

INSIGHTS

JEFFERY SADDORIS

Q&As WITH
VALDA BAILEY
DAVID DUCHEMIN
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JOHN KEATLEY
BETINA LA PLANTE
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BROOKE SHADEN
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BEN THOMAS

FOREWORD

Insights first appeared as a section in my book [Photography by the Letter](#). By breaking it out as a standalone piece, I'm setting the stage for future editions of Insights that will feature creators from a variety of disciplines.

From the original foreword:

One of the things I have loved about talking with photographers for so many years is the variety of answers I get to very similar questions. Every photographer – every artist, for that matter – has their own unique set of experiences and interpretations of those experiences that colors how they see, what they make, and how the work of others affects them. Insights is a way for me to present an ongoing collection of questions and answers to a diverse list of photographers whose work has interested and inspired me. Each of the featured artists gets five questions – two common to all of them and three unique to each of them – that they may answer as they see fit, without any expectation or restriction from me.

Jeffery Sadoris

INSIGHTS

VALDA BAILEY

What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

For me, it certainly isn't technical brilliance that elevates a photograph. A quick Google of the question threw up suggestions such as "good light", "the right technique", "low ISO" and "shooting in RAW". None of these elements really make that difference as far as I am concerned. A great photograph transcends technique and has an indefinable something that engages me. It is one that will always enable me to connect a little with the person who made the image – I want to be able to ascertain what motivated them to make the image. I want it to intrigue me – not give everything away at first glance.

How has your background in painting informed or affected your photography and to what extent do you think it's valuable for photographers to pursue other creative interests?

I think it has influenced me enormously. I now realise that one of the reasons I was drawn to multiple exposure photography is the way the sequence flattens the image and almost does away with linear perspective.



Images become flat and take on an almost Cubist quality. Or at least, they can. I hesitate to use the word "painterly" but that is sort of what happens. I think the pursuit of other creative ideas is crucial, actually. Immersing myself in all manner of creative arts is the best way I know to generate new ideas. Unfortunately free time is a precious resource these days and I am not able to engage as I would wish.



What or who has inspired your own photography the most, and how?

There are too many to mention so I am pleased you have only called for one. The person who has been the biggest inspiration is undoubtedly Chris Friel. Chris is a British photographer whose ICM (Intentional Camera Movement) work I happened upon around ten years ago. I had been doing some very limited experiments with camera movements but assumed that they somehow weren't "valid." Seeing Chris's work for the first time made me realise two things – firstly that it certainly was ok to do something so unconventional as moving the camera, and secondly that I had an awfully long way to go before I made an image that was even approaching acceptable.

You've talked about being a fan of imperfection in your work. How does one learn to distinguish between detail and imperfection that serves the image rather than simply distracting or confusing the viewer?

Good question. If my eye is distracted away from what I perceive to be the interest within an image then the photo is either binned or reworked. However, I have no interest in pixel peeping, nor cleaning up every little imperfection. The way I shoot is certainly controllable to a degree but also has a strong element of unpredictability about it and so unwanted elements invariably appear. It is hard to define when flaws become a hindrance. And it is a pretty subjective thing – maybe it goes back to my time as a painter where we left our mistakes on the canvas and allowed the history of the work to show through.

Has your photographic style been developed intentionally or has it emerged as a byproduct of simply making pictures?

Definitely not intentionally, no. It has emerged very slowly and is a consequence of many things, I think. I suppose my hard-wired preferences in terms of colour, contrast, subject matter etc, but also as a result of all the work I have looked at, all the people I admire, the teaching I have done, the way I see the world, my state of mind etc etc. I think "style" (for want of a better word) evolves and is a result of innumerable factors. It also changes and develops over time.





My approach to photography is greatly informed by my background in painting and I use various techniques to blur detail and abstract shapes in the landscape. My work straddles different genres and disciplines as I push away boundaries in the search for my voice.

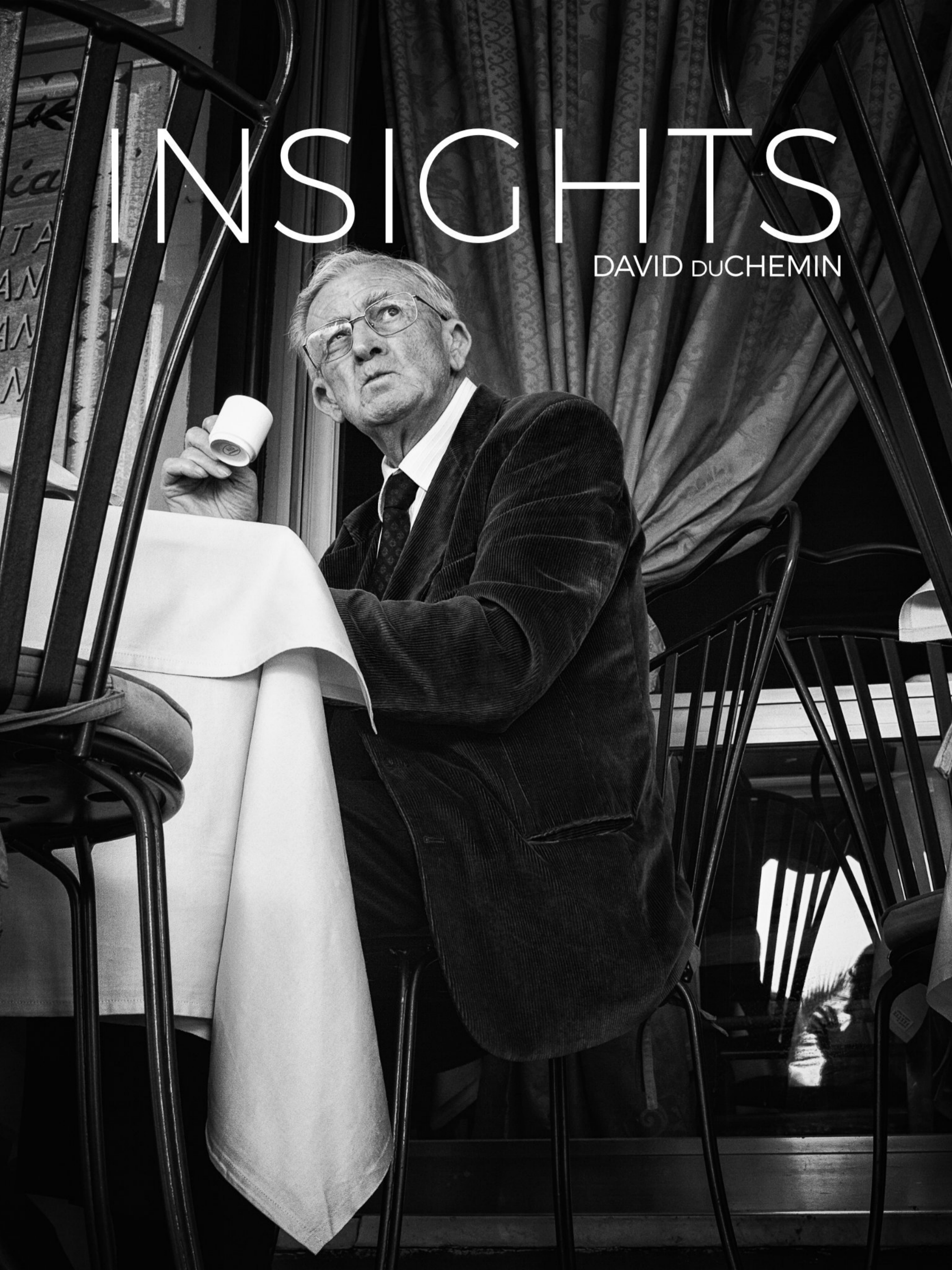
I build up layers in my camera and so my workflow is an instinctive, stream of consciousness ramble through shape and colour, light and shade, rhythm and flow and unbridled imagination where each decision I make is predicated on the result of the last one. It is a totally immersive process where the possibilities are seemingly limitless.

