

FREE
or \$1/50Afs
to street vendors

AFGHAN

SCENE

ISSUE 77 - DECEMBER 2010

Scene Photo Special: Afghanistan Through the Pinhole

The Ice Cream Man Cometh
Exclusive: War is Boring
Be Scene

perspective • insight • people • reviews • pics • life

Afghanistan through the pinhole

This month Afghan Scene runs an exclusive photo special of images taken with an old box camera by Landry Dunand. Dunand, a French graphic designer, stumbled on pinhole photography during a brief trip to Kabul and fell swiftly under the spell of his "big green wooden box"...



Let the photographer through

In 2006, I received an email through a friend of a friend, about an opening for a graphic designer with a communications company and applied. I got the job so my wife and I decided we would move here together to try it out for a few months. If we didn't like it, we could always go back to Bangkok, where we are based. While wandering Kabul's dusty streets, I came across a group of Afghan photographers taking passport-size pictures using big antiquated camera obscura boxes and silver print paper negatives. I explored every corner photo booth and shop, and found the perfect camera — my big green wooden box. I initially thought it would just be a decorative item, but I was curious to try taking some images. At that time, it was really easy to find the photographic paper and chemicals in any photo shop in town.

I started taking photos of my Kabul housemates, then the neighbours and nearby shopkeepers, practicing how to focus with the polished glass paper holder inside the box and how to develop in a country with murky, grainy tap water and no electricity for heating the water.

I had to experiment with exposure times, and the only chemicals and paper I could find were Chinese made and long past their expiration dates. I also discovered that the hole for the lens was far too small and left a black ring around my photos, so I gradually filed away at it.


I then lugged the box around the neighborhood and into Kabul's incredible old city, taking pictures of children in the Murad Khane neighborhood.

I live in Bangkok now and have started taking portraits of friends and clients, in the tradition of the old school studio photographers. Nothing digital, no electricity needed. Just a lot of light, silver gelatin paper and a touch of hocus pocus alchemy to make the images appear.

Some of my favorite images were from Kabul, because of the sharpness of the images and the depth of field. Because of the lengthy exposure times, the subjects had to remain very still, but a lot of photos just show a blur of movement or laughter.

I've been playing around with miniature shoots using action figures and turning the junk around my garden into make-believe scenery.

I returned to Kabul for a two-month visit last summer, and I had a really hard time finding another camera obscura. I biked around town for a week and found that only two camera obscura guys were still working in town. Then I had to go to every single photo shop to find developing chemicals. It was like a quest for the holy grail. After two weeks I had gathered everything I needed and starting shooting again... kids at the circus school, workers, people in the street. ✖



