

Rocky Schenck

Wonderful

“Each photograph is like a still taken from a movie that exists not on film but rather in one’s memory, with all the fuzziness typical of remembered impressions.”

Quote by John Berendt in his foreword to Schenck’s 2003 monograph.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m taking stills on a movie, but the movie is life itself.” Rocky has a way of turning the familiar into the unfamiliar. He explores fantastical and wondrous environments that couldn’t be real but they are. The images celebrate the magical world around us. Many of these images are fuzzy, blurred, vague, mysterious and haunting, impressions straight out of an Edgar Allen Poe story and starring Vincent Price. The work lies in a dreamlike state between fantasy and fear, foreboding and comforting, dangerous and lonely, yet romantically beckoning. There is a darkness that wants to invite you into its space and envelope you with its secrets and share hidden desires. “By continually exploring alternative realities and photographing the experiences, I feel that perhaps I’ll better understand how I got to this point in my life, and perhaps where I’ll be heading in the future. These wanderings are my therapy,” explains Rocky about himself and his work.

Rocky Schenck was born in Austin, Texas during the last century, and then moved to a ranch outside of Dripping Springs [Population 900], Texas at age five. His dad was a part time cowboy and a full time postman. His mother occasionally worked for the Internal Revenue Service. Both were imaginative and creative artists, who enjoyed life, parties, and the occasional drink or two. They delighted in creating a fantasy world for their two children, making each and every holiday, birthday, and lost tooth a “really big deal”. Rocky and his sister Becky

innocently believed in tooth fairies, Easter bunnies, and Santa Claus a little bit longer than other kids. He was nicknamed “Rocky” when he was three days old by his sister, who was confused by the other names his parents chose for his birth certificate: Richard Davis Botho Arthur Schenck.

As a child he was introduced to photography primarily through the old black and white movies he watched on television. Watching these classic films provided an escape from reality and illustrated fantastic worlds created on the back lots of Hollywood. The films fascinated him and he studied them religiously, gradually experimenting with duplicating tones, atmosphere, lighting, camera angles and textures. He knew that many of the settings were artificial and created by production designers, carpenters, scenic artists, and a crew of behind the scenes specialists. At age twelve, Rocky began studying oil painting, having been greatly influenced by the romantic landscape paintings and portraiture work of his great-great grandfather Hermann Lungkwitz (1813-1891) and great-great Uncle Richard Petri (1824-1857), both German immigrants and artists who moved to the Texas Hill Country in 1851. Rocky always admired their work and diligently followed in their footsteps. Working with landscapes he understood the concepts of manipulating the environment in his artwork. If what he saw in reality was not to his liking, he would romanticize the landscape by changing it through brushstrokes, colour choices, shading and the inclusion of dramatic skies or additional elements taken from his imagination. Rocky began selling his paintings professionally at age 13.

Around this same time, Rocky began a lifelong interest in motion pictures and photography. At 15 he began writing, directing and photographing low budget experimental films. A self taught

photographer, he honed his photographic skills while taking production stills on the sets of his movies with a Yashica twin lens reflex. His love of art, photography and movie making all developed simultaneously. After grade 12 he spent a year and a half studying an art major at North Texas Sate University, but decided to quit college and moved to Los Angeles. He experimented with digital but did not like the look of them; they did not have the depth, the texture or the romance of photographic prints, so he stopped using that technique; he now mostly uses a Nikon 35mm film camera. To create his special effects he tends to do this at the time of photography. He places elements over the lens, home made diffusion materials, a variety of filters to suit the lighting conditions and subject matter; in fact a bag of veritable trade secrets. Most of his manipulation is at the shooting stage with some more enhancements in the darkroom. He is reluctant to share his mastered techniques.

Rocky is a firm believer in the therapeutic value of road trips, and travels often (usually with a friend). This body of work was created during numerous trips throughout the South, and various parts of North America, Europe, England and Norway. His images range from landscapes to interior spaces.....from hotel rooms, store windows, lobbies, living rooms, information booths and conference rooms to oceans, lakes, forests, fields and trees. These environments are occasionally inhabited by silhouettes or isolated figures.



