

ADORE NOIR

A Black & White Fine Art Photography Magazine for Digital Devices

MAJESTIC SERENITY - Interview with Håkan Strand

AN: Please introduce yourself.

HS: My name is Håkan Strand, born 1959. I live in Stockholm, Sweden, with my wife and our two sons.

AN: AN: How did you become interested in photography?

HS: I first became interested in photography as a teenager when I chose photography as an elective course in school. Over the years, my interest waxed and waned, but in 1991, when I lived in New York, I became truly hooked. I discovered many galleries for fine art photography and saw many wonderful exhibits. The photography scene in New York was different, multifaceted and flourishing in a way that I was not accustomed to. This was really an eye opener for me, and very inspirational.

AN: Can you tell us about your aesthetic process?

HS: I prefer to work in low light situations, like dusk and dawn, when the light is softer and easier to control. This time of the day also provides the best opportunity for working with longer exposures, which in my opinion adds an additional dimension to a photograph. I work with exposure times from a few minutes up to just under an hour. I also do most of my work during the fall and winter. I think the weather conditions during these seasons adds a nice atmosphere for black- and -white photography. I often use several filters to emphasize this, such as red, orange and green filters. These filters can actually have a great impact on the final result.

Regarding the subject matter, I'm primarily a landscape photographer. However, that doesn't mean I exclude all other subjects.

I work quite hard with composition. I like to keep it simple and try to omit unnecessary elements as much as possible.

I often travel back to the same places and photograph the same scene over and over again until I am happy with the result. This, of course, requires a bit of determination. However, in order to get the result I want, I have to be on

location when the weather condition is the way I want it. That is, not too good or not too bad, but more on the bad side. I like to work in mist and fog, and when the sky is filled with storm clouds, or when the landscape is covered with fresh snow. I have been studying the weather reports so frequently during last years that one might say I have become somewhat of a hobby meteorologist.

Although all of the stages involved in creating a good image are important, one of the most important things is having a good negative. Therefore, I develop all negatives myself. After developing a lot of film, year in and year out, I know how to make the negatives suit my preferences. Practice makes perfect.

AN: What motivates you to create images?

HS: The feeling I get when I succeed in getting the results I'm aiming for is so rewarding. It doesn't matter whether or not the images become economically successful. For me, photography is a passion! I must also say that I enjoy the freedom of having my own business as a photographer. I gave up a well-paying job in the pharmaceutical industry in order to fulfill my dream. Since that day, I have never looked back.

AN: What are your influences?

HS: I find inspiration from many different sources. The main source is actually old photographs. Some might call me old fashioned, but I find the quality of good old photographs second to none. In the early days of photography, one had to work with very long exposure times in order to get a decent result. I love the interaction of the strong contrast in the black parts with the smoothness in the grayscale. This is partly a result of long exposure times. I also like the way the water and the clouds are affected by the extended exposure times, giving the water a gentle smoothness, and the moving clouds a painted effect.

I have been a collector of old prints and old photography books for many years. Several books with old photographs of Stockholm contain some of the best photographs I have ever seen. Many of them were taken around the turn of the past century, and some of them even before.

I am also influenced by old movies. I am a big fan of the Swedish cinematographers Gunnar Fischer and Sven Nykvist. Both of them worked in close collaboration with Ingmar Bergman. Gunnar Fischer had a major roll in capturing the outstanding light in Ingmar Bergman's masterpieces *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal*, both from 1957. Sven Nykvist used the same style in *Winter Light* from 1962. The light in these movies is extraordinary. The contrast in the black parts are strong and prominent, and there is a wonderful smoothness in the grayscale, just like in the old photographs. The integration of strong contrast and smooth parts are very appealing and inspiring, and I often strive for this effect in my own photography.

AN: What would you say your greatest accomplishments are?

HS: It's hard to say. Everything I do related to photography is sort of connected to each other. One thing often leads to another. An award in an international photography competition or a publication in an international magazine can open up for cooperation with a fine art gallery, and an exhibition often leads to new contacts and new projects. It's an ongoing process. However, if I have to mention one thing, I must say that I am very happy that Susan Spiritus Gallery in California is representing my work. It's truly a great honor for me. I had my eye on her gallery for a long time before we actually got in touch. Several of my favorite photographers are represented by Susan Spiritus Gallery. Susan Spiritus is a legend in the circuit of fine art photography. She opened her gallery in southern California, Newport Beach, in 1976 and is celebrating the gallery's 35th anniversary this year. She handles the work of nearly 50 artists, including the work of such photographic luminaries as Ansel Adams, Ruth Bernhard, George Tice and André Kertész.

AN: Out of all the places you have been to, what draws you to the Scandinavian countries?

HS: At the moment, I am working on a project with the working title Scandinavia Light. This project will include several visits to Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Faroe Island, Åland, and of course, Sweden. All of these countries are strongly connected historically and culturally, particularly through the Viking age and Norse mythology. The landscapes in the Nordic countries are quite diverse, which is one of the things that I will emphasize. This project will hopefully result in an exhibition, and ultimately, a book.

Furthermore, I have traveled all over the world, but I have to say, the quality of the light here in Scandinavia is outstanding. I find it perfect for black and white photography.

AN: Do you have any projects on the go?

HS: I am actually working on several projects. One of the projects is about my hometown, Stockholm. In my opinion, Stockholm is, without any doubt, the most beautiful city I have ever seen. This is a project that I have been working on for many years, a project that I am very excited about.

Also, I have several exhibits in the pipeline. The next in line will be here in Sweden at Gallery London in Uppsala in September. This exhibition is an extended version of my latest exhibition "Focus on Light". The exhibition will, at some galleries, include up to 40 prints. My biggest exhibition so far.

I also have several photo trips planned for the coming fall and winter, primarily in the Nordic countries. I am quite busy, and that's the way I like it. ♥

See more at: <http://hakanstrand.com>