burn.

Carl De Keyzer is a quiet man…one of the most prolific and intense photographers i know, is usually hard to find in a roomful of Magnum photographers…self effacing….unassuming….yes, classic Belgian….yet every time i see Carl he has a new book and 10 new exhibitions …i mean, who can keep up with this guy? his books God Inc, Zona, and The Europeans show us a straight up shooter who does not let us miss his wit nor his ironic twists….

"Congo (Belge)" and "Congo Belge en images" are his two new books…the first , a color selection of his two year journey through this former Belgian colony and the second, black & white historical photographs from the colonial era…a powerful one, two visual and historical punch…i do not recall ever having seen a duo body of work quite like this one….as if these two books were not enough production , Carl simultaneously is working on a project of great magnitude, the coast of Europe…yes, the whole coast….i get exhausted just thinking about it…but, Carl in his most methodical way has raised his own funding, and is bit by bit literally photographing approximately 400 thousand of miles of European coastline….

rather than write any more about Carl now, i think it best if you chat with Carl yourselves…so, do a bit of homework on Carl, then jump in here and ask any relevant questions…Carl will be available to answer any questions you post here for the next few days.

Related links:

www.carldekeyzer.com

www.momentsbeforetheflood.com

Published on June 26, 2010 by david alan harvey. 25 Comments

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for emerging photographers.

burn is curated by
magnum photographer
david alan harvey.

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25 Responses to “carl de keyzer – profile”

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Gordon L

June 26, 2010 at 4:41 pm

A straight up shooter..

I’m a huge fan of straight up, and am delighted to be introduced to this work. I love what I see so far.

Carl, I’m very impressed with your moments before the flood project. Earth seems poised to undergo a shift of un-imaginable perportions. This is an amazing and at the same time terrifying time to be living, especially for those of us who are parents.
Scientists like the highly regarded James Lovelock now warn that we have past the point of no return, and that we should be preparing for the coming chaos rather than wasting recources trying to reverse the tide. Indeed he has predicted the extinction of 80% of the worlds human population by 2100. I hope he is wrong.

Whatever happens, documenting the landscape and human rush towards the abyss are possibly the most important things we can be pointing our lenses at.

eva

June 26, 2010 at 5:41 pm

I’m on a very loosy and slow connection at the moment and can’t do my homework.. but luckily I don’t need to do it, as I know Carl De Keyzer’s work pretty well. Besides Congo what comes to my mind first is Russia and the prision pictures.

I don’t even have a relevant question, as it is already answered, it would have been “what are you working on”.. looking forward to see the result of the exploration of the coast, especially living in a country (Italy) that has a quite fair ammount of those miles.. so my next best question would be: what made you decide to undertake this project, are you looking for something specifically?

Thank you!

peter grant

June 27, 2010 at 2:10 am

How does the Magnum meeting work for us as far as asking questions. Is it somehow connected through SKYPE. Not sure how it works? if so, what number would we need to call to listen into the discussion. I’m not sure what to ask at the moment but would love the opportunity to hear others talk and hear Carl respond. As I live in an opposite time zone from you people over in N.Y, can i ask about what time on tuesday the Magnum meeting starts, so I can work out what time I’d need to connect up, if there is this interconnectedness happening.
If not, hope all there have a great day.

cheers. peter.

Eric Espinosa

June 27, 2010 at 2:42 am

CARL,

It is great to have you spend some time with us…. I am a fan of yours. First I live in Belgium and was fortunate to see your magnificient expo on Congo. Your color book in particular for me is one of those very special books… the work is of course very powerful but the book itself is also pleasure to hold in your hands because of its size, weight, the quality of the printing, the cover… A real treat!…. I have been told it is not easy to get outside Belgium (hopefully no longer the case) but everyone who loves photography should have this book at home…. Now, I have several questions for you:

1) You have chosen to go with a very large size book with many many photographs of Congo… I spent quite some time looking at all your photographs and again, I think the book is great and I like all the photographs individually but I felt you could have chosen to do a tighter edit with really the most powerful ones… While I go back to your book often, there is no way I can look at all photographs in one go without risking no longer appreciating them…. So I look at portions of the book at a time…. Did you ever worry that the size of the book itself and the number of photographs could distill the impact overall? Or did you on purpose make it such that you have to look at bits at a time and come back to re-explore?

2) No sure if you do any post-treatment/ manipulation of your photographs but what strikes me always with your photographs is that these look real, no over-saturation of the colors, no desaturation either. You see more and more in color photography these days the exploration of these colors, colors that almost look in between color and B&W… I have seen some of these colrs in the work of Paulo Pellegrin and also of any photographers from Noor… What do you think of this trend?

