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Shoot everything / diminishing returns

FEBRUARY 15, 2019 BY [MING THEIN](#)

Is it possible to practice too much? To the point that it's almost impossible to capture something exceptional because you've already seen 99.9% of the possible expressions of a given subject, and then captured and curated the best from there? Is there really a point at which additional repetition does not build muscle memory, speed of response, familiarity or spur creativity? Of late, I'm increasingly thinking the answer is actually yes: you can overshoot. But as usual, there are caveats, so hear me out before you break out the stakes, pitchforks and gasoline.

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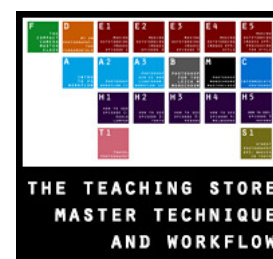
The design process

MAY 23, 2017 BY [MING THEIN](#)

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Not a camera, but a watch is as good an example as any – perhaps more so, especially when you're producing just one and it has to satisfy the most demanding client: the designer.

Whenever a photographer 'has some ideas about camera design', they often forget they're only seeing one small portion of the puzzle. Inevitably, there are significant other considerations beyond the obvious – sometimes to the point of being physically impossible or functionally incompatible with their own intended result. At this point, having significantly more involvement in the design process will allow me to clarify why some things are the way they are, why some things should or don't change, and where manufacturers shouldn't have any excuses. Think of it as a candid 'message from the other side of the fence'.

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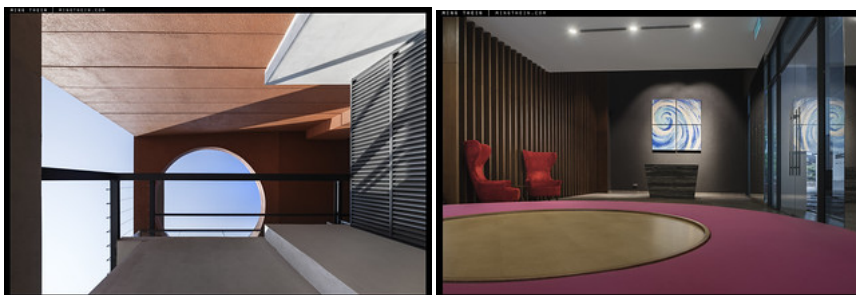
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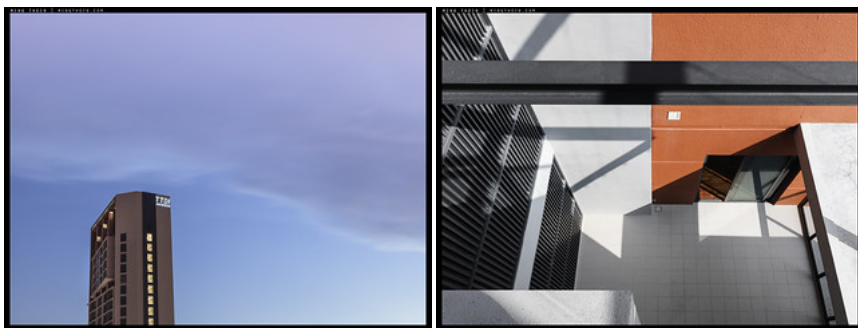
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A small change in workflow...

APRIL 23, 2017 BY [MING THEIN](#)





...can yield surprisingly major results. Think of this post as something of a continuation of [the previous On Assignment](#); the reasons why will become apparent shortly. Over the last year or so – I think coinciding with switching to Hasselblad – my shooting/curation workflow has become quite different, and I think the shift in my output has as much to do with the change in process as hardware. In some ways, the change is due to hardware limitations – but it isn't necessarily a bad thing. What I've always done in the past is some level of during-shoot curation; both for technical qualities (exposure, sharpness etc.) and aesthetic/ creative ones. During personal or teaching outings, I'd be much more disciplined and ruthless in throwing away what I'd consider marginal images; for client work, somewhat more relaxed – keeping doubles and variations just in case (which has proven fortuitous in the past).

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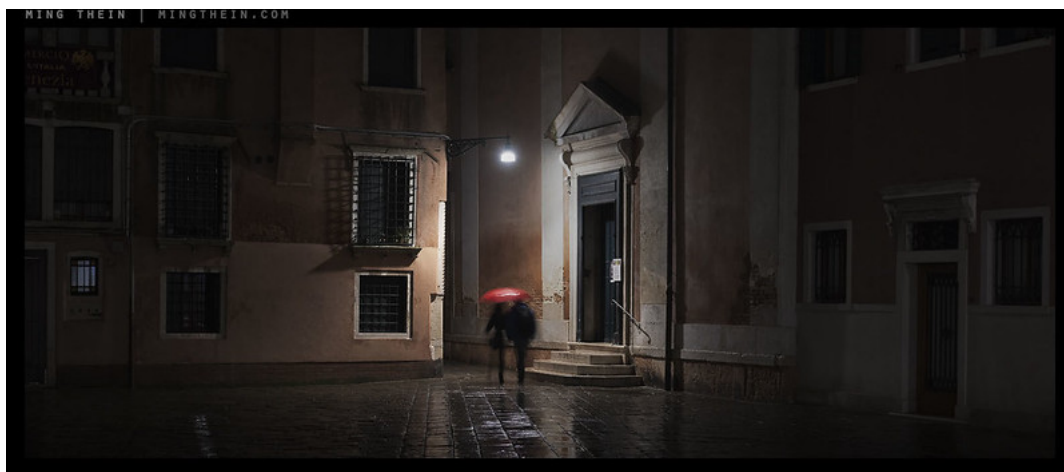
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Curating to a theme

FEBRUARY 10, 2017 BY [MING THEIN](#)



Images chosen from past exhibitions/ collections/ projects: note how they stand alone, but not together...this doesn't necessarily make them bad...or I suppose that depends on your point of view.

