





STEFANIE SCHNEIDER



Please introduce yourself

I'm originally from Cuxhaven Germany.

My production is based in '29 Palms, CA' and my post production facilities are located in Berlin, Germany.

I've been taking photographs ever since I can remember and a working photographer for almost 20 years including my studies in communication design at The Folkwang School in Essen, Germany.

When I discovered expired Polaroid material in 1996 I understood instantly that I had found the material I've always been looking for and which can translate my views and feelings perfectly. Polaroid material has the most beautiful quality - the colors on one side, but then the magic moment in witnessing the image develop. Time stands still and the act of watching the image delivery can be shared with the people around you. In today's fast world, it's calming to slow down even for just a moment. At the same time Polaroid slows time, it also captures a moment which becomes the past so instantly that the decay of time is even more apparent - it gives the image a certain sentimentality or melancholy. Because of that intensity of the moment it seems to change the interaction of the next moment. The Polaroid moment is one of a kind, an original every time.



What artists have influenced you, and how?

I think I started thinking when I watched the movie 'Days of Heaven' by Terrence Mallick. Nobody liked it. It was too slow for teenagers. It started everything, all my dreams. He called me here in Berlin once. He liked my work. I didn't write down any details. I am not good with that. I never heard from him again.

Favourite living and deceased artist?

Guenther Grass, Lars von Trier, Terrence Mallick, Daisy McCrackin (my muse), Udo Kier and Serge Gainsbourg, Hildegard Knef, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Pan Tau

How did you find your models and location?

The location needs to be remote, empty and endless. The air needs to be crystal clear with plenty of sunlight. The desert provides all these characteristics and more. At the start, it was all by coincidence. My vision got clearer and clearer as I followed the path I had set. Mostly by coincidence, sometimes by luck and always by gut feelings. I find it more difficult to photograph people I don't know so logically I ask friends or simply do it myself.



The orange haired girl is actress Radha Mitchell and the blonde is musician Max Sharam, right?

Yes. They are. Both are friends of mine. Radha Mitchell and Max Sharam both came to California to follow their Hollywood aspirations. I met these two Australian models when I first moved to Los Angeles. We quickly became friends and I asked them to do a photo shoot with me. That shoot resulted in the 'Trailer Trash' photo series. I continue to work with both of them and each has made a career in entertainment.

Radha's starred in the Woody Allen film Melinda and Melinda. While Max continues to sing and perform. Radha now has done many movies and Max is still an amazing musician. They always will be my muses.

What has been the biggest challenges so far in being a photographer?

I produce my editions in my laboratory using both photographic paper and large format negatives. There has been a gradual decrease in analog photographic material. Photographic paper and large format films are not as numerous as they have been. On the other hand, instant analog film has developed with more choice with the impossible project.



How would you describe your photos to someone whose never seen them?

My work focuses on loosely woven story lines and phantasmic characters. My choice of the American West as a dream factory provides for the shoot locations.

I work with expired polaroid film stock. The images appear imperfect, impermanent, incomplete: wabi sabi. These "imperfections" and chemical explosions of color enhance and undermine the commitment to reality in photography and induce the characters into trance-like dreamscapes. Like flickering sequences of old road movies the images seem to evaporate before conclusions can be made. That ephemeral reality manifests in subtle gestures and mysterious motives. My images refuse to succumb to reality, they keep alive the confusions of dream, desire, fact, and fiction.

Is there some interesting experience you ever had shooting?

On my last shoot for '29 Palms, CA' our complete hospital set was dismantled and completely stolen the night before our final day.

The police were called and reports made but nothing was ever found again.

Thankfully, we had done most of the shoot so it required only minor changes.

The last remaining Polaroid factory was purchased by Florian Kaps after he was inspired by my work resulting in the continuation of Polaroid film under the name Impossible.

All my Polaroids were stolen and I was blackmailed to get them returned or they would be destroyed.



Can you talk us through the process of photo shoot?

The process of the shoots has changed over the years.

I started out with spontaneous snap shots of friends and landscapes which then developed into small loose story line shoots with few props and costumes.

Sine 2005 I've been working on the 29 palms, ca project. An unbelievable love story sparked the project.

29 PALMS, CA is a feature film / art piece on POLAROIDs that explores and chronicles the dreams and fantasies of a group of individuals who live in a trailer community in the Californian desert.

The characters depicted in the film, (an actress, a singer, a DJ, a motel owner and his wife, an US army soldier, a mystic, a princess, a recluse, a movie ticket seller, two hitchhikers, a magic doctor etc.), are played by both actors and non-actors.

