

nzphotographer

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Whether you're an enthusiastic
weekend snapper or a beginner
who wants to learn more, NZ
Photographer is the fun e-magazine
for all Kiwi camera owners – and it's
free!

Interview with Eva Polak

An Impressionist Photographer On An Imaginative Journey of Creativity.

EVA, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF?

I made New Zealand my new home 20 years ago after leaving Poland. If you had told me the day I landed in Auckland airport that in a few years time I would run online impressionist photography courses, write books or speak in front of people about my work, I would laugh at you. None of it was even remotely in my plans. In fact I didn't even speak English or own a camera back then.

Thanks to photography I really found my place and my voice here. I live with my husband in West Auckland and work for a printing company during the day, the rest of my free time I dedicate to my photography.

WHAT CAMERA EQUIPMENT DO YOU HAVE?

I have a Nikon D300 and D810 and several different lenses - I really love the Nikkor Nikon AF-S 70-300mm F/4-F5.6 lens as I can take images in the middle of the day without needing an ND filter. I use the Sigma AF 50mm F/2.8 Macro lens for most of my macro photography. I also have a collection of M42 lenses, mostly 50mm and 85mm. These lenses create an amazing variety of effects, from a buttery, soft bokeh to a crazy swirl bokeh and very interesting lens flares.

If anyone wants to peek inside my camera bag and see what I do with each lens they can look here:
<http://evapolak.com/camerabag.html>

HAVE YOU DONE ANY PHOTOGRAPHY COURSES AND TRAINING OR ARE YOU SELF TAUGHT?

It all started in December 2004 when my husband gave me a small digital camera for Christmas. I was spending most of my free time with my camera, always taking photographs, reading about photography or planning my next photo shoot. I was enjoying myself immensely and I even entered a few local competitions with some success. After a year or so, I felt that I was ready for my first SLR camera. I wanted to have more control and be able to experiment with shutter speed and aperture. I also started to attend photography workshops and presentations. I was having fun experimenting with different types of photography, slowly buying new lenses and other equipment.

By 2007 I was a pretty competent photographer. On one hand I was enjoying making images, but I also felt trapped and increasingly frustrated with all the "rules" of traditional photography. Around that time, I came across an advert for a workshop at Auckland University, The Art of Impressionist Photography. I knew instinctively



that this was something that I wanted to be doing. And the rest, as they say, is history.

As I was experimenting with impressionist photography I very quickly realised that there are certain looks and effects that I'm attracted to. I started to study my own work, trying to really pin down my likes and dislikes. Soon I was using this process in my work to open up experimentation. I very quickly learned that what starts as 'What if?' could become an image that I love.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE IMPRESSIONIST PHOTOGRAPHY FOR US – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?

The wonderful thing about impressionist photography is the freedom that it gives you. There is no right or wrong way to create these images, just guidelines. Also, there is no need for expensive lenses or special equipment; you only need a camera with manual control settings.

There is the freedom to work with precision and control, or to try a spontaneous, experimental approach.

Creating impressionist work doesn't mean just using special techniques. You still have to use your sense of composition and have a knowledge of light, colour and other elements of visual design to present your subject in the best possible way.

Success in impressionist photography requires an understanding of the genre and knowledge of its strengths and limitations. It is not as easy as some people might think. The most essential ingredient that you need, to elevate your images from good to great, is expression. Actually, the fundamental building blocks of images go hand in hand with expression, because they allow the viewer to read and feel the photograph's mood.

If asked to define this style I would say that impressionist photography is the first step to abstraction, and the viewers have a clear idea as to what they are looking at and respond to emotionally. Photographs should only suggest detail, rather than focus on it.





DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE PIECE OF WORK THAT YOU HAVE CREATED?

This is a very hard question as there are so many images that are important to me. Nearly every image leads to a new discovery or improvement of my work or steers me in a new direction. I like to work on long term projects and usually there is only one at a time.

I spent more than three years just perfecting one technique - ICM (Intentional Camera Movement) with slow shutter speed. I really wanted to learn all aspects of this technique like light, different shutter speeds, different subjects, combinations with other techniques, etc.

Then I moved into a different technique and discovered dandelions.

I can clearly see how my approach to this one subject was changing and how my images were evolving. I finalised this project with a book, The Secret Life of Dandelions which you can get at http://evapolak.com/The_Secret_Life_of_Dandelions.html

I had a similar journey with moss. I created a book with this project as well, called Parallel Universes.

<http://evapolak.com/parallel-universes-book.html>

I believe that by focusing on one subject for a long time we can discover and capture the full potential of it.

WHERE'S YOUR FAVOURITE LOCATION FOR SHOOTING?

The west coast of Auckland is definitely one of my favorite spots; it's a very diverse environment of wild

spirit, rolling surf, dramatic cliffs, and distinctive black sand beaches. For me it is a magical place. I always go there to recharge and relax.

I also love being in my garden and look at the world through a macro lens. Beauty is everywhere - we just need to open our eyes.

ANY TIPS FOR RUNNING A PHOTOGRAPHY BUSINESS? HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR TIME BETWEEN TEACHING, WRITING BLOG POSTS, PROMOTION AND ACTUALLY TAKING PHOTOS?

