

'BODIE', 2011



ROMANCE OF THE WEST

Local photographer sets out to capture the fading glory of the Western frontier



DMITRI VON KLEIN

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CLARK

Never mind DeLoreans, phone booths or Einstein's theory of relativity, local photographer Dmitri von Klein has cracked the secret to time travel: a 60-year-old Graflex camera. The lens of his 4X5 large format camera is like a wormhole into the history of the American West, rediscovering places like the "almost ghost town" of Shaniko in northern Oregon or the full-blown ghost town of Bodie in central California.

"I'm fascinated with history and how it relates to photography," von Klein says. "Remote places are a way

of time traveling back to that time because they're untouched and rarely visited."

Von Klein now wants to bring this visual historical exploration to a wider audience with an upcoming book project and traveling exhibit entitled *The West: Romance of the Frontier*. Like many creatives these days, von Klein has turned to Kickstarter to help fund his ambitious project — a two-month journey in his four-door sedan from northern Oregon through eastern California and Arizona, ending in southern Utah. The anticipated result — 40 to 60 images — will potentially be published in September. "I like the idea of a lot of people being part of something, especially when it comes to art," he says. "The bottom line is I can't do it alone."

The Kickstarter fund will not only contribute to travel and publishing expenses, but also to the cost of a specific discontinued film that he shoots with on the Graflex. "The film is Polaroid black-

and-white medium contrast," he says. "It has a really beautiful way of capturing tonalities between pure blacks and pure whites. It captures every detail."

Von Klein calls Oregon home now, but he was born in Russia and spent part of his childhood in Germany before moving to Arizona when he was 10. It was there, in the desert landscape, he says, that "the seeds of being in love with the final frontier" were planted. While exploring these stark vistas and decomposing 19th-century towns, von Klein likes to delve into the psyche of the first pioneers.

"It's a story of human experience: trying to imagine picking up everything, your entire family, and going into the unknown," he says. "The mindset you would have to take on that journey is fascinating." ■

For more information about *The West: Romance of the Frontier* project, visit wkly.ws/1gf; the deadline for fundraising is May 2. To see von Klein's previous photography, visit monovita.com



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