

Jackie Ranken

Firstly, please tell us a bit about yourself and your photographic journey? How did you get started with photography and how many years have you been doing photography?

At the age of sixteen my father, Richard Nell gave me my first SLR camera, a Yashika TL. Dad was a keen amateur photographer with his own B&W darkroom. He taught me how to print and process my own film and then spent many hours with me discussing composition and cropping. Within six months I had my first job as a race photographer with a firm called Bradley Photographers (still in operation today). I photographed greyhound races and then later on, horse races. It was initially my weekend job but once I finished High School it turned into a full time career.

I was now learning how to hand print colour photographs in a colour darkroom. I learnt how to 'see colour bias' and colour balance prints. This involved making test prints of a negative, balancing the colour before the full print was sent through the processor. The processor took about 16 minutes so six enlargers were working at a time with a different race meetings in each. The long hours of concentration on colour and composition under the enlarger were a great foundation for me.

Two years later I moved to Sydney to stretch my wings and to learn more about the world. I applied for work at an advertising firm which has its' own process lab called Colour Dimensions (it was an E6 lab for processing transparency film). I was employed once again as a colour lab technician, but when clients' work was slow



I had time to experiment in the darkroom and process my own work and I was also allowed to play around in the photographic studio. I was a keen photographer during my years in Sydney. Photographing musicians and friends. Unfortunately the opportunities for female photographers in advertizing or fashion were few, it was a male dominated arena. (Not like today).

What I really wanted to be was an artist. About three years later I moved back to my home town- Goulburn, NSW Australia. I found work again with Bradley Photographers while at the same time studying ceramics and painting at the local Technical College. My life was full. I had adventures and moved from one experience to the next. One adventure found me in Perth, studying Fine Arts at Western Australia's Institute of Technology. I found work as a photographer, photographing people in restaurants, but became homesick so I decided to move back to Goulburn to start my own business.



Above: Family Photo by Richard Nell my father. I am 12 years old.

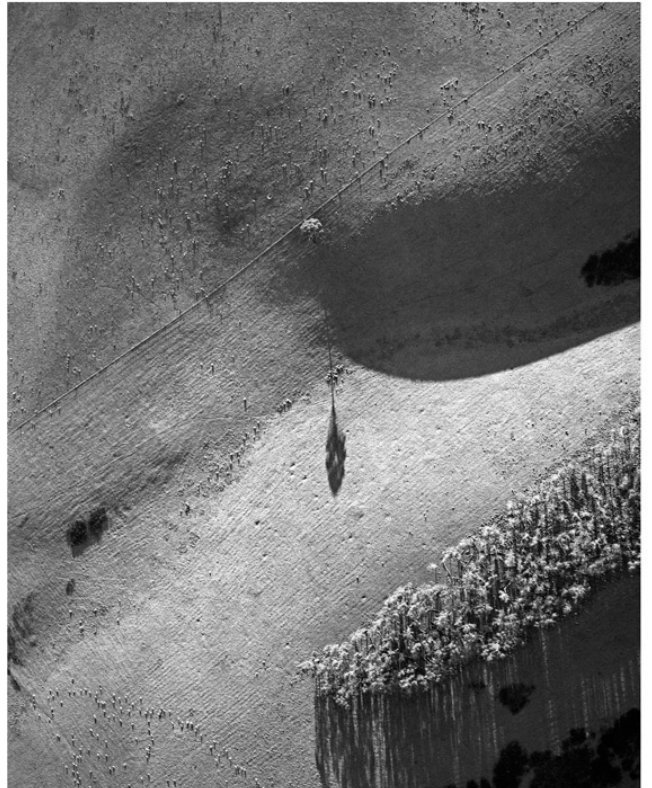
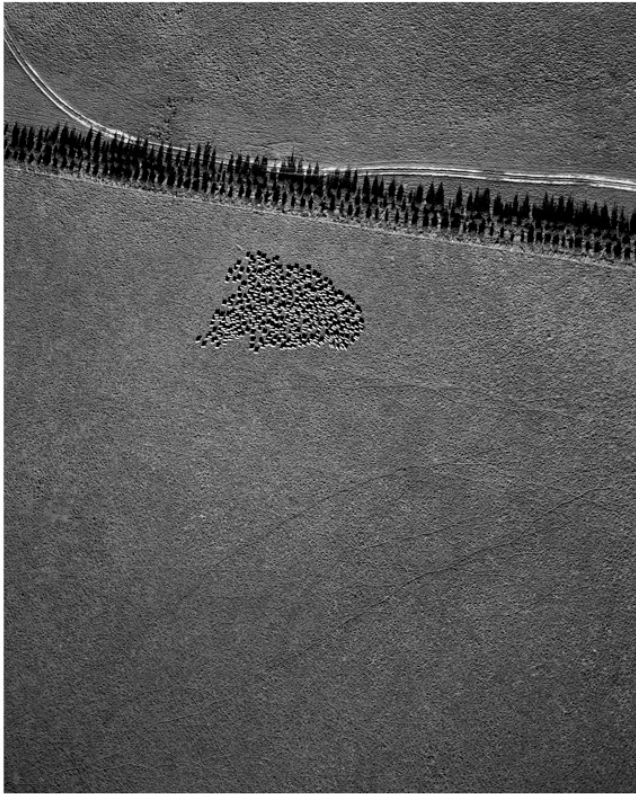
Initially, I modeled my business from what I had just learnt at my last job in Perth - Photographing people in restaurants. Photographing on a Friday and Saturday night in Goulburn proved to be a good mini business before digital photography came along, there was not many expensive overheads and I was working for myself. It gave me the funds to finish my Associate Diploma in Creative Arts (in Goulburn), where I majored in Ceramics and Fine Art Painting.

