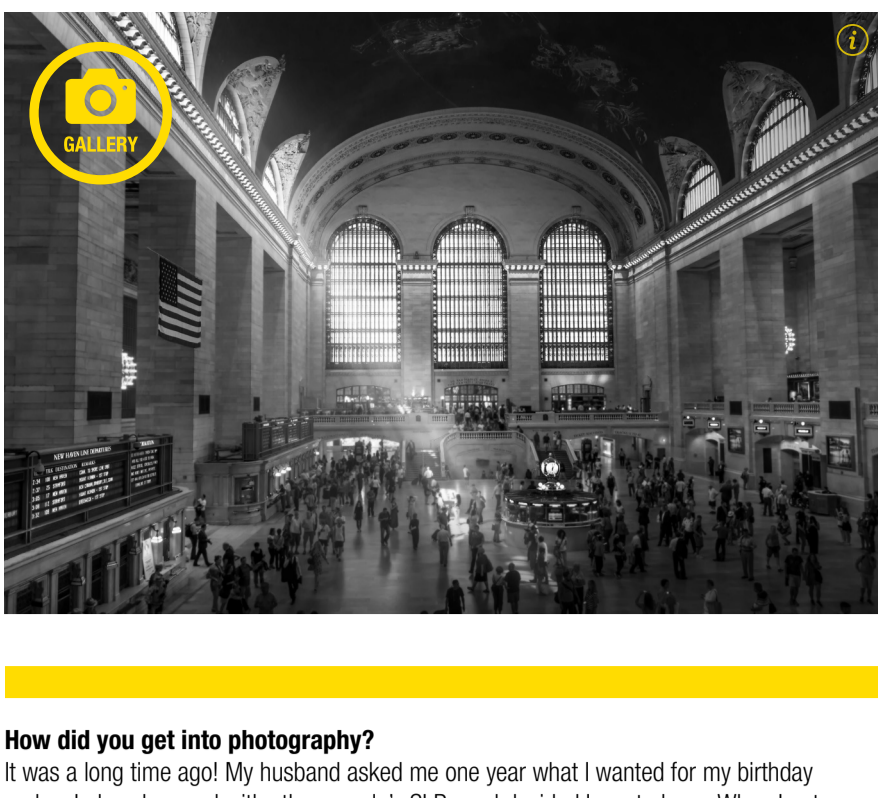




In fine form

After pushing herself to explore new subject matter on a recent trip to the US, fine art photographer Leanne Cole shares with us her images and photographic journey.





How did you get into photography?

It was a long time ago! My husband asked me one year what I wanted for my birthday and so I played around with other people's SLRs and decided I wanted one. When I got one I just loved it and loved taking photos. I got my first Nikon in 1996.

How did you learn?

I mainly taught myself. I did a lot of reading, I bought just about every magazine that I could, to try and learn. There was a lot of trial and error. Of course, this was in the days of film so I couldn't experiment too much [as film was expensive] ... I think I remember I allowed two rolls of film a week.

You work as a photographer full time. How did you break into the world of professional photography?

It just happened. About 10 years ago I returned to study and did a year of a photography course. I then went to the VCA and got a Bachelor of Fine Arts ... I spent three years learning all about composition. I've never really considered myself a commercial photographer, more a fine art photographer. Every image I do is my interpretation of what I'm looking at and I never claim that it's reality.

