



# Urbanity

An Exhibition of Street Photography  
Featuring Images from Melbourne and Hong Kong

by Damian Young





Melbourne









































Ever found that you have started taking the same image over and over? A particular type of composition that you find particularly pleasing – so you start to see it everywhere. And photograph it over and over.

In later 2013, I felt a lot of “meh” around photography. The number of photo outings had dwindled to a standstill. Any results were becoming less and less satisfying. There was little purpose in what I was doing. Without purpose, picking up a camera and heading out the door was becoming meaningless.

I stopped shooting for a couple of weeks and reflected on what had happened.

Something had to change.

I decided to start work on another exhibition – but to do so in a more purposeful way. I have to thank Eric Kim’s fantastic website for the inspiration here. Check it out at [erickimphotography.com](http://erickimphotography.com) A list of things that needed doing started to materialise...

## 1. Set a Goal

Chapter One from every self help book ever written. Still, no matter how obvious it is, I had forgotten this. I had no reason to shoot, apart from keeping my flickr stream active. Funny thing is, I have never been a “like” hunter. I was mainly on flickr for the communities.

I decided to start working towards an ambitious exhibition – either solo or at most with one or two other photographers. In the end, I decided to work with another Melbourne photographer, Roberts Birze. Rob (along with his wife, Sandy) has been a source of inspiration for me since I met them many years ago.

Once I had set the bar high by having a lot of exhibition space to fill, things started to fall into place.

## 2. Develop a Routine

My personal interests can be somewhat disorganised. Only a regular and planned routine was going to deliver enough images to shortlist an entire exhibition from. Catch the train every Saturday morning into the CBD and shoot at least a few rolls, return, develop, scan, and then upload to Lightroom.

Next came a disciplined filing system – for the first time ever – for both the negatives and how they were stored in Lightroom. Every negative went into sleeves and into folders, with each roll tagged in Lightroom. It felt great to finally do this after years of just chucking the negatives. Doing low res scans as a first pass sped things up. They are fine for viewing on screen and printing at the local photo kiosk.

Discipline and routine have resulted in being able to shoot 163 rolls since November 2013, a mix of 35mm and 120mm, all in black and white.

## 3. Delay Gratification

Delay and patience are two tools I have learned to leverage. The one piece of constructive criticism that I have received over the years is that I am a better at photographing images than I am at curating them. Stopping the constant posting of images on Facebook, Flickr etc. for the last year gave me the space to do some serious and methodical curation.

Going back over images time and time again has been quite a revelation, helping the shortlisting with dispassionate ruthlessness. Letting time lapse between each review overcomes the natural tendency to over-rate images.

Not posting anything to social media has stopped the tension created by the cycle of shooting, scanning, and quickly editing to get something up for people to look at. Reviewing all images critically on multiple occasions requires time. It still creates tension – creative tension around making sure the best images are going to be seen by the public.

#### 4. Forced Choice

Whilst there was no specific target for culling, the shortlisting decisions were made aggressively, getting each roll down to four to six images at the most. Many rolls have ended up as empty folders in Lightroom.

#### 5. Limit the Variables.

Many great photographers just shoot with a single camera and lens for an extended period, which gives consistency and focus at a particular focal length. Shooting on different cameras is exciting and keeps things fresh though.

Each time I walked out the door, I only took one or two lenses. Keeping it simple helped keep me looking for image opportunities rather than twiddling around with the lenses in my bag.

The one area I have absolutely limited is film selection. I had a few hundred rolls in my film fridge, a quite broad selection of everything across C41, E6, BW, BWC41, and infrared. All different speeds.

The paradox of choice was distracting. Every shoot required a considered film selection from some of the above. The more choice you have makes it harder to make a decision – and the fear of taking the wrong film out often led to a bag full of multiple types of film and speeds, wasting headspace on complex film decisions.

The first variable I limited was type of film. Black and white only. All the film that was clogging up my fridge and my mind that wasn't black and white were sold. It instantly felt liberating and simple.

The next variable was ISO. After shooting some 100 and 400 speed, and scanning it up, the call was to go with ISO400.

The final variable was brand. 400 Tri-X, Agfa APX, Fomapan, and Ilford HP5 were all in the mix. 24 frame rolls are a personal favourite in 35mm as they are short enough that the end doesn't hit the floor squeegeeing the processed film. The Agfa only comes in 36 frame rolls, and only in 35mm. The Tri-x and HP5 both come in 120 and 35mm formats, and both brands have 35mm in both 36 and 24 rolls.

The Agfa is a great film, and Tri-x is a legend. The Fomapan went OK too. Ilford HP5 was the winner for a number of reasons. They have a great range of matching developing chemicals available, and appear to be in film for the long haul. There wasn't any discernable difference in the quality between the Tri-x and HP5, so the decision came down to which company saw a future in film. Ilford HP5 felt like the right choice.

