

Wear Good Shoes

Advice from Magnum Photographers

MAGNUM
PHOTOS

Cover Image: Martin Parr

From "Common Sense":
The Netherlands, 1997.
Image © Martin Parr/
Magnum Photos.

In 1947, four photographers—Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger and David “Chim” Seymour—toasted the founding of what would become the world’s most influential photographic collective over a celebratory magnum of champagne in the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Over 70 years later, Magnum photographers continue to chronicle the world, interpreting events, issues and ideas through visual storytelling.

Working with the next generation of photographers remains at the heart of the agency’s remit. We are committed to providing a range of educational opportunities and practical advice from our photographers and industry experts, spanning from our regular series of Theory & Practice articles on magnumphotos.com through to workshops and masterclasses led by Magnum photographers. Our latest offering is affordable and accessible online learning via our new platform, [Magnum Learn](#).

Our first online course, The Art of Street Photography, brings together seven world-class photographers—Bruce Gilden, Martin Parr, Susan Meiselas, Peter van Agtmael, Richard Kalvar, Carolyn Drake and Mark Power—plus industry experts, to share their collective insight and experience to help you improve your practice.

To celebrate the launch of the new course, we are making this guide available for free. Inside you will find an expansive collection of tips and advice from Magnum photographers, covering topics ranging from learning your craft to finding your vision, pushing outside of your comfort zone and being determined in working towards your goals.

We hope you find it inspiring!

Shannon Ghannam
Global Education Director
Magnum Photos

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Learn 01



“Give it all you’ve got for at least five years and then decide if you’ve got what it takes. Too many great talents give up at the very beginning; the great black hole looming after the comfortable academy or university years is the number one killer of future talent.”

— Carl De Keyzer



Carl De Keyzer

Left

Ice sculpture for a competition at an ex gulag turned prison camp. Project "Zona". Novobirusinsk. Krasnoyarsk region. Siberia. Russia. 2002.

Below

Ex gulag turned prison camp at lunch time. Project "Zona" Krasnoyarsk. Siberia. Russia. 2000.

Images © Carl De Keyzer/Magnum Photos.



“My advice to photographers is to get out there in the field and take photographs. But also, if they are students, to finish their course, learn as many languages as possible, go to movies, read books, visit museums, broaden your mind.”

— **Martine Franck**

“Learn the craft (which is not very hard). Carefully study past work of photographers and classic painters. Look and learn from movies. See where you can fit in as a ‘commercial’ photographer—‘commercial’ meaning working for others and delivering a product on command. But most of all keep your personal photography as your separate hobby. If you are very good and diligent it just may pay off.”

— **Elliott Erwitt**

“Get a good pair of walking shoes and... fall in love.”

— **Abbas**



Martine Franck
Pool designed by Alain Capeilleres.
Town of Le Brusac. Provence. France. 1976.
Image © Martine Franck/Magnum Photos.



Elliott Erwitt
California. USA. 1955.
Image © Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos.



Abbas
A bronze head of President Saddam Hussein
is paraded in the streets after US troops
occupied the capital. Baghdad. Iraq. 2003.
Image © A. Abbas/Magnum Photos.



“I would advise to read a lot of literature and look as little as possible at other photographers’ [work]. Work everyday even without assignments or money—work, work, work to discipline yourself and not for editors or awards. And also collaborate with people who are not necessarily photographers but people you admire. The key word to learn is ‘participation!’”

— Alex Majoli

Alex Majoli
A patient and a care worker lie in the sun.
Leros beach. Leros. Dodecanese islands Greece.
1994. Image © Alex Majoli/Magnum Photos.

“Try everything. Photojournalism, fashion, portraiture, nudes, whatever. You won’t know what kind of photographer you are until you try it. During one summer vacation (in college) I worked for a born-again tabletop photographer. All day long we’d photograph socks and listen to Christian radio. That summer I learned I was neither a studio photographer nor a born-again Christian. Another year I worked for a small suburban newspaper chain and was surprised to learn that I enjoyed assignment photography. Fun is important. You should like the process and the subject. If you are bored or unhappy with your subject it will show up in the pictures. If in your heart of hearts you want to take pictures of kitties, take pictures of kitties.”

—Alec Soth



Alec Soth

Left
Helena, Arkansas. USA. 2002.

Above
Joshua, Angola State Prison. Louisiana. USA. 2002.

Images © Alec Soth/Magnum Photos.

“Study and theory is useful but you learn most by doing. Take photographs, lots of them, be depressed by them, take more, hone your skills and get out there in the world and interact.”

