

PHOTOGRAPHS ARE HER CANVAS, CHEMICALS HER TOOLS

Some call her the new 'Old master'. Marlene Neumann's photographs are an intimate reflection of her world and her relationship to that world. Each photograph that she produces is a once-off image – totally unique – even works from the same edition are original due to her hands-on technique.

Eastern Cape fine arts photographer, Marlene Neumann, bases her work on monochrome photography. But that is just the start of the alchemy, the magic that eventually happens on paper or canvas. Using specially formulated chemicals she achieves the subtleties of colour and texture which are the trademark of her work. The images offer a fresh and spiritual look at ordinary objects and the intimacy of her work is the result of the aptly named 'Neumann technique'.

Marlene has exhibited widely, with numerous solo and group shows throughout South Africa. Her work is found in public and private collections across the world, in corporate boardrooms and in many homes where particular images may mirror a profound experience or emotive memory for the owner.

A strong belief in educating others and sharing the magic she sees through the lens of a camera is Marlene's driving force. For nearly 20 years she headed up the Department of Art and Design at Buffalo City College. Her sought-after classes produced some of the country's finest graphic designers who speak of her with affection and awe. She has a Masters degree in Graphic Design from Port Elizabeth Technikon, specialising in photography. Her thesis was based on the ideas and philosophy behind the work of master American photographer, Alfred Stieglitz.

Marlene's most recent project is the creation of the Marlene Neumann Centre – Photography and Light in East London. The project took two years to complete and serves as a place of contemplation, a gallery for her work and a training facility for budding photographers. The space is a haven of tranquillity and calm, with a beautiful art garden, carefully planned to create silence within. Marlene starts all her photographic courses with breathing exercises. It's a way of getting her students to focus inwards, she says. She teaches students to unleash their creative energy so that their photography can express their thoughts. Of course the technical aspects of photography are taught as well.

DESIGN > posed a few questions to Marlene:

How would you describe your work and technique?

"I still work in the darkroom the old traditional way. I print my images up to 1.4m in width. My technique involves chemicals that I have formulated over the past 20 years that react on the black and white photographic paper. I can control these reactions 95% of the time but the rest is up to chance – it's wonderful to see what happens.

In my philosophy, I have always been greatly influenced by the 1940s American photographers, Weston, Strand and especially Alfred Stieglitz, to