3) I happened to have bought 3 books focused on Congo recently (many because I live in Belgium and Congo is former colony, I am more likley to come across books on that topic…). Yours of course, but also the recent book from Cedric Gerbehaye (Congo in Limbo) and “Rape of a nation” from Marcus Bleasdale… All three pieces of work are outstanding but it is striking to see how different your takes are on that country… The work of Cedric and Marcus is very dark, B&W, focused on the war, the suffering etc…Your work in color is more nostalgic, peaceful in a way…You can tell from looking at the background that the country has been in a limbo but the population seems at ease…. Where is the truth (is there one)? Does it matter? Does the photographer have a responsibility to show the real face of Congo or are you ok with the dramatization to raise awarenss of issues and catch attention? Have you missed representing some sides of Congo in your book that may be more dramatic and dark? Should you have shown some of that side more?

Anyway Carl, looking forward to your thoughts on the above…. Hope we get a chance to meet in Belgium some day…

Eric

eva

June 27, 2010 at 5:30 am

Eric, the problem wasn’t the availability of the book itself, but of the gibberish it was written in.. that’s now solved since several months, I got my copy back in March, written in a, to me, understandable gibberish language ;)

carl de keyzer

June 27, 2010 at 8:37 am

hi eva, peter,

first of all it’s great to be here.the meeting keeps me busy so there is not always a lot of time to write.
also there is this world cup going on and since I’m a soccer fanatic (played for 30 years), this cup thing keeps me busy as well.

‘Moments before the flood’ started a few years back when I read an article in a magazine showing what would remain and what would disappear in Europe in terms of coastline when the sea level would rise with 5-10-15-20 meters. Shocking.

It’s basically a project about fear for anything coming from the sea, even historically. Europe looks at the sea with eyes filled with fear. Fear for invasions, immigration, the sea itself. Remains along the coastline testify for this mostly futile fight.

Two assistants in Magnum/Paris go around the entire European coastline on Google earth and put flags in places where they think I might find an interesting situation to photograph that reflects that idea of waiting for the big one. Even if this might never happen.

I load this list of flags into my gps and drive for 4 months a year along the coastline in search for images. Doing so the requests for places to look for changes. I constantly correct my assistants in saying : ‘no more lighthouses please or leave out the nice little harbors’. This kind of working and interaction is often full of surprises. Basically other people tell you what to photograph. To drive along the 400.000 miles long coastline is impossible.

All images are shot on a Phase One P65 camera, mostly on tripod.
Book and exhibition are scheduled for the end of 2012 (end of the world according to some cultures).

Carl

a civilian-mass audience

June 27, 2010 at 10:20 am

WELCOME in BURNLAND MR.CARL DE KEYZER,

we understand you are extremely busy…MAGNUM,Football,Coastlines…Atlantis…
and my photographers here are busy too…they are all over the Universe…
trying to find their vision…
Well, I am not a photographer …BUT many of my friends here and there are struggling with
the editing process…hmmm…how can I put it…??? Is there a secret, a formula …so
they can have as a base …when it’s time for editing…???

THANK YOU AGAIN for being here…MR.HARVEY leaves the windows open…so you can come anytime:)))
and if you are near the Greek Coastline…don’t forget to stop by…
I have ouzo,organic chickens…and souvlakia :)))

May 2012 be another Beautiful year …
VIVA!!!

carl de keyzer

June 27, 2010 at 11:06 am

Eric,

Thanks for your comments on my 'Congo (Belge)' book, made at the occasion of the 50th independence anniversary of the Congo.
You made a good point about the number of images in the book. My first idea was to put less images, basically most good photo books only carry 80-100 images (and if looked at closely only 20-30 really strong images). I used to count the number of images in books I really liked.
Let me explain first the basic idea of the design.
The idea was to copy a colonial book (existing) of a Belgian administrator working in the jungle or in some distant office back in Belgium, designing the groundplan of a Belgian utopia in central Africa.
The chapters in the book (divided by pastel color book keepers paper) reinforces that idea even more. Think of 'The Heart of Darkness' 'the horror, the horror, the horror'.
That gave me about 19 chapters to be filled with images.
Actually this is an idea I mostly use for my books, there is very often an existing book that gives me the idea for my own book.
Of course less chapters would have been fine as well but somehow I felt the need to show more pictures in order to strengthen the visual idea of this massive colony, 80 times the size of the Belgian motherland. The colonial infrastructure left by the Belgians is enormous and is still used for about 90 %.

