

**MJR:** Hey, mate.

**Mikko Takkunen:** Hey!

**MJR:** So let's get started. What part of the world are you from?

**MT:** I'm originally from Finland (Scandinavia, next to Sweden). I've been living in the UK for six years now, first four years in Scotland, and the last two in Wales. I study photojournalism at Swansea Metropolitan University. I still have a year to go.

**MJR:** What drew you to photography?

**MT:** I became really interested in social and political issues in my late teens and I ended up moving to the UK to study politics and international relations in Aberdeen University. It wasn't until towards the end of my degree there that I picked up my first camera. It soon became a passion and I realized photography was the thing for me and with my background in political science and interest in media, photojournalism and documentary photography became quite naturally very interesting to me.

**MJR:** What's going through your mind and what triggers you to make your pictures?

**MT:** I hardly ever shoot unless I'm working on a story/project (i.e. I don't do any street stuff or photograph friends). So usually, I know already when I pick up my camera why I'm doing it: I've chosen and researched the story and wish to tell (about) the subjects through my photographs.

**MJR:** So you have a specific agenda with your photography.

**MT:** Yes. I would like to cover social and political issues, so that the photographs could - at least potentially - serve some useful purpose for instance by promoting change. I know there's a lot of disagreement about whether photojournalists can influence society (we heard those differing opinions also at Foundry panels).

**MJR:** Do you think it's possible to achieve this; photographs making a difference?

**MT:** I'm sure they can, but not directly. Photographs will always affect people's emotions and opinions. I don't think people have become numb to photographs despite what anybody says. Although, most people are far more interested in seeing images of sports and celebrities.

**MT:** I'd like to think we could have an influence, even if small. At the same time, it has to be said, I'd like to photograph loads of different kinds of stories, not just ones related to political or social issues. I'm open to everything. As long as I don't become a paparazzi.

**MT:** I like what Nachtwey says in **War Photographer** about '*witnessing history as it happens*'. In the future I'd also like to be part of witnessing history by recording international events. But I don't wish to sound like a social activist. Obviously, as a photographer, I get my sense of the world through photographs. Photography isn't all about making change, for me, by no means. To quote Gary Winogrand: "I just like to see how things look when they are photographed."

**MJR:** Probably one of the best things said about photography.

**MT:** Yeah.

**MJR:** But still, your focus is specific. It sounds very humanitarian.

**MT:** I guess it's somewhat humanitarian. The last few things I've shot have certainly had that focus. It feels good to know my photos can be of some use and serve a purpose.

**MJR:** So where do you see yourself down the road?

**MT:** My long term aim and dream is to be working for mass media. Whether it's as a staffer, wire shooter, or as a freelancer, doesn't matter. I'd like to remain as free as possible, so if I could make a living of freelancing, that'd be ideal.

**MJR:** But is that a realistic goal? Considering the shrinking industry and the vanishing slots available in mass media, heading in that direction seems to be less and less viable.

**MT:** Well, you can always be a poor freelancer! Haha. I know everybody's talking about how photojournalism as an industry and photographers in particular are suffering, but I believe there will always be need for good photographs. I wouldn't consider for instance citizen journalism to be a threat. There will be less staff positions and assignments to go around, but if you are you good enough, you will always find work. That's what I'd like to believe anyway.

**MJR:** So to you, the sky isn't falling.

**MT:** Stills-from-video will present a huge challenge to still photographers, I'm sure. But I'm willing and interested to diversify into video and audio. That said, I'm a firm believer in the power of the still image.

**MJR:** What are some of your influences? From looking at your pictures, they are very composed, very straight forward.

**MT:** Nachtwey is the most obvious one. The moment I saw **War Photographer**, I was hooked, as I'm sure were everybody else.

**MJR:** Nachtwey has a similar straight forwardness that's pretty classic.

**MT:** Well, thanks. What drew me to him (Nachtwey) was his no-nonsense-style: up close and personal; no fancy angles, unnecessary tilting, no motion blur etc. Just very straight. I think he has the best eye of everybody and I feel he stays very true to his subjects and the stories he's working on. With the Sierra Leone stuff I felt like I had to shoot very straight as I knew the images were going to be used by the NGO. I shot both color (digital) and black and white, but 99% is very straightforward and if there is one influence, it is Nachtwey. I often kept thinking to myself: "just to go close (if you're photos aren't good enough... right?) and shoot it straight." And I'm always trying to be really careful with the composition (but I guess everyone is) especially by cropping all unnecessary stuff out of frame. But what I would like to avoid is shooting by some kind of rules, like the rule of thirds etc.