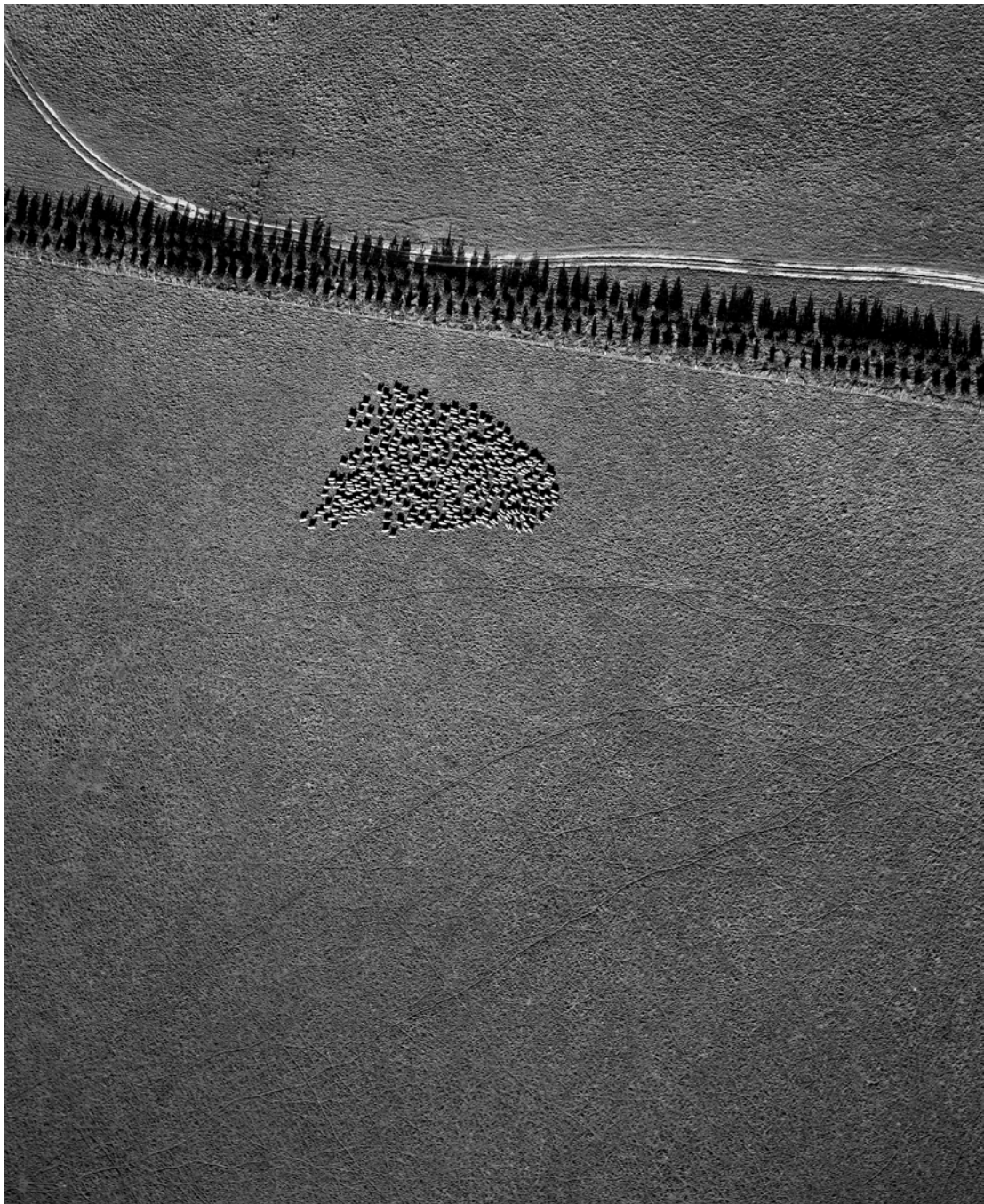
As the years went by, my photographic business diversified into wedding photography, portraiture, commercial and editorial work. I was living in a small country town where it was necessary to be a jack or all trades. I had my own Black and White darkroom and kept the passion for photography alive by exhibiting my personal