Concerning the new trend of using b/w and color mix. Very often this is not used in a functional way. For my own projects I change the photographic style according to the subject of the project. 'Moments before the flood' is shot on a very high resolution camera with multiple exposures in order to get closer to the Dutch and English 'marine' landscape paintings of the 17-18th century. History of painting is often a source of inspiration.

For the Congo I tried to get closer to the look and feel of early colonial color photographs by working in different layers combining lower saturation and darker shadows. Still the style or technique should not be to obvious. I especially don't like photography that solely relies on anything stricly photographic.

Carl

Kristof Vadino

June 27, 2010 at 11:46 am

Beste Carl,

some questions:

1. Why do you use digital now? And are you able to achieve in print the same feel of depth
than with dia? You are able to get rid off the plastic feeling?
2. With which technique the Congo book is made? I'm curious because the color prints are really
of the best I know in a book.
3. You once said that marketwise the days of complex composition (like Alex Web) are over. But some
photos in the Congo book and your other books (like the color panoramas in the Power book) are
quiet complex, others not. Is this mixture of more straightforward composition and complex ones a deliberate choice?
(dutch: vrijwillige keuze)?
4. Do you think empathic photography (Salgado, Nachtwey, VII,many NGO photographers..) is still necessary?
Is it time for more levelled documentary photography which tries to understand instead of 'change
the world'? And is film documentary than not better?
Or is it time for poetic documentary?
(I don't want to burden you with a long essay, so I'm sorry if the questions are a bit colorless)

Herve

June 27, 2010 at 12:43 pm

World Cup sure keeps us busy, Carl….

Yes, thank you absolutely for wearing so well the mantel of straight shooting (up or down!), "telling it as it is". It seems to be given shortshrift lately, but frankly, to stop shooting like that would be like asking people not to breathe anymore. It's the most natural way to take a picture, and maybe the most apt to convey the experience of humanity.

I am also re-assured by the simplicity of your language, and straight to the fact answers. To be read against the long and tortuous explanations in texts behind so many BURN essays. I like that, that photography is basically a craft, to be handled therefore manually, much more than intellectually.

My question, if I may, is about 2 seemingly different approaches to the medium, and ask your POV, or own stance, in relation to what 2 of your MAGNUM colleagues said lately. Alec Soth said that "Photography is not about (making) good pictures anymore, anyone can do that, it's about the edit", and Bruce Gilden: "I only care about the photo, I don't care about the book". Both sentences to be taken not as literaly, but still, if they elicit a response from you, I hope you tell us.

Thanks, and GO HOLLAND (about time they clinch a title!)!

eva

June 28, 2010 at 8:19 am

Carl, thank you very much for your responses, in the meantime I've been able to look at your 'Moments before the Flood' link and read more about it also there.. now I wonder if you'll need to go back to all those places to take pictures and show us the difference (I do hope not!)..

Soccer, I'm all for Ghana at this point, they seem to have fun and it shows :)

carl de keyzer

June 28, 2010 at 8:29 am

Kristof,

some answers

1. actually I have been dreaming about using digital since I bought my first computer at the age of 24 (ZX spectrum and later Commodore 64). As you know I mostly worked on medium format camera's (Mamiya 7 and Plaubel for a very long time), so I waited until digital had more or less the same handheld quality as a 6×7 negative. That is when a 1 meter by 1 meter print looked as good. That was my standard. Shooting in digital started about 5 years ago with the Phase One P25 (now Nikon D3x and Phase One P65) and printing about 7 years ago when first the Hahnemuhle Photo Rag and later the Crane Silver Rag came out (now Hahnemuhle Baryta). I do all my scanning, photoshop, printing.

2. the printing for the Congo was done in Italy, Trento where you can find a lot of very good printing houses. the thing that made a real difference for this book was the choice of paper. we used a German paper, Schoefelen Xantur Motion, a paper that is the best for photo reproduction but also the most expensive. Luckily we could convince the company to sponsor the difference in price. For people who were lucky to buy the first edition (sold out in 2 months) of Congo (Belge), they will see a difference with the second edtion. Also very well printed but still a difference.
Digital is still not the same, I miss certain nuances, depth in colors and greys but the advantages far outweigh the minuses.

3. Alex Webb is still the best 'framer' on the planet and I still admire his work. The arrival of digital diminished the value of getting all these elements into one shot. There is of course the logical (or not so logical) reflex of thinking that everything can be manipulated in photoshop and that these kind of visual olympics became suspicious by definition. It is still very hard to do.
I grew up with this language and even in my contemporary work there are still traces to be found. There is a shift though of looking more for genuine moments, places and people rather than waiting or trying to get more complexity in the frame. The layered reality, working with time, past, present is still there but is more manifested in the choice of concept and subject.

