



Paul Politis

by Cece Scott

While “beauty being in the eye of the beholder” may seem like a tired cliché, it is the heart and soul of what drives Paul Politis’ photographic approach to the images he shoots. “For a very brief time I was Malak Karsh’s assistant,” Politis says. (Malak is the brother of iconic portraiture photographer Yousuf Karsh.) “One day, we were on our way to a shoot somewhere, and we were passing dilapidated buildings covered in graffiti. I expressed an interest in photographing the buildings and the graffiti. Malak responded, ‘I wouldn’t photograph that if you paid me. It’s ugly.’ Everyone has different visual interests and different ideas about what is beautiful and what is ugly.”

For Politis, the art of photography is a combination of the visual aspects as well as his emotional response to his chosen subjects. Politis likes to commune with the objects around him, to understand why things he sees affect him as they do. With an approach that is intuitive rather than managed — Politis says, “most of my work is stuff I just come across” — Politis likes to create images that are, for him, metaphoric of what he imagines on a deeper, much richer sensual plane than the casual observer. And there is no expectation or needy desire on his part to engage or include that onlooker in his work.

“Perhaps because of my unease with people, I think I identify with and personify objects. Maybe that is why I can photograph a wall and find it fascinating and expressive.” Through his lens, Politis is able to give voice and reality to his subject matter. Politis’ newest images, the *Dead of Night* series, are a gritty photographic portrayal of what transpires mere blocks away from the bright lights of the big city. The lifeless prostrate bodies are photographed in the blackness of night, shown by a thin light casting meagre silhouettes on his grainy black and white photographs. Politis does not use any lighting equipment other than available street light and a MagLight flashlight. His long exposures sometimes benefit from the headlamps of passing vehicles.

Politis first became interested in photography in the late eighties, well before the digital revolution. At that time, a decision to shoot black and white or colour had to be made for film selection purposes. Even later, when he was experimenting with medium format film, and could easily switch between colour and black and white, colour was not his passion. Politis likes to shoot shapes and textures, which he feels lends itself more to the black and white medium. “Black and white fascinated me. I think it suits my way of approaching things. There is a lot of colour work I have seen that I admire, but the best colour photos I have seen don’t excite me nearly as much as the best black and white photos.”

Politis’ passion for shooting black and white images was initially inspired by a John Sexton photograph on a magazine cover. “It was a simple photograph of a tree surrounded by leaves. The beautiful tonal range and the simplicity of the image stunned me. I thought, ‘That’s how things should look, or perhaps how they really look, except I’m too jaded to see them as they really are.’”

Technical adeptness with a camera requires understanding “how the interplay between different f-stops and different shutter speeds affects the final photograph,” Politis stresses. Mastering the technical aspects of photography is liberating. Politis says that it was when he had the ability to not “think about these technical aspects consciously” that he “became truly free to express himself with his camera.”

Because Politis is deeply passionate about photography being an expression of personal vision and intimacy, his advice to young photographers is, above all, to listen to their muse. “Get in touch with what you are interested in and passionate about photographing. Don’t allow the opinions of others to sway you or dissuade you. The big thing is to try to open your mind. Everything is a subject.”



www.paulpolitiz.com