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DAVID DUCHEMIN



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

For me these are degrees of the same thing. A good photograph connects with people. It evokes in them a response. A great photograph does so with a wider audience, for longer, and with greater depth. It's a hard question to answer because we all do this for different reasons. For some people a good photograph, or even a great one, lies purely in the joy of making it, regardless of who sees it, or what kind of response it evokes. The gift of photography is so much more than just the resulting product: a photograph. It's in the way it helps us see, helps us become more alive to these moments we might miss otherwise.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

I like the way this question is phrased because while I have been influenced by so many photographers, it is life itself that most inspires me. It's the





experiences and the surprises that have come, most often because I'm out there with a camera, that have pushed me further and further down this rabbit hole. Making photographs exposes me to things that inspire me to make more photographs. Being awake, being present in the smallest moments, is addictive. In a less existential way, I find deep inspiration in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Sam Abell, Elliott Erwitt, Fan Ho, and others.

What is more challenging, making a portrait of a person or a place, and how are they different?

I think making portraits of people is a much more collaborative effort. Photographically the challenge might be similar, but photographing people requires a relational element that landscapes do not. You have to know your craft for both. Both require vision and creativity, but people require a level of insight, communication, and respect that the land doesn't ask of you.





What photographic technique or concept was most important for you in developing your unique vision?

I think the idea of vision itself. You know, we talk a lot about a picture being worth a thousand words, but it's just not so. Often the photograph is worth so much more, and just as often, perhaps more often, it's worth far less. In order for it to be worth anything at all it must have something to say. When I realized that photographs had their own language and that the tool of the photographer was not the camera at all but was that language, what I wanted to say — my vision — became not just relevant but vital, absolutely primary.

What are some photographic “rules” that should routinely be ignored?

There are no rules. There are principles that guide our craft, there are physics and psychologies, but there are no rules. That, however, doesn't stop people from making them up and slavishly obeying them. The rule of thirds is a good example. Composition has no rules. It has principles. We know that composition that considers balance and tension in the placement of elements is stronger than composition that's unintentional. Learning that, and learning how to play with that balance and tension, is helpful. Learning to put elements at a particular place on a grid of thirds we imagine overlaid upon our image? That's not helpful. Rules are the antithesis of creativity.



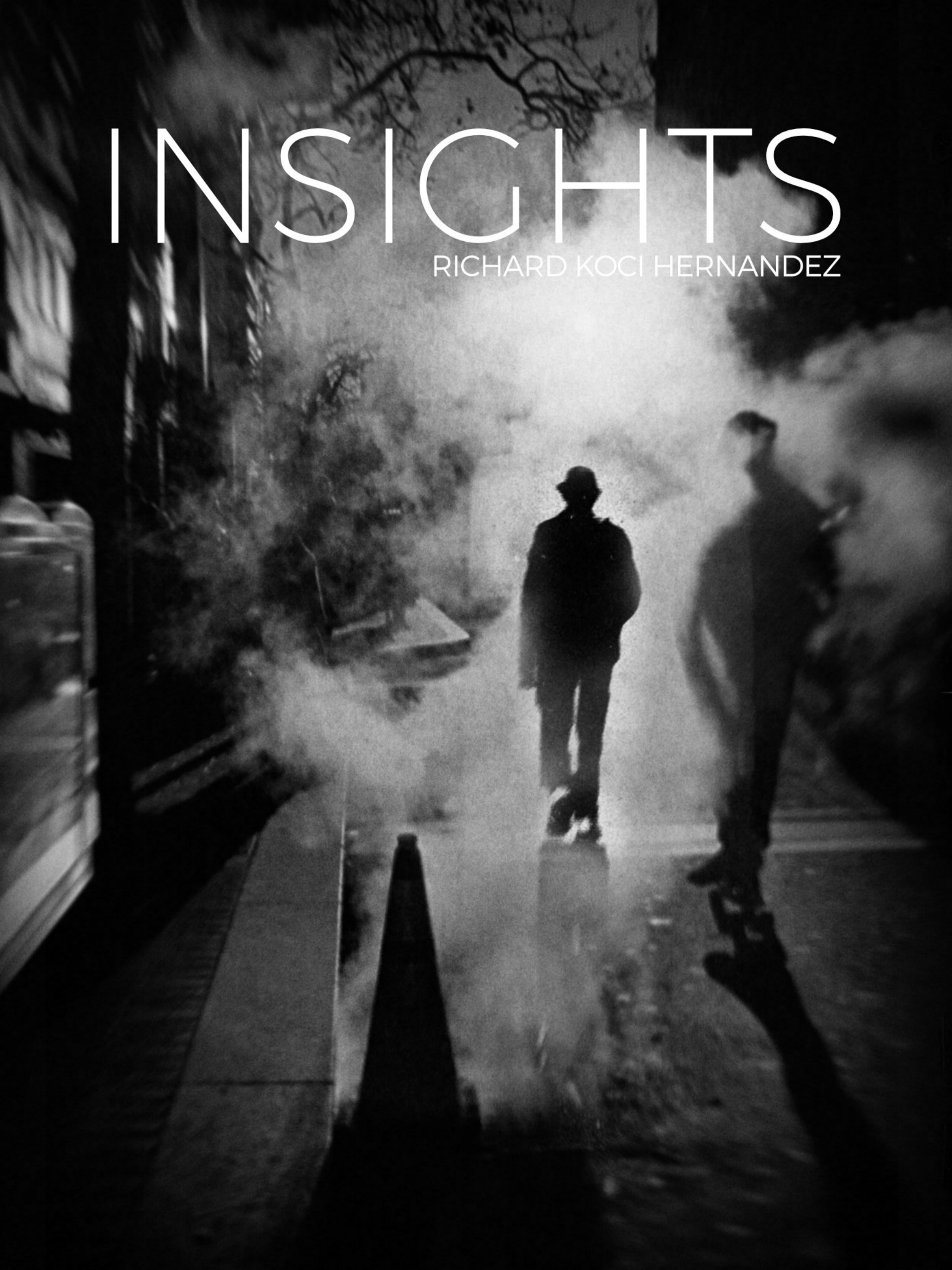
David duChemin is a world & humanitarian photographer based in Victoria, Canada. His books about the art and craft of photography are celebrated for their passion, humanity, and common sense.

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RICHARD KOCI HERNANDEZ



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

Layers and depth. I sincerely believe in the old adage, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder – meaning that the difference between good and great, the ultimate decision is in the hands of the viewer. For me, a photograph that I would consider “great” certainly has multiple layers and depth and is some thing that I can look at multiple times and pull different and layered meanings from. Ultimately I believe that's an image that leaves a lot to the imagination, is mysterious and holds tons of ambiguity allowing the reader to interject their own meaning – an image that is subtle, not in-your-face and not as obvious as it seems.



What is the most profound effect shooting with the iPhone has had on your photographic vision?

