

CHRISTOPHER WILSON IMBUES HIS IMAGES WITH A SENSITIVITY TO A RICH COLOR PALETTE THAT CREATES A TIMELESS AND PAINTERLY FEEL IN THE BEST OF WAYS.

**Justin Fantl**, *Photographer*

WILSON'S IMAGES HAVE A COMMON FIBER THAT CONNECTS THEM, MAKING THEM ONE OF A KIND. THIS APPROACH IS THE ANTITHESIS OF WHAT IS POPULAR ON SOCIAL MEDIA WHERE PEOPLE ARE ENCOURAGED TO FOLLOW, RATHER THAN TO CREATE AND VOICE THEIR OWN VISION.

**Parish Kohanim**, *Photographer*

WILSON IS ALWAYS PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF CREATIVITY [AND] HE IS NEVER SATISFIED TOO LONG WITH WHAT HE HAS JUST CREATED.

**Patrick Curtet**, *Photographer*

WILSON'S STRONG VISUAL STYLE UNIFIES MANY DISPARATE GENRES. NO MATTER WHAT'S IN FRONT OF HIS LENS, BE IT A PORTRAIT OR AN EXOTIC CAR, HIS PHOTOS LOOK AT HOME NEXT TO EACH OTHER.

**Chris Valites**, *Photographer, Writer*



**IF ICARUS WAS A WOMAN** - This image was shot while on a project for Discover Cards. The idea behind it started with a simple question: What if Icarus was a woman? And my answer was this: If Icarus were a woman she would wear macaw wings. They would be big and beautiful. And they would be made of real feathers, not wax. That way, if she flew too close to the sun, they wouldn't melt, and she wouldn't fall. If Icarus were a woman, she'd be much too smart to do something dumb like that.



## Introduction by Sandro Miller, Photographer

Christopher Wilson is an image whisper. He tames the light, softens the mood. His compositions are well thought-out, elegant and perfectly arranged and so pleasing to the eye. When I examine Christopher's work I feel he must have a deep sense of spirituality about himself. His work is ethereal, celestial and almost heavenly. My favorite image of his will always be that cowboy standing on his horse. Like Christopher, the cowboy is a curious wanderer, a seeker of knowledge and peace. You see it vividly in all his images. There is never a dark moment in his photography. A fairy tale story lies in every image. His work is a wonderful departure from the sometimes over-documented hardships of the world. I feel at peace and safe looking at his work and for this I thank you Christopher Wilson.



(Above) **THE AMERICAN HARLEY** - I know nothing about this motorcycle other than it's a vintage Harley racing bike. I was so busy photographing it and falling in love with it, I didn't hear a word of what the owner, Dale Walkster of Wheels Through Time, was saying about the bike. Anyway, isn't it cool as hell? It reminds me of something out of Captain America. And the matching leather helmet? Fantastic, even though it's utterly useless. Your brain would be mush if you ever crashed, but man, you'd make a great-looking corpse. Photographed as part of an article on the history of Harley-Davidson racing.

(Opposite, top) **THE BMW 328 HOMMAGE CONCEPT CAR** - Photographed for BMW, AG (Germany), the 328 Hommage was built for the 75th anniversary celebration of the original 328. As Karl Baumer, the CEO of BMW wrote, "With the 328 Hommage, we wished to pay homage to the passion and inventiveness of the fathers of the BMW 328. They created an icon, which is a milestone in automotive history."

(Opposite, bottom) **THE 1969 NISSAN R382** - I absolutely loved this car as it reminded me of something out of *Speed Racer*, the Japanese anime. Designed and built by Nismo, the performance wing of Nissan, the R382's sole reason for existence was to compete and win the Japanese Grand Prix - which it did, dominating the field by taking the top two position in the 320-mile race. Nissan's most feared rivals, including Porsche and Toyota, were left in the dust at the competition. Go Speed Racer, Go!



*What inspired or motivated you into your career?*

To be honest, I didn't make a conscious decision, ever, to become a photographer. There was no jumping into photography on my part. What is more true is that I fell into photography. I was working as an art director at Team One in L.A., helping them create a new campaign for Ritz-Carlton. I shot some images for my layouts. The campaign died, but the agency liked my imagery enough that they asked me to photograph another campaign for Ritz-Carlton in Vietnam. And that was the beginning. I had no idea what I was doing. I couldn't have told you the difference between an f-stop and an ISO for the life of me. But somehow, wonder of wonders, it all worked out. And it led to another project. And then another. And then I woke up a couple of years later and discovered I was making more money shooting than I was art directing or writing. Life is funny that way. You start off thinking you're going down a certain path and you're going to do this thing, and then the path twists and turns and you end up going down another path, and before you know it, years have passed and you're doing something you never imagined you would be doing. That's the way life has been for me. And now, looking back at my life, it all makes sense to me. Everything I've done in my life, whether I succeeded at it or failed miserably, has informed who I am now as a human being and as a photographer, and I'm grateful for it all.

