



BALANCING THE LINE BETWEEN FINE ART AND COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, BEAU ROULETTE BROADCASTS COMFORTABLE CONFIDENCE IN HIS ROLE OF TRANSFORMING THE LOOK AND STYLE OF A MODERN YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER.

Having worked with major players in the surfing, art, and fashion worlds, his images etch a dark cloud around the sunny West Coast, providing a new way to look at run-of-the-mill commercial photography. Whether he's shaping a look in the gallery, or shooting minglers and mavens, Beau approaches the scene with an artist's intention to lend a unique representation of whatever world in the moment. —S Preston

S Preston: Would you say that you have one photographic style? How would you describe your technique?

Beau Roulette: I wouldn't want to say that I have one photographic style just because I wouldn't want to be labeled down to one particular thing. I do a lot of conceptual,

dramatic lighting things, that's something I guess a lot of people recognize me for.

A lot of your photos have a cinematic quality to them; is that something you are setting out to do?

Yeah, I do, for a lot of my personal stuff and a lot of the stuff where I get a lot more creative freedom. I definitely try to go for a cinematic-type thing. I'm a big fan of movies, always have been. I just love the feeling of taking one frame from a movie idea and encourage someone to think of their own whole backstory. Like they look at an image and ask, "what's the beginning of this, what happens afterwards?" The more I can convey that sense of mystery, the better for me and, I guess, for my images.

How much of a thought process are you putting into those ideas, do you just create a setting? In the *Locals Run* series, those images have almost a secret agent/film noir kind of feeling.

Yeah, that's funny. The movie *Logan's Run* was the concept on that shoot. It was for 7x7 magazine in San Francisco. I had worked with the editor on an idea for it, both being big fans of science-fiction and that movie in particular. They were having an anniversary, I think, for the magazine so that movie was about turning 30 and going onto a new stage, and so we kind of wanted to run something like that. It was a science-fiction themed issue, so we came up with that idea.

We got to shoot it at the Stanford Linear





Accelerator, which was really cool to gain access without permits or have to pay any money. It's a mile long, maybe mile- and a half-long building, and they split atoms. They have a huge nuclear accelerator, where they actually just moved it to another building, so we got to shoot in the building where the old one was. It was fun, like with scale, and there's some weird equipment around, things that say "Bad Gasses" or something, poisonous stuff. That was a really fun shoot, to keep the look in that style of the '50s a little bit with the hair and whatnot, but then also

have that futuristic play on it.

You shoot a lot of fashion that doesn't resemble a typical fashion shoot. Talk a bit creatively how you come about that.

I'm a big fan of fashion and clothes, but you often see it portrayed in the same way: you get a white background, gray background, girl jumping. To me that's repetitive, a little boring, and I always wanted to bring a different mix to anything that I try to do. So coming up with concepts or really interesting lighting,

or backstories that are left to the viewer is something that I think is real important, not only to set myself apart from other fashion photographers, but to please myself as well. I mean, it's too easy to set up one light on a white background, but when you can do something that's satisfying creatively as well, I'll definitely try to go that route.

There's a freedom to make the photo more about the creative environment and less about the product?

You know there's specific things where the product needs to be shown in a great light or whatnot, but then on that same note you can still show that product in a way people want to perceive it. I include things in the environment or adapt the lighting or the action of the subject to enhance it to kind of a different storytelling. Maybe you overexpose something that people normally wouldn't, but you still capture stuff in the shadow. There's different ways to work it. I definitely try to do that in all my projects.

How is it working with Hurley, and the

Southern California image, bringing those ideas in this industry?

I think Hurley is a company that has matured a lot; they've changed a bunch even since I've been here, through their imagery and just the way they do business in general. And I believe for the better. I think it's kind of refreshing. A lot of people that are seeing it have been like, "hey, this is some kind of cool new stuff to look at," as they're looking through a magazine or going into a store. It isn't your average pretty blonde girl hanging out at the beach with the dudes, all

though we still kind of portray that a little bit, just kind of portray it in a more youthful energetic type way, you know. Instead of the cookie cutter, hey, this is how it's supposed to be.

Tell me about some of your personal work, the *Anti-Glam* series. Conceptually where were you going with that?

That's another diversion from what you're used to seeing all the time, looking through pinup stuff or magazines with girls. You get a lot of the big fake boobs, the big fake lips, the





bleached hair, girls trying to portray themselves way outside of the light of what they normally are. I wanted to go against that a little bit and show girls in their natural environment, just how they are naturally, not fake breasted, but their normal colored hair, not makeup all done up. I usually go in and it's about 40 minutes to shoot the whole thing. I just set up lights, always one roll of film, 12 exposures, on the same camera, same light. It was like purifying the event and using a different setting to show girls how beautiful they are and how strong they can be in their own worlds.

It came about when I was living in Santa Barbara and there were a lot of girls living in apartments by themselves. It was interesting to go to their place and see how clean or

messy, or what type of things they left out or had around they wouldn't normally have if they were living in a family situation or not in a school. "I want to have my freedom, this is my deal"-type thing. To me it was important to document that; it's an ongoing series that I've been working on for the last five years or so.

