

creative ZYNE

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CREATIVE
ZYNE
ALTITUDE ISSUE



Sergio Larraín

Lessons from Legend

Interviews:

João Coelho

Karen Waller

Andre Magarao

Travel

Turkey . Ladakh.

Experiential Travel

Featured

Joanna Steidle

Isabella Tabacchi

Borrowed Eye

Editorial Essay

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I started Creative Zyne because I couldn't find the magazine I actually wanted to read and spend time with. Photography kept getting sold to me: the newest gear, the loudest rankings, the biggest awards, the same popular names on repeat. Nobody was talking about the person who actually created the photograph before it even came into existence, their struggles, challenges, disappointments, rejections, moments of truth, legal battles, and the learnings that lie beyond technical excellence at execution.

I created this magazine on a leap of faith that someone, somewhere, will eventually find a piece of their life in it, or just feel a little better having gone through moments of self-doubt, rejection, or burnout, or maybe find inspiration in voices they'd never heard before.

Beyond that, I wanted to create a magazine that truly cares about photographers as artists, without gear-worship, and without an advertisement shoved at you every second page. A magazine that brings back the forgotten joy of reading books and magazines, or watching an old movie or documentary, instead of consuming whatever the algorithm decides to throw at you. If you're holding this issue right now, I hope it feels less like a magazine and more like someone finally talking to the photographer.

Vivek Verma Editor



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EDITOR'S LETTER

There was a time when I believed every photographer's greatest achievement was to find a unique way of seeing. I'm not so sure anymore.

The longer I photograph, the more I realise that none of us learns to see alone. Every image that has ever unsettled us, every book that has quietly remained on our shelf, every conversation with another photographer, every journey that changed us without our noticing. They all become part of our vision. We call it our way of seeing, but perhaps it has always been a conversation with countless others.

That thought stayed with me while putting together this issue. We called it *Altitude*, but somewhere along the way I stopped thinking about height. I began thinking about perspective instead, not the kind gained from a mountain or a drone, but the kind that comes from living, observing, listening, failing, and returning to the world with quieter eyes.

As you turn these pages, you'll encounter photographers who have climbed mountains, flown above landscapes, explored cities, written remarkable books, wrestled with creative doubts, and discovered new ways of looking at familiar things.

If this issue has a single purpose, it isn't to teach you how to make better photographs. It is to make you pause, just for a moment, before making the next one. Because sometimes the most important change in a photographer's journey isn't learning to see more. It's learning to question how we came to see at all.

ALTITUDE

Altitude is not simply about height. It is about the deliberate choice to see from somewhere other than where you are standing — the physical, emotional, and artistic distance a photographer is willing to travel from the comfortable and the familiar in order to see truly.

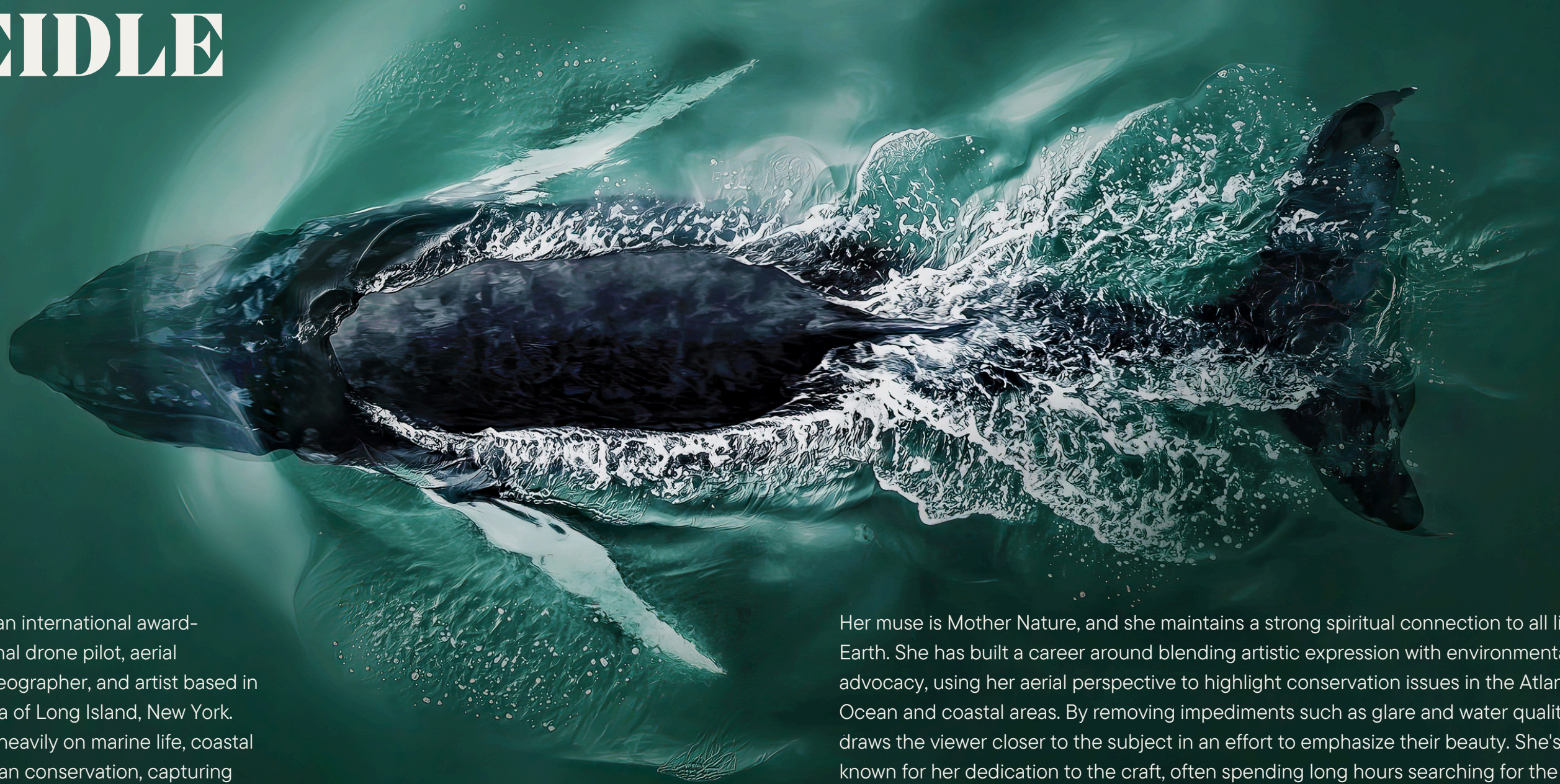
An aerial photographer rises above the earth and finds its hidden geometry. An ICM practitioner rises above the frozen instant and makes visible what the eye can feel but never see. A documentary photographer finds altitude at ground level, in the lives that the comfortable world has risen above noticing.

Altitude asks one question of every image: what did the photographer have to leave behind — in comfort, in convention, in certainty — to make this photograph? In this issues, we have curated work that answers that question, in whatever medium and from whatever vantage point.

PHOTOGRAPH: JOANNA STEIDLE

INSPIRATION

JOANNA STEIDLE



Joanna Steidle is an international award-winning professional drone pilot, aerial photographer/videographer, and artist based in the Hamptons area of Long Island, New York. Her work focuses heavily on marine life, coastal abstracts and ocean conservation, capturing stunning aerial views of whales, sharks, rays, dolphins, schools of menhaden (a keystone forage fish), birds, marshes and coastal patterns.

Her muse is Mother Nature, and she maintains a strong spiritual connection to all life on Earth. She has built a career around blending artistic expression with environmental advocacy, using her aerial perspective to highlight conservation issues in the Atlantic Ocean and coastal areas. By removing impediments such as glare and water quality she draws the viewer closer to the subject in an effort to emphasize their beauty. She's known for her dedication to the craft, often spending long hours searching for the perfect subjects to document and protect through visual storytelling. With a style of her own, she continues to progress highlighting the beauty of this world and our oceans. As a conservationist she works closely with multiple global nonprofit organizations.



JOANNA
STEIDLE



**JOANNA
STEIDLE**







INTERVIEW

JOAO COELHO

INTERVIEW BY VIVEK VERMA

There are photographers who chase extraordinary moments, and then there are photographers like João Coelho, who patiently earn the privilege of witnessing them.

One of Portugal's most accomplished documentary photographers, Coelho has spent years immersing himself in communities that most of the world overlooks—not as an observer passing through, but as someone willing to listen, understand, and stay.

As I read through his body of work, I found myself thinking of Sebastião Salgado—not because their photographs look alike, but because they share the same quiet conviction that documentary photography begins with empathy, patience, and an unwavering respect for human dignity.

His photographs speak of hardship, resilience, dignity, and hope, but they are equally a reflection of the emotional weight he continues to carry long after the camera is put away.

In this conversation with Creative Zyne, we move beyond the images to explore the quieter, often unseen side of a photographer's life—the relationships, responsibilities, vulnerabilities, and convictions that shape the work. Because behind every meaningful photograph is a human being who has first allowed themselves to be changed by what they witnessed.



1. After you finish a hard project — like *The Titanic Gang* or *Black Gold, Salty Blood* — is it easy for you to move on, or do you find yourself still thinking about it long after the shoot is over?

As a documentary photographer with a strongly humanistic approach, I never detach myself from the people I photograph or the life stories I share. Intense projects like “The Titanic Gang” or “Black Gold, Salty Blood” create deep bonds, making it impossible to simply move on. I see photography as a mission: to document the human condition and give a voice to these realities in the hope of genuinely contributing to a better world. That is why, for me, no project truly ends when the image-gathering is over; I continue to carry these experiences and reflect on them long after presenting them to the world.

2. Your photos always look completely candid, like the people don't know you're there. Walk me through what you actually do, day to day, to get someone comfortable enough to ignore the camera — do you go back several times before you even start shooting?

My photography is characterized by a deep proximity to the people I shoot. To guarantee their spontaneity and tell their stories – whether of life or work – with the utmost fidelity, it is essential that they accept me as one of their own. This process of building rapport doesn't happen overnight; it requires planning, risk analysis, and, above all, a great deal of patience.

In day-to-day practice, this means returning to the locations time and time again, talking, and building bonds of trust before even taking my camera out of the bag. It is an investment of time that can take months, as was the case with my projects on a drug gang and a group of homeless youth. Only when my presence becomes completely natural does the camera stop being an intruder and become invisible.

3. Has anyone you've photographed — someone from *The Forgotten*, or *Kabonga*, or *The True Story of Gina* — ever seen the finished photos of themselves? What did they say?

Yes, I make it a point to do so most of the time. Whenever possible, I print out a few photos to

give to them as a gift. This gesture not only strengthens the bond of trust we built, but it is also my way of thanking them for their generosity in welcoming me into their world.

Since I frequently photograph marginalized or isolated communities, many of these people do not have access to television or digital media. As a result, their first reaction upon seeing their own image is almost always one of sheer disbelief. Moments later, that surprise gives way to genuine smiles and a contagious joy. Seeing the emotional impact that a printed image has on them is one of the most rewarding aspects of my work.

4. You work both on long projects, like *The Iron Quest* series, and on standalone single images for your "Single Stories." Does your mindset change between the two — do you go in differently when you know it's one photo versus a whole story?

Truth be told, my preference always leans toward long-term projects because they allow me to explore themes in depth and build a much more structured visual narrative. When I begin a

a long-term project, the approach is radically different: it requires meticulous planning, analysis, and execution that extends over months or even years. The “Single Stories” section, however, works differently.

These are images captured in a specific instant that, on their own, manage to tell a simple yet equally powerful story. The approach here is essentially intuitive and spontaneous. It doesn't stem from prior planning or a pre-selected theme, but rather from my ability to react to the moment and convey an equally compelling narrative that carries the core messages I want to deliver through my photography.

5. Is there one person, out of everyone you've photographed over the years, who you still think about often?

Yes, I often think of Kabonga, who unfortunately passed away recently. Kabonga was a man of immense simplicity who was born and lived his entire life in a landfill. Despite losing an arm a few years ago, he never let that stop him from working and fighting for survival with admirable dignity. Beyond the sincere friendship that grew

between us, Kabonga became, for me, the ultimate symbol of resilience and generosity. He taught me and proved to me that a true, deep, and completely selfless connection can exist between people from entirely different worlds. His memory remains very much alive in me and in the way I look at others.

6. Some of your subjects — the Titanic Gang, the families in The Forgotten — are people you've returned to more than once. Do you check in on them even when you're not actively shooting?

I can only stay in touch with the families from The Forgotten when I visit the landfill because none of them have phones. The landfill is about 600 kilometers from my home, so I only visit once or twice a year.

As for Gang Titanic, it's an ongoing project that allows me to visit more often, since the beach is

closer and some of the members have phones. I've developed friendships with them, so I stay in touch regularly, even when I'm not shooting there.

7. Spending time in places like the dump, or with people struggling with addiction in Don't Get Angry, must be heavy. How do you take care of yourself after a day like that?

Spending the day with these people in unsanitary conditions and witnessing such harsh realities is always extremely difficult, no matter how much experience I accumulate over various projects. I cannot simply switch off or distance

myself from the people and the scenes I witnessed once I return home. Later, during the editing process, the impact hits all over again: I often notice details that escaped me at the moment of the shot, which only amplifies my sense of outrage that people are still living in such precarious conditions.

Knowing that I can share these images and bring their stories to a wider audience helps me channel that pain, but in the face of the raw reality of those lives, I know it is a small consolation. It is a weight that I carry, but one that I consider necessary to create the kind of photography I believe in.

8. When you're working on a long project, how do you know when the story is finished and it's time to stop?

That is an excellent question. In truth, a long-term documentary project is never truly finished, but there comes a moment when the narrative

reaches maturity. To get there, the process of editing and curation is fundamental—it doesn't begin at the computer when processing the files, but rather in the continuous ability to evaluate the material, filtering what adds value and eliminating what is redundant.

Finding the ideal balance between the essential and the superfluous is something that only experience brings. In my case, when tackling very long projects like "The Iron Quest," my strategy is to structure the body of work into chapters. Each chapter tells an autonomous story, yet they all orbit the same central theme. This approach allows me to enrich the project as a whole and maintain dynamism, avoiding monotony or overwhelming the viewer with hundreds of repetitive images. I know it's time to stop when the chapters communicate perfectly with each other and the core message is clear.





 [joaocoelho_photography](https://www.instagram.com/joaocoelho_photography)

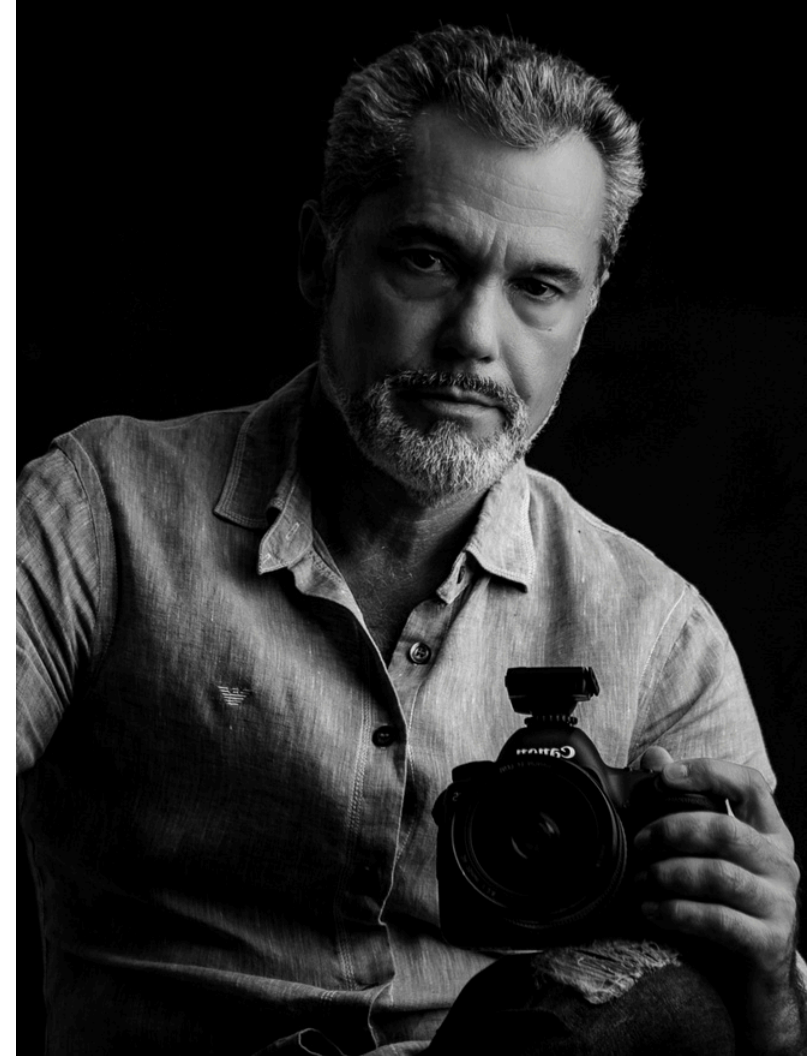
9. Has photographing survival and hardship for this many years changed the way you see your own everyday life?

Most definitely. Witnessing such harsh realities up close—and, at the same time, the resilience of people who, despite having no prospects for a better future, continue to work, care for their children with love, and smile openly at me—has radically changed how I see the world and myself.

Today, I am a much simpler person. I have learned to value small gestures and the seemingly insignificant things in daily life, because I know that any of them would bring immense joy to an adult or a child from the communities I have photographed. This experience has transformed my work into a mission, rooted in the deep conviction that photography has the power to change the world—not on its own, but through the awareness it awakens in those who see it, moving people to take action.

10. Was there ever someone who refused to be photographed, or who you couldn't win over? What did you do?

Yes, that has happened a few times. It is a perfectly natural reaction and one that any photographer has an obligation to respect, as long as it isn't just a spontaneous fear driven by a misunderstanding of why they are being photographed. As I mentioned before, my work is based on a deep proximity to people, which requires a prior process of building rapport. It is during this period that I explain who I am, what I do, and why I want to tell their story, establishing a foundation of mutual trust. However, if I sense that resistance and discomfort still persist after this approach, I never insist. The dignity and the will of the individual will always come before any photograph.



LEARNING FROM LEGEND

SERGIO LARRAÍN

Every creative life is, in one way or another, a climb. Some ascend through acclaim, others through mastery, and a rare few through a relentless search for something that lies beyond recognition itself.

In this issue devoted to Altitude, it is tempting to think only of peaks measured in metres or milestones measured in awards. Yet the greatest heights are often invisible. They are found in the courage to see differently, to resist the obvious path, and to redefine success on one's own terms. Few photographers embody that idea more profoundly than Sergio Larraín.

Chiloé Island, Chile. 1957. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos

HIS LIFE

His life unfolded like a quiet mystery—one that began with extraordinary promise, reached the very summit of the photographic world, and then took a turn that few could have anticipated.

Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1931, Sergio Larraín did not set out to become a photographer. After studying forestry in the United States, he returned home in the early 1950s carrying a camera that would gradually become less of a tool and more of a way of understanding the world. Rather than seeking grand events, he found himself drawn to overlooked corners of everyday life—the winding staircases of Valparaíso, children absorbed in play, solitary figures crossing pools of light and shadow. His photographs possessed an unusual sense of quiet mystery, transforming ordinary streets into spaces that felt almost dreamlike. Working primarily with a modest 35mm camera, he relied less on technical spectacle than on patience, intuition and an instinctive understanding of composition.

His distinctive vision soon attracted international attention. Edward Steichen acquired his photographs for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in 1959 Henri Cartier-Bresson invited him to join Magnum Photos as an associate before confirming him as a full member two years later. Assignments across Europe and South America followed, and within remarkably few years Larraín had earned the admiration of many of the most respected photographers of his generation. By any conventional measure, he had arrived at the summit of photographic success.



Corleone main street. Sicily, Italy. 1959. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos

And then, almost as quietly as he had appeared, he began to disappear. During the late 1960s, Larrain gradually withdrew from Magnum, declined assignments and retreated from public life. Rather than pursuing exhibitions or building a larger reputation, he settled into a quieter existence in rural Chile, devoting much of his time to meditation, yoga, reading and personal reflection. Photography remained part of his life, but no longer as a profession to be pursued or a reputation to be protected.

For Larraín, the quality of a photograph could never be separated from the quality of the life behind the camera. The act of seeing, he believed, depended as much upon the photographer's inner world as the scene before the lens.

More than half a century later, that choice feels less like an abandonment of success than a redefinition of it. In an age when photography is increasingly measured through visibility, followers, awards and constant output, Larraín quietly poses a different question: What if the greatest achievement is not how high we climb, but whether the climb itself changes the way we see? It is this question, perhaps even more than his extraordinary photographs, that makes Sergio Larraín a legend worth returning to.



Trafalgar Square, London, 1959 © Sergio Larrain / Magnum Photos

5 LESSONS FROM THE LEGEND

1. VISION PRECEDES RECOGNITION.

When Sergio Larraín was invited to join Magnum Photos, he did not suddenly become an original photographer. His originality had already existed; Magnum merely recognised it. Long before exhibitions, commissions or international acclaim, he had cultivated a way of seeing that was unmistakably his own. While others searched for dramatic subjects, he found poetry in ordinary streets, staircases and passing shadows. His photographs remind us that a distinctive voice is rarely invented in pursuit of recognition—it is discovered through years of quiet observation. Recognition may introduce a photographer to the world, but vision is what gives the world a reason to remember them.



Valparaíso, Chile. 1963. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos



Passage Bavestrello. Valparaíso, Chile. 1952. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos

2. A CAMERA CAN ONLY REVEAL THE WORLD AS DEEPLY AS ITS OWNER HAS LEARNED TO SEE IT.

Larraín rarely spoke about equipment. Instead, he wrote about awareness, patience and attention. To him, photography was never a contest of technique but an extension of consciousness. This explains why his pictures continue to feel alive decades later. They were not simply well composed; they were deeply observed. Every frame carries the sense that the photographer arrived before the camera did. In an era where technology evolves almost monthly, his work offers a timely reminder that cameras record light, but only an attentive mind can recognise meaning within it.

3. SUCCESS IS A MILESTONE, NOT A DESTINATION.

By his early thirties, Sergio Larraín had reached what many photographers spend an entire lifetime pursuing. His work had entered the Museum of Modern Art, he had become a member of Magnum Photos, and his reputation continued to grow internationally. Yet none of these achievements answered the questions that mattered most to him. His story does not diminish success; it simply restores it to its proper place. Recognition can affirm the work, but it cannot replace the purpose behind it. Careers are built upon milestones. Creative lives are built upon what happens after those milestones have been reached.



Valparaíso, Chile. 1963. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos



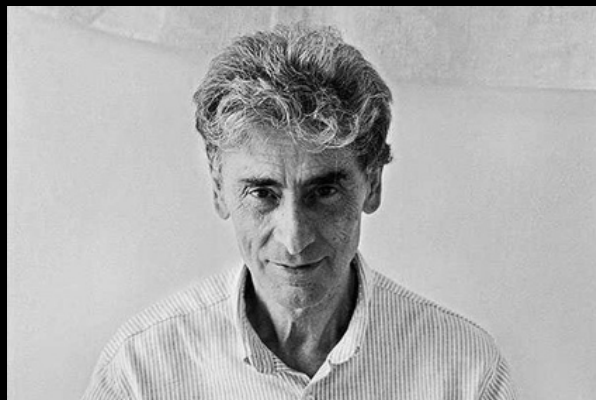
Santiago, Chile. 1955. © Sergio Larraín / Magnum Photos

4. THE RAREST FREEDOM IS THE FREEDOM TO DEFINE SUCCESS FOR YOURSELF.

Perhaps the most remarkable chapter of Larraín's life was not his ascent, but his willingness to choose a different path when the world expected him to climb even higher. Whether one agrees with every decision he made is ultimately irrelevant. What commands respect is that he refused to let the expectations of the photographic world become the measure of his own life. Every creative person eventually arrives at a crossroads where applause and authenticity no longer point in the same direction. The difficult choice is not deciding which path is easier—but which one still feels true.

5. THE HIGHEST ALTITUDE IS CLARITY.

The theme of this issue is Altitude, yet Larraín's life suggests that the highest summit in photography is neither fame nor influence. It is clarity—the rare ability to know why you photograph, what you wish to say, and what you are willing to sacrifice in order to remain faithful to that vision. Cameras will become faster, technologies more sophisticated and audiences more demanding. None of these changes alter photography's fundamental challenge: learning to see honestly. Sergio Larraín's greatest legacy is not that he made extraordinary photographs, but that he never allowed success to obscure the quiet purpose from which those photographs first emerged.