*What is your work philosophy?*

I don't think I have a work philosophy per se. All I know is that I'm always trying to create something that resonates with the heart. I fail way more often than not, of course, but always—no matter what I'm shooting—that is my intention. Robert Frank once wrote, "When people look at my photographs I want them to feel the way they do when they want to read a line of a poem twice." How wonderful, as that is exactly the way I would love my photographs to be "read," if you will—as a beautiful poem. The Irish poet Seamus Heaney, also wrote that poetry can be a powerful counterweight to the evil in the world. I love that, as I would love my visual poems (if I dare call them that) to be a part of the antidote to the hate that surrounds us. Again, I fail more often than not, but it is *the* driving force in me now, and it has allowed me to be a better father, a better husband, a better friend, a better human being, really. And unquestionably, it is the driving force for me as a photographer. I don't care what I'm shooting, or if I'm shooting for a client or not. I am always looking for something that, in its own small way, could live as a counterweight to hate.

*What artists inspire you?*

I look at many many artists, past and present, for inspiration. Some artists, whether they be photographers or painters, I look at for composition, and points of view. Others I love because of their use of color. Others still for their use of light and darkness. Sometimes it's just their spirit I love. Nadav Kander, for example, I love for his restlessness. I feel he is constantly searching to create something fresh. I don't always love his imagery, but I love his spirit of experimentation. I also love Irving Penn, for the same reason. He could photograph anything and make it art. I love Albert Watson for his black and white portraiture. There is an edge to his work that I am always drawn to. None of my imagery could ever be compared to these photographic giants, of course. Never. And I have no desire to be them. It's their spirit and passion that inspires me. My only desire is to somehow be me, whatever that may mean. It's a constant trying to strip away to be as authentic as possible. Mostly I fail. Sigh. But I keep working at it. Maybe when

I'm old and decrepit I'll get there. I also find myself looking much more to paintings than photography for inspiration these days. It doesn't matter what period or style, I'm curious by it all, as somehow I would like to take my photography in a more painterly direction. I'm not sure what that means yet, but it's what interests me most right now.

*Who among your contemporaries do you most admire?*

There are so many photographers I admire it would be impossible for me to recount, let alone remember, them all. However, here are a few I love.

For fashion photography, I love Paolo Roversi and Sarah Moon for their old-world sensibility. I think Nick Knight, the English fashion photographer, is brilliant. More recently, I've discovered a younger fashion photographer, Erik Madigan Heck. I love the way he pushes his colors around to makes his images so vibrant. All of them do beautiful, beautiful work.

For automotive photography, I love some of the work of Agnieszka Doroszewicz and Patrick Curtet. In particular, I love how they're willing to NOT show the whole car, with much of the machinery hidden in the shadows. Patrick's work for the Mercedes-Benz Vision Gran Turismo, for example, borders on art for me.

I love how Bruno Aveillan creates such impressionistic photographs by throwing glass in front the lens. I think Christian Tagliavini's whimsical reimaginations of Renaissance portraiture are magical. I greatly admire Pieter Hugo, the South African photographer. His work documenting the "Hyena Men" of Senegal, for example, is riveting. The landscape photography of Arnar Kristjanson is wonderful. His imagery of Iceland I find breathtaking. Jeremy Snell's portraiture is dark, moody, and utterly captivating.

Some photographers I love for their composition and points of view. Others I love because of their use of color. Others for their use of light and darkness. But mostly I love these artists—and the hundreds of other photographers I didn't mention—because of their seemingly endless curiosity about the world. I am inspired by their restlessness of spirit, and what I perceive to be a constant striving to make their imagery authentic, alive and true to themselves.

