

When I was around nine I wanted a fish-eye lens. This was maybe 1970. While thumbing through a photography magazine, I came across an ad - it was sort of a monthly contest - a lens manufacturer was offering a free lens if you would write to them and describe your "dream image." If they selected your "dream image," they would arrange for one of their photographers to set up and photograph the scene you've described. The picture would appear in the next month's issue and you'd be sent your free lens. You don't see ads like this nowadays.

The "dream image" I sent in was this: to lie down in a meadow with your back flat to the ground during a thunderstorm. You'd need to photograph looking straight up at the sky with a fish-eye lens. You'd need lots and lots of lightning - maybe you'd need to do this with a slow exposure. Ideally, the lightning would emanate and radiate from the center of the image. Also, it really would be best if there were trees ringing the meadow - these would show up nicely at the edge of your circular picture. The photograph would end up looking kind of like a blood-shot eyeball. I made a drawing for them.

Around this time, as I was waiting for my "dream image" to appear in the photography magazine, I ordered a submarine from the back pages of a comic book. My mother gave me some change for vacuuming the house and I had a tiny weekly allowance - so I scotch-taped my coins to my letter and sent it to the submarine maker. The ad for the submarine described it as being big enough for two people and I actually thought I'd be able to navigate Boston Harbor in it. It arrived as a large flat package and turned out to be made of cardboard. I folded it up and it became a submarine-shaped box - with submarine markings and décor on the outside. You could get inside it. It had a periscope with two angled mirrors and a torpedo tube that resembled the cardboard tube you're left with when you've used your last paper towel. You'd put your mouth on one end of the tube and blow out a plastic torpedo. At first I was disappointed, but when it was all assembled I thought it was neat. I went out a few times in my neighborhood on my own and once or twice coaxed a friend to come along with me. There was an opening at the bottom for your legs so you could walk around while your upper body was concealed. The scene I made must have resembled the great 1944 Central Park photo by Kertesz ("Homing Ship") where all you see are legs - the boy's torso is covered by the white sails of his toy ship. I wish I could go back in time and photograph my childhood.

They never did publish my "dream image" or even get back to me about it. I've never made a photo with a fish-eye lens. Later in life I did manage to photograph cloud-to-ground lightning while driving down a Mississippi highway at high speed. In many ways, the nine year old I used to be still calls the shots in my life and work.