

Photographic alchemy

As a photographer, Stephen Sack likes to define himself as an alchemist. In his work the camera takes on an added function, beyond a mere extension of the eye, where a realm of magic reveals fantastic images snatched from memory bestowed with their own life and aesthetic dimension beyond time.

Our meeting with Stephen Sack couldn't take place in a more appropriate setting... We find him surrounded by artefacts and two cameras stood within the bowels of the national archaeological museum in Lisbon. As we stumble into this scenario, the distinct sensation rushes over us, of entering a world beyond the confines of reality... An aura of mysticism irradiates from the photographer, even before he has the chance to show us his work. and as Stephen Sack, the man, introduces us to his photographs, we can start to peel away the layers and uncover Stephen Sack, the artist...

Born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1955, Stephen Sack was not yet a photographer when he left the Land of Dreams. A student of economics - he could be an economist today, if he wanted - Sack arrived in Brussels with a scholarship to study European Economic History. But this, as he could later prove, was not to be the stuff of his dreams... Having finished his studies in 1977 he was awarded another scholarship, again in Belgium to study Photography and History of Art. With the old continent as his base, Sack was given the opportunity to come face to face with a passion that has formed his life ever since: photography. "This was a very important time for me, it was then that I chose to start a new life. I had been always been looking for something more intense, more profound, something that made sense, and that's just what I found!" for Stephen Sack photography acted as a launch pad from which to discover a world of new horizons... I'm like a kind of detective, searching madly for the original source much like a scientist or an archaeologist. I'm an alchemist, in as much that I use my intuition as a guide in the transmutation process of the objects I photograph. I search for the emotion and wonder that an image can arouse. I try to create a moment that is magical, fascinating and incredible!"

Sack chooses his words carefully when asked to define his work. It is "a kind of archaeological fantasy or of science fiction" he says, "where the science is photography and the fiction is the object." Photography works as documentation of my imagination, I use it to bring out the mystery of objects. "A clear desire to capture a philosophical interpretation of the various objects he photographs is present throughout the artist's work. The object - be it a coin, an inscription on a gravestone, or a medieval clock - is transformed by time and deterioration, subject to a process of metamorphosis that can reveal its essence. And this is the very pith of what Sack documents in his photographs. His role as a photographer is to substitute the lens for human vision. Using photography as a medium, the artist's imagination provides the magical alchemy needed to unveil the essence of things. Over the years Stephen Sack has studied gravestone inscriptions, gargoyles, coins, engravings, medieval clocks, stereographs, and many other relics, to form of works such *The Chromosomic Memory* or *The Metal Mirror* which explore the themes of dream, fantasy and myth. A special interest in ancient artifacts and principally in the way they deteriorate over time is clearly identifiable throughout the artist's work. Whereas archaeologists and historians give an informative interpretation of artifacts

and events, Sack uses historical remains to discover rich aesthetic possibilities and a symbolic meaning in the pieces finds. " I take a philosophical interest in objects. I try to uncover the mystery surrounding determined pieces, their inner expression, their mysticism, rather than their true history or existence." Sack's gift as an artist is undeniable, using photography as a means to transform simple objects into images of superior spirituality, lifting them to a state of greater excellence.

The photographer does not appreciate the object in itself, solely for its aesthetic qualities. The image he captures is the result of a process of symbolic understanding, memory and recognition, where the instrument of revelation and transformation is nothing less than time. Sack believes that each object deteriorates according to its essence. From the moment he photographs it, it ceases to be a representation of mere decorative worth, for the most part inert and ignored. After capturing the aura of the object, the artist manages to give it a new dimension, a new life.

For Sack the photographic process is merely technical, belittling its relevance and emphasising rather the imaginative, alchemical process involved in creating an image. " The pieces that inspires me are magical, symbolic and what I would consider unique and perfect when I manage to see in them the ability to project the images that I first visualised. First I image, then I look for the object that conceptualises my original idea. hen I find an object that causes the same emotional impact that I had initially, in this moment I have no doubt that this is the object I have been looking for. And so I hope that the process that leads form my initial ecstasy to what really counts - the final moment, when the public manages to feel the same emotional impact that I felt .

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