When you have so much freedom in your commercial work, and return to your personal projects, does it carry over or conflict?

It conflicts a little bit because I'm able to get out a lot of creative stuff through work now whereas before a lot of the personal and creative stuff was a sidebar to doing white backdrop, gray backdrop, the same stuff and repeat type of things. I've been shooting a

lot of film, point-and-shoot type of stuff lately because it's a little far removed from what I have to do at work all the time. Instead of eight or nine lights, it's on-camera flash and film so I don't see it for six months. It's great.

When working in a creative field it can be a struggle to keep enough creativity in the well.

Yeah, I did a project in 2005 where I took a self-portrait every day and in that self-portrait had the number of the day that it was in the picture so that it was like a time line of all the things, like a finder or treasure hunter-type gig. It was almost a treasure hunt for me to find numbers everyday, but that was a really good test for me personally, on my creative side, to see how inventive I could be every day of

the year taking a photo. It isn't as much as I would have hoped, for sure, but some days it seems like such a struggle to get up and take a picture, and some days it's, "Oh my God, I got this great idea, I'm going to do this today! I'm going to set up 12 lights." It's tough to be super creative every day but if you get a good project and you get a couple weeks to work, it makes it really fun, really enjoyable.

Do you find that your personal work comes back to influence your commercial work?

Oh, definitely, a lot. If you look at what I've been doing for Hurley I think it's highly influenced by a lot of my personal work, because I have the time to work on a project now, and I'm going to get paid for it. This is

a great opportunity so I'm going to try and take this as far as I can within the guidelines of the corporate world, or the surf industry, or whatever it is.

The further you progress, do you find the lines blurred a bit?

Definitely, and for me it's great to be able to bring my personal aesthetic into the commercial work. It's a bonus rather than totally conform and change everything.

Let's talk about the *Warhol Factory x Levi's x Damien Hirst* book. What was that project and how did you get involved?

Warhol and Levi's had been doing a line for like

maybe four or five years, and I guess Damien Hirst saw some of the line. He's a big Warhol fan so he bought some and the designer got in contact with Hirst, and asked, hey, how would you like to do something with the Warhol Foundation and Levi's? And Hirst was really interested. I guess Louis Vuitton's mother company had been asking him, too, but Hirst said, "I wear Levi's when I work, I'm a regular guy so this is something I'd want to do." So they got the rights for the Warhol stuff, the Hirst stuff, to work with Levi's.

A close friend, Adrian Nyman, was the designer for the whole project. He'd been doing it for the Warhol Foundation and Levi's for two or three years, and we had just recently hooked backed up after not seeing each other in





about 10 years. Adrian was talking about this project he was working on, and that he'd like to have me do the photos and help him build the sets and conceiving the whole book. We worked really closely on how we wanted to have things done and we built all the props, all the sets, organized everything, just the two of us, and shot the whole thing in two days. It was a really small crew. Great, great project, as we got to incorporate things from each artists' environment into our sets and our pieces, to help build the world around each little different section of the clothing line being Levi's, Warhol, and Hirst stuff. It was really fun.

Did you feel any pressure as an artist working with Warhol and Hirst's work?

Oh yeah, I felt a huge amount of pressure working with Warhol and Hirst, probably two of the biggest names in art, and in my personal opinion maybe ever, in our generation from the 1900s and on. They both use a factory style to build their stuff so it was really intimidating being associated with something on such a high, you know big, big scale. And then Levi's as well, who is such a big deal in the fashion industry. Yeah, it was a lot of pressure, a lot

of sleepless nights thinking about how I was going to throw that down.

As a photographer you have the unique experience of getting to interact with artists, portraying them to the rest of the world, but also as being one of them with your own work.

That's something I've been trying to justify in myself forever, how do I stay on that side of the gallery space? Like for Hurley, sometimes I have to go shoot events at shows and it's so embarrassing to be the guy there with the big camera documenting the event when in my head I really want to be the guy that has his stuff on the wall. There's that fine line between the portrait photographer guy at the Fantastic Sams-style thing, or the portrait photographer who takes celebrity portraits. You have to want to slip between those cracks and fall in the art world down here.

Photography is probably the most commercialized art form.

I think so. I have a lot of painter people, or you get some sassy art people that are like, "Oh, you're using it for commercial stuff and

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you aren't an artist anymore?" or whatever. I have a strong disagreement with that. I think if you're doing commercial stuff and people like it so much that they'll let you do your art form for them, there's that, which is what makes it commercial, because it's liked. They aren't going to put something crappy or something people don't like out there. Yeah, if you're selling out, good for you, good job, keep selling out. Keep creating stuff, get money to make your stuff, that's what everybody really wants. And then you get it all and you're supposed to be like, "Oh, I don't want this, I'm an artist"? Fuck that.

For more information on Beau Roulette, contact Beauroulette.com.