

## **BANT Magazine/ Aylin Gungor (June 2006)**

### **AG: How did u get your start in photography? What is your history as far as schools and what led u up to this point where u do photography professionally?**

JVH: I started photographing with the age of 12 when I got my first camera for my birthday which I dearly wished for. Then I took on simple photography lessons in my high school with the age of 15. Then established myself between my friends as THE photographer in the GANG and portrayed all my friends in very conceptual and complex scenarios which I directed. Here I started taking first inspirations by Annie Leibovitz and Herb Ritts but also Sebastiao Salgado and later on David LaChapelle and Peter Lindbergh. With age 19 I managed a first solo exhibition in a local gallery with my friends portraits and then started exhibiting in various local group-shows. I started assisting a professional industry photographer who told me everything technically about photography that I wanted to know. Already there I had a very clear idea of style and composition and usually Art-Directed my photographers shoots. We were a great team... Us having great ideas.. me focusing on the style and him making anything technically possible with his skills in photography. We worked together for 2,5 years. My professional career (which had not properly started then) was supposed to end when I decided to become Teacher for handicapped children to which I dedicated about two years with practical experiences in schools and preparing for University. A friend took me on a trip to England to go and visit some Art Schools and I took my portfolio along. There I got offered a place straight away and was convinced to take the chance. My parents agreed and I moved to South of London and attended Art School at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design in Farnham.

They properly twisted my head around and shook me upside down ... (meaning: they totally confused me – in a good way) and I changed my style and expectation towards photography totally. I skipped all ideas about technique and started to think photography: What can photography do and what can it not. Why should I do photography as there are a million better ones out there already and I questioned everything that I saw... only then I found ideas what I could do that was unique and also important to me... I experimented a lot and ended up using a little snap shot camera with no technical features. I loved the fact that I learned to work really well with the most complicated cameras and studio equipment and now left all that behind and purposely neglected technique. It was all about the image and what I had to say.

After graduation in 2002 I ventured into London after some travels and decided to set up my own photographic network [www.photodebut.org](http://www.photodebut.org) which supports, promotes and connects emerging photographers. This was mainly to connect and support myself and like minded people. I always believed that in a group you can gain much more than alone.

From then I did various things like Stock Photography, Editorials, some fashion (which I hated), Portraits and was also commissioned to do some solo-shows and projects.

I got in contact with good people in the industry and worked as picture editor in a Picture Library and as Director of Photography at DIVA Magazine.

Besides I always had to work a bit besides in Bars or other small jobs.

But all in all I have to say that everything mentioned should be counted in for my education.. and so much more.. my friends and relationships.. it is life that teaches.

### **AG: What was the first photograph that you shot that told you, “this is it...photography is the real thing for me.?”**

JVH: It is a BW portrait of my brother which rocked my world. I loved the Black and White... I loved the energy... I loved working with my first 6x6 RolleiCord.. This picture is still up on the wall in the family house and is printed very large and hanging in the toilet.. Which I think is a great spot... as I always start dreaming nostalgically about the beginnings of my photography.. (I attached it)

There is also a portrait of a local girls gang which I just loved. They looked so fierce and serious.. and I loved that beauty. I always dreamed to make a fashion shoot with them.. but it just remained a nice idea and adorable images .. (I attached it too)

**AG: Some of your colour photographs, the colours are very rich such as the blues in the sky. is this attributed to your selection of film or use of filters or a combination of things? basically how do u get such strong colour?**

JVH: It is firstly a punchy cheap film: Fuji Superia and a cheap Snapshot Camera Nikon Lite Touch (cheap is sometimes just great! – And as you know: Everybody loves to have happy strong punchy snapshots.. so the makes are done accordingly)

As all pictures get scanned the get processed with a standard filter from Fuji for Holiday Snapshots and get even punchier and sharper!  
That is it!

**AG: Which publications do u regularly contribute to or where might someone typically see your work?**

JVH: There is no regular publication. I work mainly on projects for all sorts of magazines and I focus on a lot of fine art work. Sometimes I do portraits or fashion. But I am not too fond of that. I love my projects and working on a larger concept. Not just an emotional shot!

**AG: Is it hard for a photographer to work on some special personal art projects such as yours rather than working for some companies with a nice standards and budget.. i mean for the surviving.**

JVH: Not for me as I always made a difference.. some work was always for my own pleasure which I had to fund myself and sometimes I was lucky and made a job. As soon as I decided that snapshot is my thing I screwed the costs down and didn't spend too much money anymore...and also: I never expected to become a full time photographer and worked at all sorts of places and things which were mostly photo-related. I think photographers have to learn that there is not only one profession for them: A professional photographer... but there are also so many other great jobs in the photography business.. I love the diversity.. and I love managing.. so producing photography seemed to me a great interest and success to work in. Now I have found the balance and do commercial work and loads of fun world for galleries and exciting publications.

**AG: Are you working with 35mm or medium format or digital usually? do u develop all of your own work or do u send some of it out to labs?**

JVH: 35mm cheap plastic snapshot Nikon Lite Touch with a 28mm fixed lens and a flash choice and that is it.

It is all done in labs.

**AG: Do u have any interesting stories of photo shoots or clients u have worked for or subjects u have shot?**

JVH: I recently shot a self promo Christmas card for London's most prestigious Branding Company Wolff Olins.

It had to be fun, instant and multi cultural for the season of our western Christmas and New Year. They decided to send me to the nearest snow-patch in Europe (which was a glacier in the French Alps – Tignes) The Brief was to find a landscape (on my snowboard) in which I should pee (yes pee - urinate!!!) the word HAPPY.. which symbolised anything good for the season.. if you are Buddhist.. Muslim.. Christian... it was simply happiness and fun they wished to all their clients.

