

MEL
BOU
RNE
STREET



Feature Friday

E - M A G T W O

C H R I S Z I S S I A D I S



CHRIS ZISSIADIS

Better known as 'Ziz', Chris is a proud Melburnian film photographer with an eye for reflected light, laneways and the people who move amongst them - a perfect combination for Melbourne's Hoddle Grid and recent influx of glass buildings.

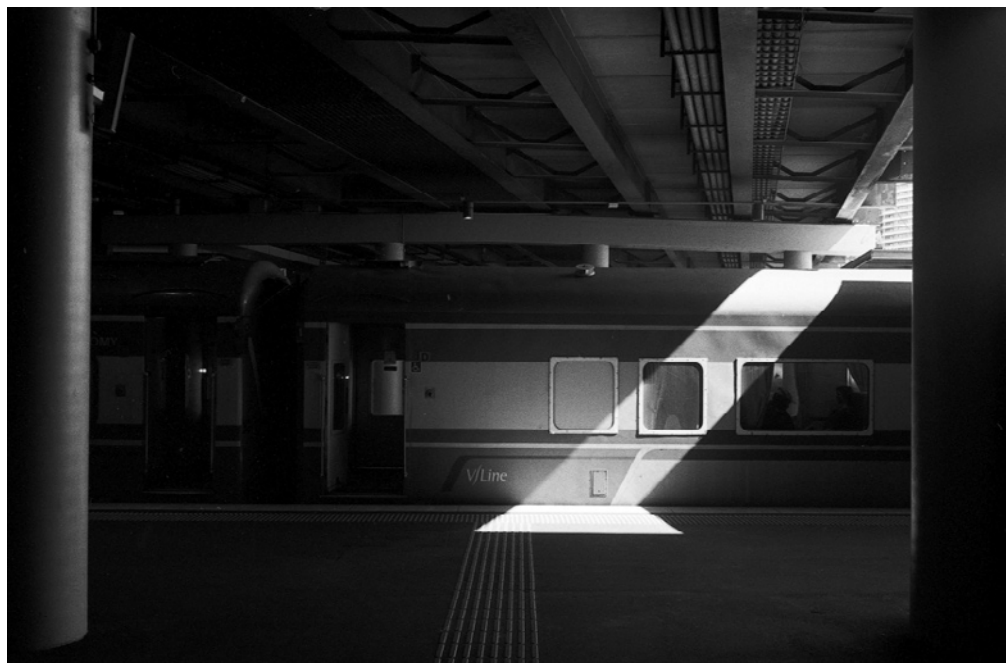
Ziz runs [UrbanLight](#), which features "light in the urban and constructed environment highlighting human passage through and use of cities and urban space".

There are some really exceptional street photographs to be seen (images featured in this e-mag are all seen on [UrbanLight](#)), and all have been taken on film.

He is also active in both the [Melbourne Flickr Group](#) and with the [Melbourne Silver Mine](#).

MS: What led you to photography?

CZ: I've had a bit of a torrid relationship with photography. I remember wanting a camera for Christmas one year, I would have been 7 or 8. However, I received something other than a camera. I was so disappointed that I got quite ill. Fortunately somebody figured out my unusual fixation, and the problem was corrected. I can't remember the exact model, but it was a Hanimex 110 camera, with one of the nifty flip out zoom lenses. Photography played a reasonably normal role for the next 30 years. In 2002 I quit my day job with a view to become some sort of famous novelist. Photography was a way of capturing images that I wanted to write about. At some stage the images became more important than the words, but I am still hoping the two interests will merge at some stage. I tend to devote years to one of the two pursuits, 2011 is a writing year for me.



How long have you been shooting street photography?

Street is relatively new for me. I've been admiring street photography for some time. Capturing candid images has long been part of what I have done with a camera. I felt that a combination of a lack of the right attitude towards shooting in public, and not owning what I felt was an appropriate rig for the types of shots I wanted to take, made shooting Street a no go area. So deciding to change that was a conscious choice I made in early 2009. I had started using a few 35mm cameras and purchased my first rangefinder in September 2009. Prior to that anything street I shot was purely architectural. I don't count my shots as streets unless the subject is a person, and the scene is unscripted and unaltered.

*Do you have a favourite location in Melbourne?
Worldwide?*

When shooting street, I generally like to take photos that also capture an identifiable part of Melbourne. I'm trying to document the city and how it is used. So I prefer busy areas that large numbers of people pass through. The Bourke Street Mall, The intersection of Degrares Street and Filnders Lane; these are places that give me inspiration.

