



URBAN
OBSERVATIONS:

i

Witness

**Images
&
Text**

by

D e x t e r B r o w n e



Observation reveals life's often hidden patterns. It turns out my fear for water lead to a Swimming Scholarship, a degree in Civil Engineering, and now a career in Photography.

Introduction

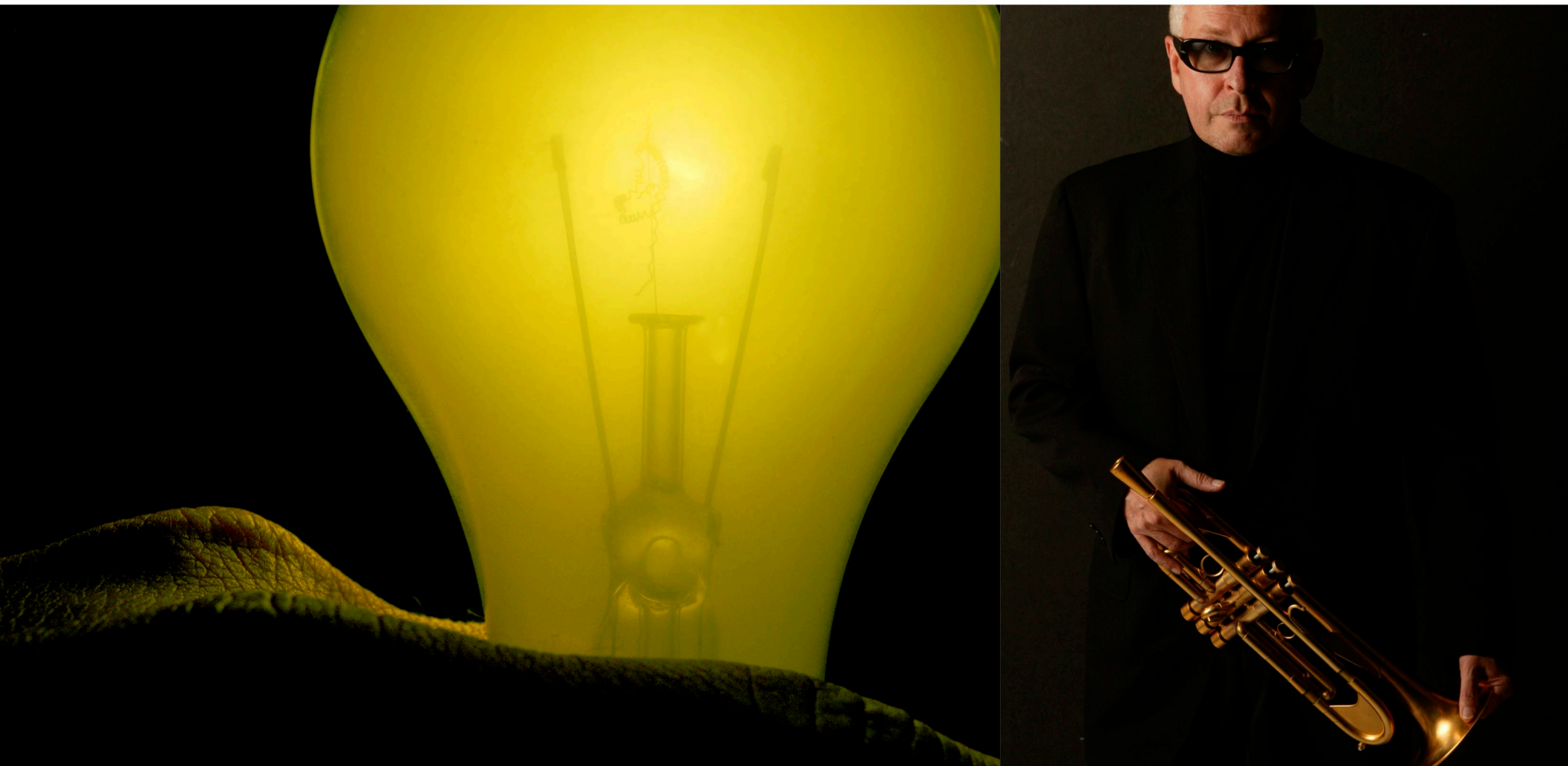
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I remember hitting the cold water of Scotland Bay [Trinidad] as I plunged helplessly underwater with an up till then, heart stopping fear of water and drowning. I slipped off the boat when someone accidentally flung something out of my Dad's nautical boat window which prompted a reaction that would cause me to slip off the edge. It turns out that the person responsible assumed that it was someone that could swim like my older brother Roger, and enjoyed a moment of humor while I sank like a rock. I was frozen stiff with fear. I remember seeing the pretty little bubbles that rose slowly and steadily, glistening with specular light from the incoming rays of sunshine. I wore no goggles but I remember seeing clear as day, the underwater sight. Damn. I was only eight. Eight years of fear and now this. Funny enough, I recall this as my first exposure to the power of observational energy as, for a short time, my panic and fear varnished and the underwater environment stood still for inspection. True observation is that powerful. Upon the sight of a tiny fish swimming, my hands moved and I immediately discovered a love affair with athletics, science, and art. This book is a testimony of my observations, now, as a "Citizen of the Planet".





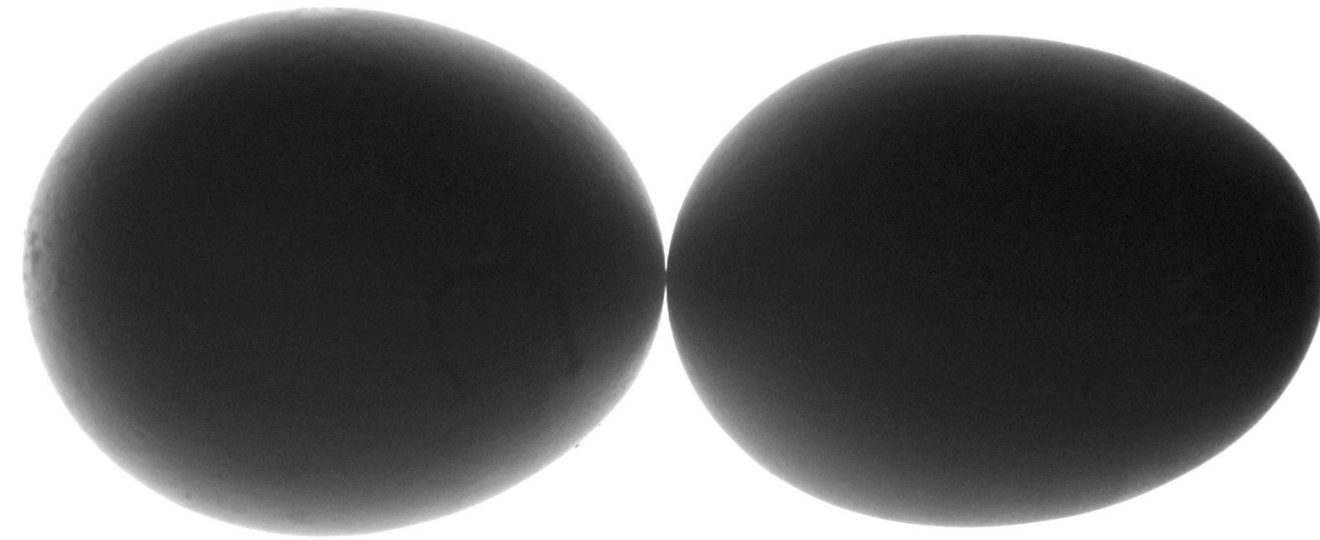
My images often remind me of my eternal bond with Science and Engineering. I miss you,
but as you can tell, I could never escape you.



My Imagination needed some exercise so my conscious listened to my subconscious, and I shot. I shot anything that I could see. My distant mentors will know who they are.