Ilford are keeping the dream alive in a positive way. They actively promote film photography, and all their "how to" guides are up-to-date on their website as evidence of this.

#### 6. Print Real Photos as Part of the Process

Analogue photography is a throwback to the past. Photographs should end up as a print, rather than just living on a computer screen. Something easily forgotten.

The final step in curating images was getting cheap 6 x 4 prints at Officeworks and laying them out on the floor. Prints make it much easier to see which are working and which are not. The prints are only a few cents each, and brings them to life.

#### 7. Consciously Develop New Techniques and Skills

I mistakenly thought that I was continuing to develop as a photographer just because I was still taking photos regularly. When I sat down in November 2013, the honest, and very critical assessment of my work over the prior 12 months was not much fun...

Learning is something that has to happen consciously. Books featuring images from the masters such as Henri Cartier Bresson, Vivian Maier, William Eggleston, Magnum Photographers, Fan Ho, and others started arriving via Fedex in time to make it under the Christmas Tree.

One book at a time is the key, making notes on each photographer's style and techniques. Next, summarising it into a set of pointers in a notebook to consciously apply out in the field makes sure the knowledge sticks. Referring back to the notebook throughout the day brings a conscious focus on using newly learned techniques.

## Conclusion

Discipline may sound counter-intuitive to the creative process, but without it creative growth cannot happen.



That's Roberts Birze on the left and Damian on the right!

Introduction to Urbanity.

The images were taken over a roughly 12 month period from November 2013. All were captured using classic film photography techniques. The negatives were then scanned to produce the final file.

Thanks

to Rob for agreeing to jointly hold the exhibition.

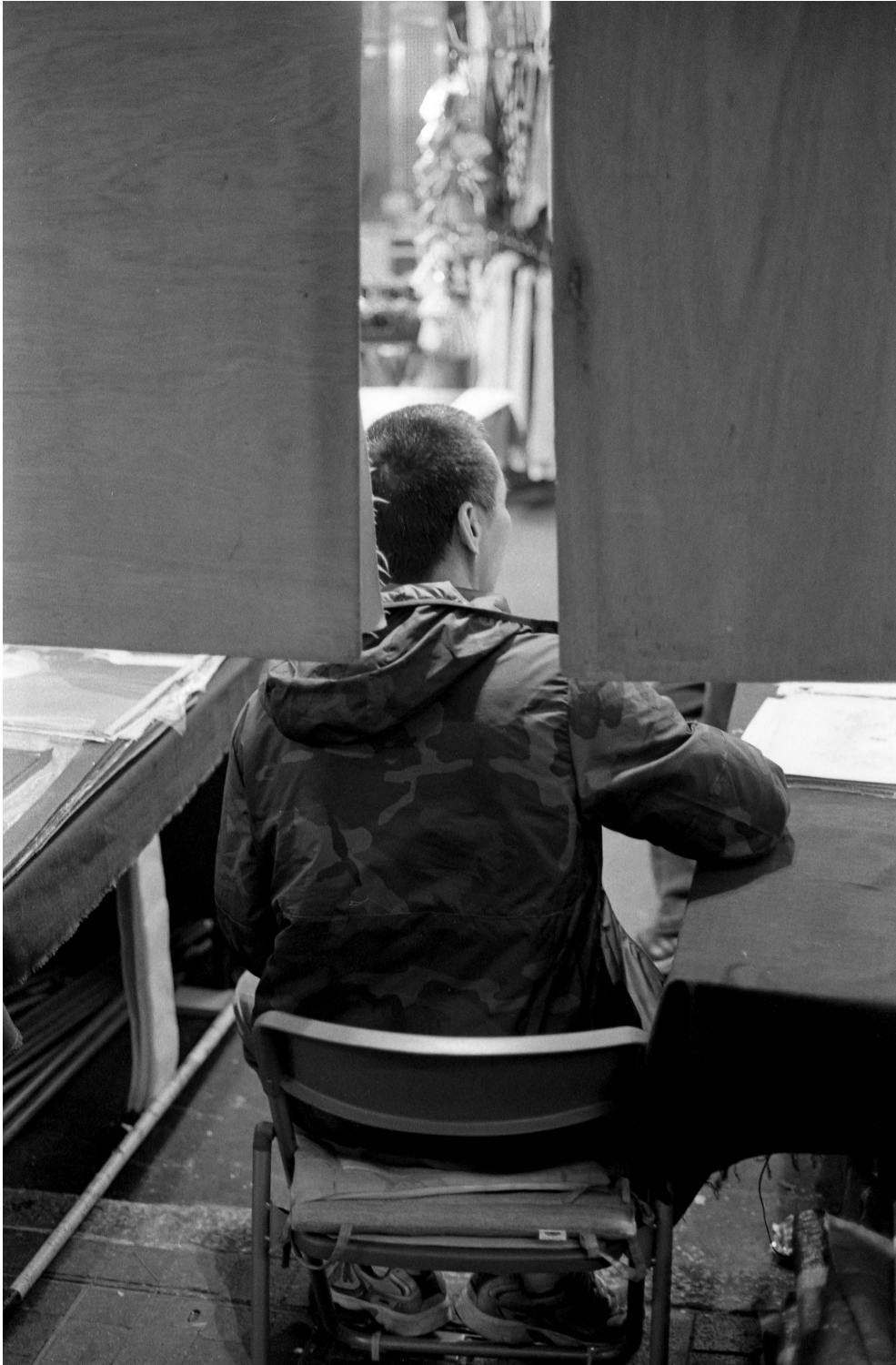
to Sharon and Tim for hosting my visits to Hong Kong.