The ability to be practically invisible and blend in with my surroundings. Honestly, the ability to be in public and be part of the heartbeat of a scene, or city, without the obvious label of photographer is something I love about mobile photography. Another important aspect is the ability to shoot, review, post-produce and share with the social media stream in a matter of seconds and potentially open up dialogue around my images or photography in general has change my world view about the power of photography.





What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

Roy DeCarava rocked my photographic world. I continue to be influenced by his work. There is something mysterious, inspirational and straight from the heart in his vision. Another influence on my photography, funny enough is based on a lack of influence. My father, who was never part of my life or really influential in any way has spurred me on a photographic search in search of "him" via my series finding the hat man. I recently came to the realization that the strong influence of men wearing hats in my photographs was directly related to the lack of a father figure and my photographic journey. In continually photographing men in hats is my journey of attempting to find a father figure who is no longer there.



How is “visual storytelling” different from just taking pictures?

The answer to this question really has to do with a photographer's intent. I believe that if a photographer has a strong intent while photographing something, attempting to tell a story, present a view or perspective of the world, Then their image transcends simply “Just taking pictures” or what we refer to as a snapshot and transcends into visual storytelling.

What are some of the biggest perceived limitations of mobile photography?

The quality of the resulting images always seems to be the biggest perceived limitation in my opinion. So many people are consumed by the idea of megapixels, that they fail to see just how flexible and beautifully printed and presented an image from a mobile phone can be. I have 30x30 images printed and hanging in galleries, I have images in large format magazines and coffee table books, not to mention a 6ft x 3ft mobile phone image hanging in my house and the quality holds up and amazes people all the time. Sure, the mobile phone isn't always the right tool for every job, but it has a place in the toolbox.



Richard Koci Hernandez is an internationally recognized, award-winning innovator in journalism and multimedia. He recently published “The Principles of Multimedia Journalism: Packaging Digital News” Routledge, 2015. He is a national Emmy award winning multimedia producer who worked as a visual journalist at the San Jose Mercury News for 15 years. His photographic work has appeared in The New York Times, Wired, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, The Los Angeles Times, USA Today, and a National Geographic Book on iPhone Photography, among others. He has been named one of the “Top 25 Influential Communications Professors” and one of the “Top 100 Photographers on the Web.” His work for the Mercury News covering the Latino Diaspora and the California Youth Prison System earned him two Pulitzer Prize nominations and in 2003, the James K. Batten Knight Ridder Excellence Award. In 2006, Richard was named deputy director of photography and multimedia at the Mercury News after spearheading the creation of the organization’s first visual journalism website, MercuryNewsPhoto.com. He has taught multimedia workshops and presented keynotes for dozens of professional organizations and was most recently invited to be a visiting professor at the prestigious Paris-Sorbonne University. In 2011 Koci Hernandez was named an Assistant Professor of New Media at the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley.

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JOHN KEATLEY



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

For me, a photograph must achieve several things to be considered great:

- It needs to be created with a strong sense of vision and purpose. To me, this means the photographer wrestles with, studies, and keeps themselves up at night thinking about the particular subject matter because they care about it so deeply. I believe you will almost always find this to be true for the creator of any great photograph.
- If the photograph stirs up strong feelings in me, and I find myself drawn to the image like a bug to headlights, that is another indicator.
- And finally, if the image can stand the test of time, meaning I can return to the image multiple times over a period of time, and still feel the same way about the photograph, then I would consider it a great photograph. Often times, my first reaction to a photograph is for reasons that are waning, or superficial. Those feelings will eventually wear off, and what you are left with are your true feelings about the work. It's the difference between infatuation and love.

In contrast, my new definition of a good photograph has become, “what's the point?” I can look at a million good photographs anytime I want on Instagram. Pretty much everyone can take a good photograph these days because there are virtually no barriers to getting into photography. What used to pass as a good photograph, now just seems like white noise.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

Bryan Cranston has been a major influence on my photography recently. His philosophy of not trying to please others, and focusing on what you do best was a big tipping point for me. It pairs with an Ernest Hemingway quote that I also love, “When you start to live outside yourself, it's all dangerous.” This new way of thinking has allowed me to strip away my fear and desire to please others, and identify the themes in my life I am most interested in, and create from there. This has led to what I would consider my best work.





What's more of a creative challenge, commercial photography or fine art photography?

I would say commercial photography is more challenging for me creatively because you are working with constraints and other people's ideas. It is a process I enjoy greatly, but from a creative standpoint, it can be difficult balancing your vision with the vision of others, along with creating photographs that are rooted in corporate strategy with the intention of making money. The real goal or purpose of commercial photography is not to make a beautiful image, but to create an image that will drive a specific result or reaction from your target audience. That is really different from Fine Art, which is simply being yourself and looking for other like minded people who will connect with what you have to say.





Can you be a successful new photographer without a strong presence in social media?

Social media is not everything, but it is where the people are. If you want to be heard, you have to go where the people are. Personally, I would recommend to new photographers that they should use social media. You don't have to be on every platform, but maybe one or two of the ones you connect with the most. If you decide not to be on social media, I think you need to really hustle, and spend extra time and money in other areas. It really just boils down to what your goals are, and what you want your life to look like. Maybe the benefit to your quality of life by not being on social media would be worth the slight downtick your career takes. Ultimately, I don't think you have to do it to be successful, but I believe it does help if used properly.

How do you know when it's time to end one project or body of work and begin another?

I have very strong feelings and opinions, and I also have a difficult time hiding my feelings. That being said, when I feel done with something, I know right away. That doesn't always mean I should be done, but my feelings usually win. It is a similar feeling when I often decide to begin on a new project. When I feel restless, and frustrated, that is often a good indicator I need to be working on a new project. I'm not much fun to be around when that happens. Creating is something I feel compelled to do on a deep level.



John Keatley often self-characterizes his work as a reflection of himself, rather than the individual he is photographing. In recent years, his journey of self-discovery has brought clarity to emotions that have always been present yet were previously unknown. Anxiety. Fear. Isolation. Not Being In Control. Keatley capitalizes on the correlation between these emotions and humor. It is a fine line, sitting in the pain of the emotion and understanding that pain can also be humorous. Yet John beautifully executes this dichotomy in his work, as the viewer is invited to stay a moment longer and ponder the unexpected.

