

# Guy Gagnon

## Artist Interview

Guy Gagnon is a French Canadian born in Rouyn-Noranda city, also called the 'National Capital of Copper'. The city is located in the heart of the Boreal forest, in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. He has lived in Brussels since 1994 where he is working as an Oracle database administrator, mostly inside the European Institutions.

No doubt, it was the purchase of his first digital camera in 1999, that his taste for photography appeared. Basically an occasional hobby, photography quickly became a passion through which allowed Guy to express his feelings and his perception of the world.

Guy tells us that he is not a professional photographer. He "learnt" photography by himself, mostly by empiric method instead of reading books about the subject. Guy did not follow any courses either. Guy admits to us that he has a lot to learn. For example light management, and composition rules, ...

In photography world, Guy's aim above all is to create exclusively artistic and emotional peices. As Guy constantly need to express his emotions and his aspirations through an creative activity, photography remains the ideal media for him. It is a real daily therapy for him, which revives his joys and his successes, or to the opposite, calms his disappointments and frustrations.

His favourite subjects are architecture and urban life, and the macro photography. Especially macro's of nature. Guy dreams, that one day he could publish a collection of his work in a book. He says the book would gather his black and white photography, urban architecture or collection of flowers and plants.



# The Interview

What first interested you about photography?

For two linked reasons :

## Need of creativity

Before being a database administrator, my first jobs consisted in developing data-processing applications. At that time, the development required to me a certain amount of creativity ,as well in the methods used to program, as in the design of the interfaces users (ergonomics, page-setting)

Even if my current career offers me all the desired latitude and initiative, the creativity is missing. And more I advance in age, more I need to freely express my emotions and my aspirations through creative activity. Initially a simple occasional passion, photography quickly became the best way to express my feelings, to speak about me and my perception of the world.

## Curiosity of technologies

Until 1999, philately represented my single hobby and I had much pleasure for this leisure very enriching and didactic. But curious of new technologies, I was succumbed in 1999 to the emergence of the first digital cameras. Until this moment, my pleasure for the photograph was limited to make usually pictures everywhere during my annual travels, without too troubling myself about the technique. In the purchase of a digital camera, I believed to find the best solution to save money on photo film and costs of print. I wrongly thought that there would be no more complicated adjustment, neither missed photographs. Not at all !, I quickly had to admit that the success of a beautiful photograph lies in the care carried at framing and the technique itself. A bad capture or a bad management of the light is not properly avoided while bracketing blindly. It needs a minimum of the control of its digital camera, and to get knowledge about its strong points and its weaknesses.

The usage of a compact digital camera gave me a mitigated satisfaction. Too much often, I was frustrated by the poor acuity of the pictures and the low reactivity of the compact. My real passion came seriously around 2002, i.e. when I bought my first DSLR, the Canon D30. I replaced it with the excellent Canon 20D since October 2004. This Canon 20D always follows me in my displacements in Brussels and during my annual holidays.

You have to know that I learn photography by an empiric way, and

I do not have any academic knowledge of photography. Forums on internet also help me to improve my practice of the photography.

Do you plan an image or is it a spontaneous process?

I rarely plan my images, excepted when I do macro photographs of plants inside my apartment. Most of the times my pictures urban, stolen moments and landscapes are made spontaneously. When I take a walk into a park, a city district or even in a cemetery, I carry my camera with me and shoot everything that causes emotions, interior thoughts or simply an astonishment. I admit that I am taking too many pictures. I have lot of DVD of photographs that I never took time to develop and show to the people I am a real compulsive photographer.

Occasionally I can plan shooting of buildings in order to get the best light and reflections. In such case, I privilege these days with a blue sky sparkled with beautiful big clouds. For more esoteric mood, I privilege the soft light of the morning, when a small fog envelops the scene.

What is your favorite thing to photograph?

I particularly like to photograph architecture and macro of plants in an artist way. For both I take attention to the graphics generated from the lines, the curves, the light, the texture of the subject and the scene. I am not interested to photography for a documentary purpose. I prefer to photograph in a creative way while too not being shifted of the reality. I also like to all of the landscapes that makes me dream and carry calm and serenity inside of me.

