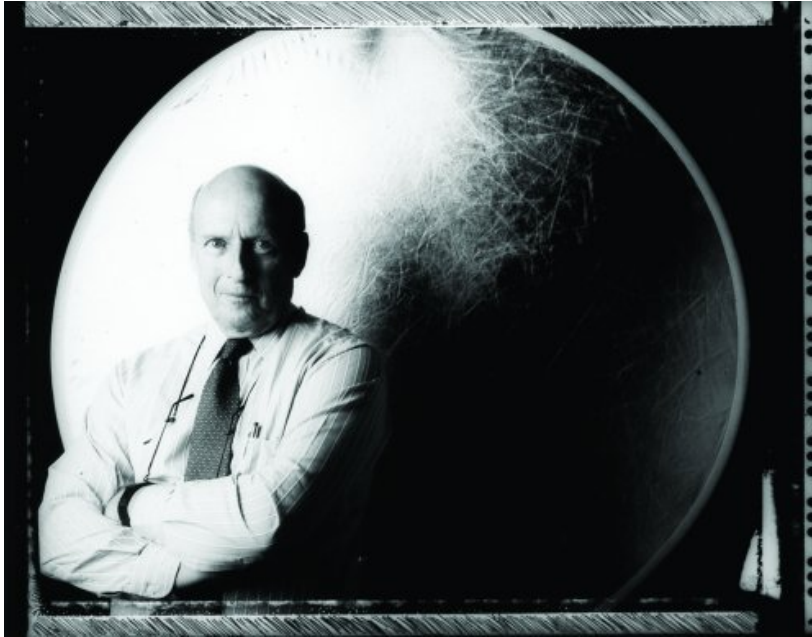


Rangefinder Magazine
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Profile: Mauricio Donelli by Harvey Goldstein
A Passion for the Image Language



Charles Conrad;



Ruben Blades;

Mauricio Donelli, recently featured in Rangefinder for his wedding photography (April 2006), is also noted for his portraits and nudes. In 1992, before the era of digital imaging captured the photographic industry, Mauricio was creating portraits with his new Sinar P2. Obsessed with high quality and detail, he would test his posing and lighting with Polaroid 55 film. This gave him and his subject a fast answer as to how everything looked.

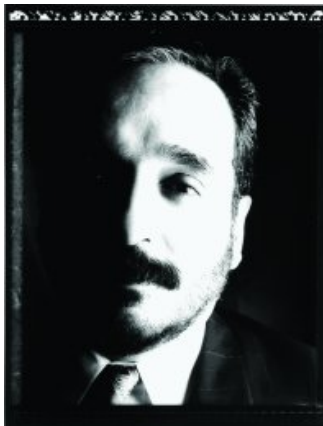
Many of his portraits are self-assignments of people who have become important because of what they do. For these special people, he tries to create a scenario where they pose within their element. He compares himself to the old portrait

photographers who brought their cameras and ideas to work.

Mauricio once photographed Charles Conrad, commander of Apollo XII (which landed on the moon in 1969), while Conrad was visiting a friend's office (shown this page). Realizing who Conrad was, Mauricio quickly gathered his camera and lighting gear and was ready to photograph him in less than an hour. He asked Conrad to pose with a round, silver reflector at his back to simulate a full moon, referring to Conrad's achievements. No two people see an image the same way: What Mauricio saw as a reference to the moon, Conrad amusingly saw as a reference

to his bald head. Following a five-day trip traveling through Latin America with the Dalai Lama, Mauricio asked if he could have 10 minutes of the Dalai Lama's time to create a portrait. The Dalai Lama laughed, explaining that all photographers say it will only take 10 minutes, when it usually takes more than an hour. In less than 10 minutes, Mauricio completed the portrait of this quiet, wise and unassuming man handing him a flower.

Mauricio began his portrait and nude studies to grow and develop as a photographer. He was always busy as a wedding photographer, and whenever he was contracted for a new wedding, his clients asked for photographs similar to what they had seen. He was making wedding photographs that were very similar to each other, and his creative process was going in circles. This was contrary to his personal philosophy, which was to change and create. By creating his own assignments, he was free to imagine and do whatever he wanted; he was not obligated to fulfill the needs or wishes of a client.



Expanding his



repertoire with portraits gave him a better understanding of the world around him, thus he became more creative with his wedding photography: new images, new points of view and a wider array of special moments.

Willie Colón;

Because he often works with people with limited time, the famous and nearly famous, Mauricio tries to prepare in advance. He states that by understanding all of the surrounding elements, it becomes easy to create almost anything. With a portrait, the subject is within the scenario, you just have to imagine what to do and then recreate the portrait in your own style.

The leading questions are always where to place the subject, how to light the subject, how many lights he will need and which lens to

the Dalai Lama

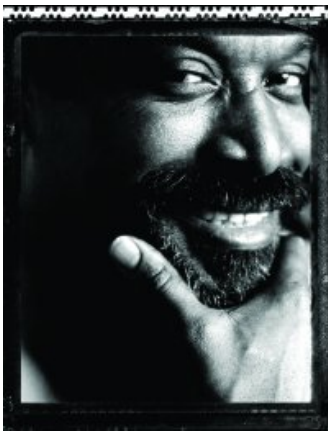
use. Mauricio prepares a simple design of his idea, imagining the lighting, and he writes down all of the details. He has his assistant serve as the model, and he makes some tests with the Polaroid Type 55 film. If he is pleased with the results, he is ready for the real subject. In this way, everything is worked out in advance, and the time it takes to actually make the photograph with the subject is minimal— usually less than 15 minutes. The only problem he faces with self-assignments of famous people is that it is much harder to get a commitment from them; he has to explain what he is doing and why, and they want to know what he is going to do with the photographs. Mauricio feels it will be easier after his book is published because that will show why he does this type of work.



