

JEFF ALU

The Desolate Desert Is Fertile Grounds For This Photographer

By D. Samuel



Communicating Beauty and Simplicity...

In Black and White

Jeff Alu is a promising photographer who has a closet full of creative hats, including being a 3D artist, an animator, and a composer. One of his greatest passions lies within the deserts of Southern California, a place where Jeff's sojourns are captured through his Kodak DC-280 Digital Camera. In post production, Jeff prides himself in his ability to convey his message by manipulating his images using photo-editing software.

Inked: How did you become interested in photography?

Jeff Alu: I've always been interested in the graphic look of black and white photography. I did some photography back before digital and then

quit for a while. Then I bought a digital camera to document some of the hikes I had been taking in the desert. The more I took photos out there, the more I saw the potential of black and white photography. It took about a year for me to develop a style, influenced by photographers such as David Fokos; from there I developed a style of my own.

Inked: What got you started in black and white photography?

JA: I worked at the Palomar Observatory to search for asteroids and comets. We used a Schmidt Camera to take photos of the sky and then process them in the darkroom. So I have tons of black and white darkroom experience. The processing was very procedural, and I did

a lot of it, and really learned to hate darkrooms. Since I have a background in 3D Graphics, using a photo-manipulating program to do my processing was the next logical step.

Inked: Why do you choose black and white? Why not sepia or color, or infrared?

JA: I've played with sepia and color, but I feel that the absence of color means less interference and noise, less to confuse the viewer when color is not present. I also feel that a lack of color gives the viewer the impression that the artist is trying to say something more specific. When color is there, the image may look like a snapshot, something they're used to seeing. With the color gone, it might trigger something in the viewer's mind to look a little deeper. As far as infrared, I like the look, but sometimes I feel the result is too specific and identifiable and can also get in the way of communication.

Inked: How do you feel about the opinions of some traditional photographers who feel that digi-



38 | AUGUST 2005 | WWW.INKEDMAGAZINE.COM



tal prints aren't photographic prints and therefore don't hold the same value?
JA: I'm very tolerant. There is a difference in the nature of capturing the image, but not the outcome. I've seen more and more traditional photographers embracing digital all the time. I don't think traditional will fade away totally for a long time, but in time it will. However, I have the highest respect for photographers who want to stick to traditional methods.

Inked: What do you use to shoot your images?

JA: My first camera, a Kodak DC, is no longer in service. From there I moved up to a Minolta Dimage F, which also no longer works—it was exposed to too much sand. Now I'm using a Minolta Dimage G MP. I've found that the features on the digital camera are really not at all important. For me they're just capture devices until I can get the images back into Photoshop.

Inked: After you've taken a picture of the image you want, what is the next step in your process?

JA: I bring the image into Photoshop and convert it to black and white via the Channel Mixer. I take all of my photos in color, just in case I ever need a color reference; on occasion, a few of them simply look better in color. After converting to black and white with the Mixer, I use the dodge and burn brush to paint literally darks and lights onto the image. This is the key part of my process, and where most of what I'm feeling is placed into

tography in the first place is to try to illustrate things that I feel are very often overlooked yet also very important. To me, there is so much that can be learned about life from seeing some simple scenes that I see in the desert. Ever since I can remember, I felt that the desert and areas of desolation in general have something very strong to communicate. Once we learn to see a lot in a little, we learn to appreciate everything around us a little bit more.

Inked: So you try to convey the image of desolation with some or most of your prints?

JA: Well, not always "desolation" as a subject, but I find that in desolate areas, it is much easier and more powerful to isolate certain subjects, and bring them to the front, multiplying their importance.

Inked: What message are you trying to convey in the print Rift?

JA: I'm trying to show how there can be beauty and simplicity in things that we may not normally

consider beautiful. While a motorcycle track on a dry lakebed might normally be associated with destroying the environment, when things line up just right, you've got something really cool. The cloud, the track line up in time to create beauty. This could very easily be overlooked, but there it is right in front of you, if you only open your eyes.

JA: Well, currently I use www.digiprintstore.com for all of my prints. They claim at least 50 year archival.

Inked: There's a line between an artist who creates art for self-enjoyment and others who create for the enjoyment of others. Which are you?

JA: I think I'm both. The underlying force driving me to create is the desire to make my voice

Inked: What are two of your favorite images that you've created from your travels throughout the desert?

JA: I would have to say "Trimetro" and "Car". "Trimetro", to me, is the ultimate in something that popped up out of nowhere and made for a fantastic subject.

Inked: Do you scan your images? If so, how long does it take you from the time you scan an image until you turn off your computer?

JA: I don't scan the image; I download it from the camera. I usually produce the images quickly. I think the most time I've ever spent on

an image is maybe one hour. I very rarely go back and do alternate versions. I usually like to go with the first one. Spontaneity is very important in my images.

Inked: Why did you decide to sell your prints?

The underlying force driving me to create is the desire to make my voice heard.

heard. On the other hand, I am very motivated to create more and more when other people like my work. My training came from many of the online photo sites that allow you to upload your photos and get feedback. Positive comments push me forward.

Inked: How do you ensure that your prints will



40 | AUGUST 2005 | WWW.INKEDMAGAZINE.COM

JA: I thought I'd just give it a try. I saw other photographers doing the same thing, and I thought I could supplement my income. I've sold about 25 prints since I started selling in 2001.

Inked: How many galleries have represented you so far?

JA: European galleries were more interested in exhibiting my work before American ones. My first exhibition was in 2001 in Barcelona, Spain, at the Galleria Dart Zero at their Art in Summer exhibition. After that, I was featured in Slovenia at The City Gallery. My first US exhibition was the same year in Los Angeles at the Millard Sheets Gallery. The same year I was featured in London at the Colville Place Gallery. In 2003, I was featured at The Perfect Exposure Gallery in Los Angeles for their Aesthetics 2003 show. In 2004, I had a solo exhibition at the Chop-Chop Gallery, also in Los Angeles, that ran from May to June. Last year in July Studio 343 in San Pedro, California, also had a solo exhibition of my work. This year in January The Solaris Gallery in West Hollywood featured me and other photographers in a group exhibition. Also, from June 10th to July 7th I will be in a group exhibition at J|R Gallery in which all proceeds go to School on Wheels (SOW).

Inked: What factors go into sizing and pricing your works?

JA: I try to print out as large as I can. Pricing is based on other prices I've seen and the recommendations of gallery owners.

Inked: What advice do you have for the aspiring digital photographers?

JA: Put the camera down. Look with your eyes, not the camera. It gets in the way of what you're trying to see. □

Jeff's 8 x 10 images sell for \$140, his 11 x 14 sell for \$180. The 16 x 20 is \$220 and his 20 x 24 sell for \$300. All images are printed on Kodak Professional paper through R-4 Chemistry and have an archival life of 50 years. All prints come matted. Jeff Alu's gallery can be seen at www.inkedmagazine.com/inked/JeffAlu. More images can be found at Jeff's website at www.animalu.com/pics.

Jeff Alu photo captions:
Page 37, Rift,
Page 38, Shack,
Page 39, Darkfan,
Page 40 Trimetro,
Page 41, Dream (top), Car (bottom)



WWW.INKEDMAGAZINE.COM | AUGUST 2005 | 41