I don't travel a great deal, but when I'm in a new city. I tend to look for the same sorts of areas to shoot. Train stations, and any major bits of infrastructure tend to lend themselves to the type of things I like to photograph.





What is your favourite subject while on the street?

I guess the thing I look to shoot the most in an urban location, and certainly the thing I “think” about the most is reflected light. I have developed a pretty deep knowledge base on how light works in Melbourne. I have to give credit to the city’s planners for setting up our beautiful light catching grid which make this possible. In recent years Melbourne architects have embraced glass, which means opportunities to capture reflected light occur throughout the day.





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

Yes, as much as I enjoy photography, getting out can become a chore. Avoiding shooting the same scenes over and over is also hard to avoid. A new camera, even if it's a \$5 salvos crappy cam can usually help break that block. Or, going out without a camera is a pretty good way to guarantee that something amazing will happen right in front of you. I find the fear of missing something a great motivator.

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

I don't spend a great deal of time looking at other photographer's work. There are of course the usual names that appear in these sorts of discussions. These images have no doubt been implanted into my psyche and motivate me. The social aspects of the flickr website, the Melbourne flickr group and in particular the people I have met through the Melbourne Silver Mine have been the greatest inspiration and source of knowledge to me. Of all the people that are part of the MSM, Vinnie Piatek is the reason I forced myself to shoot street. I call my street shooting sessions "Being Vinnie".

But it's my love of the City of Melbourne that makes me want to keep doing what I am doing. Seeing that love of the city in other people's work is also a great motivator.



As photography becomes more and more ubiquitous, with a camera on every corner, do you think street photography can stand as an artform?

I'm not entirely certain photography ever quite made it as an art form. I don't think it's what people think about when they think about art. I don't see that as a problem, it's just a fact. Photography is closer to a trade than an art. But most trades can be incredibly artful.

Street photography in particular requires the photographer to possess a set of skills unlike most other practitioners. But these are mainly character traits. Having an "eye" can be learned, or at least nurtured. Most photographers who become famous do so on the basis of a handful of images, a tiny percentage of what they shoot throughout their lifetime. After standing on some street for an hour waiting for something to happen, or the light to do what it's supposed to, I can feel like a glorified CCTV camera.





Film or digital?

I'm not anti-digital. But I choose film. I shoot for pleasure, I'm not in a hurry. I want to control the way I capture an image. Film gives me every opportunity to do so. I also want chemistry, nature and an element of chance to have a part in what I produce. I want to be able to take the captured image and apply different techniques to it to create a completely new result. Digital processes impede that goal, whereas film champions it.

