

LONGQUAN SWORDS



J Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication



What do I know about swords?

To me, a sword was usually a short stick I picked up somewhere on my way to becoming a pirate or a musketeer as I walked to my friend's house before school. No Hattori Hanzō blades of steel for me — just a stick and a make believe bad guy to vanquish in my imagination.

But, swords — actual weapons — are real things, made by real people, crafted from real materials. I know that now, too, from first-hand experience when I had an opportunity to photograph one of the famed Longquan sword makers in Lishui, China.



I wish I could tell you that they were making swords of legendary fame. I don't know, and I suspect there was an element of the tourist trade involved in their production. Be that as it may, I can assure you they cut with ease — a testament I can verify by how easily one cut my finger before I realized just how sharp it really was. In a different part of the compound however, a different sword — perhaps destined for some imaginative boy — would not have damaged a marshmallow. Stacks and stacks of swords, each stack for a different purpose and with a different design, were distributed in the dozen or so buildings that surrounded the central compound.

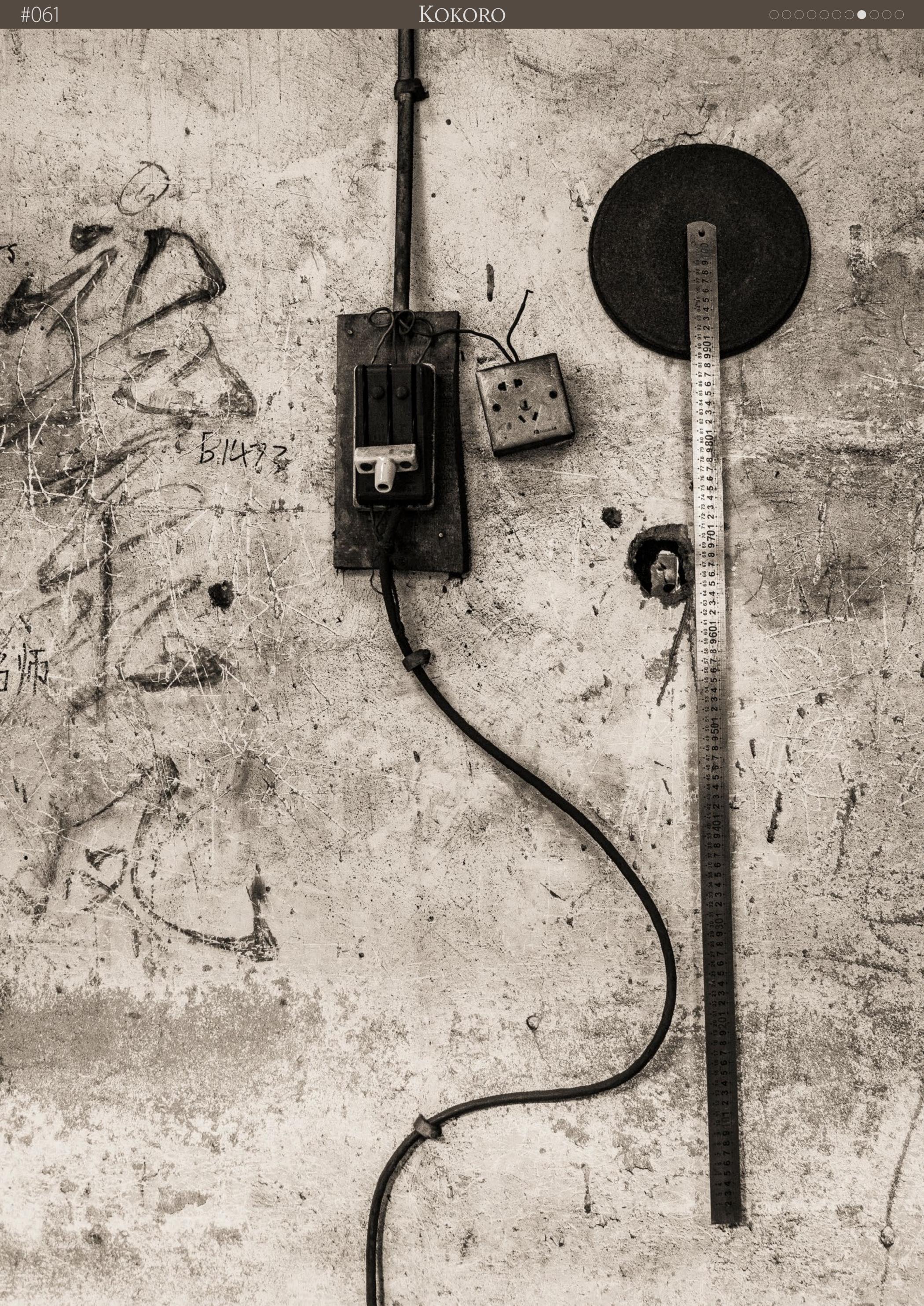




As much as the swords were fascinating, the shops and the craftsmen were moreso. By the wear on the walls, the depth of dusty metal filings on the floors, the deft skill with which each step in the process was executed by the various workers, the polished and refined details of production — by all of these the shapeless bars of steel transformed into the exquisite beauty of a finished blade. In my naiveté, I knew little of what I was watching and photographing, but even amidst my unanswered questions, I could recognize the skill of countless hours making these Longquan prizes.

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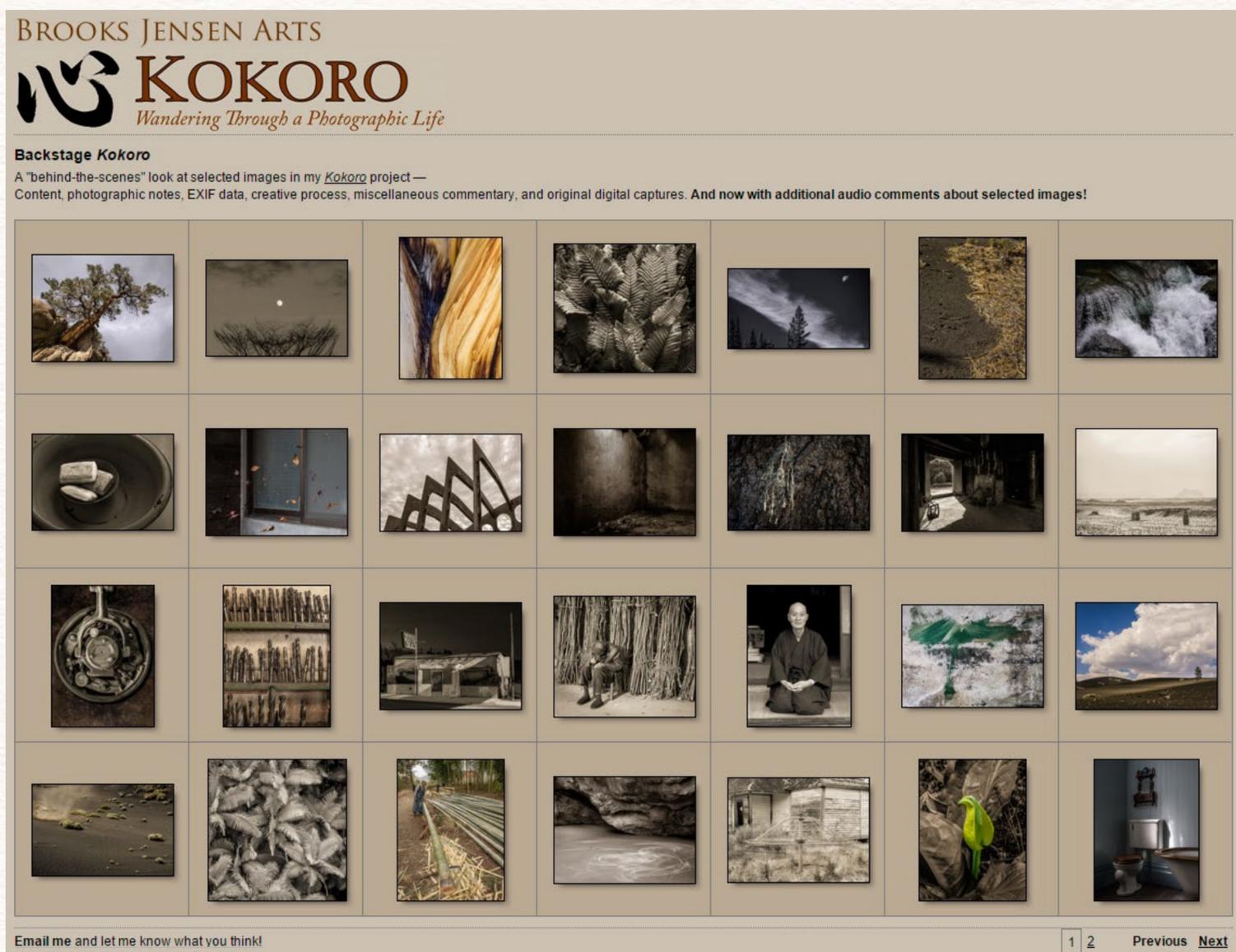




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Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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