



AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

WITH

Sascha van der Werf

Sascha van der Werf, Born in the beautiful south of Austria, in Wolfsberg. His Carinthian and Dutch roots can be found in his work while capturing touching moments today. He successfully completed his master's degree in business and then worked for several years in marketing and key account management, including Apple Austria. Photography didn't count for him at the time, though his father's good old Minolta always pointed the lens at him.

Sascha van der Werf is the creative type who cannot sit still and wants to bring his ideas into a form. Looking closely at his work, you will immerse yourself in the world of a human to whom it is essential to share his vision with optimism and to convey the message in a dignified aesthetic.



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Lens Magazine: Thank you, Sascha, for taking the time to have a chat with Lens Magazine. We were very impressed by your work solely dedicated to Black and White photography. As we visited your website, we saw several main fields you have focused on in the past years: Boudoir, Street Photography, and Portraits. All are made in an extraordinarily high level of expertise. Let's start with your background as a photographer. Where did you study the field? How did your journey in photography start?

Sascha van der Werf: In 2017 I turned 40. And Like many forty-year-olds, I began to wonder if this was really the life I always wanted. The few documents (a few personal snapshots) were not enough to deduce who I am, what I love, and what is really important to me in my life.

One day I got myself a camera and started taking pictures of my personal life, which led to an exploring journey with a very personal touch. It helped me discover what really has meaning in my life, be honest with myself, and critically question myself from time to time.

My perspective on the world and my reality changed significantly since I started. Every click, every moment I witness, and all the people I meet through photography defined me for who I am today. I believe each work is a self-portrait of the person I portraited, and the personal communication is within each photo.

Today with my photos, I make a statement, share how I relate to the world, and express my feelings. My camera is always with me. I remember all of my moments with her (The camera is my great companion).

It is unforgettable experiences and experiences that really enrich my life, not the material things. These photos are a part of my life - photography has a positive influence on my life today. It became my language for sharing everything that I want to express and communicate about.

Lens Magazine: Did you come from an artistic family?

S. V. D. W.: No, not at all. I have an economic background, and most of my family a technical one. Art has never been significant in our family,

and photography has not always been a part of my life. Today I can't imagine a day passes without having my camera with me for creating memories of special moments during the day.

L.M.: Why only in Black and White?

S. V. D. W.: The constant distraction by colors in our oversaturated world makes it chaotic for me.

I like it simple, which I find it being expressed in black and white photography. Black and white photography allows me to see more clearly and reduces distractions,

mainly because of my red-green color blindness. Further, I can express my message, emotions, and feelings more clearly with Black and white. I build a stronger emotional relationship with someone when I look at their picture without the distraction of color. There's no right or wrong; it's a personal choice. Sometimes, the world looks better to me in Black and white, where images are more aesthetic and timeless and allow me to make a visible statement in a saturated, colorful world.



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L.M.: In which of the fields did you start your journey in photography? (Boudoir, Street Photography, and Portraits)

S.V.D.W.: At the beginning, I was focused only on documenting my personal life, but soon I widened my interests and began to include my environment into my documentation until I got into street photography. I wanted more ... and went deeper into this fascinating world.

And as I got to my 40 birthday, I received a present from my friend Ernesto, which influenced me sincerely- my first real photobook by **Henri Cartier-Bresson** (today I have an extensive collection of photobooks by many photographers). I wanted to get even deeper into this genre.

HBC's work had a significant influence and made me start my street photography journey. Careful observation, patience, and recognizing the right moments that play a vital role. **Cartier-Bresson's**

concept - a split second that reveals the greater truth of a situation and captures the essence of fleeting the moment - shaped modern street photography and influenced my work a lot.

While I had a strong artistic approach, in the beginning, I meanwhile do more documentary street photography. It became essential to me to find meaning in what I am doing, especially in street photography, which is a way of liberation; it changed my view of the world and life. If we encounter life with mindfulness, it brings us back to reality. As we move carefully, step by step, we get to know our city, our fellow human beings, and above all, ourselves better.

L.M.: What gear are you using? (Camera, Lenses, and editing apps).

S.V.D.W.: I learned that with less equipment, I can concentrate more on the essentials: making photos. I have fewer decisions to make and feel free and dynamic

with my shooting. I started with Leica Q and got used to it very quickly and had excellent outcomes. Still, I felt like I was missing out on something - with just one camera, so I build a collection of all kinds of equipment and gear.