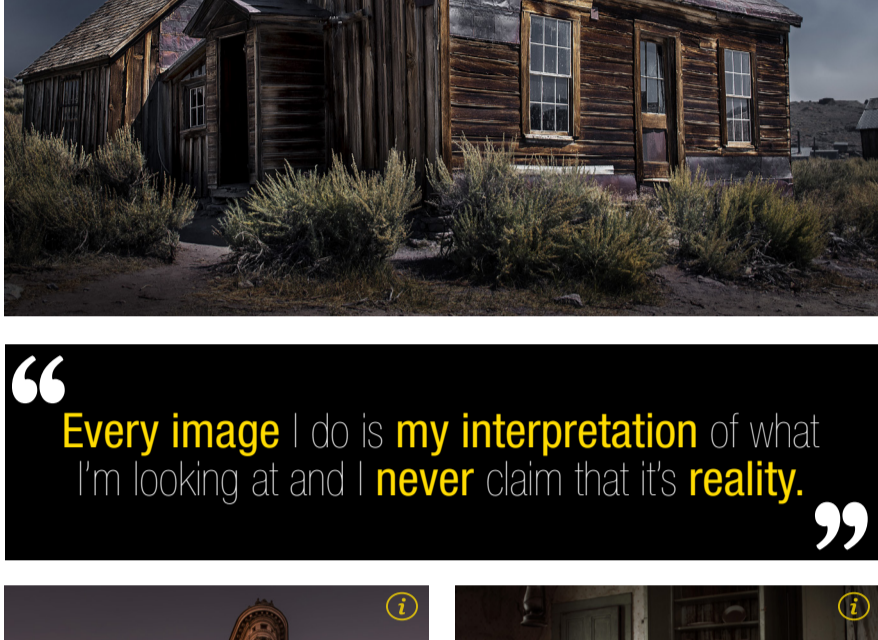
Do you exhibit your images?

My work is mainly teaching now, so I teach people photography, mainly women. I don't want to do portraits or weddings, so I find it's limited with what I can do, and how I can make money. So I teach and I've also started a magazine, *Dynamic Range*. After noticing a lack of women being represented across all areas of photography, we decided to start our own magazine to show that women do a lot more [than only portraits and weddings] and that they're good at it.

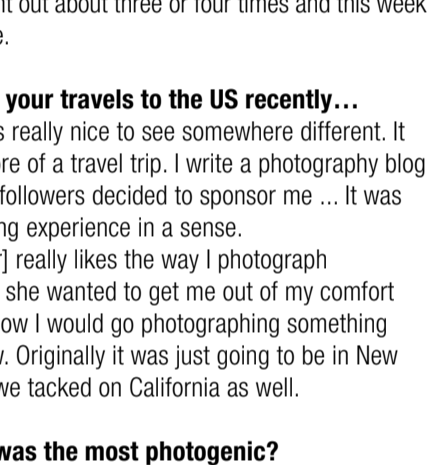
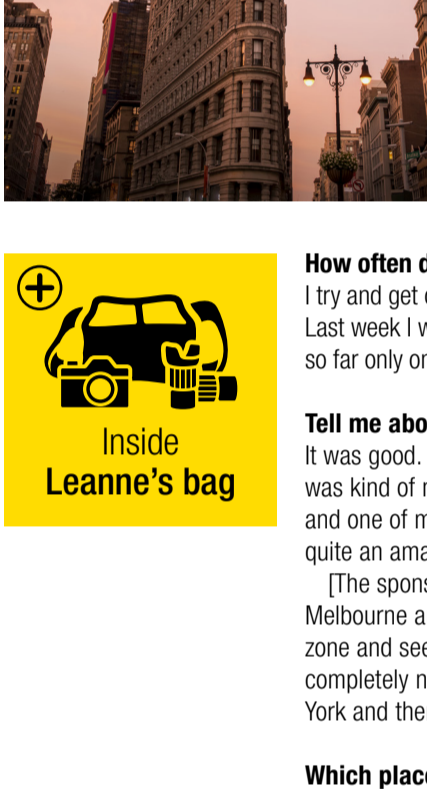
How would you describe your photographic style and what do you enjoy shooting the most?

I'm an architectural photographer, but more fine art architecture. I don't do real estate. After my trip to New York I had so many people saying I should do more architecture again and that they really liked it.

I'm also really interested in the environment and our effect on the environment. I do landscape photography from that point of view, too, and I think probably [that influences my] architecture photography too.



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How often do you take photos?

I try and get out a couple of times a week, sometimes more. Last week I went out about three or four times and this week so far only once.

Tell me about your travels to the US recently...

