



JÜRGEN TELLER

sprezzatura

ANDREA BLANCH: *You mentioned that you are influenced by William Eggleston; you share a sense of color and what seems to be eclectic subject matter. Are you similar in other ways?*

JÜRGEN TELLER: *I'm more influenced by him in the way that he is his own person. I am my own person, there is no direct influence in terms of the photography, but he is such a free person and we spent quite a bit of time together; it was really inspiring.*

AB: *When did this start?*

JT: *Ages ago, ten years ago? I can't remember now.*

AB: *Do you make a distinction between your fine art and commercial photography?*

JT: *Of course I do. The work I do for myself nobody tells me what to do, so I do that on my own. If I do a project with my mother walking through the forest nobody is telling me what to do. In fashion I have to photograph what I have to photograph. It's a big difference there are restrictions in that, but my approach is in a way similar.*

AB: *Your lighting doesn't change?*

JT: *No*

AB: *Are there restrictions on how clients like you to shoot?*

JT: *Exactly that's what I mean. No one tells me I have to photograph my mother. I want to photograph my mother. That's the difference. There is a responsibility I have towards the client to make [their clothes] look as good as I possibly can.*

AB: *How do you get your models to do what I imagine they wouldn't do for other photographers?*

JT: *Well they obviously like me, and they obviously like the results of what we do together and trust me. If the model is an extrovert, then the pictures will be more extroverted. If the model is a shy person,*

the portrait or the work will be more sensitive and shy. So I really work with [the model] and would never go against what I think would be right for that person. They know exactly what they are getting into with me. It's important for me if I like someone to see them, spend time together, have dinner with them, and also work on a regular basis with them. So it gets better and better not just like 'oh I did that one and now onto the next one and the next one.' I work with people who I respect and like.

AB: *Even first timers?*

JT: Yes, because there is a conversation. I send them my work or they know my work. I explain pretty much what I am trying to achieve and we go from there. It's quite smooth, but I need to have their input too. So I end up with a sort of structure and idea of where I want to go, but at least I'm open to the subjects' feelings and their own creativity and ideas in their own head. We try things out together.

AB: *Is your work as spontaneous as it seems?*

JT: No it's not. It's very planned through, I think very hard of where I want to photograph the subject and how I want to photograph the subject. The outcome does look spontaneous, it looks very easy, but it's very hard work to make it look easy. For example, that's Arnold Schwarzenegger within the alligator. He invited me to his office and his house and he had certain ideas and I stumbled across this alligator which was a sort of a prop from a movie. And so I thought that's really funny and I said, 'why don't you climb into the alligator', and Arnold said, 'Yeah alright.' I want to have a bit of fun too.

AB: *How did you come by your distinctive lighting style?*

JT: It's through years of photography and what my eye likes, and what I like. Of course, 30 years ago, when I started photography I worked with all sorts of different cameras; like large format cameras, where you go under the black hood, as in a plate camera, then you have to learn to work with a Hasselblad camera, then you work with 35mm and each camera works better with a certain light. You find your way, what you feel, and express yourself in the best way. There is a natural progress that intrigues me.

