FREDERIC BOURRET: ROMANTICISM

Romanticism is the first word that comes to mind when I look at the work of French artist Frédéric Bourret. He doesn't rely on technological trickery when it comes to his beautiful black and white photography http://www.fredericbourret.com. Where does he get his inspiration? Read our chat and find out.

MICHAEL: Hello Frederic. Your work is simply exquisite. Your photographs of street scenes and life are so elegant and poignant. Your work really reminds me of one of my favorite photographers, Henri Cartier Bresson. Is he an influence?

FRÉDÉRIC: Hello Michael. Thanks for inviting me. When I started photography, I first learned the techniques and I did not open one book of great masters. I wanted to see the world through my own eyes and avoid any kind of influence. So I wouldn't say that HCB was an influence not meant to be at least, even though I love his work too. The first book I received and opened (it was a gift) was the Friedlander, MOMA's one, because one of my friends thought I would love it and I did. I so love how Friedlander plays with the elements and tries to trick the viewer. He is now part of my influences, I guess. Whenever I take a shot, I always try to think if I would like to stare at this picture a day, a month, a year without losing the feeling of the shot. This is what guides my art.

MICHAEL: Your work also is very natural. It doesn't seem like you use a lot of tricks or photoshop. Maybe you do, I'm not sure. Also, I love the black & white. What do you like about black & white photography?

FRÉDÉRIC: My work is 100% natural. I don't use photoshop at all. I just used photoshop for a new, color series called "Behind Waiting," but very basic. Black and white can bring a new dimension, a certain atmosphere to a photograph. When you work with color, the aesthetic is very important. With black and white, it's much different. You need to get the emotional part of the picture and you have to create the feeling. That's why I don't want to use photoshop on my black and white pictures. You can't try to create an emotion, it has to already be there and be strong. Emotion is key in this photography.

MICHAEL: You are clearly the real deal. Another thing I notice about your work is that it's serene and romantic. Of course, you photograph what is there, but you have to notice it and that takes some sense of romanticism.

FRÉDÉRIC: I like serene pictures when you can take the time to analyze all the details. These are the scenes that I like to take and to look at. I am not a big fan of crowded places. So, for example, a picture of Times Square on a Sunday afternoon would not please me and I guess there are very few chances of seeing me there either. As for the romantic side, it's hard to tell, I guess it's part of my personality even though I don't think a lot of people would use this term to describe me.

MICHAEL: Very interesting. You're doing a very cool, color series that involves what looks like overexposing the subjects in the photos. What was your inspiration for that and what's the meaning behind it?

FRÉDÉRIC: Thanks. The series 'Behind Waiting' is a two-year work project. The inspiration came while I was waiting like everyone else for a bus. Afterward, I wondered if these moments are the same everywhere else. I wanted to capture those lost moments when you're waiting for a bus in Asia, Europe and North America. Afterward, I did a small process on the image to erase the notion of time and place. The process is very light (just on the colors) and it brings a new dimension on the picture. You need to focus not necessarily on the subject, but also on the environment. The series will be shown for the first time in nearby Paris.

MICHAEL: Very cool. Tell me more about your inspiration for the series.

FRÉDÉRIC: At the beginning of the project, I really wanted to see if these lost moments were the same in different countries. I wanted to know if France was so different than Japan for example. Basically, we are all waiting out there not speaking to each other. It's like a ritual, we come and we wait. People are focused on the wait, but not really on the environment or people surrounding them. Everywhere I went for this series ... Bucharest, Kaunas, Valencia, Montreal ... it was the same thing. The phenomenon is something interesting when we are all looking for friends on Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, etc. We like to communicate, but not directly by seeing each other. Yet ... the bus shelter is a perfect place to communicate. The technique I used allows me to erase the faces of people while keeping their gaze. Their faces are not the point of the series, so I didn't want people to focus on the faces. It also helps to erase the keys too blatant of today's technology like ipod. In a way, it creates a sense of timelessness.

MICHAEL: I totally agree. People have lost the ability and desire to communicate with other real people. This is what art is all about. You know, practically everyone and their grandmother owns a camera. Plus, so many people think taking great pictures is easy. As a professional photographer, how do you feel about this?

