

Apogee Photo Magazine

An Interview with Fine Art Photographer, Claude Peschel Dutombe

by M. Arlene Rafiq

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Claude Peschel Dutombe, referred to as Mr. Claude, grew up in Germany and comes from a family of film makers. He is the son of a playwright and film director, Lothar Dutombe and film editor, Birgit Peschel. Claude's world view was shaped by his experiences while in Berlin and Munich and his various travels to the US, Russia, Spain and Asia. His international experiences have given him a natural inclination towards the arts from a broader perspective, so he is thus better able to see and suggest innovative solutions with ease.

Now living in Bangkok, Thailand, Claude has absorbed the Asian culture and has recently started to place his interests on a new project called "FrozenZen". It is a growing collection of several fine art photography series created to serve the needs of interior designers and architects working on high end hospitality and residential projects.

Using highly creative techniques, Claude's Asian influenced art collection reflects the simplicity of form and a calming sensuality often described as Zen-like. His refined sense of style, color and choice of subjects will definitely attract the most discriminating art connoisseurs.

Arlene Rafiq: When did your interest in photography and the fine arts first begin?

Mr. Claude: I was exposed to art at a very young age. As early as five years old, I accompanied my mother to her place of work and would spend hours scanning through huge baskets of cutout film strips. From then on I knew what I was going to be and had pursued that ambition with the support of my family. At age nine, I was already taking photographs and processing them myself in my homemade dark room.

AF: How did you discover that you would have the creative talent for art?

Mr. C: I would say that it probably came through my curiosity and passion for any kind of artistic performances, shows and exhibitions. As a teenager, while my buddies went to the discos to have a great time, I found that I would much rather spend my time watching a theater performance or visiting an art exhibition.

AF: How did your career unfold?

Mr. C: I started, like many other photographers, working as a freelance assistant to well known commercial photographers in Berlin, Munich and Hamburg. I would book the models and



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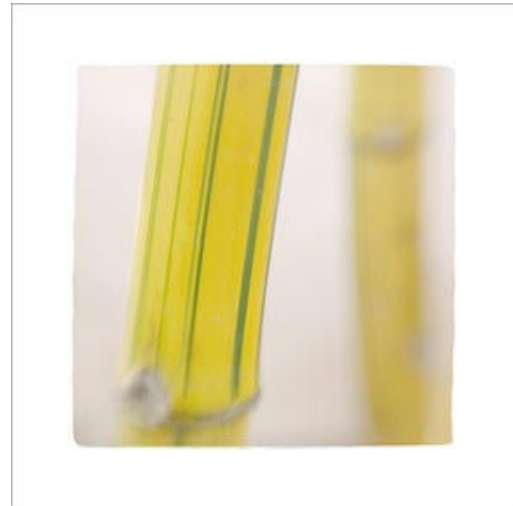
prepare the studio for the photo shoots, whether it was setting up the lighting, making sure all the equipment was in the right place or just working to meet their expected needs.

While still in art school, I also did an internship for several months, and during that time, I was afforded the opportunity to do commercial photography on my own. Photography is quite an expensive course, so in order to finance my classes I took retouching jobs - that was the start of my image editing exposure. There, I teamed up with very talented editors and soon I was becoming an expert in the field.

As I was just beginning to launch my career in both photography and image editing, I was offered a well-timed opportunity to come to Asia. My sense of adventure was the driving force to accepting the position. The occasion presented itself when I met a nobleman who was looking for a partner to run his planned image editing workshop in Bangkok. Together with two other partners, we formed a company that is now considered “the experts in image editing”.



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AF: Who were the biggest inspirations for your career?

Mr. C: I have the good fortune to be carrying the DNA of my parents, who exposed me to art at an early age. In a sense, those people from whom I learned the most when I started out were already the giants in the industry.

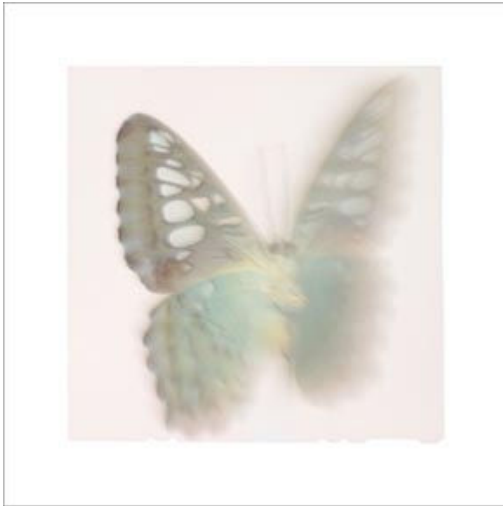
I also had the distinct pleasure of working with a famous American artist and photographer, Shimon Attie, on his big projects in Berlin, Hamburg and Dresden in the early 90's. It was during those photo shoots that I learned about the importance of developing an artistic concept first, only then to be followed by the technical realization.

Because we also seek inspiration from within ourselves, I believe that living in a cultural environment, completely different from the one in which I grew up, has changed me as a person and my approach to how I look at things around me. In my continuous quest for new inspiration, I have found that a lot has been derived from simply being an observer - familiarizing myself with a unique culture and society.

AF: What do you enjoy most about your work?