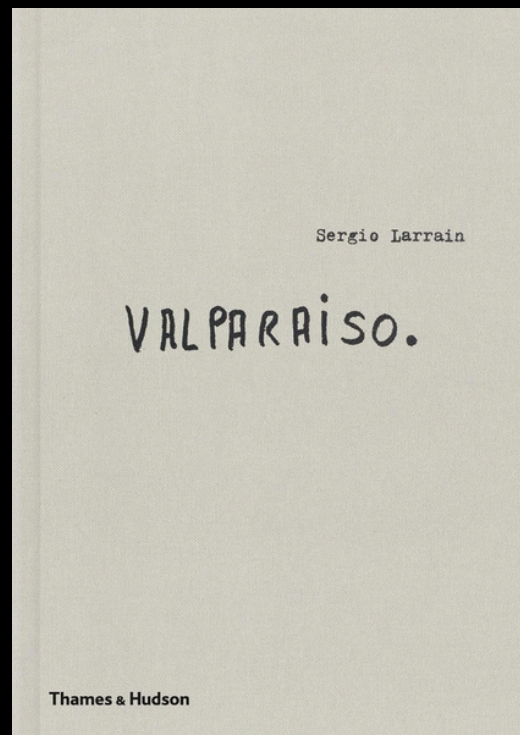


REFLECTIONS

Photography is filled with stories of remarkable ascents. Sergio Larraín's story begins in much the same way. Yet what makes it unforgettable is not the summit he reached, but the question he quietly left behind.

In a profession that rightly celebrates recognition, his life reminds us that success and fulfilment are not always the same destination. The photographs that endure rarely emerge from a restless pursuit of acclaim. More often, they grow from patience, curiosity and a way of seeing that remains faithful to itself long before anyone else notices.

Every photographer will climb a mountain of their own—an exhibition, a book, an award or a lifelong personal project. Those are worthy summits. But Larraín's life gently reminds us that every summit also offers a choice: to keep climbing simply because another peak awaits, or to pause and remember why the journey began in the first place.



Perhaps that is the true meaning of Altitude. It is not measured by how high we rise above others, but by how deeply the journey elevates our way of seeing. In the end, that may be the only summit that truly endures.

EDITORIAL ESSAY

BORROWED EYE

PHOTOGRAPHS & WRITING: VIVEK VERMA

WHY THE GREATEST THREAT TO YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY ISN'T YOUR CAMERA, YOUR COMPETITION, OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE—IT'S SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE'S VISION.

THE QUIET CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

There is a tender moment in almost every photographer's life that rarely gets spoken about. It doesn't arrive when we buy our first camera, get our first photograph published or exhibited, or win our first award. In fact, it usually arrives much later, after years of learning, travelling, practising and improving.

At this stage of our photography journey, our photographs have never been better. The compositions are stronger. The editing is refined. We understand light, colour and timing. We receive appreciation from peers. Perhaps our work has even been recognised in exhibitions or competitions.

Yet, despite all this progress, an unsettling question begins to emerge - "Why do my photographs feel strangely familiar?" Not familiar because they resemble our earlier work. Familiar because they resemble everyone else's.

We stand before extraordinary landscapes only to make photographs that have already been made thousands of times. We wander through cities searching for originality while subconsciously recreating images we admired on social media at other times. We convince ourselves that we are expressing our vision, when in reality we are often repeating visual decisions that probably originated in someone else's mind.

It is one of the great paradoxes of contemporary photography. Never before have photographers had access to so much inspiration. Never before has genuine originality felt so difficult.

THE BIRTH OF A BORROWED EYE

Every artist begins by borrowing. A painter studies the masters. A musician imitates melodies. A writer unconsciously echoes authors they admire.

Photography is no different. We all begin by imitation because imitation is one of humanity's oldest learning mechanisms. The problem is not that we borrow. The problem is that many of us forget to stop somewhere along this journey and imitation quietly changes its very purpose. It stops being a bridge towards discovering our own visual language and slowly becomes our destination.

We begin chasing photographs rather than experiences. Locations rather than stories. Recognition rather than curiosity. Validation rather than expression. Without noticing it, we no longer photograph what genuinely moves us. We photograph what we have learned is supposed to impress or get recognition through awards or exhibitions.

This is what I call The Borrowed Eye. It is not the inability to create. It is the gradual replacement of personal perception with inherited perception.





The Borrowed Eye does not prevent us from making beautiful photographs. In fact, it often helps us make technically excellent ones and that is precisely why it is so difficult to recognise.

THE MOST DANGEROUS SUCCESS

There is an uncomfortable truth that every mature photographer eventually encounters. It is entirely possible to become exceptionally good at making photographs that are not entirely our own. This is the greatest danger – not failure, but the success itself. Because failure forces reflection. Success often rewards repetition.

Imagine a photograph that receives thousands of likes or wins an award. Naturally, we make another one. It also performs well. Soon we have developed what appears to be a style.

But is it truly a style? Or is it simply a pattern that has been positively reinforced by an audience?

There is an important distinction here. A style grows from repeated ways of seeing. A formula grows from repeated ways of succeeding. Style emerges from authenticity. Formula from validation. From the outside they can look almost identical. From the inside they are worlds apart.

WHY WE ALL BECOME VICTIMS

It is tempting to believe that photographers lose originality because they lack imagination.

Psychology suggests something very different. The human brain evolved to conserve effort. Rather than analysing every decision from first principles, it relies on mental shortcuts and patterns that have generally worked before.

These shortcuts are incredibly useful in everyday life. They help us make rapid decisions without becoming mentally exhausted.

In creative work, however, the same shortcuts quietly become invisible constraints. They encourage us to trust what appears popular. To follow recognised authorities. To avoid disagreement. To seek evidence that confirms our existing beliefs.

None of these tendencies make us weak photographers. They simply make us human. The challenge is not eliminating these biases. The challenge is recognising when they begin making artistic decisions on our behalf. Because the moment we stop questioning why we make a photograph is often the moment someone else's vision begins quietly directing our own.

THE HIDDEN ARCHITECTS OF OUR VISION

SOCIAL PROOF: *"If everyone photographs it, it must be worth photographing."*

When many people appear to value something, our minds naturally assume it must be valuable, that's social proof. It is immensely useful in everyday life, helping us choose restaurants, hotels and products. But creativity obeys different rules.

Popularity is evidence that something has been appreciated. It is not evidence that it is the only thing worth appreciating. Every trend follows the same life cycle. Originality becomes influence. Influence becomes

repetition. Repetition becomes conformity. The irony is almost poetic. The very photographs that once broke conventions eventually become the conventions future photographers feel obliged to follow. Perhaps this explains why some of the most visually spectacular places on Earth now produce surprisingly predictable photographs. The problem has never been the landscape. It is that thousands of photographers arrive already knowing what they are supposed to see.

AUTHORITY BIAS

"Surely the masters know better than I do."

Every photographer needs mentors. Books have shaped us. Workshops have accelerated our learning. Judges have challenged our standards. Great photographers expand what we believe photography can become. Influence is not the enemy. Blind obedience is.

Somewhere between admiration and imitation lies a subtle psychological trap. We stop asking - "What does this scene demand of me?" and begin asking, "What would my favourite photographer do here?" Slowly, opinions harden into rules. Golden hour becomes "golden rule". Minimalism becomes "fine art". Black and white becomes "classy". Razor-sharp becomes "professional". The rule of thirds becomes sacrosanct.

Most of these ideas contain established principles and wisdom. But, none of them are universal truths. The greatest artists in history rarely became influential by following existing rules. They became influential because they questioned them.

Pablo Picasso rejected centuries of single-point perspective to develop Cubism, fundamentally changing how reality could be represented on canvas. Likewise, Claude Monet abandoned the polished conventions of academic painting in favour of loose brushwork and fleeting light, giving birth to Impressionism. Neither artist achieved greatness by conforming to the accepted standards of their time; they did so by redefining them.

Today's unconventional experiment may become tomorrow's accepted visual language. The purpose of studying great photographers is therefore not to reproduce their vision. It is to understand their curiosity, their discipline and most importantly, a relentless willingness to question accepted truths.

Vision cannot be borrowed. It can only be discovered. And discovery has always demanded one thing that no workshop, camera or competition can provide – the courage to trust your own eyes.

CONFIRMATION BIAS

"I already know what makes a good photograph."

There is a curious stage in every artist's journey. The beginner believes they know very little. The experienced photographer begins to realise how much there is still to discover. Somewhere between those two stages lies the most dangerous place of all. The moment we become convinced that we have finally understood photography. Confirmation bias encourages us to seek photographs that reinforce our existing beliefs while overlooking equally compelling work that challenges them.

Perhaps we decide that dramatic light is essential. Or that emotion matters more than technique. Or that minimalism is superior to complexity. Each belief contains a measure of truth. The problem begins when truth quietly becomes certainty.

The landscape photographer stops appreciating intimate details. The documentary photographer avoids abstraction. The fine art photographer begins to overlook the extraordinary beauty of simplicity.

Gradually, photography becomes less about discovery and more about confirmation. We stop asking - "What is this scene trying to tell me?" and begin asking, "How can I make this scene fit my style I am already familiar with?". Growth rarely ends because photographers stop learning. It ends because they stop allowing themselves to be surprised.

THE BIAS WE RARELY TALK ABOUT

There is another force hiding beneath all the others. That bias has its origin in our fears. Not fear of failure, as most photographers eventually accept it. It is the fear that our own way of seeing may not be enough.

If we photograph what genuinely fascinates us, what if nobody else cares? If we abandon trendy aesthetics, won't we become invisible? If we spend five years on a deeply personal project, what if it never receives the recognition?

These are frightening questions. And so we make a compromise. A very human compromise. We keep a little of ourselves and a little of everyone else. That compromise feels safe.

But over time, safety becomes habit. Habit becomes style. Eventually we forget where our own voice ends and borrowed influences begin.

Perhaps the greatest danger is not imitating another photographer, consciously or sub-consciously. It is becoming so successful at it that we mistake imitation for our identity.

That sentence deserves to be read twice. Because it explains why originality is not primarily a technical challenge. It is an emotional one. It requires taking the very risks our fear works hardest to prevent.

WHEN RECOGNITION QUIETLY BECOMES DIRECTION

Photography awards occupy a unique place within our community. At their best, they celebrate excellence. They introduce us to remarkable photographers we might otherwise never discover. They preserve standards. They

inspire us to improve. They matter. But they also create an unintended psychological consequence. Every winning image becomes a reference point. Photographers naturally study previous winners. They notice recurring aesthetics that get rewarded. And without consciously intending to, future submissions begin drifting toward those visual languages.

Judges, too, are human. Familiar excellence is often easier to recognise than unfamiliar brilliance. This is not a criticism of judging. It is simply another expression of human psychology.

The healthiest competitions understand this responsibility. They recognise that their greatest contribution is not merely rewarding technical perfection. It is encouraging visual diversity. Because every time a competition rewards genuine originality, it quietly empowers thousands of photographers to trust their own eyes.

As photographers, however, we also carry responsibility. Awards should refine our craft. They should never define our vision. The moment recognition begins determining what we choose to see, we have unknowingly exchanged artistic freedom for external validation. Recognition is a wonderful travelling companion, but it is a dangerous navigator.

RECLAIMING YOUR OWN VISION: METACOGNITION

If the Borrowed Eye develops gradually, almost invisibly, then reclaiming our own vision cannot be a single act of rebellion. It must become a lifelong practice of awareness. Psychologists call this metacognition—the ability to observe our own thinking while we are thinking.





For photographers, it is something even more intimate. It is learning to observe the photographers behind the photograph. Every photograph is created twice. First in the mind and then in the camera. If we never examine the first process, we can never fully understand the second. Perhaps that is why some photographers continue producing technically remarkable work while quietly feeling emotionally disconnected from it.

INFLUENCE OR IMITATION

One of the greatest misunderstandings about originality is the belief that original artists reject influence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every significant photographer has been shaped by those who came before. The difference lies in what they borrowed. They borrowed discipline, persistence, curiosity, integrity, courage, but refused to borrow their outcomes.

A photographer studies vision—not to reproduce it, but to discover where their own begins. There is a simple question worth carrying throughout your photographic life: Am I borrowing another photographer's answers, or am I borrowing their questions? One leads to imitation. The other leads to discovery.

BEST PRACTICES

The Borrowed Eye evolves with changing technologies, changing trends and shifting ambitions. The goal, therefore, is not perfection. The goal is vigilance. Here are five practices that have nothing to do with cameras, yet may profoundly change the photographs we make.

1. PHOTOGRAPH WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

Several times each year, photograph with a single intention: none of these images will be posted, submitted, judged, or expected to prove anything. Remove recognition from the equation and simply observe what draws your attention. More often than not, that is where your most authentic creative voice quietly resides.

2. INTERRUPT YOUR OWN HABITS

Every photographer develops habits—favourite focal lengths, familiar subjects, predictable compositions, and a signature editing style. While these routines make us efficient, they can also make us blind. Every so often, ask yourself: If I were photographing this scene for the very first time, what would I notice that I have stopped seeing? Creativity rarely vanishes all at once; it quietly settles into comfort.



3. FEED YOUR EYES BEYOND PHOTOGRAPHY

A photographer who studies only photography gradually limits the vocabulary of their imagination. Read literature, visit museums, watch films for their rhythm, listen to music attentively, study architecture and sculpture, or simply walk through nature without a camera. The richest photographic ideas often emerge from experiences far removed from photography itself. The broader your influences, the more unmistakably your photographs become your own.

4. LEARN TO RECOGNISE THE WARNING SIGNS

The Borrowed Eye rarely announces itself; it appears in subtle thoughts about trends, judges, algorithms, or what others might prefer. These moments do not make you a lesser photographer; they simply reveal that external expectations have entered the creative process. Notice them without judgment, then return to the only question that truly matters: What am I trying to say?



5. BUILD PROJECTS, NOT COLLECTIONS

Single photographs capture moments; long-term projects cultivate understanding. As recurring themes, questions, and emotions emerge over time, they reveal not only what we are drawn to, but why. An artistic voice is rarely found in style or editing—it is discovered through sustained attention to what repeatedly calls us back.



THE PHOTOGRAPHER YOU WILL BECOME

Imagine meeting yourself twenty years from now—not with better equipment or more awards, but after two decades of making photographs with unwavering honesty. The advice would likely be simple: Trust your own eyes earlier.

Photography is often described as the art of seeing, but perhaps it is equally the art of unlearning—unlearning expectations, borrowed certainties, and the quiet belief that our work must resemble what has already been celebrated before it deserves to exist. Recognition fades, technology evolves, and trends come and go, but your way of seeing is the only creative compass that grows more precise the longer you trust it.

BEYOND THE BORROWED EYE

Every generation inherits a visual language. Every meaningful photographer eventually learns to question it—not because tradition lacks value, but because every tradition was once an act of courageous originality.

Study the masters. Learn your craft. Seek critique. Enter competitions. Celebrate recognition. But never allow any of them to become your compass. Because cameras record light, only photographers create meaning.

Every mountain has been photographed. Every famous street has been explored. Yet no one will ever stand before those places carrying your memories, your questions, your joys, your losses, and your way of seeing. Your way of seeing is your greatest artistic edge. So whenever you raise the camera to your eye, ask yourself one question: “Am I making the photograph I have learned to admire or the photograph that only I could have made?”

The first may earn recognition. The second will reveal your voice. And when everything else has changed – technology, trends, algorithms, and taste – in the end, your greatest masterpiece will never be a single photograph. It will be the way you learned to see and trust your own voice.

ISABELLA TABACCHI









Isabella Tabacchi is an award-winning nature photographer based in Bologna, Italy. Born in Carpi in 1992, she has spent the past decade traveling extensively to photograph remote and diverse landscapes across the world. A Hasselblad Heroine and DJI Creator, she has received major honors including International Landscape Photographer of the Year, Xposure Awards, and Milky Way Photographer of the Year. Her work has been featured in BBC, National Geographic, Forbes, The Times, and she has served as a juror for prestigious international photography awards.





INTERVIEW

ANDRE MAGARAO

Some photographers capture action. Others capture speed. But few can make a fraction of a second feel cinematic. Over more than a decade, Andre has built an unmistakable visual language where precision, timing, and masterful lighting transform moments of athletic performance into unforgettable images. From skateparks and oceans to championship golf courses, his work has graced over 60 magazine covers, earned hundreds of international publications, and received some of the industry's highest honours. Yet behind every dramatic frame lies a journey shaped by curiosity, discipline, and an unwavering pursuit of light. In this conversation, he reflects on that journey and the philosophy that continues to drive his work.

INTERVIEW BY VIVEK VERMA

1. You actively ride and spend time around sports like mountain biking, skateboarding and kiteboarding yourself. How has being part of those communities changed the way athletes trust you, compared with someone photographing from the outside?

I think photographing action sports is much more of a team effort than most people realize. The best images usually happen when both the athlete and the photographer understand each other's worlds.

Because I ride mountain bikes, skateboard, and kiteboard myself, I understand the limitations of the sport as well as the possibilities. At the same time, the athletes I've worked with understand what I'm trying to achieve creatively. That mutual understanding creates a level of trust that makes it possible to push for something special.

For example, in mountain biking we might arrive at a trail that isn't particularly exciting from a riding perspective, but the light or the background is incredible. In those moments, the rider has to trust that I can see a photograph they don't yet see, and be willing to work with me to create something unique. Other times it's the opposite—the rider is attempting an amazing trick, but the light or the location isn't doing us any favors. Then it's my job to find a different angle, use lighting, or build a composition that elevates the moment.

The strongest action photographs come from that collaboration. It's not just about documenting what happened; it's about two people combining their expertise to create an image that's more compelling than either of us could make alone. In a way it's all about being part of the community rather than observing it from the outside. You're not just documenting the sport—you understand its culture, its rhythm, and the people who make it special.



2. Looking back at your Kiteboarding and Surfing projects, has there ever been a photograph that mattered deeply to you but never found a client, publication or audience? What made you keep believing in it?

Absolutely. One of the challenges of photographing kiteboarding and surfing is that everything depends on the weather. The most unique conditions don't happen when it's convenient—they happen when nature decides they happen. If I waited for a client assignment every time, I would miss many of the photographs I'm most proud of.

There have been plenty of times when I saw a rare combination of wind, light, waves, or weather and decided to go shoot simply because I knew the opportunity might not come again for years. Some of those images were never published or commissioned, but I don't regret making them. They represent moments that simply couldn't be recreated.

Believing in that work is probably the hardest part of being a photographer—much harder than taking the picture itself. It's difficult to invest your time, energy, and money into something without knowing if anyone will ever see it or value it. But I've always believed that if you only shoot when someone is paying you, you'll never create your most personal work.

In the end, I keep doing it because I genuinely love it. That passion has always been the driving force behind my photography, long before there was a client or an audience.

3. Many people see only the final image. Can you tell us about one photograph from your Bike or Skateboarding work that carried a personal cost, whether physical, emotional, financial or simply weeks of persistence that nobody would guess from looking at it?

I don't think there's just one photograph. Almost every image I make in action sports has a story behind it that people never see.

People usually see the final frame, but they don't see what it takes to get there. In mountain biking, simply reaching the location can be a challenge. Before e-bikes became common, you had to be a strong rider just to carry cameras, lenses, flashes, and batteries up the mountain. Even today, getting to the right location often requires riding technical trails with a backpack full of expensive equipment that was never designed for that environment.

Kiteboarding is another level. To create the images I want, I often use powerful flashes in the ocean, surrounded by salt water, wind, and flying sand. If you read the equipment manuals, they basically tell you not to do any of the things I do. Every shoot feels like I'm asking my gear to survive conditions it was never built for.

The mess doesn't end when the shoot is over, either. I'm convinced there's still sand from countless kiteboarding trips hidden somewhere in my Pelican cases, my car, and probably even on Delta airplanes after years of traveling with my gear. After a motocross shoot, no matter how much I clean everything, I still find dust in my house days later.

If you analyze it logically, photographing action sports doesn't make much sense. It's physically

demanding, hard on your equipment, expensive, and completely dependent on the weather. But that's also what makes it so rewarding. The challenge is part of the experience, and despite everything, I still genuinely love doing it.

4. Every long-term photographer goes through periods where the excitement fades. Have you ever reached a point where you questioned whether you wanted to continue photographing action sports? What helped you find your way back?

I don't think the excitement has ever faded for me. If anything, I still get excited every time I see great light or watch an athlete attempt something I've never seen before. That curiosity is still there.

What has changed is the industry. When I started, it was easier to build a career based purely on photography. Today, the market is different. Brands expect photographers to create videos, social media content, and tell stories across multiple platforms. Making a living as only a photographer has become much more challenging.

What has kept me going is the community. Action sports attract incredibly passionate, creative, and adventurous people. I've been fortunate to build friendships with athletes, filmmakers, brands, and other photographers all over the world. Being surrounded by people who genuinely love what they do makes it hard not to stay inspired.

At the end of the day, I still enjoy the process just as much as the final image. As long as I have the chance to spend time outdoors, work with talented athletes, and create something that



didn't exist before, I don't see myself losing that excitement anytime soon.

5. Your photographs often celebrate moments of achievement, but sport also contains failure, injury and disappointment. Has spending years documenting athletes changed the way you personally deal with failure in your own life?

Absolutely. One of the greatest privileges of my job is having a front-row seat to what professional athletes go through, and it has definitely changed the way I think about failure.

Over the years, I've watched these sports evolve. In many ways they've become much safer for recreational participants, but at the highest level

they've also become more demanding and, in some cases, more dangerous. Part of that is simply because the level keeps progressing, but I also think social media has played a role. Spectacular tricks and bigger risks naturally attract more attention, which can push the limits of what's possible.

What I've learned is that success is built on an incredible amount of failure that almost nobody sees. As a photographer, I'm often there for the crashes, the injuries, the missed attempts, and the frustrating days that happen long before the winning moment or the magazine cover.

Being around that has taught me the value of persistence, discipline, and routine. The best athletes aren't successful because everything

goes their way—they're successful because they keep showing up after setbacks. Watching that year after year has definitely influenced how I deal with challenges in my own life. Whenever something doesn't go as planned, I'm much more likely to see it as part of the process rather than the end of the story.

6. If you had to photograph an entire personal project with just one lens and one lighting setup, what would you choose, and why has that combination stayed with you over the years?

If I had to choose just one lens and one lighting setup, it would be a 70–200mm lens and off-camera flashes. I've always been drawn to longer lenses because of the way they compress a scene. They simplify the background, isolate the athlete, and create a cleaner image. That compression also helps make the lighting feel more natural. Since I use off-camera flashes a lot, a longer focal length makes it easier to hide the light source within the environment, so the final image feels dramatic without immediately revealing how it was created.

Off-camera lighting has become such a defining part of my work that it would be impossible to leave it behind. It allows me to shape the scene instead of simply documenting it. Whether it's bringing out the texture of water in kiteboarding, adding depth to a mountain bike trail, or separating a skateboarder from a dark background, light becomes another storytelling tool.

7. Winning recognition such as Sports Photographer of the Year inevitably changes how others see your work. Did it change your own expectations of yourself in ways that were helpful, or sometimes difficult?

Awards are a tremendous honor, and I'm incredibly grateful for the recognition. But they don't really change who you are as a photographer. The day after winning, you still have to wake up, pack your gear, chase the weather, solve problems on location, and try to make a photograph that is better than the last one. That part never changes.

The biggest difference is probably that more people become aware of your work. You receive more emails, more opportunities, and perhaps people trust your work a little more before they've even met you. That's certainly valuable. Internally, though, I try not to let awards define my expectations.

If you start creating images just to win the next award, I think you lose something important. I've always tried to focus on making photographs that excite me and that tell a story. Sometimes those images receive recognition, and sometimes they don't. At the end of the day, the satisfaction still comes from creating a photograph I'm proud of—not from the trophy that might follow.



THE SATISFACTION STILL COMES FROM CREATING A PHOTOGRAPH I'M PROUD OF, NOT FROM THE TROPHY THAT MIGHT FOLLOW.



8. This issue is themed "Altitude." Beyond physical height, has there been a moment in your career when you felt you had finally reached a personal "altitude", only to discover there was another climb waiting beyond it.

Absolutely. In fact, one of the things I've learned is that every time you think you've reached a new level, you often find yourself starting from the bottom again.

People outside of action sports sometimes assume that success in one discipline automatically translates to another. In reality, it rarely works that way. The skills certainly transfer—I approach mountain biking, skateboarding, surfing, and kiteboarding with the same understanding of light, timing, and storytelling—but the communities are different.

For example, having photographed dozens of kiteboarding magazine covers doesn't automatically earn you credibility in skateboarding. Skateboarders want to see great skateboard photography. Mountain bikers want to know you understand mountain biking. Every new sport requires you to earn trust and prove yourself all over again.

In a way, that's what keeps the job interesting. Every new community, every new athlete, and every new discipline is another mountain to climb. It reminds me that there isn't a single summit in this profession. There are always new stories to tell, new people to earn the respect of, and new challenges that push you to become a better photographer.



**SUCCESS IS BUILT ON AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF FAILURE THAT ALMOST NOBODY SEES.
THE BEST ATHLETES AREN'T SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE EVERYTHING GOES THEIR WAY—THEY'RE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE THEY KEEP SHOWING UP AFTER SETBACKS.**

 [andre_magarao](#)

LEGAL EDGE

WHO OWNS YOUR PHOTOGRAPH?

Why every photographer should understand the difference between authorship and ownership of copyright. They are not the same.

PHOTOGRAPHS & WRITING: VIVEK VERMA

Every photographer has said it or at least thought it: *"I took the picture, so it belongs to me."* Most of the time, that instinct is correct. But it is also one of the most common oversimplifications photographers make about copyright.

