

Renaissance Man of Carroll Gardens

By [Michael Milton](#)

March 6, 2018, 2:49 pm

A conversation with photographer John Mazlish



Chris Biesterfeldt, Vinegar Hill/Dumbo

“The Art of Seeing” by Michael Milton

Photographer John Mazlish and I met by chance at a Christmas party this past December. As it happens, I love photography. One thing led to another, and recently we met again at Local 61, a chill and ultra-hip coffee shop/bar located at 61 Bergen Street in Cobble Hill. At my request, John brought along images of his work and shared more of his life with me.

“This has been a powerful year for me,” Mazlish confided. “My mother— a wonderfully talented painter who deeply influenced me—passed away. Shortly afterwards, my adoptive sister passed as well. Each day becomes more precious now, as does the awareness of life’s finality. The time to live is now.”

Pictures from John’s recent trip to the west coast immediately caught my eye. There is a particular shot of the California coastline, just south of San Francisco that fascinated me. An image of the Pacific Ocean— a jagged ridge on the far side and a cavalcade of wild plants and flowers up closer—reminded me of paintings by well-known Monterey artist, Virginia Lynn.



Swirling Ocean, Big Sur

“I steer clear of cliché sorts of landscapes and try to find beauty where you don’t imagine it will be,” he said. “I’m attracted to a kind of zen-like simplicity. I just pulled over to the side of the road and looked down for this photograph of the cliffs.”

John's fine art pieces are, quite literally, fine art. Three shots taken in Sag Harbor—a Monet-like pond, a structural autumnal image of articulated tree branches reflected in water and an Asian flavored close-up of fall foliage—are stellar and would look stunning hung anywhere.

John's involvement with music, as a guitarist, a writer and a vocalist is very apparent in his art, as well. "I am lucky to be friends with some amazingly talented people. Their talent inspires me. Their music and art inspires me."

I pointed to the photograph of Donovan with the umbrella. "Oh, yeah." John says. "You remember him?"



Donovan, Woodstock Film Festival NY

Do I remember him! His hit "Mellow Yellow" was an ear worm which I couldn't shake lose for years. "I shot that up at the Woodstock Film Festival, where I've been working for many years" John recalls.

We went through some Brooklyn musicians he has photographed. "Brooklyn is a great place for photographers. It's really a huge playground. I especially love shooting in Red Hook and Dumbo."

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I liked a series of photos of singer/songwriter Joanna Wallfisch, all three taken in Red Hook. "Yeah, she's amazing. She's beautiful and has great talent."



Joanna Wallfisch, Red Hook

He showed me an evocative photo of jazz guitarist Chris Biesterfeldt walking away from the camera, taken in Vinegar Hill. Other Brooklyn musicians followed; guitarist Joe Brack, (check out his 3rd album, “A Good Life”), and singer/songwriter Kyler England.

“The wind was blowing and it was freezing,” said Mazlish. “I love that the shot reflects wild energy!”

“I try and keep my style natural. My shots are almost always about simplicity and straightforwardness. I love to keep my subjects in motion. Movement helps reveal the essence of people.”

A photo of a Pied Piper-esque man followed by a cow caught my eye. “That’s one of my best friends, Kevin So. He does it all; plays guitar, piano, killer singer. His Indie label is “Sexy Asian Man.” “Kevin and I have been working on a musical entitled, “Great Wall,” John enthused. “The great David Henry Hwang (author of the Tony award winning “M. Butterfly”) is involved, and the show won “Outstanding Music & Lyrics” in the New

York International Fringe Festival. I truly believe in this piece. It's refreshing- comprised of real, genuine songs- interpreted for the theater but none written specifically for it."



Kevin So, Williamsburg, Cross-processed film

A photograph of Lipbone Redding standing on the Smith and 9th Street subway platform captured for me some essence of a musician's life in New York City.

"There is much joy working for myself. Think of it! I get to be out in the most beautiful places and I'm there for work. What a gift."



Kyler England, Williamsburg, East River State Park, Cross processed film



Kevin So, Nashville



Joe Brack, Vinegar Hill/ Dumbo



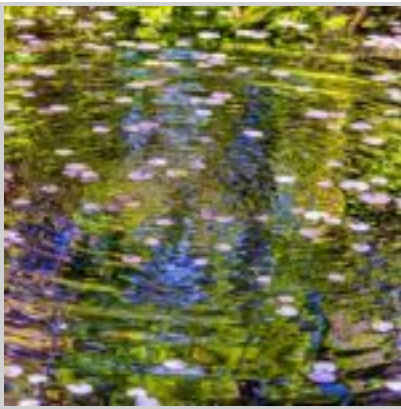
Joanna Wallfisch, Red Hook



Central Park Autumn abstract



California, South of San Fran



Sag Harbor, Lily Pond



Lipbone Redding, Smith & 9th st. subway, Carroll Gardens



Kevin So, Williamsburg, Cross-processed film



Joe Brack, Vinegar Hill Dumbo



Joanna Wallfisch, Red Hook



Autumn Reflection, Sag Harbor

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