

David Zimmerman

“Like anyone who spends much of their time in the field, my challenges are both physical and psychological”

Everyday life influences David Zimmerman, from the light in the sky to an inspirational book. “Documentary films, Picasso, street art, Rothko, Robert Adams and the Greek poet Cavafy,” David reels off. “I try to interpret what I see and think into a visual that captures that interpretation.”

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, David currently resides in Taos, New Mexico and New York City from where he conducts his fine art practice and other projects. He extensively travels and has lived in many places all over the world throughout the years.

David’s interest in photography began in his early twenties when he was living and working in Europe and the Middle East. “At the time I was primarily studying painting and sculpture. I would occasionally take photographs of a landscape as a reference for my paintings.” After developing his films, David saw the potential in his images and realised that often his photographs were more interesting than his paintings. “The light was more interesting and the movement and the clarity in the

images suited my intentions.” When David returned from his travels he studied at the Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, California, along with many greats of his generation, and graduated with honours (BFA) in 1981.

David has received a number of awards and recognition for his work over the years. His most recent acknowledgement was in 2009 at the prestigious Sony World Photography Awards. Zimmerman was honoured with the much-sought-after L’Iris D’or for his body of work ‘Deserts’. “Recognition of some of the work has given it a broader audience,” claims David. “And with a broader audience comes a more interesting and informative dialogue.” Other awards David has won in his career include the Photolucida’s Critical Mass, The Lucie Awards and the Hearst NY Photography Biennial.

Throughout his career David has lived many high points and finds it hard to name just one – as his work has progressed his highlights have altered. “For years it was doing creative projects in New York,” he tells us. “And I also lived along the Ganges River in India for some time making photographs. Now I live ▶▶



▲ **UNTITLED (TRAILER)**

Photographed at the Salton Sea in southern California for an ongoing personal project on abandoned landscapes
Shot details: Contax 645, Leaf digital back, Zeiss 55mm lens at 1/4sec, f11, ISO 50

◀ **UNTITLED (POWER POLES)**

Photographed in central Nevada at the site of an abandoned chemical plant for the ongoing personal project on abandoned landscapes
Shot details: Contax 645, Leaf digital back, Zeiss 45mm lens at 1/2sec, f11, ISO 50

▶ **UNTITLED (METAL WALL)**

Photographed in Utah for a personal series exploring physical barriers as metaphors for social and economic obstacles
Shot details: 4x5 view camera, Schneider 65mm lens, Leaf digital back at 1sec, f16, ISO 50



GETTING TO KNOW...

David Zimmerman

Website: www.davidzimmerman.com

DP: What has your photography been used for? Who are your clients?

DZ: I do two or three commercial assignments a year now – Mercedes Benz, Apple, Pepsi and the like. The majority of my time is spent on my own projects, and for the most part, it is represented by galleries and museums.



DP: What advice would you give someone trying to follow in your footsteps?

DZ: My own background was in painting and then in photography. I studied photography for four years and had a fairly good technical background. I worked for many people in New York when I got there in the early Eighties and that helped fast-track some of the technical and problem-solving issues inherent in photography. I've always felt that mastering the technical side allowed greater flexibility on the creative side. That is probably the way I'd do it if I had to do it over – master the technical and free the creative.

DP: Best place to view/buy your work?

DZ: Prints are for sale through the galleries listed on my web site www.davidzimmerman.com



◀◀ **UNTITLED**

People impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, where many thousands lost their livelihoods in the aftermath
Shot details: 8x10 view camera, 360mm Schneider lens, Kodak 400 negative.
No exposure records

▼ **UNTITLED (CHAIR)**

Photographed at the Salton Sea in southern California for the ongoing personal project on abandoned landscapes
Shot details: Contax 645, Leaf digital back, Zeiss 35mm lens at 1sec, f16, ISO 50

“I’m interested in the world around me and try to stay aware of how the planet is changing, both socially and environmentally”

▶▶ in a remote place in the desert, which brings me closer to the places I work in.”

Inspired by the world around him, David’s work has environmental undertones that become apparent when collectively studying his images. “I’m interested in the world around me and try to stay aware of how the planet is changing, both socially and environmentally,” he states. “I would say that I don’t actively pursue something to take photographs of, but instead I respond to things that have an impact on me and use photographs to clearly understand them more.”

Having a diverse approach to his work means David’s varied interests ultimately become part of his projects. One of David’s powerful bodies of work, the aforementioned ‘Deserts’, explores the paradox of human existence with the land that we exploit in order to exist. “My work in natural, endangered and altered landscapes is an attempt to understand the balance between human need, and the consequences of unrelenting depletion of the planet’s resources,” he says. Much of David’s desert work is shot in less than ideal circumstances, but he points out that

these are what he considers to be the best times. David wants to capture the power of the desert and the isolation and magnitude of the space. “I would frequently begin photographing at night or in an approaching storm. Like anyone who spends much of their time in the field, the challenges are both physical and psychological. The risks of storms or scorpions or rattlesnakes are real, but I think the greater challenge is making a meaningful photograph while dealing with the risks. The desert can be haunting in the dark, in the heat or in a storm, and I feel my own vulnerability.”

Not content with leaving some projects to rest, David will often return to his works months or even years later to develop the concept. “I tend to revisit projects after I begin them because the concept still resonates with me and I sometimes feel there’s more work to be done,” he says. “From my perspective, when I look back at photographs from a series and feel the story is complete – that’s not very often – then for me that is a successful project. Gallery success in a positive or negative sense is things I have to not let have too much influence on my work. There ▶▶





▲ **UNTITLED
(DUNES)**

Photographed in New Mexico as part of a series exploring desert landscapes of the American southwest

Shot details: Contax 645, Leaf digital back, Zeiss 210mm lens at 10sec, f11, ISO 50

“The desert can be haunting in the dark, in the heat or in a storm, and I feel my own vulnerability”

▶▶ are of course a thousand opinions out there and you could spend a lifetime listening to them all.”

David uses a variety of techniques, equipment and methods to create his work and he finds that his approach frequently changes. “I have the tendency to use large format for many of my practical projects,” he tells us. “Much of my recent work is with a digital back on a view camera or 6 x 4.5cm Contax and I still use a DSLR on occasion but primarily for HD video.” Interestingly, David’s Gulf portraits were captured on traditional and rarely used 8x10-inch negatives in order to produce the quality that is unique to this method. However, for David, a camera is just a tool. For him, the right settings and his relationship with the moment and space are ultimately more important. “I don’t use any particular technique per se, but I do love bad weather. Storms, fog, night... the moods can be spectacular.”

In most of his projects David tends to work alone, although there have been a few occasions where he has required a small crew. He finds that working closely with talented people means

he develops close relationships with many, and continues to work with them from time to time. As for exhibiting his work, David claims he usually enjoys preparing the exhibition more than the exhibition itself. “It’s really a solitary process that I enjoy and I have always loved printing,” he states.

As for the future, David is well aware of the hold photography has over him and is not about to give it up easily. “Photography can be difficult to give up,” he tells us. “I heard a story a while back about the great Mexican photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo who, at his 100th birthday celebration, while sitting in his chair, Leica in hand, was photographing his feet as he warmed them in a pan of warm water.” David tells us for the future he is continuing his Gulf of Mexico work and is working on a documentary film addressing the complexities of the energy crisis. He is also working on a social project in Asia that focuses on photography and the visual arts. “It’s exciting for me as I look forward to spending more time out there in the next few years and onward.”

DP