To every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. We must seek a balance of the sexes
at all times.

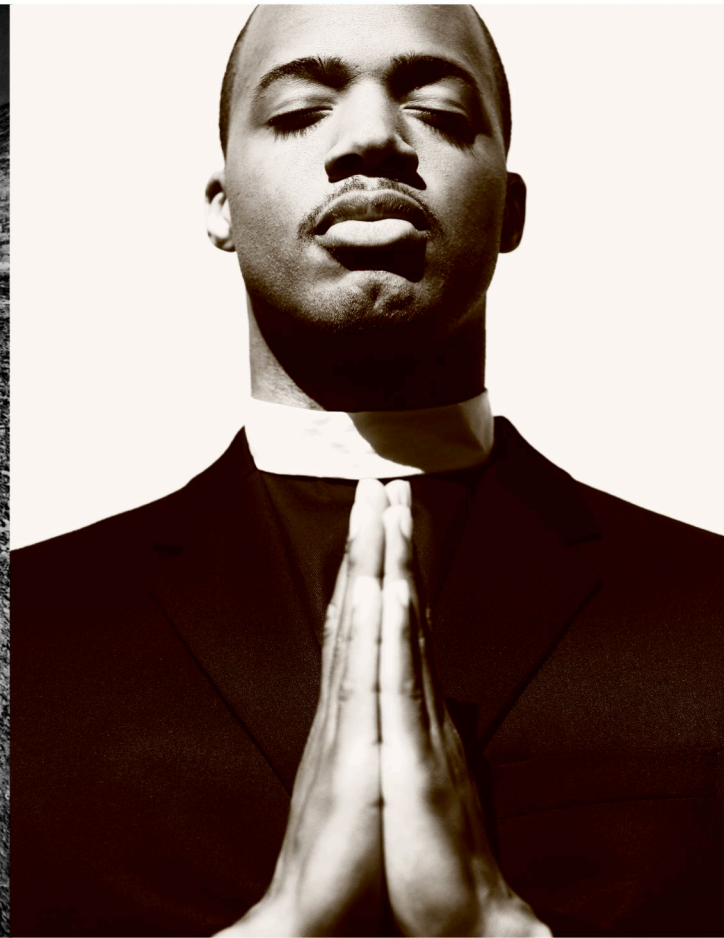


Martin Bauber(German Philosopher) believed that we knew everything the in womb and lost it all at birth. I would like to regain that sense before I die. I am getting closer.

Urban ObservationS

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True “urban observation” must involve a release of fears and misconceptions. We must refrain from the snap judgments of OUR shallow consciousness. You must accept that YOU are part of a WHOLE that everyone else belongs to. They say that when you change the way you look at things, the things that you are looking at start changing. Every profound expression comes from presence, introspection, observation, and execution. I constantly try to dissolve the barriers between myself and the world. I believe that glory exist in everything, everywhere, at all times. It is our challenge, if we choose to accept it, to peel back the complex layers of the planet and present nourishing adaptations of our existence to the masses. This inevitably involves a sacrifice and risk as you impose your will and perspective on to physical forms and materials. This I believe is an essential task for each “citizen of the planet” because it is “such creation that is art” in the words of the German philosopher - Martin Bauber, who went on to eloquently point out that “invention is finding, and forming is discovery.” So go bold into the environment that cradles you and inject the unselfishness of your soul and skill into it. Remember to record everything. It’s YOU.



I remember one of my classmates at Fatima College asked me if I thought God could make a rock so heavy that he couldn't lift it? Words could be dangerous.

Houston, We Have A Solution!

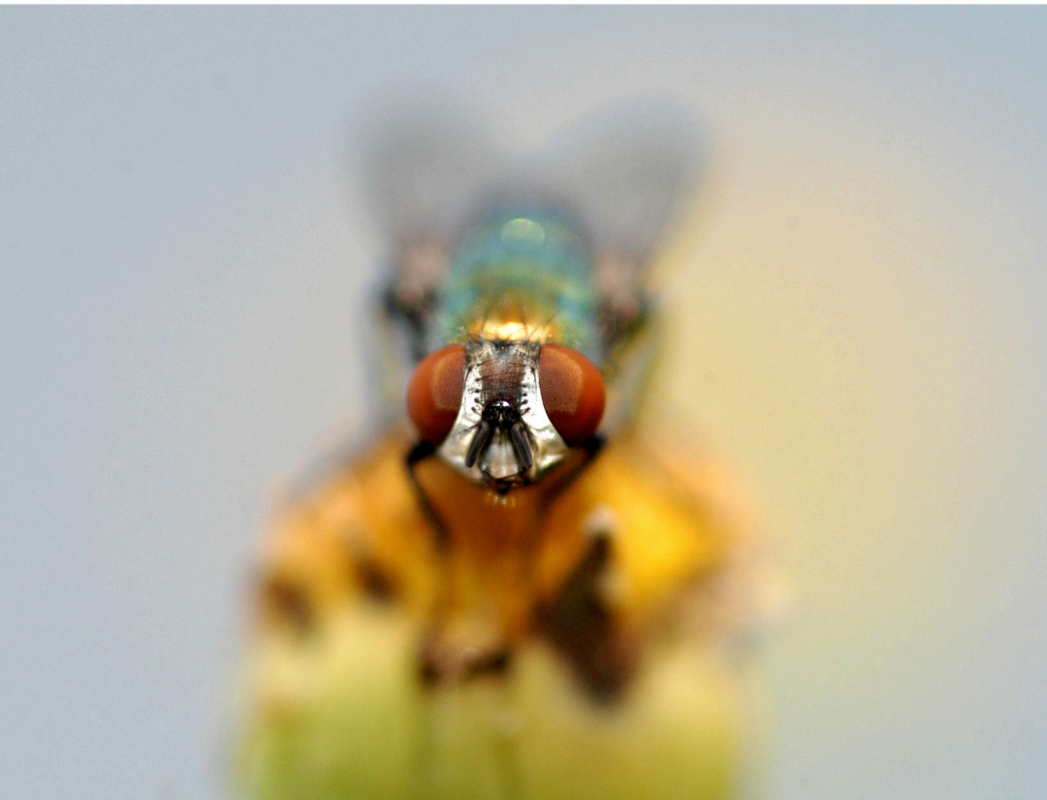
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It turns out that the birth of my dedicated picture taking started with the purchase of my still cherished 35mm Nikon N70 at the Houston Camera Exchange from my friend forever - Jason Jaeger, who was the sales person that happened to help me that day. This was March 7, 1997. It began a relationship that assisted my development significantly. He is one of a kind. I almost left the store when another sales person about 6'- 300 pounds with a foot long white beard shouted in the deepest voice that "it's not the camera, it's the man!"- in response to my proverbial question by newcomers - "what will be a cool camera for me to take some great shots?" Jason called me back in, gave me some great advise and saw thousands of dollars of of sales and commission after that. He deserved every penny and more that he got from me because he taught me a very important lesson about art: Never get seduced by equipment. I guess this is what the first guy was trying to say but I guess "tone" is everything sometimes. I later found him to be quite a good guy but sometimes arrogance is poison to an amateur. Jason was just the antidote. I found the solution to my extended search for unquestionable passion in Houston. At last, I found the solution! Big up H-Town! I miss the food. I miss all of my subjects. Eternal thanks.



Some of the more memorable series of images I created in Houston, TX.

I was in the full swing of my Engineering career so photography excited yet frightened me. I was a good and effective Engineer/Construction Manager enjoying the security of the Largest Environmental Engineering firm in the world while actively involved in the then largest civil works project in the United States - The Greater Houston Wastewater Program. At the end of the program I received the blessings of my superiors to pursue my passion, “when the opportunity presented itself”. My Engineering career was rich and I could not have hand picked better mentors but it was however time to move on to where my passion could be met with ample opportunities for the growth of a career in Art and Imaging. That day will come in Los Angeles. Gordon Parks said that “one of the keys to success is to move quickly when the door of great opportunities open momentarily” Bye for now Houston, I will see you again. Thanks for the lessons and memories. I will be back for some food!