Graciela Iturbide;

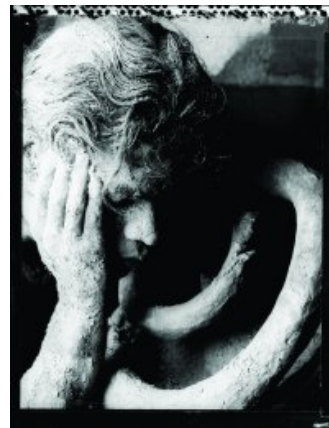
One of Mauricio's favorite portraits is the one that he was the most nervous about taking; his subject was Arnold Newman, "an icon of the portrait." (Photo shown on page 88.) "I wanted to make him happy with the portrait, which I did. He loved the way his reflection is shown in the back of the upside-down 4x5 camera and how it makes everyone turn the picture around. What people do not understand is that the image on the groundglass of the camera is his upside down reflection. The set for this picture was prepared with two 4x5 cameras so the subject was reflected on the groundglass of the first camera with a 210mm Rodenstock lens while the second camera (with a 150mm Rodenstock lens) took the picture of the reflection. Two kinds of lights were used to create this image: a strobe to illuminate Mr. Newman and ambient light for the frame of the first camera that reflected his image."

Mauricio recalls, "Because I used Polaroid 55, I tried to get the film from the back loader without processing, which is pretty tricky but is the only way to process the pictures later. This material has to be carefully treated because of its very thin emulsion. I made two or three tests and then took six to 12 photographs. I processed them later with sodium sulfite, washed the negatives, and put them in a Photo-Flo solution to let them dry slowly. The most beautiful print you can get from a Polaroid 55 4x5 negative is from a color metallic paper; the frame that the Polaroid leaves as a chemical border copies in stain bronze with the image in pure warm black and white."



Pete Conde;

Working with nudes is entirely different than portraits. Mauricio begins by spending time with the subject, and depending on where they are, the decision of lighting, either flash or natural, becomes the most important aspect. "I do not base my work on just one kind of light, I feel pretty free with both. When the body is in front of me, I start to explore, to move around and listen to my intuition so when the magic starts, the images begin to flow." Mauricio feels that his work with nudes is the kind of work that makes him feel absolutely free because it imposes no restrictions. He compares photographing nudes to meditation. It is like entering another level of consciousness, understanding and speaking with the body in front of him. As his conversation begins, the images appear. "It is that moment that you understand that kind of language that we never speak, except for a few short moments in life."



Oscar Machado

Mauricio's nudes are photographed in black and white, and because he likes the freedom of a 35mm camera, he uses a Nikon F5. The lenses he uses to photograph his nudes are the 24mm, 50mm and a 105mm macro lenses. His present film of choice is Kodak CN400, C-41 process.

Because he is from the traditional school, his pictures use the full negative; there is no cropping. Mauricio believes that when the eye is immersed inside that rectangle, one has to be sure everything

inside it is perfect because you cannot crop what is supposed to be a piece of art.



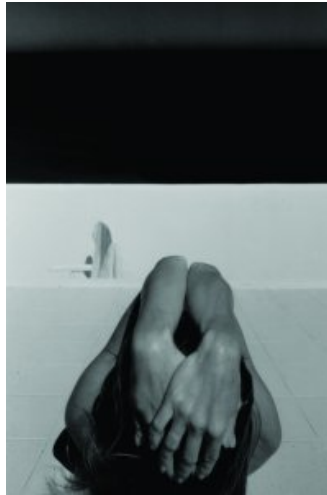
Arnold Newman;

only time will tell.”

With this thought, he reflects on his concern about digital photography and the issue of losing the art of seeing and capturing the moment. He believes that making a lot of clicks in a few seconds to find out if the moment was caught on the memory chip is changing the art. He worries that the relevance of the photographic moment that traditional photographers have sought to catch on film may be lost in this digital era.

Mauricio feels that the key to photographing nudes is exploration around the form, and that the work is in the shape. Most of his photographs are taken with natural light in natural places. “I love to photograph at the beach because that is where I feel connected with life. Most of my nudes are made at the beach or near water scenes, which I find very inspirational.”

Mauricio continues to work with traditional film for his portraits and nudes; it is the work that bears his signature. “Maybe some of my work will someday be digital. But for now, neither the portrait nor the nudes could be digital because of the feeling of the cameras and the film, which is irreplaceable. It is a matter of time, and the future brings changes. Maybe there will be new work and new stories will be created and shown;



From Akvatika series

For more on Mauricio visit www.mauriciodonelli.com.

Harvey Goldstein from Branford, Connecticut, has been in the photographic industry for more than 30 years. He is a former studio owner and presently edits numerous association newsletters and magazines, as well as being a freelance writer.