



AUTHENTIC AUTEUR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Frank Meyl, 44, draws on modern architecture in his approach to his photographic style. He tells **PICTURE** how his love of architecture lured him into exploring architecture in societal terms and how he achieves authenticity in advertising.

WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON CURRENTLY?

One of the most special things is the ongoing globalization and the effect it has on people today. What is going on right now is there are lots of companies and chains that have the same style, for example when you move from one Sheraton to another...you don't know where you are when you wake up. It interests me to see how places are different right now. I love to travel to places that I feel are interesting for me -- places that are bizarre or extreme like Dubai and Las Vegas. In Dubai, money rules everything. It is my goal to shoot there every four to five months to see how it develops.

HOW DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER DUBAI?

I do have a degree in interior architecture. When you come from this side you always have an eye on what is going on in building around the world. They commission all the best architects to do buildings there.

WHAT ABOUT SHOOTING ON LOCATION DO YOU LIKE?

I like that my projects bring me all over the world because my photography is about shooting on location. I really love that because you always have endless variables. There is always something unexpected going on when you shoot on location and it makes it exciting and demanding. You can control coincidences. So, I don't set up my stuff totally and stage it. It is mostly set up in the rules of the job but I always try to get into a flow mode so

unexpected things happen, which is important.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES?

There is one image on my website with a guy on a rooftop pool cleaning the pool. We were shooting in Dubai at a sky pool. This guy showed up and he was cleaning something else. We asked him if he could be in the image. At the end it was a perfect fit but it was not intended in the first place. This was one of my personal projects.

HOW ABOUT AN EXAMPLE IN YOUR COMMERCIAL WORK?

When I started out 10 years ago, we introduced an authentic real life look into advertising. At the time it

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was all models and staged. I was the first guy who introduced real people into advertising. That was when it started to get a spontaneous and believable look in commercial photography. That took off really well. I got jobs shooting all over the world for this special kind of look. Now I am moving away from that because now it's a standard. Now, I am using Photoshop and digital photography but I still like to get this believable authentic look on the images and the message as well.

WHICH COMPANY WERE YOU WORKING WITH WHEN YOU INTRODUCED THAT 'AUTHENTIC LOOK'?

It was for a major ad campaign for a TV station in Germany. I did every job thereon after in the same kind of style where I try to get real emotions into a believable setting. I did this for insurance companies, banks, Verizon Wireless, Philip Morris, HP, Sony, BMW and Audi.



**HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THAT WITH A NON-ACTOR/MODEL?**

We shoot and shoot and shoot until the people feel comfortable in a real natural way.

WHAT SETS YOU APART?

My specialty is to put this in a very clean and graphic background. But at the same time it's real and emotional and this is quite rare.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE FIELD COMING FROM AN ARCHITECTURE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND?

I was always a photographer but never wanted to study photography because the most important thing in photography is our vision. It is about seeing. Nobody can teach you that. From my point of view, it's your personality and the things you believe in that make you a good photographer. It's not the technique, it's quite easy. I prefer to assist photographers to understand technique and how the business works. But still keep my very own personal approach to photography. I'm very happy I was not educated in photography because I think

they may have ruined my love for it. I was always a photographer but I didn't want to study it, but at the same time I wanted to study something I loved, which was architecture.

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER STUDYING ARCHITECTURE IN DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY AND IN LOS ANGELES?

I worked for Eric Owen Moss. He is not repeating his successful recipes over and over again; he is constantly searching and growing. I learned from him to not strive for perfection but always do the best you can at the moment, and then go from there.

YOU CAN SEE YOUR ARCHITECTURE BACKGROUND IN YOUR IMAGES.

What I'm after is the spirit of the place. I don't like to shoot architecture as it is. I rather like or rather use it for a message I'm after, like globalization. I'm a huge believer in individual style and personal freedom. I hate to see things becoming the same all over the world.

YOU WORK FOR COMPANIES ALL OVER THE WORLD. WHAT ARE THE DIFFER-

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Creative Director Ogilvy Frankfurt

Why did you choose to work with Frank on the Allianz Insurance company campaign?

Allianz is a very demanding client who puts a lot of interest in a perfect result -- absolutely no mistakes regarding perspectives, angles, shadows, background details and so on. It has to look high class, especially when it's a brand image motif. Frank is the kind of photographer you can rely on.

What are your thoughts on his work?

He doesn't rely on later, he relies on now. Even if he only needs an ant to shoot as an element, he perfectly lights the whole forest around the ant. Moreover, he finds the time to capture additional elements you never thought of before to add quality in the final motif.

Describe how he is to work with?

Frank Meyl is in our opinion one of the worlds most contemplative, yet still pragmatic photographers we've been working with. He thinks about every detail over and over. He does test shots even when the brief isn't confirmed, just to have answers in the discussion. That's why it is so wonderful and easy to work with him - Frank comes with answers instead of 'umms' and 'maybes'. And he stays very relaxed - which is a great contribution. Because he knows what to do if things don't turn out as formerly planned.

What is his directorial style?

The word for Frank's pictures is 'crisp'. Images look strong, angles are appetizing, color code is fresh and hefty. (...who knows what might turn out if Frank discovers to shoot food one day?)



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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SHOOTING AN AMERICAN CAMPAIGN VERSUS A EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN?

It's a big difference. In Paris, they like to discuss things. You have to communicate a lot. For example, we still shot on film six years ago. We were setting upon in a studio and I shot three rolls of film. We discussed the whole set for three to four hours, and we did the setting 10 times. After the job was finished, the client selected the first image from the first film. It's funny I had to do it over and over again. In America they love to have hand-drawn sketches and they give me a whole lot of freedom to bring in my own vision on the set. Opposite to that in Europe a lot of things are set up and tested in the market before it's produced. In the end you have to produce an image that is fixed and set up. It's hard to get something new and unexpected because they have tested everything in the images and don't want to change anything.

WHAT IS YOUR LIGHTING APPROACH?

I think the best and most complex lighting is available light. Unfortunately, we can't wait or have the money to have the best situation. That is why we bring a flashlight and HMI light. Lighting for me needs to be

natural and believable. I am not the guy of special effects and looks that aren't happening in real life too. That is a major part of being authentic and believable. We manipulate a lot but mostly to get the best look.

YOU'VE WON AWARDS IPA AWARD, Px3 IN FRANCE, AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY'S AP 25 EXHIBITION -- HOW IS ENTERING AWARDS CONTESTS IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISHING ONESELF AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

For me it's important. It's special. Photography is an ongoing process and at a certain point you want to know what other people think about your photography.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO A YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER ABOUT MAKING IT IN THIS BUSINESS?

Work on your own vision and try to get to know how the business works. Every business has its own rules. In general, photography is not about technique, it's about your own vision and your personal interests. You have to shoot a lot. You can only be successful if you are a strong personality with your own vision. ■

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