AB: *Did you come upon this by trial and error? Or was it serendipitous.*

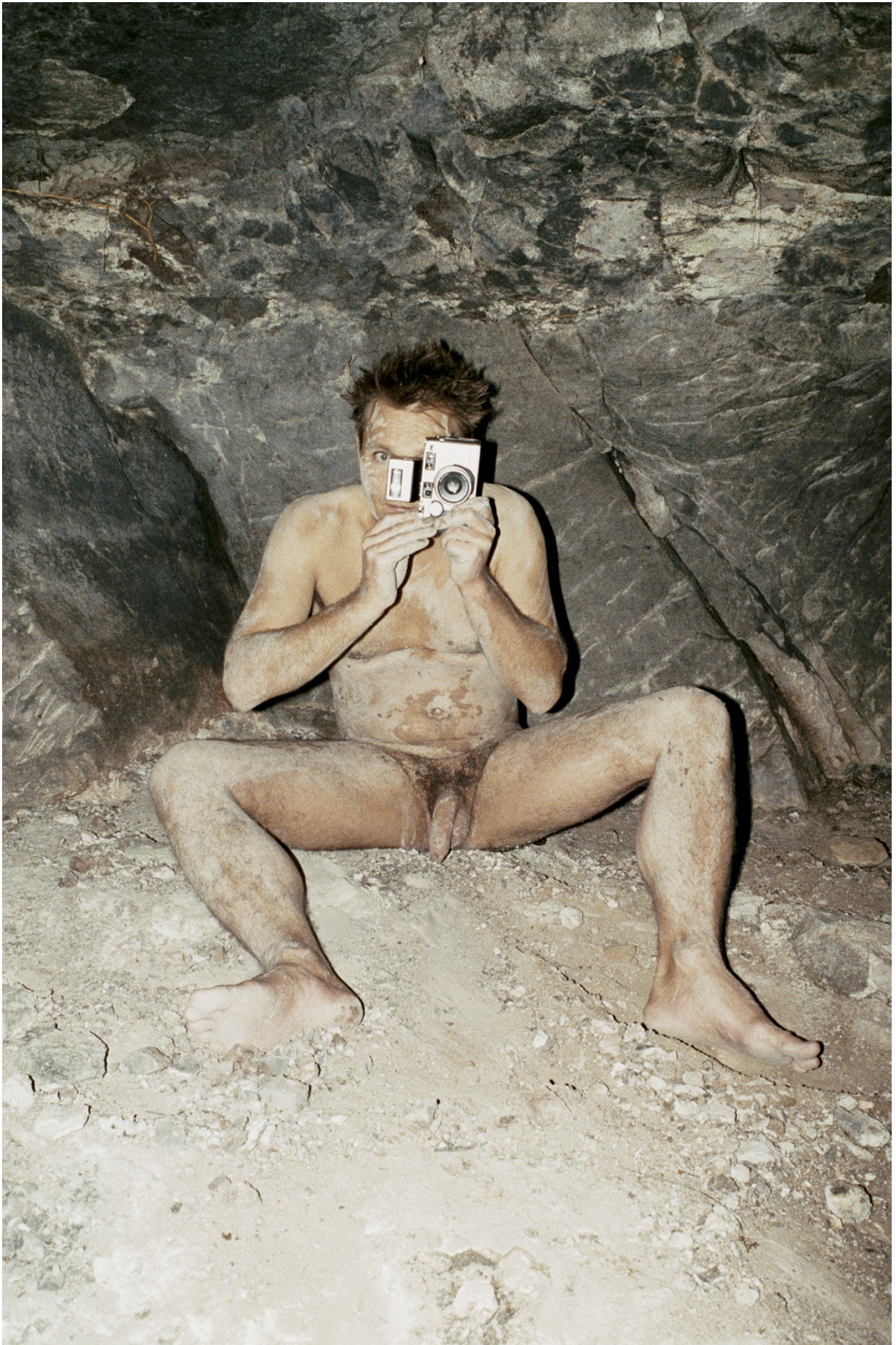
JT: It wasn't trial and error. It was really searching for what suits me the best. You try one and you work on one. In every single photograph I publish that I give to the client I am actually working in the darkroom, or at the retoucher and I approve it and work on it. That's a very, very long process.

AB: *Do you do post?*

JT: With retouching you work with the light that is in the photographs, whether it's tungsten light, sunlight, flash, or whether I mix them. I choose what's right. I could give a print to my printer and say, 'you know my work, just do it'. He can never do it so I have to be here with him. I say it's a bit too dark it's a bit too light, it's a bit too yellow, it's a bit too cold make it warmer etc.

AB: *People think you photograph with one or two cameras with the on camera flash. They don't know that you use any other light. Does this surprise you?*

JT: It's like asking what a car mechanic does and saying, 'he just fixes it.' It's a lot more complicated. I would not assume to tell the car mechanic how to fix my car because I don't know how to fix my car. It's a profession I do not know. I am a professional knowing my craft. But, because people think they have two eyes they can judge the quality of a photograph. There is a lot of craft involved and a lot of hard work.









AB: *We recently interviewed Steidl, and he has published most of your books, what was your experience with him?*

JT: I would say in a way we have a total companionship. I count him as a friend in a way and he was completely and totally open from the first moment. Equally I share his enthusiasm and love of making books. He likes what I do so much, and he is extremely flexible with me on when to achieve that. I can publish a book very quickly with him. He is open to putting in extra effort, and I really enjoy being there in [Steidlvil] when I always go. For example I did *Louis XV*: On the side where the pages are we have a gold frame around it, and it's real leather, and he doesn't say 'oh that leather is too expensive' we try to do a good book. I do expensive books, I do cheap books, I do all different sizes, and he is always open to just generate books with me. I find it extremely pleasurable working with him. He is great.