The confusion usually begins because two words are casually used as though they mean exactly the same thing: author and owner. Outside the legal world, the distinction rarely matters. In everyday conversation, if someone created something, we naturally assume they own it too. Photography, however, isn't always that straightforward.

Understanding the difference won't make you a lawyer, nor does it require reading pages of legislation. It simply makes you a more informed photographer, the one who knows when to pause before signing a contract, accepting a commission or agreeing to terms that could affect the future of your work. Perhaps more importantly, it helps replace assumptions with questions.

THE PERSON BEHIND THE CAMERA

Let's begin with the easier of the two ideas. The author of a photograph is, quite simply, the person who created it. The one who made the creative decisions that resulted in the image. That includes deciding what to photograph, choosing the composition, selecting the moment to release the shutter and shaping the final visual expression. Whether the image is captured on a medium-format camera, a smartphone or a drone, authorship is fundamentally tied to creative creation.

Think of authorship as answering one simple question: Who made this photograph? In many situations, the answer is obvious. You planned the shoot, pressed the shutter, and created that image, so you are its author. For most photographers, that's where the story ends, or so they believe.

CREATION AND CONTROL ARE NOT ALWAYS THE SAME THING

Now consider a different question. Who has the legal right to decide how that photograph is used, licensed, sold or reproduced?

Surprisingly, that answer isn't always the same person. This is where ownership enters the picture. Ownership concerns control rather than creation. It determines who can commercially exploit the work, grant permissions, assign rights or enforce them against copyright infringement.

In many cases, the author and the owner are indeed the same person. Independent photographers creating personal projects will often occupy both roles simultaneously. But not always. And that "not always" is where many photographers encounter unexpected troubles coming as surprises.

WHEN THE TWO PATHS DIVERGE

Imagine a photographer employed by a magazine or newspaper. The photographer captures remarkable images throughout the year. No one disputes who created those photographs. They remain the author. Yet the rights associated with those images may belong, wholly or partly, to the employer, depending on the employment agreement and the laws of that country.

Now imagine a commercial photographer hired for a large advertising campaign. The client may ask for complete ownership of the final photographs as part of the agreement. Elsewhere, a stock agency might require certain licensing rights before letting you upload that image on their website. A publisher may request broader rights than you initially realised. A production company might include contractual clauses governing future use of commissioned work.

Each of these situations is different. Each depends on the agreement involved and the law that applies. But they all illustrate the same principle: Creating a photograph and controlling its rights are not necessarily the same thing.

THE CONTRACT THAT QUIETLY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Photographers often devote enormous attention to preparing for a shoot. Yet the few pages they sign before the assignment frequently receive the least attention. That contract may contain just a handful of sentences or sometimes merely a simple drafting tweak determining who owns what after the shoot is over.

Sometimes those clauses are entirely fair and reasonable. Sometimes they simply clarify expectations. Sometimes they transfer rights far more extensively than the photographer anticipated.

The point isn't to distrust every client. Most professional relationships depend on clear agreements and mutual understanding. The point is simply to know what you're agreeing to before your signature turns assumptions into obligations.

LICENSING ISN'T LOSING OWNERSHIP

Another misconception deserves attention. Many photographers hesitate to license their work because they fear they are "giving it away."

Usually, they are not. A licence is often better understood as permission rather than surrender. It allows someone else to use your photographs under agreed conditions while ownership may remain exactly where it was.

Some licences are narrow. Some are broad. Some are exclusive. Others are non-exclusive. Each arrangement serves a different purpose. The important lesson is that granting permission and transferring ownership are not automatically the same act. Understanding that distinction can give photographers greater confidence in negotiating how their images are used.

WHY THIS MATTERS EVEN IF YOU'RE JUST STARTING OUT

Most photographers don't lose rights because they intended to—they lose them because they never realised they were being negotiated in the first place. It can happen during your very first paid assignment, a magazine commission, a brand collaboration, a competition entry or an agency agreement.

The excitement of seeing your work recognised often overshadows the fine print that determines who controls it afterwards. By the time you discover what you've agreed to, the opportunity to negotiate may already be gone. The best time to understand your rights isn't after success arrives—it's before you sign your first contract.

THERE ISN'T ONE UNIVERSAL ANSWER

One of the greatest challenges in discussing copyright is that photographers often search for a single, universal rule. Unfortunately, none exists.

Copyright principles share many common foundations around the world, but the details vary considerably from one country to another. Employment relationships, commissioned work, contractual assignments, moral rights and other aspects of copyright may be treated differently depending on where you live or where your agreement is governed. That means advice shared on social media, discussed in online forums or confidently offered by fellow photographers may not necessarily apply to your situation.

Whenever rights genuinely matter, it's worth understanding the law that applies where you work and carefully reviewing the agreement in front of you. A few minutes of reading can prevent years of misunderstanding.

A BETTER QUESTION TO ASK

Perhaps photographers have been asking the wrong question all along. Instead of asking, "Do I own this photograph because I took it?" ask yourself, "Am I the author, the owner, or both?" Most of the time, the answer will be reassuring. Occasionally, it may surprise you. And that single distinction can shape the future of your work far more than you realise.

Every photograph begins as an act of creation, but its journey doesn't end with the click of the shutter. It may go on to be published, licensed, exhibited, printed in books, entered into competitions, archived for future generations or passed from one pair of hands to another. Understanding who created the photograph is only part of the story; understanding who controls its rights determines how that story continues.

You don't need to memorise copyright law to become a wiser photographer. You simply need to remember one idea: creating a photograph and controlling its rights are not always the same thing. Carry that thought into every commission, every collaboration and every contract you sign. It may be the most valuable piece of non-photographic advice you'll ever receive—not because it will help you make better pictures, but because it will help you keep control of the life those pictures go on to live long after they leave your camera.

INTERVIEW

KAREN WALLER

INTERVIEW BY VIVEK VERMA

There's something about Karen Waller's work that made picking her for Altitude feel less like a decision and more like a certainty. She started as a painter, and you can still feel that history in every frame, that patience with light, that unwillingness to rush a moment. Raised on the Yorke Peninsula, her connection to landscape isn't borrowed, it's lived in.

What really pulled me in, if I'm honest, is her long exposure ICM work. There's a controlled chaos to it, movement that somehow still feels deliberate, elegant even. I've sat with her images more than once thinking I'd like to get there myself someday, to trust the blur the way she does.

Altitude, for us, was never just about height. It's the vantage point someone earns after years of looking closely. Karen holds strength and fragility in the same frame, and that tension felt exactly right for this issue.



1. You added aerial work over the salt lakes recently — series like Lake Fowler Flow and Salt Works Geometry. What was it like the first time you saw that landscape from the air? Did it change how you felt about the ground-level images you'd already made there?

It was extraordinary to see the salt lakes from the air for the first time. I had spent several years photographing them from ground level, so I thought I knew that landscape intimately, but flying over Yorke Peninsula revealed something entirely different. It felt like entering a whole new world. The lakes became less like places I was standing beside and more like vast, shifting compositions of line, colour, texture and form.

I had long admired the aerial work of notable Australian photographers, and that partly inspired me to look at the landscape in this way. My background in painting also shaped how I responded to it. Artists such as Fred Williams, with his minimal approach to the vast Australian landscape, and John Olsen, who often imagined the land from above, were important influences. Both moved away from the traditional European convention of representing landscape through a fixed horizon, opening ways of seeing Australia that felt more expansive, more abstract and more connected to the character of this place.

I am also conscious that looking at Country from above has deep and continuing significance in the ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent, map and understand Country. While my own work comes from a different cultural position, I recognise that these perspectives form part of a much older relationship with land and place.

After that first flight, I became much less interested in the ground-level images. From the air, the lakes were both abstract and completely real, and that tension really appeals to me. They became painterly and the process became less about making an obvious representational image and more about rhythm, surface, colour and the marks left by water, salt, wind and time.

That perspective gave me a way to represent the Australian landscape in less familiar forms, and to tell new stories about place. There is always a desire in my work to show viewers another way of seeing by revealing something that might surprise them or by gently challenging what they think they know about a landscape.

2. Think of the piece of work you're most proud of, or that got the most attention. What did reaching that point cost you — financially, physically, or in your relationships — that people don't see when they look at the finished image?

That is an interesting question. The image I would like to talk about is titled Tenuous.

It speaks to things that are deeply important to me and is an example of how our work is inextricably connected to our own story and history. There is never really a single starting point but a continuum. Tenuous reflects a lifetime of connection to nature, and also the way loss in nature affects me so profoundly.

The image began with the discovery of a tiny baby bird which had died. The soft feathers blew in the wind, and it was at once heartbreaking and achingly beautiful. It was in this moment that I wanted to honour the brief life of this bird, although the story took time to evolve into the image, Tenuous. I realised that, if I was going to make those images honouring life and death, I had to face a deep grief that often lingered long after the image was made. There is a cost in terms of mental health.

That continuum took its toll in 2025, when we began facing an environmental disaster in the ocean here in South Australia. The algal bloom devastated the entire ecosystem. At first, I could not face it or even look at it what was unfolding because the grief was so intense.



Over time, I did begin to document the deaths of species of sharks and rays, some with two-metre wingspans. You walked along the beach discovering the deaths of the entire ecosystem and witnessing this in disbelief and feeling numb. The algal bloom continues to have an impact. It was very difficult to document, because I felt so impotent and helpless in the process.

Now we are in the early stages of bird flu impacting bird life in South Australia and nationally, and that brings another layer of grief. Environmental grief is overwhelming because it often feels as though there is nowhere for it to go and feel so powerless. My depth of grief exists because of early experiences of being taught to value nature and the environment and this is the continuum I mentioned.

Tenuous is also about how we value life, growing older, how much time we have, and how we choose to use that time. Life is fleeting and we never know how much time we will be given. It is about the importance of connection to nature which is echoed in the hands of my subject Claire, and the feet of the bird.

Grief has played an important role in my work over many years. An early loss became a catalyst for channelling grief into my work. Later, when my dad died, I could not find peace or quiet my mind. It was then that I found that moving into the landscape, being in nature, and using those places as creative inspiration allowed my mind to quieten. I found joy there. When people look at the finished image, they are only seeing one moment. They do not see the whole journey behind it and the lifetime of loving nature, the

losses, the grief, the mental cost, or the long process of finding a way to honour something fragile.

3. Has a body of work you cared about ever been turned down by a gallery, competition, or publication? What did you do with it afterward — shelve it, rework it, keep submitting it elsewhere?

Rejection is part of making work, but that does not mean it is easy. When you enter a competition, submit to a gallery, or put a body of work forward and it does not go anywhere, it can really affect how you feel about the work. There is usually that initial disappointment, and sometimes a period of questioning whether the work is as strong as you thought it was or if it has value.

After that first response, though, rejection often becomes motivating for me. It can push me to look again, to ask what the image or series still needs, and whether there is another way to tell the story. Sometimes that means reworking an image, sometimes it means reshooting, and sometimes it means realising that the original idea still has value but needs more time, distance or a different approach.

I try not to see a rejection as the final word on the work. It may simply mean the work was not right for that particular opportunity, or that it has not fully found its form yet. If the idea continues to stay with me, then I usually take that as a sign that it is worth pursuing further.

4. Has there been a period where you seriously considered stopping photography altogether? What was going on in your life at the time?

There have been many moments when I have questioned whether I should keep going. In

some ways, that happens almost daily. The self-doubt and the comparison with others can become relentless. On the one hand, there is the daily self-doubt sabotaging self-belief, and then, in moments of success, the overwhelming imposter syndrome comes to the fore. It becomes a cycle that is difficult to step outside of.

The other question is whether your work is making a difference. I have to remind myself that revealing the beauty in nature can have an impact on how other people value and see the world around us. And in telling those difficult environmental stories.

The deeper question for me is not only whether I have thought about stopping, but how to overcome those feelings when they arrive. The thing that helps most is the act of creating itself. When I am making work, I move into a space that feels very close to mindfulness. The negative thoughts quieten, and I am simply present with what I am doing. I am in the moment, often hyper-focused, and that act of attention becomes a way through the doubt.

Competitions and external judgement can intensify those feelings. You can enter something and not do well, and that can really affect how you feel about your work. After the initial disappointment, though, that feeling often becomes motivating. It pushes me to look again, to work harder, to rethink, and to keep moving forward. Ultimately, photography and creating are what keep me going. There is something deeply fulfilling about the act itself, especially when it connects me with nature and the landscape. That connection gives me a place to return to when self-doubt becomes loud. It reminds me that the work is not only about success, recognition or outcomes, but about the experience of being present, observing closely, and making something from that connection.



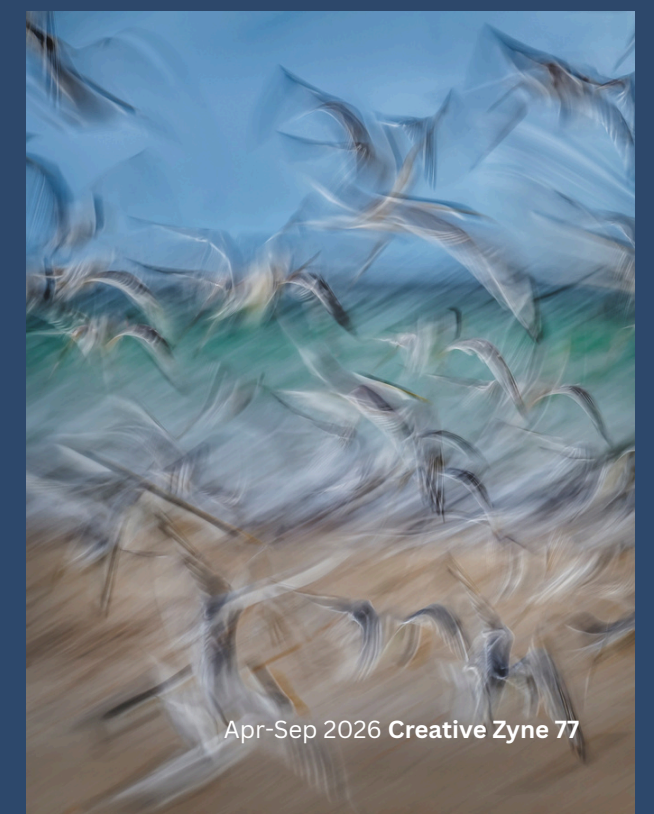
5. Your background in painting keeps coming up as a footnote in past interviews but work like Sandbar Designs or Lime Flow genuinely reads more like a painted study than a photograph. When you're out shooting something like that, are you seeing it through a painter's eye in the moment — or does the "painting" only happen later, in the edit?

The painter's eye is very much part of how I see the world, and I do not think it can be separated from the way I make photographs. One of the things I miss most about painting is the physical act of making a mark with a brush, charcoal or pencil. Those marks are distinctly human in their quality. They can be hesitant, bold or confident, and they often reveal something of the person who made them in that particular moment. In my ICM work, I recreate a sense of the brushstroke through movement and the passage of time. I am still pursuing that desire to create a mark, or a kind of signature, that becomes a portrait of myself in that moment. The camera becomes another tool for mark-making, and the gesture of movement becomes part of the image itself.

In the aerial images of the salt lakes, the landscape itself becomes a collection of nature's painted marks. I am looking at the traces left by water receding, being redirected, and flowing in response to natural elements such as wind, rain and sun. From above, those marks can read like brushstrokes across the surface of the land. In that sense, I am searching for nature's own mark-making and then bringing those qualities to life in post-production. I am not separate from my background in painting, even in the way I process an image. Post-production is a powerful part of that process for me because it allows an intuitive, painterly approach.

6. When you're building a body of work like the salt lakes series, roughly how many images do you shoot for every one that survives into the final edit? What's it like being the person who decides what gets cut?

With the drone, I feel I have the advantage of time. I can compose the image carefully, make small adjustments, and explore slight variations within a particular subject or composition. Sometimes those differences are very subtle, but I may take numerous versions before deciding which one is the most successful. For example, I might take one hundred images with the drone and select only a single frame, because many of them are similar. The process becomes one of looking closely and recognising which small shift in line, balance, colour or form gives the image the greatest strength. Being the person who decides what gets cut is part practical and part intuitive. It requires discipline, because an image may be beautiful in some way but still not be the strongest image.





The success rate also depends on what is happening in the landscape and whether what I am seeing has enough value as an image. With the salt lakes, this is often determined by the amount of rain and how full the lakes are. They are most beautiful when the water is receding, revealing layers of salt, colour and pattern. In those moments, the landscape offers more complexity and more possibilities.

If I am shooting a still life using ICM, the success rate is often much lower because the results are less predictable. The range of images can be much more diverse, and many will not be successful. That unpredictability is part of the process, but it also means the editing stage becomes essential. It is where I must decide which images carry the feeling, movement and atmosphere I was searching for, and which ones I need to leave.



7. You've mentioned a current portrait project about growing older. What's been the hardest part of that project so far — a subject who said no, or someone whose story stayed with you longer than you expected?

Over the years, some subjects have said no, which I understand and accept. Others have agreed and surprised me with the depth of their stories. I have photographed many older people, not only for this project, and what I love most about portrait photography is that everyone has a story worth telling. When both photographer and subject are open and vulnerable, a deeper connection forms, and people often feel comfortable revealing something of themselves.

It is the stories of resilience that deeply affect me and the strength of the human spirit that deeply impacts me. One of the most powerful subjects I have photographed over several years is Rex. Rex was born with a condition called osteogenesis imperfecta, which causes brittle bones. Born with several fractures, Rex had metal rods inserted into his legs to provide support to enable him to walk and his spine was fused. And yet, there is such a passion for life and acceptance of his personal circumstances that is hard not to be inspired. They are the stories that never leave me.

Some of the most moving stories came from a 2015 national Australian project documenting World War II veterans through portraits and interviews.

More than ten years later, many of those subjects have died, but their portraits and stories remain housed in the National War Memorial. I am very proud of my involvement in this project as one of the many volunteers Australia-wide who contributed to this huge undertaking.





Karen Waller is an Adelaide based photographer and artist whose work spans portrait, landscape, nature, and aerial imagery. Raised in rural South Australia, she developed a deep connection to the natural world that continues to shape her aesthetic and subject choices. Her long-standing ties to the Yorke Peninsula remain a central source of inspiration.

Originally trained as a painter, Karen later transitioned to photography, carrying her painterly sensibilities into her visual practice. She has been recognised across multiple photographic genres and currently focuses primarily on personal projects and teaching workshops, particularly in techniques such as ICM.

Karen's work explores the interplay of strength and vulnerability, beauty and discomfort, and the emotional tension between darkness and light. Through both portrait and landscape imagery, she seeks to reveal what is often overlooked and to challenge viewers' perceptions through themes of fragility, loss, and human connection.

 [karenwallerphotography](https://www.instagram.com/karenwallerphotography)

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

NOT MAKING THE WINNERS LIST

Every photographer has felt this: a winners list without your name on it. In this *Altitude* issue, our editor and founder of ZIPA talks candidly about what a jury's silence actually does and doesn't mean.

PHOTOGRAPHS & WRITING: VIVEK VERMA

There's a particular kind of quiet that comes after you've scrolled through a list of winners and your name isn't on it. You tell yourself you're ready for it. Not everyone wins, you knew that going in. Then the list loads and something in your chest tightens anyway. You read the names once. Then again, slower, just in case you missed yours somewhere in the middle. You didn't.

I know this quiet personally. I've sat with it more times than I'd like to count, across more contests than I remember the names of, but 2025 was the year it hit hardest. I sent a body of work I genuinely believed in to one of the bigger international magazine awards and didn't make it into the top hundred. A few months later I entered another major award, the kind with a steep entry fee and an international jury, and didn't get so much as an honorary mention. Between the two, and a handful of smaller ones that same year, I'd spent close to a lakh of rupees in entry fees and had almost nothing to show for it besides a couple of honorary mentions scattered elsewhere. I remember going back to the winning selections afterward, looking for what I was missing, and for a long time not finding an honest answer. I'd close the tab, go quiet for an evening, and eventually end up telling my wife about it, because saying it out loud somehow made it smaller than carrying it alone.

If that tightening feels familiar, you're not overreacting, and you're definitely not alone in it. Nearly every photographer who has entered a contest has sat with this exact ache at least once, the private, strange grief of loving something you made, believing in it

quietly for weeks or months, then watching the world walk past it without a second look.

If I'm honest, it wasn't only grief. Some of it was envy, plain and uncomfortable, toward the names that did make the list. That's not a noble thing to admit in a column about mental health, but pretending it isn't there doesn't make it go away. It just adds shame on top of disappointment. Envy usually means you care. It doesn't mean you're small. What matters is what you do with it next.

What makes it worse is how personal it feels, even though it usually isn't. A photograph isn't just a file you uploaded. It's a piece of how you see, sometimes made on a day that mattered to you in ways the frame alone can't explain. So when it goes unrecognised, your mind doesn't stop at "this didn't place." It reaches further. Maybe the way I see isn't good enough. I've had that exact thought about images I still love today. That thought is unfair to you. It's also completely human. Feel the disappointment before you decide what it means.

This is also where people tend to go wrong, in two opposite directions, and I've made both mistakes myself.

The first is letting the silence convince you the work, or you, simply isn't good enough, and carrying that as fact. That's the wound talking, not the truth. Most awards are judged by committees reaching for consensus, a room full of different tastes trying to agree on a shortlist without a fight. That process rarely rewards the boldest or most personal frame in the pile. It rewards whatever the fewest

people object to. A genuinely original photograph can lose to something safer, again and again, for reasons that have nothing to do with its merit. Add the mood of the room, the theme of that particular edition, how many similar images arrived just before yours, and what looks like a verdict on your work is often closer to a coin landing on its edge.

It was never a verdict on your worth. It took me years of collecting silences before I actually believed that, rather than just repeating it to myself.

The second mistake is quieter, and honestly more tempting. Deciding that because the panel got it "wrong," your work owes no further scrutiny, that the loss is entirely theirs and you can stay exactly as you are. I went through a phase of this too, dismissing every result I didn't like as proof the jury simply didn't get it. That comfort feels good. It isn't honest. Every photographer, however accomplished, has room to sharpen their eye further. That doesn't stop being true just because one panel missed a particular set of images. Both things can sit together. No jury gets to decide that part of you. And your craft still deserves your own honest attention, not because of what any award said, but because that's what caring about the work actually looks like.

So how do you actually tell the two apart? Not by how the result feels in the moment, both sting the same. Look at the feedback instead. If the same note comes back from two or three people whose eye you trust, in different words, on different days, that's signal. It's worth sitting with. If all you have is silence

from one panel on one afternoon, that's noise. It isn't worth sitting with.

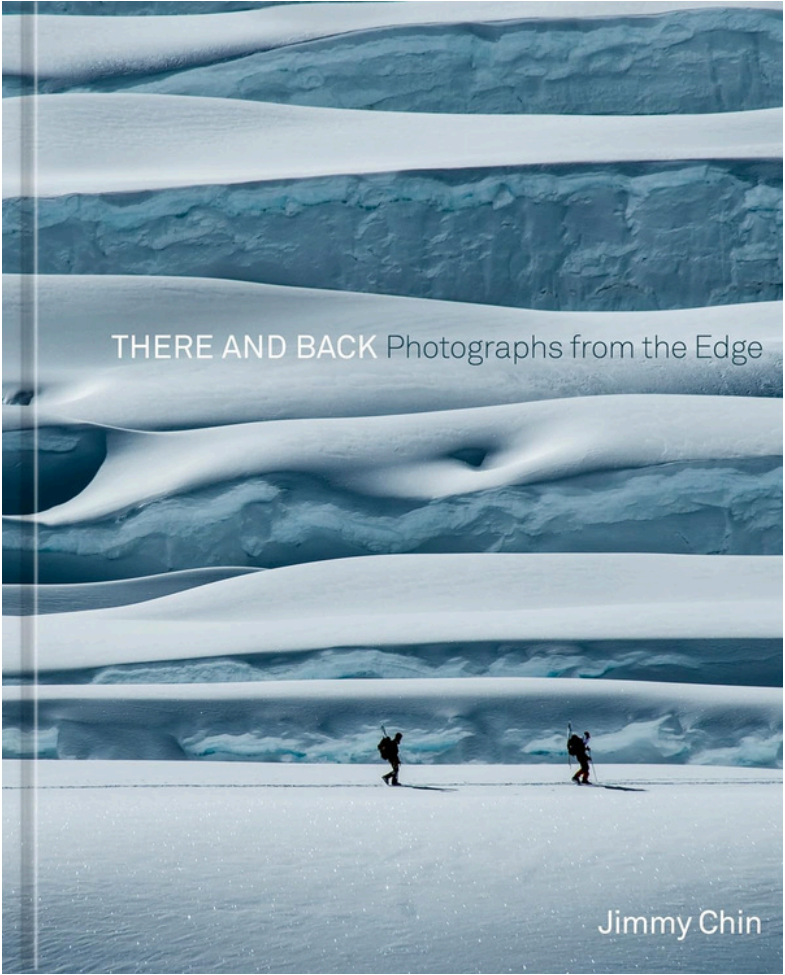
Here's the distinction that actually changed things for me: who was I refining my work for? For a while, without quite noticing, I was chasing whatever style or mood happened to win that particular year. I wasn't improving. I was diluting the very voice that made the work mine in the first place. Award panels reward what a handful of people liked in a given year. They were never a stable map of what makes photography good. I know that now mostly because I chased that map for longer than I should have, and lost time I could have spent actually building an eye.

