

Publication: Friday Magazine

Country: Online

Date: 24 May 2019

Page:

Circulation:

Article: **I don't Use Photoshop: Emirati Industrial Photographer on the Raw Power of Image**

FRIDAY

I don't use Photoshop: Emirati industrial photographer on the raw power of images

Shreeja Ravindranathan May 24, 2019

Emirati photographer Jalal Bin Thaneya tells Friday the function and importance of industrial photography, and how he wants his solo exhibition *Beyond The Fence* (at Tashkeel) to be an artefact of our modern lives



I like images being a straightforward depiction of things. I don't want to dictate anything through them, says Jalal
Photo by Beha Lindner

What led you to photography?

I decided to pursue photography in 2013. While working at Jebel Ali ports in a construction company, I witnessed the demolishing of a control tower and took pictures of it. I then started taking pictures of abandoned rural areas. The transition to industrial photography happened when my trips to the UK exposed me to post-war pictures and developed my interest in the industrial tone and brute imagery. It was a very brooding and prolonged process. It wasn't instant.

Has your work with special needs awareness influenced your photography?

My time campaigning for special needs awareness (from 2006-17) saw me sleeping on the road, running across the UAE and walking through the Empty Quarter. It made me view the world realistically, that it's not always skyscrapers and luxury. I had a lot of time alone to reflect on what I wanted to do and how I wanted to say it.

Where do you find your inspiration and what fuels your creativity?

Our modern lives inspire me. The fact that we're going to run out of oil in 45 years compelled me to talk about oil and gas, scrapyards, cement plants because we don't see the impact of these places. Not everyone can go to these places in real life; so I took pains myself to get to these dirty, dangerous places and capture them in an artistic manner. I think it's an important conversation because there's a shift in the way we live now especially with Expo 2020 at our doorstep – we're moving towards electric vehicles and renewable resources such as bio fuels..

What were some of the challenges of making *Beyond The Fence* a reality?

It took a lot out of me physically because the places I captured are very big and hazardous. And even before you get there, you have to negotiate with the authorities and management. Then there's security clearance. I have to explain I am an artist, but they don't always understand that.



Publication: Friday Magazine

Country: Online

Date: 24 May 2019

Page:

Circulation:

Article: **Cont. I don't Use Photoshop: Emirati Industrial Photographer on the Raw Power of Image**

How did you ensure your stark subjects evoke beauty?

I chose to shoot at sunrise and sunset and if I'm inside a facility then I'd capture images at night as well. I chose sunrise and sunset so I'd get soft light to illuminate these harsh industrial subjects and add a certain beauty to it. I don't edit any of my images. The cameras I use are large format Hasselblads (the brand that was the first camera on the moon) and not consumer-level cameras.

How has Instagram influenced the nature of your photography?

You can no longer be old school and hide away, you've got to embrace technology. Instagram is an informative tool and a great medium to promote my work and the story of the process involved – footage of me negotiating and getting into places makes for great documentation of what I do and how I do it but Instagram doesn't work as the primary gallery for the kind of raw images I take. In a gallery, you can go up close and see the dust and the dirt because the quality is a 1,000 per cent better.

What was your experience of being part of the Critical Practice Program at Tashkeel?

It was very motivating as a local artist to work with international artists in the UAE and it saddens me that it has come to an end. I was working with a Lebanese artist, Chafa Ghaddar, and Spanish artist Silvia Hernando Alvarez. We would meet and discuss our progress and what we want to do. My mentors were Emirati photographer Jasim Al Awadhi and Flounder Lee, an American artist based in the UAE. The program did so much for me both personally and professionally.

What is the power of photography?

Images are powerful. In the 1940s Hitler used photography for propaganda and in the nineties when the US invaded Iraq you'd get conflicting images. I like images being a straightforward depiction of things; I don't want to dictate anything through them. These images might be boring to some but it is what it is.

Does the audience in the UAE understand and appreciate that considering they're bombarded with processed, aesthetic images all the time?

That's a challenge for a photographer like me because I don't use Photoshop to edit my pictures. People are slowly warming up to the concept of industrial photography but you have to convince them by inviting them to exhibits, being open to their questions, and patiently explaining the images to them and making sure it resonates with them.

What is the conversation you're trying to start with this exhibition?

Beyond The Fence is about our modern lives and its by-products. When we drive a car, we're polluting the earth. At the end of its lifetime that car goes to a scrapyards. I'm not trying to be an activist, neither am I trying to document places [like rigs and factories] – you won't find their names or locations. I want these images to become the artefacts of our modern lives that people in the future look back at and say 'oh this is what a cement factory looked like.'

The photographers who inspire you?

Margaret Bourke White, an industrial photographer in the Second World War, is someone I look up to. Then there's Alex Prager, Edward Burtynsky, and Charles Sheeler as well as Paul Strand.