It was now time to fly!

The City Of Angels With Dreams: Los Angeles

I call LA “The City Of Angels with Dreams” because many of the people here are acting on the impulse of a dream to be heard, seen, or recognized in some grand way, if possible, probably unlikely. Yet this town remains the last place on earth where your identity could be put on the world’s center stage in a flash! The mechanism for amplification of image IS this town, so if you are in the right place at the right time, you could “blow up”!. This undoubtedly remains an exciting prospect for many who will not soon dwindle in numbers as each season brings a new flock of talent, yet most will fall far short of the sometimes impractical expectations for themselves in a “gatekeeper” system. This is an a tournament with few survivors. In LA, if you have nothing good to say about someone or something, say nothing. Really. Say nothing. Nothing will slow accent faster than the karma of bad energy that birth from your lips. Oh yes. On the subject of lips, there are no contracts in Hollywood for any of the sexual acts often requested by the unscrupulous “gatekeepers” who ignorantly believe that they have earned the right to stain the soul of someone in need. Popularity contests often get ugly. You have been warned. Just keep a smile on your face and get your market share. Work with who respect you the way you respect YOU.

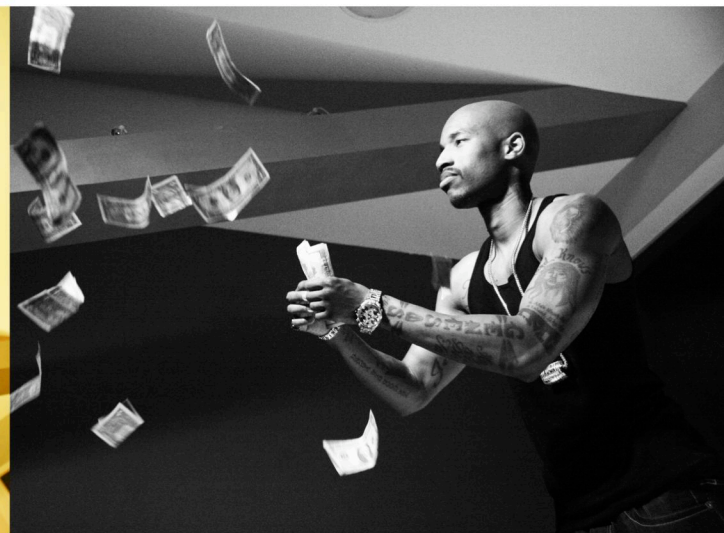


LA is always on fire! - "It's a great place to live, but I wouldn't want to visit there." - Mark Twain





My friend, director Andre Smith, narrated the much passed around and unwritten rules of engagement in LA/Hollywood as follows: “There are no rules; No one knows anything; Watch your back; And it’s who you know! What a town to call home! Well the good news is that I have lived and thrived in Los Angeles without clenching to the dismal inclinations of the “Hollywood code”. I believed in my ability to contribute to the industry of my passion and I took each person, one at a time. I have met some wonderful and interesting people in Los Angeles especially because I understood the type of bowl we were swimming in and so looked a little beyond the superficial layer we all have to parade in LA at some time. It is sometimes funny when I meet someone from New York in Los Angeles, I hear complaints about everyone in LA being fake. They say if you are bored in a relationship, chances are that you are a boring person. This notion may well extend itself into this dilemma, so divorce yourself from ever thinking that anyone belongs to an “advanced” culture, worthy of ridiculing others. So come to LA and roll the dice, or just drop your top and head to the beach. I heard this kicked around a couple of times: “It’s just as hard to make a bad movie” - so give it your best in life and keep a smile on your face, even if its fake!



They say if you are making enemies in Hollywood, you **MUST** be on the right track!

A Race For Races

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My experience as a Photographer in Houston and Los Angeles has no doubt spelled a couple of harsh realities for me. Minority photographers compete against an almost impenetrable wall of establishment that has mastered that art of marketing and validating its own perspectives while ignoring the contributions of others. It wasn't until the Vienna Philharmonic experimented with screened auditions that the stunned jury confessed to a "grotesque situation" of selecting a person of Japanese decent as the best and several Women to play the "Male" trombone. Experts believe that snap judgments that are often incorrect, steer verdicts before the case is over. We must take life one person at time and in the skill of a great humanitarian, assume nothing and greet with a sincere heart. I have certainly had the pleasure of enjoying the company of great people of all races, however, I would be negligent to humanity if I did not warn of the devastating effects of the moral majority as it continues to systematically wield its sword of "unearned advantages", while ignoring that it cuts. They say sunlight is the best disinfectant so let's race to where we enjoy presence of the whole through respect for self and others. We are only enjoying a fraction of our global fruit because of ridiculous "distinctions" that rob us all.





I was very impressed with Mr. Obama's presence and message



I hope that Mr. Obama understands that he is in more of an image battle than a political one.
Come on Hollywood.

Star/Celebrity, Hollywood

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Celebrities come in all forms. They are simply people who managed through skill, luck, persistence, and/or a mix of all, to ride the rays in the tubes of households or the screens of movie theaters, or of course both. I have met talented, untalented, fat, skinny, tall, short, black, white, gay and straight popular people. They somehow enjoyed a “freakonomical” fate of popularity. All celebrities are stars but all stars are celebrities. At least by “Hollywood” standards. “Stars could open a picture” is what I have heard in conversation with the savvy. So though we are all special, stardom is an unusual human experience. Few could ride that bull. There is certainly no celebrity mould or formula. It’s up for grabs. I always appreciated the opportunity to shoot familiar faces but I was never “caught up” in the energy that was as myself. Ok. Maybe Rick and Vanessa threw me a little off balance but this mental parallel is what allowed me to consistently draw the soul of even the ones who make it a job to protect it. I love portraiture. The eyes and the thousands of facial muscles before me rarely tell a lie. We are all in doubt and in need of something and sometimes even a golden bed does not help a sick person. Some stars live above it all. Vanessa is one I had the pleasure of photographing.



