

Abstract photography is just one area that the award winning photographer Martin Osner covers. The first time I looked at Martins work on his site www.martin-osner.com I was just instantly blown away and hooked. Often I quickly browse through photographs, but with Martin's I really took my time to look at them and let my eye explore every aspect of them.

Martin's work is captivating and thought provoking and just plain good. His abstract photography (one of my personal favourite areas of work) encouraged me to go out and look at the world through my viewfinder differently.

I hope this interview with Martin Osner inspires you in your own abstract photography work as it did with me.

Hello Martin, thank you for your time today and sharing your expertise and experience with us. Before I ask any specific questions I always like to give the interviewee an opportunity to briefly tell us themselves and their photography?

My pleasure. A few years back, when writing an artist statement, I ended it with the words; "I have never doubted my love for photography or my burning passion for art. It is something I could never stop. It's what I do, it's what I love, and it's who I am". I guess this statement encapsulates my career and me. After leaving school in 1981, I walked straight into freelance photography, specializing in anything that paid the bills. I believe ones steps are ordered by God and throughout my career; I always had work and bread on the table. After ten years, I decided to get involved in the educational side of photography and co-founded the National College of Photography, while continuing with commercial photography. Looking back I feel that for me, the combination of teaching and working in the industry was one of the best career development choices I have ever made. Also, I certainly under estimated how much one can learn from your own students and the interaction with other lecturers, the energy, passion and creativity that came out the classroom was unbelievable. In 2004 I decided to specialize in fine art photography. Very soon it became obvious that my "technical correct" commercial commissions were clashing with my "creative" fine art style. In 2006 I decided that it was one or the other and closed down my commercial studio completely. Today I still lecture at the College while shooting exclusively collectable art photography. I love every minute of it.

Your photography covers many different areas of work but what really stands out for me is your urban abstract photography. This is best illustrated by your "Abandoned" and "Urban Reflections" series. Could you tell us a little about these series of images, what inspired you to take them and what is it that you think makes a good urban image?

I agree, my work is quite varied; I suppose this stems from a teaching background. The abandoned series was born out of a necessity to relinquish control. In December 2006, I felt that I was still subconsciously treating outdoor subjects as if they were in a studio. I needed to do something radical to change that. I decided to go back to complete basics. I left for a two



week trip into the countryside with only a basic camera and a lens. I remember driving out feeling quite vulnerable and the urge to turn back to collect all the gear was quite strong. It took three days before I could take a picture. About two years back I had spotted an old abandoned marina on an inland lake, which I had already revisited on a number of occasions without much success. I just knew that this subject was going to be my first challenge using limited equipment. At that time my approach has become very focused and as today, I will not shoot if I don't stand a good chance of some success. I am sure that God



must have known what I was going through and intervened with an early Christmas present. It was late afternoon on the 20th of December; I had not yet taken one picture and had contemplated returning to the studio where I could find some comfort in studio lighting and some large format equipment. And then it happened; it was almost like a destined moment in my life. The weather suddenly turned and a dramatic storm had moved in bringing with it a mushroom shaped cloud. I rushed over to the vantage point I had predetermined, set up a composition and waited. Within minutes the storm descended onto the old marina. Everything went quite dark and then, fortunately, some light broke through

off the horizon lighting up the glass windows of the building. I only got off two shots and it was all over. Looking back, had I taken all my equipment with me I would have probably missed the shot altogether. I entitled the picture "Extremity" but this is where the abandoned series really started. That night, after a discussion with my wife, I decided to shoot a body of work highlighting today's modern throwaway society. This new project would incorporate subjects that once had a use but now had been abandoned. I also decided that I was going to shoot the images in moody light under heavy skies. The series got off to a great start as the very next day, in the same area, I shot the picture of the car on the pole (Abandoned 1), a confirmation that I was on the right track.

The urban reflection series came along a bit later. In May this year I was offered an exhibition at a Gallery in downtown Johannesburg. Although the galleries insisted that the abandoned images were featured, I felt that I also wanted to show work that echoed the urban environment and culture in around the gallery. I spent a few days walking the streets of Melville and Brixton, two suburbs near to the gallery. I was drawn to the graffiti art. It amazed me how society was almost blinded to the colourful graphics that were ablaze on the walls. People walk by, but nobody looked. I then decided that I would shoot some of this content to round off the exhibition. What was really strange is the fact that many of the images in the series are literally a stone throw from the gallery, yet not one person, including the gallery staff recognized that the images were captured in their own backyard. This proves that we as a society only choose to see what we want and nothing more.



Could you tell us a bit about the equipment that you use and why you feel that it suits your particular urban abstract photography style?

Equipment is not important to me. I regard the camera as only one element within a creative process. In fact, for my type of photography the quality of today's equipment is almost too good. For this reason I experiment with equipment and processes to get the look and feel I want. Instead of the technique being altered according to the camera being used, I prefer to change the camera according to the result I want.

I understand that you like to experiment with your abstract photography etc. Could you tell us in what ways you like to experiment and why you enjoy looking for new ways to express your photography Art?

Again, I think this is a direct result from the classroom. Today I teach fine art photography. Being the type of person I am, I will not tutor a technique I haven't mastered myself. This means that hours and hours are spent in the studio, darkroom and on the computer prior to a lecture or workshop getting it right. I guess some of these skills tend to find their way into one's own work.

I notice you currently have a new project that you are involved in called "Home sweet home". Could you tell us a little about this project and what sort of images can we expect to see?

Home sweet home is a long term project and it has to do with what you and I call home. Most of us have a place to go home to. For some home is a country for others it's a house or dwelling. South Africa is known as the rainbow nation because of the diversity of people and cultures. In this series I want to show the diversity by highlighting the homes in which people live. From the mansions in up market neighborhoods to the tin shacks in poorer areas. I try not to express negativity through my work, so for me it's not about how rich or how poor people are, but more about happiness and contentment in various walks of life. At any given time I am busy with a number of projects.... this is just one.

Finally Martin, as an award winning photographer yourself, what advice would you give to someone who wanted to aspire to your degree of expertise and success and who had a particular interest in urban abstract photography?

I would rather concentrate my answer to photography in general. I would say that one would need to eat, sleep and dream about photography. A career in visual art is honestly a lifelong calling. If you have the interest and the artistic ability you are well on your way. Secondly very little happens without commitment. My advice is to close all back doors and become committed to your vision. When trying times come and they will, don't give up....ever. Remember it's not important what people think about you and your work, what more important is whether or not you believe in yourself. Then learn as much as you can about lighting, practice photography as much as you can and thank God as much as you can. Place yourself in the oven of life and bake for thirty years.

See more of Martin's abstract photography and much more on his websites at:

www.martinosner.com

www.martinosnerphotography.com

www.fingerprintcollection.com