
Canada's definitive photography magazine

BRET CULP

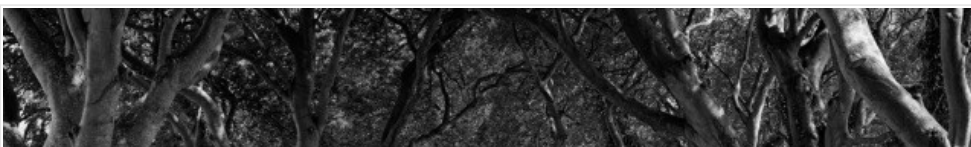
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Q~ Bret, simply put, your landscapes are stunning. They speak to an erosion of structure and the demise of what once was. A former glory, seemingly lost, but you have somehow brought it back to life. What is it about this subject matter that speaks to you?

A~I believe that art is a means of working through the often complicated and important issues of life, both for the creator and the viewer. From a young age I have struggled with the idea that life ends, which I know has been a significant influence in my choice of subject matter. Investigating themes of time, mortality and spirituality through photography has informed my thoughts and feelings helping me to work through it all.

I have come to understand that in addition to visible appeal, there is an intellectual beauty in the cyclical patterns of growth and decline, which is the unifying fate of everything that exists. It's because of this that I named my website "The Beauty Of Impermanence". Note that it is not called "The Impermanence of Beauty", which would have meant something very different.





Q~ Your travels have brought you to such locales as Italy and Ireland; two visually breath taking destinations. As a photographer, how did you approach shooting in a foreign country? And, did you encounter any obstacles in your journeys?

A~Before travelling to any destination I try to determine how it might connect to my chosen subject matter I do my homework by planning trips using Google maps, doing internet research and poring over geology, geography and history books Once there, a GPS unit is invaluable I also go out of my way to engage locals about their favourite places

I haven't encountered any real obstacles while travelling I believe that attitude is the mother of all luck and, of course, luck happens when preparation meets opportunity However, even with a GPS, due to the ancient roads and the overgrown land it's often challenging to find certain specific places in Ireland





Q~ The history of Ireland is steeped in mysticism and countless conquerors. Each leaving their mark on the landscapes or the architecture raised in their honor. Did the weight of this history impress upon you while you were shooting?

A~Definitely. When photographing in such locations, time disappears and I feel the significance of each passing moment as well as a strong connection to the past.

An example of such a place, Skellig Michael is the larger of two Skellig Islands located 15 km off the southwest coast of Ireland. It holds a special place in Irish history and folklore with the earliest references dating back to 1400 BC. Legends say it is the location of the final battle between St. Patrick and the snakes that plagued the land. It was one of the best known but most inaccessible early Christian monasteries and survived a number of Viking raids in the 9th century.

Climbing to the top of the nearly vertical seven hundred foot rocky island using the same granite carved steps that monks created 1,500 years ago was a precarious, exhausting yet exhilarating experience. With each step I felt as though I was leaving the material world further behind. Guarding a passage called Christ's Saddle is what appears to be a giant stone dragon, seen in my photograph The Petrified Dragon Of Skellig Michael. It's interesting to note that St. Michael, the island's namesake, is often depicted killing a dragon with a sword and that dragons were equivalent to snakes in ancient mythologies. At the peak stand six beehive huts, two oratories and terraces of the well-preserved sixth-century monastery. Several hours passed outside of time as I made countless photos. Finally, as I made my way back down to the sea I could feel myself slowly returning to this world.



Q~ You are a landscape photographer, but your images speak to the presence of humanity. Either subtle or overt, there seems to be an underlying feeling that we have been there and left something of ourselves. Is there any intention in your work to show this connection between humanity and nature?

A~Yes. It's important to remember that we are not separate from nature and so it's inevitable that in one way or another we will leave our mark in the land.

It's not an accident that many of our structures have been created for spiritual purposes, which I

believe is connected to concerns about mortality – the duality between the eternal and the transient. At the same time, as soon as something is created it begins the process of reintegrating back to the earth where it will ultimately become something new. Nothing can escape the ephemeral nature of existence so we should try to see the beauty in it. It's important to remember that life is not possible without impermanence.



Q~ Switching gears for a moment, we are very interested in the type of equipment you use. And if you had a choice between film and digital, what would be your preference?

A~For years I used medium format film equipment and Kodak Tri-X film. I would scan the negatives and do my post-processing on the computer; I've used Photoshop since version 1. While I love the classic look of creamy-smooth prints, I am also attracted to the look of vintage film grain. I like the blobs of silver that make up an image to that of a painter's brush strokes and so not only did I not try to avoid it in my work, I often used techniques to increase it. On the other hand, I dislike the look of digital noise. By 2008 I had transitioned entirely to digital capture and I found that I subconsciously replaced the texture inherent in the materials with texture in the scene itself, often emphasized by back or side light.

My captures are now made using Nikon DSLR's. They're in colour and contain a wide tonal range allowing for more post processing choices. A lot of time is spent manipulating the tones to find a balance that maximizes the drama while remaining believable and honest to the subject. Do to requests for larger scale work many later photographs are composed of several individual captures stitched together allowing for the resulting high-resolution image to be printed very large with remarkable fidelity.



Q~ Finally, are there any Canadian photographers who inspire you? How about international?

A~The following are three of many Canadian photographers that inspire me. I like Edward Burtynsky's commitment to immaculate large-scale images of nature transformed by man. Many of Robert Polidori's photographs capture haunting, culturally significant environments. Going way back, William Notman's famous portraits as well as his evocative scenes of 19th century Canadian life are fascinating.

Internationally I'm drawn to Minor White's spirituality, Alfred Stieglitz's moody images of New York and his concept of equivalents, Robert Adams' writings and the work of many other masters. However, my strongest inspiration often comes from evocative music, painting, prose, cinema and other artistic endeavours. I'm inspired by reverence, quality and depth in any pursuit.

We want to thank Bret for his time. We invite you to see all of Bret's gorgeous images at his website. You can visit it by clicking [HERE](#).