work. The first exhibition was of "Street Photography" and then my most important exhibition was of 'Aerial Abstracts'. (It was this body of work that won me Canon AIPP Professional Photographer of the Year, 2x AIPP Landscape Photographer of the Year and a 2nd place in the Canon World Press Awards in 2003).

I was basically a self-taught businesswoman and photographer. I learnt what I needed to know to do the job and I tried really hard to do the job well. Joining the AIPP (Aust. Institute of Professional Photography) helped with this process. (This was when I started to enter the photography awards). I was in my thirties; I had two beautiful children and was helping to build a home for them.

I have now been a photographer for over thirty years.





What does photography mean to you?

Put simply, I find photography connects me to my creative self like no other medium. When I go out into the landscape I always go with my camera. It's my zen. I then 'find myself' through this photographic

experience. I no longer shoot commercially, preferring to leave the commercial clients for my husband, Mike. Instead, I work on publicizing our www.qccp.co.nz website, printing my images and writing.



How do other people view your artworks?

I would think that people look at my art work as an expression of me, it's not to everyone's taste. They bring their personal experiences along with them as they view the work. Either liking the work or not, sometimes the work makes them smile, that's good. I don't ask for more. I think that once an image is printed and on the wall it has its own life.

I have a gallery in Wanaka, New Zealand called The Picture Lounge represents my work.

Prints can be bought directly from me. This year I was a core program artist in the Ballarat International Foto Biennale <http://ballaratfoto.org/2013-festival/> . I have another exhibition planned for April 2014 in Brisbane at <http://www.fotofrenzy.com.au/spaces/exhibit-foto-frenzy>







Having won many awards in NZ and in Australia, how important are competitions to your creative process and/or to your journey as a photographer and an artist? Irrespective of whether you win or not, what do you hope to gain from each competition?

I initially entered the Canon Australian Professional Photography Awards (APPA) in 1995 when I was a young professional photographer photographing weddings and family portraiture. Joining this Institute taught me how to become a better photographer and a better businesswoman. I learnt how to market myself and I used the kudos gained from winning awards as personal validation that I was on the right track as well as validation to my customers. I was helping to support my family through these years so it was important for my Photography business to make an income. The long term benefit is the wonderful relationship that I have built up with Canon, in Australia and New Zealand. I am now a Canon Master (along with Mike, my

husband). We are ambassadors for Canon, they believe in us and we believe in them. This helps both our businesses. The awards that I have won over the years has gained me the honour title of Grand Master in the New Zealand and Australian, Institutes of Professional Photography. At this stage I am the only woman to have both titles.