AB: *Did you have a specific idea in mind when you went to Ukraine?*

JT: Peter Poroshenko, the director of the Pinchuk Art Centre who also did the pavilion in the Venice Biennale for Ukraine. That was in Palazzo Papadopoli. He wanted to do a group show instead of a single show. He wanted to ask Ukrainian artists and western artists to ask the question; "Where is the Ukraine heading?". What is happening now? and what's going to happen in Ukraine?", and with this theme I explored the question. I went to Ukraine and I compiled a double story for *W Magazine*.

AB: *So there was something in mind?*

JT: I went there first for 2 weeks and thought about what the hell I could do. Then I came up with this idea. When you arrive at the airport in Ukraine and you stand in the queue to show your passport there are video screens everywhere where they showed fashion tv. Which I thought was extremely bizarre. Then you go on the subway, and on the trains in the subway there were monitors, and it's fashion, fashion, fashion, handbags, handbags, handbags. They opened up these Gucci shops and Saint Laurent shops. There were masses of black huge cars, Mercedes and convertibles. Then at the same time there was this incredible obvious frustration and poverty. I kind of wanted to go to with that capitalistic hunger for products they wanted. That's when I came back and explained to *W* that I wanted to do a fashion story. That's when Louis Vuitton came up with a handbag combined out of 17 handbags, it was the most expensive handbag in the world and I took that bag there. That answers one of your first questions about whether my work is spontaneous. I went there for 2 weeks, had discussions with Peter Poroshenko and looked at the area, then came up with a completely different idea. Something else inspired me but there was a lot of planning involved.

AB: *Do clients give you a lot of freedom?*

JT: They want my impact, they don't come with a finished layout, they don't say; "well, do trees over there, the car has to be there, and this has to be there." It's not like that at all. I choose my clients extremely carefully. I have so many requests. I have to listen to everything, and that's where the work already starts. I decline most of the requests. You just listen to the people where you think you actually could give them something, and they give you their trust and the understanding. I feel like I can follow this, but with other people they like something about me, but not for the right reason so there is a lot of work involved in choosing your collaborators.

AB: *Would you consider your work Political?*

JT: One has to be careful what you say in this question. I certainly think a lot of what the impact of the photograph is, yeah. Is it political? Maybe? It's an opinion.





AB: *Do you think your work has changed since you have a family now?*

JT: Of course. Work is always changing. 17 years ago when I had my first daughter, I became a different person. It changes you completely, how can it not? You have a totally different outlook on life, and in terms of the work you become much more precise. You don't have that time to doodle around, so you have to use your time really well. I used to think about 'oh I'm going to think about this, and do it tomorrow, and work a little on it, and then I'm doing this, and this'. Because you have time if you don't have kids but now time is more constricted. You have to be much more precise and sharp because you have a life with your family.

AB: *What advice do you have for someone who is just starting in fashion photography today?*

JT: It's simple, try to be your own person, you have to bring yourself to the table, and you have to have a really good reason why you are doing it—why you are doing what you are doing.

AB: *What was your reason?*

JT: I enjoy it. But you know I could think other fashion photographers are into the lifestyle, or into the power, or into the mind, or into the girls. I think I'm good at it, and I find it relatively easy to do, and I have a good instinct for it. I don't treat it as a chore, I treat it as an adventure. I treat it as something interesting, and there are restrictions but you enjoy these restrictions. There is a tremendous freedom which they give you, they can get you to places. Get you certain scenarios get you people you would never have thought you were going to work with and it opens incredible doors. You use these things that they can give you to your advantage. Not advantage in negative way but for something positive.

AB: *Do you feel a moral responsibility when you take a photograph. For example, there are no smoking laws, do you feel comfortable showing girls smoking?*

JT: You do have a responsibility. Of course I wouldn't ask a young girl to be naked either, only if they are fully grown, and I feel they understand the situation, and know what they are doing. In a fashion photograph I wouldn't have them smoking either except if its a photograph about themselves, a portrait, and if she is smoking then, she would be smoking. I'm conscious about things.

AB: *Are you a spiritual person?*

JT: Well I guess I can give you a straight answer. My dad killed himself when I was 24 and that gives you a lot to think about. I'm thinking it could go this way, or that way, and I'm thinking I just have one life. I don't want to just doodle around and not do anything. You are in control of your life and you have to push your life. You have to take the opportunity. You have to take the step and excitement and that's what I am doing.

AB: *This issue is about ritual, do you have a daily ritual?*

JT: I really enjoy getting up in the morning and having breakfast together with my family. Then I drive my son if I am in London, I drive him to school on my moped. That's a ritual I really enjoy.