*What is the most difficult challenge you've had to overcome?*

For me, the most challenging part of being a photographer is sitting down to do the final post work after a shoot—as I do all of my own coloring and retouching. The only time I bring in my retoucher (who is brilliant, by the way) is when I don't have the time to fine tune a composite, which is often. Sometimes I get to a final look that I love very quickly. Other times, however, I have to really massage an image to get it to where I love it, often creating multiple versions before I'm happy. And it never gets any easier, damn it. In fact, if anything it's the opposite. I'm much more critical of my work than ever, as I am of the belief that if you aren't getting better as a photographer, you're getting worse. There is no such thing as Hovering. Ansel Adams once said, "You don't take a photograph, you make it. The negative is comparable to a composer's score. The final print, as the result of working in the darkroom, is the music." I love his analogy, and I believe it to be absolutely true. There is no such thing as a great image straight out of a camera, at least in my experience. The post work in the darkroom (whether digital or otherwise), is where the score transforms into music. It can be an extremely time-consuming, frustrating process at times, but when it all comes together, when somehow, miracle of miracles, the image starts to sing, well, I live for those



**COWBOY ON HORSE** - An image from an extensive project documenting the epic battle of this family of ranchers who are still intent on trying to save the last wild horses of North Dakota called Nokotas.



moments. They feel like little epiphanies to me. I also print every image I work on as part of my retouching process. The reason being, I always see something I need to work on when an image is printed - contrast, coloring, composition, cleanup, whatever - that I won't see on my computer monitors. In fact, I find retouching solely on a computer to be a bit of a cheat, as even a poorly retouched image can look decent on a monitor. Printing, however, is a completely different beast, and requires much more attention to detail. Plus there's something absolutely wonderful about seeing—and feeling—your final image on a beautiful stock. The image may never live on paper, but I always make it live on paper, as that (for me at least) is where a photograph truly comes to life and feels real.

*What would be your dream assignment?*

Well, I'm not sure I have a dream assignment. What I do have is a ridiculously long list of personal projects that intrigue me, many of which I collect on Pinterest - a fantastic vehicle, I find, for flushing out ideas. Most of the ideas involve traveling to the third world, such as India or Africa, or traveling to remote locations during the worst time of the year (winter), when nobody is around. Mongolia in winter. Tibet in winter. Scotland in winter. I just returned from a project in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, for example. For the most part, it was cold, raining and absolutely miserable. Everything was shut down for the season. Nobody was there. And I loved it. All the rain and fog made for some wonderfully moody imagery, which was exactly what I was looking for. With regards to these projects, I always have something very specific in mind I want to do. I never just travel willy-nilly. For me I find I need the freedom of a tightly-focused photographic brief, as it gives me time to breathe and truly explore a world I've never seen before. If I can stay still in one place for a long time, the better the stills I walk away with. For example, I went to Tanzania a few years ago with the sole purpose of shooting formal portraits of indigenous tribespeople in a popup studio—having been inspired by Irving Penn's portraits of tribespeople using his north-light tenting. We spent about ten days there, shooting hundreds of portraits, and that's all I did, period, and I couldn't have been happier with my time there (which was magical), and the results. Another project I have in the hopper right now involves going back to Jamaica to photograph formal portraits of Rastafarians. Not the rent-a-dreams, as the locals call them, that you see on the beach. But the real gurus who live in the mountains. I find their disciplined, monastic way of life inspiring. Another, more local, personal project I'm working on involves photographing soap-box derby cars. Having done a number of projects for car companies, including Fiat, Infiniti, BMW and Ford, I love the idea of shooting these toy cars in a similar way that I photograph real cars. I think that would be great fun, and lead to some really beautiful imagery. I'm also planning a project with a dear friend of mine who is a passionate motorcyclist and bespoke bike builder. I want to document his personal road odyssey through Bolivia, where the journey through these barren landscapes becomes the outward manifestation of an inward journey of self-discovery. And lastly, I'm working on a journal that I hope to publish quarterly. I'd love this publication to be a printed community, if you will, for visual inspiration. Anyway, the world is big and beautiful, and I just want to get a good look at it before it gets dark—and this is just my way of doing that.

*What do you value most?*

Integrity. Kindness. Persistence. Patience. Humility.

*What interests do you have outside of your work?*

Well, when you're running your own production company, you're pretty much working all the time. I'm either finishing up a project, prepping for an upcoming project, working up treatments for a possible project, promoting my work through portfolio reviews and advertising, reworking my website, the list goes on and on and on. And if I'm not working, I'm thinking about work. It's endless. But that's okay. I feel blessed to be able to do something I love with every fiber of my heart. *And* I get to do it with my wife, who also happens to be my Executive Producer and the business end of our company. She's brilliant. I call her the Fifth Beatle, as she's the own who gets no credit for my success, but deserves much of it. The only thing I do outside of work when I am home—and I do it religiously—is yoga. For me it is essential to my wellbeing, and I can't imagine my life without it. It's the closest to church I get.