Last year I reduced everything to two cameras, one for the street and one for the rest. For the Street photography, I work with my Leica Q2 or the Q2 Monochrom; both come with a fixed 28mm lens. We sharpen our eyes and learn to assess distances better when we only use one lens, which helps me a lot, especially in the street. I developed a feeling for it; I know its limitations, making me

more efficient, and I don't lose valuable time changing the lens. I never leave my home without this camera; it is always in my hand, ready to shoot in the streets.

My other camera system is the Leica M. With this camera, my search for beauty in the perfect moment began - my personal "decisive moment." I use two lenses, 35mm and 50mm. This is a whole new experience, and I really enjoy it.

For the editing process, I use mainly Capture 1.

To get some analog/vintage moods in my digital images, I use Silver Efex Pro, and for corrections, I can't do it in Capture 1; I use Photoshop.





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L.M.: How would you describe your photography style, and were there any other photographers that influenced your development and shaped your style during the years?

S.V.D.W.: I tried out many paths in photography, and I actually don't want to put myself in any kind of category. If I have to sum up my "style," I would say my photography expresses humanity's touching moments. No one can be improved by only autodidactic studies. So my work is inspired by others. As I studied my favorite photographers, I got an idea of how to improve. Consuming pictures on the screen does not help me develop. My time is precious, I use it

carefully, and I want to be more aware of the work of others. I studied printed images, visited galleries, and read a lot from other photographers. It is a more intense way to learn because I want to know how they see the world and what they focus on in their work.

There are countless photographers whose work I really appreciate and who impress me. I'm touched or inspired by other's work. Modern photography is a bit too influenced by technology. In the past, photographers had fewer technical tools and made amazing images - that's just one of the reasons I fell more connected to them.

Here and now, to list all those who inspire me or whose books I have at home would go beyond the time frame. Right now, I'm going through **Rodney Smith's** work. His photos inspire me a lot - especially in my storytelling projects.

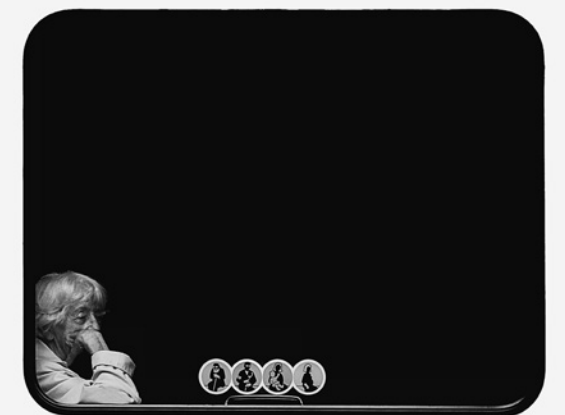
Further, in my opinion, a good photo and a painting contain the same ingredients. To improve my understanding of a good picture, I have annual tickets for the local museums. I believe learning from painters is the best we can do. Studying the composition and philosophy of the works exhibited help me a lot to improve my style and technique. And in the end, photography is painting with light.

L.M.: In your portrait and Boudoir work, we can witness a very extreme level of Black and White, almost no use of the grayscale's different shades. The outcome is a theatrical and clean line. Tell us about the editing process of the images.

S.V.D.W.: In my work, I differentiate between the artistic and the documentary approach. Realism is very important to me. A painter adds elements to a painting; I subtract them in my photos until you only see what I want to show. In my artwork, I remove elements that are annoying to me to better lead the viewer to the main image's message. While I only adjust the bare essentials with documentary recordings, sometimes with art photos, I edit until a surreal moment emerges from the recording. I don't manipulate images by adding something that wasn't in the picture when taken because, with all art, it is important to me to stay authentic. I don't like cluttered pictures. Peace and harmony are essential to me; that's what I find in my minimalistic approach. I reduce disruptive elements while attaching great importance to aesthetics and maintaining the authentic and emotional message. I want to create art, but I don't want to analyze it as such, and it's not up to me to decide whether something is art or not.



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L.M.: Let's talk about communication with the models and the figures you portray. How do you create such an intimacy with the figures for achieving such a close and gentle outcome? What is your communicative approach when you need to take a portrait of a person?

