



PERCEPTUAL ART

CHRISTIAN GHAMMACHI'S REFLECTIONS OF LIFE

Photography is the window to this intriguing world of ours, a way for us to discover the diversity of life and come to know humankind. Bringing us closer to this concept is **Christian Ghammachi** who mesmerizes us through his photographic representations of time and spur of the moment impressions. Sharing chapters from his photo journal, Christian takes us on a visual journey to experience the elements of existence captured ever so beautifully in frames of light and emotion.





Above: Batroun, Lebanon; **Left:** Apple Smile- Havana, Cuba; **opposite:** Christian Ghammachi.

“When photographing people, I like to frame my shots tightly, trying to capture their emotions, almost as if I’m diving into their soul.”

Arabian Homes: *Please tell us a little about yourself.*

Christian Ghammachi: I’m half Lebanese and half French. I was brought up in the Middle-East, mainly in Lebanon. I have been based in the GCC for the past 11 years pursuing my career as a lawyer.

AH: *When did you develop an interest in photography?*

CG: More than 15 years ago. I recall seeing photographs that my father had taken with his new Canon A1 and how affected I was by the realization that someone could forever capture a moment, a detail, an emotion. So I borrowed his camera and bought a few books to learn about the techniques behind photography and off I was. Safe to say my father never saw his camera again.

AH: *How would you describe your photographic style and technique?*

CG: Well it depends on the subject matter. When photographing people for example, I like to frame my shots tightly, trying to capture their emotions,

almost as if I’m diving into their soul. But in general terms, I think it is all about light and how one perceives it. I remember reading a very inspiring book a long time ago called “natural light photography”; it taught me how to better see the light around us and take advantage of it. In fact, with enough technical experience, you can really make use of natural light in almost every circumstance and create amazing results.

AH: *Tell us about your themes and subject matter and how each one inspires you?*

CG: At first, most of my photography was of people- women, children, and men. I love photographing people because it’s the only time you interact with your subject, which inevitably adds a dimension to the shoot.

As I grew older and could afford it, I discovered travel photography. I have made it a point to travel as much as I can. My travel shots are a mixture of portraits and landscapes, as well as some abstract work.

I then tried nudes and semi nudes, of both men and women. I thoroughly enjoyed it as I came to



Right/above: Jamaica at school;
opposite: Trinidad de Cuba.

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realize that photographs of human bodies are not only sensual but can embark you on many different paths. In one photo for example, you can't be sure if you are looking at a woman's back or a dark valley on a full moon night.

I also tried fashion photography and had my fun with it. I was fortunate to work with talented designers and fashion directors in the area but I don't think I would do it on a regular basis, simply because photography for me is about taking spontaneous shots of what inspires you right there and then, not what a client needs or sees.

Lately, I have been increasingly drawn to a new kind of subject matter, which is a bit difficult to explain but the whole idea is to find beauty in objects or settings that, at first glance, have nothing particular about them. An old door knob, for instance, or a rusted locomotive in an abandoned train station, a worn out laundry shop or dirty market in Havana...etc.

AH: *What are some challenging aspects of photography that you face?*

CG: Not to take any due credit from Bahrain, which has a lot to offer in many respects, but one of the main challenges I face here is that subjects can be rather limited. When I was in Cuba last

December for example, I couldn't stop taking photographs, given the great diversity of subjects, many of which were new to me.

In more general terms, even though the basic principles of photography are the same today as they were 20 years ago, a lot has changed with the advent of digital photography, some good and some not so good. Be that as it may, it is both interesting and important to stay apprised of technological progress in photography and to try and adapt it to your own needs.

AH: *How has traveling influenced your photography and in turn you as an individual?*

CG: Traveling has certainly changed me as a person. It has made me more aware of my irrelevance as an individual and has allowed me to discover how rich and diversified our world is, be it in people and cultures, history, natural beauty and human creations; traveling truly humbles you.

Because photography is part of my core, my work is often naturally influenced by the things I see and feel as I roam. Even though most of the traveling I have done so far was not aimed at taking photos, I was still lucky enough to capture some memorable shots. Last year for example,







Above: Fashion- Comme un Garçon; **left:** Havana, Cuba; **opposite above:** Tile Boys- Lebanon; **opposite below:** Trinidad de Cuba.

during a weekend trip to Oman, I came across an old fisherman sitting on the beach. I grabbed my camera and started talking to him as I kept snapping photos; an unexpected encounter that resulted in one of my favorite photos today!