“Never think photography is easy. It’s like poetry in that it’s easy enough to make a few rhymes, but that’s not a good poem.”

“Study photography, see what people have achieved, but learn from it, don’t try photographically to be one of those people.”

“Photograph things you really care about, things that really interest you, not things you feel you ought to do.”

“Be open to criticism—it can be really helpful—but stick to your core values.”

“Photograph things in the way you feel is right, not the way you think you ought to.”

— Chris Steele-Perkins

Chris Steele-Perkins
Blackpool, England, 1982.
Image © Chris Steele-Perkins/
Magnum Photos.



“I got into photography when I was around nine or 10 years old because of a few books my mother had on the lower shelves of her bookcase. Books by Dorothea Lange, Chim, Lartigue and also *The Family of Man*, *The Best of Life* (1973) and *Wisconsin Death Trip* [by Michael Lesy]. I absorbed them intensely and I know I’ve carried those images with me all my life, like ‘imprinting’ in birds — whatever you put next to them when they are born, they will assume forever that it’s their mother.

Chim’s photo of a polish girl — probably the same age I was then, who had grown up in a concentration camp and her drawing of home; Dorothea Lange’s migrant mother; *The Best of Life* book had a big effect on me. I vividly remember the pleasure I had looking again and again at Avedon’s photos of Marilyn posing as different actresses (even though I didn’t know who Avedon or Marilyn Monroe were).

Photographs of war, especially McCullin’s photos of Vietnam, were imprinted on my brain, without knowing the politics yet. There was one page of photographs in the book that I especially remember. The first row shows photography as a witness to time passing and change.

The second row shows the effect of speed on a man’s face — making the invisible visible and very strange. And the third row was pure fantasy and play. I think of that page as my first lesson in photography. Particularly that you’re free with a camera — you can describe the world, you can invent it, there didn’t seem to be any rules; a picture of a pineapple playing a cello was fine. *Wisconsin Death Trip* was responsible for my first realization of death and its inevitability, and my reaction was very literal: to photograph everything I cared about so it wouldn’t disappear forever and people 100 years hence would know us. That’s when I asked for my first camera.”

— **Alessandra Sanguinetti**



Alessandra Sanguinetti
The Necklace. Buenos Aires. Argentina.
1999. Image © Alessandra Sanguinetti/
Magnum Photos.

“Study the works of the greatest photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson and Andre Kertesz. Try to travel to many parts of the world and understand what a diverse world we live in.”

— Hiroji Kubota

Hiroji Kubota

When I first visited the Kim Chaek Ironworks, the largest ironworks in North Korea, in 1986, I was told that the works had an annual production capacity of 2.5 million tons. There is no way of knowing what its capacity is today. A huge billboard showing the late president, Kim Il Sung, peering into a furnace is erected in front of the main gate to the ironworks. I was guided to various places inside the plant. Coupled with the falling snow, this area impressed on me a powerful visual image.

Chongjin, Hamgyongbuk-do. North Korea. 1986.
Image © Hiroji Kubota/Magnum Photos.



“Learn all the skills you possibly can—film-making, sound, writing, finance, marketing, painting, installation. Read, think, be curious and just keep making your own work! Don’t always listen to advice—no two practitioners’ paths are the same!”

— Sim Chi Yin

Sim Chi Yin

A family takes a walk and goes fishing in an area in southern Malaysia now covered with giant sand dunes. The Danga Bay area is earmarked for a massive residency and commercial development, with much of the land reclaimed. Mangroves nearby appear to have been drowned by sand. The world is running out of sand as Asia's rapid urbanisation is driving up demand like never before. Malaysia. 2017.

From "Shifting Sands," 2017—ongoing.
Image © Sim Chi Yin/Magnum Photos.



“My grandad exchanged some loyalty stamps for my first camera when I was just eight years old. Its first outing was on a school trip through Foxton Locks, part of the extravagant Grand Union Canal in Leicestershire, in the English Midlands. My first picture was of my teacher, Miss Allen, in 1967. It was not a particularly flattering picture, and nor does it suggest the dawn of any great talent. Perhaps choosing Miss Allen as my first subject was a cry for help, a pact between the two of us that she would look after me. But she didn’t. Craig Smalley (the school bully) had spotted the camera. All the other pictures were to be of him, and him alone.

I wonder if he still has those pictures? Of course I had to hand them all over to him after I got them back from the local chemist, or wherever it was my parents took the film. I told my grandad; I had to explain why I had only one picture to show him. I assume he later said something to my parents because the Smalley threat began to subside. But my plan of recounting the trip aided by twelve pictures came to nothing, and felt somehow less real because of it. So photography was immediately elusive, precious, challenging and desirable.