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BETINA LA PLANTE



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

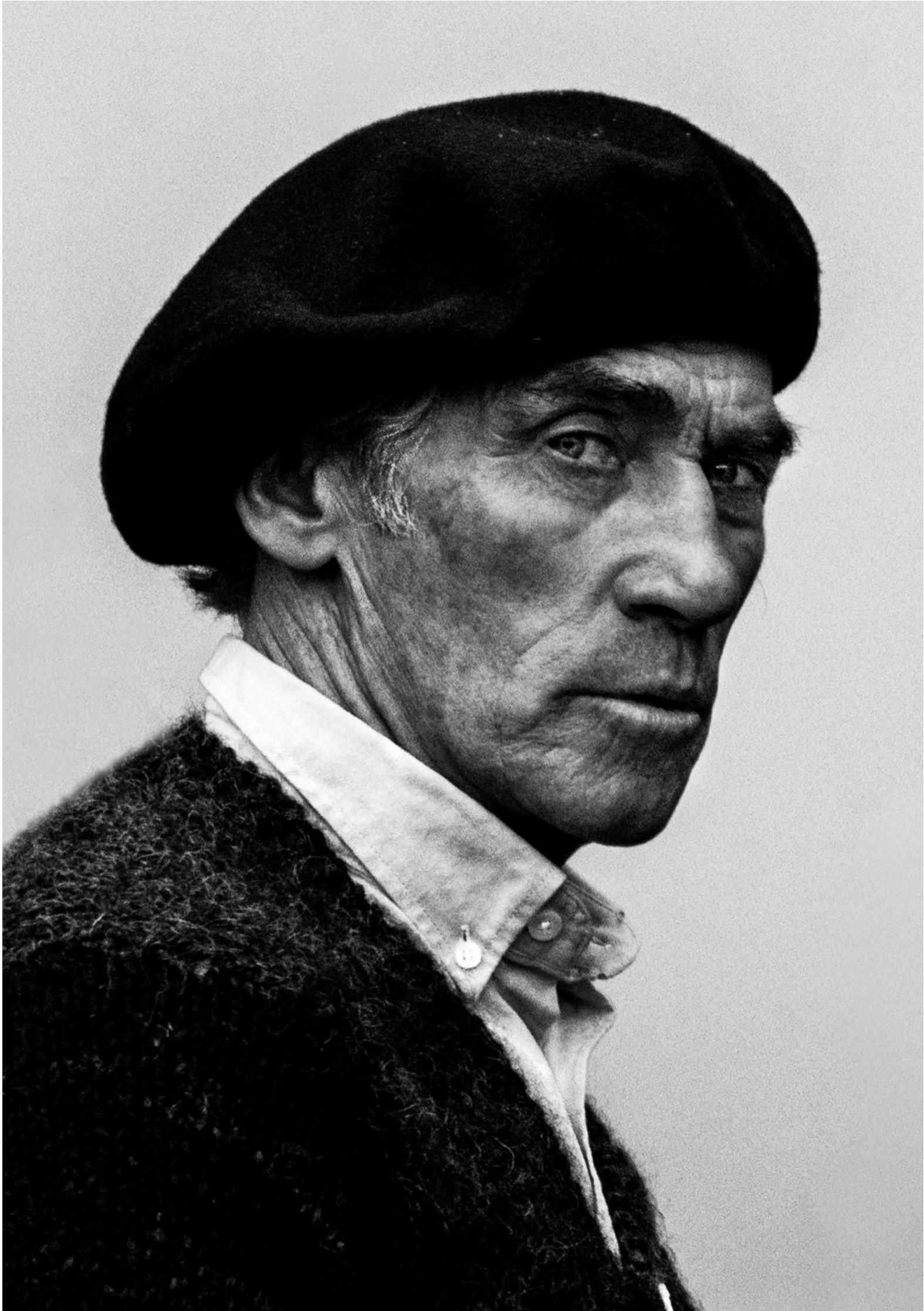
There are so many good photographs, where all of the elements — composition, lighting, subject, and technique — work together to create a pleasing result. For me, a great photograph is one that has an impact on the viewer beyond the expected and leaves a lasting impression long after you are no longer looking at it. A moment caught in time that resonates both visually and emotionally, poses questions, inspires curiosity about the subject, and leaves an imprint.



Self-portraits are a significant portion of your body of work. Has the increase of “selfie culture” changed how you approach your self- portraits and/or how that work is received?

I've never been comfortable in front of a camera as I don't like the way I photograph, so self-portraiture allows me to explore those vulnerabilities and insecurities that I would never expose to someone else's lens in a controlled way. I've tended to point the camera at myself mainly in times of transition, or emotional ups and downs, so the images represent a personal “diary” of sorts, in a somewhat abstract or conceptual manner. I don't think of the “selfie culture” has had any effect on how I approach it, as I do it simply as a cathartic exercise when the mood takes me. But I prefer to look out rather than in, so I tend to do self-portraits less often.





Is it more challenging to make a portrait of a stranger or a friend?

For me it is more challenging to make a portrait of a stranger. I feel I have an advantage with someone I know well, as there is already a comfortability and connection with the subject that usually affords an honesty to come across in the portrait. The difficulty with a friend is not to take too much for granted and become complacent. With a stranger more often than not there are time constraints, as well as an initial potential “wariness” on both sides that needs to be overcome, or indeed used to advantage. I feel under more pressure when I don’t know what the chemistry will be like - especially if it’s someone well-known, who has been photographed many times before and you are trying to capture something unique, beyond the already documented. I like spending time with a subject prior to taking the portrait, more in the lead up to picking up the camera, and that luxury is not always an option with strangers.







How has starting with film in an analog darkroom impacted the way that you approach digital photography?

I still shoot very much as if I were shooting film. I shoot in manual mode 90% of the time, relying on aperture priority or shutter priority only when I'm walking around a city, and I tend to shoot relatively few frames, and only when I'm really struck by something. The thought process that comes hand in hand with shooting film has never really left, and even though I know I could shoot thousands of frames and delete them after, or check the back of the camera to see if the exposure or other elements are correct (which of course I do because I can!), there is a satisfaction in knowing you made the choices yourself when you get the results you were looking for, and being able to know how to correct them when you don't.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

All art in every form is an inspiration. All forms of expression - written, visual, performed. Especially now in this digital era, where everything is so readily accessible and there is such a wealth of talent, it's hard NOT to be inspired daily. But I do like to go to the theatre, and to movies, and to art exhibitions, and read paper books, experience work as it was intended, rather than just through the computer. It's a completely different experience. In terms of people who have inspired me, the list is long, but a special mention must go to Elliott Erwitt, who is not only one of the great photographers of our time, but also a dear friend since 1997. I had the honor of watching him at work over the years, and on a couple of occasions, working alongside him (casting, not shooting), and I started to look at photography as something more than a hobby, and more of a means of communication. He is charming, witty, generous, kind, humble, inspiring. I spent a day with him in NY this June, and over dinner he presented me with his latest book, Home Around the World. When I got home, I opened it to find this inscription: "To Betina, colleague and friend, EE." A true gentleman.



Originally from Argentina, Betina La Plante grew up in Switzerland, Italy, and England, and now lives in California. Betina describes herself as a full-time mother and an occasional photographer. She uses predominantly natural light and her evocative images have earned her both admirers and clients around the world. She photographs friends, family, celebrities, and strangers with a unique vision and a singular style that can be seen in a number of magazines and publications as well as on her various social media sites, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr.

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INSIGHTS

MAARTEN ROTS

What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

I believe that whether something is good can for a large part be judged objectively. Whether it's great is much more the result of a subjective experience, a personal value judgment. Also, I don't think great is necessarily better than good. Depending on what the creator wants to evoke and the audience they have in mind there is room for good, bad, great, ugly and everything in between.

Let's say a good sentence is grammatically correct and avoids ambiguity. It is meant to communicate something clearly without too much room for interpretation and with a specific result in mind. A poetic sentence is often the opposite; it can be grammatically incorrect, is preferably ambiguous and open to interpretation, asks the reader to actively participate and sparks the imagination.

A good photograph is often made by following the rules, technically well-executed and with a specific purpose in mind, whereas a great photograph stretches those rules or ignores them altogether. I think experimentation and improvisation are key elements towards a photograph that is more than just good, but those same elements also increase the chance of failure. Taking a risk might be the first step towards a potentially great photograph. It takes confidence to take that step. Knowing the rules, understanding the technique and being aware how to achieve a certain effect by applying this knowledge — trusting the process — can be an important foundation to build this confidence on.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

Not so much an inspiration but an enabler: our camper van. In 2015 my wife and I bought a Volkswagen T4 and a year later we found ourselves traveling around Europe for extended periods of time and work while we're on the road. For me that meant having a lot of time to focus solely on my photography while also having the possibility to explore new surroundings. The difference in light, shadow and architecture in each new place affected what I wanted to make photographs of and helped me develop my visual language. The lack of distractions from everyday life when I am traveling translates into a lot of focus on just a few things, which really helped me become aware of what I am fascinated by and define the subjects I am interested in.