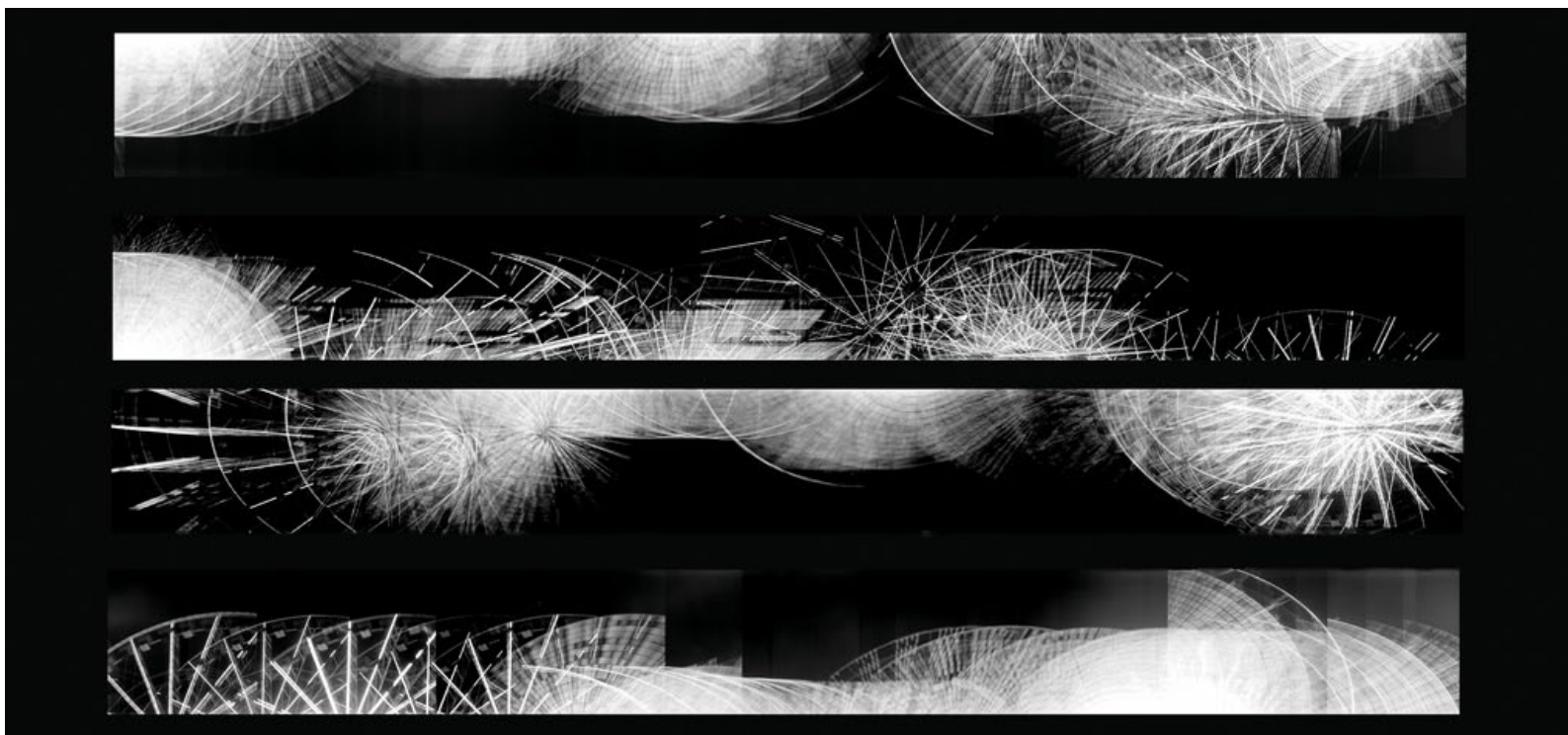
Will film photography always have a place?

Yes, as long as capturing still images is relevant, analogue photography will be there. The rise of digital mimicking of analogue photographic techniques guarantees it.

There are still things that you can only do with film. Capturing an image on film, breaks the idea of what a "camera" is. For example, in the Melbourne Silver Mine's 2008 unesensored show I exhibited an image shot using a broken Smena 8M 35mm camera. The Smena is a very simple Russian fixed

lens camera. The film winding mechanism of this particular camera was broken, it wouldn't stop winding after a shot was taken. This enabled me to advance the film whilst the shutter was open. I placed the camera on a tripod, opened the shutter, wound the film slowly through the camera, twisted it on the tripod and held various filters in front of the lens.

The result was a single 24 frame wide image, where the speed at which the film advanced was dependent upon my own hand. I'd like to know how to reproduce that using a digital camera. These are simple things for an analogue capture, complex for digital. (See image next page)



AS NAVIGABLE PATHS UNFOLD

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

Like many street photographers, my most interesting stories have happened when somebody feels compelled to stop me from taking photos. Melbourne is by and large a reasonable place to shoot street. In fact the most common problem you encounter is people stopping, believing you are trying to take a photo of a wall, rather than a photo of them walking past it. I try and avoid any confrontations, but they are inevitable in this game. I'd advise photographers to familiarise themselves with the Laws relevant to shooting street, but not to believe it is their sole responsibility to make sure these Laws are obeyed by those who are there to enforce them. It's not worth it, smile, and walk away.

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

For street, I have been using a Canon Canonet QL17 GIII. Most frequently loaded with Fuji Neopan 400 which I shoot at 800 and develop in Rodinal 1+50 for 11 mins (i.e. I develop it at 400). I like this technique for shooting scenes which contain shadow, and most of my urban scenes rely on shadow or the anti-shadow of reflected light.

The rig isn't ideal, but it has worked for me. I would like to have a second camera with a wider lens with me when I'm shooting street. Having a 50mm and a 28mm at the ready would handle most situations that I feel warrant an exposure

See more of Chris's work at:
[Urban Light](#)

Chris Mentioned:
[Melbourne Silver Mine](#)
[Vinnie Piatek](#)
[Melbourne Flickr Group](#)
[MSM on Flickr](#)
[Reflected Light Flickr Group](#)

Many thanks to Chris Zissiadis for allowing me to
feature his work and his thoughtful responses.

Produced by William Watt for Melbourne Street

