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Feature Friday

E - M A G T H R E E

L I A M W H I T E



L I A M W H I T E

With a focus on stillness and balance, Liam White's film photographs create a calming effect. Whilst he is active on the street, he also has a passion for portraiture, and some of Liam's most interesting work is done indoors, with a series simply called 'Quiet'.

In this the third Melbourne Street E-Mag, he talks about his approach to photography and offers some background to where the idea of Quiet came from.

MS:

How long have you been shooting?

LW:

My dad gave me my first camera when I turned 18, but I'd been borrowing his camera for years before that. Shooting was a natural thing for me but I'd never considered my pictures being exposed to anyone besides myself. I started shooting stuff that wasn't just my friends when I went overseas in 2005, and shot a few pictures that I still really love. When I moved to Melbourne in 2008 I started doing a lot of walking by myself, which gave me more time by myself to think about taking pictures. Since then I've become more and more interested in photography and I've felt like I've been able to shoot with a little more intent.





Do you have a favorite location?

I like walking around the suburb where I'm living and really getting to know all the side streets, alleyways, shortcuts and idiosyncracies of 'my' neighbourhood. I know other people really love shooting street in the city because it's so dynamic and you can be a little more unobtrusive, but I don't feel the same connection with the CBD that others might. I think it's because I grew up out of the city, and I feel much more connected to a small suburb / town kinda feel.



Melbourne's suburbs feel like small towns in themselves, especially when you realise you now know the lady at the post office who talks to herself, and you know the grocer by name. It's kinda neat. I do a reasonable amount of shooting indoors though, as I love the way natural light comes through windows and falls off objects in a room.



What is your favorite subject while on the street - what shots tend to draw your attention?

I'm almost always looking for beautiful light. Light, and then colour. I shoot mostly colour film and while I shoot a bit of B&W, I find that I usually want to capture a balance between light, colour, and objects. B&W allows me to focus on light, which I find alternately freeing and frustrating. I am looking for balance and stillness, which kinda seems like the antithesis of street shooting a lot of the time. I do think that cities can be still and quiet as well as hectic and dynamic though. It's probably the small town kid in me looking for a balance to living in the city.



What kind of camera/lens combo do you usually use? Any reasons why this is your favorite for street photography?

For an everyday walkabout camera I will usually take my Olympus OM-2n and a Zuiko 50mm f1.8. I've had the 50mm for over ten years now and it's still my favourite lens. It's not flash like a 1.4 or a 1.2 but I love how natural it feels. It's sharp when it needs to be, but also deals with out of focus areas beautifully. I've been shooting with a Zuiko 28mm wide lately but I have to work a little harder to visualise how the picture is going to be with that lens. The 50mm is as natural as breathing to me.

Do you ever struggle to go out for a session? Are there any techniques you use to get out of a shooting slump?

Definitely, yes, I struggle with this all the time. I find it hard sometimes to find the energy to think about what I want to be shooting.

I've tried shooting through a motivational slump without thinking about what I was shooting, but I don't have the same emotional connection to the images that I get back, and I get overwhelmed having rolls and rolls of films sitting in my room that I don't want to scan because I don't like the pictures. It's like they're someone else's pictures. Around this point I usually start bemoaning the lot of the photographer shooting with film, because it can be a laborious process, choosing the film stock, shooting, dropping it off at the lab, coming back the next day, scanning the images, then editing and selecting which images I'm happy with.

I'm pretty picky too, which means I usually spend a fair bit of time working on images that will never roam beyond the fences on my hard drive. But, when it works, it really works, and the process can be a joy.



Are there any photographers you particularly admire or gain inspiration from?

I really love Sebastião Salgado's pictures. They're incredible. The light and the way he interacts with his subjects. I also like that he tells stories about the everyday, about real life. I don't like pictures that construct a false reality. I get really turned off by the fashion photography world. It's so false. I'm interested in pictures that tell me about the real world. I love Richard Renaldi's 'Bus Travelers' series too. Again, it's about real life, but it's more about the insularity of group travel and the mundane. It's shot so beautifully.



By Sebastião Salgado, see more of his work [here](#)



Film or digital?

Film. I tried shooting digital for a year but got frustrated and bored with the predictability of digital and went back to my 'lucky dip' film SLR. I've been having fun with Instagram lately (I'm @leeeham) but that's the extent of my digital dalliance. At this point I have one digicam that sits on the shelf and about twelve film cameras that get used to varying degrees.

Do you have any stories that have unfolded from a shoot?

I somehow managed to persuade the members of Sydney band Lungs to take off their shirts and pose for me in my bed. I'm not sure who was more worried about how clean the sheets were.

Do you enjoy shooting bands?

Yes and no. I've stopped shooting live bands because I got a little burned out on it. There are only so many pictures you can take of bands. I know some people love shooting live bands, but I haven't shot any bands for about a year now. Portraits of bands though, I'm still very much interested in shooting those. I have an ongoing on-again off-again series of pictures that I have been shooting of creative friends, whether they're musicians, crafters, or visual artists.

Probably my favourite of that series has been shooting Cat and Tara Badcock for the exhibition flier for their joint 'Meat the Badcocks' exhibition last year. We threw a few ideas around and spent the morning cooking up fake blood. As a vegan, I found the whole idea of shooting two butchers toting stuffed fabric meat cuts hilarious.



I saw that you recently purchased a Hassleblad, has it lived up to expectations?

It's been such a lovely little thing to shoot with. Compared to my Mamiya RB67 that I was shooting a lot with before I bought the 'blad, it's much more of a carry-around camera, which means I've been shooting with it a little more.

I kinda miss the 6x7 format of the RB67, but I've been enjoying getting to know the square format, and that sharrrrrrp Zeiss lens. I'm really happy I bought it, but I'm already wishing it could focus closer, so I'm considering a second lens, maybe a portrait lens. They're not cheap though, those Zeiss lenses. Ouch.





Do you have any projects on the go?

I recently had some 4x5 Polaroid Type 57 film passed on to me from a good pal and ace artist Josh Pringle (check out his blog at joshpringle.com - it rules!) so I'm thinking about a portrait series using that film stock. The only issues are a) I don't have a 4x5 camera, and b) I don't even know if the film still works, since it's 40 years expired (!). If it works though, that will be a really fun project. I also shot a bunch of frames around Reservoir when I was living there last year, and I'm going to do something with those - I just have to figure out what I want to do with them first. I'd like to do a photo zine, so that's something I'll get happening soon.

If you could shoot only one genre for the rest of your life...

Maybe this is less of a genre, but I think I've recently discovered what I like shooting best. I'm looking for quietness, for the stillness of a room minus people and movement. I find that kind of picture, the quiet picture, really speaks to me. Maybe it's the product of being someone who's always needed some time away from other people, but I find myself looking at that kind of picture for far longer than a dynamic, 'loud' image. I dig subtlety, which I'm sure other people would find boring. When it's done right, it's endlessly fascinating to me.

See more of Liam's work at:

<http://www.liamwhite.com.au>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/liamlia>

& on instagram as @leeeham

Liam Mentioned:

Richard Renaldi's 'Bus Travelers'

Sebastião Salgado

Many thanks to Liam White for allowing me to
feature his work and his thoughtful responses.

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