In fact people often reproach me for not having found my style, that



I photograph to many different subjects. It is true that to all both or three weeks, I change topic. According to my moods, the topics approached must be in harmony with my feelings. This alternation of topics is done accordingly to my states of hearts, my good and bad days. Photography is a real daily therapy which revives my joys and my successes, or to the opposition, calms my disappointments and frustrations.

Even if I approach several topics, I return early or late to the topics which I temporarily left on side. The loop always finishes by being buckled. Anyway, to make photographs which challenge me remains the most essential thing. Also important is that this hobby continues to please to me, and allows me to succeed in sharing this pleasure with the others.

In a lot of your photos you use greens a lot what is is about these colour pallets that appeal to you?

Some two years and beside the B/W, I am playing with two different pot of colors :

- one of straight cyan, for my landscape and plants one of green/red tinted cyan obtained from ma crossed processing for architecture and stories series.

I particularly appreciate these colors variations of cyan because to my eyes, they give an kind of plenitude and evanescence moods to the scenes. Whereas a plain soft cyan applied to landscape is giving more poetry, a green/red tinted cyan will carry more character to a urban scene.

In any cases, these colors inculcate a kind of unreal and strange atmosphere, as it the scenes had been photographed in a parallel world, where time is temporarily frozen. Unconsciously, perhaps I am building me a world where I could feel better, a world in adequacy with my values and aspirations.

Would you experiment with different colour pallets in the future?

Even if most of my pictures on my web site are presented in B/W, I am a fan of colored world. My main constraint remains the available time. I have so many ideas in my head, but with my computer job I miss times to experiment.

In the beginning of photograph learning, I experimented a lot with the red and vivid orange colors with self-portraits series about the madness and possession. But I am not sure yet if I should present this series in my web site. Maybe it would shock the readers



Do you have any new works in the making at the moment? Would you like to tell us about them?

Yes I am working (more thinking than working) about two series concerning dolls : Photographs of dolls presented behind the windows of shop and homes ·Photographs of a particular doll that I shoot around the city.

At this moment, I am always searching and experimentations about the way to digitally process these picture. I want to add a special mood to my shoots, but I am not sure exactly which one. Like I am not sure either if I should keep my gallery in a positive way, or if I should dare to plunge into obscure worlds and feelings J

Unfortunately, time is also missing to work on these series. My daily work is taking too much times from my life ...

**What is the most difficult thing in regards to photography?**

For my point of view, the most difficult is to succeed to capture the scene in a manner, that when spectator is looking your final picture, he feels the same emotions of you. The success not only relies on the right composition and light capture, but also on the attention you give on the reaction of the spectator. You have to anticipate it. In any cases, I consider that I succeeded my photograph when it brings to the spectator, any thoughts or any particular feelings like spleen, evanescence, happiness, souvenirs, introspection ... I am really satisfied when my picture causes a sense of well-being.

It is better to have a bad composed photograph that bring emotions than a technically perfect composition which does not inspire anything.

**Do you use digital programs to enhance your photos?**

Since I shoot exclusively in RAW mode, I am stucked to computer softwares. Not a problem because I am working in computer world (database administrator).

To convert my pictures from RAW to TIF, I mainly use the quick and accurate Canon DPP software, whereas the rest of the job is done through Photoshop CS2. Under Photoshop I do the colors, light and contrast corrections in order to enhance my photographed. Sometimes I crop some pictures because I am not always conscientious for the composition, especially when I have to shoot quickly during a walk with friends.

To reduce the noise, I exclusively use Neat Image software.

The colors experimentations, the cross processing and this blurred effect that simulates a Lens Baby are also done with Photoshop.

**What is your greatest photographic achievement?**

Beside my first exhibition, my greatest achievement remains my publications inside Russia and Hong Kong magazines. Why ? because it proved to me the universality of pictures, that my feelings, my sensibility and my vision of the world, may also be shared and appreciated with other people on the planet.

**What else would you like to photograph in the future?**

In my heart, I dream to carry out the project of making intimist photographs of artists and personalities. To make intimist portraits marked of respect and complicity. And who knows, a kind of portraits where I could add a reference concerning my love of plants and flowers. Unfortunately, I did not succeed to convince any star.

