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broncolor User Profile - Monica Stevenson by Allan Weitz



Monica Stevenson – self-portrait

Monica Stevenson is a New York still life photographer, and a very good one at that. She's also, of all things, an accomplished equine photographer. That is, she shoots horses. She also rides her own horse, and competes in dressage, a highly disciplined sport Monica describes as 'figure skating on horseback', minus the ice and those god-awful outfits. But more on horses later.

The daughter of a English father and German/Chilean mother, Monica was born in New Jersey, but her father's marketing job had them continent-hopping early on. Monica's childhood included 6 years in Australia, Spain for a year, her high school years split between Puerto Rico (3-years) and Atlanta, with college years split between North Carolina and Ohio. Detours along the way included Polynesia, Samoa, Fiji and other places most of us only visit in the movies.

Stevenson first caught the bug to take pictures when she was about 6 years old while sitting atop the family commode and watching over her father's shoulder as he developed black & white prints in the bathtub. Backed by this technical know-how and a good measure of spunk, she soon became the photo coordinator for the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill college yearbook. She also photographed many of the school athletic events. Among the soon-to-be-famous basketball stars Monica photographed were fellow classmates Michael Jordan and James Worthy. Soon after graduating, she was off to the 'Big City'.

As a newbie in town, Monica interned for and/or assisted Albert Watson, from whom she learned perfection and discipline, James Wojcik, and Chris Callis, from whom she learned the laws of controlled chaos. Since striking out on her own, Stevenson has developed a following in two distinct fields of the craft – studio still life and equine.



Among the most striking still life imagery Stevenson has produced are her 'liquid' pictures. Capturing still images of fluid subjects is something many shooters attempt, but few do as well. For Stevenson, the challenge was creating visually compelling still images of subjects that are anything but still. A great part of the process early on was finding a lighting system that was up to the challenge of capturing the moment, figuratively and literally.

While 'fixing' things in Photoshop has become an accepted process for many shooters, the better ones – Monica Stevenson included – know the preferred method is to get it right in-camera, and save Photoshop for cleaning up errant drips and splatters. And when it comes to capturing detail in flying liquids, having the right lighting system can make the difference between a good shot and an amazing shot.

Being interested in science and technology since childhood, Monica quickly recognized the advantages of the broncolor system. "When you have the right tools you can do anything, and you start seeing things you've never seen before." The science and esthetics that define the broncolor system are leaps and bounds beyond other lighting systems, and she's particularly fond of the keyboard-like controls of broncolor Scoro A4S packs, which allow her to easily set the lighting parameters to fit her needs.

The short flash durations (1/8000s - t 0.1 or 1/12000s - t 0.5) made possible by broncolor Scoro packs are simply unbeatable. "With other light sources, the final image never matched the latent image my minds-eye saw when the shutter was activated. With broncolor, the image that appears on the screen is often better than the image I expected to see when I pressed the shutter."

When describing the differences between previous lighting systems she's used and broncolor, Monica draws parallels between a large, 64-crayon box of Crayolas and a 12-crayon box. "You can make pretty pictures with both, but the creative possibilities of a 64-color palette are far greater than the 12-color option. You stumble with other lights in situations where it's smooth sailing with broncolor."



Stevenson has also been shooting video as of late using the new video-enabled DSLRs that have come to market over the past few years, and here too she has found a continuous light source that suits her needs in the form of broncolor's Kobold system, a daylight-balanced light source that mirrors the flexibility and accuracy of broncolor flash systems.

One project Monica has in the planning stages is a commission to document Arabian horses belonging to His Highness Sheikh Mansoor Bin Zayed Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi, a country Monica describes as being unlike any other place she has lived in or traveled to in every sense.

Along with photographing these majestic horses as they go through their paces, Monica is also planning a series of portrait-like images of the horses interlaced with blowing fabrics. Horses can be skittish when surprised by something unexpected, and as such, Monica plans on working closely with an acquaintance who trains animals used in movies during the early planning stages of this project. "If I tell him I'm coming over in 2 months to shoot horses being splashed with buckets of water, he can acclimate them to being splashed." It's also a project that will demand precise exposures and timing, both of which are hallmarks of the broncolor system.

As an avid rider and competitor, Monica makes ready references to the similarities between good camera gear and a good saddle. 'Sometimes you go out riding and it's just 'not right'', and you don't know if it's the horse, if it's you, if it's the weather, or maybe the saddle. And a good saddle makes for a better ride, especially in dressage competitions where 'dialog' between horse and rider consists of subtle, but specific movements and gestures. And if the saddle interferes with this dialog, you're not coming in first, second or third.

And just as a good, well-designed saddle enables a purer, more intuitive dialog between a horse and rider, the same can be said about photo gear. If it's designed right, and does its job precisely and reliably, it helps create a more fluid, intuitive dialog between the photographer and subject. And this is why Monica Stevenson considers broncolor her lighting systems of choice.



More information and pictures about Monica Stevenson you can find under <http://www.monicastevenson.com>.