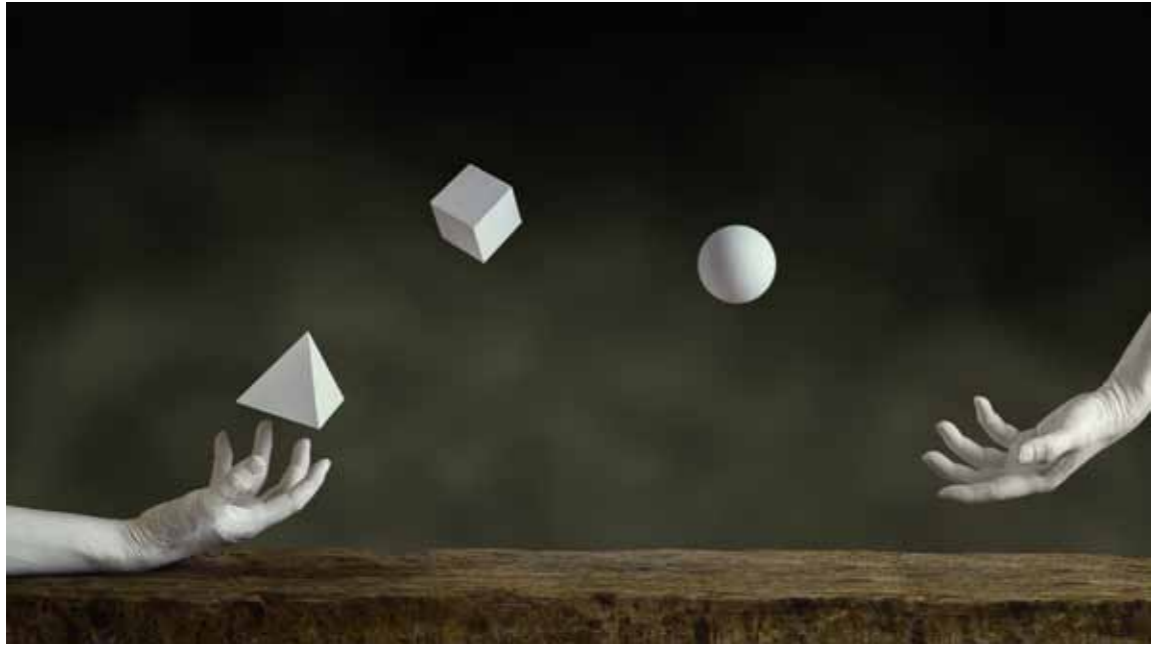


Steve Chong

"IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT THE WAY YOU SEE IT."





As he turns into bed at night, images of eyes and hands consume him in the darkness, flashing across the open savannah of his mind. When morning light breaks into dawn and he wakes, the unfinished scenes of work that has yet to begin flood his mind, willing him to pick up his camera and shoot. Steve Chong is no mere photographer; he is a genuine artist that lives and breathes art. He enjoys prodding the darkness in people and even painted his own front door black to symbolize his passion for mystery, much to the dismay of his mother (who still complains about it to this day!).

"I want to see what's in you; I want to evoke the insecurity that lies within you. I want to make you feel uncomfortable," whispered Steve Chong on his dark conceptual photographs, an award winning conceptual artist with a string of medals hung upon his belt. He carries with him a soft aura of despair, it lingered beneath his smile and bright eyes, yet his voice was so full of intense passion it sparked the interest of all who listened. It is impossible to hold a conversation with Steve without getting drawn into his stories, his animated

"I want to see what's in you; I want to evoke the insecurity that lies within you."

gestures and most of all, his mind.

Steve's work consists of conceptual, still-life, and most recently, landscape photography. These three distinct genres of photography focus on completely different subject matter, and are also specifically chosen to evoke completely different reactions in the viewer. In this diverse range of topics, there is one thread that connects all these different categories of photography, and that is art.

