

ENTREVISTA A CLAUDIA SCHADEBERG

Clara: I have the questions here. All right. This is in case you're a young photographer who is starting and you are taking pictures and you've made a feature story. What is your first move in this situation if you want to distribute your story?

Claudia: I think probably the first thing to do is to approach newspapers and magazines. Those magazines or newspapers which are interested in what you're doing (documentary photography). There are very few of them so you go for those, you call them up and just ask why you are interested in this project and if so you will supply you with the images. I think that's a first step starting out. Galleries are the very last step because galleries tend to be rather narrow minded and they want to go with somebody who is a little bit more established. There are very few galleries that are focusing on documentary photography. So the best bet is newspapers magazines. I'm not sure if the Internet can help much. Maybe contests for photography. You need to get step in the door and if you're independent it makes it a little bit more difficult.

Clara: You've worked for a long time with galleries. So how would you describe the relationship between galleries and artists and which recommendation would you give to someone who is just starting for protecting himself from working with galleries?

Claudia: Well first of all if you go to a newspaper you'll do it independently. As a freelance and something you must be very careful that is keeping the copyright. Alfred Eisenstaedt, for example, worked for many years for Time Magazine, he took many famous pictures, none of them belong to him, they all are owned by the magazine.

You have to go to a gallery which you trust. Now, it's very difficult to find out who you trust and who you don't. Often it comes with the experience of dealing with other types of people and how well you know these people. Also a gallery that likes your work wants to promote it. And also deals with similar work. For me galleries are pretty much the last step in lots of other things. Over the years you will build up contacts and you build up galleries which you will find out if they're trustworthy. For example if they don't keep their promise, if they don't pay you or they don't return your prints.

Clara: Does that happen quite often?

Claudia: I mean, for example we've never committed ourselves ever totally to a gallery because of the problems. We've been independent. I'm acting as a gallery does because I can't find a gallery that I trust who will work for us. Don't forget that a gallery has to do a hell of a lot of work to promote a photographer, you have to do publicity, press, they have to watch out for you, exhibitions worldwide. So galleries are a bit tricky. I have heard recently that galleries are losing their importance and that auctions are a good way of getting your work on the market. People go straight to museums which have similar type of shows to their the sort of work. It's a very personal thing, galleries. Every country has different types of galleries and galleriests. So if I approach an American Gallery their interests will be different from a German gallery, in America they tend to often go only for American artists, they don't want anything else. I once approached a museum in New York which concentrates on black American history. I said 'Why don't you do a comparison parallel to South African Apartheid?' And they didn't seem to have any great interest in South Africa.

Clara: So it is normal to suggest a theme?

Claudia: Yes, you have to go with what you call an 'English cold calling' calling out of the blue like you're selling encyclopedias. I'm afraid you have to learn to be thick skinned and quite pushy. That's the way it is. If you believe in what you do and they it should be seen by a lot of people, then you push.

Clara: What is the percentage a gallery will take from a sale?

Claudia: Usually it is a 50 percent. That's the normal fee. You see, they have to pay for that gallery space which is quite expensive and they will be able to secure the party's invitations. That's why it is a 50 percent.

Clara: And auctions?

Claudia: Oh they only take about 10 / 15 percent. So it's less. The options are pretty good. Now with auctions usually they approach you if they want your work, but you can start off by trying to approach one or two people. I mean I approached one of the best auction houses in Germany. I said 'Would you

like a Mandela image?', which is iconic, and they said 'no'. You just never know who's invested in what. For instance, there are other markets that I have no idea about yet. I don't have a clue about what the Chinese market is after. But one has to do quite a bit of research to find out what different markets want. Yes you also have to find out who's got some money to buy things.

Also, there are many art fairs every year around the world. Basel is interesting because it is one of the most expensive art fairs to participate in but you have to be invited. Paris Foto is a bit easier but it's good to go up fast to find out what the seeing is, what people like. Because you have about 150 different galleries you can see what they're doing what they're selling and what they're interested in. So that's Paris Photo.

Clara: What do you think about the future of documentary photography?

Claudia: The thing is if there is a big difference between commercial and documentary. Documentary photography is very narrow, but it is gaining interest. Also perhaps you probably know that Silverprints are getting rarer and rarer. It's film that's getting far more value. So now that's the way to go. The thrill is true, because with a digital format you miss out on various stages, the meaning and the value of photography, it's so instant and also the quality is better in many ways. I mean not that many people would carry on so these days. The problem is that dark room photography is hardly any more taught which is a terrible terrible thing, it should be absolutely mandatory on photography courses.

Clara: How do you think auctions affect to the value of the photograph?

Claudia: It all depends on which country the auction is held. There's no logic to what gets a high or a low price, no logic. So images prize not necessarily relate to the quality of the work. You can get really good selling at low prices and really bad selling at high price. It is potluck, hooters. We've had auctions in South Africa and what I thought would sell didn't, and we've had auctions in England and Germany and France where the same picture sold very easily. What also happens is you don't really decide the price of your pictures. What you do is you give the Reserve Price So you sell them and you point the lowest it can actually get.

Clara: But do auctions reach for a young photographers?

Claudia: They go for the classics. Basically they're just salespeople, and what they do is look for the easy money. Now you can contact them and offer what you have but they will very unlikely accept it. They have the collectors contacts, and they know what collectors are looking for, once you get the interest of a collector then they call you.

Clara: How important do you think are social networks to advertise yourself?

Claudia: I would say that they work just for promoting exhibitions and that sort of thing. You very rarely get somebody who wants to buy prints through them because they want to know you, and often they go to galleries or people who represent you, because they believe galleries know what is up to come and what will get fashionable.

To sum up, if you are a young photographer who wants to work and understand the business I would suggest to start from the bottom, work with small spaces, it doesn't have to be galleries, it can be coffeshops or churches, see how the public reacts to your pictures and learn little by little. There is no hurry to get anywhere.