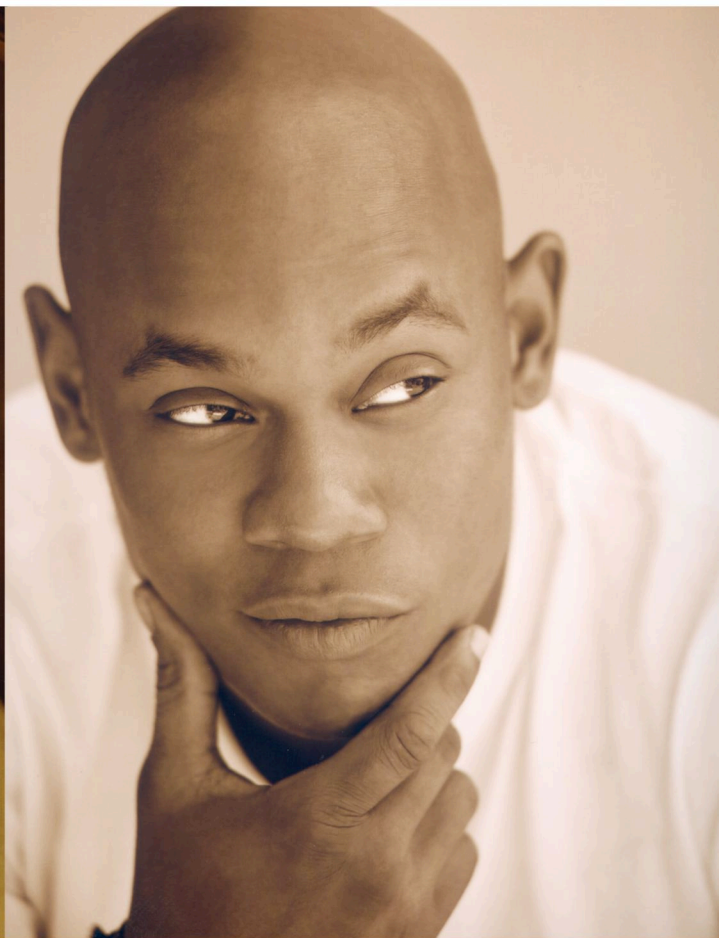
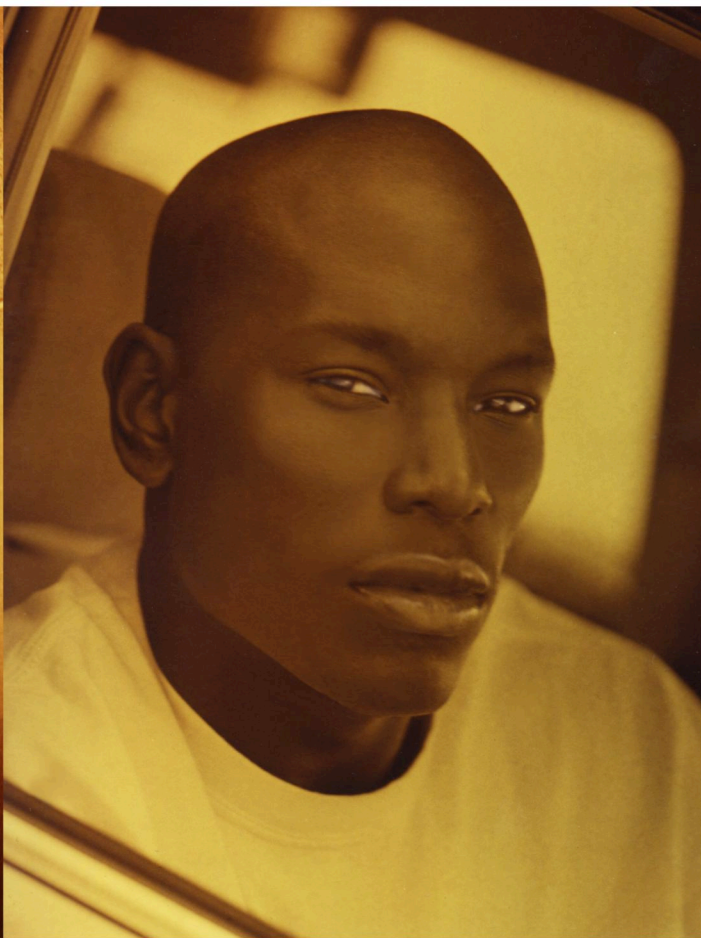


Hollywood remains the leading manufacturer for STARS. What other city could decorate the sidewalk with names, forged here, for international amazement..















At A Loss For Images

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We have witnessed remarkable achievements from Minorities around the world in various fields of merit. The future of many more minorities appear “promising” given the growing availability of educational institutions such as the Leadership Academy in South Africa that will germinate the seeds of curiosity and ambition into full grown trees, thriving, contributing and inspiring others to bear fruit. This is positive change. However, as Author Bill Overton so eloquently put it: “When a people cannot control or determine how their image is portrayed, projected, distributed, and marketed, then they are at the mercy of those who can.” Education, though much needed, now brings preparedness for the assimilation into a domain where even highly educated minorities still thread with subservient optimism towards an illusive “top”. The health of minority self image was badly damaged by historical events that now require “radical” solutions for mental recovery. Minorities remain proportionally non-existent from the halls of imaging and publishing that continues to ensure self imposed subserviency and under-utilization of potential. This continues to be the largest leak in the bucket unless the talent pool of minority image makers are allowed to emerge and inject the injured with much needed doses of reflective and relative positive imagery.