Mr. C: The excitement I feel when a planned project comes to a final stage and you are about to realize if the concept worked out as you imagined it would. There are times when you've created something that has succeeded beyond your expectations and that makes you walk on “cloud nine”. Then, there are times when something you created turns out very different from what you

visualized in the beginning. Those moments can sometimes result in great disappointments, but they can also be a wonderful surprise!



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AF: Tell us about your latest project?

Mr. C: I am in the middle of a new project which has developed into something very stimulating, because I never really know exactly what the end result will be. I am freezing various objects in big blocks of ice and then letting them melt down. While the ice is melting, the subject changes by the second – the shape, color and light reflections keep evolving. One shooting session of the very same object can take hours, as I am photographing during the entire meltdown process.

AF: What is “FrozenZen”? When and how did you start it?

Mr. C: “FrozenZen” started in late 2006 with a consignment project. A friend of mine asked me to create a few art pieces for his newly opened medical clinics in Nashville, Tennessee. He suggested botanical themes as large giclee prints on canvas.

When the project was completed and hung in the actual space, the response from visiting interior designers was tremendous. Because of those acclamations, our thoughts then led us to taking it a step further. We would develop several series which would appeal to the needs of architects and designers.

”FrozenZen” was born and is now a partnership between myself and my friend David Starko, who initiated the first set of work.

Fall 2007 brought collaborations with “Editions Limited”, which is one of the major art publishers in the industry. This synergy will provide us with extensive exposure at the Art décor and hospitality tradeshow.

AF: How did you come up with the name of “FrozenZen”?

Mr. C: We were looking for a catchy name which relates to the artwork, but also leaves some room for mystery. When people are looking at the various images, we constantly would hear describing words such as; calming, simplicity, soothing compositions,

relaxing and balanced. All those words can easily relate to the Zen philosophy, which is based on meditation practices. Also, the word “Zen” connects quickly to Asian cultures and since all the photographic works of art do relate to Asia and have been created there, the name truly applied.

While we were brainstorming to find the right name for the project, I remembered a famous quote by R.H. Blyth that had I read many years ago: “Art is frozen Zen”.

As the act of photographing is very often described as freezing a moment in time, we immediately agreed that the name, “FrozenZen”, brought all of the descriptive elements we wanted into the perfect connection with one another.

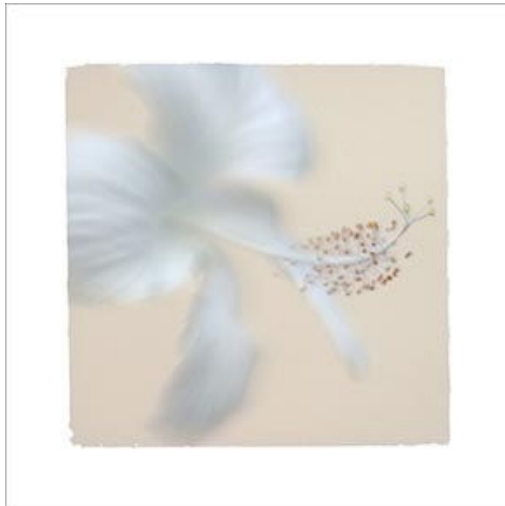


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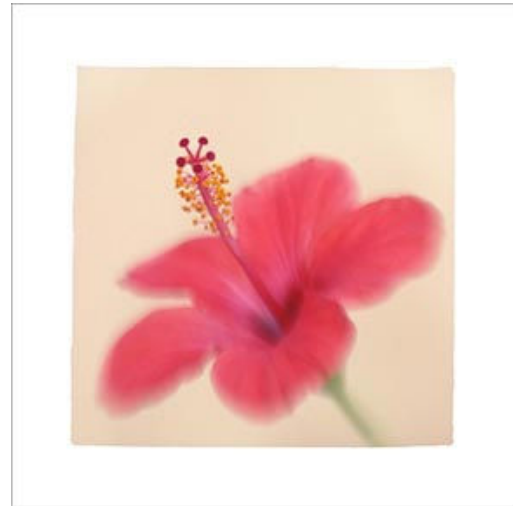
AF: What has been your greatest challenge?

Mr. C: On a personal level, I have learned to let go of a mind set that has been inherent in me from day one and I am learning to experience the present without making comparisons based on what I think may be better or worse.

In terms of my photography experiences, I would probably have to say being involved in a professional fashion shoot in the streets of Hanoi, without any legal permission from the communist authorities.



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AF: If you had to choose, what subject is held dearest to your heart and why?

Mr. C: 6 a.m. - Wandering through the streets of a city I have never previously visited, photographing people starting their day-to-day activities in their familiar surroundings. I call it the “moments of innocence”, when everyone is still very relaxed or too caught up in their personal activities to care about a stranger with a camera in his hand.

AF: Artistically speaking, where would you like to see yourself in say, 10 or 20 years?

Mr. C: I hope that I will have the chance to continue my constant exploration of new places and

experiences - both provide me endless new stories and subjects to quench my creative thirst. In other words, as long as I don't see myself sitting down and having to think hard on what project to work on next, I will be artistically satisfied and happy.



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**Samples of Claude's artwork can be found at
following web-sites:**

www.frozenzen.net
www.claude-peschel-dutombe.com

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