

Can you please explain what Venice offers you, as a place to photograph that is unique to the city?

I can only say that I fell in love with Venice, she became my ultimate source of inspiration long before I met her, when as a graduate student I decided to audit a particular architecture class. At the front of the class was a scarred and wrinkled screen on which the professor projected slightly distorted images of Venice. She, the city that is an archipelago that has its own island for the beautiful dead. She, the city of massive stone constructed out of sea light, out of the air, poised between the temporal world and the world of impossibility. Venice, an impossibility floating on 10 million tree trunks.

When you have in your mind that context: a singular place that in its entirety is a work of art, made up of equal parts water and stone, stucco and air, you know that even the most pedantic of viewers might lay aside their pedantry in honour of her poetry.

I have visited Venice many times and early on Venice taught me that she is a city that always gives the image seeker and maker enough time. You realize within moments that you will see very little of her on any given visit. And so there is no need to rush. You will not see more acutely or better by rushing. There is no other city that makes me feel that way.

I find that your work often consists of fragments - a detail, a reflection, a shadow. The images can feel abstracted but not incomplete. The result is that the photograph transcends the present. Can you tell us about the measure of time in your photography?

I think one's sightline often forms out of the geography of one's early youth. For me, born on the prairie of the United States, the landscape was so vast that, in order to find a scale I could relate to, small details, fragments of conversation, the light crossing a texture in a way that made me dream of water, all these elements came to be very meaningful to me, potent symbols, undeciphered messages. I never lost that affinity for the easily overlooked, the detail camouflaged by the large, impressive sight surrounding it. I did not want to make statements about time and memory. I want to create images that whisper that quieten the viewer down, that make suggestions about an unresolved narrative, for that is what time combined with memory is.



Virgin and Child with Votive Candle

Your 'Virgin and Child with Votive Candle' image in Dream of Venice in Black and White captures both warm embrace and enigmatic vision. Can you please share with us the process of taking this photograph?

I came upon them unexpectedly, as one does so many treasures in Venice. All were held within a scarred armature of elegant curves. A scratched protective glass or Perspex slightly clouded their faces and muted the candlelight. They were situated above head-height, so the passerby might have missed them. The walkway was narrow. I leaned against the opposite wall, meditating upon them, upon that symbol of adoration in perpetuity, for quite some time until the passage became clear enough of people to photograph. After a few shots, I decided that I would need to hold the camera above my head so that, with good fortune, the lens might see through the slight obscurity caused by reflected ambient light. This meant I had fight for the image a bit, to be patient, to keep at it until I caught the angle and the moment.

Eventually, I saw what I needed. A Venetian blend of seeing some meaningful aspect of something, but not all of something. Instead, I was hoping to still time for that fraction of a second that would allow me to express my feeling of emotional connection, that might filter through my sightline to the image to the viewer, in a series of mysterious handoffs.



Glimpse of the Place of Sacrament

You have described the “breath-holding” treasures of Venice, which was such an interesting choice of words because I often find that your work inspires an inhalation (as opposed to an exhalation). Is this stillness that you are able to create manifest by subject or process?

Perhaps I do not distinguish between subject and process so very much. I know that I must quieten myself down psychologically and physically before I can start to photograph, because what I am ‘after’ is unknown to me until I find it. Especially in Venice, the visual poem you are waiting to hear can be sung at an alleyway’s end, above the head, in the light against surface beneath your feet. The sound of a call or the slapping of water can make you turn in a totally different direction, excuse yourself from the crowds, wander off. Then the subject and the poem, the meaning to me of the sight in front of me might be revealed.

The wounds on the stone surfaces and frescos, the stucco washes on crumbling walls, all these are elements that to me symbolize Venice herself. She is one of the world’s cities perhaps most wounded by time and by humans. But Venice is the city where the myth of self will outlast onslaught. I just hope we don’t forget place our hands ever so gently upon her surfaces; made both perfect and imperfect with age, ask her for pardon, before stepping quietly onward.



San Michele Wrapped in Light

I am struck by your use of language. It seems to mirror many of the qualities I find in your images: elegance, eloquence and thoughtfulness. I was not surprised to discover that you've written a book with poetry and photography. I am wondering if language and photography are equal expressions of your creative spirit, or if one portends the other.

Your words are amazingly generous and I am most grateful for them. Sight and sound, glimpsed images and partly heard sentences, were part of my childhood. People spoke with a sparse, almost harsh poetry that I always found very beautiful, but I think that I was always very aware of being in a certain place, being inside a visual and physical context, when I heard that particular kind of poetry. Later, when I could read myself, the two worlds merged seamlessly. When I see something that moves me, transfixes me, words or fragments of emotional expression occur almost simultaneously.

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in Dream of Venice in Black and White and for this opportunity to talk about my relationship with Venice.



Stone with Bridge

top/header image: "Venice Dreaming"

Italian version

links:

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Dream of Venice in Black and White

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