



Photo-Partnership

Photographer John Branton Gynell

By Soledad A. Judge

The Swiss luxury watch-making brand famous for legendary watches such as Hampton, Classima Executive and Riviera, has chosen photography as its new territory of expression. Why? Photography has naturally imposed itself as a bond of complicity between the brand and its customers in a search for shared, real and unforgettable moments that make the life of each and every one of us unique. Through its capacity to capture an instant, photography is also a way of measuring the passage of time. To drive this message home, Baume & Mercier has been developing “photo-partnerships” with some of the most prestigious fine art institutions, such as Magnum Agency in New York, PhotoEspana in Madrid, FotoGrafia Festival in Roma, and Henri-Cartin Bresson Foundation. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2006 Baume & Mercier partnered with a young but extraordinary talent, John B. Gynell. Born and raised in the Bahamas, John spent his formative years growing up in Nassau and the Exumas. Today, his signature black and white landscapes capture the many aspects of these admirable islands. His immense passion for the medium of photography, along with his unconditional love of the Bahamas, is highly evident in his photographs. His devotion towards nature, and the exquisite beauty and depth of the Bahamas comes shining through in both his seascapes and landscapes.

John Branton Gynell – Q&A

Exhibition title: Fine Bahamian Landscapes “It’s all about a split second”

Why did you decide to accept this invitation to partner up with Baume & Mercier?

I accepted the invitation to partner up with Baume & Mercier because of who they are. Baume & Mercier represents a traditional, elegant, well-crafted product, which I feel is a great match with my art. I feel that, to a certain extent, my large format photography and hand-crafted prints made in my darkroom share the same type of respect and craftsmanship. I am very much a perfectionist, and strive to produce a quality product, just like Baume & Mercier with its watches. I also thought it would be a great opportunity to showcase the Bahamas and the unique pristine landscapes of these islands. The type of photography that I do is very old school and, in my view, is a refreshing, pure way of depicting the radiant landscape of the Bahamas, some of the most alluring islands on this planet.

As a photographer, what is your relationship with time?

Because I work with large format using a 4 x 5 Wisner Traditional field view camera, it takes a really long time to prepare for one shot. For an image that takes less than one second to capture, it takes about 20 minutes just to set up the camera. It is all about a split second. You wait forever for the conditions to be perfect. The sunlight, a passing cloud, the weather, all these factors can affect the exposure. About 75 percent of the places I shoot in the Bahamas I usually get to by boat; therefore, the tides are also very important. In the dark room, time is also critical when you are developing film. Under processing or over processing the film are just a few of the factors that can ruin your work.

How did you select the photographs for the Baume & Mercier exhibition?

The twelve photographs I picked for the exhibition were chosen because I think they best represent a good cross section of the typical Bahamian landscape. They are not only pretty beaches, palm trees, and water, but I feel that they represent a more diverse look at the topography of the Bahamas. The Bahamas is a world of rock, ocean, and sky. A relatively flat landscape, but still very unique. These twelve photographs also depict some of my favorite places in the Bahamas, common places where I spent lots of time in my childhood, and to which I return frequently today.

What is the message you want to convey through your photographs?

My work allows me to preserve the beauty of the Islands of the Bahamas. My work attempts to reveal a striking landscape, without the soft early morning light or late afternoon magic hour, so commonly sought after in contemporary photography. Instead, I try to depict the stark reality of a mid-summer day, focusing on the naked, unrefined view portrayed by the reality of the intense tropical sun. For me, that stark brilliance offers a contrast and truth, which makes up the beauty and essence of these islands. In a way, I am doing what photographers before me did to preserve unique places of the American West, such as Yosemite, Sequoia, and King's Canyon. Artistic photography helped to protect these lands and led to the creation of the National Park System. In the Bahamas, there has been a lot of land development over the years. A lot is being sold off in the name of progress. My goal is to get there before they do.

What is your relationship with the Bahamas?

There are many magnificent places on this planet. People find beauty in numerous aspects and regions of our world. For me, that beauty comes from a 100,000 square mile archipelago that extends over the clearest, most pristine water in the world, the Islands of the Bahamas. Over the years, I have realized that the Bahamas is a magnificent place and that each island has its own unique landscape. Most of my photography is of the Exumas, yet I have photographed on several other of the out islands, such as the Abacos, Acklins Island, Andros and Long Island. Eleuthera, for example, is all deep ocean with high cliffs on one side and shallow waters on the other side. On a recent trip, I took a plane over to visit Crooked Island for the first time, and when I got there I realized that the landscape was very different from the terrain in Exuma. To me each island is truly unique and that is what I am trying to capture with my photography.