I didn’t take it for granted then, and I haven’t since. During a nervous, painfully shy childhood I would painstakingly caption and catalogue all my pictures. Today I imagine they lie somewhere deep in my father’s loft, to be re-discovered in some painful but inevitable future.

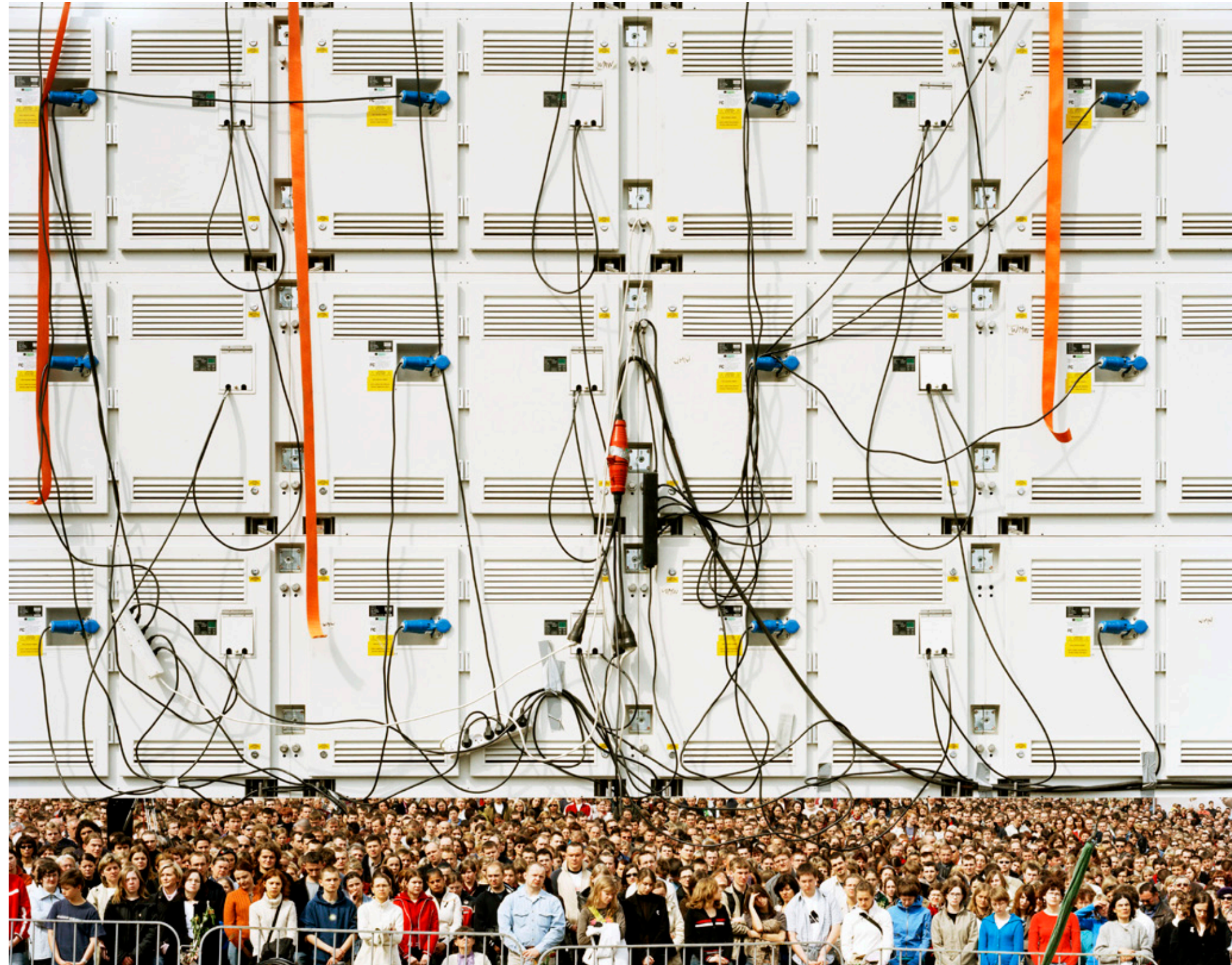
I vividly remember, in 1980, seeing an exhibition by the war photographer Don McCullin at the V&A in London. His pictures touched me deeply—you’d have to be made of stern stuff if they didn’t—and they clearly moved others. Some people were in tears. At the time I was a third year painting student who had, as yet, shown very little inclination towards photography. But now, to a young man used to working everyday in the life room, trying to tease an emotional response from a stick of charcoal, a piece of cartridge paper, and a naked model, McCullin’s work was a revelation. I knew Rothko could move people, if you were of the right frame of mind and you were prepared to give his paintings time, but this—these photographs—they were so powerful. They really did communicate. I liked this democracy. I decided to be a photographer, though I had next to no idea how.”