4. I'm not a big fan of empathic photography although I have admired Jim and Sebastiao when they were still at Magnum. Personally I feel very uncomfortable to use poor and sick people, all kinds of victims for my images. I did do it but not for personal use (it was unfortunately the only way to travel around in the Congo, by working for NGO's). Most of that kind of photography is quite one dimensional, aimed at large audiences and not always so pure of intent. I prefer the subjective, sometimes disturbing approach.

Carl

carl de keyzer

June 28, 2010 at 8:40 am

Herve,

I think Alec meant that everybody can take good pictures now technically. that is true for sure. Not so sure about taking 'real' good pictures. Alec handles editing and shooting in a very delicate way. I admire his work a lot, his books are alwyas a very welcome surprise. He manages to convince the old school photographers that strong work can be made without the sensationalism of any technique or approach. Reality in its purest form.
Of course it has a lot to do with editing and choosing the right subjects, tensions. It's a struggle I have learned to manage better over the years. Congo (Belge) is the first book I have edited entirely without the help of friends and colleagues. The digital revolution and the arrival of photographers like Alec has freed me of some personal and outside pressure to come up with 'strong photography'. It feels as a relief rather than a handicap.

I don't agree with my good friend Bruce (also a big soccer fan, converted by his daughter who plays the game). His photo's AND books are strong. I don't believe he doesn't care about his books.

Carl

Imants

June 28, 2010 at 8:43 am

How relevant is Magnum to you, has it become a bit of a niche dinosaur…….considering few under twenty know anything about it unless one is into photography.

Patricia Lay-Dorsey

June 28, 2010 at 9:41 am

Thank you, Carl, for spending time with us here on Burn. Your answers all show an openness and willingness to share your experience and perspective in ways that will benefit those who are coming of age photographically speaking in these times.

Over on today's NY Times Lens blog is an interview with one of your Magnum colleagues, Bruce Davidson.

http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/28/showcase-177/

In it Bruce speaks of his new 3-volume retrospective book just published by Steidl. Apparently this book includes many images never before seen. I am reminded of the recent book published by MoMA on the occasion of their exhibition of HCB's work. In both of these books, we see images that the photographers did not feel were worthy to be included in earlier books and exhibits.

My question, Carl, is whether or not you see yourself ever wanting to go back over old contact sheets and digital archives to reconsider publishing works that had not made the cut in earlier edits of your work for books and exhibits. Edits are so subjective: we change and the times change. Sometimes it can take years for us to see clearly the value in our own work.

Carl, I realize you are at a different stage of your career from Bruce Davidson, but are you ever curious about what might be hidden away unseen not just by others but by you?

Patricia

bob black
June 28, 2010 at 11:57 am

Carl! :))

sorry, no real time to ask a question but i wanted to thank you for sharing your thoughts with the audience. I've read your replies this morning: richly intelligent and thoughtful and as a photographer, i value that tremendously, so thank you once again for taking the time and sharing your thoughts.

so, a question about books. as a photographer and writer, books have always meant more to me than individual photographs, and work that way as a photographer (not interested in single pictures, per se), and I love what Alec is doing with Little Brown Mushroom and publishing….so, my question for you is the proverbial desert island question:

10 photobooks that you couldn't tire of/live without…and one caviat: NO MAGNUM PHOTOGRAPHERS :))))…so, which 10 picture books would you take with you on those long drives :)))

and thanks again Carl for joining us…it's been really terrific to read your thoughtful replies! :))))

thanks again

all the best
bob

Kristof Vadino
June 28, 2010 at 12:39 pm

Carl,

Thanks a lot for your time and for the very clear answers on technique, print and approach!

Kristof

carl de keyzer
June 28, 2010 at 6:39 pm

Imants,

Let's say that Magnum is still very important to me as a community. Without it I would probably not have continued producing books at my current speed.

Carl

carl de keyzer
June 28, 2010 at 6:54 pm

Patricia,

Sometimes retrospective books with a lot of unpublished and unseen images give me a strange feeling of commercialism. They are rarely truly undiscovered, hidden treasures. Henri Cartier Bresson's later books are a perfect example of that.
I haven't seen Bruce's book, so I can't say anything about it.