This is the only way I can show people how I perceive them, especially in my boudoir work. I like to meet the people I portray before. At least for a coffee talk - so I can get to know them a bit and find out if I am the right photographer for them. I will never start a new Boudoir project without meeting upfront.

S.V.D.W.: I deeply care about the people I portray. With my images, I tell their story - how I see and connect with them. And many things go into creating a good portrait, but time, a personal connection, and respect are important to me. It is a strong foundation for my photography when I can connect with a person, which takes time.

In street photography, I learned to work with whatever is available, especially with the light. That helps me a lot, so I do not need to set up great scenery or expend my time on backdrops. The gained time allows me to focus on the human on the other side of the lens.





Elina
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So I'm less distracted and can pay attention to their mood, genuine emotions, and feelings - because I want to portray them authentically as I perceive them and how I feel the moment together. Since everybody is different, has another background, and different feelings, I do not have a "general" approach for everyone, except being honest with them and giving them my full attention while being together.

L.M.: Lens Magazine: Was there ever a hard- uncomfortable

shooting time with a model? And how did you handle it?

S.V.D.W.: Of course, with both models and clients. If shooting with a model does not work out, no matter what I try, I do end the session. It always takes two to create an image, not only the photographer.

With clients, it's a different story. Most of them have little to no experience in front of the camera. I have a few tricks to make them feel

more comfortable, and I do make many brakes to not exhaust them. If it really does not work out on that day - I always offer another day to proceed at no extra costs. I want them to be happy with the outcome. It makes no sense to keep going if it does not work out just because they booked that day. But it rarely happens because I believe meeting upfront and building up a connection before the shooting eliminates many uncomfortable moments that might come up during the photo session.

Elina
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L.M.: Do you also do commercial projects in Portraits and Boudoir?

S.V.D.W.: Yes, I do, in several fields, not only in portraits and boudoir. I appreciate it if someone is touched by my work - and I really love to make others happy with my images. But this year, I started to focus more and more on my personal photography projects, which will be presented later this year. The preparation and composing of these projects are time-consuming, so I will have less time for commercial projects.

L.M.: In your Street Photography work, we can see a different approach, with perspective, grayscale and unique angles. Tell about the journey of looking for the right image in the street.

S.V.D.W.: In street photography, we can't force anything; only if we stay open with our minds will we discover a lot being photographed. A good photo in the street is the interplay of a trained eye, skills, luck, perseverance, and (Street) Photography is the art of observation. I can only successfully record people, places, and moments in time if I am 100 percent involved. When I explore a new place, I turn everything off and become one with my surroundings. Good street photographers are sensitive, have a lot of empathy with their subjects, and many of us are not even noticed. Empathy and the ability to empathize with the feelings and worldview of others play a major role.

I learned most of the techniques of street photography through constant practice. But I knew the best trait a street photographer can have is curiosity.



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Elina
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We cannot fake it in life, which drives me to learn more and experience more. My curiosity lets me see in, up and down everywhere - and I reward myself with my pictures. I give my environment my full attention. My eyes are, of course, the most important tool in photography, but with my other senses, I can gather additional information about events around me that I might not "see." All the extreme noise and smells, and other influences can lead me to an exciting situation around a corner. Without it, I might move on in a different direction and miss an opportunity.

It is a very challenging genre in photography; we discover new approaches, learn to work with the elements and what is available. Street photography showed me how important it is to focus my full attention on my surroundings - it influences my photography a lot. I think it teaches us a lot of functions that a good photographer should have. That's why I keep practicing it every day and never leave home without the camera in my hand.



Kerry
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L.M.: We can see several workshops for 1 on 1 and for groups on your website. The upcoming scheduled group workshop is on Sept - Nov 2021. Tell us about the importance of teaching in your career.

S.V.D.W.: Up to September, I'm offering only 1 on 1 Workshop due to restrictions related to the pandemic.

The first group workshop for this year will be in September for the Austrian Leica Academy. I don't know if "teaching" is the right word. You can't teach somebody photography, maybe the technical process but not the rest. Because photography, for me, is not a pure application of a technical process. It is more about the perception of what we experience with the whole

body. Everyone as an individual reflects in their photos the inside in the outside.