How important is it for your various bodies of work to feel visually cohesive over time?

I try not to think too much about it, especially during the process of taking photographs. It blocks me creatively when I am aware of too many aspects before I even start. I have to keep the possibilities open and have learned to trust the way I see and capture the world around me. I am not consciously trying to photograph in a certain style, nor can I change the direction my photography is evolving into. I don't have a recipe with a list of ingredients that will ensure me of a certain result.

I prefer to simply start walking around taking photos and spend a lot of time reflecting on and thinking about what I have captured – repeating this process often. These moments of reflection are not intended to dissect the photographs I took in order to make a checklist of the different elements and properties that need to be in a composition in order to photograph. Instead these moment of reflection work more on a subconscious level, they serve to visually prime myself so I can better recognize the situations where a potential photograph is hiding without knowing what that image looks



like beforehand. I guess you could describe it as training my visual intuition. There are a lot of variables at play outside my control when I am walking around with my camera. I can only control how focused I am on what I focus on.

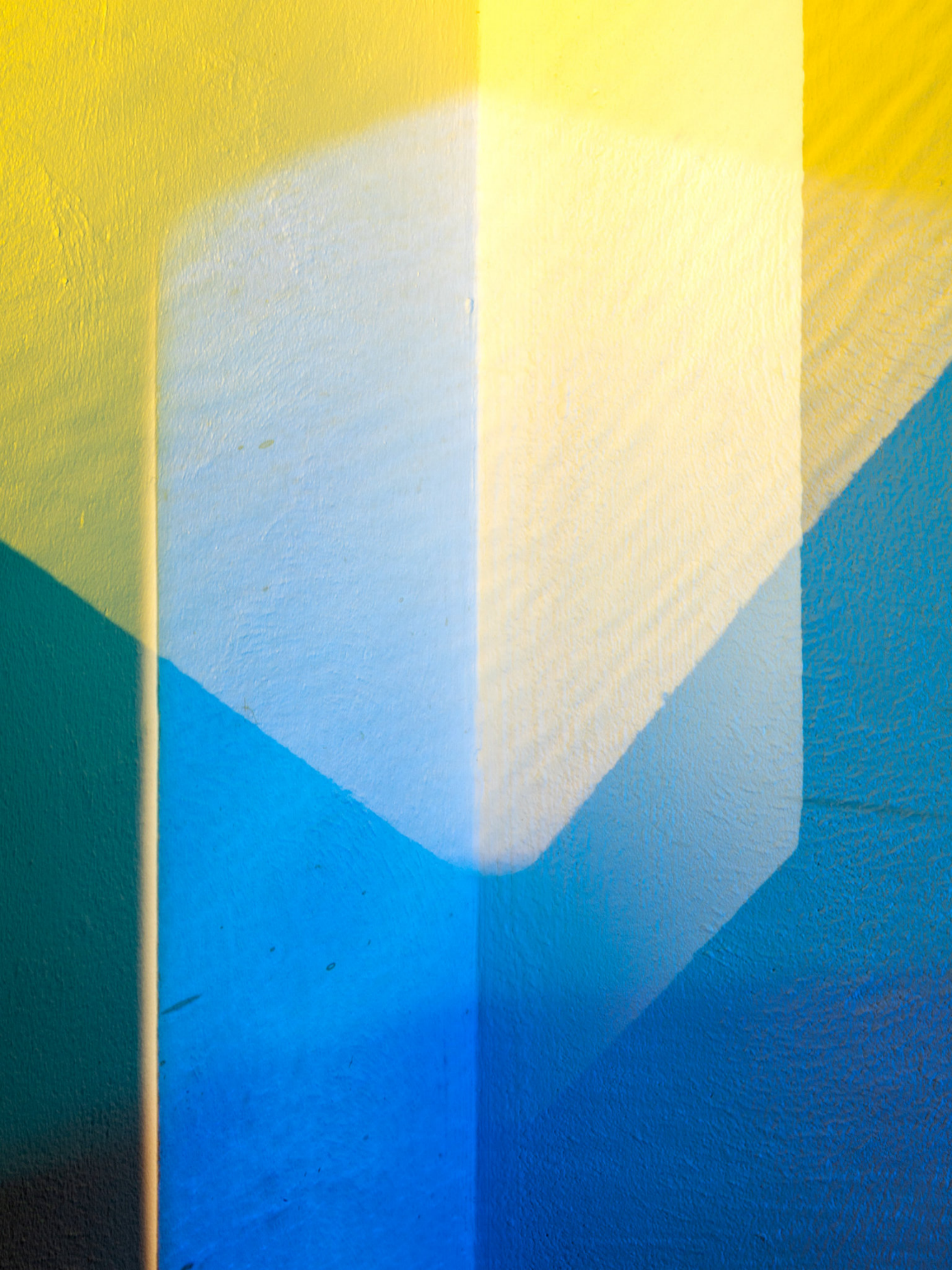
In this process each body of work forms organically, but the act of selecting, editing and sequencing is not to be underestimated. This is a much more conscious activity where I try to rationally organize the collection of photographs that came out of intuitively creating them. My concern here is to make sure the series I am working on is well balanced within its own context, while trying to avoid worrying about my previous work and how these works may or may not feel visually cohesive.

You have done some terrific collaborations with other artists. What makes someone a good potential collaborator for you?

For me the attitude you have towards creating is much more important than the kind of work you make. I think it's fundamental that both parties are open to change and are willing to try something different, to learn something new. I know I get stuck when I hold on to preconceptions about my work so I learned that it's essential to not have a clearly defined outcome in mind. When you respect each other's differences, accept the limitations and embrace the process you can explore new possibilities and new things will happen. That's what a collaboration is about: to create something that would have never come into existence by my own efforts, to really work together. With each new collaboration there is always some kind of struggle and I have to consciously remind myself of all these aspects in order to open up.

How do you approach the work you create for each issue of your magazine March & Rock? Do you find yourself making new work specifically for the magazine or are you curating from work you have already made?

One of the underlying principles of doing a quarterly magazine is to have each edition reflect what I am working on at that moment. While I am aware of the fact that this means my current work in progress might end up in the next issue, I don't allow myself to let that influence the photographs I take, because I know it will hinder my creative process. When I am taking photographs I need to be in the moment, not in the editing room. That's



why I approach each new issue by curating work I have already created, preferably recent work. I make a rough selection of photographs from the past months that I eventually distill down to around 24 images that will make up the issue.

Sometimes there is a distinct project that I am doing which leads to a selection of photographs for the magazine. Issue #16 for example consists of photographs I took during a period as artist in residence at sommergalerieZöbing in Austria. In other cases there is a certain urgency, like with issue #18 which only featured photographs that I made inside the house during the first lockdown in early 2020. I wanted to share that experience while it was still happening.

Most important, literally and figuratively, the fun and joy of making photographs should always come first.



Maarten Rots received his BFA from the audiovisual department VAV at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 2010. Working mainly with video and found footage such as slides and super 8 film, his various short films have been screened at numerous film festivals around the world - often nominated and awarded. After replacing a broken video camera with a DSLR in 2015, photography quickly became his medium of choice. Not much later, he released the first edition of March & Rock, a quarterly photo magazine featuring his own work that he has published independently ever since.

