INTERVIEW WITH

RAINER NEUMANN

Please tell us something about you, your life and interest, etc. Put as much detail as you like and then we will start the questions.

My name is Rainer Neumann. I live in Ludwigshafen, Germany. I work as a sound engineer, recording classical music. From July on this year I will retire. I am interested in classical music and art in general. I'm also interested in gardening. We have a house with a big garden where I love to work. Of course I like photography.

What inspired you to become a photographer?

I was attracted to photography first as a student in Berlin, where I studied Tonmeister at the „Hochschule der Künste". I liked the possibility of creating some kind of art.

What age are you and at what age did you start your journey as a photographer?

I am 62, I started around the age of 20, but never looked at photography as more than a „hobby" at that time. Things changed only a couple of years ago, with digital cameras and the possibilities of „post processing". The possibility to create the look I desired to obtain.

Would you mind sharing some of the things you feel helped you along the way with your photography,

(lessons, workshops, books, etc)....and also some of the things that may have hindered you, that you overcame on this journey?

I always tried to learn something about the technique of photography and about composition. To know how it works until one does not have to think about it any more on the photo trips. Never did workshops, I'm more the type who looks for those information in books. When I started to get involved in photography in analog times, I always missed the possibility of having a dark room at home. I missed the possibility to have some influence on how the pics looked after shooting and before giving them to print. That changed with digital cameras and the possibility to have the „dark room" on my MacBook using the appropriate app. Apart from that one has to go out and shoot, come back and be critical about the results.

Do you feel photography enhances your life? If so, how?

I don´t know if I would say „enhanced" but photography changed my life, because it changed the way I look at things, situations, even if I don't have a camera at hand.

If we are speaking specifically of photographers, which are the ones of the past and present do you admire?

I constantly discover photographers I never heard about. I love the work of

Sebastião Salgado, Bruce Gilden and Steve McCurry to name 3 of the famous ones. I also like the work of Walker Evans, Bruce Davidson and Cartier Bresson. I love the landscapes of Josef Hoflehner. Sometimes I discover photographers like Nicolás Muller, Mario Marino, Raghu Rai, Lee Jeffries, Araquém Alcântara which I never heard about before. The one who changed my attitude towards street photography, who made me want to do street is Thomas Leuthard (he stopped taking pictures, but his work is still present on Flickr)

What purpose does photography serve for you?

It's the kind of art I currently want to do.

Do you do photography for hire or as an art form?

It´s art!

What do you do for work and how does photography fit into that?

I´m a sound engineer. I make recordings of classical orchestral and chamber music. My work and photography are 2 different things: for work I use my ears for photography I use my eyes. For both I need the ability to pre visualize the result I desire.

What genre of photography are you most comfortable working in?

STREET! In the first, second and third place..... Apart from that: (abstract) architecture; minimalistic nature/landscape.

When you work, are you working on different series or just finding photos that fit the way you feel at the moment?

When I do street photography, I don't have a plan, I decide in advance where I want to go: the location. But apart from that, I walk, I change the direction, I change my mind where to go, I follow the situations and street scenes which I see. When I do minimalistic nature/flowers/rotten food etc. I do series. But it has nothing to do with my feelings.

Can you describe a few of the trigger mechanisms that make you want to stop and shoot?

Oh, I never „stop" to shoot when it comes to street photography! If you stop you get discovered. Street, at least in my eyes, is candid! I walk, I see something either on my side of the street or on the other side, I try to get close and get my pics while passing, I never stop, I never look back. Of course the trigger mechanisms are the type of subject, the type of situation which are worth being photographed.

How strong of a connection do you have with your subject matter and can you describe that connection?

Don´t know if I get the question correctly..... If the subject matter is „Street": it's a strong connection. Even if I don't have a camera at hand walking somewhere, I see pictures in my mind, how they could be, if

I only had a camera available. I can´t stop looking around like that any more.

What are your recurring themes?

I am more attracted to „unseen" people, the older, the poorer ones, because in those faces one can see more „lived" life

What camera are you working with currently?

I use several, I tried Fuji, Nikon, Ricoh but I ended up with Sony. Currently a A6400; A7C; A7Siii (for the night shots) as it comes to street photography. Sony A7RIV for landscape, architecture etc.

What is your favorite Focal Length or Field of View?