What eventually helped wasn't another contest. It was going back to photobooks, studying photographers whose work I trusted, and asking people who owed me nothing for the truth rather than reassurance. Give the sting real time to soften. Days, not minutes. Then bring the work back out. Not to please a panel this time, but to ask it your own questions. Is the composition doing what I meant it to do? Would someone who wasn't there understand the story I was trying to tell? What would a mentor I trust, or an editor who owes me nothing, actually say about this? That kind of feedback taught me more in a year than a decade of unexplained rejections ever did, and it let me grow without needing to become someone else's idea of a "winning" photographer.

This is part of why I built ZIPA the way I did. I can't take away the sting of not placing. Nothing can. But I could remove the part that made it worse for years: the silence itself.

If your work doesn't make it there, you'll know why, in the juror's own words. Signal, not noise. One perspective, clearly explained, never mistaken for the final word on your talent.

If you're sitting with this right now, hold all of it at once, the way I've had to learn to. The ache is real, the envy is real, and both deserve to be felt rather than brushed aside. Your work is still worth refining, on your own terms, for your own reasons, regardless of what one list did or didn't say about it. It took me a long time to actually believe that about my own frames, and I still have to remind myself of it some days. If you've carried something like this quietly, I'd like to hear about it. For this column, or just for yourself. You're allowed to still feel it. That doesn't mean you've stopped growing. A list is not a mirror. Stop checking it like one.



BOOK REVIEW

**THERE AND
BACK**

JIMMY CHEN

All Photographs Copyright Jimmy Chin

RATING: 4.7/5
PUBLISHER: TEN SPEED PRESS
PAGES: 320
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DIMENSIONS: 25 X 3 X 31 CM
WEIGHT: 1 KG 920 G

IT WASN'T JUST THE IMAGE THAT HELD MY ATTENTION—IT WAS THE REALIZATION OF WHAT IT MUST HAVE TAKEN TO STAND THERE WITH A CAMERA.

Halfway through *There and Back: Photographs from the Edge*, I found myself lingering on a single photograph far longer than expected. A lone climber suspended high above a vast glacier, the mountain dropping away beneath him into silence. It wasn't just the image that held my attention—it was the realization of what it must have taken to stand there with a camera.

Some photography books impress you with technical brilliance. Others stay with you because of the life lived behind the images. *There and Back* belongs firmly in the latter category.

I read this book slowly—page by page, image by image—often pausing longer than I normally would. Not simply because the photographs are visually striking, but because many of them carry the unmistakable weight of altitude, exposure, and effort.

For those unfamiliar with him, Jimmy Chin is not merely a photographer traveling to remote landscapes. He is a world-class climber, expedition skier, and filmmaker, widely known for co-directing the Academy Award-winning documentary *Free Solo*. That dual identity fundamentally shapes the photographs in this book.

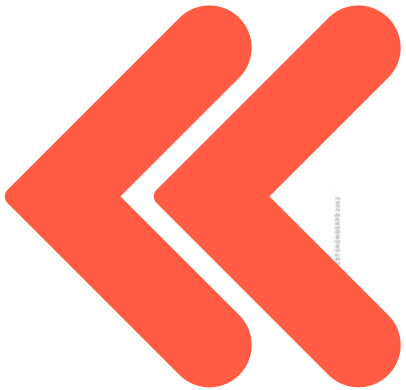
Many of these images exist only because Chin could physically reach places that most photographers simply cannot.

A PHOTOGRAPHER WHO EARNS HIS PERSPECTIVE

As I moved through the book, one idea kept returning: Jimmy Chin earns his vantage points. Some photographs appear to be taken from razor-thin ridgelines where the world falls away on both sides. Others feel as though they were made while hanging from a rope midway up a towering granite wall. A few seem to come from the very tips of summits where the horizon stretches endlessly in every direction. These perspectives fundamentally change the language of mountain photography.

A climber inching across an immense rock face suddenly gives scale to the landscape in a way that empty scenery rarely can. A sweeping Himalayan skyline photographed from an exposed ridge allows the viewer to see the mountains the way climbers experience them—vast, intimidating, and humbling. While turning these pages, I kept returning to the same thought:

This photograph could only exist because the photographer was also a mountaineer. And that authenticity is what gives the images their quiet power.



above: Stephen Koch climbing one of the ice towers near our advanced base camp, Central Kangshuk Glacier, Tibet.



I never imagined it could take two hours to put on ski boots.

But I'd never tried putting on a pair of down, rock-hard boots inside a cramped tent at 28,000ft above sea level. The exertion required felt like doing deadlifts with a plastic bag over my head. I eventually succeeded—a small victory relative to the task at hand. In a few minutes I would step into my bindings and ski down the Lhotse Face of the Everest massif with my good friends Rob and Kit DeLaurentis.

We had spent a sleepless night at Camp 4, having climbed and skied from the summit the day before. Sking the South Pillar route on the Lhotse Face would entail descending a slope listed at 50 degrees for five thousand vertical feet. Conditions were not good below us stretched an expanse of bulletproof blue ice smeared with intermittent bands of wind-hammered snow that was only marginally more forgiving than the ice. Once we dropped over the edge of the South Col, there would be no safe exit until we were at the bottom of the face. We would be going down our way or no way at all.

Our journey to this moment began in spring 2005, when Kit, who had just won her second straight Women's Free Skiing World Championships, called me. Kit had been working toward climbing and skiing the Seven Summits, and only Everest remained on her list. She wanted to know if skiing it was possible. I had summed Everest for six routes on prior trips, and I told her that I thought it was "possible" in terms open to interpretation. That summer, I trained with Kit and her husband, Rob, a legendary skier himself.

By September, Kit, Rob, down-time mountaineer Dave Hahn, and I arrived at Everest, where twelve hand-picked Sherpas had already built a route through the Khumbu icefall to the summit. We were the only team on the mountain during the post-monsoon season.

To ski Everest, you need to leave enough gas in the tank during the ascent to make precise and committing turns on the descent, but the mental discipline necessary to constantly anticipate and make split-second decisions about potentially lethal predicaments is even more important. Catastrophic events like avalanches are certainly a hazard, but understanding and/or averting seemingly insurmountable problems probably poses an even greater risk. When temperatures drop to -40°F, something as insignificant as removing a glove to adjust a jammed zipper could initiate a series of compounding mistakes that might kill you.

We hadn't slept in more than a few hours for three days. After a windy night spent staring at the flagging nylon ceiling of our tent, we double-checked our ski bindings and slid over the edge of the Lhotse Face. Sking our line would require two hours of unrelenting focus. The steel edges of our skis penetrated the ice no more than a millimeter at a time. Every jump turn had to be perfectly executed. If you blew an edge you'd shoot straight down the mountain. We called this apex of terrain a "no fall zone" for obvious reasons.

When we reached the bottom, Kit, Rob, and I became the first Americans to ski from the summit of Everest, and the first ever to ski the South Pillar route. We laughed about spending two months on the mountain to ski the worst run of our lives.

above: Kim Dorian and Morgan Shepley carrying equipment down a steep icefall on the Western Corridor, Mount Everest.

above: Kit DeLaurentis, my wife, and Rob DeLaurentis, Rob's husband, hanging up at 28,000ft to repair the victory line during our ski descent on the southeast ridge of Everest.

THE HUMAN STORY BEHIND THE IMAGES

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That dual identity fundamentally shapes the photographs in this book. Many of these images exist only because Chin could physically reach places that most photographers simply cannot.

WHY THE PHOTOGRAPHS FEEL DIFFERENT

There are many beautiful mountain photographs in the world. Yet Jimmy Chin's images often feel distinct.

The difference lies in access and immersion. Because Chin climbs with elite mountaineers and participates fully in the expeditions he documents, he photographs moments from within the experience rather than from the outside looking in.

Climbers appear as small, determined figures against enormous walls of rock and ice. Their presence transforms the landscape. The mountains are no longer just scenic—they become environments that test human endurance and spirit.

Looking at these images, I was reminded that the photograph is only the final moment of a much longer journey. Most of the story happens before the shutter is ever pressed.

Although *There and Back* is undeniably a photography book, its appeal extends far beyond photography.

Landscape photographers will find inspiration in the light, scale, and perspective of the images. Adventure photographers will appreciate the authenticity of the environments and the proximity to real moments in the mountains.

But even hikers and outdoor enthusiasts with little interest in photography will likely find themselves drawn into these pages.

The photographs capture something many people recognize from their own time in nature—the quiet thrill of standing somewhere high and remote, where the air is thin and the world suddenly feels very large.

THE MOUNTAINS IN THESE IMAGES ARE NOT SIMPLY LANDSCAPES—THEY ARE ENVIRONMENTS THAT TEST HUMAN ENDURANCE AND SPIRIT.

 [jimmychin](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM JIMMY CHIN'S THERE AND BACK

EXTRAORDINARY IMAGES OFTEN REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORT.

Many of Chin's photographs exist because he was willing to climb higher, travel farther, and endure harsher environments than most photographers would.

YOUR PASSIONS OUTSIDE PHOTOGRAPHY CAN SHAPE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY.

Chin's mountaineering ability defines the perspectives that make his images unique.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT ADDS MEANING TO LANDSCAPES.

A tiny climber against a vast wall can transform a scenic photograph into a powerful story about scale, vulnerability, and determination.

AUTHENTICITY COMES FROM IMMERSION.

The deeper you are embedded in the world you photograph, the more truthful your images become.

ADVENTURE FUELS CREATIVITY.

Exploration—whether physical or artistic—often leads to the most memorable work.

SHOULD YOU BUY THIS BOOK?

If you are looking for a technical photography manual filled with lighting diagrams or gear discussions, this is not that kind of book. But if you appreciate photography that grows out of experience, exploration, and a deep connection with the natural world, then *There and Back* is absolutely worth owning.

Personally, I found many of the images in this book deeply inspiring. Some of the most compelling compositions exist precisely because Chin reached vantage points few photographers ever will—knife-edge ridges, exposed summits, and immense vertical faces far above the valley floor. And perhaps that is the quiet lesson this book leaves you with.

It reminds us that sometimes the most remarkable photographs are not simply about chasing beautiful light. Sometimes they begin with a much harder question: How far are you willing to go to see the world differently?

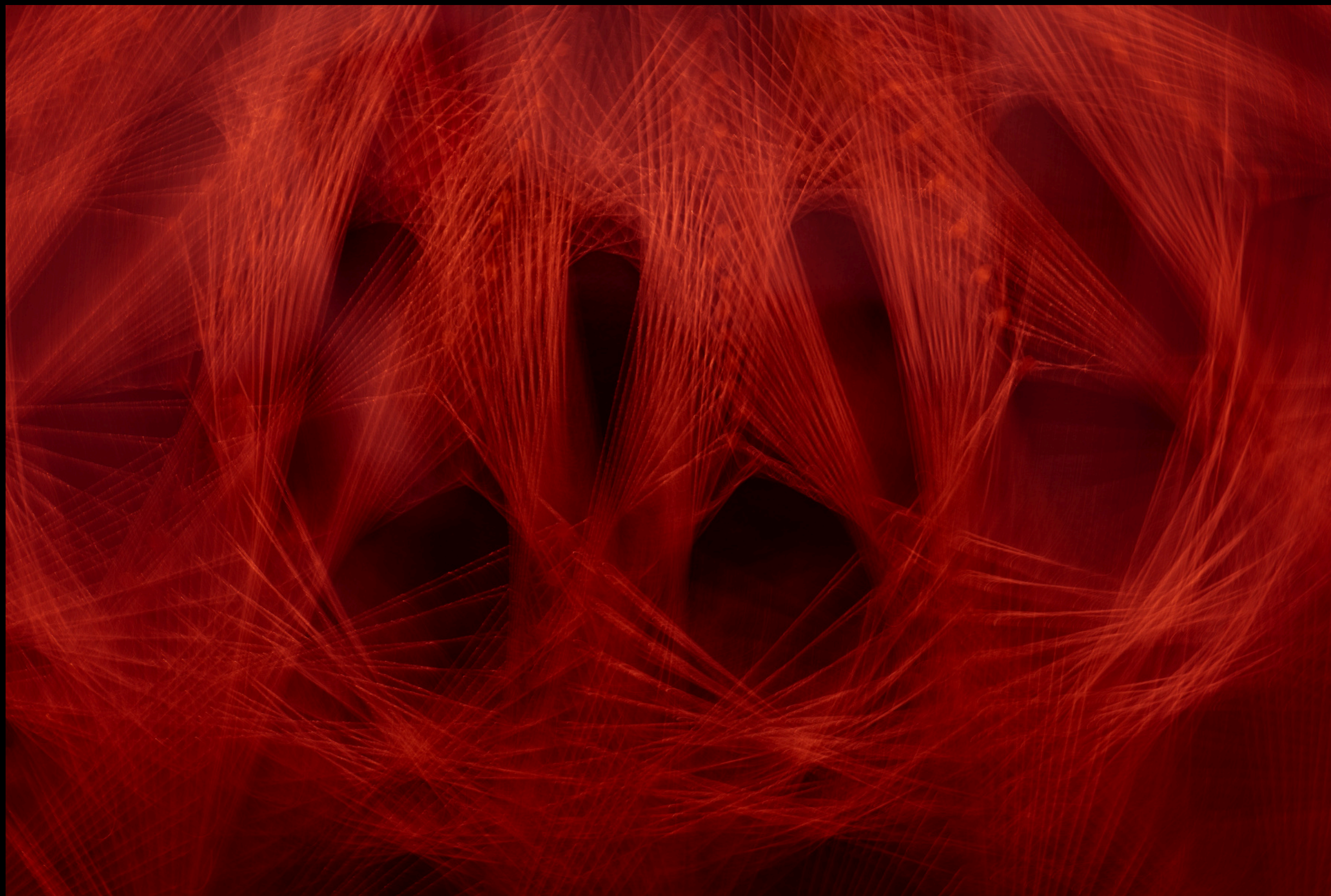
PHOTOGRAPHY SERIES

GETTING ON MY NERVES

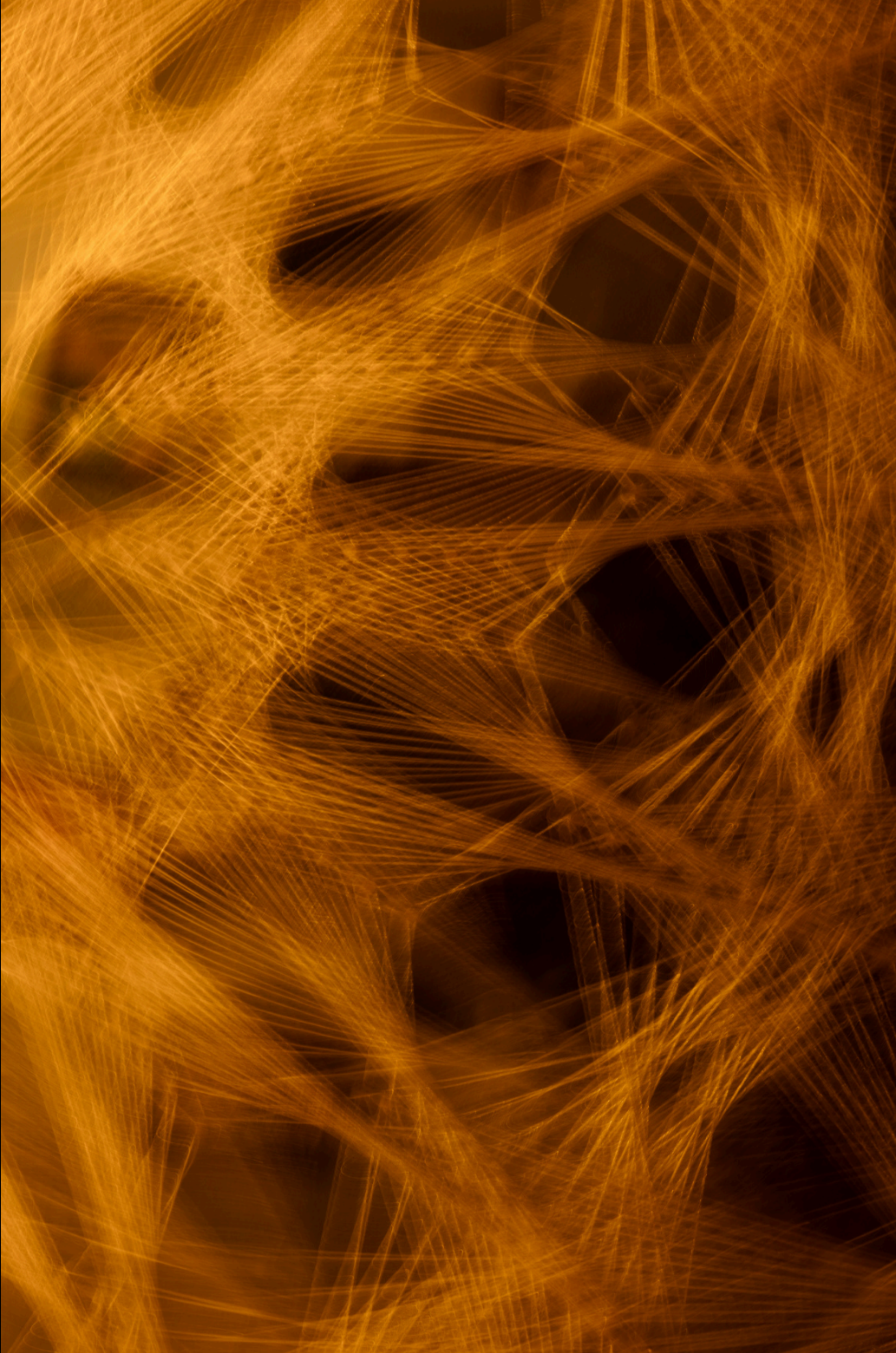
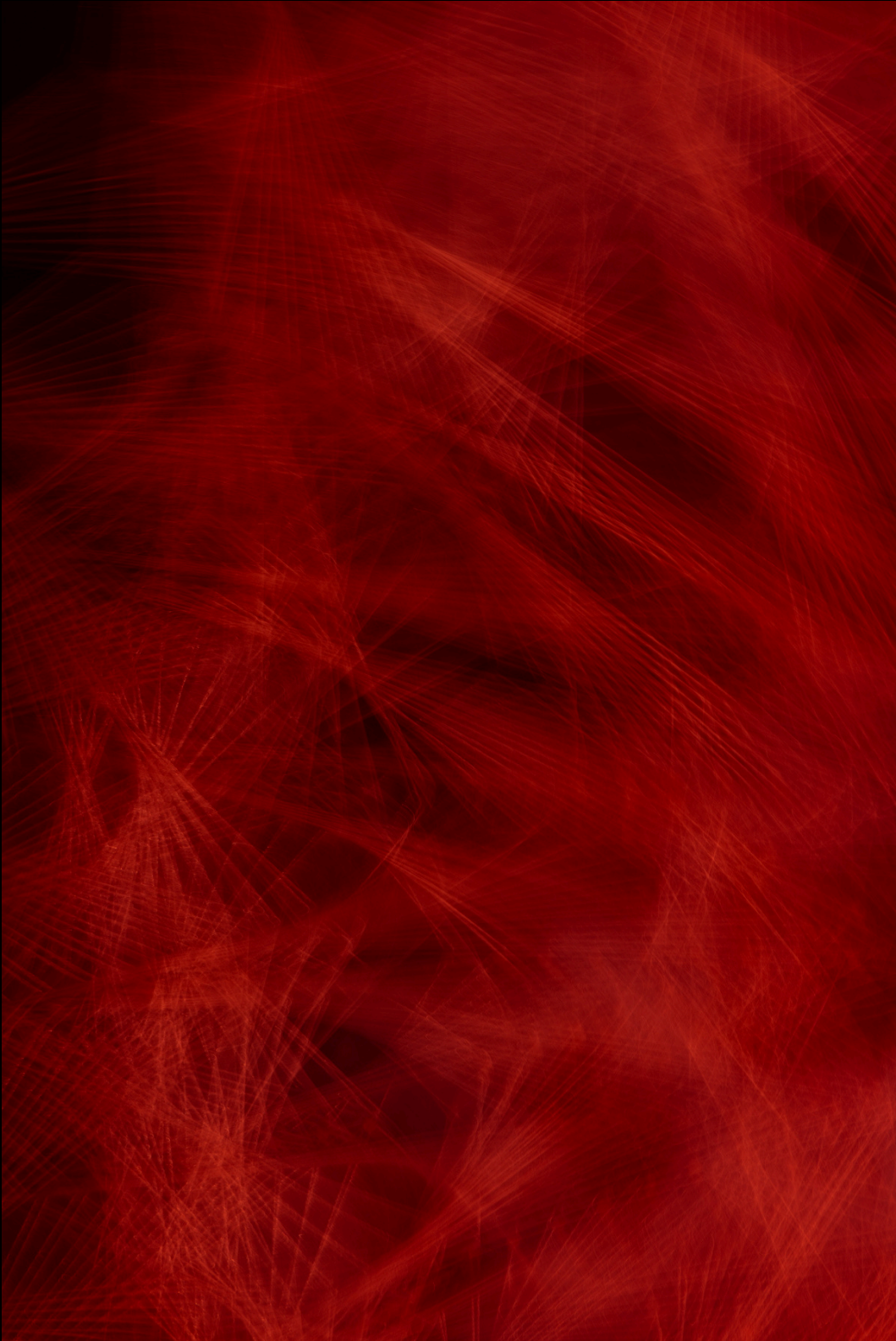
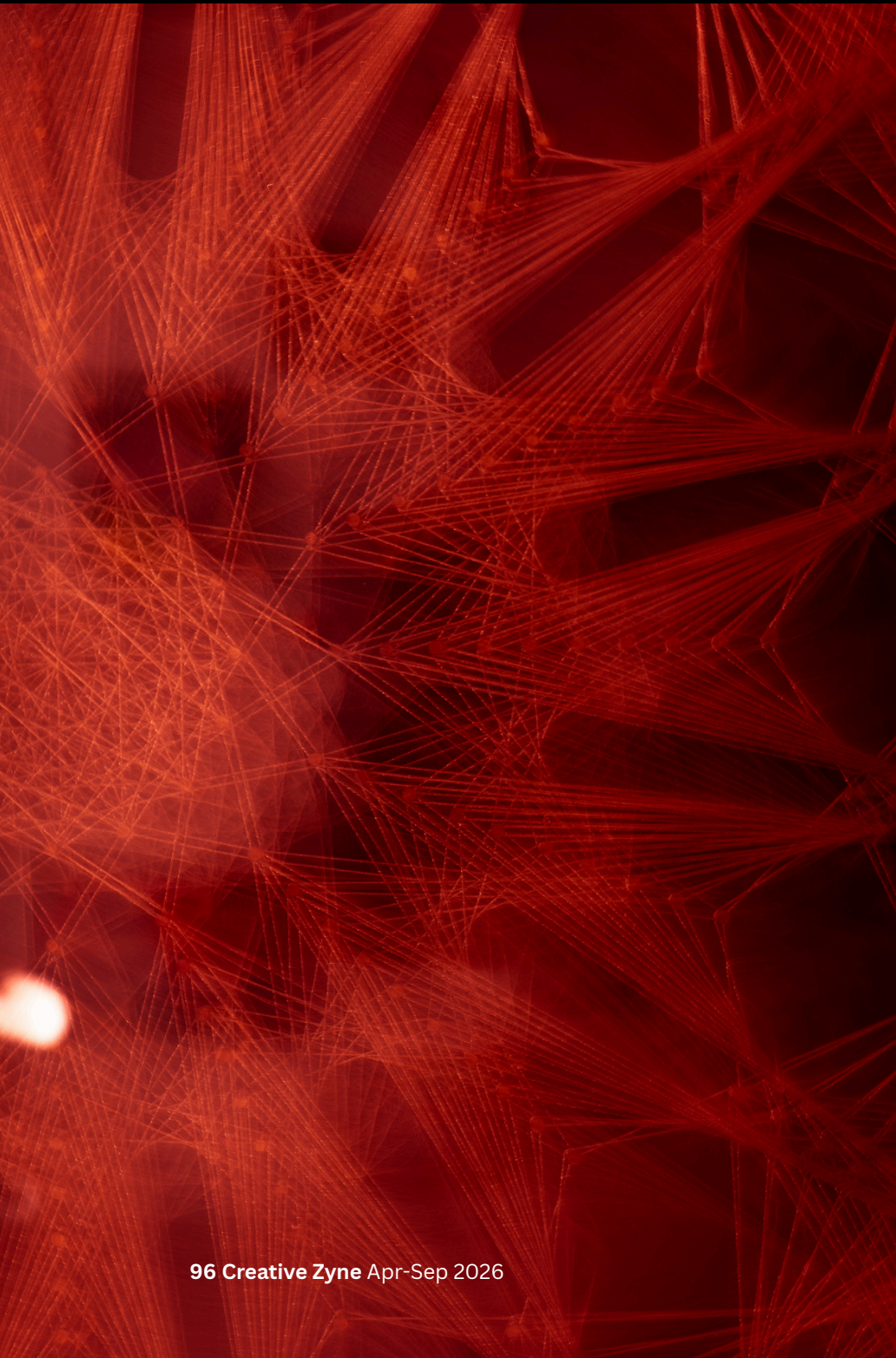
BY VIVEK VERMA

GETTING ON MY NERVES

Getting on my Nerves comes from a familiar place: the irritation that builds quietly, the frustration that lingers, and the anger that sometimes arrives before we are ready for it. Red becomes the language of that emotion—raw, restless and difficult to contain. The two orange images carry a different kind of heat: the moment when irritation begins to flare. These photographs are not about anger alone, but about what it feels like to live with it—to recognise it, sit with it, and sometimes simply let it out. Through abstraction, emotion replaces explanation, leaving behind colour, movement and the traces of something deeply human.