Since 2016, Maarten has spent six to eight months a year traveling around Europe in a camper van. These journeys are the most important source for his abstract environmental photographs, taking the everyday urban environment as a starting point. Over the years, Maarten's work has gradually become more abstract, and from 2019 onwards he began to apply the visual language he developed through photography to projects involving mediums such as stained glass, spray paint and handmade paper.

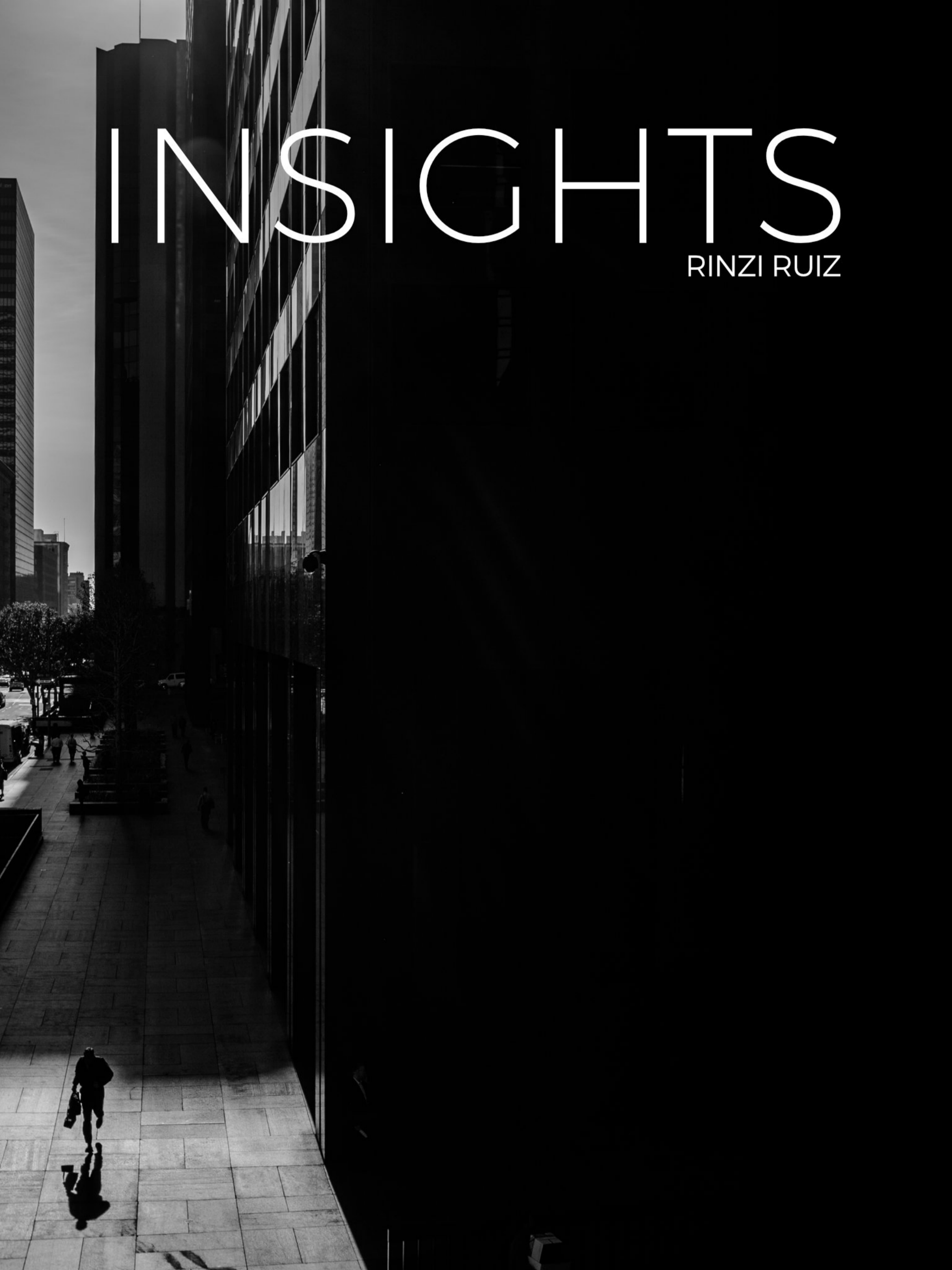
Maarten's work has been exhibited at numerous international solo and group exhibitions and is held by collectors around the world.

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RINZI RUIZ





What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

The difference for me is that a great photograph produces an emotion. Whether it's a result of the composition, the subject, color or black and white, the combination of elements reaches out to you and makes you feel something.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

The two consistent things that have inspired my photography are light and learning. The moment I realized how important the quality of light affects the photograph changed my world. Seeing just how many ways it does affect the photograph inspired me to go out shoot as often as I could to learn and experiment.

What's more difficult, finding a great location or finding a great subject?

I guess it depends but I think finding a great subject is a bit more difficult. I could probably walk around for a while in the city and find a location I want to work with but then have absolutely no foot traffic in the area. In that case the location becomes the subject I suppose.

Do you focus more on shadow or light and why?

I focus more on light because it's the brightest part of what I see. When I'm walking around I try to stay conscious of where the source of light is coming from and then see what it's illuminating but then also what types of shadows it may be casting.

What's the most unappreciated skill of a street photographer?

If being willing is a skill then I would say it's that. To be any good at it you have to be willing to get out and shoot constantly. You have to be willing to be out there in any weather, different locations, around different types of people and willing to accept the possibility that someone might not like you taking their picture.







Rinzi Ruiz is a freelance photographer and a Fujifilm X-Photographer who is passionate about capturing the moments in life. He finds beauty in humanity and finds it in capturing the emotion, the mundane, and the art in reality that is found everywhere. He has a background in fine arts and graphic design but found photography to be much more fun and rewarding. He has been featured in Los Angeles Times Framework and a street photography blogs such as The Candid Frame, Fujilove Magazine, and Visuellegedanken for his street photography work but also is involved in other types of photography such as portraiture, events, and weddings.

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INSIGHTS

BROOKE SHADEN



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

The determination between a good and great photograph is how it makes the viewer feel. Art is not only the act of creation, but also the act of release. When we release our images into the world, we allow them to take on a new life that could never have blossomed under only our watchful eye. The moment an image means something to someone else, it goes from having potential to having filled its potential. Which then leads us to the question: Who can decide if a photograph is bad, good, or great? The viewer, I think, and only in a way that is so very specific and personal that others may disagree. I believe that even the most celebrated images are considered unimpressive to others, and even “bad” in some cases. And who's to say they are wrong? The only judgment that means something is the one you make for yourself.





What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

There are times when I feel exhausted of imagery. We all know the feeling of being drained of inspiration and lacking motivation to create. But the single thing that has had the biggest impact on me is understanding my purpose. When I connect to my life's greater purpose, I always find the energy and inspiration to create. My purpose is to show that there is beauty in darkness, and to destigmatize death and grief. Therefore, no matter what inspiration I find in the world, whether it's a fellow creator, nature, a book, or something else, it always serves to tickle my purpose and shift me into action. Inspiration can feel divine, yet I think it's anything but. It is the deep, soul work of connecting to your deeper purpose. When you know your purpose, you are never truly without inspiration.

In what ways are you willing to be more “creatively risky” using yourself as a subject than you are using others?