— Mark Power

Mark Power

Death of Pope John Paul II. Watching
the Pope's funeral on large video screens,
broadcast live from the Vatican.

Warsaw, Poland. April 2005.
Image © Mark Power/Magnum Photos.



“When I was a teenager my older brother who liked photography was given a handmade wooden enlarger called an Emperor and a Rolleiflex from our uncle. My brother used to take me to a photographic club called Les 30×40 (in reference to the size of prints). Once a month, a bunch of fans of photography met in Paris to exchange their experiences, knowledge and love for photography. There was one guy, very old fashioned, who lived alone with his old mother and who was an art historian specialised in photography. Every month he prepared a lecture on a great photographer.

That’s the way I discovered the big names in photography. Some of them were even invited—one day he introduced to us Diane Arbus. That might be the first time I had been really excited—even ‘moved’ would be more correct—about photography. Later, my brother gave up photography—my parents didn’t let him and wanted him to have a ‘real’ job—and I fought against them and became a photographer.”

— Patrick Zachmann



Vision & Voice

02

“You must have something to ‘say’. You must be brutally honest with yourself about this. Think about history, politics, science, literature, music, film and anthropology. What affect does one discipline have over another? What makes humans tick? Today, with everyone being able to easily make technically perfect photographs with a cell phone, you need to be an author. It is all about authorship, authorship and authorship. Many young photographers come to me and tell me their motivation for being a photographer is to ‘travel the world’ or to ‘make a name’ for themselves. Wrong answers in my opinion. Those are collateral incidentals or perhaps even the disadvantages of being a photographer. Without having tangible ideas, thoughts, feelings and something almost literary to contribute to the discussion, today’s photographer will become lost in the sea of mediocrity.

Photography is now clearly a language. As with any language, knowing how to spell and write a grammatically correct sentence is, of course, necessary. But, more importantly, today’s emerging photographers now must be visual wordsmiths with either a clear didactic or an esoteric imperative. Be a poet, not a technical writer. Perhaps more simply put, find a heartfelt personal project. Give yourself the assignment you dream someone would give you. Please remember, you and only you will control your destiny. Believe it, know it, say it.”

— **David Alan Harvey**

David Alan Harvey
Berlin Wall. Hanover. Germany. 1989.
Image © David Alan Harvey/Magnum Photos.



“My favorite pictures have always been complex ones, pictures which ask questions and pose problems but leave the answers and solutions to the viewers. These are images with a long and evolving life, in which the photograph may transcend the subject and become the subject. Central to the strength of these images is photography’s most precious and unique quality, believability: that the moment preserved on paper is true and unaltered, that it really happened and will never happen again.

In my search for photographs I have come to realize that the best pictures are surprises, images I subconsciously seek but do not recognize until they suddenly appear. These are thrilling moments in a kind of photography that can be frustrating and unpredictable, with the picture often spoiled by something so minor as the momentary glance of a subject at the camera. In approaching people I prefer to be the observer rather than the observed and value the human presence, even a human shadow, as the most important element in my pictures.

The flow of people in a setting, their changing relationships to each other and their environment, and their constantly changing expressions and movements all provide the photographer with unlimited choices of when to push the button. By choosing a precise intersection between the subject and the moment, he may transform the ordinary into the extraordinary and the real into the surreal.”

— **Constantine Manos**

Constantine Manos
Florida, USA, 1997. Image ©
Constantine Manos/Magnum Photos.





Constantine Manos
Playing in the square. Elounta. Crete.
Greece. 1964. Image © Constantine Manos/
Magnum Photos.

“I didn’t get truly excited about photography until my sophomore year of high school (although I actually learned photographic technique from my father much earlier). I had played around with making little (extremely bad) movies, using friends and family as actors, and rapidly realized that I did not want to work with lots of other people. I wanted to work alone. I began photographing in the streets of Brattleboro, Vermont, near the school that I attended, and in Boston, where my family lived. I discovered photographing in the street. I’ve been doing it ever since.”

— Alex Webb

Alex Webb
Jumping. Boquillas (Border). Mexico. 1979.
Image © Alex Webb/Magnum Photos.





“Be yourself and look
outside of yourself.”

