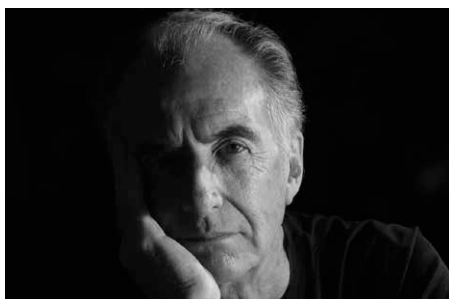




Yintong talks with...

Michael Freeman, world-renowned photographer and author



In a career spanning almost 50 years, Michael Freeman has published 155 books, including the bestselling *The Photographer's Eye* that has sold a million copies in 28 languages around the world. His work has been commissioned and published in many major magazines, including *Life* and the *Smithsonian* and those that accompany *The Sunday Times*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Observer*. He is unequivocally one of the most widely published authorities on photography in the world.

This year I am delighted to say that Michael has come on board for the second Global SinoPhoto Awards. What especially qualifies him to judge our Chinese themed photography competition is his authority on Asian countries, especially through his books *The Tea Horse Road* and *The Life of Tea*. Having the opportunity to work with Michael on the Awards has, enabled me to interview him to satisfy my curiosity about his career path and to uncover the secrets to his longevity in photography and writing as well as learn of his current and future plans.

After reading geography at Oxford, Michael started his career with an advertising agency. Six years later, he got itchy feet and took a three-month sabbatical in the Amazon. On his return, his photographs were exhibited at the Brazilian Embassy and were seen and admired by the editor of *Time Life*. His first commission soon followed.

"When I began writing about photography, it



Dali East Gate, Yunnan, China



Plaza de los Cochones, Cartagena, Colombia

was well before I knew enough to do so, but that's the over-confidence of youth for you!" Michael shares frankly. "My advertising career taught me how to market myself, how to conceptualise pictures and how to combine words and pictures in a package. Back in the 1970s, there were a lot of specialist consumer magazines out there that needed a regular stream of conceptual images, and I found a profitable niche supplying these."

Perspective

The situation these days is completely different, driven by the sheer volume of shots being taken, and with so many makers of equipment and software. How does Michael maintain his fresh perspective and commercial appeal to get commissions?

"Once again, my advertising background helped me to understand how to take and sell commercially appealing pictures, and I was lucky enough to work with some fantastic art directors and picture editors. People like Lou Klein at *Time Life* were a big influence on me – as much as, say, Cartier Bresson, Irving Penn or Joel Meyerowitz. There is a lot of hype about the importance of your equipment, but visual imagination, composition and timing are much more important. It is about what we think about when we take the shot. I'd say it's the creative side that's the hard part, and this is what governs your success as a professional photographer."

Asking him how he spent lockdown I am not surprised to learn that he has missed travelling ("I can't wait to return to China") or that he is well advanced in a new project, a series of books, the first of which, *Michael Freeman on Composition*, to be published in spring of next year. This will be followed by four more on light and shadow, colour and tone, black and white, and capture "if we make it that far. I'm not even completely sure what that last volume will be about, but I'm hoping I will do by the time I get to start it!"



Yi funeral, Yunnan, China

Ultimate goal

There is clearly still a huge appetite to create and consume this art form, I wonder why this is so. "The reasons are that the world of photography has not stayed still, and neither have I," Michael explains. "Photography has been taken seriously by many more people, and there is new interest in how images can look. I have shot more, and thought more, and have new ideas. The audience for books on photography is much, much broader, and more democratic.

"Nowadays, most writing on photography tends to be about equipment and how stuff works and what settings to use. But I'm not particularly interested in these. As I see it, there are three sets of skills in photography, and they all need to be mastered. They are technical, visual and conceptual. It's the second and third that interest me, and they're the ones that contribute the most to a successful, intriguing or thought-provoking image, which is surely the ultimate goal."

www.michaelfreemanphoto.com

Yintong Betser is managing director of ACTIVE Anglo Chinese Communications (activeukchina.com), connecting business through culture and PR events, including The Global SinoPhoto Awards www.sinophoto-awards.com

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