FRÉDÉRIC: The real question is what do people consider a great picture? If they are on vacation and they take a postcard-like pictures, they're great. But if you're not with them sharing the places and the moments, these photos will be emotionless. Photography may seem easy, but in a series of prints (a body of work) people, without knowing you personally, have to feel something special when they look at your photographs. Many

people are able to take a great picture, but it becomes harder and harder when you need to put that great picture in a series and tell a story, like an art project.

MICHAEL: Very interesting. You know, I've seen more and more photography at places like the Armory Show and Art Basel Miami Beach in recent years. Some of it seems like simple snapshots that I could have taken and then some of it is truly extraordinary work like yours. You just touched on this, but I really want to know ... when do you consider a photograph art and not just a photograph?

FRÉDÉRIC: This is a great question. When you look at one picture in an exhibit without considering the whole art project, it may seem like a great photo ... a simple photo that even a three-year-old kid can take. But the artistic form of the project, the message says it all. So I would say one picture out of the blue could be very interesting, but what makes the interest is the whole series. The art project makes a photograph and especially an art photograph. Photography is like painting; some canvases are beautiful, some are emotionally strong and some are made to push the limits of art. You have several types of painters as well as photographers. To tell you the truth ... with some projects, I really don't get it!

MICHAEL: I understand. You're a Parisian. Does Paris inspire you? Or ... does Paris just inspire foreigners like me who have a romantic view of it?

FRÉDÉRIC: I am not really inspired by Paris. In this city, I feel like I am trapped inside a museum. It was like that 300 years ago and it will remain the same for a long time. I don't say it's not a beautiful city, it sure is, but for my art side, the city lacks of movement and energy. It may seem paradoxical to want movement in photography, but it's the essence of photography. New York has this kind of positive energy, I used to live in the city and the inspiration came right away. I would have loved to have seen Paris in the early 1930's with the real Parisian faces. As for now, I can't really get the right feeling. I hope in few years I will though.

MICHAEL: But I thought Paris was a cool art city. What about contemporary art? And what about artists? I would think that Paris is like Heaven for artists today.

FRÉDÉRIC: Yes, Paris is a cool art city. You have the possibility to see tons of great pieces and major artists. The thing is that I can't get the feeling of it photographically speaking, but a lot of people do and they do it very well. Paris is an art scene, an important one too. It's one of the major places in the world. But it's also a mature place and very established. I would say Berlin or Vienna are much better for young artists today.

MICHAEL: What do you think about the art world? Is the art world taking contemporary photography more seriously?

FRÉDÉRIC: The art world is fascinating. I am speaking for the creation part. I love spending time in galleries and fairs. Some artists are just plain talented. For example, I love the work of Liu Di. He did a project on animals and the city and I think it's brilliant. I think since three or four years, photography is starting to become more popular. People do realize

that photography is not just a click on a button like a painting is not just a line on a white canvas.

MICHAEL: Are you a full-time photographer? How do you support yourself? Are art photographers (artists) like you in high demand?

FRÉDÉRIC: I am a half-time photographer. The other half, I do marketing for a digital art magazine in France. It's how I make a living. I don't do commercial prints or wedding. I only do artistic photos and I sell them directly or through an exhibit. High demand? I do okay. It requires a lot of work to get and organize an exhibition, but I wouldn't mind more demands!

MICHAEL: Finally Frederic, How would you say the average person views art photography and what are your hopes for your own work and career?

FRÉDÉRIC: I would say that photography has entered private collections and is now starting to be in living rooms as art. It's starting to find its own place. As for "average" people, I would say it takes time to understand photography as it's kind of brand new and only 170 year old. Painting has been here forever and the average person still doesn't get it when it's not about impressionism. The years will do the job. As for me, my only hope is to carry on creating, this is my fuel.

MICHAEL: Thanks Frédéric. This has been fun.

FRÉDÉRIC: Thanks a lot Michael for this chat. That was great!

To find out more about Frédéric's work, check out his website at http://www.fredericbourret.com.