— Larry Towell

Larry Towell

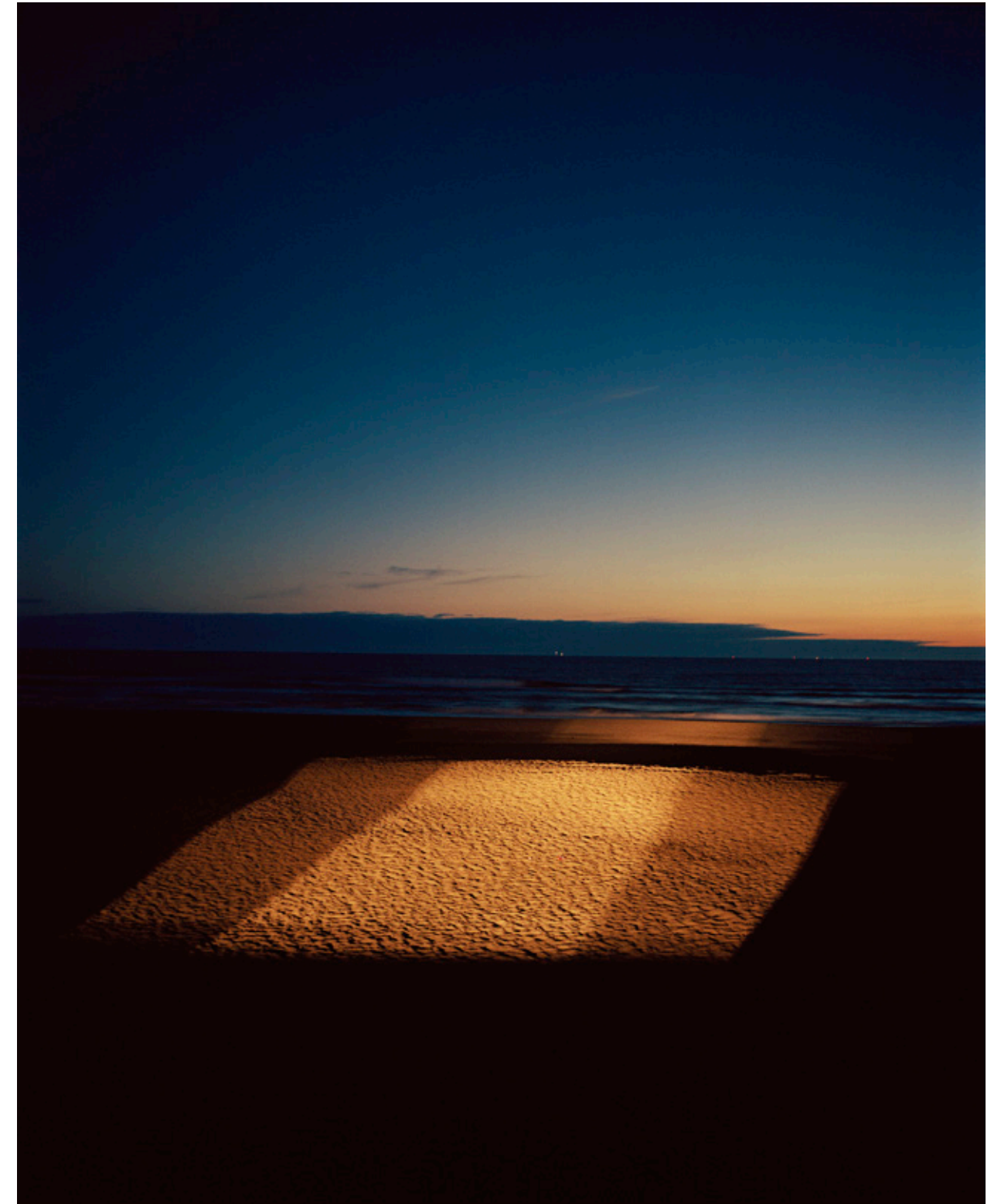
An Arab child and Israeli soldier after a demonstration by Israeli settlers who marched through the Arab quarter of East Jerusalem. They were protesting the September 1993 signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. East Jerusalem, Israel, 1993. Image © Larry Towell/Magnum Photos.

“Take your time making work.
Don’t give into the pressure
to post every image you make
online. Wait ‘til you have
something to say, even if it
takes years, and then share it.”

— Gregory Halpern

Gregory Halpern
Los Angeles and vicinity.
USA. 2008—2015.
From the project “ZZYZX”

Image © Gregory Halpern/
Magnum Photos.





“Don’t try to please everyone. Instead, try this: Make your work for an audience of two — for yourself, and for a single artist of your choice. The artist should be someone you greatly admire. Your goal is to make work that you are proud of and that this other artist will also find compelling. Your voice will be clearer, and less compromised.”