In my case, when I do look at earlier books years later (I try to avoid it but students force me to during lecures) I always notice the weak spots first. 'Why on earth did I put this image in it'.
Most of my books took about a year of traveling, taking pictures and about 3-6 months production time. The production time was often too short without enough distance in time and images with emotional ties and strong stories often got in while not always being important or necessary for the concept or subject.
Sometimes editors screw up like with my first book 'India'. It was still the days of prints and he had sent my 10 best images to a local newspaper. By the time the book had to be printed, the prints were still not back and he decided to put 10 other images in the book without telling me.

All of my books have a different technical and stylistic approach. The 'fil rouge' is my interest in global systems (religion, communism, power, war, prisons, colonialism, history, nature).
I tried a retrospective exhibition once and it failed because of the diversity of my work. I guess I need the tight environment of one book, one exhibition. Mixed they loose strength.
But I guess one day I will try again and with the help of good friends and experts there should be a way of adding value to my archive.

Carl

Herve
June 28, 2010 at 9:50 pm

Thnaks Carl for taking the time to answer my question. Yes, I am sure Bruce cares about his books, and I am sure Alec knows a great shot does not come along for the asking, and even less, for the technique.

What you say, that digital photography brings freedom to the photographer, is not often heard (facility, is more often used) yet, these are most encouraging, and enabling words to those of us who have come late in embracing this passion that is photography.

Patricia Lay-Dorsey
June 28, 2010 at 11:02 pm

Carl, your response to my question about your feelings regarding going the retrospective route yourself gives me much to think about. As a former multimedia artist with a relatively new focus on photography, I can understand the discomfort you describe when you encounter some of your earlier published work. I share those feelings, not just about my visual art but my writings as well. How we express ourselves creatively depends on where we are in our personal, social, political and religious development. I often find my early work does not dig as deeply into a subject as I would were I to do it today. But I comfort myself in the knowedge that I went as far as I could go at the time. Maybe there is something to be said for revisiting a place or people and seeing if I could bring more depth to my understanding of it this time.

I also had to google "fil rouge" and found it means "guiding thread." Always love learning new (to me) words and expressions. This one is a definite keeper.

Thanks so much, Carl, for sharing your insights and experience with us here. The clarity of your answers makes me wish I could take a workshop with you one day. Best wishes to you in all you do…

Patricia

Jamie Maxtone-Graham
July 1, 2010 at 6:42 am

Hello Carl,

No real questions. I'm just an honest admirer of your body of work. Your website has been long bookmarked on my computer and when I am feeling some personal creative lacking or a need for honest and clear 'looking', I refer to you.

An amazing and varied body of work. Thank you for sharing your work and thoughts here.

Most sincerely.

Lee Guthrie
July 1, 2010 at 11:01 pm

Hi Carl, don't know if you are still hanging around this post; just arrived home yesterday and for the few days before that I was wrapped up in my travels. I have enjoyed your comments. During this last road trip to mainland USA for 10 weeks, I had these ideas on what I wanted to capture. I did in fact find some photos that fit my ideas for new essays and have not given up on them at all.

What I discovered was in the place of what I was searching for I found a multitude of new material to shoot: flowers of all things. With the depth of field and lovely light and rain and sun spots I discovered a whole new way of expressing emotion with these flower photos. And I taught myself new techniques for capturing a photo.

In telling this I am wondering if you have ever shot a project and come away with an entirely different project than you initially went after. I find this happening to me all the time. Eventually I may pull together photos that follow the initial idea but it is always outside of what I planned.

carl de keyzer

July 5, 2010 at 12:36 am

Lee,

I was caught up in a million things after my return to Belgium, sorry.
To be honest my plans and overall concepts about a chosen subject do change quite a bit when traveling. But not to the extent that I change my subject entirely. Things evolve and I discover new ways of looking of course. Basically the images I take during the first month are for testing only, trying out different angles. When the first really satisfying images appear in terms of style, approach I usely keep these images in the back of my head and basically copy these over and over again but under different circomstances and situations. This way the project or concept gets its consistency and allows viewers to step into my vision on the subject.

Lee Guthrie

July 5, 2010 at 12:20 pm

Since making my comment I have gone back over the images I captured on this trip and there are many that I did in fact set aside into two subjects I was seeking. So even though I thought I had not accomplished any of the essay work I set out to do I in fact did get a start on them. Funny how that worked. Thanks Carl for your comments. I liked the way you described how things evolve and that your first time spent is experimental. That makes sense. Really enjoy your work.

>Re: PHOTO » Blog Archive » Carl de Keyser & Google Earth
Pingback on Jul 7th, 2010 at 8:56 am

Comments are currently closed.

« margeaux walter – sunday afternoon

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