I know my own limits, so self-portraiture becomes both easier because of that, and more of a daredevil stunt as well. Because I know the limits of my comfort, I try to push them all the time. On the surface, I do things like jumping into murky bodies of water, teetering on cliffs, or crawling into holes in the ground. But on a deeper level, the fear of failure evaporates the fewer people you have to please. When you are completely alone on a photo shoot, there's no need to create something finished and 'good' for the sake of pleasing everyone involved. If I fail, it means very little to me. There is incredible freedom when you remove expectation from art. Think about all the ways you carry the expectations of yourself and others into your craft. From social media and regular sharing of your work to clients and thinking about what “sells”, we are completely saturated with the opinions of others. Remove them, and you are confronted with only yourself. How would that change your art and mode of expression? This is the kind of creative freedom I strive for. I don't always succeed, but using myself as the subject in my images certainly helps get me closer.

Your work feels like it occupies a liminal space between the natural world and dreams. How has it evolved and how consciously do you direct where it's going?

I think my work will always inhabit that space because I am completely uninterested in living in the real world. From my earliest memories, I've been

enamored with other worlds and fantastical settings. I feel more at home in them. So in a sense, that liminal space is where I feel most welcome. My very first image that I ever made was quite literally about that in-between space. It featured one of me handing a ball of light (symbolic of the soul) to another 'me' in the image. From that first image I ever created until now, I strive to find my deepest self in places not easily accessed. Some of my work is dark and gritty while other work is ethereal and feminine, and I see those visual expressions as different eras in my work. They all explore the same topics with different visual expressions. My work is moving in a darker direction currently, focused even more literally on death and grief, but even as I explore new ways of expressing, the liminal space is a constant.





How do you approach creating such personal work with yourself as the primary subject that is also inviting or relevant to an audience?

Imagery is the perfect platform to play with symbolism. If I've learned anything about connection, it is this: people's experiences will vary dramatically, but emotions don't vary all that much. We all experience similar emotions to one another that exist perhaps at different levels and different times, but we all know what emotions feel like. Grief, joy, sadness, elation, fear. That is the universal language. My work plays on the universal, not the specific. While I may create something featuring myself as the

subject, and that image may even draw on something I experienced or felt, I use symbolism to bring the viewer into their own emotions. Color, for example, plays a prime role in universal symbolism. The color red may evoke any number of immediate, emotional responses from people, from love to blood to death to passion. It's my job to understand how all of the visual elements in my work can play upon the imagination of a viewer to create a universal experience that feels oddly personal.



Brooke Shaden explores the darkness and light in people, and her work looks at that juxtaposition. As a self-portrait artist, she photographs herself and becomes the characters of dreams inspired by a childhood of intense imagination and fear. Being the creator and the actor, Brooke controls her darkness and confronts those fears.

After studying films for years in college, she realized her love of storytelling was universal. She started photography then in 2008, excited to create in solitude and take on character roles herself. Brooke works from a place of theme, often gravitating toward death and rebirth or beauty and decay.

Ultimately, her process is more discovery than creation. She follows her curiosity into the unknown to see whom her characters might become. Brooke believes the greatest gift an artist has is the ability to channel fears, hopes and experience into a representation of one's potential.

While her images come from a personal place of exploration, the goal in creating is not only to satisfy herself; her greatest wish is to show others a part of themselves. Art is a mirror for the creator and the observer.

Brooke's passion is storytelling, and her life is engulfed in it. From creating self-portraits and writing to international adventures and motivational speeches, she wants to live a thousand lives in one. She keeps her curiosity burning to live a truly interesting story.

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INSIGHTS

RACHAEL TALIBART



What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

A good photograph communicates. It does more than simply represent its literal subject. It is usually well composed, uses light effectively and is technically competent (insofar as it is appropriate to the artwork).

A great photograph gives you goosebumps and lodges itself in your memory, whether you want it to or not! It asks you to view it repeatedly and it rewards the lingering gaze. A great photograph has nuance. It invites the viewer to engage his or her own imagination and life experience. Its imaginative afterlife is beyond its creator's control.





What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

It would be true but also rather too easy to say “the sea.” Nonetheless, spending a lifetime in the company of my chosen subject has enabled me to see it more deeply and, hopefully, express something worth sharing.

As for people, well, I am a voracious consumer of visual art and have shelves groaning under the weight of photo books that inspire me daily. It’s hard to pick out any individuals. On a personal level, I would say that Jonathan Chritchley, himself a very fine photographic artist, has been tremendously helpful in encouraging me to find my own voice as a photographer.

How do you know when a particular body of work is finished?

I’ll tell you when I finish one.



What advice would you give someone who can't seem to find their unique photographic niche?

First of all, chill out about it. A niche isn't necessarily right for everyone and, as the word implies, can be a prison. Some people are more creative as generalists.

If we take niche to mean voice, then that's a different thing. Most serious artists have a style or voice, although it usually takes a long time to find it and it never stops evolving. Try lots of things, take your time, and reflect on the experience of making the work as much as the finished work itself. Ask yourself, what it is that I want to say? Good art communicates more about the way the artist experiences the world than it does about the subject literally depicted.

Finally, what does 'unique' even mean these days when we are drowning in visual media? If you define it too tightly, you'll never get there. Art builds on art — look at and enjoy a lot of great art, from current artists and the great artists of the past. Then take the inspiration and run with it — don't worry too much that what you produce at first may be derivative. Acknowledge your influences, then keep going and, eventually, you will add your own twist to the idea. That's how art develops.

What can photographers learn from seeing their work in print versus only seeing it on a computer, tablet, or phone?

Words do rather fail me when I try to express the experience of seeing my work in print. It's a visceral thing. However, I'll try. For me, my photographs only become part of the world when I print them. They are liberated from the ephemeral, virtual realm of pixels and become tangible artifacts. Quality 'fine art' paper, when well matched to the photograph, is a joy to behold. I love a soft, loose texture, matte or pearl depending on the image. The pictures seem to take on a three dimensional quality and they breathe in a way they never do on a shiny, flat monitor. I honestly believe that investing in a decent printer, some great paper and printing skills will make considerably more difference to a photographer's work than buying new camera gear.



Rachael Talibart is widely recognised as one of the most influential seascape photographers working today. Her critically acclaimed photographs of the ocean and coast have been featured in the press all over the world. Rachael is represented by galleries in Europe and the USA and her work is frequently exhibited. Her limited edition prints feature in private collections internationally. She is the author of three monographs, including “Sirens” and, most recently, “Tides and Tempests,” and she writes for photography magazines.

