

Timothy Saccenti

Bak108 // Interview

- You are directing both **advertisement** clips and **music videos**. Which one do you like most? Can you please share your working process while **visualizing a song**?

At the moment I'm enjoying the music video process, there's less people involved than in an advertising shoot, which keeps the quality higher. There's this notion that having a large committee of people decide what is best will create a better end result, but the opposite is true. Having too many people involved actually decreases creativity and thwarts any individual thinking that may not agree with the group, thereby cutting off an entire world of possibilities. Also this seems to be a new age of music videos, obviously youtube has changed the world. 5 years ago you could make an amazing video and no one would every have a chance to see it, now, at the very least, you know that your finished piece will be available to anyone in the world with a computer and internet connection to view, albeit in horrid quality. This has created new and interesting challenges that have been discussed enough that I don't need to go into here, needless to say that it's an interesting time to be working in the music video realm, and I think everyone is just keeping their fingers crossed there's some massive bandwidth breakthrough or internet television movement that helps increase the quality and speed of viewing motion on the web. That said we love working with advertising budgets and the constraints that the needs bring, what is design but coming up with a solution based on the constraints one has to work within?

The working process is basically sitting down in a darkened room and playing the song really really loud over and over again and noticing what images come up. It starts very simply like that, to get an idea of color schemes, shapes, motion, timing, it determines the underlying abstract language we will use in the piece. Then that abstract skeleton is covered with the literal parts of the track, I.E. we look at the lyrics, the narrative elements, and then start getting input from the artist who created the song. Luckily most of these artists have a great visual sense, and some form of character for themselves, it adds much to the process. Next we will try and come up with the "twist", the element of surprise or visual interest points that will anchor the piece together, we pool all our resources for element, the editor, director of photography, effects and set designer all have many ideas and we bounce them around each other for a time, seeing which stick. Though I'm new to motion work it seems to me the key to success is having an amazing team to collaborate with, and luckily I have that at the moment. We all have personal interests and obsessions about visuals and things we want to push and try out. The music video medium is excellent for that as, unlike a full length film, one isn't necessarily bound by a narrative, one can be very experimental(if the music allows for it).

- How often and what for do you use **computers**?

We use them for all the administrative work in the studio, obviously, and for processing and coloring/enhancing all our imagery. We love our computers, but generally try to build as much as we can in the studio and do as many effects and such as possible in camera, it's still more satisfying that way. Being some kind of luddite and NOT using computers out of some vague notion of integrity is just idiotic though. Different people have different processes of working and computers are an amazing tool to have in the arsenal. I learned photography in the pre-digital era and learned to print in a proper darkroom so I have an analog background and tend to think relation to the physical world when designing ideas and sets, but I have also worked extensively with Q Studios in New York City, one of the top digital enhancement studios in the world, so I'm getting the best of both worlds.

- Some people think that **digital photography** images are not comparable with negatives and some think the opposite. Where do you stand between digital and analog photography?

We use digital often, but that is mostly down to 1, convenience, 2, the fact that we shoot in a controlled environment (the studio) and 3, the workflow the client desires. Up until the last few years we didn't use much digital as the quality was poor, but with the advent of the Canon 1 DS series and the Phase one systems that all changed drastically. On location we still might use film as it is faster and has more latitude, but in the studio a Hasselblad setup with a p45 phase one system is nearly unbeatable quality wise, without moving to 4by5 film formats. In the coming years there will be no more professional film cameras in production, minus a few specialized items and collector pieces, so this discussion will be mute, and much of that will be down to workflow. The desired delivery mode of most magazines and agencies (not art galleries mind you) is and will continue to be digital, the entire system of designing and going to press is now based on it, so just for this point alone the digital format will be preferred in every step of the image making process. It's not just about how you shoot the image but about the entire long process of getting to the final outcome....that, in a few years, will most likely be electronic paper.

- We can say that high definition cameras have reached the quality of 35mm film. Feeling the difference is nearly impossible for an ordinary viewer. Digital video is not only cheaper than film, but it's also a lot easier to work with. How do you evaluate **the future of film**? Do you think new technological developments will change the standards in movie industry that came from 19th century?

