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OFF THE SHELF: FLYING PICTURES
Posted by Kristina Budelis

If I could choose one superpower, it would be flying. My new three-year-old acquaintance Adam, who was wearing Superman pajamas (complete with cape) when I met him the other night, agrees. As he flitted around his apartment, cape flying, he seemed almost to soar. Regrettably, I never had Superman pajamas, but I spent many a summer day dashing to the edge of the swimming hole near my home. When I reached the edge I'd jump and close my eyes: for an instant, I was flying.

When I asked the photographer Daniel Gordon the superpower question, he promptly replied, "Compressing TIFF files into JPEGs with my mind." But Gordon hasn't quit trying to fly just because he's a grownup. For five years, Gordon roamed the lush countryside of the Hudson Valley, staking out pretty take-off spots. When he found a landscape that caught his fancy, he would return with a large-format camera and tripod, leap into the air and—with the help of an assistant—capture his ephemeral flight on film. The most triumphant of these images comprise his book "Flying Pictures."

"I think what appealed to me about flying is that I shouldn't be able to do it, but through photography it is possible," Gordon told me. "I don't think of myself as a magician, or even really an illusionist, but there's no doubt in my mind that the camera is both." He describes the endeavor of creating the images as "part performance, in which for most of it I just look like a crazy person flopping around on the horizon line of the landscape." The act of capturing the picture, he adds, "was the only place that 'flying' really existed." His flights always began hopefully, and ended tragically as he crashed down to earth.

But in between lie the photographs, impossible scenes in lush landscapes, invitations to suspend disbelief and to pause—in mid-thought, if not in mid-air. Here's a selection.

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