It was good. It's really nice to see somewhere different. It was kind of more of a travel trip. I write a photography blog and one of my followers decided to sponsor me ... It was quite an amazing experience in a sense.

[The sponsor] really likes the way I photograph Melbourne and she wanted to get me out of my comfort zone and see how I would go photographing something completely new. Originally it was just going to be in New York and then we tacked on California as well.

Which place was the most photogenic?

Probably Yosemite National Park. If I could go back to any one place, that would be it. I was only there for one night, so time was against me, but it would have been nice to have spent a few days there.

What has been your favourite shoot overall?

Probably my trip to the US and Yosemite National Park. That was just mind-boggling. Those mountains! I've never seen anything like it in my life.

Here in Australia though, one of my favourite places to shoot is up the Mallee. My mother lives up there; it's the north-west corner of Victoria. It's like the gateway, the start of the outback, but it's an area where you've still got people farming. They've been in drought forever and so it's a really harsh environment. I love getting up there to take photos.

What gear did you take with you on your US trip?

I took a Nikon D750 and a NIKKOR AF-S 35mm F/1.8G lens... I also took my NIKKOR AF-S 24-70mm F/2.8G ED, which is really my go-to lens. The D750 went really well. I was quite impressed.

I've got a Nikon D800, so the file sizes [with the Nikon D750] were half the size, which was nice – I didn't fill up as many memory cards.

I loved the Wi-Fi ... every time I'd go out I'd take a photo with it, download an image onto my phone, do a bit of processing in Snapsave and then it would be on Instagram. I stopped taking photos from my phone.



What are you currently working on?

At the moment I'm spending a lot of time on the next issue of the magazine. I also write articles and I also have my blog and try to keep up with social media. Apparently Instagram is the one to be on at the moment so I'm trying to put a photo up every day. I have a photography blog, which I've been doing for five years now, and I've got almost 40,000 followers.

That's where I've probably put most of my energy in the last couple of years, but I don't know that people have the time for blogs anymore. I think that's probably where Instagram is gaining popularity... You can still see the images, but you don't have to spend as much time on them.

What is it that you love the most about photography?

I like going out and taking photos, exploring new places, but also going to old places. I also love working on images. I love getting a photo that I've taken, opening it up into Photoshop and just seeing what's possible and what I can do with it. I enjoy that just as much as taking the photos.

Is there something or someplace that you haven't photographed yet but would like to?

I'd really like to go to England and Scotland and New Zealand, but I'd also really like to explore Australia.

I think Australia is an amazing country, obviously because I live here, but I think it could be an absolute photographer's delight – it's just so different. I don't quite know how I want to photograph it yet, but it's definitely on the list to start travelling more.

I want to be able to – this probably sounds really wanky, but I want to photograph the heat, because Australia is such a hot country. It would be nice to work out how to use that in the photos.

It sounds like you carefully consider everything before you go and take a photo...

Probably not, I tend to just go out and shoot everything, but I do think about places a lot before I go there. I do research locations a bit before I go, I will Google them.

When I go somewhere for the first time it's just a scouting trip, I don't expect to get anything great. If they're places that I know I can get to again I see what kind of photos I can get, and then I hope that I can get back to photograph what I really want to get.

How has your photography evolved over the years?

I think I've become a lot more certain about what I want. I used to want to just shoot everything and in some ways I still do, but I think I want my work to help protect the environment.

I received a grant last year to produce a book on a local area that is in danger of having a freeway put through it. I've been photographing it for the last couple of years and we'll make a book.

Can you tell me a bit more about that book and what you are shooting?

It's near Heidelberg, it's a wetlands area. It used to be a swamp, or a wetland. Then it was used as farmland for a very long time, and then about 20 years ago they put the watercourse back. Lots of birds go there and it's also an important area for the community because the locals use it and it follows the Yarra River.

The book will hopefully help people become more aware of the area and want to protect it. I think that's one thing that photography is very good for – it helps people build a connection with a place that words alone can't. Hopefully the book can help people want to save it and to protect it. And if it doesn't, then it will just be a beautiful reminder of what we had. ■