Digital video, first off is NOT cheaper than film unless you are shooting a big production with lots of footage. The initial cost of renting a digital camera that is high enough quality and can handle the different lenses you would want to

work with in a proper shooting environment will cost thousands of dollars a day to rent, easily. You also need special equipment and technicians to run it, which also cost money. It's still cheaper to create a small project with a bolex camera and real film and scan it in to edit it. There are many prosumer digital video cameras with "HD" settings on them, but they do not have the quality of film, not to my eye. They chips have major problems with color rendition, contrast control, and shadow/highlight banding. Unless you are shooting on greenscreen with a very simple, medium contrast lighting setup, with no camera movement and no real motion, then it's not the best choice quality wise. However the latest high end digital movie cameras are amazing and in a few years when all the workflow kinks are sorted out and the bodies are smaller and easier to use then there will be a real revolution in quality across the board. But as far as changing standards in the movie industry? I can't answer that as I'm not in the movie industry myself, but technically yes I'm sure they will change with the technology as they always have.

- As easily seen, the **atmospheres** are quite impressive both in your photographs and video works. In what ways do you design the sets in your mind? Do you always prefer being responsible for that?

As I said, our team is amazing, and we all bounce ideas together to come up with the basic theme. We enjoy designing the sets and art directing the piece based on the initial ideas we have, set building and art direction are very important parts of the project to us as they determine the whole mood of the piece. Mal Torrance, our set/prop artist, has created many great sets in the photo industry, and we usually collaborate on all the projects in one way or another. We enjoy building at set so the artist or subject has something to react to, it leaves the shoots open to more possibilities, rather than adding sets in post..though that can be good too depending on the project!

- If you have **limitless budget**, what kind of project would you create?

We'd probably put that money to better use socially than building an alter to our own egos...but how about a low-gravity dub soundsystem on the moon to start?

- If you had one chance, **which person in the whole human history** would you like to take pictures of?

The first cloned human, Eve of Adam&Eve, and the future ruler of the New World Order. Oh wait, they are all the same person right?

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- Do you have the **aim of being immortal** as a visual artist? Do you think **fame** is important?

Luckily I have amazing friends and family so fame isn't really ever a

motive. As far as immortal? I'd just like to continue having interesting projects to work on that can spark interest or thought. To think about fame and being immortal takes too much attention away from the present, and the present is all we really have, isn't it?

- Are you interested in **cinema**? What do you think about Hollywood movies and how do you compare them with European and far eastern cinema?

It's so easy to bash Hollywood films. So let's do it. They suck. Just kidding. There's this idea that movies made in other parts of the world than California are all amazing, but guess what? Shit films are made everywhere, you are just force fed the ones from Hollywood because they spent so much money on them that the advertising department is made to justify their existence. Personally I don't care where a film is from, if it's popular or not, if it's good, I enjoy it or get something out of it, then it's a good film to me. It's dangerous ground to pledge allegiance for or against anything in finite terms, best to keep your mind open and think for yourself. Luckily I have friends who love nothing but avant cinema like Jodorowsky and the like, but also have friends who can see the genius in Top Gun. Our netflix que is schizophrenic, which is great, mixing influences keeps you on your toes. Recently I tend to lean towards documentaries and obscure 70's scifi myself..but that is also determined by what projects we are working on. That I find is one of the greatest benefits of working in an artistic field, you can be exposed to so many types of art/films/music and then reinterpret it through your ideas..then send it back out into the world.

- The famous old Prussian photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt says; "I don't like to work with assistants. I'm already one too many; the camera alone would be enough." What do you think about this statement? Do you like **teamwork** or would you prefer **working alone** like Eisenstaedt?

Respect to Eisenstaedt, he's one of the greatest photographers in history. Things have changed in the industry tremendously since his time, budgets and productions are massive undertakings now, much more money is spent and on the line..It's more like creating a movie now rather than a simple intimate portrait..at least for some projects. I think if he was shooting an ad campaign now he would be happy to have assistants around to make sure the \$100,000.00 production didn't get ruined because someone loaded a sheet of film wrong, there's a lot more money on the line. From my other answers earlier you can see that teamwork is crucial for most of our projects. But, for portrait work, I agree, I am often happiest going out on my own to meet a subject, setting up simple lighting, getting a rapport going, and recording the sitting in an interesting way.

Having too many people around can distract the subject or myself. Luckily I have many project that are just that, and I often request projects like that after shooting intense campaigns.

- Theme of our current issue is "**Me**". How can you describe yourself with only three words or one sentence?

My friend called me "cheeky specy monkey" the other day but I think I'll just go for one word. Lucky.