— Gregory Halpern

Gregory Halpern
Los Angeles and vicinity.
USA. 2008 — 2015.
From the project “ZZYZX”

Image © Gregory Halpern/
Magnum Photos.

“Photography can give a person a voice, but it says nothing without intent and meaning. When you begin, the emphasis can be too much on trying to make pretty pictures. My advice is to first focus on having something to say. Your photography naturally becomes more fluent as your commitment deepens.”

– Matt Black

Matt Black

Snowfall outside a shuttered K-Mart.
Flint, Michigan. USA. 2016. Image
© Matt Black/Magnum Photos.



“I believe photography—like many other things one does in life—is the exact expression of who you are at a given moment. Every time you compose and release the shutter, you give voice to your thoughts and opinions of the world around you. So other than the obvious patience (photography is a complex medium, a voice which requires time to develop), perseverance and the necessary humility when dealing with others, I would recommend working to become a more developed and informed individual, a more knowledgeable and engaged citizen. This will translate into a deeper more complex understanding of the world around you, and ultimately into richer and more meaningful photography.”

— **Paolo Pellegrin**

“Be yourself, get up early and don’t try too hard, as whatever is trying to come out will come eventually without any effort. Learn to trust your instincts and don’t worry about what others will think or about the process too much. Work hard but enjoy it.”

— **Peter Marlow**



Peter Marlow

Shingu-Koza-Kamikura bonfire festival, 2000 men run down a mountain with flaming torches and dresses in white, in a celebration of "manhood", no women are allowed on the mountain. Prefecture of Wakayama, Japan. 1998. Image © Peter Marlow/Magnum Photos.

“To photograph what is closest to you and the things that you enjoy and have an interest in. Make the whole process as fun and as least difficult as possible.”

– Trent Parke



Trent Parke

A man stands huddled under awnings on the corner of George & Market st. His tie thrown over his shoulder after running through a Sydney thunderstorm. Summer rain. From "Dream/Life" series. Sydney. Australia. 1998. Image © Trent Parke/Magnum Photos.

“It’s important to tell stories close to you and often a small story can talk about something bigger. Do not look at the people as ‘the other’, but try to get close to them - try to understand, not only photograph. Make photography a conversation.”

– Bieke Depoorter



Bieke Depoorter
Untitled. USA. 2010.
From the series "I Am About to Call it a Day".
Image © Bieke Depoorter/Magnum Photos.

“Be yourself. Don’t copy anybody.”

– Harry Gruyaert



Harry Gruyaert
Bay of the Somme river. Somme departement.
Fort Mahon. Picardie region. France. 1991.
Image © Harry Gruyaert/Magnum Photos.



Passion 03

“Try to live something intense— at home, abroad, it does not matter. It has to be passionate. And once you know the basics forget about photography.”

— Thomas Dworzak

Thomas Dworzak

Girl with balloons. Destruction in the city center.
Nothing has been rebuilt since the two wars.
Grozny, Chechnya. Russia. March 2002.
Image © Thomas Dworzak/Magnum Photos.



“Find something you are passionate about and shoot your way through this obsession with elegance and you will have a potentially great project.”

— Martin Parr



Martin Parr

Left
From "Common Sense"
Benidorm, Spain, 1997.

Above
From "Common Sense"
The Netherlands, 1997.

Images © Martin Parr/
Magnum Photos.

“I first got excited by photography the first day I picked up a camera. However this was not until I was 20 years of age. I suddenly realized that I had an excuse to be anywhere and gaze in wonderment; the camera gave me something to hide my shyness behind. The act of pointing a camera at another human being is daunting. However, clarifying what is unfolding in front of one can give one immense pleasure. I have had a blissful life.”

