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MAGAZINE**

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Breaking the Rules

His photographs force you to take a second look. Flowers are magnified to expose ethereal details, steel behemoths belie a fragility that is rarely seen, portraits dig deeper to capture a hidden sensuality and playful joie de vivre. **Guy Gagnon** takes **Melanie Andrade** on a quick tour of his private world and personal work.



Guy Gagnon

Forty three year old Guy Gagnon hails from Quebec, Canada but now resides in Brussels. While he modestly proclaims that he has had no formal or informal education in photography, learning through critiques on Internet websites and poring over technical books, his images tell a different story - each one more haunting and incisive than the next.



You mention on your website that your passion for photography started with your first digital camera in 1999. How did this interest develop?

In 1999, I succumbed to the appearance of the first digital cameras. Until this moment, my pleasure for photography was limited to taking the usual pictures during my annual holidays, without any care about the technique. My first purchase was the Fuji MX 500 quickly followed by a Casio QV 3000. The digital world is marvellous because it allows one to get instant results on the computer. This is the best way to learn and understand quickly the principles of aperture, speed and Depth of Field in a very concrete way. But the more I used it, the more I was frustrated by the poor acuity of the pictures and the low reactivity of the compact. Thus, I acquired my first DSLR in 2002, a Canon D30. I still consider 2002 as my first serious jump into the photography world.

Photography is a real daily therapy which revives my joys and my successes, or to the opposition, calms my disappointments and frustrations. The more I advance in age, the more I need to freely express my emotions and aspirations creatively. People often reproach me for not having found my one style, that I photograph too many different subjects. But according to my moods, the topics approached must be in harmony with my feelings. Even if I approach several

topics, I return sooner or later to ones I had temporarily left aside. To make photographs which challenge me remains the most essential thing. Also important is that this hobby continues to please me, and allows me to succeed in sharing this pleasure with others.

What are your influences? Art? Books?

I remain very influenced and attracted by the work of Karl Blossfeldt, Mapplethorpe and Ansel Adams. Especially, because they take pay particular attention to the emotion and the aesthetics caused by the graphics (lines, curves, ...) and the ▶



composition of their pictures. Personally, I can relate to that. As much as possible, I try to transpose this search of aesthetics when I photograph cityscapes and buildings. It allows me to find the pretty aspects of urban architecture that appear cold and ugly on the first look.

Your interests lie in architecture and macro photography. That's two pretty diverse topics. How did these two specialities evolve?

Architecture and urban constructions have a kind of relationship with the world of plants around us: they are made of patterns, lines, textures, geometry. However, while plants are mostly drawn with curves, buildings consist of straight lines.

In order to break the monotony and roughness of the architecture, I try to find more daring manners to compose the scene, with the risk of non-respect of the elementary rules of composition. For the plants, I stress on the textures

and the curves which inculcates a kind of sensuality or a personality to the plant.

Your work on urban city life is very graphic. The city seems to be condensed into stark line and details. Can you comment?

When, I shoot architecture, my goal is always the same: to find a kind of dialogue of lines and curves, parallelisms and crossings which give peace, balance and harmony to my picture. To that end, I have a natural tendency to search for diagonal lines and point of views. I have the constant desire to innovate and experiment, and to surprise in my personal manner. Instead of taking the usual cityscape and building pictures which include all the subjects in the same photograph, I prefer to concentrate on only a part of the subject. Often, I try to split the photo composition between the reflections on the ground and the scene above, to capture a part of a building and another of the sky with clouds. Dichotomy allows

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me to build a story or to emerge a thought that would never have come to mind without such evocation. Over time, urban photography changed my way of looking around me. From now on, I have the feeling that each time I look at something, my eyes try to seek the best framing, the best composition, the most beautiful angle of sight, even when I am not accompanied by my camera. This brainwork contributes surely to my progress in photography.

Are you attracted to symmetry and design or are you trying to find a pattern that others do not see?

Exactly! As you can see in many of my pictures, I like to make unusual compositions in order to break the composition rules but also to provide another angle and point of view. Many Belgians who saw my pictures said to me that the composition was so unusual ▶



and amazing that they did not recognize these buildings or cityscapes that they see everyday. They said that from my pictures, they discovered a new city.

There are times when some of your images are almost poetic. Your choice of subjects as well – cemeteries, shadows, reflections... indicate a sense of solitude. Do you agree?

Whereas my architecture pictures express dynamism and motion, my stolen moments and landscapes often evoke the melancholy of the moment.