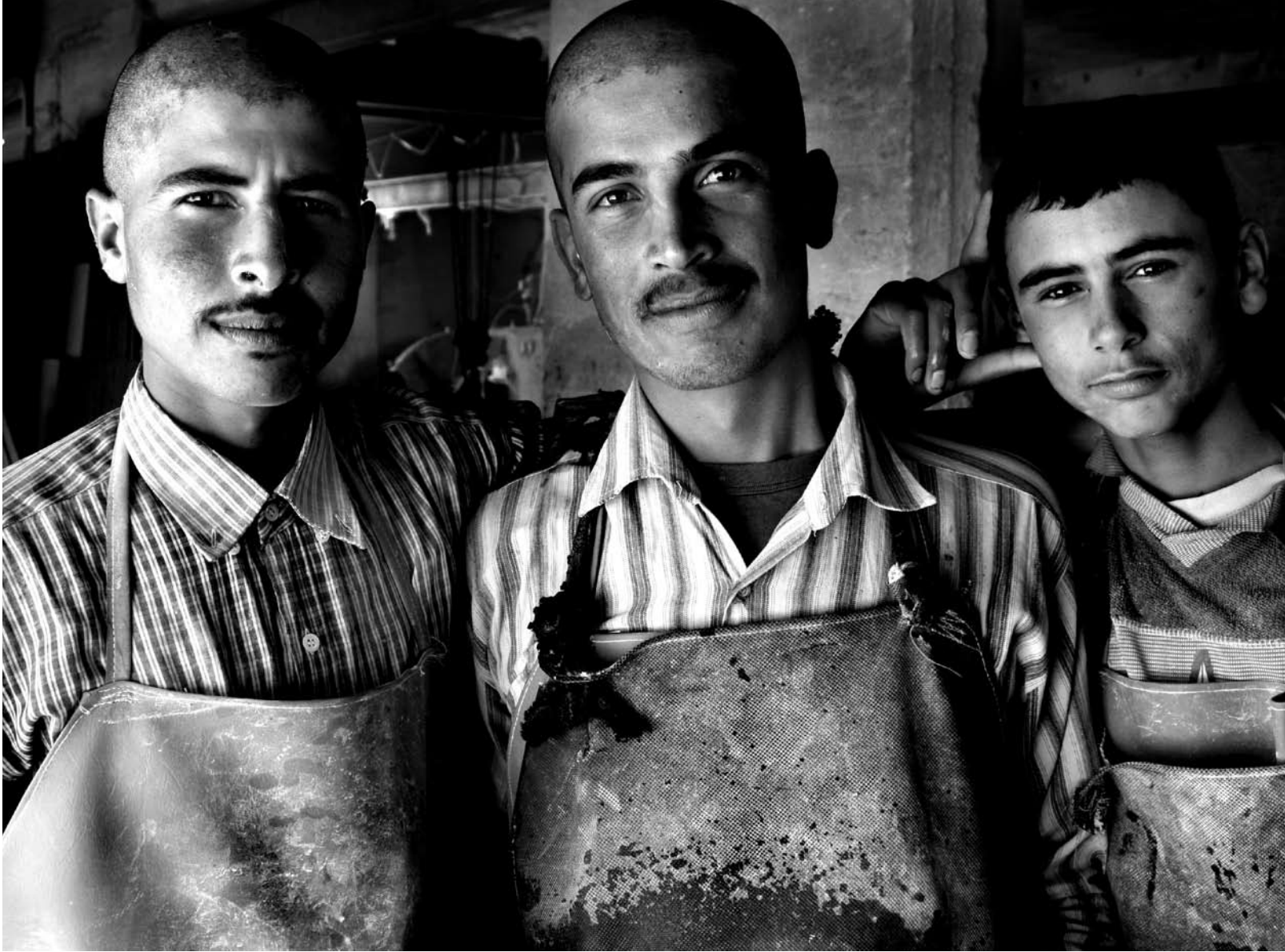
Walking around with a camera can be intimidating and bothersome to local people sometimes, but other times, with a smile here and a few nice words there, the camera can suddenly become a great tool, not only to take photos but to communicate and discover.

AH: *Do you manipulate your photos digitally?*

CG: I switched to digital photography a while ago and I use Photoshop on my PC to work on the photos I have taken. However, I am not a fan of digital creativity. I use Photoshop the same exact way we used photo labs in the past- to give photos more or less contrast, or color saturation. If a photo is not good to begin with, there's no sense in trying to alter it digitally.

AH: *How was being a part of ARTlounge beneficial in promoting your work?*

CG: I had never participated in an exhibition before and it was a very interesting experience to



be a part of ARTlounge 4; Marion did an excellent job and the turnout was great. I enjoyed having people I never met view my work and make their comments. Even though I take photos for my own personal pleasure, it's really rewarding to know that other people enjoy my photos and even feel moved by them.

AH: *What are your future plans?*

CG: The ARTlounge exhibition has encouraged me to show more of my work. I'm now thinking to have a solo exhibition in a few months where I will be able to showcase more of my work. I'm also working on a photo book that will retrace the past 15 years. Fingers crossed!

AH: *Why is photography so important to you?*

CG: Photography allows me to capture things and show them as I perceive them, through my eyes. Taking photos makes me happy, and what is more important than that? **AH**

To see more of Christian's photos, visit:
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