The secret to any success, in my mind, is consistency. Small steps but frequent...

I don't have a lot of time between my full time job and my private life so I have to organise my time very carefully.

My students are my priority. They are the most important people. I do my best to keep them happy and make sure that they are learning a lot.

I try to make everything else as easy as possible for me... If I feel I have nothing to say I don't write my blog post. I planted a lot of flowers in my garden so I don't have to travel anywhere to take pictures which saves me time!

I'm not the most organised person and I'm easily distracted. My effort this year will be in learning to focus so I can do more.





ANY TIPS FOR OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS IN PROMOTING THEIR WORK AND MAKING MONEY WITH THEIR PHOTOS?

There are many opportunities to make money with photography at the moment. The Internet makes it possible for us to reach a global audience. The trick is to treat photography as a product and then find the right people for that product. This is the hardest part, but if this first step is done right then everything else is easy.

I research a lot of photographers and artists to find out how they run their businesses and if possible I adopt proven strategies. To me knowledge means power so I invest heavily in personal development.

YOU SEEM TO DO A LOT OF GROUP EXHIBITIONS, HOW DOES THAT WORK AND HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

I got together with three of my friends and we put together a proposal for the exhibition at UpStairs gallery in Titirangi.

After the proposal was accepted I spent a lot of time researching and learning about exhibitions. My goal was not only to exhibit but also to sell my work, so I followed all the advice as best I could to reach my goal.

After a few solo exhibitions I received invitations to do other group shows. I always said, Yes. For the past few years I have been invited to do a few school fundraising shows. I love these opportunities as they are very well organised and run.

I always encourage my students to exhibit their work, even if the exhibition will be just for family and friends. Having a show is an exciting and very special experience. Also it gives you a direction and focus.

YOU CRITIQUE PHOTOGRAPHY, CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THAT?

To me, looking at a photograph, especially an impressionist or abstract one, is like deciphering a visual message coded in lines, shapes, and colour.

If the message is clear then the image is successful. If I have trouble understanding the story my job as a teacher and judge is to honestly point out the weaknesses and give my best advice for improvement. Most of the time I see the problem lies with the composition or overly relying on a specific technique to tell the story.

For me the hardest part is to ignore my own preferences and honour someone else's point of view and creativity. Art is very personal, and individual expression is very important. It should bring joy to one's life. I've seen so many hearts broken by unthoughtful comments.



WHAT TIPS CAN YOU OFFER PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO WANT TO TRY THIS STYLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY?

I would say "Just do it!" Take photographs as often as possible. Learn from your successes but also from your failures. Carefully study your own photos, and ask yourself a lot of "why" questions. Finding your own personal style is a lifelong, personal journey, so listen to your heart. As a great photographer, Ernst Haas, once said, "We see what we know until we know who we are, then we see what we feel." Most of all, enjoy your journey!

WHAT ELSE SHOULD PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU OR YOUR WORK?

I'm very grateful to my students. Because of them my understanding of photography, my own processes and techniques are without doubt greater. So if you really want to learn something, teach someone else!

I do small group (up to 10 people) weekend workshops 2-3 times a year. I like small groups as I can really give individual attention to each participant. But my main focus is on online courses. These are 5-6 weeks long and are very rewarding for me as I can see a huge improvement and development of each

student. I try to have no more than 10 students at one time so I have enough time for each student.

ANY FUNNY PHOTOGRAPHY STORIES TO SHARE?

One afternoon I went to Piha to photograph the sunset. As it was a midweek day there was nothing happening there. The beach was deserted and the weather didn't really promise a spectacular evening.

As I was strolling along the beach I noticed in the distance a figure swimming in the ocean. With the hope of making some images I got closer. To my surprise, through my 300mm lens I could clearly see that he was naked. I felt a bit uneasy. It is not in my nature to photograph unclothed people with my telephoto lens, even if I'm not capturing any details.

Soon enough I noticed that he saw me. So, I turned around and walked away. This guy was very quick getting out of the water and dressing up. He caught me just before I got to my car and demanded to see my photos. I apologised and explained to him the nature of my work.

The expression on his face was priceless as he discovered that any particular features of his were not recorded.



DO YOU EVER FEEL THAT YOU LOSE YOUR CREATIVITY?

Of course, many times. I don't think that there is an artist who is immune to that feeling.

When that happened to me for the first time I was scared and I thought, "This is it. This is the end of my photography journey."

Now, I know that I just need to relax and rest.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE REST OF 2018?

I have so many projects I would like to finish this year.

I have three or four books in the making at the moment... Wonderland's Impressions - Creative Macro Photography, Dance Impressions - a collection of images I created going to ballroom competitions. Creativity Journal - Tips, ideas, exercises to keep

your creativity alive and last but not least Flowers Impressions - a flower a day stories. I'm also working on another online course - Composition in impressionist and abstract photography.

I have a lot of ideas and sometimes this is a curse, as very little is actually done!

WHERE CAN WE FIND YOU ONLINE?



www.evapolak.com



www.facebook.com/evapolakimpressionist



www.instagram.com/eva.polak