Process: Long exposure shots of a thread artwork captured with intentional camera movement (ICM) and post-processed in Adobe Lightroom with hue and temperature.



Original Thread Artwork Credit [@studiogatha](#)

AUTHOR SPEAKS

ALEXANDRA
THANNHÄUSER



Alex is a fine art photographer with a background in architecture and digital media. Her work explores the relationship between space, structure, light, and human presence through carefully composed urban scenes defined by geometry, rhythm, and visual balance. Her work has been exhibited and awarded in Europe, Western Asia, and North America. In 2024, she published her debut book, *Beyond*. In ‘Author Speaks’, she shares her journey of publishing her book *Beyond*.

HOW MAKING A PHOTOBOOK CHANGED
THE WAY I SEE MY OWN WORK

Creating my first photobook, “BEYOND – Journey through the Lens“, changed the way I look at my own photography in ways I had not fully anticipated. Until then, I had mostly thought about photographs as individual images. Some belonged loosely together, others stood on their own, but I had never been confronted with the question of what happens when a larger body of work is brought together and asked to tell a story.

A photobook forces you to look differently. It is no longer adequate to ask whether an individual photograph is strong. You begin to consider how images relate to one another, what happens when they are placed side by side, and how one photograph can change the way the next is perceived. An image that may seem less striking on its own can become essential within a sequence due to the rhythm, pause, or transition it creates.

The editing process was therefore one of the most revealing parts of making the book. Going through years of photographs made me step outside the experience of having created them and look at the work as a whole. Gradually, recurring elements that I had not consciously pursued began to emerge: geometry and human presence, reflections that create spaces between reality and perception, moments of stillness within busy environments, and a constant search for order within visual complexity.

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Sequencing the photographs added another layer. Images can have conversations with one another across pages. A line might continue in an entirely different photograph; a gesture might find an echo several pages later; an architectural form could suddenly connect with the shape of a human figure. These relationships were not planned when the photographs were taken. They emerged only once the work was brought together.

I remember reaching a point where I thought I had finally found the structure of the book after spending a considerable amount of time grouping the images and working out how they should follow one another. Then I came across a documentary about sequencing. Although watching it almost casually, it completely changed the way I perceived what I had done. With this new perspective, I realised that I could no longer leave the sequence as it was.

It was a difficult moment because so much work had already gone into it. But once I had seen the possibilities differently, they could no longer be ignored. So I began rearranging the book - almost from scratch. It was probably one of the most challenging parts of the entire process, but also one of the most valuable: recognising that something considered nearly finished could become something different, and then being willing to take it apart and reorder it. Applying what I had just learned directly to my own work gave me a deeper understanding of sequencing than I could have gained from simply reading about it.

This was perhaps one of the most important discoveries: finding a thread within my photography that had developed intuitively over time. The book helped me recognise that even though I photograph different subjects and move between architecture, street photography, reflections, and quieter observations, there is a way of seeing that connects them. Coherence does not necessarily come from photographing the same subject again and again. It comes from the questions you return to, the visual relationships you notice, and the way you instinctively respond to the world around you.

Adding my thoughts to accompany some of the photographs was another important part of this process. Photography has always been primarily visual and intuitive for me, so putting into words what I photograph and what I am searching for required a different kind of reflection. The texts in the book are not documentary or explanatory; they are more poetic, sometimes inspired by a particular image or feeling, and intended to exist alongside the photographs rather than define them. Finding this balance between image and language made me think deeply about what words can add without taking away the openness of a photograph. It also helped me understand more clearly some of the ideas that had been guiding my work intuitively.

My background in architecture has trained me to absorb an enormous amount of visual information when I move through a city - lines, structures, proportions, light, reflections, and the way people inhabit space. Photography is a filter for all of this. It allows me to decide what matters within that visual abundance and reduce it to something more essential. Finding the words for the book helped me understand this process more clearly myself.

There is also something fundamentally different about seeing photographs printed and bound together. On a screen, we tend to move quickly from one image to another. A book asks for a different pace. You turn a page, pause, move backwards, notice connections. Images become physical objects with a place in relation to one another. Seeing my own photographs this way gave me a certain distance from them and, at the same time, brought me closer to the work.



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALEXANDRA THANNHÄUSER



Since completing **BEYOND**, the experience of making a photobook has continued to influence the way I photograph. Nevertheless, I feel no need to make an image for a particular series or future book; preserving the openness and spontaneity of my way of working remains essential. Rather than changing what I photograph, the process changed how I see the relationships between my photographs. That awareness continues to shape the visual language of my work today.



 [alex.uniqueye](#)



READERS' GALLERY

PHOTOGRAPH: KIRAN M. BHUMKAR | INDIA



During the shoot, I spoke very little. I preferred to observe. The most meaningful moments arrived when the musicians forgot about the camera and became completely absorbed in their own world. Closed eyes, relaxed hands, and quiet gestures carried far more emotion than any posed expression ever could. Those fleeting moments became the heart of this series.

As photographers, we often chase action because it feels dramatic. I wanted to challenge that instinct. I wanted to prove that stillness can be just as powerful. Silence is not empty. It carries anticipation, memory, devotion, and emotion. Sometimes it tells a deeper story than movement ever can.

These photographs are not about documenting a performance. They are about preserving a relationship. A relationship between an artist and an instrument, between tradition and identity, and between silence and sound.

My hope is that the viewer doesn't simply see musicians holding instruments. I hope they pause long enough to feel the weight of years hidden in a single frame. If these images allow someone to hear music without a single note being played, then they have fulfilled the purpose for which they were created.

 [pixonpicturesstudio](https://www.instagram.com/pixonpicturesstudio)



KIRAN M. BHUMKAR

WHEN MUSIC FINDS LIGHT

Some photographs are planned, while others are simply felt. This series belongs to the latter. When I stood behind the camera, I wasn't looking at musicians preparing to perform. I was watching people who had dedicated years of their lives to something greater than themselves. Before a single note was played, there was already a story unfolding in the silence. That was the story I wanted to photograph.

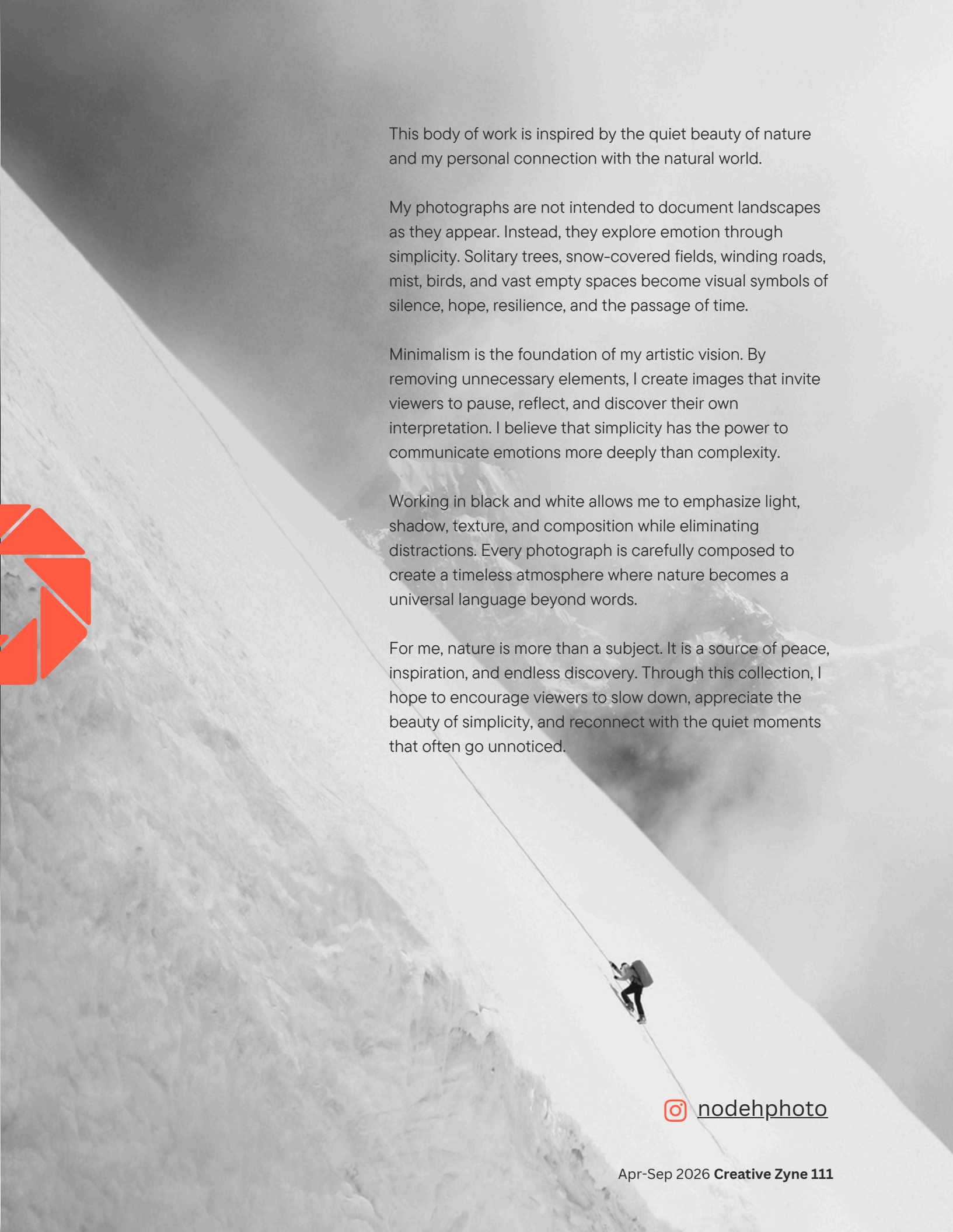
Indian classical music has never been only about sound. It is about patience, discipline, surrender, and an unspoken connection between the artist and the instrument. Those emotions cannot always be heard, but they can be seen if we are willing to look closely. My intention was to make that invisible connection visible.

I chose black and white because colour often speaks first. I wanted emotion to speak first. By removing every unnecessary element, the viewer is left with nothing but light, shadow, texture, and expression. Every highlight reveals a fragment of the artist, while every shadow holds the countless hours of practice that no audience ever witnesses.

MOSTAFA NODEH

MINIMALISM





This body of work is inspired by the quiet beauty of nature and my personal connection with the natural world.

My photographs are not intended to document landscapes as they appear. Instead, they explore emotion through simplicity. Solitary trees, snow-covered fields, winding roads, mist, birds, and vast empty spaces become visual symbols of silence, hope, resilience, and the passage of time.

Minimalism is the foundation of my artistic vision. By removing unnecessary elements, I create images that invite viewers to pause, reflect, and discover their own interpretation. I believe that simplicity has the power to communicate emotions more deeply than complexity.

Working in black and white allows me to emphasize light, shadow, texture, and composition while eliminating distractions. Every photograph is carefully composed to create a timeless atmosphere where nature becomes a universal language beyond words.

For me, nature is more than a subject. It is a source of peace, inspiration, and endless discovery. Through this collection, I hope to encourage viewers to slow down, appreciate the beauty of simplicity, and reconnect with the quiet moments that often go unnoticed.

 [nodehphoto](https://www.instagram.com/nodehphoto)

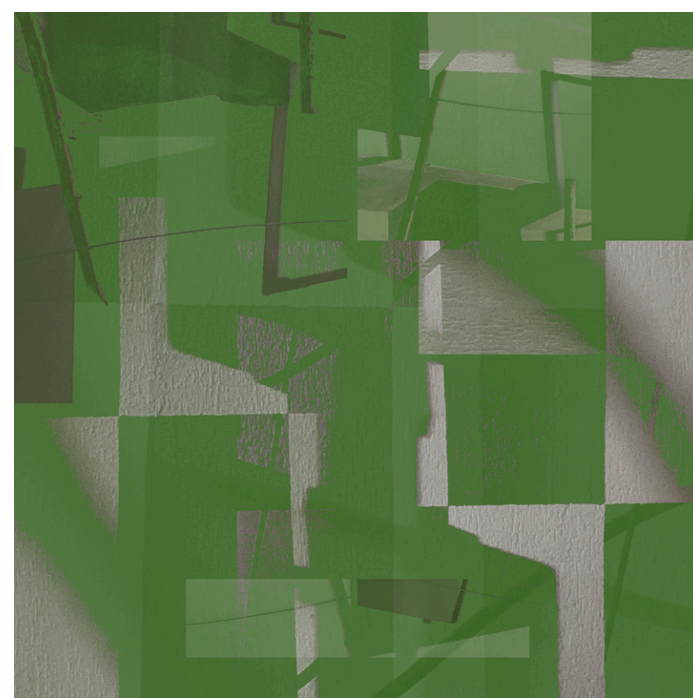
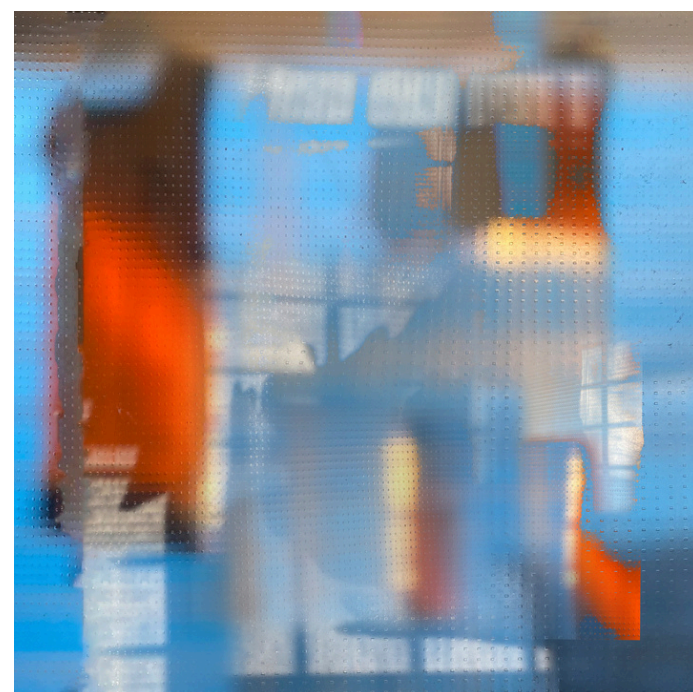


MEGHNAD GANPULE

ABSTRACT

My abstract works begin long before I open a digital canvas. The process starts with observing a place—its space, forms, textures, light, and the relationships between its elements. I often photograph these environments or make quick sketches to understand their visual rhythm and conceptual possibilities. These observations become the foundation for the work. On the digital canvas, I combine multiple photographic layers, transforming reality into an abstract visual language. The final image is not a direct representation of a place, but a reconstruction of memory, perception, and imagination, where the familiar evolves into a new conceptual narrative.

 [fineartwithmegh](https://www.instagram.com/fineartwithmegh)



YAGNESH MEHTA

CHASING THE DAIVA (DEITIES)

India is a land of inexhaustible mystique. Whether a stone's throw from home or a thousand miles into the interior, the subcontinent perpetually offers narratives that thrive far from the tourist track.

One of my journeys led me to Benjanapadavu, a somnolent village on the outskirts of Mangalore in Karnataka's coastal Dakshina Kannada district. Here, I traded the controlled luminescence of wedding halls and fashion runways for a tradition that predates organised religion itself. Contrary to its frequent mischaracterisation as a mere "festival," the ritual—known locally as Daiva Kola (or Bhuta Kola)—is no commercial carnival. It is a profound, intimate ceremony performed by a Kutumba (family) to invoke ancestral blessings. This is a raw dialogue between the living and the divine, conducted not for spectacle, but to safeguard the health, prosperity, and prophecy of every kin member.

To preserve my creative acuity, I habitually undertake one or two passion projects annually—venturing into unvarnished spaces that offer a stark counterpoint to my commercial oeuvre. This opportunity came through my close friend, Rakesh Kottary, whose maternal roots are deeply entrenched in Benjanapadavu. His invitation was all the impetus I required. I packed my gear and set off into the unknown.

The local pantheon features four principal deities, each embodying distinct forces of nature and ancestry. For this project, I turned my lens on two of the most formidable: Panjurli, the wild boar spirit tethered to agricultural fecundity, and Guliga, a fierce, fiery entity renowned for his relentless energy and protective fury.

THE TRANSFORMATION

The hours preceding the ritual were deceptively placid. In a quiet corner of the family compound, the performer sat cross-legged, his expression inscrutable as the makeup artist worked in meditative silence. Layer by layer, the metamorphosis began—the visage painted, the elaborate headdress affixed, the heavy brass jewellery donned. Yet, the true change remained invisible. I observed his breathing decelerate; his gaze turned inward. He was no longer a person preparing for a performance, but a vessel being consecrated for possession. A profound solemnity permeated the air, needing no translation. I raised my camera only when the silence permitted me.

My approach to documentary work is elemental: observe, absorb, and immerse. Before I raise the viewfinder, I study the ecosystem, allowing the reportage moments to reveal themselves organically.



THE SPIRIT EMERGES

When the first drumbeat struck, I felt its resonance in my chest before I registered the sound. The rhythm was ancient, insistent, and impossible to ignore. The performer entered the arena—no longer himself, but Guliga incarnate. His movements were explosive, his eyes wild and unblinking. Adorned in elaborate regalia—a grand headdress, striking red attire, heavy jewellery, and massive brass anklets called gaggara—he moved with seismic intensity. The brass crashed against the earth with every step, raising dust and sending tremors through the throng. The women of the family erupted into spontaneous chants, their voices cresting and receding in waves.

The pounding of traditional drums and hypnotic, guttural chanting fuelled an energy that gripped not just the performer, but every soul present. I stood frozen for a moment—not as a photographer, but as a witness to something primal. Then, instinct kicked in.





With two cameras slung across my shoulders, I was unmistakably the interloper. I knew my primary task was not about shutter speed, but about reverence. Every step had to be measured. I spent my initial hours refraining from shooting, instead listening and connecting with Rakesh's family and, eventually, the performers themselves. Building this rapport was my only path to becoming invisible. Wedding photography taught me that the real story begins long before the main event; applying that logic in this spiritual context paid rich dividends.

Throughout the ceremony, I maintained a strict personal discipline: do not disrupt the energy flow. Do not disturb a single soul. Yet, despite my careful distance, I found myself repeatedly swept up in currents of energy entirely alien to my own lived experience. The air was thick with the scent of camphor and coconut oil, the ground vibrated with every beat of the drum, and the collective faith of the family was palpable.

THE REVELATION

I had arrived with a singular, unwavering visual ambition: to capture a photograph that revealed the spirit itself—not merely the man in the costume. I waited through hours of raw, untamed power. And then, in a fleeting fraction of a second, I witnessed it.

The performer paused mid-stride. His gaze locked onto mine—or rather, the spirit's gaze pierced through the viewfinder. There was something primordial in those eyes, something that seemed to look through the lens and into my very intent. For that one moment, time dissolved. I pressed the shutter. The click was swallowed by the drums, but I knew. I had it.

As I packed my gear in the pale, etiolated light of dawn, the silence that followed the night's frenzy felt almost sacred. The wedding halls and fashion studios I would return to suddenly felt distant—not lesser, but certainly lighter. Daiva Kola was a stark reminder that genuine storytelling is not about flawless composition or perfect lighting; it is about surrender. It is about stepping into a world that does not revolve around you, earning the trust of its people, and waiting with patience for the extraordinary to reveal itself.

 [yagnesh_mehta_photography](https://www.instagram.com/yagnesh_mehta_photography)



NETFLIX

TALES *by* LIGHT

ART WOLFE, DARREN JEW, KRYSTLE WRIGHT, RICHARD L'ANSON, PETER EASTWAY "TALES BY LIGHT"
DIRECTED BY ABRAHAM JOFFE MUSIC BY BLAIR JOSCELYNE EDITED BY JARED UNDERWOOD PRODUCED BY LORNA-JEAN BRADLEY, HAYLEY ONIKUL, PHIL SOLIMAN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JASON MCLEAN PRODUCED BY UNTITLED FILM WORKS, CANON AUSTRALIA CO-PRODUCED BY FRED EL-HARRIS
DIRECTED BY ABRAHAM JOFFE

MOVIE RECOMMENDATION

TALES BY LIGHT

IMDb Rating: 8.2/10

SEASONS: 3

EPISODES: 6

CAST: DARREN JEW, ART WOLFE, KRYSTLE WRIGHT, ET AL.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

YEAR: 2018

AVAILABILITY: NETFLIX

Every serious photographer hits the same wall eventually. Technique stops being the hard part. You know your camera, you know light, and the photograph still doesn't move anyone the way the moment did when you were standing right there. That's the wall Tales by Light lives inside, and it's rare enough for a show to actually sit there instead of skating past it that I ended up watching the whole thing over two evenings when I only meant to sample an episode. It's a Canon and National Geographic production, created and directed by Abraham Joffe, first out in Australia in 2015 before Netflix picked it up globally in November 2016.

What's actually going on in each episode?

A working photographer gets dropped into somewhere most of us will never reach. The Maasai Mara. The Namibian desert. The Bahamas. The Himalayas. And the camera stays on the actual job of making an image that means something, not a highlight reel of the ones that worked. The failed attempts stay in, so does the waiting, so do the arguments with weather and light and access that never make it into anyone's Instagram caption. Netflix's own line on it gets this right: photographers and filmmakers travelling the world "capturing indelible images of people, places, creatures and cultures from new, previously unseen angles."

Season one is carried by Darren Jew, Art Wolfe and Krystle Wright, with Peter Eastway and Richard l'Anson alongside them, six episodes built around themes like Submerged, Tribes, Adrenaline, Wild. Later seasons bring in Jonathan and Angela Scott photographing Kenya's wildlife, Eric Cheng chasing the truth about feared aquatic predators, Stephen Dupont looking for dignity in how different cultures handle death.

Three seasons total now, eighteen episodes, and each photographer is working a completely different discipline. That's really the whole point of the show. It refuses to treat photography as one thing, the way a landscape photographer and a war photographer are not solving the same problem at all.

Why does it feel different from the usual photography content online?

Nobody's selling you a lens here, or a preset pack, which honestly is most of what passes for photography content now. Cameras barely come up. What comes up instead is judgment. Why this frame and not that one. Why the photographer waited four extra hours for the light to shift six degrees. Why one angle disrespects the subject and another honors it. That's the part nobody teaches you in a fifteen-minute tutorial, and it happens to be the only part that actually matters once you already know your gear. The cinematography backs this up too, since the series doesn't just document photographers, it photographs them, which is a harder trick than it sounds.

Not flawless. A few stretches lean too hard into cinematic sweep and lose the thread of what the photographer's actually thinking. But rare enough that it barely registers as a complaint.

Episodes

Season 3 ▾

Season 3: U/A 7+ mild themes, tobacco use



Children In Need Part 1

25m

Documenting impoverished, at-risk children for UNICEF, photographer Simon Lister is joined in Bangladesh by goodwill ambassador Orlando Bloom.



Children In Need Part 2

20m

Simon and Orlando continue their Bangladesh trip, visiting a makeshift school and photographing young children working in hazardous jobs for low pay.