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INSIGHTS

BEN THOMAS

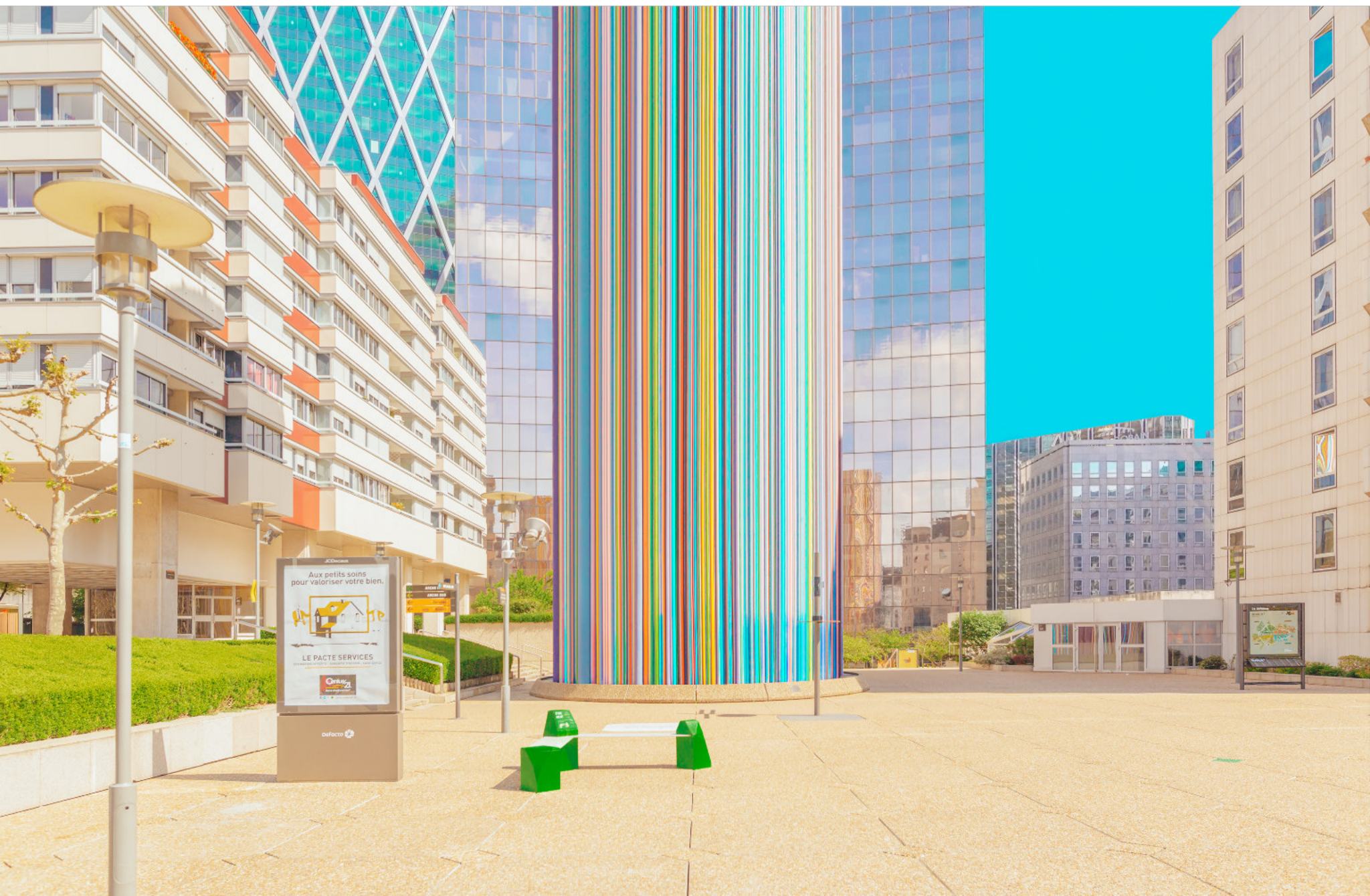


What's the difference between a good photograph and a great photograph?

I think this is always going to be a personal thing. Personally I am looking for a connection to the image and that connection can come from anywhere. It could be structurally or aesthetically appealing, the subject matter may be something close to me. Having said that, what I think is great, you might think is ok, or horrible even. There will always be some rules that people fall back on to determine if an image is 'great' as in, is the image exposed properly, are principles like the rule of thirds observed however, these rules are only a guide and ripe to be experimented with or indeed, broken.

What or who has inspired your photography the most, and how?

A painter by the name of Jeffrey Smart has really influenced me more than anything else in my career so far. In early 2014 I was in a real creative rut, I had stopped taking pictures out of frustration. I had just come out seven years of shooting a series called "Cityshrinker", a tilt-shift series that enabled so much of my photography career. I had just released my first book called





Tiny Tokyo and felt like when it was released that I had nothing more to say when it came to the series. I had created a small body of work named Accession which was more experimental than anything else however I was completely lost as far as what to do next. I spent the best part of 2014 figuring out what I wanted to do next.

Funnily enough, it wasn't until going back home to Adelaide that Smart's work captured me. His use of colour and perspective had me totally mesmerized and strangely it was almost as if the universe was screaming at me that this was the direction I needed to explore. I found out that Smart attended the same technical school in Adelaide as my grandfather (who started life as a draftsman) and learnt perspective from the same teacher. This was pretty mind blowing for me already being a fan of Smart's work. In another coincidence, Smart also spent the best part of his life painting in Tuscany, at this time I was about to embark on a extended residency in Tuscany to work on this new body of work.

With all of that buzzing around in my mind, I started shooting again. This time it was different however, I was seeing scenes differently than what I had before. I grew a new appreciation for colour and light and how to manipulate it to build a scene. It was the start of the most enjoyable period of my work so far.

How did you recognize that color was to become a central character to your current body of work?

Colour has always been important for me, I've always loved the process of transformation that grading brings to a picture. In a world of presets, instagram and snapchat filters I wanted to build something that actually brought meaning to the shot, not just a treatment of a filter for the sake of it looking better/different or whatever. My recent work has very deliberately had a focus on building a picture that is essentially a juxtaposition of something that is both illustrative and hyperreal with colour acting as the lead protagonist.

How has photography affected how you see the world?

On a very basic level, photography has enabled me to see the world. I have no doubt that I wouldn't have travelled or experienced a fraction of what I





have for not deciding to take pictures. There is obviously the massively geeky part to it. For instance, right now writing this I'm drifting off every 10 minutes or so to look out my studio window. It's clear blue skies and there is a row of native Australian gum trees behind our back fence. Now, while I'm looking at the leaves on the gum trees I'm thinking to myself, "I wonder what the chromatic aberration on those leaves would look like shooting at $f/8$ on my 50 prime," knowing that I'm going to be pushing that blue sky to its limits in post. Pretty sad, right? I probably have that technical banter running through my head dozens of times during any day.

Putting all of that to one side, photography has enabled me. It's enabled me to do things I never thought possible, I've met some of my closest friends through photography and most importantly, it's given me a sense of doing something important with my life which ultimately dictates how I see the world every day. I just want to capture it all as best as I can.

How do you keep a unique visual style fresh in a long-term project?

I'm a big believer in always trying to push forward. There will always be ways to improve what you do, it could be technical or it could be in terms of your narrative or subject matter. I think if you are enjoying the work and still have something to say, it will reflect in the work. If it's becoming a struggle, it's time to jump onto the next thing for a little while.



Ben Thomas is a photographer and visual artist born in Adelaide, now living in Melbourne, Australia. Ben's work centers around the cities and urban spaces that we live in. His "Cityshrinker" series (2007) was internationally acclaimed and considered to be one of the pioneering projects exploring the tilt-shift technique. Ben's study of urban spaces continued with "Accession" (2012) using mirror and kaleidoscopic techniques to highlight how repeating patterns and objects act as the basis of our urban surroundings. Ben's latest series "Chroma" (2015) and "Chroma II" (2016) further deconstruct cities and urban areas using colour and flatness to question how society defines the places in which we live.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffery Saddoris is a painter, podcaster, graphic designer, writer, and photographer whose journey with a camera began at 12 when his grandfather handed him a Yashica Mat 124G loaded with a roll of Tri-X. Seeing the print fade up in a tray of developer cast a spell that has lasted more than four decades. Jeffery's love for photography made its way into podcasting and, since 2009, he has recorded hundreds of hours of conversations around creativity, including more than 6 years of weekly episodes about photography as the co-host of On Taking Pictures. He is also the host of Process Driven, his ongoing series of long-form conversations with creatives about how the process of making art manifests across genres and disciplines.

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