*How do you define success?*

When I was younger and just starting out as a commercial photographer, success meant financial success - of course. Success was also tied to acknowledgement - winning awards and getting press for my work. However, as I grew older, and more comfortable in my skin and more confident in my abilities, my definition of success has become more personal, if you will, and more about what can I do to contribute, in my own small way, to the world around me. Is this the best I can be? Can I be stronger? Kinder? More compassionate? A better father, husband, citizen of the planet? Can photography act as a counterweight to hate? Can my camera be an instrument for change? How the hell do I do that? Stuff like that. For at the end of all my days (and stealing a few words from Maya Angelou), I would like to be known as a man who taught to be a human being. Don't get me wrong, I still need to be financially successful, as I have mouths to feed and a mortgage to pay. And I still love the accolades that come from doing good work. Absolutely. I'm a Leo after all. However, after all these years, I don't feel so attached to or defined by financial success or acknowledgement.

*What advice would you have for students starting out today?*

If a student asked me for advice, this is what I would say, as cliché as this will all sound: Don't be in such a panic to figure everything out. Slow it down. Breathe, kid, breathe. It takes a lifetime to create a life. Really. Embrace the unknown. Let life surprise you. Take it one step at a time. Be persistent. Be patience. Be gentle with yourself. And please, please ignore what everyone else is saying and doing, which means putting down your cell phone, turning off the TV and avoiding social media like the plague. Comparison is a direct path to despair. You are not in competition with anyone. Just work your butt off to outdo your past, not other people, and your life and your work—regardless of whether it's photography or not—will reveal itself, I promise.

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*See his Graphis Master Portfolio on [graphis.com](http://graphis.com).*



**HABIB - This is Habib, a two-year-old peregrine falcon that I photographed in Abu Dhabi as part of a series on falcons. These raptors are extraordinary creatures. The fastest animals on the planet, they have been clocked at over 280 mph during their dives (called stoops). To protect their eyes during their stoops, falcons have a third eyelid that spreads tears and clears debris - basically it's nature's version of goggles. And the speed and energy of their stoops are so great that they allow falcons to deliver instantaneous knock-out blows to their prey. Anything being hunted by these birds doesn't stand a chance. Used by the desert Bedouin well before Christ was born, falconry is now considered the sport of kings in Arab cultures. Is it any wonder that these prized falcons fetch as much as two million dollars?**







**MAASAI WARRIORS** - Part of a larger campaign of portraits of indigenous tribespeople, Maasai warriors are in charge of protecting livestock from predators and enemies. Since the Maasai is a cow culture, and wealth is based on the number of cow one has, being a warrior is a vital role within the community. To become a warrior, one must first be circumcised (usually between the ages of 7 and 16), the idea being that if one can endure the excruciating pain of circumcision without flinching, one is brave enough to risk his life to protect their herds. Shot in Tanzania for Smithsonian Magazine.

I AM ALWAYS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING THAT, IN ITS OWN SMALL WAY, COULD LIVE AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO HATE . Christopher Wilson, *Photographer*







**SAND BOARDING, ABU DHABI** - Anyone who thinks that sand boarding is like snow boarding is delusional. Sand boarding is nothing like snow boarding. You can't turn on sand. You can't stop on sand. You can't do anything on sand except go straight down and crash. That's it. Period. And man, does it hurt when you crash, because, unlike snow, sand is basically cement only a tad softer. So you can

imagine how our poor talent, Gleb Osipov, must have felt after a day of hurling himself off these giant sand dunes in the middle of the Rub' al Khali desert. I swear I heard bones breaking a few times. But Gleb just bounced up after every wipeout, dusted himself off, climbed up the dune and did it all again. He was a trooper. Insane, but a trooper nonetheless.





**BLIND SOLDIER** - To help bring awareness to the Lakeshore Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps disabled veterans, I was commissioned to photograph this soldier who was blinded and scarred in a horrific bomb blast. A triathlete and an inspiration to countless disabled vets, he has been recognized

personally by President Barrack Obama. To visualize both the darkness that surrounds him and the light that emanates from this joyous man, we built a black north-light tenting (as inspired by Irving Penn) and I photographed him emerging out of the black into the sun. No lights were used other than God's light.