— David Hurn

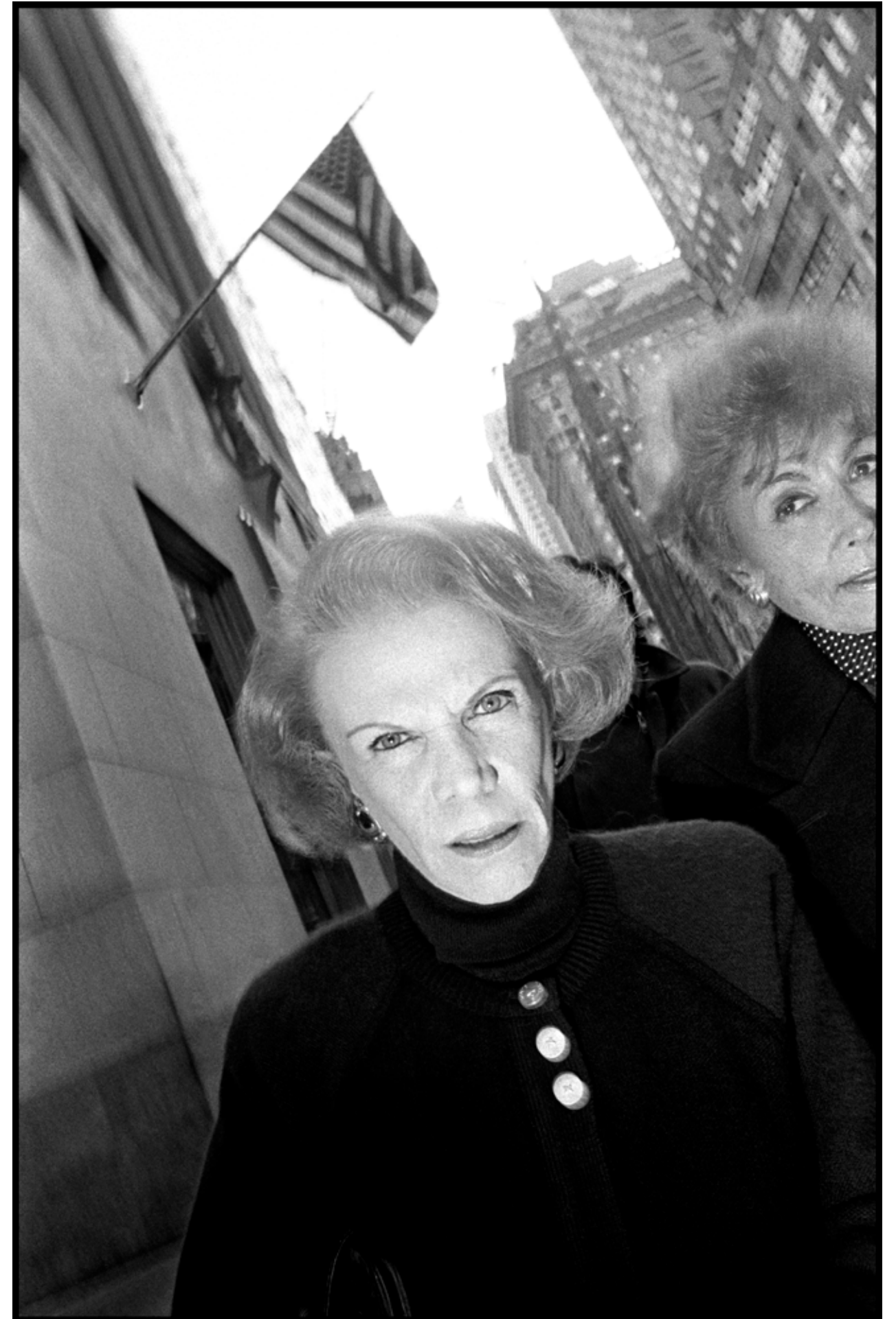
David Hurn

The Beatles in the Abbey Road Studios, where many of their most famous records were made, examining the script of the film 'A Hard Days Night'. London, England, 1964. Image © David Hurn/Magnum Photos.



“In 1966, when I printed my first picture and I saw it coming out, I got really hooked on photography. It was a picture of a cute little squirrel!”

— Bruce Gilden





Susan Meiselas
Sandinistas at the walls of the Esteli National
Guard headquarters. Esteli, Nicaragua. 1979.
Image © Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos.

“Dig in, follow your
instincts and trust
your curiosity.”

— Susan Meiselas

“Forget about the profession of being a photographer. First be a photographer and maybe the profession will come after. Don’t be in a rush to pay your rent with your camera. Jimi Hendrix didn’t decide on the career of professional musician when he learned to play guitar. No, he loved playing music and created something beautiful and that *then* became a profession. Larry Towell, for instance, was not a ‘professional’ photographer until he was already a ‘famous’ photographer. Make the pictures you feel compelled to make and perhaps that will lead to a career. But if you try to make the career first, you will just make shitty pictures that you don’t care about.”