**MJR:** You say you don't use the classic rules, but your work still echoes a lot of them. Like that picture of the boy by the window.

**MT:** I guess when you look at an insane amount of photographs--and I look at photographs constantly even if I don't sometimes shoot for a month or two--you find yourself repeating those frames. So if others use rules, you end using them yourself. That said, somethings just work. But rules are meant to be broken. you can't shoot based on some rule book.

**MJR:** But you've gotta know the rules to know what you're breaking, don't you think?

**MT:** I think you are right. Most of my other favorites can all be found from VII, Magnum, and NOOR. Two photographers I've really got to admire are Kratochvil and Pellegrin, which might be surprising since they shoot very differently from Nachtwey, but I really dig their personal styles. I feel they both have signature at least when they are shooting black and white, not necessarily when they shoot color. I'd like to experiment a bit more, and hopefully develop a style of my own. Christopher Anderson has to be mentioned also. I feel like he's the new Nachtwey, if you can make such a statement. Out of the NOOR guys, I especially like Pep Bonet and Stanley Greene. Alex Majoli is really cool too. The stuff he did in Russia for Global Fund's Access to Life project blew my mind.

**MJR:** Some of the photographers you mentioned almost have made it a rule to break the rules. Like Kratochvil, for instance. Yet from your own work, you're very straightforward; completely different directions.

**MT:** I'd like to try (to) shoot more experimentally. It remains to be seen if that'll happen.

**MJR:** Let's talk about your work in Sierra Leone. How did you get hooked up with that NGO?

**MT:** I knew I had to do a personal project in the spring and I decided that working for an NGO would be cool so I just wrote them an email. Has to be said that I offered my services for free. But the main thing for me was to get a some experience. I think it would have been exceptional if they had paid me when I hadn't shot anything major before and hadn't even been to Africa. I

gave them loads of the photographs as a thanks for the access as well as providing me with a driver/translator for a month. But I ended up doing a lot of interviews, and are now going to pay me for getting their hands on them and some of the video I shot, and I will end up at least getting back all the money I invested in the trip.

**MJR:** So you're just about breaking even then.

**MT:** About Sierra Leone a bit more, I'm really happy with the portfolio I got out of the trip, so money well spent. And I have the copyright, so even if I gave them some photos, I can still try and get those images published. I'm actually heading to Lebanon, to photograph Palestinian refugee camps next month for four weeks, with the same deal for a Lebanese NGO. I give the NGO some photos and they have promised to provide me with a fixer. I had a discussion with Stephanie Sinclair about it and she told me not to work for free, but I feel like I'm not. I can do whatever I want with the images. It's more like a self-assigned project. I still have a year left of PJ school so I can still afford to do unpaid stuff.

**MJR:** You're investing in your own future.

**MT:** Yeah. With the Sierra Leone thing I'm pretty much going to break even. I offered these images anywhere I could, but I'll really try to do that with the Lebanon project. I'm sure that if I come back with good material there's somebody who'll have some use for them and even be willing to pay. My short term plan for the end of the year is to get a proper website going and then start getting in touch with photo editors. Hopefully, by the end of my course (June 2009) I'll have a kick-ass portfolio and some contacts who could offer me at least some short assignments in the UK. I'm thinking of making a base in London after graduation. And certainly then, I will have to stop whoring myself for free. (Laughs)

**MJR:** I forgot to ask how old you are.

**MT:** I'm 28. Same age as Ben Lowy, which annoys me immensely! But hey, Salgado and Nachtwey were well into their thirties before they even picked up their cameras.

**MJR:** Well, it was great talking to you, mate.

**MT:** It was cool to chat. Kinda got me thinking of my photography as well.

**MJR:** That's the goal, isn't it.

**MT:** I think I'm gonna hit the sack; it's past 3 a.m. here now. The MJR blog is really cool, so it's an honor to be included here. Cheers.

**MJR:** Peace.