"The first question people ask me [about my conceptual work] is 'what is the motive?' The aim of most photographers is to make you feel comfortable by showing you positive images, like forests, mountains, or pretty girls. Why? Because humans feel insecure all the time. We try to placate that by showing you nice images that give you a sense of



familiarity – but this is how I want you to feel: insecured. That way, you start to ask questions. You start to ask why," shared Steve cryptically on the purpose of his work. Conceptual art exists to make you question the piece, for when you start questioning you are thinking and feeling, you are responding to the image – not just comfortably sitting in a spot, looking at a pretty picture. He continued by explaining that lighting, technicalities and camera mastery are of no use in conceptual photography if your creative process is weak and if you do not have "it" in you to create "art". Pure creative talent is born, not made. It is a God-given gift not all can



STEVE CHONG

Many years ago, Steve Chong used to sit behind a computer and bang out codes and software as a programmer. One day, he picked up his camera to shoot images for a website he was developing and quickly realised his photos were awful. Wanting to improve on his technique, Steve began photographing everything in sight. Today, Steve is an award winning photographer with over a hundred medals and awards, focusing on conceptual, still life and landscape photography. He has just published his first book "The Light & Mist of Yuan Yang" which you can order from us!

OPENING PAGE:

Shaken not stirred

TOP LEFT:

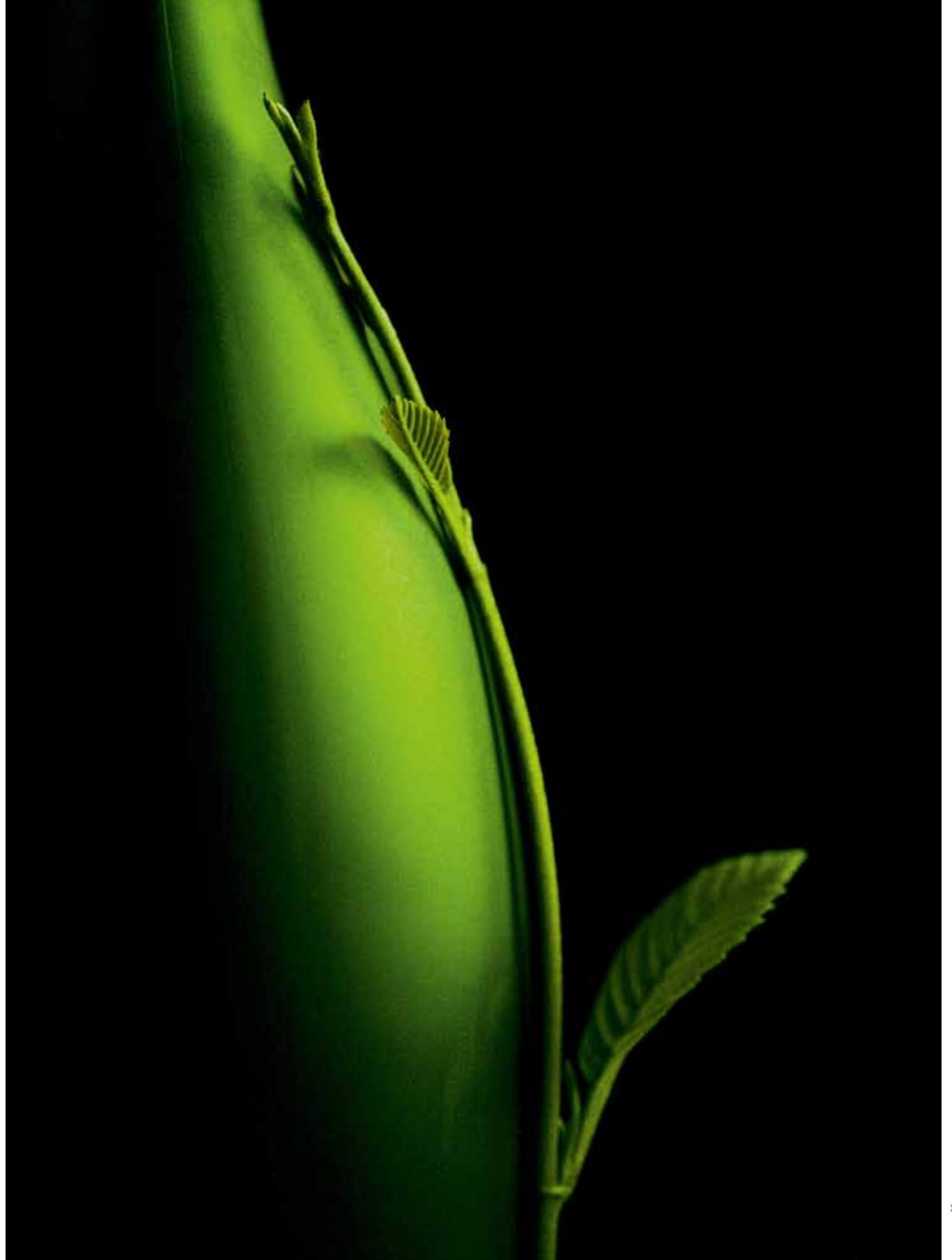
Ride of passage

LEFT:

The path less taken

OPPOSITE PAGE:

I need you





“Why should there be only one answer to my work?”

acquire. However, it needs to be polished to perfection or else is rendered a dull blade not worthy of cutting butter.

“If you look at my art you will come up with at least one answer. If ten thousand people look at it, there are at least ten thousand answers. Why should there be only one answer to my work? Why should I give you that answer in the first place? Life is full of mystery. Why should I change that?” shared Steve.

Before Steve discovered his artistic talent, he was a programmer. He took photos for his client’s websites and realised they were “absolute rubbish”. He wanted his viewers to gain a real impression of what he was doing and what he was seeing, not just snapshots of items around him that carried no real weight, that represented nothing. From the moment he had that initial epiphany, the act of photography became much more than just pressing the shutter, it was much more than what that tiny little viewfinder had to offer. Steve began to shoot “dead things”; also known as still-life. Here, he challenged himself and made chopsticks spring to life and in turn, transformed those blocks of shaped wood into art. It was still-life that was the fundamental backbone of his education. A long time friend and esteemed mentor once told Steve that his images were pretty photographs but he should “stop wasting time taking images of nothingness or pack up and throw his camera away”. It’s easy to take a good-looking image, but can you add depth and life to it? This got Steve thinking hard about where he wanted to take his talent and skill.

“Can you make a hardboiled egg come to life? If I gave you a plate, would you be able to tell me a story through it? Still-life tests your composition, artistic merits and your aestheticism. To be frank, shooting still-life shows if you have talent or not. For



example, if you shoot a pretty picture of an egg, you have just captured a copy of an egg. There is no message except for ‘look, it’s an egg’. If you use interesting angles and lighting, then great! You know how to compose your image and play with light. The camera and lighting manufacturers will probably like you because you know how to use their equipment. You’re one level up but there is still nothing that exists to make your viewer really think or feel,” shared Steve enigmatically. His hands fluttered with each sentence as his eyes narrowed into slits. His voice lowered as if he was sharing a top secret conspiracy theory. “Now, some people can turn that egg into a masterpiece that can make people weep. They can remind you of your deepest, darkest days and cause you to break down in one glance. For example, one inspiring young talent used paper as a secondary

subject in his frame. He spent hours folding hundreds of paper crosses from sheets of paper. He piled them up in the background, lining masses of crosses together to form a textured backdrop. His image, although simply crafted, had an intensely deep message. It signified the beginning and the end of life, birth and death. That is art. That is talent,” shared Steve. “Art is a piece that makes one think. It is a piece you will never forget once you see it. It has a message and its intention is to reveal your inner feelings. That is art.” After winning more than a hundred awards in the arena of the International Salon of Photography, including countries such as Austria, USA, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, France, (and many more) and obtaining the prestigious Associateship by the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, Steve decided to broaden his horizons. After inducing

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP:
An eye for an eye
FAR LEFT:
Omnipotence

TOP
Enigma of the mass

RIGHT
An unholy pact



“Still-life tests your composition, artistic merits and your aestheticism. To be frank, shooting still life shows if you have talent or not.”



the negative aspect of the soul through his conceptual art, he decided it was time to produce work that brought out the positive side of people as well.

