

Robb Report

THE APPRECIATION OF EXCELLENCE

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND



THE SUMMER ISSUE

Inside the colourful world of
photographer George Byrne

Volume 3, Number 4 \$19.95
Summer 2019

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ISSN 2206-9569



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FEATURES



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In Living Colour

Take a walk through
LA with acclaimed
Australian photographer
George Byrne - a man
crafting abstract beauty
from what he sees
around him.



In Living Colour

A painterly dance of colour and light, the repositioning of the urban landscape as abstract beauty - introducing the alluring work of Australian photographer George Byrne.

by Richard Clune

The thing is, if you put me in front of the world's most beautiful buildings, I probably wouldn't know what to do with them."

Australian photographer George Byrne is downplaying things, and then some. Because his talent is obvious - albeit a talent that sees him illuminate, in abstract and brilliant colour, the uneventful or the unknown, finding and framing beauty in street scenes oft-overlooked: a carpark wall; a lamppost; signage; a pool ring.

It is simple and yet it resonates well beyond the captured moment, his lens delivering a beautiful and bold romp through urban space and shadow - Jeffrey Smart-esque visions pierced by rainbows or colour and largely devoid of people.

Los Angeles has been the 43 year-old's making. The Sydney kid who rode an artistic bent - music, fine art, photography, words - to Sydney College Of The Arts before a want to travel, to explore beyond his Balmain upbringing, delivered Byrne to the alleged City of Angels.

"I guess I'd always had this sense that I would live somewhere else for a period of time," Byrne explains. "And I was very sure I was going to do that all through my 20s, it was just a matter of when and how and where."

It was a decade later - at 33 - that he flew for the States and an original New York base, a city he'd come to know a little thanks to his sister, the actress Rose (yes, that Rose Byrne - *Two Hands*, *Bridesmaids*, *Insidious*, more).

"At that time LA was just this vast mystery to me, I'd visited here and there





“I clicked with the LA landscape. And I started to explore the urban aspects I’d been interested in since I started taking photos.”

and each time I came I returned with a different feeling of the city as I’d be staying in different areas, all over the place, from Venice to Culver City to Studio City... And I always questioned, ‘what is LA?’”

An offer to play some music in a band - he’s always been musical, played in various outfits and released music along the way - meant an eventual move to the west coast.

“I was spread pretty thin in those early years, I’ll be honest - doing music and working in a cafe. I mean there was a lot of different jobs. But being that way also enabled me to focus - to think about things and what I wanted to do, to try and find what I wanted.”

Byrne has always dabbled with visuals and played about with cameras. And so he started to snap what he saw around him. But film was expensive and so he also shot on what was then a new and accessible device, the iPhone. Social media, then in its infancy, acted as a canvas on which to promote his take on LA. People responded positively and it gave him further thought.

“It kind of all clicked organically. I guess I clicked with the LA landscape too and I started to explore the urban aspects I’d been interested in since I started taking photos. And suddenly I had this tool to take a photo for nothing, I could work on it for nothing and I played more with it, became emerged in it and really, I guess, that’s the way I work - I have to be fully immersed in it, living it, because it’s then you’ll find out what you’re doing or what it is you’re trying to say.”

The colour and the light of LA has long held appeal to artists across mediums. It was the same for Byrne - a light went on, he says, and he “went crazy”,

“Things became refined and eventually I started to come up with this sort of language that I have.”

taking thousands of photos.

“Things became refined and eventually I started to come up with this sort of language that I have.”

Bold. Unique. Alluring.

“There’s an aesthetic link to why good urban landscape works, just as in why an abstract expressionist or modernist painting might work, It’s in an arrangement of shapes and colours and space ... There’s a magic to it, though it’s hard to articulate exactly why that is.”

Junk space is a term bandied about in regards to such urban exploration and documentation - “yeah, picking out junk space and turning it into these beautiful moments. For me, I’m a big fan of the underdog, broadly speaking - it’s where I feel comfortable - and maybe that plays to it a bit also.”

Byrne has presented several solo shows both in Australia and the States - his latest, ‘Exit Vision’ at New York’s Olsen Gruin gallery, leading to high public praise in what is a tricky art scene.

Still, he remains tethered to humility - despite the growing attention and mounting social media following, his Instagram account (@george_byrne) now nudging 120,000 followers.

He also remains a grafter - one who’ll hit the streets following our interview, scouting for anything he may have missed or that which he hasn’t yet seen in a certain light.

“The dream’s to employ an army of drivers, eight hours day, but that’s for when I hit the big stage I guess,” he says, laughing.

“For now, it’s just me - traversing, finding, learning.”