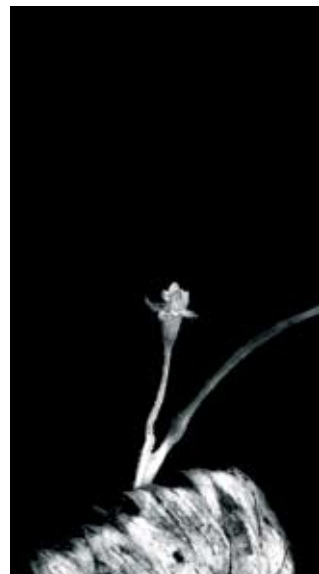
In fact, I try to provide to the readers, the same feeling that I had when I photographed the scene.

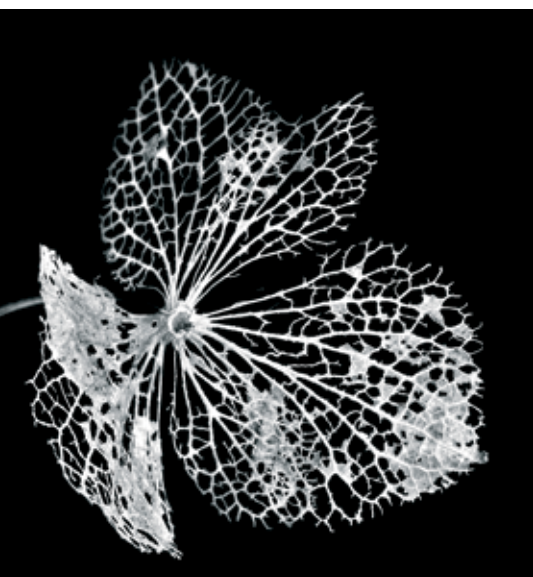
Another trend I see in your work is your fascination with mouths and extreme close ups of faces and hands. Any reason?

I am definitively fascinated by such close ups because it is like a communion, a sharing of emotions between me and the subject. I always have the feeling that the person is giving me, for a short moment, a privileged private moment of his life.

Any favourite destinations, experiences while shooting your landscape images?

My favourite destinations are few and constant - they are my native province of Quebec with its wonderful landscapes, the Belgian coast and the region of Vosges





in France. I like to find harmonies in these scenes of confrontation between a threatening sky and a docile/soft land. Such conditions provide me a real opportunity to reveal the poetry and the ephemeral life of the scene, to create theatrical atmosphere.

For most young photographers starting out, the road ahead is fraught with setbacks. Any advice?

First, make pictures in order to try and please yourself before others. Photography is an emotional art which must take you towards your artistic creations or feeling expressions. Secondly, be audacious, dare to break the rules of compositions. However, do not forget to keep an eye ▶





on the harmony of the elements in your composition. Your picture must provoke the viewer, a quick internal questioning or a sudden breath of deep emotions. Never be sparing with your emotions. A picture that attracts the viewer is often the one where he can feel the personality and moods of the photographer at the moment more than anything else.

Why the decision to have your work in largely black and white?

I often convert my pictures into black and white in order to strip all colours and bring about another mood. For some people, to desaturate a picture means to sacrifice the realism in order to get a theatrical effect. Stripped of its colours, the picture can become purer, more powerful, indeed even poetic. In fact it's really with black and white, that photographing urban architecture and cityscapes became a true passion. Black and white allows you to isolate within a scene striking shapes that you wouldn't have otherwise noticed. As we know, to merely retouch a bad picture will not make a good photograph. The photographer must anticipate the aesthetic purpose of the picture at the moment of the shoot. So, when I shoot urban architecture and cityscapes, not only must I concentrate on the composition but I also have to pay particular attention to capture

the maximum level of grays and to take care about the light exposure. Although I photograph with colours, I have to anticipate the subject in a black and white version before shooting it.

What has been your favourite subject or project so far?

I hesitate between choosing my series of black and white plants/flowers series and my occasional capture of portraits of the people in carnivals, gay pride parades, or simply the intimate portraits of friends.

What are plans for the future? Where do we see Guy Gagnon next?

From the photography side, I hope to work on two series - one of photographs of dolls, and the other to progress on the capture of shadows and silhouettes in cemeteries. I would also like to prepare a more contemporary series that would not be extravagant neither too abstract. I am often irritated with contemporary photographers who give me the feeling that they only want to show complicated and crazy representations of day to day life, often without connection with the human sensibilities or emotions. Finally, I always keep the hope alive of being approached for a book - I can dream, I can dream!!

For more of Guy Gagnon's work visit www.guygagnon.com.