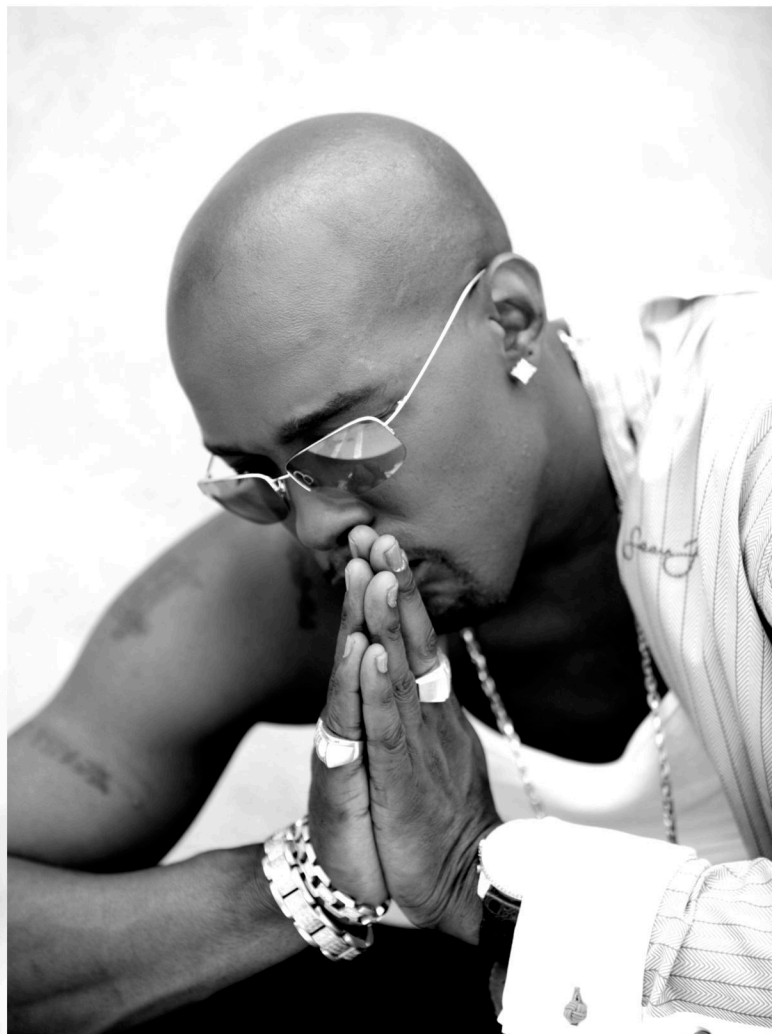














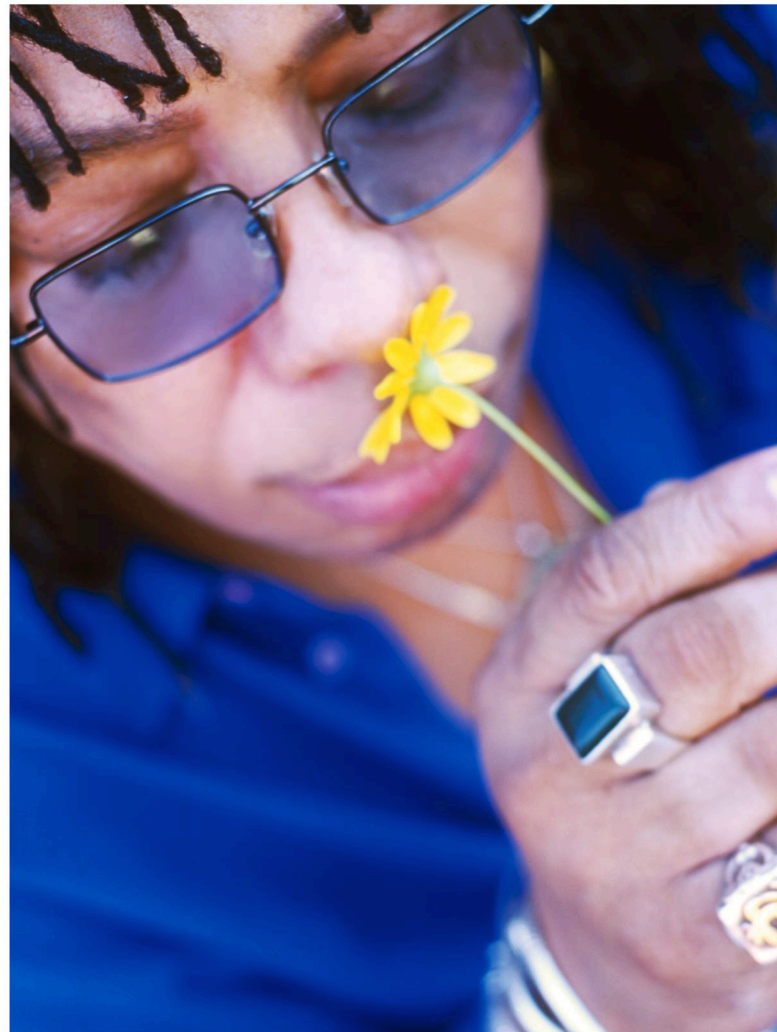


I Will Miss You RICK

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I remember when we first met at Cedar Sannai Hospital in Beverly Hills. You were recovering from your heart surgery. Your wife Tanya was in the room comforting you. I remember that you lived up to everything I had imagined as an intense fan of yours growing up in Trinidad, even as you had numerous tubes connected to you. You also made me feel so at home, you gave me great compliments on my work and then you asked the magical words: “Did you bring your camera?” I remember whipping it from behind my friend’s back {Keith Collins} and raising it to eye level to start recording the history I never imagined for myself. Rick James in front of my lens! You stopped me suddenly and fiddled with the a dread or two until it hung jusst right, then you instructed me to proceed, “go ahead and shoot Rick James Dexter Browne!” I captured some great images. I remember shooting you a couple of weeks later at my house. I remember cooking curry chicken for you, your family an folk on several Sundays. I remember your world class sangria and how you never lost a bet. I remember all of our phone calls when you always had me laughing and learning. I will miss the man who soared much higher than the words of the tabloid serving critics. You are the greatest writer/producer/performer/friend ever! R.I.P Rick. Your Boy.





You will always be missed, but ever present. Everybody still bumps the genius of your music!



The Art Of Life In Art

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Woodrow Wilson said: “ We are not here merely to make a living. We are here to enrich the world with a finer spirit of hope and achievement- and we impoverish ourselves if we forget the errand”. While engaged with art, the soul steps out and travels for a while. The imposition of will and skill by the artist on the form yields a resultant that can offer us mortals a chance to gaze in awe at the complexities of the universe, yet feel at home with it. As part of a response to an interviewer’s inquiry about the critics being “suspicious of his work”, Herb Ritts, whose work I will always admire, said that “I love Cindy Sherman, for instance; I love the fact that she has made a world that is basically her own, rather than about magazines or advertising”. I love the fact that my unorthodox path into art enabled me to create images that were contextual to my life rather than a response to school assignments. The technical aspects of photography were digested by my scientific sense but once I learned how to drive the car, I started concentrating on the forms before me. The swing from “left” to “right” brain was challenging though, as Kahlil Gibran professed it, “your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgement wage war against your passion and your appetite.” Your life of art must forever seek a peaceful balance.



An absolute “creative process” demands an absolute release from the limitations of a “process”. “Right-brainism” is essential. Google “Betty Edwards”. You will thank me later.



Make-up, Hair and Clothing Stylist play a vital role in the production of images that captivate the masses. Eternal thanks to all the Stylist I ever worked with.







Never stop dreaming about your dreams and goals in life. It is better to try and fail than failing to try, and they say you have to wake up if you want your dreams to come through..



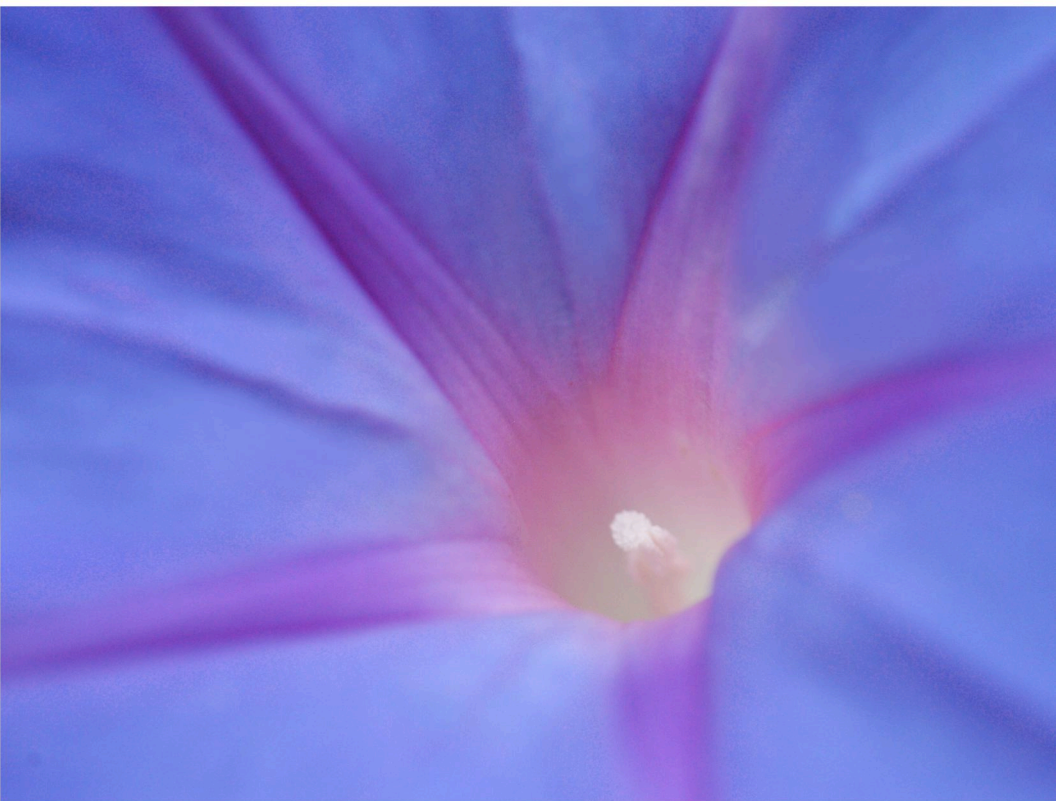
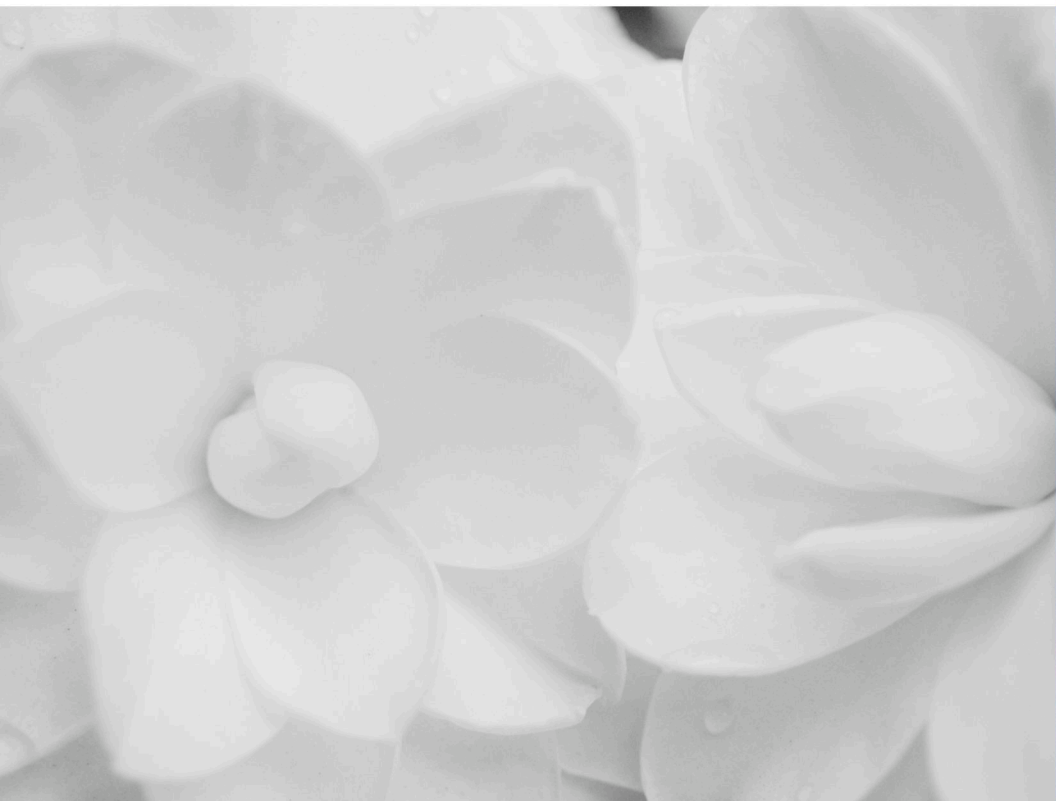
Attraction develops relationships.