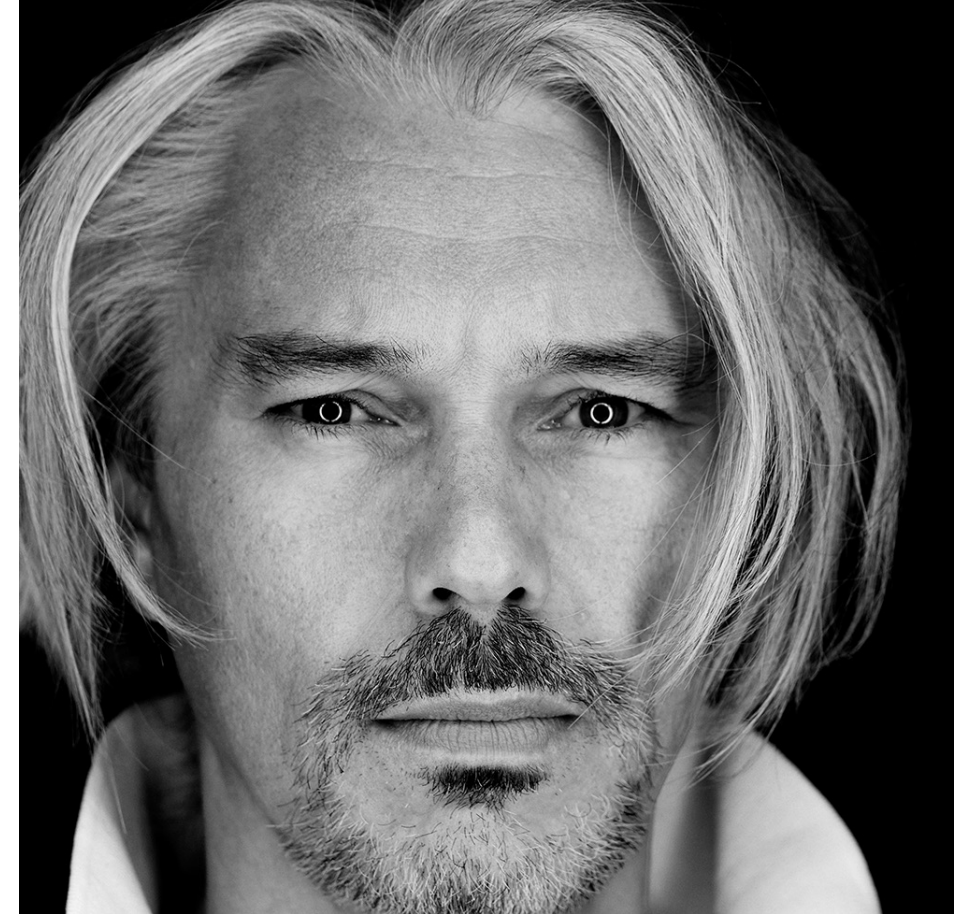
In my workshops, I focus on giving my participants inspiration. Show them new creative approaches and discover new perspectives, and I help them find their unique voice in photography. And yes, it plays an important role in my career because

I love to inspire people and help them develop. And a lot of my participants became friends of mine, with whom I have a constant exchange, and that also inspires me a lot.

Also, behaving as correctly as possible, integrating oneself into the situation and life on the street, is just as important as the respectful handling and use of the documentation. More conscious perception of one's surroundings helps to read everyday life photographically and to rediscover it. I show my participants how they can discover these moments for themselves, what is important when taking photos on the street, and how they can tell the story / the moment from their point of view.

L.M.: From a professional photographer's point of view, what advice do you have for young photographers trying to make their way in the photography field?

S.V.D.W.: Photography can be a nice hobby that we immerse ourselves in and enjoy the process of creating. And not everybody wants to create added value and make a statement with their photos. But doing it professionally, I believe someone should be aware of why he is photographing and have a vision. I also struggled a long time until I came across a statement by David duChemin: "At a time when extensive skills are required in this craft, we differ primarily in our vision: the way we use photography to tell the stories that our eyes and hearts perceive." My vision motivates me and helps me orientate myself and others to achieve a goal. I think this is the basis everyone should have – one to start the way into the photography field.



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- Sascha van der Werf

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