**Who and what are your biggest influences?**

Even if I mainly photograph urban architecture and macro of flowers, I remain very influenced and attracted by the work of Karl Blossfeld, Mapplethorpe and Ansel Adams. Especially because they take a particular attention to the emotion and the esthetism 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 esthetism (aesthetic) when I photograph cityscapes and buildings. It allows me to release pretty aspects of urban architecture that appear cold, and ugly at the first look.

I am also fond of the work of the humanist photographers Elliott Erwitt and Michel vanden Eeekoudt. Both have a great talent to photography social situation with sensibility and humour, and I appreciate their pictures of animals in the cities.

**Do you come from a creative family background?**

In a point of view, I could answer yes. First of all my father always worked as carpenter and cabinet maker world. He built houses as he designed and built pieces of furniture for peoples. Today, he is always building such high quality furnitures. Beside her governmental job, my mother always had the hobby of seam. During a long time in the passed years, she loved to make clothes from cloth patterns bought in local shops. Cloth patterns that she often adapted to her taste.

No doubt that the taste for a creative hobby comes indirectly from my parents...

**What do your family think about your photography?**

First of all, my parents prefer my coloured pictures instead of black&white ones. Their favorite series among my many pictures

remain the nature (landscape , bugs , insects) . My family and friends are not attracted by contemporary style pictures.

Unfortunately, I have the feeling that my parents consider my passion as a momentary whim (hobby), that does not really bring anything profitable. They often said that instead to be published inside photo magazines, I should try to sell my pictures for postcard or things like this. Personally, my publications in magazines are my “personal visit card” instead of having a professional knowledges, and they allow me to progress and to gain trust in my work. Anyway, I do not want to resume my artist work in sales of postcards, I want my photographs printed in limited number of prints and recognized as real Art. Probably I am dreaming too much. Anyway, I would appreciate to get a larger recognition and interest from my family, and to be taken seriously in my artistic steps, and even be more intensively encouraged.

**If you had to learn something new about photography what would it be?**

Learning photography by an empiric way, I have many things to know.

First of all, I would learn seriously how to use flash in order to better manage the light and the shadows on the subject. I feel completely uncomfortable with the use of flash, but also with the control of the hyperfocal that I never succeed to understand and manage.

Finally, I definitively have to get more knowledges in the manner of directing a model, and to find the best angles and compositions in order to emphasize the photographed person. I dream to have a mentor that would like to show me how to be better.....

**What camera and equipment do you use?**

I own a CANON 20D, with which i mainly use the following lenses : Canon EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM Zoom, a Canon 70-200 f/4 , a Canon EF 100mm f/2.8 USM Macro Lens , and Tamron AF28-75mm F/2.8 XR Di LD Aspherical (IF) Zoom Lens, to make sharp portraits and landscapes, and some macros.

I have 2 compact flash cards of 4Gb, 1 of 8 Gb and 2 of 1 Gb.. I also own a portable hard disk Tripper 20 Go which allows backup the content of my memory card. With my Canon 20D, I have a set of 5 batteries

**What are your interests outside of photography?**

I mainly appreciate to take walks in forest and mountains, to go to

the cinema and to listen music. Nothing more, excepted also to work on my personal web site J To be honest, the photography is taking nearly all of my hobby times. Every evenings and Sundays I am “developing” and working on my photographs with Photoshop on my computer.

Before to be interested by photography, I was exclusively attracted with the philately world.

**Where would you like your photography to take you in the future?**

To remain credible and realistic, let I say that my aspirations are large, but not really impossible. I would be very happy and proud of myself if I could gathers my B/W flowers pictures in a beautiful collection book (and to sell it).

It is an utopia, but I would like to concentrate all of my time to photography, to develop new themes and ideas. Unfortunately, as photograph amateur, old of 42 years, I must accept the fact that I must continue the rest of my life, my initial job of computer scientist (Oracle database administrator). Photography is a wonderful passion that I discover 1999 with my first camera. But to the opposite, the photograph passion is also the worst thing that happened to me these last ten years. Why? Because since that I felt in love with photography, I hate my day-to-day job of Oracle database administrator.

What is sure , if I could live from the photography work, it should from an artistic way, where the creativity and experimentations may be applied in my processes.

Just like I dream to be recognized artistically, even if my exhibitions are limited.