Endless 2004



Top: Ant Hill 2004
Bottom: Aurora 2003



Top: Balloons and Cigarettes 2002
Bottom: Daydream 2003

When asked how he goes about creating his photographs, Rocky Schenck replied "my approach is rather simple: I record on film what I see and what I feel as I travel through life. Although my photographs have been taken all over the world, there is a consistency to the imagery due to the manipulation of both the film's negative and of the print's surface. I consider my images to be illustrations of my conscious (and perhaps subconscious) dreams, emotions, and longings. Many of the images explore positive and negative realities which inhabit dreamlike settings. When I shoot these images, they are usually not premeditated or contrived.... I simply take my camera with me wherever I go and try to remain open to whatever life shoves... or gently places... in front of me. When I'm shooting, I look for images which tell a story, or provide some element of a dramatic narrative. Of course, sometimes it's a matter of being swept away by the haunting beauty of nature, which provides constant inspiration and solace. If I am sad or depressed or melancholy, I can wander somewhere with my camera and usually turn my mood around by stumbling upon something unexpected and wonderful."

In 1987, a gallery owner in New York discovered Rocky's work and gave him his first one man exhibition, followed by a second exhibition in 1990. Both shows were well received and reviewed by several publications, including Art in America, Artforum, and Aperture. Since then, Rocky has continued to show in galleries around the world and his work is now included in several prestigious collections. In his recent solo exhibition "Rocky Schenck: Los Angeles" at M+B gallery he documented the city secrets. "We all know the iconic places that have been photographed over and over again," Schenck says. "I'm drawn to the more mysterious side of the city."

L.A. is famous for its sun-kissed sidewalks and palm tree-lined boulevards, but it's also known for being able to morph into almost anywhere else. He seeks that shape-shifting quality in an environment. Schenck roams the city, camera in hand, in search of the undiscovered. His amblings have turned up treasures in the historically rich West Adams and Boyle Heights neighbourhoods. The image "9th and Lake," for example, depicts a spire-topped residence near MacArthur Park superimposed against a glowing background. An illuminated window reveals the silhouette of a solitary figure.

"When you see the title, 'Los Angeles,' you think you are going to see the cliché, the downtown skyline or the concert hall," said M+B associate director Shannon Richardson. "But you walk in and nothing is familiar. Rocky rarely reveals exactly where anything is because he wants it to feel out of context, out of time." Although many of the images can't be pinpointed to a specific location, some, such as "The End," are instantly recognizable. Snapped during last year's fire in Griffith Park, the photo shows smoke rising above the Hollywood sign.

Rocky has enjoyed parallel careers in art and commercial photography. In his own words he says that the art world has treated him well, his assignments have all come from word of mouth, he has enjoyed wondrous experiences with a diverse range of photo jobs. He enjoys filmmaking and has written and directed multiple projects, including music videos for Kylie Minogue and Nick Cave ("Where the Wild Roses Grow"), and other artists, including Delta Goodrem ("In This Life"), Robert Plant & Alison Krauss ("Gone, Gone, Gone"), and "Please Read the Letter"), Alice In Chains and the Cramps. Fashion shoots with Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, Baz Lurman, the Scissor sisters and Neil Diamond.

He loves working with people but knows he can always escape into the private world of his art photography. It's how he started and where he will end up. There's absolutely nothing to compare with stumbling upon a subject or a landscape or a reality that is unexpected and surprising, and then capturing it on film. It's an extraordinary feeling and he is always looking forward to his next photographic journey.

His current limited editions of 10 per image, each image is a toned silver gelatine print, sized at 16 x 22 inches which sell for around USD\$2,500.00. Visit M+B gallery based on Los Angeles or visit their website at www.mbfala.com or his own website www.rockyschenck.com

Top: Black Pond 2001
Bottom: Grand 2007





Left: Happy Birthday, Mr.President Dress 1999
Top: Curtain Call 2001
Bottom: Gabriel 1999



Top: Gazing Ball 2004
Bottom: Guns and Clowns 2003



Top: Heaven 2002
Bottom: Information 2001



Top: Learning Circus 2007
Bottom: Mischief 2004



Top: Promenade 2003
Bottom: Sleepwalking 2004



Top: The Baptism 1990
Bottom: Picnic 2002