I've recently been asked by a couple of people about curation – specifically, the process I use when putting together a portfolio, photoessay, exhibition or something similar. Turns out that whilst I've talked about the [importance of curation in the past](#), and evaluating images individually and against each other in [Photoshop Workflow II](#), I've never actually addressed about the process as a whole. It's actually a pretty interesting topic that isn't as straightforward as you might think.

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On the curation of a book

JANUARY 25, 2017 BY [MING THEIN](#)



Though a book of photographs is something that I've been asked for time and again – I've honestly felt that it doesn't really make a lot of sense to do, both because ultimately the audience is quite limited, and because the economics are a bit of a disaster if you care the slightest about quality. Speaking to many possible publishers, printers, and photographers who've done it (including those considered to be highly successful in this game, such as Nick Brandt) – it's clear to me that any sort of photographic-only book is only worth doing if somebody with deep pockets is funding it for you. For example, Brandt doesn't break even on any of his books – because his required standards for printing are so high; the problem is once you've seen what's possible, it's very difficult to compromise. Yet...I've not only decided to do one, but my editor and I are well into the process of putting it together already. Why? Let me attempt to rationalise – and share some of the frustrations...

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Personal favourite images from 2016: or, a year in curation, part II

DECEMBER 30, 2016 BY [MING THEIN](#)



Arisen from nought

Despite the implied humble origins of the structure, it manages to be dominant, powerful and solid. The architecture is stark, yet functional, and in a way – beautiful for it. It also asserts the feeling of man's imposition of dominance and order over nature.

[Continued from part I: a curation and analysis of my favourite work from 2016.](#)

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Personal favourite images from 2016: or, a year in curation, part I (warning: possibly NSFW)

DECEMBER 28, 2016 BY [MING THEIN](#)



Wet departure, Hong Kong

Bad weather is usually the bane of any available light/ documentary photographer – in this case, just the right amount of bad came together for a much stronger sense of atmosphere than if on a sunny day (that bit of atmosphere between subject and distant background helps, too)

I thought I'd try a little exercise to round off the year: aside from the usual introspective new year's resolutions, I felt that a retrospective curation of work done the previous year might prove to be interesting from both an analytical standpoint and a higher level view of where I'm headed creatively. However, as with every curation exercise – there was a serious struggle to get it down to a manageable number, topped of by questions around emotional bias, wildly different subjects, and some images having significantly more sitting time than others (e.g. January vs December captures). I shot close to 50,000 frames in total, which is significantly less than in previous years, but tempered by the fact that a lot of that was controlled, deliberate single-shot capture off a tripod ('conventional' medium format style). Overall productivity remains the same, I think.

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Sitting time, objectivity, and always check your B roll...

SEPTEMBER 12, 2016 BY [MING THEIN](#)



How often do we either a) edit the results of a shoot immediately after said shoot, or b) leave the [curation](#) so long that we forgot what we shot – and worse still, forget of the post processing intentions and final vision we might have had at the time? Too often, I think. Either eagerness leads to the former, or time pressure to the latter. I know a friend who's still got images from more than a year back he hasn't looked at – yet he keeps shooting more. I've also shot with people who are done with everything – curation, post processing and posting to social media – before they go to bed on the same day as the shoot, no matter how late that might be or how many images had to pass. I try and find some balance, personally – enough time to have a bit more objectivity, but not so long that I forget why I wanted to make that image. Yet occasionally, one slips through...

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Alternate presentations: cinematic Thaipusam 2016 photoessay

JANUARY 31, 2016 BY [MING THEIN](#)



As a follow on to the article a few days ago about my experiences shooting medium format for low light reportage work, I'm presenting the promised cinematic set from Thaipusam 2016. I deliberately left a few articles' gap between them rather than presenting them back to back; this allows a bit of settling time and objectivity between the two sets of images. It also brings up the question of stylistic choices: how do you decide?

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Project thinking

DECEMBER 13, 2015 BY [MING THEIN](#)



From Paradise Lost – the former forefront of military hardware in old age and thinking about better days

It is quite common to hear a photographer or artist talking about work on 'x project' or 'y project' – in practical terms, it means that images are being made to fulfil a certain objective or idea. For the longest time I'd stayed away from doing this because I felt frustrated at the limitations it would impose at the least expected of times. I also didn't feel that I had the time to commit to pursuit of a single idea. But at some point in 2013, that all changed for me for various reasons. Outside commercial work, I now find myself working in a few major themes.

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