They sent an Art Director with me who had never seen Snow before.. or even had been on a Snowboard.. well... I taught him the basic moves and left him on the baby lift whilst I went off with litres of liquids to write happy in the snow. It took me a while to come up with the perfect mixture of 60% pineapple juice and 5% cherry-juice which I found in a local supermarket and heated up with 35% boiling water in order to melt the snow and to look yellow enough to be convincing to be real pee!

The Art Director was still of no use on the second day and I didn't get to snowboard myself as I wrote happy about 100 times in the snow. Eventually Wolff Olins picked a favourite landscape and a writing and put them together in photoshop. It then got printed as A1 poster on very thin (bible-) paper. It looked great. (poster attached)

They were really excited and when I then afterwards showed them my small tiny shitty cheap camera... they couldn't believe it and thought I was joking. It took me a lot of energy to convince them that I did their project with that instamatic camera.. that was sooooo much fun! Great great great! I loved it!

**AG: Your photography projects has an incredible texture of density and light and also has a great stories as i understand.. Is it difficult to control the composition of what you say, have in your head, as a photographer? How did your dreams of flying project come out. it is unbelievable, so simple but greaaaaat idea and great photography and great kids?**

JVH: I have all pictures in my head before I photograph... I see them or have them in front of my inner eye and know that I have to translate them into a photograph. But I am also open to improvising. I love playing on location. But they always have to make sense and I need to know where the images fit in within history and theory of photography. If I think a picture similarly has been somewhere taken before then I wont take it. I hate copies. Sometimes I see images and think that thy are not complete and that I have something to add.. then I find my personal angel and try to improve concepts.. I think that there is so much bad imagery out there (also very much exciting work) but I think that life is too short for bad images...

'The Dreams of Flying' came about when I played photography and forced myself to think every hour of on 24hours day to come up with a great picture from scratch.

I had a friend with a dog around a the boy next door was there too.. I had the idea to have a boy riding on a dog.. but knew that the dog would never allow that in normal gravity. So I came up with the lying-on-ground idea. I took the yellow turban which I brought from my India journey out of the cupboard and cut out some silver stars. Ready were the props for the dog picture. The rest of the images followed as soon as this picture turned out to be a success. It took me a while to grasp the idea fully and then understood the formula for my language. And then we (me, my partner and the kids) went on and planned adventures to be realised!

**AG: How did you find those kids to work for? How did they react for this project? esp.bike gangs one is perfect.**

JVH: They are my neighbour kids.. and their friends.. and their friends... We used to do a lot of photography together in the past.

They loved the project however it took them a while to understand it but as soon as they got it we had loads of fun...and they had loads of ideas themselves.

**AG: The landscapes look very unique and I guess it is really hard to shoot landscapes different than other photographers do.**

JVH: About the landscapes: Living in London made me (I am a country boy) longing to nature. I loved it and I was very keen to leave the city as often as possible. On each trip I tried to find the perfect landscape picture to bring it home to the city. On my journey I would try to find something in the landscape that gives it sense and a 'raison d'être', a reason to be there. I wanted to relate the human kind to it and found great subjects which were solely in the landscape. My idea is always: Find a stunning landscape and a single object which relates to it. This can be a house or trees or a person or a cloud or even a bump in the landscape... I think live consists of relation ships and this is what I simply look for.. a landscape with nothing in it is not important to be photographed... maybe for a documentary photographer who wants to catalogue the surface of the world.. but I think I am a photographer and I want to tell a story.. I don't want to document... I want to think beyond what I see and I want to stimulate!

**AG: Do you ever "photoshop" your imagery?**

JVH: hardly ever.. and if then so minuscule... it actually does not matter! I do not change anything .. but maybe I tidy up a little stick which laid on the street as it distracts from the pebble next to it.. I could have also taken it out in person but did not see it when I took the picture!

**AG: What are you working on, presently?**

JVH: A story about two boys who go on an adventure trip and a pseudo-documentary-story about a child in India!

**AG: Who inspires u in general? ( this doesn't necessarily have to be about photography).**

JVH: Music and Literature.  
The people in the street.  
Bad photography.

**AG: What other interests do u have besides photography?**

JVH: My friends... very much!  
Walking in the nature.  
Loads of great music.. loud and danceable.

**AG: What about music, movies? Are you interested in them as well? What are you listening recently and which movies did you watch lately?**

JVH: I listen to all kinds of great music. I believe in music in general and can find sense and perfection in Hip Hop as much as in the cheesiest and most perfect pop song.. but also Heavy Metal can sometimes be amazing.. or a simple classical piece.. and a man with a guitar can make me shut up too. And Norwegian Music is devine.

I hate background music.. and I love music that disturbs brilliantly without being chaotic or boring!  
Techno is boring to me.

To name a few Artists: Radiohead, Björk, Aphex Twin, Tori Amos, Eric Satie, Die Fantastischen Vier, Thomas Dybdahl, Michael Jackson, Jack Johnson, AHA (only early stuff – best pop ever), Cinematic Orchestra, Coldplay, Keith Jarret, Buckshot Lefonque, Dino Saluzi, Joe Jackson, Kate Bush, The Killers, Leonard Bernstein, Nils Petter Molvaer, Nina Simone and so many other Music Magicians!

I love dancing and wished that I could have become a professional dancer (contemporary ballet) if not a photographer!

Movies I loved recently were: My favourite this year: You and me and everybody we know. Also good: Brokeback Mountain and that French Movie with Daniel Auteil.. I think it was called: Hidden. WOW that was amazing

My overall favourite movie is 'Far Away so close' by Wim Wenders.

So.... I think I told you loads now... this was the longest interview ever. I hope I gave you what you wanted. Thanks a lot for making me think.