Ebb Tide. © Marlene Neumann



Downstairs Door. © Marlene Neumann



Jug. © Marlene Neumann



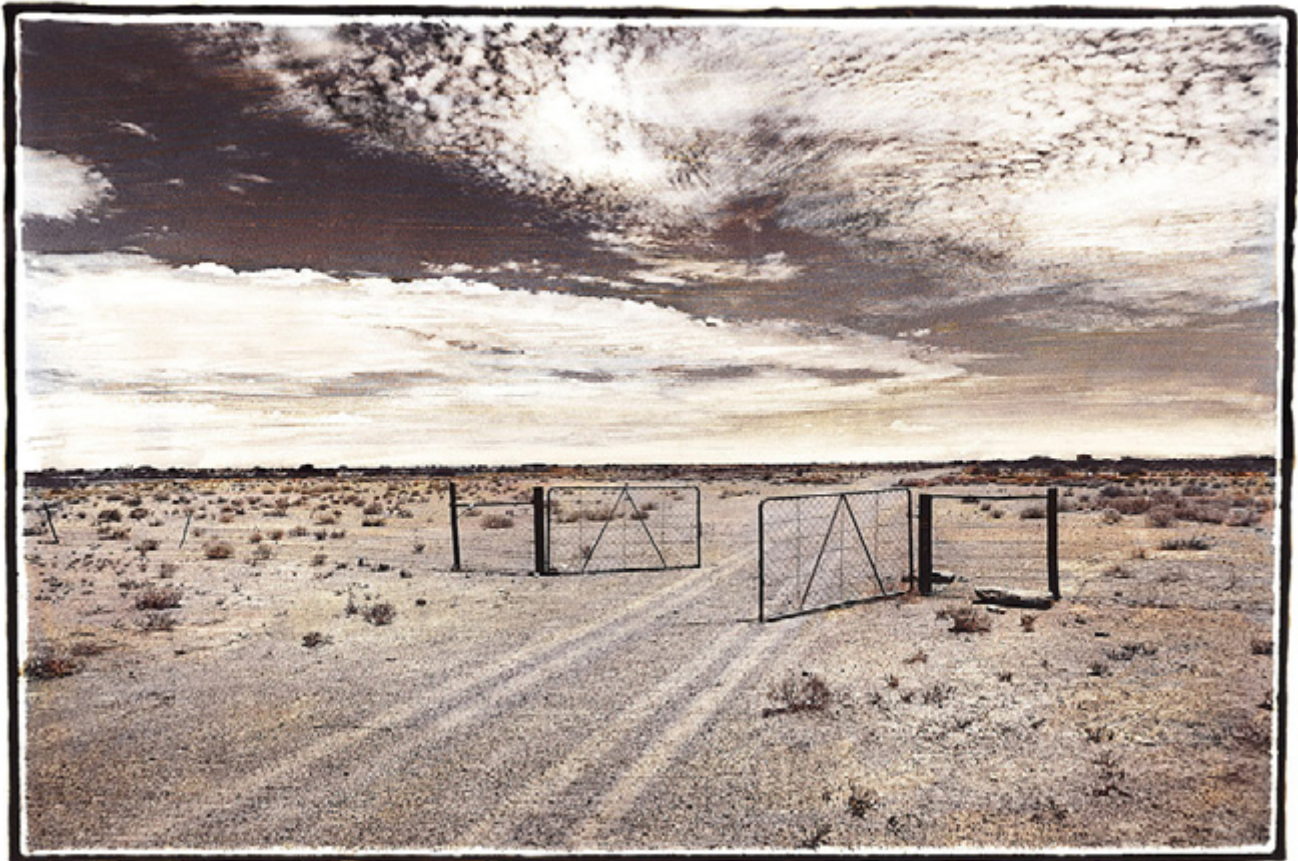
Witsand. © Marlene Neumann



Eternity. © Marlene Neumann



Tribal Tree. © Marlene Neumann



Journey Home. © Marlene Neumann

whom I tribute every exhibition. My work is about the emotion and not the technique – this is just a means to an end. I have broken the boundaries of pure photography to express what I feel. If it talks to your heart then you need to own that emotion. It is evoking something deep inside of you.”

What is your main creative focus?

“I would have to say emotion – it’s about making you feel that you want to be part of what you are looking at. I photograph what I feel not what I see. I think it’s the same when you look at my work. You are feeling it not seeing it. My work also expresses my deep searching of the spiritual world. In a way it is my attempt to understand myself and my questions, thoughts and purpose in this life.”

What gives you the most satisfaction during the creative process?

“I would have to say the special moment when I know that I have a good shot! I can just feel that I have captured the emotion of the landscape or object. Everything has energy – whether it is a stone or a tree or a landscape. Everything wants to express itself. We just need to be ready to see or feel it.

Seeing the image come up in the darkroom trays has to be one of the most liberating sights. It shows there is still magic left in the world.”

Where do you find your inspiration?

Nature is the source of my inspiration. We listen to our heads too much and sometimes forget to listen to our hearts. Being in nature, walking on the beach, for example, brings us in tune with our heart again. I have built a photographic centre where I want to teach adults to see and feel things differently. I want to take people back to basics and inspire them to connect with nature. <



Eastern Cape fine arts photographer, Marlene Neumann. © Marlene Neumann



The gallery at the Marlene Neumann Centre – Photography and Light. © Marlene Neumann



The ‘art garden’ at the Marlene Neumann Centre – Photography and Light. © Marlene Neumann





Early Morning. © Marlene Neumann



Aloe Tribe. © Marlene Neumann



Roadside Baobab. © Marlene Neumann