Oh, that's a good and difficult question. When I started to do street photography I used 55 mm on full frame. Mainly because I didn't had the courage to get as close as necessary. When I was in India this year, I started to use the 25 mm Batis on full frame and I loved it. I also tried 10 & 18 mm (full frame) but that's too wide for my use.

What is the distance to your subject you are most comfortable with while working?

As close as possible!
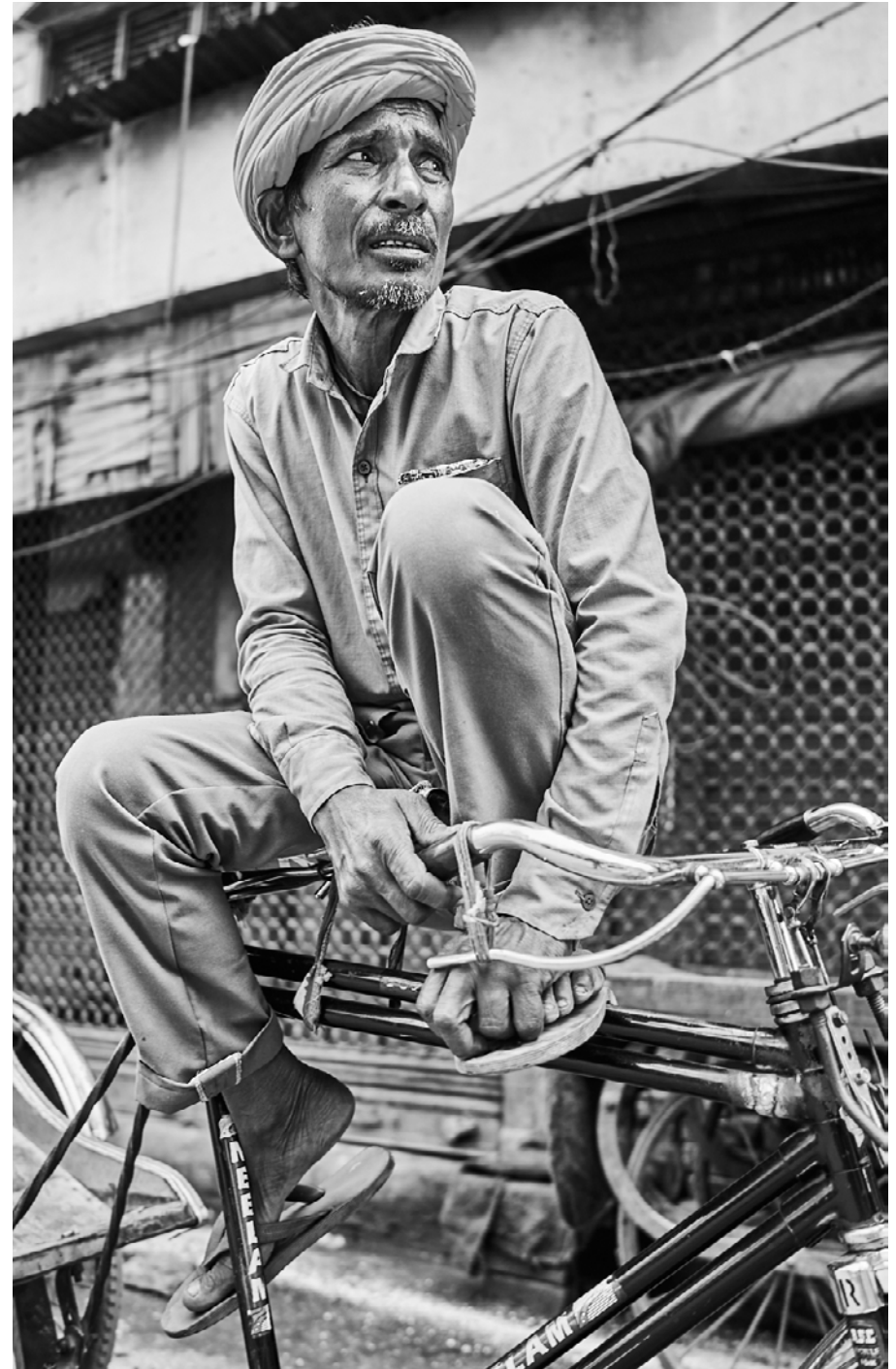
How do you see the relationship with your camera? Is it a friend, tool, or whatever?