Paradise in Peril Part 1

22m

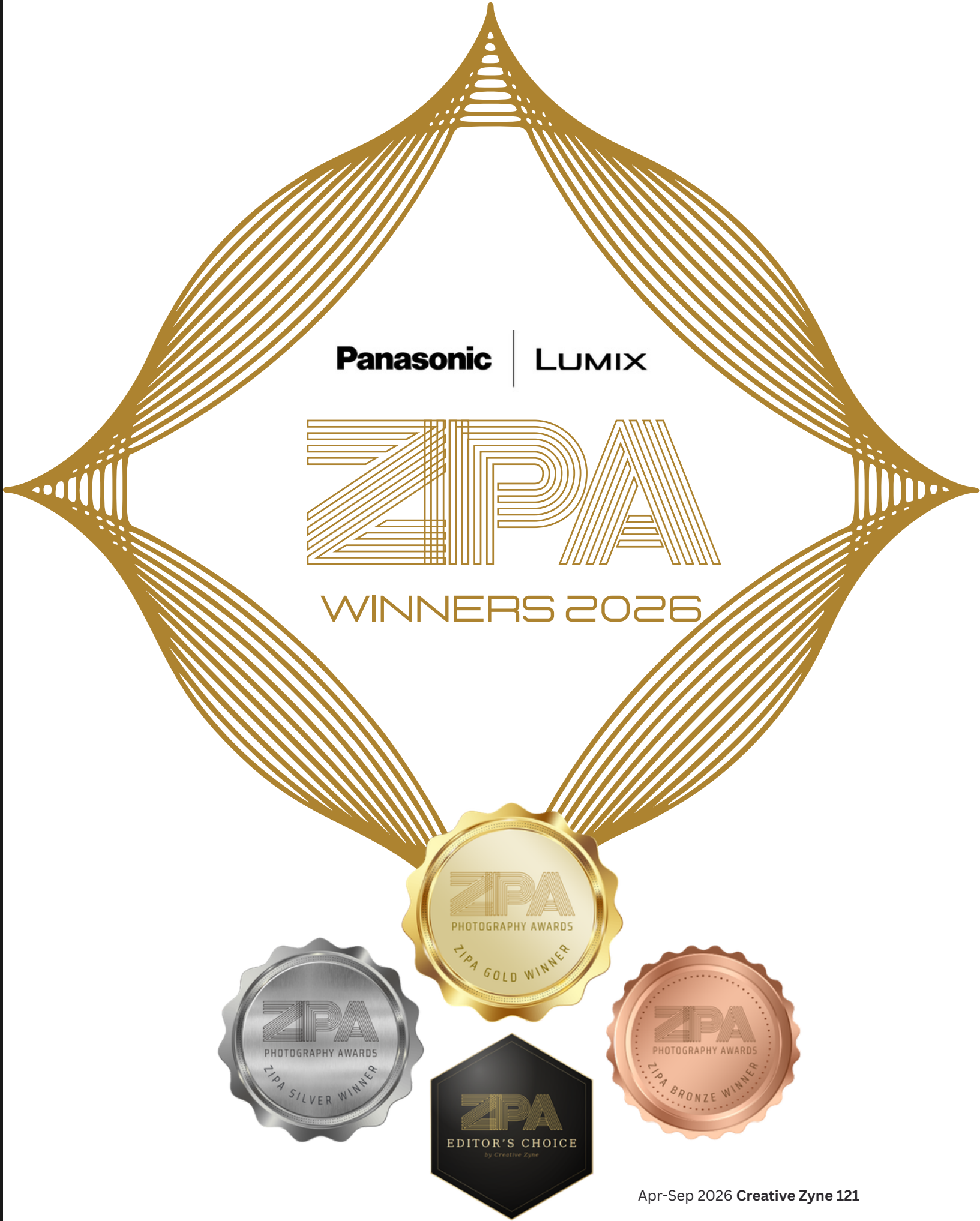
Undersea photographer Shawn Heinrichs fights to preserve the rapidly vanishing diversity of ocean life by capturing its beauty in dazzling images.

Worth watching if you've never picked up a camera?

More so, if anything. Photographers will recognise the frustration here, a shot that just won't come together, going back to the same spot at the same hour for the fourth day running, and what the show hands you is proof that none of that is a personal failing, it's just the job.

For everyone else it plays closer to travel and anthropology, carried by people whose entire profession is paying attention to what the rest of us walk straight past. One caveat worth knowing going in: most of the photographers here work in nature, wildlife and travel photography specifically, so there's less on offer if you're chasing portraiture or street work. Narrower than the marketing sometimes suggests.

Eighteen episodes, twenty minutes to just over an hour apiece, so this isn't a commitment,, it's an evening or two. Nothing new has come since 2018 and there's no sign anything will, which oddly makes what's already there feel worth protecting rather than skipping. Watch it once for the places. Watch it again for what these people are actually deciding in the seconds before they press the shutter, because that's the part you miss the first time through, and the part that stays after.

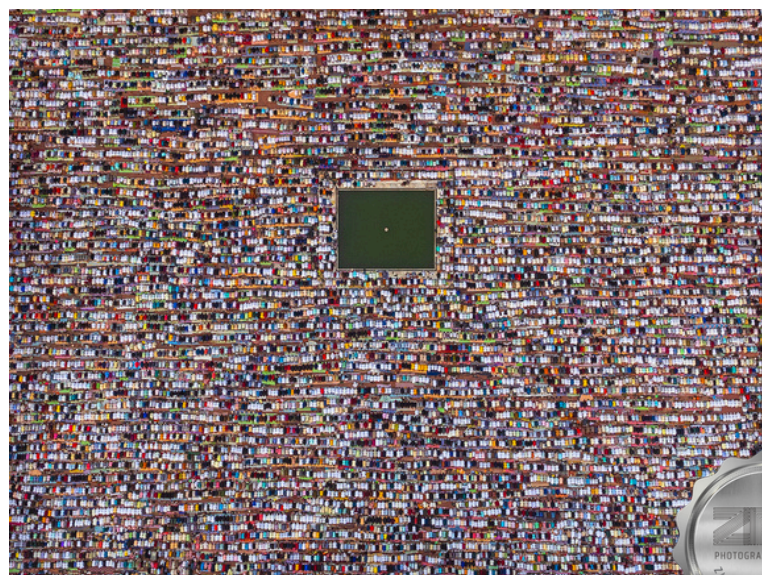




SUBRATA DEY | BANGLADESH



ZIPA 2026 received more than 10,000 submissions from 65 countries, in its second edition! This is a true milestone for us and a powerful testament to the trust, prestige and credibility you have placed in us.



SAURABH SIROHIYA | INDIA



In this issue, we feature the Gold, Silver and Bronze winners of ZIPA 2026 from 18 submission categories, judged by 16 eminent photographers from across the globe.



PAWEL ZYGMUNT | IRELAND



CO-JUDGED BY MURAT İLHAN
& ISABELLA TABACCHI



FADI KOUDSI | EGYPT

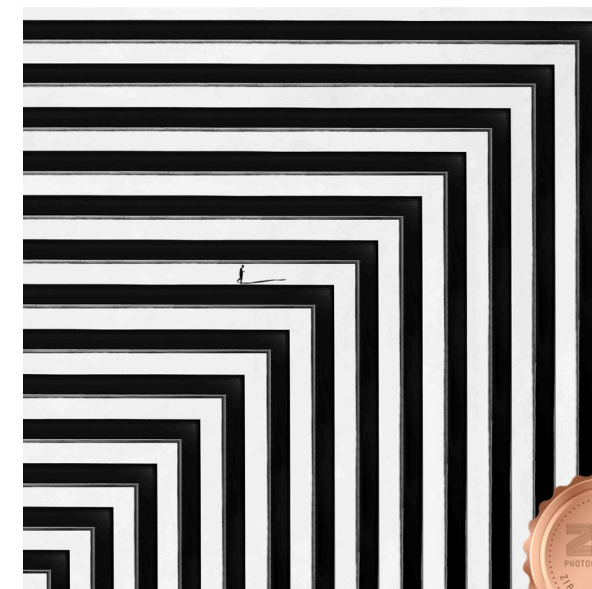


ABSTRACT

JUDGED BY ZUZANA FAJMONOVÁ



GHADIR VAGHARI | IRAN



ARTIN DARVISHI | IRAN





AMIN ROSHAN AFSHAR
IRAN

CONCEPTUAL

JUDGED BY ZUZANA FAJMONOVÁ



AVIN ABBASI | IRAN



GHAZAL ABBASI | IRAN



AMIR ALI NAVADEH SHAHLA
IRAN

ARCHITECTURE

JUDGED BY
ALEXANDRA THANNHÄUSER



HADI DEGHANPOUR | IRAN



BERND GANTERT | GERMANY

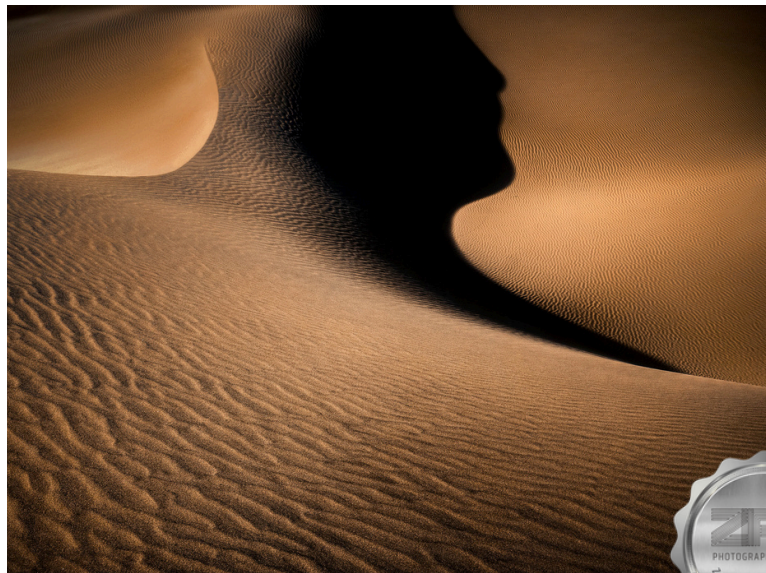


HIMADRI BHUYAN | INDIA



LANDSCAPE

JUDGED BY ISABELLA TABACCHI



MEHDI PARSAEIAN | IRAN



PAWEL ZYGMUNT | IRELAND

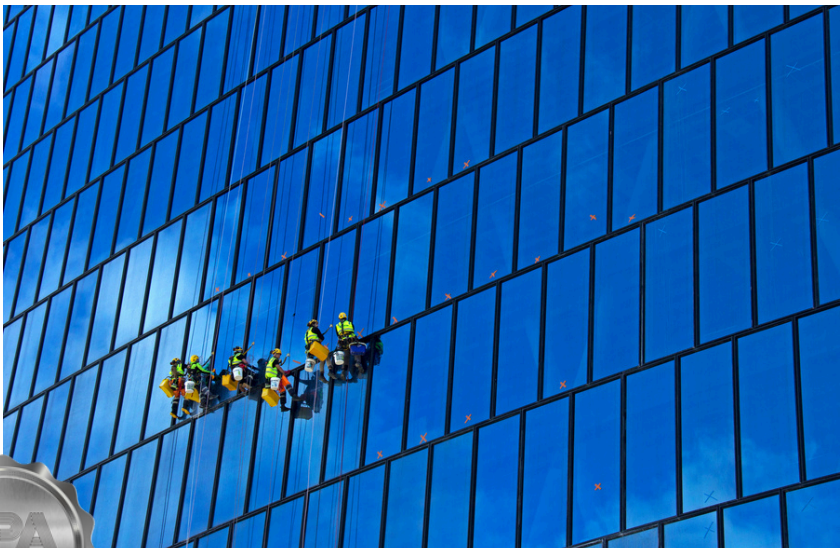


MOJTABA GITINEZHAD
IRAN



MINIMAL

CO-JUDGED BY ALI ZOLGHADRI &
NINA PAPIOREK



JOPHEL BOTERO YBIOSA
PHILIPPINES



EMRE GOKSU | UK





SEYED MAHDI VAGHARI | IRAN

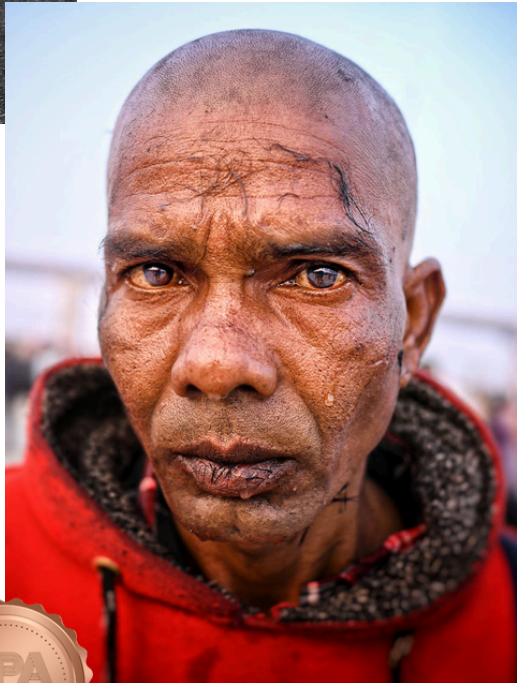


STREET
PORTRAIT

JUDGED BY REMON DIAZ



GHADIR VAGHARI | IRAN



PRITAM SARKAR
INDIA



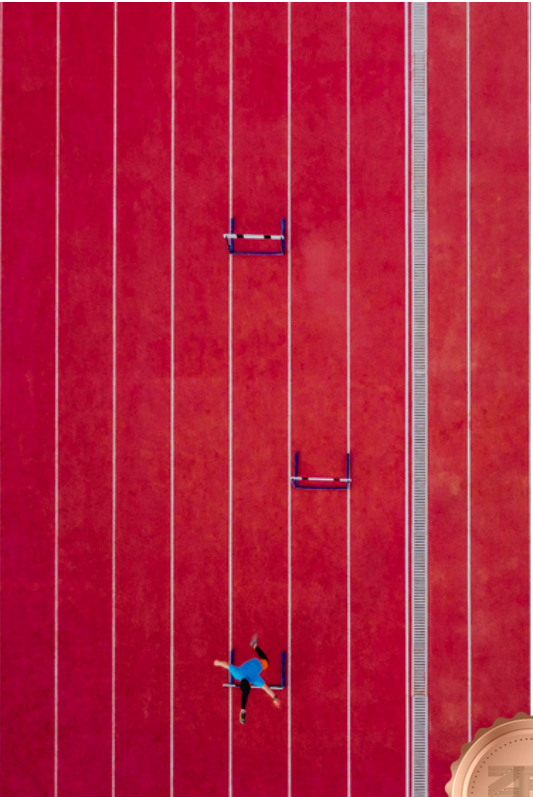
SÉBASTIEN ANEX
SWITZERLAND

SPORTS &
ADVENTURE

JUDGED BY
GERMAIN FAVRE-FELIX



ANDRE MAGARAO
BRAZIL



MOJTABA GITINEZHAD
IRAN



MITRA HOSSEINI | IRAN



DECISIVE MOMENT

JUDGED BY REMON DIAZ



FARID AZADI | IRAN



NATALIA GORSHKOVA | RUSSIA



SAJJAD RAHIMI | IRAN



FASHION



JUDGED BY CAT BROWN



BEHNAZADAT JAVADI
IRAN



ABHIJEET K. BANERJEE
INDIA





CHIM OANH | VIETNAM



SELF- PORTRAIT

JUDGED BY CARMEN PASCUAL



ZHALEH BAHRAMI | IRAN



HASTI NAVAEE NEZHAD | IRAN



TAKAMASA HONDA | JAPAN



PORTRAITURE

JUDGED BY CARMEN PASCUAL



ABHIJEET K. BANERJEE
INDIA



JOPHEL BOTERO YBIOZA
PHILIPPINES





SAURABH SIROHIYA | INDIA



XIAOPING LIN | CHINA



KEYHAN MOHAMMADI | IRAN

TRAVEL

CO-JUDGED BY ROBERT LIE
& MURAT İLHAN

WILDLIFE

JUDGED BY DR. CAESAR
SENGUPTA



RAMPRASAD DUTTA | INDIA



SANKAR SENGUPTA | INDIA



ERFAN SAMANFAR | IRAN



WEDDING

JUDGED BY ANJAY THAKUR

SEYED MASOUM AZARANI | IRAN



MOHSEN GHOLAMI | IRAN



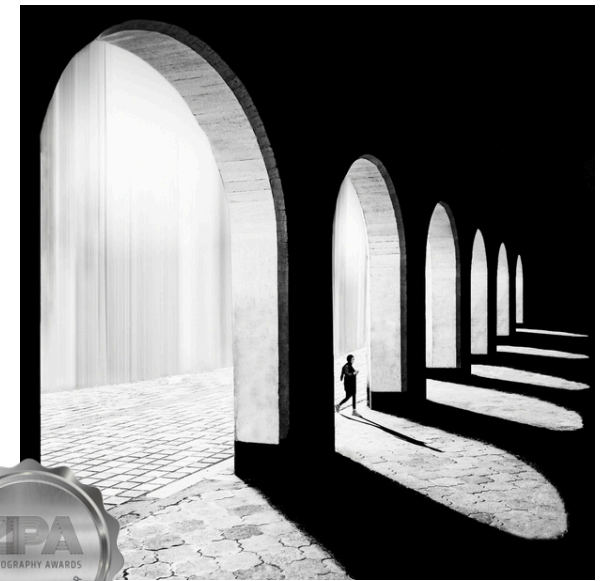
YAGNESH MEHTA | INDIA



MUSTAFA AL-SHAIBANI
IRAQ

URBANSCAPE

JUDGED BY JOZEF DANYI



ARTIN DARVISHI | IRAN



MEHDI PARSAEIAN | IRAN



SOURAV DAS | INDIA



PHOTO JOURNALISM

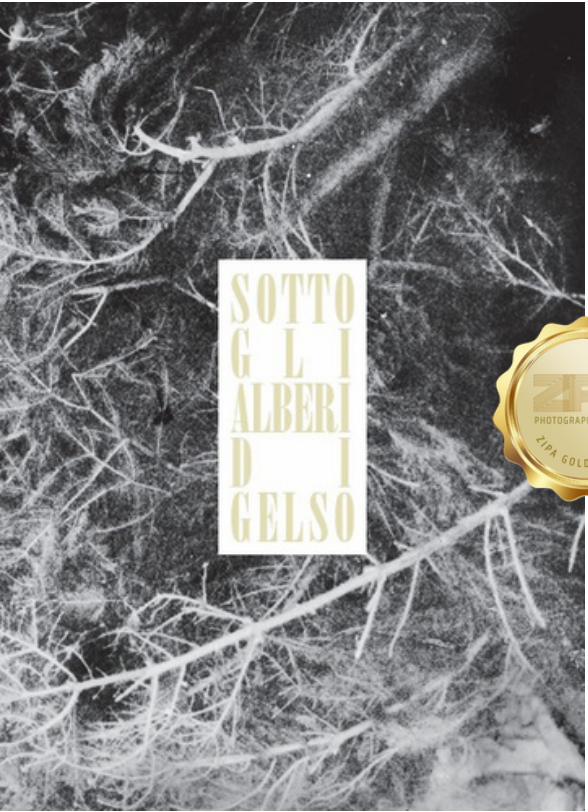
JUDGED BY JOÃO COELHO



MOHAMED GAMAL | EGYPT



SOUMAYAN BISWAS | INDIA

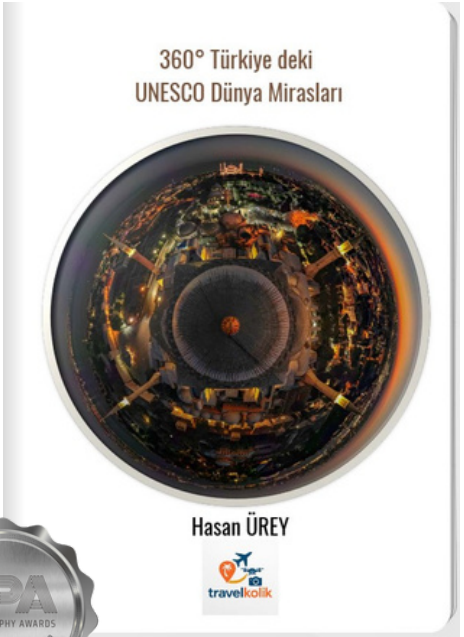


GIUSEPPE RICCARDI | ITALY

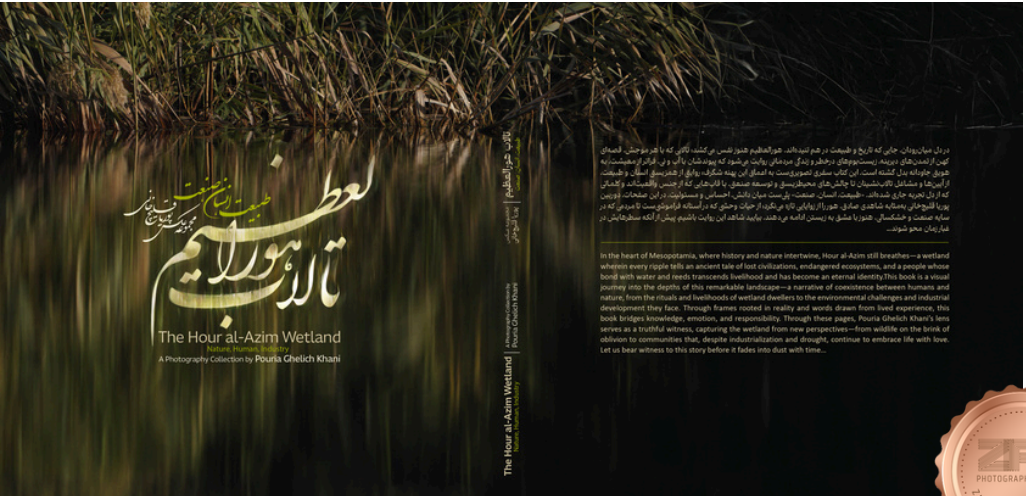


BOOKS/ZINE

JUDGED BY ALI ZOLGHADRI



HASAN ÜREY
TURKEY



POURIA GHELICH KHANI | IRAN



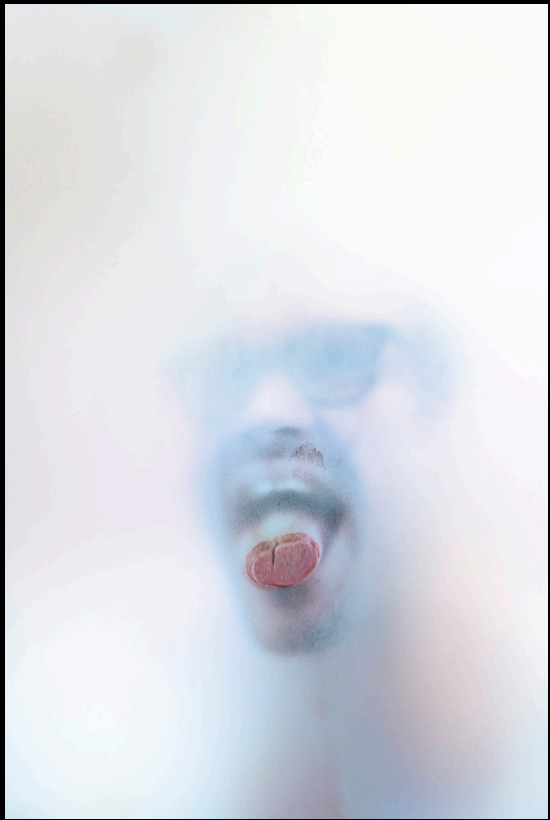


◀ CONCEPTUAL

RUFAI ISMAILA
NIGERIA



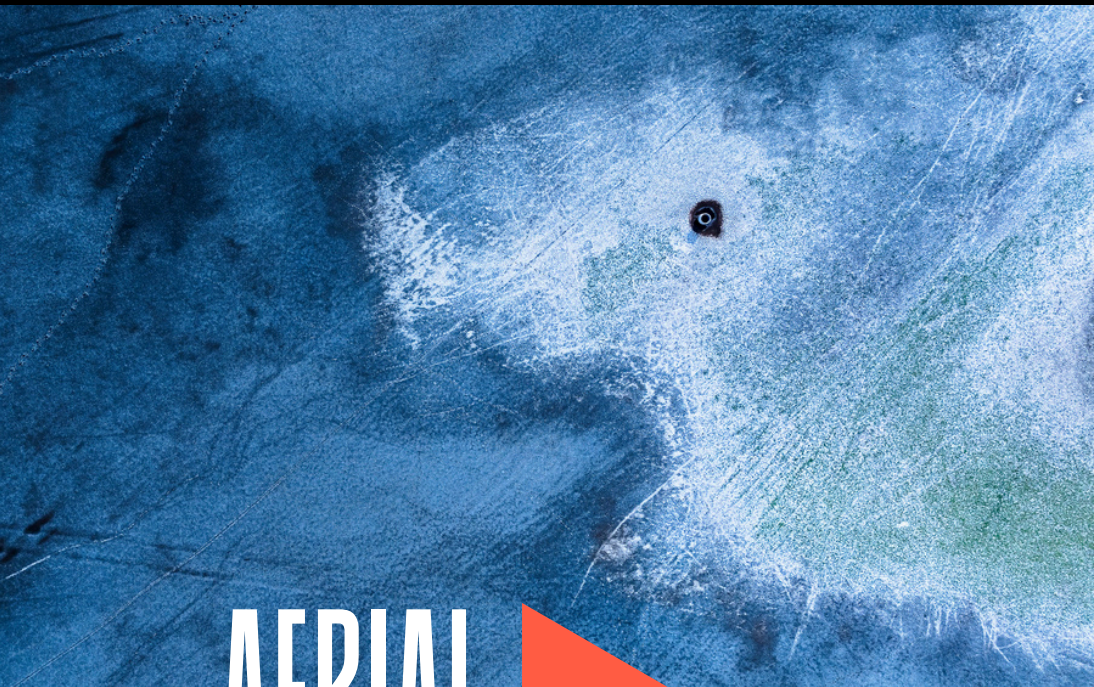
Editor's Choice is an editorial recognition by the Chief Editor of Creative Zyne, celebrating three underrated photographic works in each submission category that personally resonate with him for their aesthetics and intrigue, beyond technicalities.



