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JC Leyendecker

Ted Preuss

Dennis Meacham

Photo: Ted Preuss



Photographer Ted Preuss

Exploring shape and form
through the visual use of platinum

By Bryan S. Smith

At the formative age of eight, while hiking with his family, Ted Preuss found an instamatic camera that still had some film left in it. “I never had a camera,” he says. “So I busied myself shooting images of what surrounded me, and after my camping trip I processed the film and found the pictures to be quite interesting.” His mother, an illustrator and painter, commented on the natural composition of his work and how he had posed the pictures. She thought they were pretty outstanding. It was to be the beginning of Ted’s big adventure.

“In 1985, I began getting serious about photography,” he shares. “I lived in Boston where I started producing architectural photography, building a client base and contributing to their portfolios. After a time, I moved to San Francisco and started an architectural photography business that lasted 7-8 years. I did extremely well throughout northern California. I photographed numerous buildings and private homes with market values upwards of \$40 million. I was shooting interiors and exteriors, every night, weekends and holidays, pretty much for the seven years. I kind of got burned out at that time taking photos.”

Preuss moved to Chicago where he now resides, and, taking a break from photography, began to design furniture, which inspired him for about three years. “I felt like I needed to get back into photography, but I wanted to do it for myself,” he claims. “I wanted to produce more fine-art black-and-white photography.”

He perused the Chicago art scene, viewing photography collections of museums and galleries and elsewhere in his travels. He realized through that experience what he wanted to do. He was inspired to pursue working with platinum and palladium photo printing.





Platinum was first considered for use in photography in 1856, and palladium in 1859, both as intensifying agents for silver prints. William Willis is widely credited with having created the platinum printing process.

"The one thing that really drew me to the platinum process is that it blends well with the images I was capturing at the time," he says. "I wanted to create very soft tones and subtle tonal ranges, and platinum really handled that well. These are images that have a timeless feel. I wanted something that would last for a very long time that would have a wonderful archival element. Platinum is one of the longest-lasting print media that will endure for generations without fading."

Preuss continues, "Some people describe the work I do as nude photography, but I describe it as more figure studies. I work with the lines of the subject. I am not really looking at the details of what's within the image I am creating; it's mainly the lines and the flow of it. If it's their arms versus their hair or the fabric that is draped around the person, I really concentrate on the lines. The outline has a nice flow to it even if you don't see the detail of the image. It's kind of like a sculptor working with clay for the first time. He begins by building the first part of what is to be sculpted. My work is sculpted. I don't just expose the person. My images are not sexual or erotic; I deal with the shape and form."

Preuss describes his photos as more of a study in a personal instant with a person. They may be brushing their hair or getting ready to scratch their back. He says, "I try to capture a moment. My images fall into different categories, too. There are the staged, theatrical-type images and then there is the more personal moment type of images."

In the beginning, many people Preuss photographed weren't models. They were friends, other artists, people he collaborated with. He would begin by having a conversation with them before a photo shoot. "I try to bring their personality into the photo," he says. "It's how I perceive how they are. I look for gestures in the way they carry themselves. I try to capture that into my images so they have a personal feel, a personal meaning to the photograph."

"I usually have one or two ideas of what I would like to accomplish with a photo session right at the beginning. Once we begin working, I usually go an entirely new direction."





Most of my shots are 'between' shots. These have become some of my best images."

A photo session with Preuss can last anywhere from two to three hours and produce three to four poses. He acknowledges, "I like that about the large-format camera. I spend considerable time composing the image, looking at it, getting it in focus, and checking the lighting versus just snap, snap, snap and then pick something out from that."

Though he is extensively educated in photographic lighting techniques, Preuss does not bring that knowledge into the platinum series. He says, "I try to work more with a natural light. I visited many museums and studied how master painters would paint their subjects and how they actually portrayed the lighting. It wasn't just commercial-type of lighting like you're taught in school, I try and break the boundaries and fit the lighting into the image I am creating. Nothing is set in stone. I create a different light for each image."