Washerman | David Gill



Making popcorn | Landry Dunand



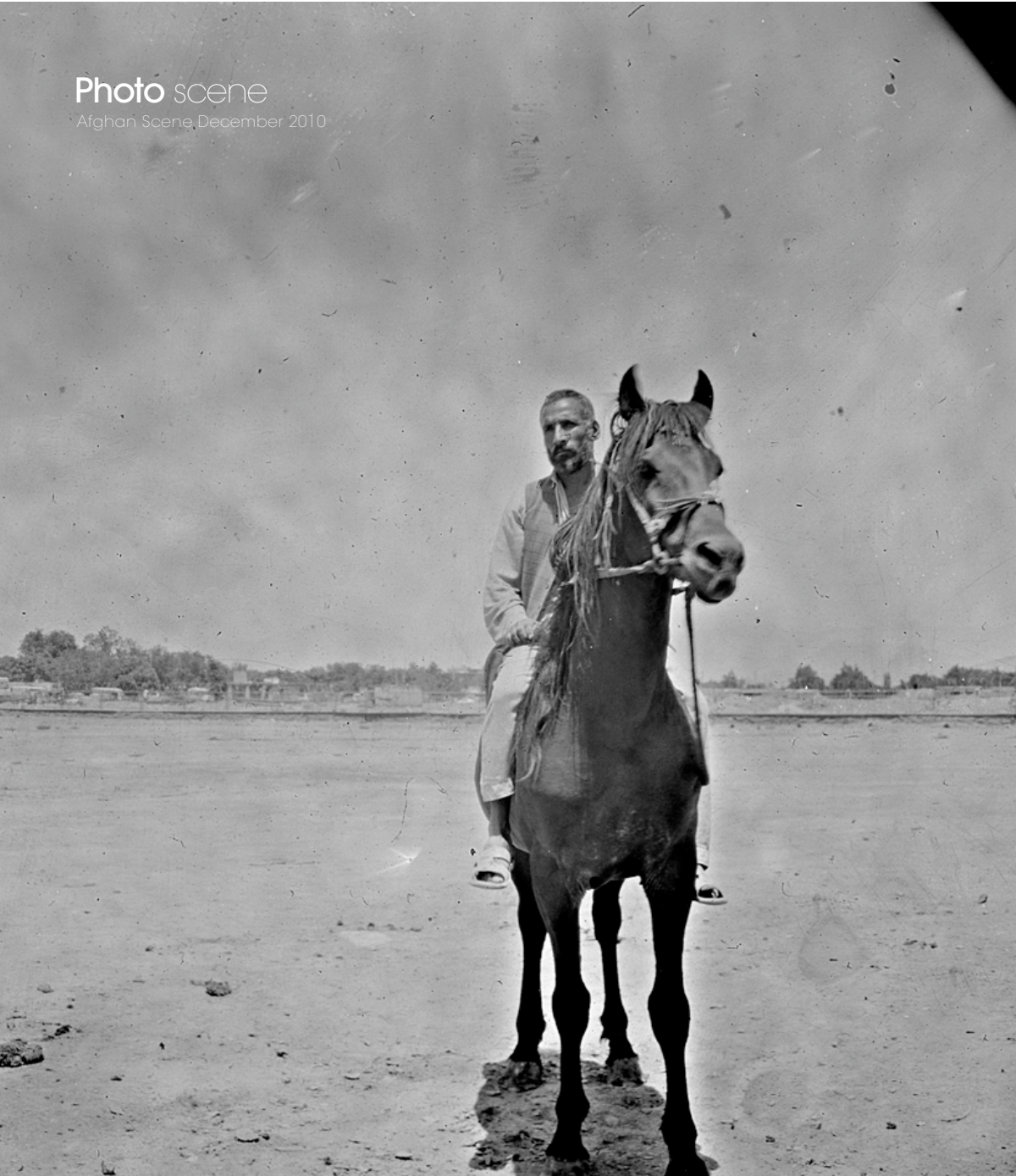
Man in a pakoul | Landry Dunand



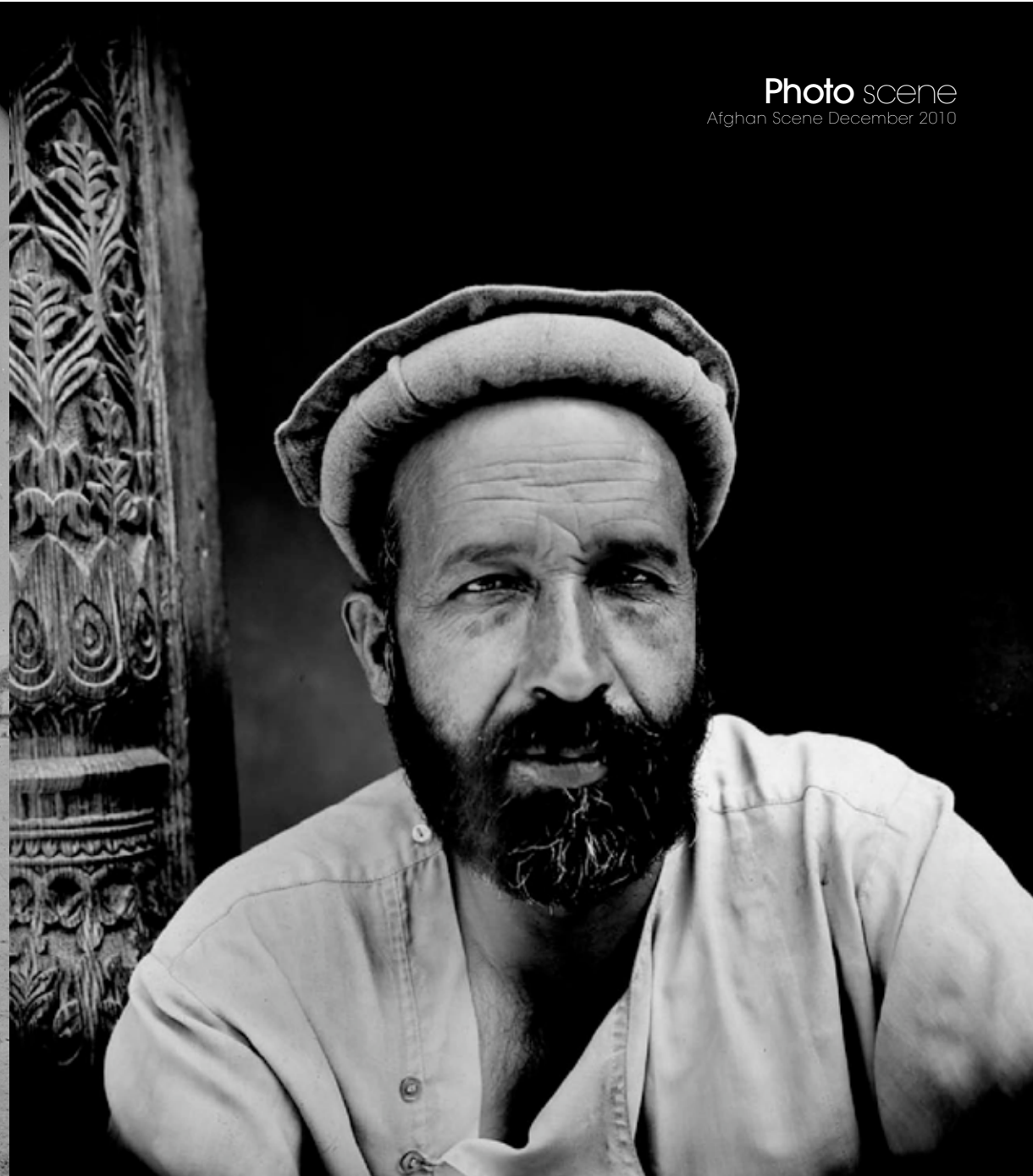
Asheqan wa arefan | Landry Dunand



Boy in a plaid shirt | Landry Dunand



Buzkhashi rider, or chapandaz | Landry Dunand



Potter | Landry Dunand



Masked kids | Landry Dunand