ARE WE TWO
STRANGERS NOW?

RIK ROOS
NETHERLANDS





AERIAL



TIMEA AMBRUS
HUNGARY



PAWEL ZYGMUNT
IRELAND

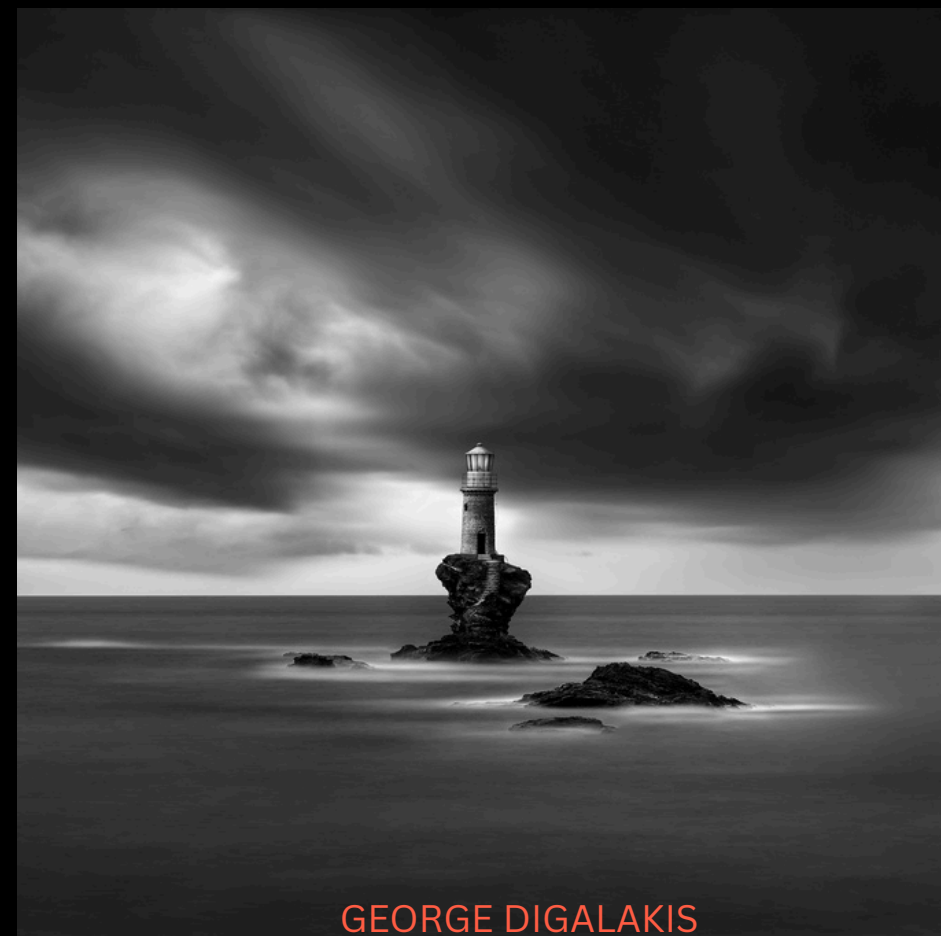


HARIS SHAHZAD
IRELAND



LANDSCAPE

MEHDI PARSAEIAN
IRAN



GEORGE DIGALAKIS
GREECE



OLGA ARUNE
CZECH REPUBLIC



TRAVEL

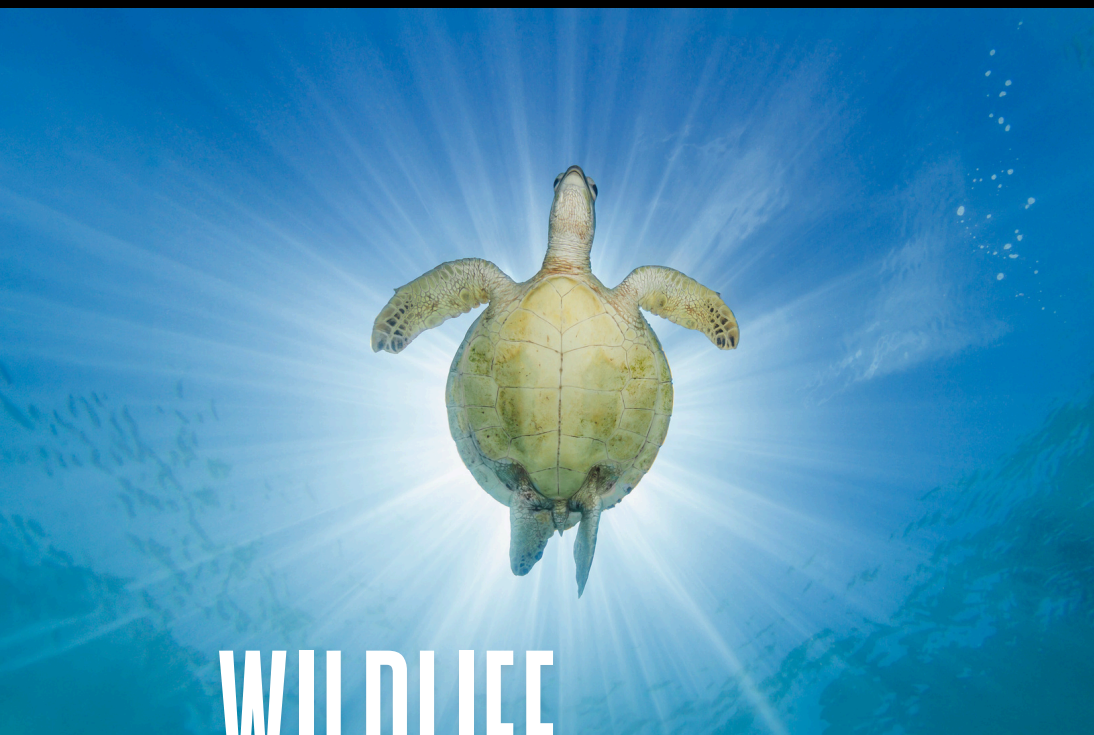
SAURABH SIROHIYA
INDIA



KIRILL NIKITIN UK



ANTONIO FLORES GARCÍA
MEXICO



WILDLIFE

CONOR MOORE
AUSTRALIA



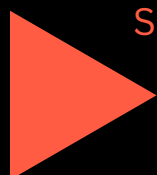
EMAN ABDELKADER EGYPT



ERFAN SAMANFAR
IRAN



DECISIVE MOMENT



SHIRKOO MAMAGHA
IRAN



ARNAB BISWAS INDIA



KIRILL NIKITIN UK



WEDDING

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POUYA SHAHJAHANY
IRAN



SAMANE FAKHAR IRAN



MAJID HOJATI IRAN

Apr-Sep 2026 Creative Zyne 149



PHOTO-JOURNALISM

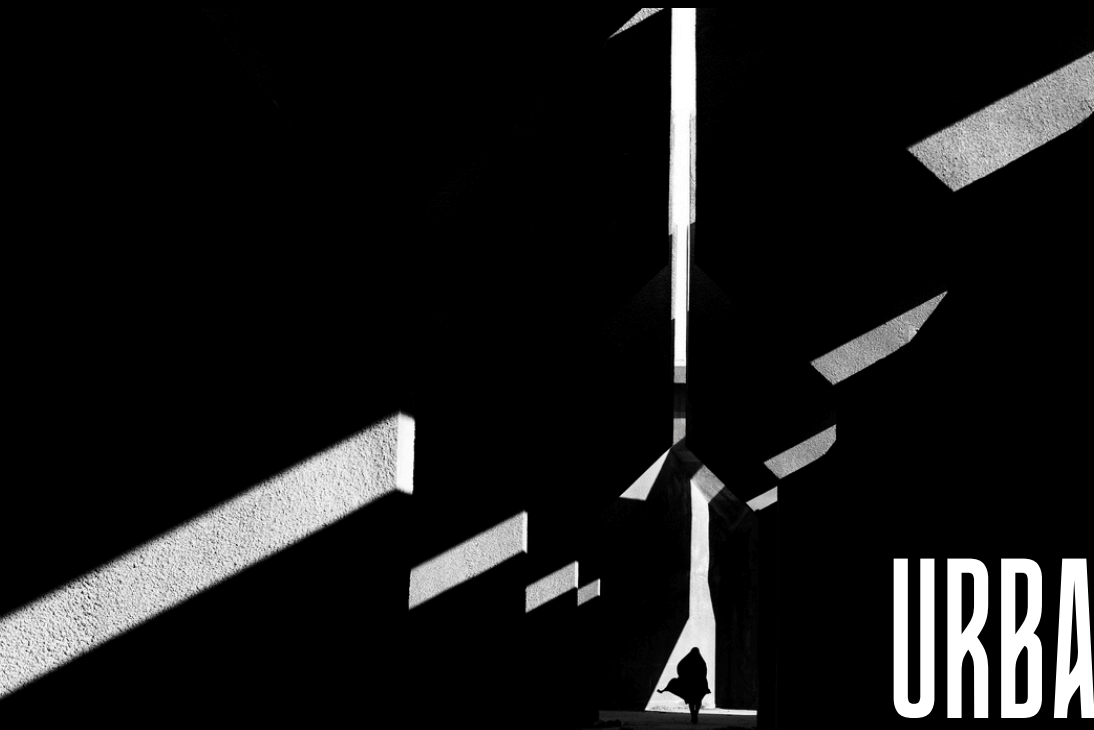
AHMED ELERYAN
EGYPT



ABBAS VALADI IRAN



ALSYED ALSADNY EGYPT



URBANSCAPE

HOSEIN TAHAVORI
IRAN



STEFAN LENZ AUSTRIA



RADOSLAW KOPCZYNSKI
POLAND



ABSTRACT

HIMADRI BHUYAN
INDIA



MAHDI VAGHARI
IRAN

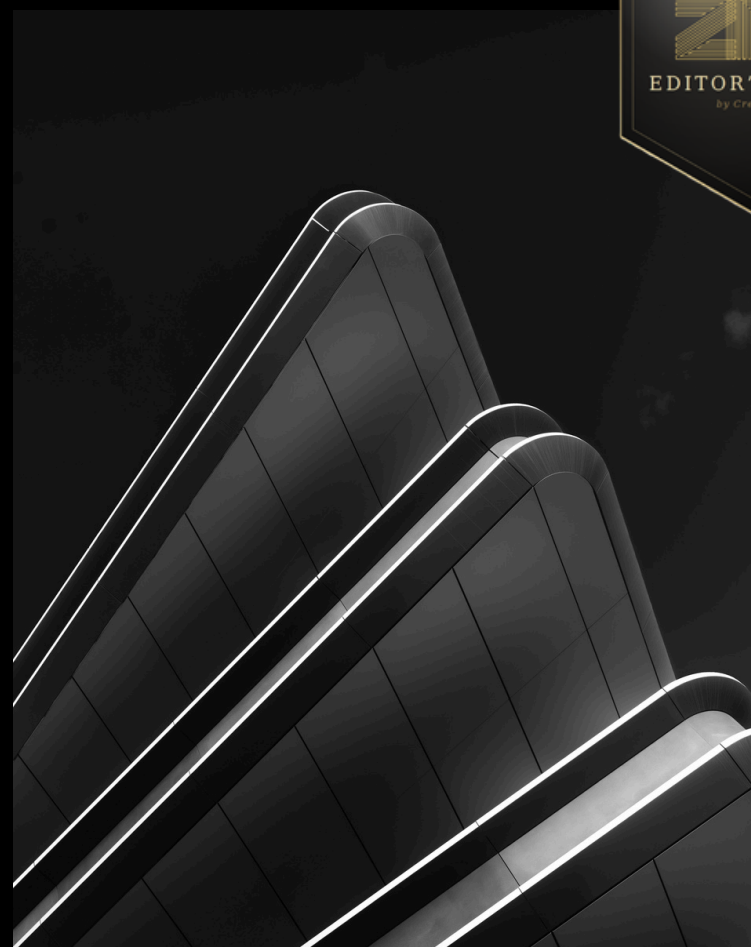


TOMAS SALAC
CZECH REPUBLIC



MINIMAL

MOSTAFA NODEH
IRAN



STEFAN LENZ
AUSTRIA



ATUL SALUJA
UNITED STATES



STEFAN LENZ AUSTRIA



ANITHA MYSORE INDIA



BERND GANTERT GERMANY

ARCHITECTURE



SPORTS

ANDRE MAGARAO BRAZIL

BLATTI JEREMY
SWITZERLAND



REZA DANYANYAN IRAN



PORTRAIT

MONICA SPERANDIO FRANCE



HANAN ELMAHMOUDY



LILING CUI UK

STREET PORTRAIT ▼



KIRILL NIKITIN UK



CLIFF MOGERE KENYA



RADOSLAW KOPCZYNSKI POLAND



CHIM OANH VIETNAM



SHABNAM MALEKI IRAN



PARISA MOTAMEDY IRAN

SEE THE COMPLETE
LIST OF ZIPA 2026
WINNERS AT

zyneawards.com



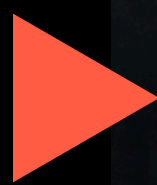
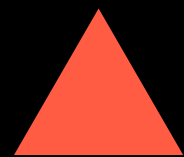
LAURENZ HEYMAN SWEDEN



SAJJAD RAHIMI IRAN

SELF
PORTRAIT

FASHION



DR. ARUNIMA GHOSH INDIA

ADABAĞ | 2025

Through the Dust: A moving herd kicks up a dense cloud of dust from the dry earth. Illuminated by the fading light, hundreds of animals merge into a living, flowing mass over the soil, turning a daily journey into a timeless migration.

MURAT İLHAN

TURKEY 

In this visual journey through the landscapes of Turkey, Murat takes us to an altitude from where everything looks poetic, a view different from the touristy snapshots of a country where Europe meets Asia. Lone figures on salt flats, boats threading emerald deltas, herds dissolving into dust and light — each frame strips away scale until landscape becomes pure colour and rhythm. What emerges is not documentation but meditation: a reminder that from far enough above, nature and humanity read as one continuous, fragile design.

 TRAVEL

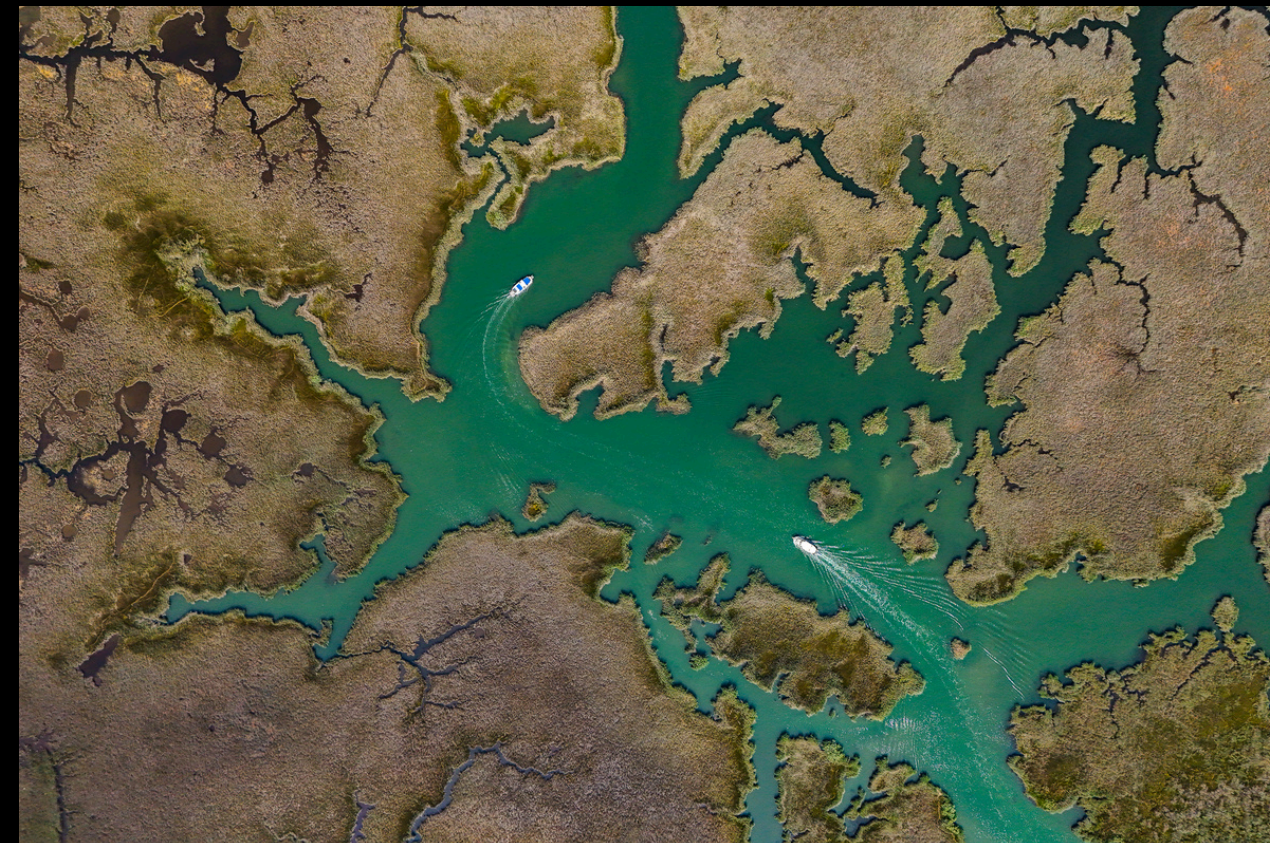


SALDA LAKE | 2022

The Blue Threshold: A lone silhouette walks between the pristine blue of the lake and the mineral-rich shore. The vastness of the landscape and the smallness of the human figure reveal the delicate scale between nature and humanity.



BURDUR LAKE | 2022. Silent Map: The dried lakebed transforms into a silent geography shaped by the memories of water. Fine cracks and lingering tiny pools whisper that retreating life hasn't entirely vanished.



DALYAN DELTA | 2025. Two Trails: Gliding through the reeds, two boats leave distinct wakes across the complex waterways. Human movement becomes a fleeting mark, briefly drawn onto the ancient lines of the delta.



YAYLA LAKE | 2025. Sanctuary: Surrounded by water, a small island stands as a protected pocket of breath within a wide, dark expanse. Viewed from above, nature reveals the life it quietly conceals at its core.

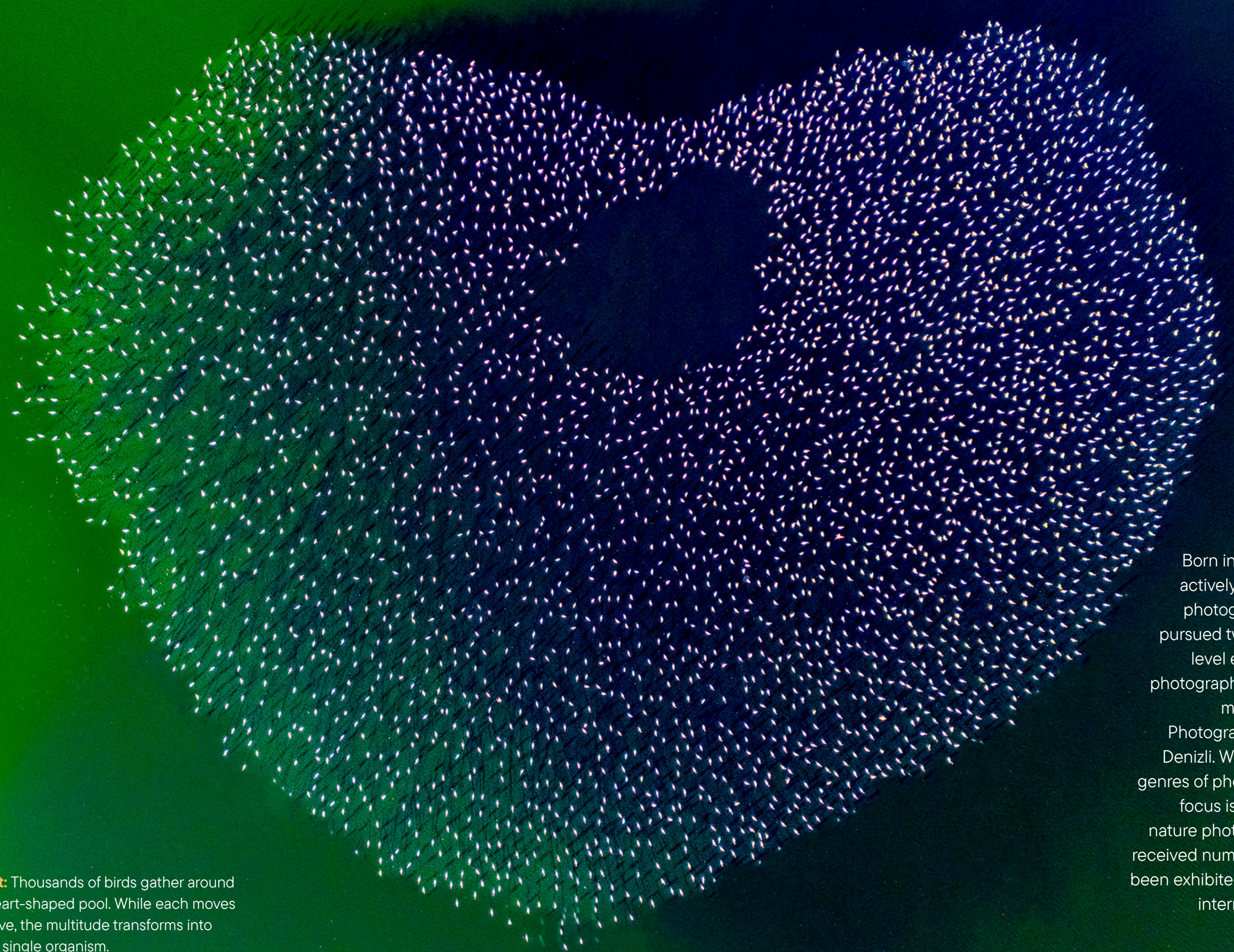


ACIGÖL | 2025. Azure Edge: The warm tones of the mineral earth abruptly meet the deep blue water veins. As flamingos gather along this sharp boundary, color and life converge on a single, delicate line.



ACIGÖL | 2026

Yellow Silence: Dark mineral trails stretch across a vibrant yellow surface, evoking abstract formations rising from the earth. A small flock of flamingos feels almost like a refraction of light within this vast field of color.



ACIGÖL | 2025

Rhythm of the Heart: Thousands of birds gather around a naturally formed, heart-shaped pool. While each moves individually, from above, the multitude transforms into the unified pulse of a single organism.

Born in 1975, Murat has been actively engaged in the art of photography since 2010 and pursued two years of university-level education to refine his photographic practice. Murat is a member of the DEFSAD Photography Art Association in Denizli. While he appreciates all genres of photography, his primary focus is on documentary and nature photography. His work has received numerous awards and has been exhibited in both national and international competitions.

 [muratilhan](https://www.instagram.com/muratilhan)

TRAVEL REIMAGINED

THE RISE OF EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL

ROOPALI ADLAKHA

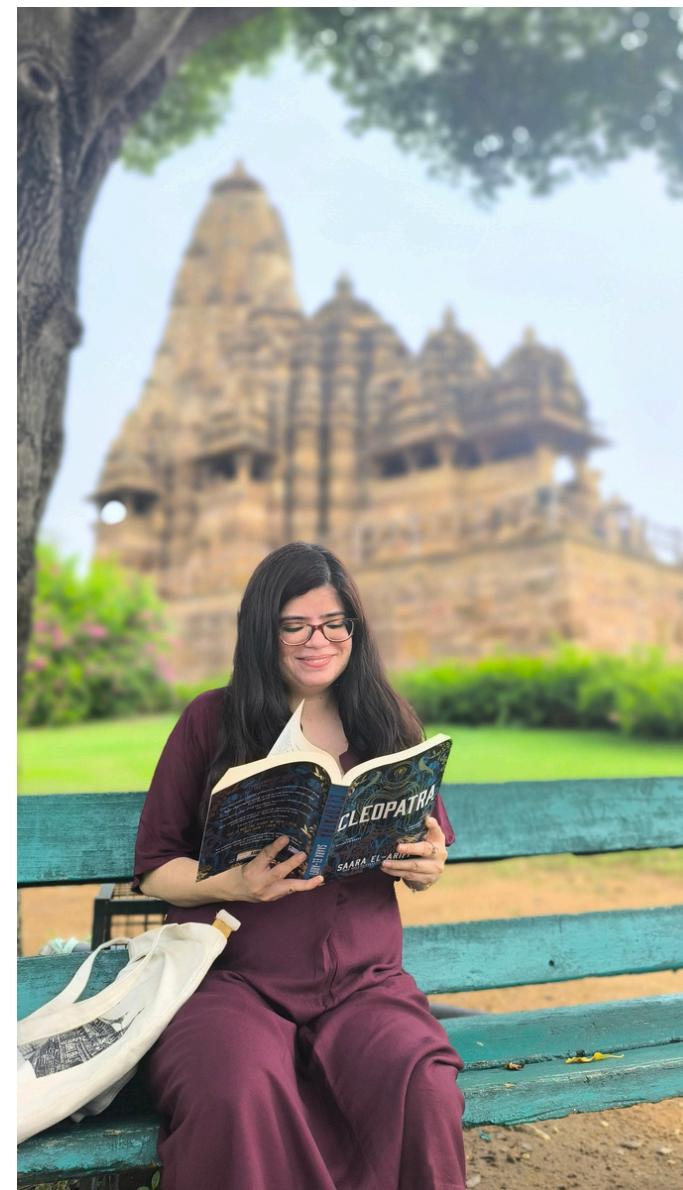
As we explore the many meanings of altitude in this issue, perhaps the most rewarding heights are not always measured in metres. Experiential travel invites us to rise beyond simply seeing a destination—to immerse, connect, learn and feel. Roopali explores this shift, where our passions become pathways to discovering places anew.

