



Candid culture



Above: Photographer Andy Solo.

Left: A selection of images from Andy's upcoming solo exhibition – *Flash Life: Images of New York*.

Becky Wilson speaks to travel photographer Andy Solo, who reveals her passion for exploring new places and looking at them from new perspectives.

When Andy Solo travels, it's never just about taking in the sights: it's also about capturing the sights – though not in a snap-happy way. It's about revealing the essence, the core and the spirit of a place through its details.

"I'm drawn to the depth and detail – the minutiae, the nitty-gritty. I love the textures, colours, patterns and points of difference," says Andy, who speaks to me after returning from her first trip to New York. "I like inscriptions in city concrete, quirky colonial doorknobs, the texture of ancient Asian texts... interesting things like that."

As a travel photographer, New York is one of many places to which Andy has travelled, always with a camera strap around her neck; eyes peeled, searching for a moment, a person, a door or perhaps an angle that will personify and encapsulate the feeling of the place.

"I loved taking photos in New York: It has a real gritty, authentic feel to it," she says. "The city is filled with grungy street art, quirky detail, funky people and character."

One of the most photographed cities in the world, New York is also one of the most inspiring.

"I guess I was expecting *Sex and the City* high-rise superficiality but I found it to be edgy, diverse and down-to-earth," Andy says. "I spent the majority of my time wandering the streets, shooting relentlessly; endlessly fascinated and inspired."

Her inspiration is revealed within each of her images, encapsulating the city's wealth of diversity: an old, peeling street poster of a bare-chested man holding a gun; a picture of a missing child; a faded and dirty blue front door framed by a steel grey exterior; hard-hat-wearing workmen toiling in the street; and colourful and engaging street art. "I guess you'd describe me as an artistic travel street photographer," she says. "Though I may research a region, I never plan my photography. I just strap on my camera and hit the streets, waiting for whatever presents itself to me."

Andy's story of wanderlust began when she was 24. "I sold everything I owned and bought a one-way ticket to Sri Lanka," she says. "It changed the way I viewed the world, and remains one of my favourite countries."

A complete love of travel wasn't the only passion Andy discovered during the trip. Having had no other real passion in her life up until this point, she was so inspired by what she saw that she felt compelled to capture it all on film; her excitement and enthusiasm growing with each new place that she encountered. Eventually returning to Australia, Andy studied photography at the University of Sydney, then headed back onto the travel trail for the next

couple of years: bussing through Israel, horse-riding around Egypt, boating between Greek Islands and hitchhiking from Mexico City to Guatemala.

"I don't like to engage, influence or alter things", she says of the candid photography style that allows her to pull those unique moments into her camera. Having completed a postgraduate degree in Communication & Cultural Studies, Andy developed a particular interest in cross-cultural perception that has greatly influenced her approach to photography. Now, she uses her camera to explore and highlight differences among cultures.

Although her collection of New York images are a mix of colour photographs and black-and-white ones, Andy's preference is to shoot in the latter. Many of her most raw, personal shots are printed in simple black-and-white. "When you strip away the colour, you're left with the gorgeous texture, contrast and basic nature of things," she explains, recalling the early days in which she would head out to take photos with her old SLR film camera. "I set up my darkroom wherever I travelled, and vividly recall the thrill of each new print emerging, slowly and seductively, under the red lights.

"I really miss the romance and tactile nature of darkroom photography. I'm still revelling in the creativity, abundance and freedom that digital photography allows, but I'm tending to go back towards monochromatic images."

These days, Andy travels as much as she can, taking her husband Dan and eight-year-old son Akira with her. She has shown the images taken on her travels in various galleries, her most recent exhibition being a collection of images she shot on a trip to Japan.

Andy is utterly in love with travel and with imagery, so her focus on travel photography comes as no surprise: "There are barriers to travel for many people, so I try to bring a little piece of the world back to Australia to increase people's understanding and share the beauty," she says. "The diversity of our planet and its people is an incredible thing. I hope sharing my images goes some way towards greater cultural comprehension and compassion." ●

FLASH LIFE: IMAGES OF NEW YORK

Andy Solo's images of New York will be exhibited at Breathing Colours Gallery, 446 Darling Street, Balmain NSW January 25 – February 6, 2011
Open 10am-6pm (Tues to Sat) or by appointment.
www.breathingcolours.com