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Hamburg / Überseequartier

UNTER GRUND / UNDERGROUND

PHOTOGRAPHER

MICHA PAWLITZKI

FACTS:

PHOTOGRAPHER: MICHA PAWLITZKI

CAMERA: PHASE ONE 645DF+

DIGITAL BACK: P45+

FROM THE BOOK UNTER GRUND / UNDERGROUND

Since the age of 15 Micha Pawlitzki has had a fascination with photography. His first work was published when he was still finishing his doctorate in Business Administration. With his doctorate complete in 2004 Micha, turned his passion into his profession and ever since he has worked as a photographer from his office outside Munich, Germany.

Micha is mainly known for his work with Book & Calendar publications, large format fine art prints for businesses as well as private collectors, and for teaching photo workshops around the world. When it comes to fulfilling these different projects, Micha says his aim is to “photograph very clear, intense images with a strong graphic design. I want my images to radiate my deep fascination with nature and culture. They must also show my concern with, and devotion to, technical perfection.”

Like most others, Micha Pawlitzki always considered subway stations as uninspiring and unpleasant places. However, 20 months ago Micha got the idea to capture the most exciting and interesting stations in Germany for a large format coffee-table book. After 18 months of hard work, long nights, a few unpleasant experiences and hundreds of visits to the German underground, Micha is now ready to publish a beautiful insight into some of the most architectural inspiring and unique stations of Germany. This is his story:

What was the thought process behind the project?

While researching another project I came across some pictures of German subway stations. I was immediately entranced by the varied and imaginative architecture that I saw in those photographs. Subway stations had been for me, up until that point, only unpleasant and hectic places of transit to get

from point A to point B. Spontaneously, I had an idea for a large format book. I wanted to publish the most exciting, coolest, and the most innovative subway stations in the country. It was important to me to completely focus on the architecture and keep all commuters out of the pictures. I immediately called my publisher, who was also completely fascinated by the idea. After a 15-minute call the book was a done deal. My publisher gave me free reign from the beginning in regards to the size and number of pages of the book, as well as the time frame – it was only important that the images were unique, new, exciting, and that all German ci-ties with subways were represented.

What has been the physical process in creating the book?

I worked intensely for 18 months on my book UNTER GRUND. I visited all of the German subway stations, always looking for the most promising and photogenic. I then photographed the very best at night. I worked between 10pm and 2am, sometimes even until 5am, when I was photographing heavily used stations that only had few hours or no “out of work hours”. It was important to me to photograph all stations completely empty and without people. If you visit these stations during the day it’s hard to appreciate the architecture because of all the commuters, incoming and leaving trains, the noise and hectic pace. Photographing the same stations at night the architectural impression is much stronger.

I am always very concerned about achieving the highest quality in my photography, which is why everything has been captured with my Phase One P45+ camera, and various Phase One lenses. I used a tripod on all images because of the long exposure times. Now, in early October 2013, my 256-page book UNTER GRUND will be presented and

featured at the Frankfurt Book Fair in a lavish layout, beautifully printed by EDITION PANORMA. I have already published many books and calendars in renowned publishing houses and have won many prizes – but this project was special. All those associated with the book from the publisher to the art director, the graphic designer to those supplying the text, and right down to the PR person, worked with particular dedication.

We discussed controversial as well as constructive opinions on layout, sequencing of images etc. for as long as it took to find perfect solutions. What was particularly important and good about this process was that quality was the main concern. This might be the reason behind the great media response the book has received even before its release date. We have been featured in German newspapers and magazines like Spiegel, ZEIT, WELT, all of which have

showed sections of the book online as well as in their printed versions. Besides that we are very excited about the large format exhibition that is planned.

Which image was the most difficult to capture, and how did you work through it?

During the 18 months there was not just one particular image that was hard to photograph, but rather the recurrent problem with each station (even deep into the night) where commuters were waiting for trains. This is something I definitely wanted to keep out of my photos in order to fully concentrate on the architecture. Obtaining permits was also difficult in some cities. Finally, working late at night was at times a real test of nerves. After a few unpleasant and dangerous encounters at the beginning

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Munich / Marienplatz



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of the project I worked with bodyguards to be safe. In the end everything worked out and I am very happy that I was able to work for a year and a half without any real problems.

As you mention, subway stations are often known to be dirty, unpleasant places packed with people, but your images are colorful, clean, beautiful and deserted, how did you achieve this?

Yes, that was my prejudice to begin with as well and the opinion of most people: Subway stations are dirty, boring and dangerous. No doubt there are ugly, boring stations in each city in Germany (and in the world, for that matter) but there are also an increasing number of dreamy, newly built or renovated subway stations that are light, airy and brilliantly designed architectural marvels. Stations that seem more like modern art galleries or atriums than subway stations. In some stations like “Hafencity” or “Überseequartier” in Hamburg one almost becomes speechless when exiting. Those two stations as well as “Marienplatz” and



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Munich / Westfriedhof

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“Westfriedhof” in Munich are among the most innovative and beautiful in all of Germany.

To keep the waiting passengers out of my pictures was in the end a matter of my persuasive powers. I simply talked to the passengers and explained my project to them. Without hesitation most of them moved out of my pictures. In this way they helped me to place a station – something common and everyday – into an unknown context, without any distraction. This kind of photography is central for me. It is a “school for seeing”. I would like to reduce the common, everyday and often overlooked to its basic elements, so that nothing diverts attention away from its beauty and originality in order to allow it to unfold and make a deep impression.