Relationships bring Life. Life then brings Art and more Life.

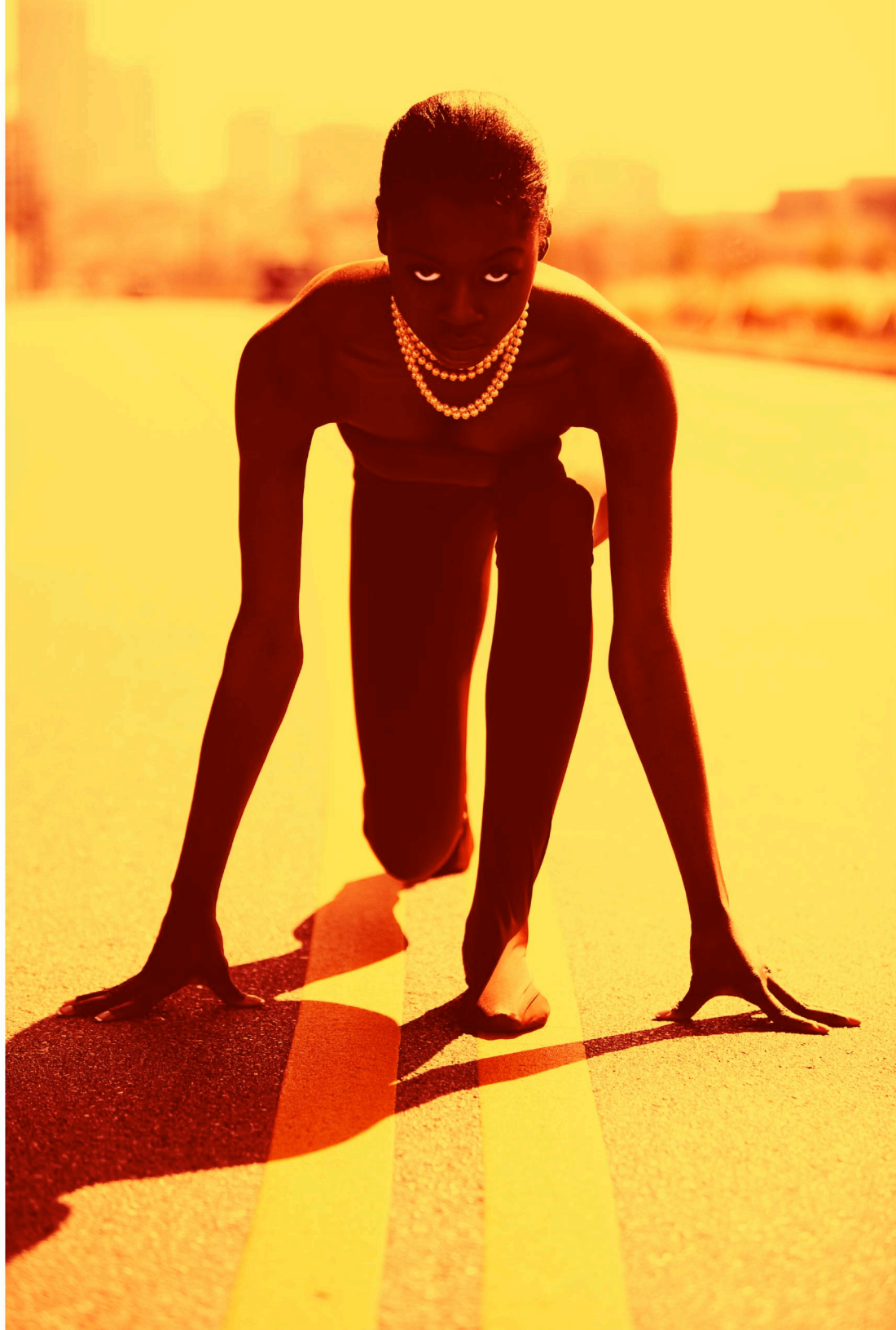


Flowers remind us of the fragility of life, yet of its splendid textures and colors, if only momentarily. They also reminded me to live in the NOW.



On her 70th Birthday, an adoring fan of her magnificent performance said to Dorothy Dunnigan, “I will do anything to play like you”,she said, “No you wouldn’t, else you would!”.





Bringing Sexy Back!

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I have had the pleasure of photographing some of the sexiest women the earth could offer and as such I always approached the images with caution and respect. I am a portrait photographer so it is important for the soul of the subject to shine through in the photograph. I think “sexy” female and male images can be enjoyed by couples but it must present a celebration of the body and personality. Mystique and mystery can also play an important role in the establishment of lasting yet respectful sexiness. Sexy women carry a physical manifestation of persuasion towards others who are easily reminded of physical deficiencies in their presence or image. I like to categorize my work in this area as “Sexy Culture” because it offers a broader stroke to the complexity and necessity of sexy energy.

Today, the success of women in all facets of life has now place some very important, intelligent, and sexy women in charge. Guys, don’t be intimidated by the sexy CEOs, you could learn a lot from the “Darlings Wearing Prada”.



Sexiness can be spiritual. Thou it must have the soul of the person present.



Picasso said that the hand without the spirit, was not art.



I shot countless sexy women in Los Angeles but each time I tried to maintain the woman's "importance" in the image.



Beautiful Beauty

The incident involving beauty Pageant winner Tara Connor where she was given a “second chance” following some acts of indiscretion during her post celebration activities supports perhaps another truism, beautiful people don’t only get better jobs, they get fired! less also!. I imagine it may be safe to assume that everyone has pondered being the holder of a widely accepted “face of beauty.” Or just being more beautiful. It no doubt has its rewards as the best (and worst) talents of the gene pool attempt to form joint ventures with them for their own personal reward and, perhaps for the future success of the any resulting siblings. The beauty I enjoyed observing the most was my wife Lisa who has been my partner for 19 years - College Sweethearts if there is such a thing. The red face (to the left of this page) I call “InfraLisa”, is a portrait of Lisa shot on infra-red film back in 2000. It is certainly one of the most beautiful images I have ever seen I am proud to say it is of MY wife - Lisa Michelle Browne. We used it extensively in our promotional materials to attract other beautiful people who left with their own stunning versions. I am grateful for my experiences observing and recording the behavior of the bold and the beautiful who we dare not live without. “Beautiful Beauty” can be seen through the eyes of anyone, not just the beholders!







