

Mastercraftsman

Glitz, Glam & Glory.

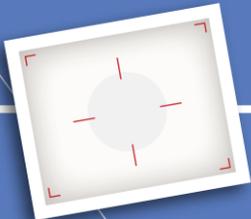
Mumbai based photographer, Shashi Nair's name pops up an awful lot in the world of advertising photography. And his specialization happens to be in the area of lifestyle, fashion, products and automobile photography. In fact, his innovative style has gained a lot of attention over the last two decades especially, in the way how he challenges convention by playing with the viewers perception of form and beauty. Moreover, his photographs are always full of life - like the frame of Bollywood action hero, Akshay Kumar, captured in suspended animation while skating off to glory in a print campaign. However, he continues to push the creative envelope by ensuring the transition appears more natural and seamless. Excerpts:



Shashi Nair,
Mumbai



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Looking at your body of work, one gets the feeling that you love what you do. What then is the mantra that not only keeps you motivated but also enables you to innovate with lighting, mood and the creative flow in your imagery?

Yes of course, I don't think that I can think anything else beyond imagery of any form. However, I always draw my inspiration from my teacher, 'Mother Nature'. And every time I look at simple things around me in life, I all the more feel there is a perennial flow in abundance for me to learn and understand the true form - be it lighting or the



mood of lighting, shape and its ability to define and redefine differently every time. This very unstoppable ability of 'Mother Nature', keeps me motivated and obsessive. In fact, it also keeps me going forward with the thought of discovering each and every time on whatever venture I undertake up to create an image.

You are equally adept at shooting people, still life, automobiles, etc. In fact, how did the advertising photographer in you evolve and how did you develop the warm, natural style that you are known for?

It all started initially when I was inspired by the portrait painting or portrait pictures in the various books that I had the fortune to go through and finally one day, I saw few portrait pictures in a small portrait studio close to my neighborhood. In fact, this was the starting point and thereafter my thoughts evolved about different ways of creating a portrait. I quickly started developing a taste for understanding photography. In the meantime I had the privilege of knowing a few cinematographers and also understanding their different styles. In fact, I have always believed that as a photographer why can't I too have the ability to shoot with the content and inspiration for anything - for instance still life, fashion or automobile. Moreover, cinematographers do not have this choice and also the ability to handle everything. However, at the end of the day, I need to look at the shape, the color, texture, style and also the lighting treatment that is required to create the necessary feel and mood to approach the subject.

After getting the right kind of training and also assisting renowned professional photographers in Chicago, it enabled me to broaden my vision in the advertising world and in many ways was the real start of my journey in photography. Initially, I used to follow the work of many popular international photographers, including the ones whom I had assisted, as well my teachers who had a profound



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ics are both disturbing and paradoxical; it's beautiful yet the subject is not. Does it mean that an environmental landscape photograph has to be beautiful?

Yes, beauty is conceived differently by different individuals, while I see things with my instincts and follow them, while my approach to the subject... these are most of the time quite natural, or may be influenced by the thought arising after seeing the subject and also my impressions on how I want the subject to look like. In short, I influence the image by exploring around the scenes and thereby deciding which angles work the best. This could involve in lying down on the floor, crouching low, climbing a ladder, working at a slanted angle or moving closer to the subject or else by simply varying the lighting. However, the priority is to think about what is the message that is required to be conveyed and

thereby creating a composition to reinforce it further.

What are the most challenging aspects in automobile photography. Where do you precisely focus on?

In automobile photography one has to grapple with the idea of photographing reflections. A majority of the automobiles are painted absolutely glossy with almost all reflective components and hence its important in understanding and controlling the reflections to create a stunning image. It is also significant to identify with beauty and to converge on all interesting aesthetics, contours, that compliments the different elements in the vehicle to make it absolutely stand apart. Further more its pertinent to have a knowledge of both outdoor and indoor lighting. Besides, a decent knowledge of the vehicle and its unique selling point is a mandatory



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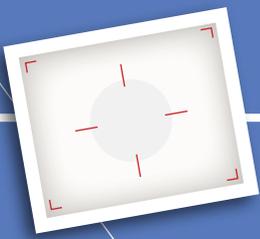
influence in the early part of my career. Slowly I broke free and also started following my own instincts and also developing my own natural instinctive style which offered me the creative freedom to translate my independent thoughts and expression in my imagery.

How would you describe your passion for photography? Secondly, what are some of the challenges faced by fashion photographers?

To me photography is an obsession, that continuously fuels my mind to observe and understand and to view things from an entirely different perspective. In short, its an evolving process even while shooting, and there is always a team of professionals working together in most cases to make

a great fashion picture. It goes without saying that everyone in the team has to continuously support and contribute equally to make the picture stand out. Its very difficult to deliver great fashion images without the support of a team comprising of good professional model, stylist, makeup and hair, a designer etc. Importantly, while shooting outdoors with natural light, one needs to be precise and at the same time maintain a good control over the whole process to achieve the desired results which in a way helps in deciding between good, better and the best,

Your portfolio has an element of aspirational beauty and style attached to it. But the choice of subject and the use of aesthet-



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before the commencement of the actual shoot in order to generate the precise focus of the image that satisfies not only the client but also fires ones creative passions.

Importantly, do you consider yourself to be more technical or more artistic and why?

I consider myself first and foremost to be an artist. However, I cannot escape or neglect the technical aspects of photography which is absolutely an integral part which supports good image making.

However I strongly believe that it is more vital to have the sense of art which comes from within and the technical aspects can always be developed upon going forward. In fact, only with technique one cannot craft a great image because photography involves a deeper understanding which the human brain enables to visualize way beyond comprehension.

Is technology and digital retouching reducing the gap between professionals and amateurs? Do you consider Photoshop a boon or bane to creativity?

Definitely not. For instance, if a badly shot picture is partially improved with technology and used professionally, it need not endorse an amateur getting promoted to becoming a professional photographer. One should primarily create a good image and only then the use of technology enables to further enhance it and to adapt it to one's imagination and creativity. In fact, digital retouching is not a substitute to badly composed pictures and is also not a license to brainless photography. A thinking photographer can pre-plan his thoughts on the use of Photoshop before the shoot and thereafter plan the shoot accordingly. In short, he needs to be precise and requires to shoot his subjects accurately and by no means he can leave it entirely for the Photoshop to fill the gaps. Photoshop definitely helps the photographer to process and also enables him to further enhance his imagination in his imagery. However there is a need for a good content, then only the Photoshop can further improve upon the image and take it further.

▣ **Mathew Thottungal**