Through the window | Landry Dunand



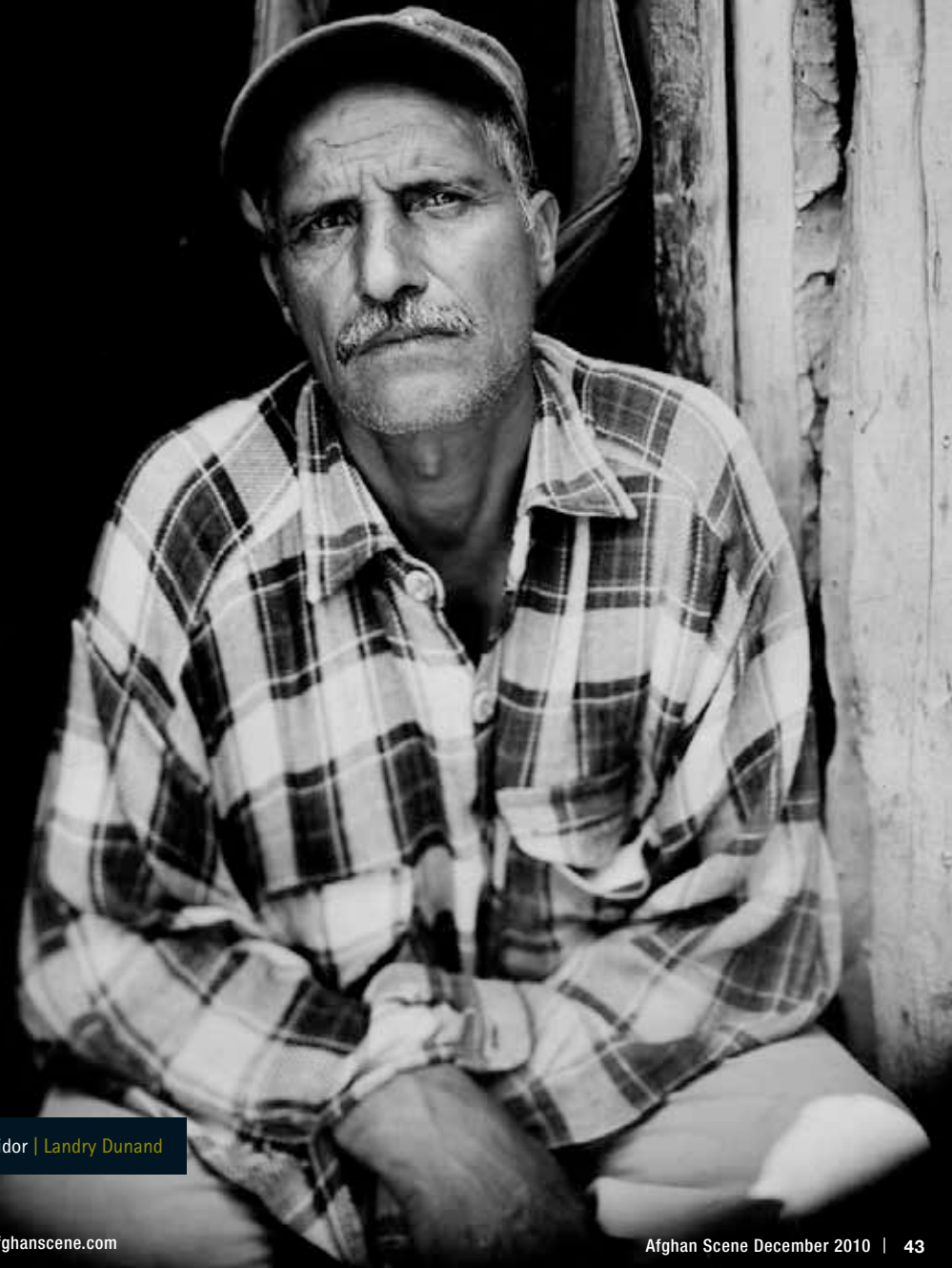
Girl with clubs | Landry Dunand



Ironsmith | Landry Dunand



Woodcutter | Landry Dunand



Chawkidor | Landry Dunand



An Afghan antiques seller | Landry Dunand



On a roof | Landry Dunand



Two circus kids | Landry Dunand



At school | Landry Dunand