Travel has become the new norm. After a few trips, the novelty can begin to wear off and the marginal utility of simply visiting another destination starts to dip. Yet the need to take a break, experience something new, calm your nervous system, or challenge your body and mind remains. Enter experiential travel – a more personalised way of exploring the world, built around what you actually enjoy.

What started with trekking, surfing or city holidays centred around culture and history has become far more nuanced. Not everyone wants intense physical activity, and not everyone wants to spend their holiday moving from one historical monument to another. Today, whatever it is that you enjoy, are curious about or simply want to experience, there is likely a travel experience designed around it.



Love food? There are food and cooking-centred tours to destinations such as Italy and Vietnam. Love reading? There are reading retreats. Want to slow down and recover from the hectic pace of city life? Wellness retreats now range from yoga and meditation to Ayurveda, onsens and mineral-rich spas.

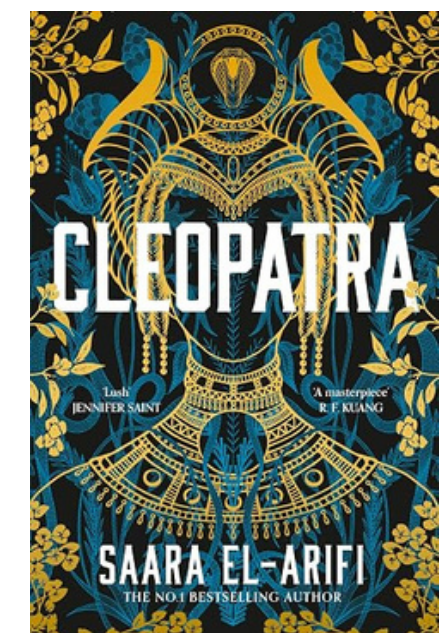


The idea is simple: instead of travelling merely to see a place, you travel to do something you love – and in the process, experience the destination differently. Here are some experiential journeys to consider for your next short or long break.

READING RETREATS FOR ALL THINGS BOOKISH

Even for something as solitary as reading, there are now retreats designed around the joy of books. Some are more social, offering readers the opportunity to connect with fellow book lovers, while others are quieter and more introspective, allowing you to indulge in good food, nature or historic surroundings and, most importantly, uninterrupted reading time. For a book lover, it is difficult to imagine a better holiday.

A wonderful example of this is Read-A-Kitaab's reading retreats. I attended one such retreat with this book club in Khajuraho, this July. As a reader, you might expect a reading retreat to mean being tucked away in different corners of a property, curled up with a book and coffee. To an introverted reader, this sounds heavenly all by itself. But this retreat was built for much more.



It was thoughtfully centred around community and a shared love for books. We checked into the hotel and soon the introductions and “what I am reading” sessions turned into thought-provoking conversations. There were book swaps, book club style discussions, an author talk, and numerous games like book charades (dumb charades with book titles) and a murder mystery night.

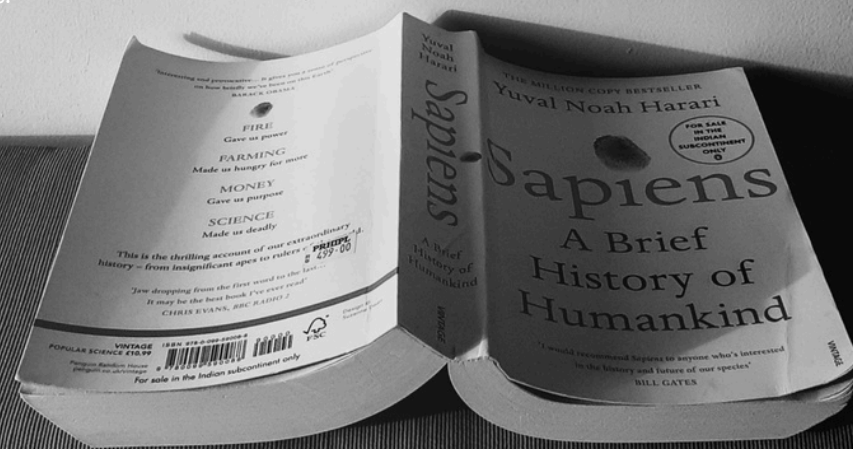
We also got to explore the architectural genius of the Chandela dynasty. The Khajuraho temples were truly a beauty to behold. In the early hours of the morning, before the crowds arrived, we walked through the lush grounds, marvelled at the intricate carvings and delved into the history of the temples and the different dynasties that form part of the complex past of these temples.

The newly started Khajuraho Light and Sound Show, narrated by the legendary actor, Amitabh Bachchan, was spectacular. The production value was undeniably at par with some of the best shows one can see in Europe and other popular Southeast Asian destinations.

Better still was sitting in the temple grounds, surrounded by the rich history of our country, and reading the wonderfully diverse set of books that we had all brought along.

Speaking of diversity, perhaps the best part of such retreats is the people. In no other setting would you necessarily find yourself interacting with such a wildly diverse group of well-read and smart people. We had a young man in his mid-20s who was finding himself, alongside a woman in her 60s whose fire and spark could put many youngsters to shame. Doctors, CAs, lawyers, marketers, authors, engineers and art collectors were all part of the mix.

Reading retreats are, ultimately, a wonderful way to meet like-minded people and experience a destination through the eyes of book lovers – or simply to slow down, get away from the noise of the world and curl up with a good book.



STARGAZING AND THE ART OF PAUSING

For most city dwellers, a star-studded night sky is a real luxury. Stargazing has an almost otherworldly quality, and this new travel trend offers a chance to step away from the constant hustle and noise of urban life. From simple road trips to the outskirts of a city to watch a celestial event to professionally curated stargazing tours, the options are plentiful, and arguably, there is something for everyone.

With telescopes becoming the new travel must-have, astro-tourism is becoming increasingly accessible and attractive. If the mysteries of the universe make you curious, or if you simply want some perspective on your own life, step outside the cities, find a place with limited light and look upwards. It is an extraordinary way to experience something phenomenal that we have, in many ways, grown accustomed to taking for granted.

A trip to the Atacama Desert in Chile or NamibRand Nature Reserve in Namibia may not be accessible to everyone, but there are several destinations within India that are both relatively pocket-friendly and worth the effort of getting to. Some easy entry-level destinations include the Thar Desert near Jaisalmer, Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat and Havelock Island in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

You could also head to Astroport Sariska in Rajasthan, Starscapes Observatory in Mukteshwar or the observatories in Kausani, Uttarakhand, for an extraordinary experience.



For the ultimate experience, one can head to India's first Dark Sky Reserve in Hanle, Ladakh. With exceptionally clear skies and minimal light pollution, Hanle allows you to experience the vastness of the Milky Way in a way few places in the world can offer.

Apart from the destinations, it is important to check the weather and, when possible, plan your travel around a celestial event that captures your attention. It is also worth investing in an experienced guide who can explain the night sky and the relevant equipment, further enhancing the experience. Planning well could be the difference between a good trip and a memorable one.

While astrotourism may seem like a recent trend, it may be one you find difficult to look away from once you start. It is certainly a beautiful way to connect with nature, step away from the everyday and regain a sense of perspective of the vastness of the universe while enjoying unforgettable views.



FLYING FOR CONCERTS AND JAMMING: THE NEW-AGE TOURISM

Discovering new artists or experiencing your favourite one, exploring unfamiliar locations or simply enjoying the energy and company of strangers while bonding over a shared taste in music - concerts and music festivals have gradually become one of the most popular reasons to travel.

This trend is gaining popularity for all the right reasons. People are travelling farther and farther for their love of music. For years, people have travelled for festivals such as Tomorrowland in Belgium, Burning Man in Nevada, Ziro Festival in Arunachal Pradesh and NH7 Weekender across India. What was once a niche form of travel, is now a common reason to pack your bags, get on a flight and book a stay, all to immerse yourself in the energy and vibe of a particular artist or musical experience.

With more and more popular artists embarking on world tours, masses now have an opportunity to enjoy music in different parts of the world and learn about the local artists along the way.

The iconic Eras Tour of Taylor Swift is widely known for the way it boosted tourism and local economies in the cities it visited. Whether you travel to a destination that was already on your wishlist or, like some of us, book tickets to destinations you might otherwise have been less likely to choose, there is always an excuse to be part of a global musical phenomenon.

The planning itself can also make such a trip more exciting and fulfilling. The enthusiasm builds months and sometimes even a year in advance - booking concert tickets, arranging flights, planning an itinerary around the concert and destination, looking for stays, connecting with fellow travellers and music lovers, and picking out the perfect outfit that fits both the weather and the vibe of the music.

Then comes the waiting - the hours before the concert, surrounded by other fans who love the same music or artist as you. The list goes on. All of it can amplify the excitement and give you the feeling of getting your money's worth even before the concert begins.



**POTTERY RETREATS AND
LEARNING TO LET GO:
SHIFALI SHETTY**

For those who want to learn something new and creative while still slowing down, pottery retreats sit at the perfect intersection of travel, craft and introspection. And, as an added bonus, you get to take home some self-made souvenirs. Now that sounds like a solid plus to me.

While looking for my first solo trip, a few years ago, I came across a pottery retreat in Dharamkot, a small, quaint town tucked away in the hills of Himachal Pradesh. Something about it immediately appealed to me. So I booked it.

Dharamkot felt like the kind of place where time moved a little differently. The retreat site itself was surrounded by green hills, trees and crisp mountain air, far enough from the noise of everyday life. The stay was simple, beautiful and peaceful. There was something incredibly comforting about waking up to the quiet and having nowhere I needed to be.

I had always found pottery fascinating, but I had never really thought about what goes into making something from a lump of clay. At the retreat, we learnt different techniques like pinching, throwing clay on the wheel and creating flat pieces that could be shaped into different forms.

The wheel was probably what I had imagined pottery would be like: sitting in front of a spinning mound of clay and slowly watching it take shape. In reality, it was much harder than it looked. The clay has a mind of its own, and the slightest change in pressure can completely alter what you are trying to create.

If you are not someone who enjoys loud music and intense concert energy, there are plenty of more melodious, relaxed but equally enthralling travel-and-music experiences. The Jodhpur RIFF and Magnetic Fields Festival, for instance, offer music against the mesmerising backdrop of Rajasthan.

And that is what makes this kind of experiential travel so compelling. You are not simply exploring another city or nature reserve; you are diving deeper into the culture of a place through one of the oldest forms of human expression - music.

It allows you to connect with a destination at a deeper level and experience its energy - whether that means the organised chaos of international pop music, the calm of classical music, or the innumerable possibilities somewhere in between.



All said and done, it was the pinching technique that I loved the most. It involves using your fingers to slowly shape a ball of clay, pinching and turning it until it becomes a bowl or whatever form you want it to take. There was something very intimate about it. You could actually feel the piece changing beneath your fingers. It required patience, concentration and surprisingly, a lot of letting go.

That was perhaps the biggest surprise of the entire retreat. I had gone there thinking I was simply going to learn pottery. Instead, I found it incredibly therapeutic. There was no room to think about emails, plans or the million little things that usually occupied my mind. There was just the clay in front of me.

One day, we went on a trek through the surrounding hills, and I got to see Dharamkot beyond the retreat. The landscape was breathtaking — green, vast and completely unhurried. Another unexpected highlight was visiting the monastery and having the privilege of hearing the Dalai Lama. It was one of those moments that you don't plan for and end up remembering for years.

But the most beautiful lesson came at the very end. We were asked to deconstruct and in some cases actually break most of the pieces we had spent days creating. We could only take a couple of them home. At first, it felt almost cruel. Why make something carefully only to let it go?

But then I understood. Sometimes we hold on to things simply because we have put so much of ourselves into them. The retreat taught me that creating something and owning it are not necessarily the same thing. Some things can be beautiful, meaningful and still be left behind.

I came to Dharamkot for pottery. I left with a few imperfect pieces, some wonderful memories, and a lesson I hadn't expected to learn: sometimes, the most important part of creating is knowing when to let go.

WHICH EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCE ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?

People travel to play and watch different sports – from watching football matches and F1 races in different parts of the world to exploring different forms of nature through scuba diving and skiing.

Wellness retreats are at an all-time high. Travellers are flocking to India for yoga, Ayurveda and meditation retreats, to name just a few.

The possibilities are endless. If you have a hobby, an interest or a passion, there is a way to merge it with your love for exploring new places and cultures.

Perhaps that is the real promise of experiential travel: you no longer have to choose between the things you love and the places you want to see. Your passion can become the reason you travel, giving you a whole new perspective on the chosen destination.

PHOTOS: VIVEK VERMA

 [tiptoeingacrosstheglobe](https://www.instagram.com/tiptoeingacrosstheglobe)

ANKIT RAJ

PANGONG LAKE

Landscape photographer Ankit Raj from Himachal Pradesh in India takes us beyond the familiar Leh-Ladakh experience, offering an aerial perspective of its iconic landscapes. Seen from above, the region unfolds in unexpected shades of azure and turquoise, revealing a vastness and beauty often missed from the ground. Yet, these ethereal landscapes are fragile. Through Ankit's eyes, this journey is also a reminder that every traveller's small, responsible choices can help preserve the places we come to admire.



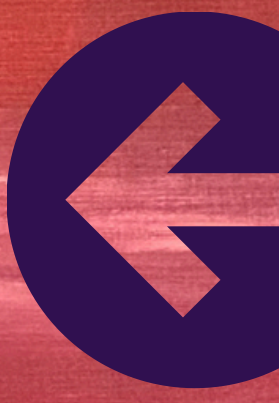




Based in Manali, Ankit Raj has spent a decade capturing the Himalayas, with Ladakh and Pangong Lake at the heart of his visual journey. His striking aerial photography transforms remote landscapes into mesmerising compositions of colour, pattern, culture and light—revealing the Himalayas from extraordinary perspectives while celebrating their fragile beauty and timeless power.

 [ankitraj09](https://www.instagram.com/ankitraj09)



ART 

ARTIST IN FOCUS

**RAGINI
BHATIA**

A Past Experience

This artwork evolved from the subconscious like a random dream. The symphony of colours reminds us of a past beautiful experience that made us live it again.

Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 24X37 inches

BEYOND HORIZONS

Beyond Horizons series is the turning point of my life as well as my career as an artist. After experimenting for two years in all kinds of mediums, I was finally about to give up art. The artist in me wanted to come out, express itself, explore and navigate through lived experiences, but somehow every time I was disappointed. I was not able to navigate through my conscience.

One day I took an old textured canvas and the leftover oil paints. I wanted to do an abstract painting, so I started to dab a few colours on the canvas, and the canvas beneath showed in some places, which I thought was good for an abstract painting. But it started looking patchy, and the colour combination looked bad in portrait orientation.

I again felt remorse and thought of joining painting classes or to just giving up. A twinkling tear dropped on the canvas. I thought I should just cover the visible canvas patches underneath and make it smooth. I will only start painting after I do a full-time or part-time course in painting. I took a smooth brush to merge everything and cover the whole canvas. In doing so, I observed that the colours started to blend in a beautiful manner and a horizon started to take shape.

The Calm After the Storm

This painting depicts the calmness we feel after letting out all our emotions. Just like a peaceful sea right after the storm.

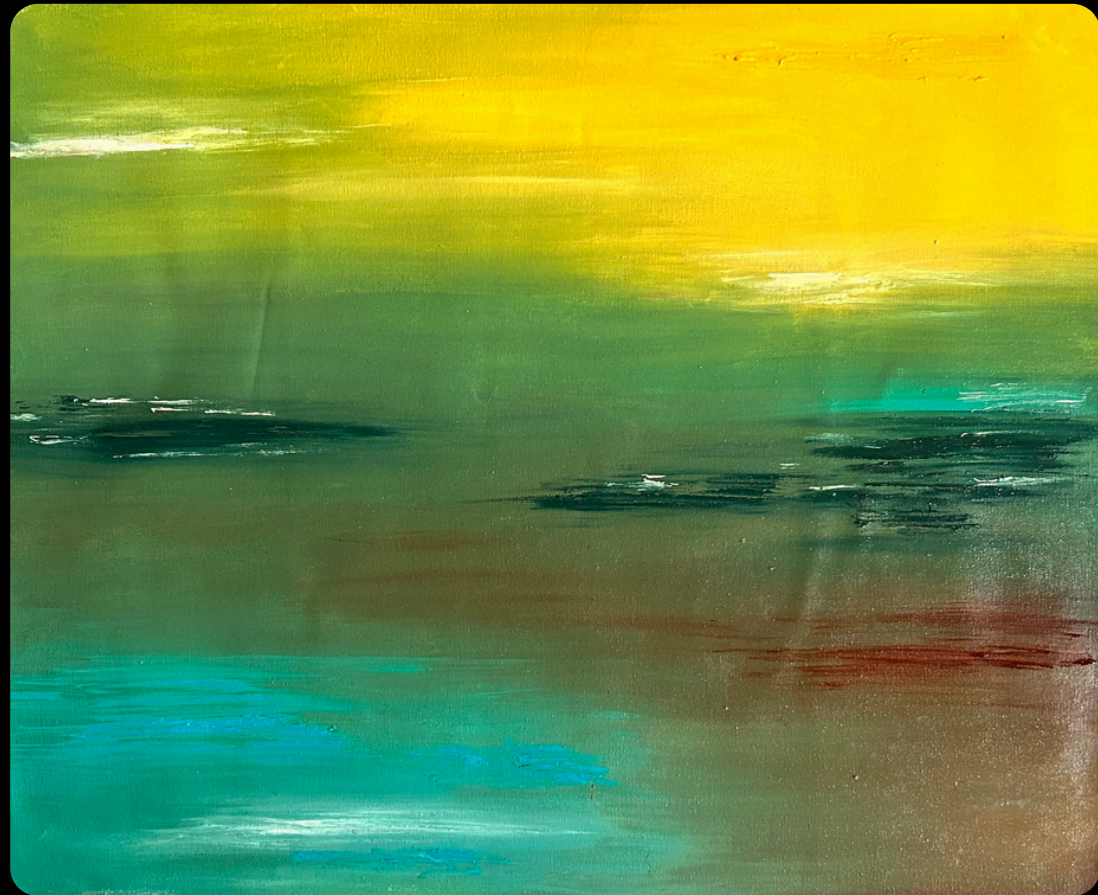
Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 24X37 inches



I finished the process and found that in landscape layout, all the colours blended well, the whites looked like specks of light, and the painting had depth to it. Adding dabs of oil colour gave it a textured look where the observer can even touch the colors. So, I was ecstatic about the result; now the painting appealed to all senses. I rejoiced as the painting looked complete and motivated me to make a series of such abstract landscape paintings. Landscapes within us.

I now feel confident that in the coming time I will be able to express myself in a more pragmatic way. I will venture in those corners of my mind where I did not go earlier, and I know that I'll be able to reflect on my past experiences, feelings, childhood memories, mysteries, emotions and maybe snips of past lives as well. Who knows where this journey takes me. But it has become a way of life now. Just as we eat, exercise and meditate, art is a form of meditation for me. Every day I immerse myself in this enchanting world of my mind. To get inspired and to inspire others.

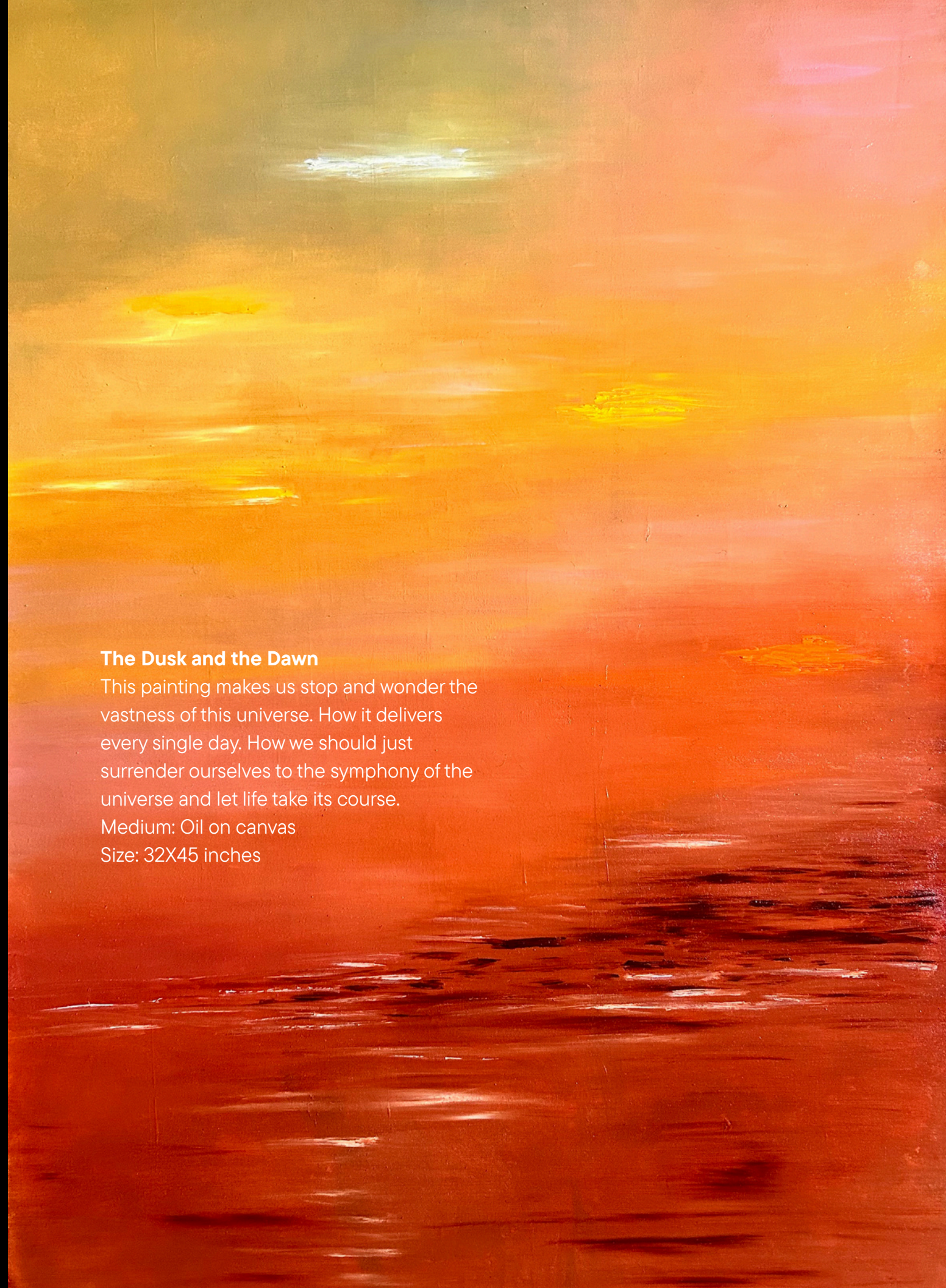


Sweet and Sour

This painting helps us to cherish the sweet moments from the past as well as the instances that let us down. But even the lows teach us to bounce back with more force.

Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 17X21 inches



The Dusk and the Dawn

This painting makes us stop and wonder the vastness of this universe. How it delivers every single day. How we should just surrender ourselves to the symphony of the universe and let life take its course.

Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 32X45 inches

Smell Lavender (Right)

This painting is an ode to the healing nature of lavender that helps us recover from any past trauma. This color is a symbol of healing power of nature.
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size:24X37 inches



To Be Loved (Above)

This painting makes us hopeful that the world will eventually receive the love it deserves.
Medium: Oil on canvas
Size:17X21 inches



Ragini Bhatia is a contemporary abstract painter whose practice moves fluidly across mediums on canvas, drawn always toward the same enduring themes: hope, transition, and the quiet persistence of light. Her palette—at once radiant and restrained, warm tones meeting cool—places her work at a compelling crossroads between abstract expressionism and spiritual landscape painting. In her hands, light becomes something almost tactile, a presence the viewer doesn't just see but perceives, while color takes on the weight and warmth of texture itself.

At the heart of her canvases lies an emotional horizon—one that reaches beyond the visual and resonates at the level of the soul. Bhatia's paintings read as quiet acts of resilience, gentle assurances that even the heaviest shadow eventually yields to clarity and warmth. Through sweeping fields of color layered with subtle, horizontal texture, she constructs immersive spaces that invite the viewer to slow down, breathe, and locate a moment of stillness within life's inevitable transitions.



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