One of the greatest sorrows humanity faces is the lack of importance placed on art in this day and age. According to Steve, we, humanity, have never caused so much harm against mankind, against one another, as we have today. We have never performed such destruction against nature. It is during times like these when art can be used to pacify the soul through images of positivity and familiarity. These images make the viewer feel secure and comfortable. “If we can pacify the soul, would the world not be a better place?” Steve asked simply.

Steve, himself, is a person with many secrets pushed deep into the abyss. Although his conceptual photography sometimes revealed his own challenges and insecurities, he realised that he needed an outlet that would bring joy and allow him to experience serenity, wonder and awe. Thus, he began to create work that purposely existed to sooth the damaged soul.

In 2006, Steve grabbed his gear, put on a parka and ventured to Yuan Yang, China with a group of fellow friends. Here, Steve made his mark in China with jaw-dropping landscape photography. The rolling paddy fields, “sea” clouds and magical lighting (also known as “Jesus Light”) stole his heart – he was so caught by the natural beauty he temporarily put his conceptual photography aside and even produced an entire book on the light and mist of Yuan Yang. His destiny became intertwined with the land of Yuan Yang as soon as he shot his very first photograph – it was as if the wind called his name and the land claimed his body, merging his physical and



THIS PAGE:
Beautiful landscape of Xinjiang

spiritual self into that incredible moment. No matter how beautifully Steve captured the rolling hills of paddy fields as they stretched into pools of glowing gold, or the thick sea clouds framing tall, sharp trees, it could never replace the intense beauty of Yang Yuan. He can only hope to share its majesty with you through his incredible pictures.

Taking landscape photography has never been mistaken for an easy task. The weather, land, light and inhabitants are completely out of our control, there is no way to stop nature. “You can’t conceptualise what you want to do when shooting landscape. The message is only determined in the spur of

the moment. I can plan what I want to shoot, but I have to tune to what is available in nature. However, nature isn’t determined by me; I have no control over the situation out there,” shared Steve on the difficulties of shooting outdoors. “The best you can do is study the place; know the land and the types of clouds that are there. Get familiar with the weather and figure out what time is the best for shooting. The weather is your biggest problem – don’t be surprised if you find yourself with only one hour of optimum lighting. That may be your only window! Don’t miss it!”

When Steve first began taking landscape photos he



“When it comes to photography, the main thing to do is follow your heart. Don’t listen to anyone and work the way you think is appropriate.”

brought an incredible amount of gear up into the highlands. Once there, given the erratic weather and unpredictable lighting he realised it was best to just carry around one or two body kits with a few essential lenses rather than bog himself down with all the equipment he had lying at home. The window of opportunity is only open for a few minutes at a time, and time spent worrying about which camera to use is time spent wasted.

“When it comes to photography, the main thing to do is

follow your heart. Don’t listen to anyone and work the way you think is appropriate. Forget boundaries, forget rules. The only rule is to move with passion,” shared Steve. From a programmer to award winning photographer, Steve Chong is a shining example of just that. If this programmer was able to explore his subconscious and discover the creative territory of his brain, there’s no reason you can’t, either.

Over the next year Steve plans to return to his roots of conceptual photography, pushing his viewers to the next level of self-reflection in the darkest corner of their souls. But to balance out this darkness, he will also be leading more expeditions to Yuan Yang, so expect to see more stunning panoramic shots of Yuan Yang that will sooth your inner darkness - perhaps you should even sign up for a trip or two.

If you would like to purchase his spectacular book, ‘The Light & Mist of Yuan Yang’ please contact Steve Chong himself at info@stevechong.com. You can check out more of Steve’s amazing work at www.stevechong.com.

THIS PAGE:
The light and the mist of Yuan Yang

EQUIPMENT:
Sigma SD15
EX 10-20mm
EX 17-50mm
EX 50-150mm
EX 50mm f1.4