Of course it's a tool, but a tool which should be your friend. In India I ended up only using the Sony A7C because I loved the possibility to change between portrait and landscape mode easily.

Do you have a preference for Black & White or Color? Please explain why.

Black & White! The display of my camera shows b&w. After a walk, I use the best ones to be processed in b&w.

The remaining ones, which would be double in b&w I use for color.

Probably my love for b&w comes from the classical „street look" I always had in mind.

I also use b&w for architecture and landscape: in those genres I try to be as minimalistic as possible. I love color, but very often it's disturbing. When doing b&w one has to concentrate on the basics like composition, etc.

Are you self-taught, educated, or a little bit of both?

If you mean my knowledge about photography: Self taught!

How do you feel about being photographed?

I prefer to be on the other side of the lense......

Do you like to work by yourself or to have someone with you? Please explain why.

By myself!!! There is no room for communication while doing street photogrpahy. I'm totally concentrating on observing what is going on around me, changing direction, going faster, more slowly. Any other person would be annoyed by that.

Do you listen to music while you are shooting? How do you feel the music enhances the visual experience?

I love listening to music, as it is a very important part of my personal and professional life, but: I never do it while shooting. Or I concentrate on shooting, that includes the „sound" of the streets or I listen to music in the breaks. Music wouldn't enhance the visual experience for me.

Do you have a preference for images in an analog or a digital state?

Digital! But I also appreciate looking at some chosen works as a print.

How important is the post-processing of the pictures in your work?

I love post processing. I shoot RAW, so I have every control about the look of the final picture I want to have. Especially with b&w this is crucial for me.

Where in the world are you located?

Ludwigshafen, Germany

Where is your favorite place to work?

In photography? It was Brasil, I'll be there for about 2,5 months one more time this year, but: I was in India for the first time this year and I absolutely loved it! Unfortunately I got sick after 3 weeks so I had to return home early but I'll be there more often!

When you're feeling somewhat slow or lost, how do you find your way back to find inspiration to get working again?

Actually, as it comes to street photography I never get lost: there are so many countries still to discover! In the pandemic when it wasn't possible to go out, I thought about doing series I could do at home: like „rotten food" or „minimalistic flower".

Do you exhibit your work in any form?

I use flickr, 500px, 1x.com and Facebook to exhibit my work.

Do you go to exhibitions or do so on the web?

If I get the chance to visit an exhibition I do so.

Do you collect other photographers' work?

I don´t „collect" but I have dozens of books about photographers

How do you feel about the current state of photography?

The problem is: everybody has a camera and can get a decent picture out of it. And all those pictures are published.

Difficult to find good pictures among this flood of output.

And: while looking for the good ones, one has to look at the not so good ones as well.

How satisfied are you in your current state of photography and what would you like to improve upon?

I´m quite satisfied, because I can see that I am still improving in quality and composition.

Can you describe how you judge the success or failure of your work?

Oh that's difficult! What is success? To get more likes? Being published on 1x.com? Win competitions? I'm quite satisfied with my „success" on 1x.com for example: 150 published and some awarded pics in the first year. If one of them gets rejected, I try to figure out if the composition or the technical quality doesn't work. Sometimes I agree, sometimes not.....Sometimes people don't like what I have to offer, that happens to everybody. On Facebook, which is very strong in street photography, I am more content with a friendly comment than with the amount of likes.

What would you be doing now if you had not picked up the camera?

Working in my garden, reading a book on my kindle, playing the piano, listening to

classical music, cooking something, looking at some Netflix series, post processing the thousands of pics waiting for me still on my MacBook, etc, etc....

What do you dislike about photography?

Perhaps that massive overflow of output in all those social media platforms....

Is there a question that you would like to answer that I haven't asked?

A lot of people say: post processing in street photography isn't appropriate.

I don't agree.

All the grand ones did post processing with the methods they had.

Post processing shouldn't include excessive „photoshop´ing", but the „classical" methods like: dodge and burning, sharpening, cropping etc. are absolutely necessary to obtain a decent result!

If you would like to make a closing statement, we'd love to hear what you have to say.

I would like to thank Don Springer for this opportunity to display some of my work and this interview.

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