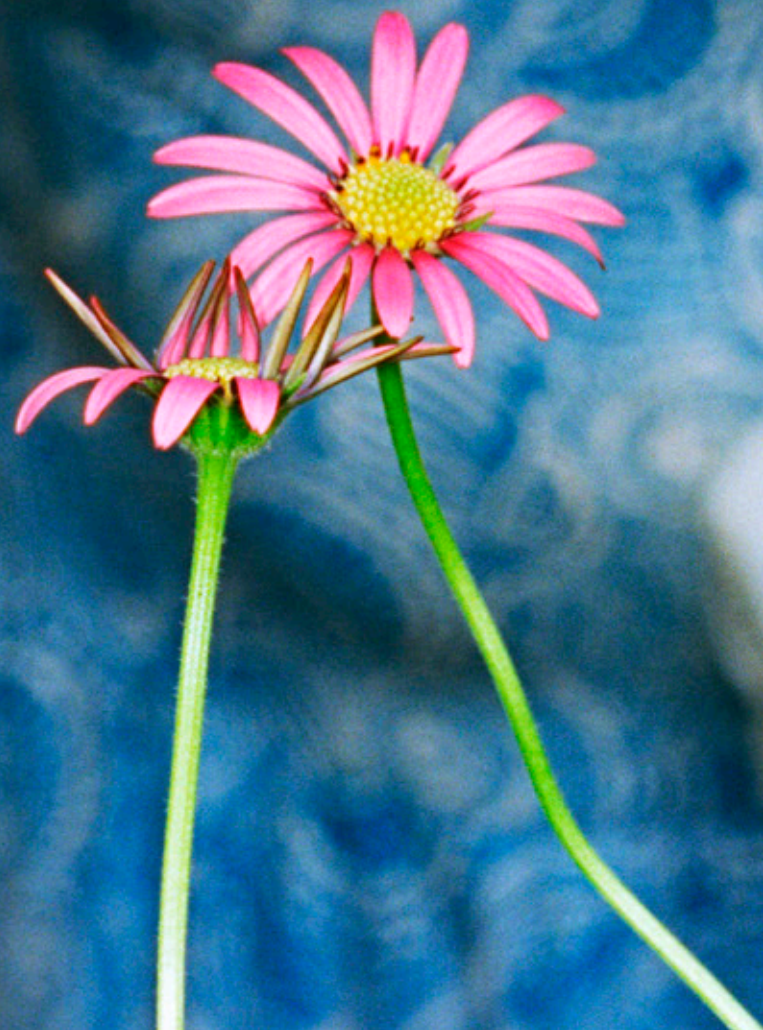
— Christopher Anderson



Christopher Anderson
Reflection in window in Altamira.
Caracas, Venezuela, 2006. Image ©
Christopher Anderson/Magnum Photos.

Consistency

04



“If you want to be a photographer, you have to photograph. If you look at photographers’ work you admire, you will see that they have found a particular place or subject and then have dug deep into it and carved out something that is special. That takes a lot of dedication, passion and work.”

— Steve McCurry

Steve McCurry

Left

Peshawar, Pakistan. 2002.

Right

Monk at the Jokhang Temple.
Lhasa, Tibet. 2000.

Images © Steve McCurry/Magnum Photos.



“Stick to one project for a long time. And keep working on it through many stages of learning, even if it might feel finished. It’s the only way to break through what I think are some vital lessons that need to be learnt about storytelling and how to combine images.”

– Mikhael Subotzky



Mikhael Subotzky

Left
Beaufort West rubbish dump. Beaufort West.
South Africa. 2006.

Centre
Samuel, Beaufort West rubbish dump.
Beaufort West. South Africa. 2006.

Right
The entire Mallies family survive off Michelle's
sex work and her father's disability grant.
Beaufort West. South Africa. 2006.

Images © Mikhael Subotzky/Magnum Photos.





Risk 05

“Go out and do the things you really want to before getting tied in. If you don’t take the risk in the beginning you’ll find it much harder to come back and take it later on.”

— Olivia Arthur

Olivia Arthur

A Saudi couple dance at a private party
in Jeddah. Jeddah. Saudi Arabia. 2010.

Image © Olivia Arthur/Magnum Photos.



“Throw yourself off a cliff, figuratively speaking. Photography is a language. Think about what you want to use it to talk about. What are you interested in? What questions do you want to ask? Then go for it, and throw yourself into talking about that topic, using photography. Make a body of work about that.”

— Jonas Bendiksen



Jonas Bendiksen
Villagers collecting scrap from a crashed spacecraft, surrounded by thousands of white butterflies. Environmentalists fear for the region's future due to the toxic rocket fuel. Altai Territory, Russia. 2000. Image © Jonas Bendiksen/Magnum Photos.

“Make your own mistakes. You need to have your own experience and nobody else can really tell you what to do.”

— Sohrab Hura



Sohrab Hura
Stormy night. Laos. 2011.
Image © Sohrab Hura/Magnum Photos.

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