There is a Jamaican proverb that says “A beautiful woman is a beautiful trouble”. What do you think?





Don't you just love being arrested by the sight of rare beauty. Don't leave on the handcuffs for too long!





The eyes never lie, unless of course you believe that they could pretend not to lie. Fool or be fooled! Life does not have to be this cynical. Smile.



HIPHOP AND THE STREETS

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My intersection with the Music industry came in Houston when I started booking photography jobs from Rap-a-Lot Records shooting artist like Scarface and “Devin The Dude” for promotional/CD materials. J Prince is a great man whose contributions to hip hop will remain legendary. I witnessed the virtues of “quiet leadership” from him. He was first to employ elements of discipline into the challenging dynamics of making great Hip hop. He made the art a science, and vice versa, and it is reflected in the range of success that his label has enjoyed, earning its title as the “oldest hip hop label on the planet.” I am proud to say that I was a contributor to that piece of history. But where are we today. Well, today there are a-lot more “rap-a-lots” but I can’t say for sure that the volume of “hit music” has grown proportionally. Within the inner city neighborhoods, the natural leaders of the “clicks” often feel an obligatory sense to nurture the talents of their zip code while maintaining the hustle. This is bringing the core of the street into contact with the top echelons of the service industry that work with top talent. Both sides are ‘cautiously optimistic’ as they begin the process of trying to trade big money for big service -a tier of the consumption cycle that will prevail regardless. Soon the “hills” will be the “hood”, though I doubt the reverse.









SLAUSON

BOY







The DIGITAL DEMOCRACY (or Digital Divide?)

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Shiva, in “Arts & The Internet”, said that the world will witness a paradigm-like shift from individuals benefiting more from the people that knew about them than the people they knew. The Digital democracy is forecasting that each individual could claim a market share from the Global Nervous System if they found a way to set up shop. The good news is that the ability for global citizens to “get connected” is becoming easier and more affordable. It will no doubt become a “free” commodity, much the way network TV and radio exist in our lives today, only globally. What will the saturation point bring?. It will no doubt bring much needed resources and exposure to neglected citizen and cultures of the planet. But will it sustain itself as a tool for all? The answer to this is where my concern lies. A couple of years ago, I read an article that forecasted that “the future belongs to groups”. These worlds may well evolve into a truism of our times as corporate “black belts” are in a new rush to establish territory and popularity in Cyberspace. They now want to relate rather than relegate the masses. New lines for Real Estate and your 2nd life are currently being drawn and unsuspecting “friend searchers” are building and cultivating virtual cities that, for your extended hang time, cultivate your thoughts and behavior at AdSense U !.



THE FORCE CALLED MAN

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My 12 year career as a Civil Engineer/Construction Manager exposed me to the side of man that quest to improve the “quality of life” for others. Engineering and Construction are noble professions that boast some of the most exemplary characters on the planet and I was privileged enough to share time and space with. Names like Ronald Nurse, Thomas Brown, Allen Grunwald, David Bouck, Walter Hitch, Victor Wells, Nello Sweet, and of course my father - the Greatest - Trevor Browne, immediately come to mind though there are many more. I will forever be grateful for my exposure to the “technical” world and I carry it with every image I make. I have I feeling that the “left” shall see me again. Ready to imagine. I believe it was Einstein who said that “Imagination was more important than knowledge”. We shall see. Today “men”, through the dilemma of “diminishing returns” has now rendered the image of man tarnished and battered. I wish to remind the world of the visionary contributions of man and the comforts, and yes, discomforts at times, that “man” has afforded us. I can type on my Mac with a large flat screen for others to inspect and reflect on a book that may reach millions. I owe a lot to the visionary execution of the men that came before me, and of course the women that made everything possible.