The story is constructed through the interpretation of real life communications (i.e. phone calls, emails, conversations) that have taken place as the individuals depicted in the story try to make sense of events that have occurred in real life.

In this sense the story is, in part, a biography and social commentary, and the characters are the exaggerated alter egos of the individuals who play them.

29 Palms, CA is an artistic/ conceptual/ visual/ filmic collaboration between several artists from different artistic backgrounds: writers, actors, musicians, directors, visual artists, and others, and will culminate in a full-length feature film.





The project is being developed continuously by all parties involved. This mainly pertains to the script and storyline, as well as character development, and background. A general story outline exists. Along these lines the characters are living within their stories, expressions, images taken of them etc. The characters add to the stories change their directions. The characters are influencing and feeding off each other. The project, a "long-term improvisation", continuously growing and developing in an organic fashion. The development is taken place online. For this reason we are creating the website : www.twentyninepalms.ca. The site also covers the production side of the project: the how, when and who. A published schedule regarding all production steps will keep each participant up to date. The film will not be shot at once, but rather step-by-step over a period of time, whenever a scene has been developed and is ready for production. All of the contributors write and act as the character, as which they have been casted, and which they bring to life. Each character has his or her own character page on the website and writes a fictitious or semi-fictitious diary on it in order to reveal the background story of the character. Pieces from this diary might be edited into the script as well. It can also happen that a scene has been written and shot, but meanwhile, because of biographical influences displayed in the diary, the character's life has moved on and changed. In that case the scene is cut out of the script, but might still be used standing on its own as a sub chapter or part of the background story of the character. The website itself is an entity of its own. Because there is no set time limit for the development of all the parts involved, it will take years to finish the film (writing, photography shoots / filming, editing etc.). Scenes are being written and shot, stories are being told, life is changing. Thus the website becomes the reflection of a period of time, of changes within and around us. Parts of the project are developed as "chapters" or "episodes" and presented in galleries and public art spaces, as well as in theaters and film festivals. Books containing artwork, script pieces, story parts, poetry etc. will be published. And of course there could be even more: the limited edition actress doll OXANA, the SORAYA the princess doll, ALEX, the motel owner's wife doll, etc. The development of the project becomes the project itself. The grand finale is the full-length feature film.



I AWOKE FROM THE DREAM. THE FEVER WAS GONE.
OUTSIDE I HEARD A LOUD FAMILIAR SOUND.
THE SOUND OF THE GARBAGE TRUCK SLAMMING ITSELF ON THE DESERT FLOOR.
FINALLY, I SAT UP.
EVERYTHING WAS CLEAR NOW. I HAD TO START HERE AGAIN.
PREPARE MYSELF. TEACH MYSELF. ARM MYSELF. GET MYSELF READY FOR LIFE AND LOVE ONCE AGAIN.
FOR THIS I MADE A PLAN.

STEP ONE: CLEANING AND BEAUTIFYING THE HOUSE WITH REAL POSITIVE ENERGY IN MY HEART.
PURPOSE: CHANGING THE NEGATIVE ENERGY OF THE HOUSE.
TURNING THE CURSED LIFELESS HOUSE INTO A LUCKY ONE. LEARNING TO CARE.

STEP TWO: WORKING ON A BLOSSOMING GARDEN.
PURPOSE: CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND LIVING. KEEP IT ALIVE.

STEP THREE: ENDURE THE QUIETNESS OF BEING ALONE IN THE HOUSE. IN THE DESERT. ENDURE MYSELF.
PURPOSE: BEFRIEND MYSELF.

SO HERE I AM. NOW. SEEDING. MAYBE HARVESTING ONE DAY.



Tell us about the technical process.

The film will be shot mostly on Polaroid film stock, which then will be edited and partly animated. Some scenes will be jumpy, intercut with short pieces of super-8 material. To see the usually static characters in real time movement all of a sudden is quite stunning. Other scenes of edited Polaroid stock are very smooth due to animation being applied. Sometimes a still image will appear while the characters talk from the off. Most conversations for the radio show will be filmed on 16 mm in a rough documentary style. But then, all of a sudden the roll of film is empty, the image disappears, the screen flickers, then goes black. The characters keep on talking, as we hear the sound of the end of the film hitting the film case. The audience is taken back to feel like the viewers of an old super-8 family movie.

What's next for you?

Lance Waterman and I will be leaving next month to keep on working on the white picket fence story. for this story we have built and will build all sets. We started to build up a trailer park for the 29 palms, CA project. the project seems endless and keeps developing.