to Sonia for letting me take over the kitchen with Paterson

Tanks and Reels every Saturday afternoon.



Hong Kong















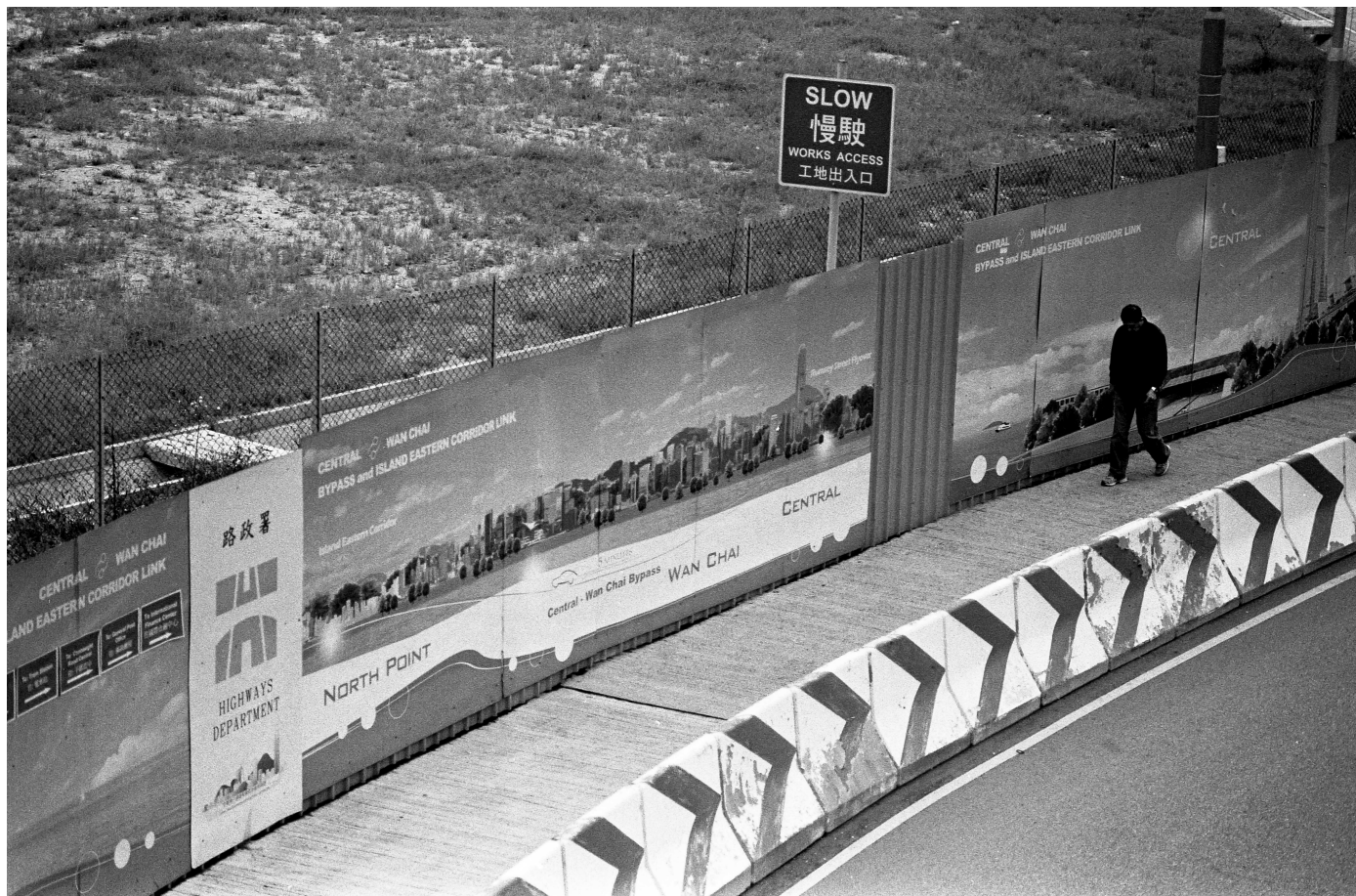




















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