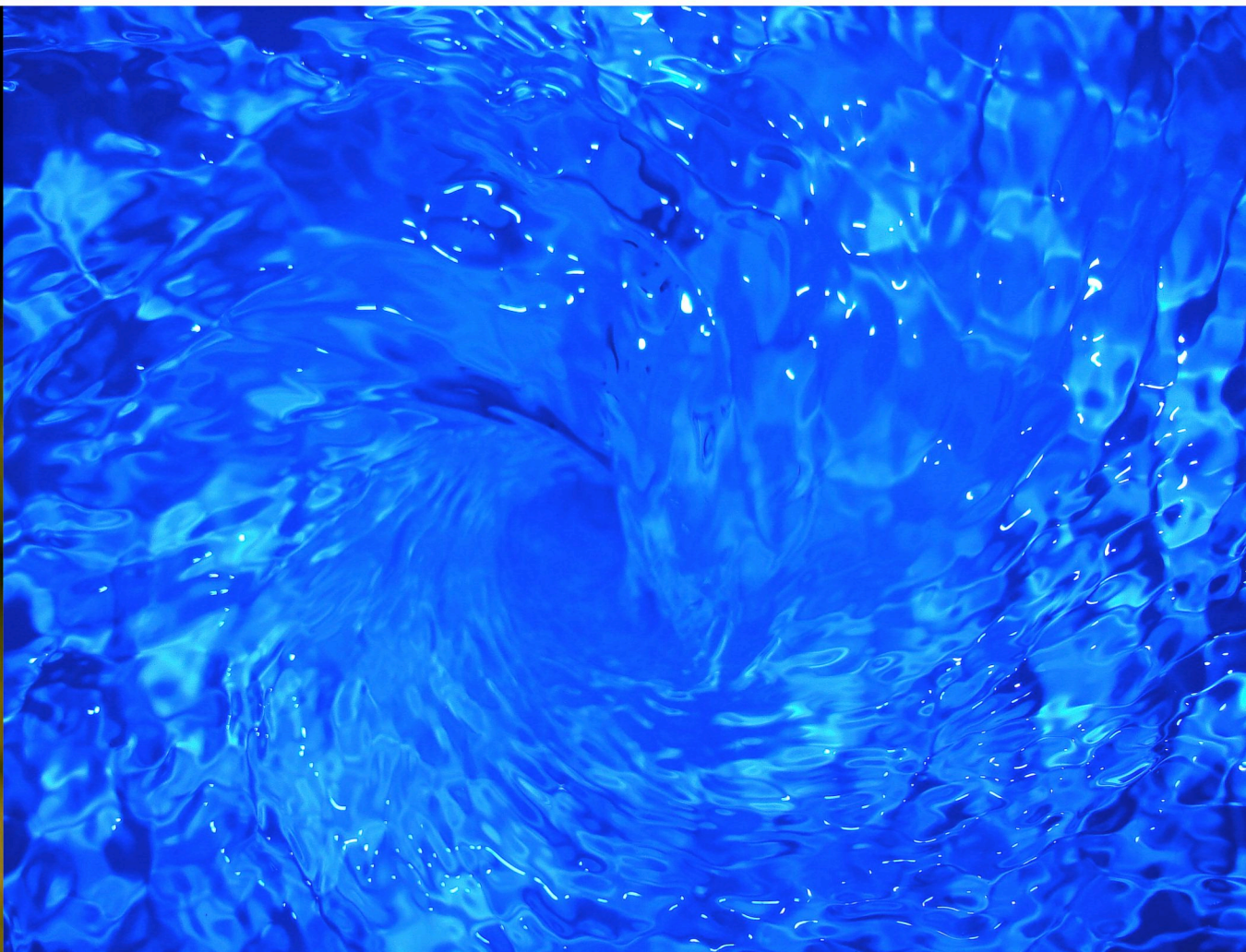


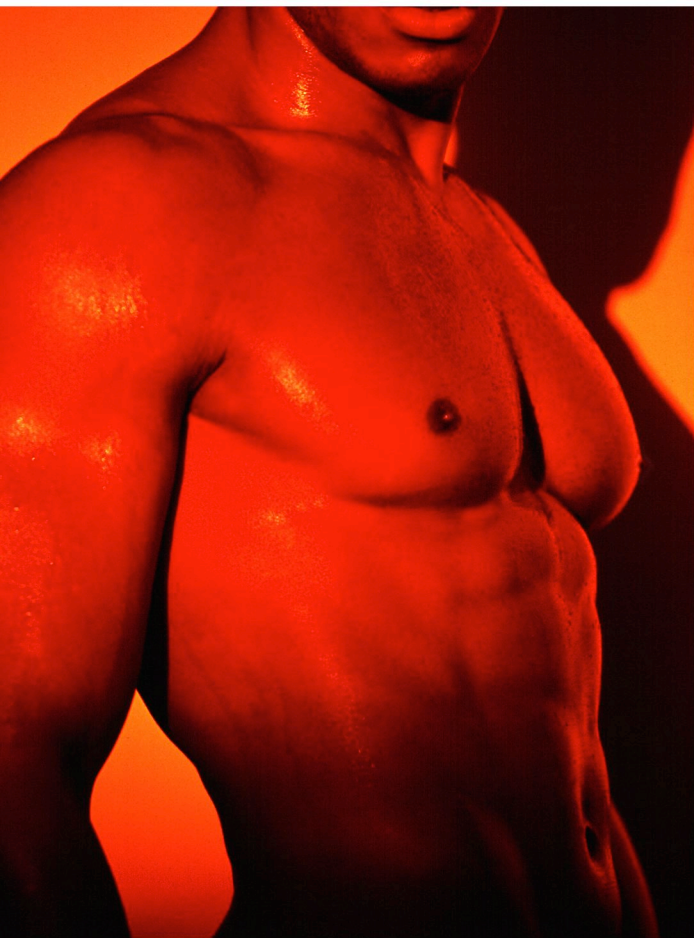
The Consumption Cycle has economic fallouts that must concern us all.



Suffaration is the soul of the devil, yet within it lies the energy for triumph and jubilation.









WAR ON OURSELVES

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I will not pretend to understand the burdens of being a world leader and having to be the messenger of the “necessary evil” that often strike a tone of discord with “the public”. I understand that the information that the public receives is often a fraction or distortion of the truth. How else would “intelligence” be able to maintain their advanced military strategies. History has shown that past civilizations just “shook up” other civilizations for no justifiable reason but, with the passage of time, history finds a way to explain things other than they appear in the present. Presidents and other world leaders often have to bear the fallout of “unpopular” decisions and actions while privy to knowledge that with the passage of time, the cloud of misunderstanding and anger will dissipate. Nonetheless, the broad stoke of destructive military action from world leaders results in the loss of truly innocent humans who had a place and a destiny on this planet, yet now they are not here to delight us with their wit and wisdom. Remember everything is in everything. I long for the day when we cease to destroy the remaining vital pieces of the puzzle of our collective human experience in ignorance. Gold without wisdom is but clay. The French say that “War makes robbers, peace hangs them”. I now understand Mr. Bush’s challenge.



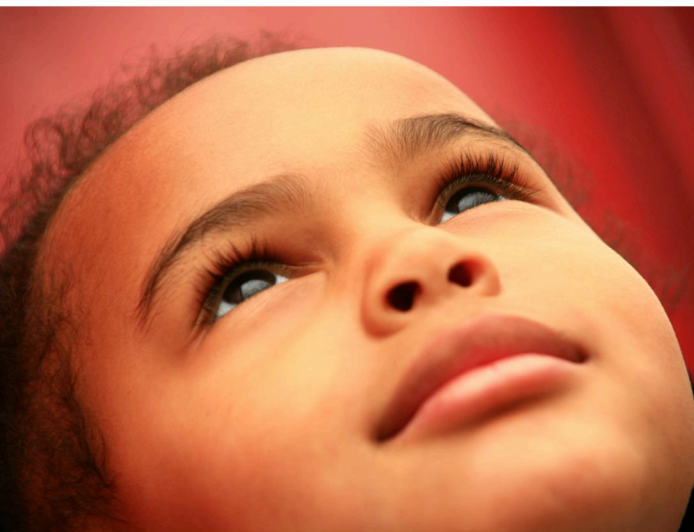
“MY EYEBALLS”

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My children have certainly added a advanced dimension to my life because in each of them, lies an extension of myself that I do declare is more powerful than myself, because they are who I live for. Without any of them, I will not see. My wife and kids are my eyeballs. They are everything I stand for and have been an unwaivering pillar of support through my trials and tribulations. They have consistently offered great models of human existence and I am forever indebted to each and everyone of them who I ever came into contact with.

Kahlil Gibrand said this about children: “Your children are not your children. You may house their bodies but not their souls, For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may stive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.”

I dread the day they decide to leave the nest. It will certainly ALWAYS have a place for them, even if they don't want to become photographers :)



FINAL WORDS, FINALLY

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Never allow the often shallow perspectives of cultural survival and assimilation rob YOU of your potential energy and “presence”. It is too easy to adopt a popular belief and hold indifference towards others who made the same mistake with YOU. Anyone from anywhere on the planet could relate on some level and could learn to relate and respect all others, even when opinions sharply differ. This I believe is a step to a true understanding of our planet’s problems which could open the door for our collective wisdom to prevail. Is all the scholarly energy of our world really contributing to an enhanced global experience? We need everyone that enters the world for things we may not yet understand. A global drive to communicate, relate and understand is imperative for our yet to come “quality of life”. We need for both the Scientist and Artist to embrace this challenge equally. Our planet has far more things in common than the differences that continue to govern the cumulative global impression which presently is dim. I have read several interesting and scholarly literary contributions about the aquarium that we swim in but few have conveyed a sense that whether you understood every facet of the book, you could only still be as special as the writer and all its readers. Go forward in with peace, understanding, and wisdom.



To the harsh critics and the ones who tried to dismantle my fate, thanks for letting me know that I was on the right track!

Thanks & Dedications

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I would like to thank my Wife, Lisa Browne, Trevor & Bianca Browne, Paul & Mary Lightfoot, my kids and all my relatives, my Teachers, my Advisors, Lynn Jeter, Donell Nelson, Abie Aguiar, Fred Johnson, Hokie Bowman, Christopher Gray, Dame Lee, Claudia Jordan, KD, Eric Glenn, Gerald McCauley, Rayne Moore, Stacy Gibson, Michelle Coussey, Sasyia, Carl Payne, Jason Jaeger, Keith Collins Jr & Sr, "Champ", Wil Kirkham, Orock, Grady Carter, Ryan Heck, Gooch, KC Foreman, Jeff Bowler, Hayden Newallo, Yohnnie Shambourger, Andre Cropper, Craig Thomas, Tracey Freeland, Michael Houston, Eric Howard, Newton Jackson, Walter Smith, Kenley & Dawn Davis, Allen Grunwald, Ronald Nurse, Dr. Johnson, Mark Jeremie, James Carrol, Dustin Robertson, Johnel Langerston, Big U, Alex Mehia, Al Carnes, Andre Smith, Ron & Dana, Jessica Burnsweig, Regan Jacson, Pharow, Dave Urabe, and anyone who gave me the pleasure of photographing them. I dedicate this book to the memory of the following, all of who crossed my timeline momentarily and are no longer here with us, but forever remembered: Jennifer Reece, "Careless", Peter Samuel, Rick James, B.B. Moore, Shannai, "Jesus", Tira, "S-Dome", Terry Bowers, Aaliyah, Clive Thomas, & Mrs. Dunkley.