The awards were meant to be a way for photographers to push their creativity. I certainly used it to express myself and to challenge the judges as to what a landscape image is. I remember the first year I entered a landscape image with a kitchen utensil thrown into it, a judge commented "why would someone ruin a perfectly good landscape by throwing something into it?". Other judges saw the uniqueness of the idea and enjoyed the aesthetic. Either way, from there on entering into competitions was a personal challenge to push my own boundaries.

What would you say are some of your most memorable achievements and why?

My most memorable photographic related experience was when I won the Australian Professional Photographer of the Year in 2002. This experience pulled me out of the back blocks in Goulburn and put me in the spot-light. It helped me to believe in my dreams and take responsibility for my goals. In one day I was flown from one side of Australia to the other, invited onto the stage and embraced

by my fellow photographers. The next morning I was talking 'live' on morning television. If I could do that then I could do much more. I have now won the New Zealand title of Professional Photographer of the Year twice.

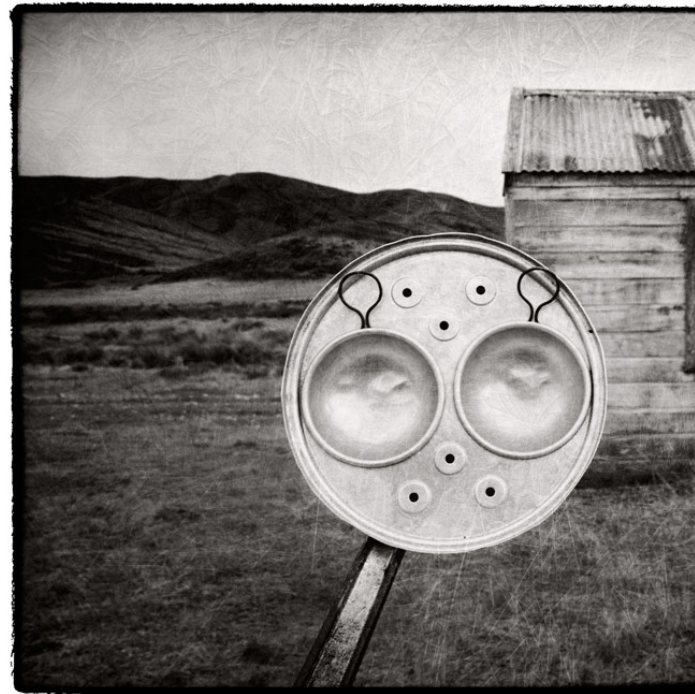


What do you feel is the key factor to you being able to constantly create award winning images? Do you ever have photographer's block? How do you find inspirations and creativity?

One of the key factors in being able to constantly produce awards winning images is to make sure you are out photographing as much as possible. Then have some one like Mike Langford (my husband and fellow Canon Master) to critique the work to offer encouragement and support-who I am. I also think I have an advantage because I print my own work.

You are a Canon Master. Can you share with us what that title entails, and how it feels to be recognized by Canon?

I am a Canon Master because I believe in their company. I have been using their camera equipments ever since I won Canon Australian Institute of Professional Photography 'Photographer of the Year' in 2002. They offer many opportunities for amateur photographers and well as Pro photographers to improve their photography and be inspired. See what's happening with the Canon Photo5 competition , the main prize is an all expenses paid Landscape Photography workshop with Mike and myself in Queenstown. We both help each other to grow and foster creativity in photography.





Your award winning images are breathtaking, elegant, and yet simple, with very minimum editing. What is your philosophy on post-production, and its role, if any, in the creative process?

Thank you for the feedback. It's always a buzz when someone appreciates my work. I use Photoshop when I need to. I like to use my camera skills to make as best an image that I can 'in camera'. Then I use Photoshop to take out any distracting highlights and re-adjust my crop if needed. I like to add subtle texture when the sky is white, this texture is of an image of frozen ground. The most important element is to make an image that has the correct aesthetics. I don't think that 'photoshopping' is cheating. Photographic manipulation has been going on since the dawn of photography.

When I am printing an image to enter an 'award' or competition I will print the image well ahead of time, I will tape it up on the wall for a few days and judge it in different moods and with different light. If there are problems I fix them.

