

NGM.COM

DECEMBER 2010

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

THE
SEARCH
FOR

King David

New
Discoveries
in the
Holy Land

\$5.99US \$6.99CAN



0 70989 36824 8

122



Photographer Daniel Gordon soars—briefly—over a snowy field in New York's Hudson Valley.

Daniel Gordon's book Flying Pictures was published last year by PowerHouse Books. See more of his work at danielgordonstudio.com.

Taking Flight I can fly. I just can't do it for very long. I began taking photographs of myself in flight about ten years ago, when digital cameras were becoming easily available. Because digital images are so simple to alter on a computer, I wanted instead to manipulate photos the old-fashioned way: light through a lens exposing an image on film. This allowed me to make pictures that were at once documents of the truth and a visual fiction.

To fly, I always worked with a friend. I'd find a location, set up my large-format camera on a tripod, and compose the landscape, making a Polaroid of the setting to figure out where I wanted to appear in it. Next I'd walk up to the horizon line of the landscape. My friend would shout to me when I'd reached the place I'd chosen on the Polaroid. Then I'd get a running start and just jump forward, up, and out into the air. My friend would snap the shutter. I'd do this over and over, making one photograph per jump. Of course I'd come crashing to the ground over and over too. In the picture above you can see how red my arms were from landing in the snow so many times. The photographs in this project may show an instant's victory over gravity. But in the end, I always crashed back to Earth.



I never wanted the pictures' backgrounds to be too specific or identifiable. Most were either in California, where I grew up, or near Bard College in New York's Hudson Valley. Here I am, barely visible, flying over a Napa Valley field (above).

My flying style (left, aloft in the Hudson Valley) improved over the four years I worked on this project. I had to concentrate on keeping my body parallel to the ground. It's actually very painful to do—even before I hit the ground.



I wonder what people driving by must have thought—seeing this guy in the distance, running and jumping and falling. They never got that perfect flying fraction of a second. This picture (above) was made near Plainfield, Vermont.

Early on I realized that wearing street clothes in these pictures was kind of a distraction, so I started wearing long johns. Sometimes I almost seemed to blend in with the landscape, like this time in Point Reyes, California (left).