Jerry Uelsmann

Uelsmann was born in Detroit, Michigan. While attending public schools, at the age of fourteen, there sparked an interest in photography. He believed that through photography he could exist outside of himself, to live in a world captured through the lens. Despite poor grades, he managed to land a few jobs, primarily photographs of models. Eventually Uelsmann went on to earn a BA from the Rochester Institute of Technology and M.S. and M.F.A. degrees from Indiana University. Soon after, he began teaching photography at the University of Florida in 1960. In 1967, Uelsmann had his first solo exhibit at The Museum of Modern Art which opened doors for his photography career.¹

Uelsmann is a master printer, producing composite photographs with multiple negatives and extensive darkroom work. He uses up to a dozen enlargers at a time to produce his final images, and has a large archive of negatives that he has shot over the years. Uelsmann does not carry multiple attachments, but only one camera, "Most photographers carry many cameras with multiple attachments. Most photographers have one enlarger. I have half a dozen." When beginning to create one of his photomontages, he has a strong intuitive sense of what he's looking for, some strategy for how to find it, and an understanding that mistakes are inevitable and are part of the creative process. His process begins after a day of shooting. He returns to his work station in his home and covers a large drafting table with hundreds of proof sheets. He folds and overlaps various contact prints, explores the visual possibilities, then brings the options into his darkroom. He then sets his selected pieces into the large number of enlargers that he owns in his darkroom, and moves the photo paper progressively down the line, building up an image.