What programs do you use to create your artworks?

Nik Software - in Particular Silver Efex Pro - is a great way to make Monochrome images from colour. I make my own custom settings and use those as starting points for the conversion. I also use my own custom made borders on my final art prints.

Is black and white your preferred method of editing? Do you see the world in black and white while you are photographing?

I often prefer to shoot in monochrome at the time of capture because it allows



me to 'see' the image as monochrome on the LCD screen. I shoot a combination of Raw and Jpeg. The Raw file will return to colour in the computer and sit along side the monochrome Camera jpeg. The Jpeg is what I call the 'live' performance, it reminds me of how I felt at the time of capture. I then reprocess Raw file back to monochrome although some times the Jpeg does the job with minimal corrections needed.



**You seem to do a lot of teaching as well.
Is this something that you enjoy?**

Teaching photography is part of 'what I do'. It helps pay the bills and gives me the freedom to make photographs for myself (without the thought of having to images to sell to a particular client) . The feedback from students is that I am a good teacher. This is because I care about photography, I enjoy teaching people and I am patient.

Initially I was teaching at Illarwarra Institute of Technology in Goulburn, NSW. Black and White 'Art Photography' in a traditional darkroom with film. Then Mike Langford (my husband) and myself moved to New Zealand and set up Queenstown Centre for Creative Photography, www.qccp.co.nz.

We have backing from Canon and offer students the use of Canon EOS digital cameras while on ½ day to 4 day workshops. Digital is the best way to learn, we teach people to use manual so that they can take control and use their camera more creatively. We can check their progress and offer advices when appropriate.

Do you worry about giving away your secrets?

I don't worry about giving away my secrets. To be open and free is a good way to live life. The best way for people to learn is the face-to-face experience. To be in a workshop with like-minded individuals, learning and sharing is the way to go. Then to take this knowledge away and explore what it means to you in your own life.





What is your typical thought process when you take a photo? Is there anything that you try to pay special attention to? What kind of scenery attracts your attention?

When I am shooting I try to simply zone in on what I am seeing and how I feel about it. I like to forget about what ever is happening and enjoy the space and time I have to myself, I enjoy this time and allow the 'creative process' to unfold. I look to discover new ways of seeing, while practising the old. Many of my favourite images arrived in this way.



It seems from your landscape photography that you don't necessary look for the "Grand" scenery to create beautiful work. What do you think is the most essential component of a great landscape photograph?

The most important element for me is emotion. Emotion in Monochrome is mostly is expressed in light, texture and shapes. Then it's the idea that's important: Why you are photographing and what you are trying to communicate with the viewer.





Do you think its possible for everyone, particularly when they are just on holiday, to be able to capture beautiful photographs that combine art and landscape photography?

Art and landscape photography for me work along side each other. When Mike and myself go on holiday we plan it around photography: What we want to photograph and at what times we want to be there. It's best to be up early before the regular tourist and when the light is more interesting and there are less people.







Do you have any tips for our readers if they would like to enter into competitions - not only how to prepare their images, but also to prepare themselves for the results?

- Be emotive
- Composed images with care
- Think about what you want your image to say and then help it say it with editing if necessary.
- Prepare your files and make sure you control any distracting areas, high lights and areas at the edge of frame that may distract the viewer.
- For online entries. Make sure your image looks good small as a thumb nail as well as great when enlarged.

Other Tips

- Use Live View
- Photograph with like-minded people
- Give yourself time to play
- Learn the craft and study the past
- Photograph what you love
- Use a visual diary to write down your ideas

What is next for Jackie Ranken? Do you have any future plans for your photography?

More books, more workshops and more exhibitions. We are just about to print our second "Field guide to Creative Landscape Photography'. We are self publishing this book, it will be available through selective NZcamera stores and through our website.

We would like to set up a Photographers Gallery and Conference Centre for Photography in Queenstown, New Zealand and are looking for people to back the idea. This is the long term dream and why our company is called Queenstown Centre for Creative Photography. You can find out more from our website: www.qccp.co.nz

For more of Jackie's artworks, please click on the link below.

<http://www.jackieranken.co.nz/>