

The photography of Bart Kuykens: analogue love stories

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02/09/2021 Black and white photos have rarely been as colourful as those by Bart Kuykens – the Belgian who specialises in capturing the relationship between humans and machines. To switch off, he enters his darkroom – or his Porsche.

His photos are the instrument that he uses to compose a story. His seven-part book series A Flat 6 Love Affair has a special melody, alternating between loud and quiet tones. After seven volumes and years, the book spines spell out 'Porsche' when placed in a row. Bart Kuykens is driven by a passion for analogue photography, and is inspired by the music and design of the 1970s. The Belgian native prefers to work alone, because then he can do things his way. When he wants to relax, the father of two boys likes to get into his 1970 Porsche 911 T and go – enjoying the feeling of being at one with the road. The 46-year-old reveals why he sees borders as imaginary lines, why he doesn't worry about things being in sharp focus and why the art of photography is a like a gift for him.

How did you get into photography?

Bart Kuykens: Photography is much more than a craft for me – it is a talent and a great gift. I am convinced that everyone who is interested can learn the theory of photography, but that does not automatically mean that they are a good photographer. I was given the talent to take photos – and gratefully accepted it. I appreciate the trust that my protagonists place in me and I love pressing the shutter release when I have the chance to capture the perfect moment.

Which is your favourite camera when you are out and about?

Kuykens: At the moment I use the Hasselblad H1 medium format camera and the Leica R7 for my 35 mm photos. Both brands are a perfect match for my personality. Some people believe that you can take better pictures with an expensive camera. They perhaps feel safer with it. But at the end of the day it is all about the content.

You take analogue photos and usually in black and white – is that your trademark way of telling stories?

Kuykens: For me it is the only way to take a particularly good photo. I sometimes work with a digital camera too, but then I quickly miss the special 'wow' factor. Digital photography is perfect for many situations: it is fast, it is sharp, it has plenty of megapixels – but only in analogue form can I capture the true beauty of a moment.

How would you describe your style?

Kuykens: My signature style is dark and angular. I never worry about focus, I like the artefacts of film. I only work with daylight if possible. I always try to capture the mood.

When did you have the idea for your book series A Flat 6 Love Affair?

Kuykens: I started to take photos of a few friends with their Porsche cars in 2015, such as the 912 of a mate in the Netherlands. After I developed the pictures I was absolutely thrilled and decided to photograph another Porsche with its owner. And then another one. I couldn't stop until I had enough photos for a book. I then decided on seven volumes, one for each letter of the brand, one book per year, seven years of Porsche love stories.

Will you tell us about your own Porsche love affair?

Kuykens: I am not the typical Porsche fan. I love the cars, I love the community, I love the travel and the roads, but most of all I love it because behind every Porsche there is a person with an interesting story. I bought my first classic car, a VW Karmann-Ghia, in my 20s and sold it two years later. I had underestimated the running costs. Ten years later my neighbour showed me his Porsche 911 from 1971. I was fascinated by the 911 – and this feeling has never left me. I bought myself a Carrera 3.2

from 1985 and a few other models. I sold and exchanged plenty of cars during my search for the perfect Porsche. Until I realised at some point that I was chasing an illusion. There is no such thing as the one perfect Porsche. Each one has its own story. I am currently driving a 911 T in GT Silver from 1970 and I am happy with it.

What fascinates you about old cars?

Kuykens: The form. The story that the car tells. And the patina.

Why Porsche?

Kuykens: Because a Porsche is reliable and has a timeless design. There is no better car for going on a road trip with friends and having plenty of fun. I associate freedom, everyday usability and sportiness with the Porsche brand. You are always stylish when out driving a 911.

If something breaks on your 911 do you repair it yourself?

Kuykens: Under no circumstances. I would always let a professional take care of it. I do not have any patience for repairs, so I would mess everything up. However, I would cover a small dent with a sticker.

What does 'home' mean to you – is Belgium the epitome of home for you?

Kuykens: No. Belgium is a country like any other. I just call it home because I grew up here. I speak the language and my children go to school here. But this country did not make me who I am today. I make my own world for myself, my own kind of home, with the people I like and love. Physical boundaries are no more than imaginary lines for me.

Who or what inspires you?

Kuykens: Music, design, architecture and people. I love the interior design of the 1970s. And when it comes to personalities, I am inspired most by people with a particular work ethic. By those who share my motto: get up early and achieve a lot! As regards photography, I am inspired by Anton Corbijn.

Is there something you believe in?

Kuykens: I believe in myself. Miracles do not happen, so I work hard and believe firmly in myself. Nothing comes from nothing.

What are you currently dreaming about?

Kuykens: At the moment I am dreaming about having lunch on a sunny terrace in Los Angeles. When it is not about my passion and my work I am really quite a dreamer. But on a professional level never, because when there is something to do, then I get down to it – and I have no time for dreaming.

What do you regret?

Kuykens: There are a number of things, but somehow they are too trivial to mention them here. I prefer to quote Frank Sinatra with 'My Way' because that is exactly what is typical for me, the way in which I do things my way.

Who would you like to photograph one day?

Kuykens: Definitely Al Pacino and Keith Richards.

Who would be your favourite passenger for a long journey?

Kuykens: That is difficult and depends on the duration of the trip. But to be honest, I love being on my own in the car. After a few hours I reach this wonderful state in my head where my thoughts are free and I feel at one with the road – and that's a great feeling.

Info

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