PEACE MISSION

By Laura Jackson

What does the CIA's original U-2 Spy plane and the mysterious world of Fatali's photography have in common?

A whole lot more that you could ever imagine...



Espionage Into New Worlds

As Cold War tensions heated up in the early 1950s, the U.S. military searched for new ways to discover the Soviet's true intentions. They believed that if they could create an aircraft that could fly at 70,000 feet, it would not only be beyond reach of Soviet fighters and missiles, but even beyond their radar.

The unique capabilities of the U-2 would allow for overflights into Soviet airspace to take aerial photographs of their most secret operations. An impressive photographic enlarger was designed to further enhance the details of these photographs, providing undercover investigation like never before.

Many years later, long after older photographic techniques were replaced with newer digital technology, photographer Michael

Fatali had the good fortune of acquiring some of this original U-2 photographic equipment. Fatali, already known for revealing nature's wonders in ways never seen before, now has the opportunity to provide yet another world view—utilizing the U-2 equipment for peace reconnaissance.

When Bigger is Better

The cameras on the original U-2 planes actually had an amazing resolution of 2.5 feet from an altitude of 60,000 feet. Then, the military's custom photographic enlarger, using ultra high-resolution lenses, allowed for an enormous amount of details and definition in the resulting image. The enlarger allowed the military to create detailed 10-foot long maps of enemy territory. In 1962, an infamous U-2 mission actually photographed the Soviet missile installations in Cuba.

Through a long and tedious process of putting back together 30,000 pounds of old U-2 photographic enlarger parts long stored in a warehouse, likely for several decades, Fatali has created a new photographic studio and darkroom in Park City. He now has the capability to produce his awe-inspiring photographs in an astonishing 4 x 10 foot format. And what's important to understand here is that it's not at all the same as just blowing up a print to a giant size.

The definition possible with the U-2 equipment is an amazing one billion of the sharpest single analog dots. In comparison to digital terms, that would be an unbelievable 11 Gigapixels image file.

Known for his optical prowess and ingenuity, Fatali designed a new custom light source that will allow him to print his unique Cibachrome photographs in a giant size using the U-2 enlarger. What that translates to is an ability to create a photograph with mystifying depth and clarity. The same equipment that was once used to disclose undetectable enemy activity will now reveal nature's most secret details.

Fatali explains, "The first time I used some of these specialized optics, I was floored by how much more information came to light in the image. I see more details and range color intricacies than ever before."

Timeless Classics

Even with the advent of surveillance satellites, as well as many newer fleets, the U-2 remains in service more than 50 years later. The U-2 fleet even outlasted its Mach 3 SR-71 replacement.

Part of what makes Fatali's works ageless masterpieces is that he makes each photograph by hand in a dark room using old optical processes, rather than newer digital technologies. Not only is there no digital manipulation or computer imaging, but his form of printmaking offers a stability and saturation of color that newer technologies simply don't match. He uses a rare photographic paper known as Cibachrome, a silver-emulsion paper, that is not just museum archival, but designed to last for generations to come.

Rest assured that when you take a look at one of Fatali's breathtaking photographs, it's truly the next closest thing to being there. He strongly believes in using only natural light without any sort of filters. "To me, using nature's light is the best way to express the wonders of natural phenomena," said Fatali.

He explains that he might have to go back to the same location for months or years at a time to get the precise image he was thinking of, in the right season with the exact right light. But it's most definitely worth the wait. Fatali's goal is for his viewer to feel an intimate and passionate connection to the spirit of the land as he does. And now with his newest innovative ability to create such immense pieces of art, you can completely immerse yourself in the healing power of his landscapes.

The Fatali family invites you to visit their gallery located in historic Park City at 556 Main Street. Private and group darkroom and studio tours are available by appointment 435-772-2422.

Along with his passion for still photographs, Fatali is now also using his talents with his recently formed production company. Bringing his spectacular high-resolution images to the big screen, Fatali will be using IMAX film stocks. "Get ready for a new sight and sound experience of extraordinary world wonders revealed through motion pictures," said Fatali.

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