



# PETER WILDANGER

Q AND A WITH VIOLET SHURAKA

**Name?**

Peter Wildanger

**Portfolio website?**

<http://www.peter-wildanger.de>

**Where are you currently living?**

Germany

**Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in Duesseldorf, Germany.

**Were you a creative youth?**

At 14 I dyed my hair pink, began to consume drugs and smash shop windows. In the early 80's this might have been an expression of creativity.

**Did you imagine that you would be an artist/photographer in adulthood?**

I never would have thought back then that I would grow up. I am actually still working on it.

**How long have you been taking and exhibiting photographs? What drew you to the medium and why did you choose to pursue it seriously?**

I began seriously taking photographs at around the age of 16, as the world seemed so strange to me that I wanted to hold on to every moment. To keep things in mind was my main inducement. Later came the question about what I am actually making and how things change when they are transferred into a picture. Currently, the posing of these questions is the decisive impetus of my work and photography seems to me the ideal medium for that.

**What do you like most about living in Duesseldorf?**

Life is quite relaxing here.

**It is a city that has produced many great photographers. Does being in Duesseldorf inspire your work?**

I would not attribute my inspiration to the city and its prominent photographers, rather to my colleagues with whom I live and work.

**How do you feel about the legend of Bernd and Hilla Becher? Has their work influenced you?**

I think at the time they simply photographed what interested them without a prearranged, complicated concept. It is nice to think that out of this a theme developed that they worked on for a lifetime. There is something very reassuring in that.

**What about the work of their students? Is there one that you particularly identify with (Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Jörg Sasse, other)?**

Identification is too strong a word. There is work that I appreciate, for example "der Rhein", by Andreas Gursky or the Grenoble-Block by Jörg Sasse.

**Do you see these photographers around town? Is there a place where all of the Duesseldorf photographers meet up to share a beer?**

There are places where artists meet, such as the Mikrogalerie. Generally, Duesseldorf is a "private" city, which means apart from public events there are rather smaller circles and group exchange.

**You most often shoot architectural structures/interiors, as do many German photographers, do you think there is a reason why so many contemporary photographers are drawn to this subject matter in their work?**

I can only answer that question for myself. I am not so interested in an adequate display of a concrete building. In that sense I am not an "architecture photographer". But as a "city kid", my perceptual abilities have been calibrated by the urban space. So I have a precise idea of dimension, proportion and coloration. I "know" what color bricks are or how big an air conditioner is in a yard. But there is a great potential for confusion in this prior knowledge when it is confronted with pictures. Things change then. It is at this point that we begin to be astonished.

**Has anyone that you studied with influenced your photographic style or your personal philosophy?**

At the University in Essen, the city in which I studied, a very special climate of exchange and cooperation between the students ruled. One can say that it was not so much individual persons, but the voice of the whole that influenced my work. One can also see how close the relationships built at the University were, in that we formed a group there that continues to exist years after our studies. This combination of competition and working together is still very productive.



**Did you study photography at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art? Is this where Jörg Sasse teaches? (Where did you go to university, if not the Düsseldorf Academy of Art?)**

I studied at the University of Essen. The program at the time was called (and renamed last year) Folkwang. Jörg Sasse taught there from 2003 to 2007.

**I noticed that the titles of your images are numbers. What do the numbers in your titles refer to, if anything?**

Titles of my pictures serve only as identification. Using abstract titles, I want to avoid offering a context for the work. Looking at a picture, particularly a photograph, one is immediately compelled to name that which one sees. There is the danger that one does not perceive the impression itself, rather this descriptive appellation. That is an obstacle that is necessary to overcome in order to open up the view. Somehow an illustrative title would make this more difficult.

**Do you shoot with a digital SLR camera or with a film camera?**

For many years I have been taking pictures solely with digital SLRs. This is more of a practical than an ideological decision. It's important for my work to produce a huge stock of images at first. The raw material for the work process are snapshots. I take approximately 15,000 pictures in a year. About 10,000 undergo light computer editing. It would not be possible for me to accomplish such an amount with an analog camera. But the question of analog versus digital is, as I said, not a principle. For some time I have combed through the purely analog Archive of the Ruhrland Museums with great interest. And some of my work is based on old, analog pictures.

**Do you use the computer as a tool when creating your photographs?**

Yes, the computer is a tool that makes my work possible. The first step of the workflow is sorting the images in a databank. A relational databank is not only a way to order images, but also an instrument of perception or cognition. It is interesting, for example, to collect all pictures with street lights. You realize that there is an unbelievable amount of different models. The world seems suddenly so rich. Then you can set up subcategories, lights in the country, in the city, in other countries, etc. Thus a synchrony is generated allowing to search for patterns and structures that else wouldn't be discovered. Another pos-

sibility is to set up abstract categories, such as sorting by color, proportion, layers and so on. And for instance suddenly a reddish golden brick wall appears next to a picture of a bull fighting arena with golden yellow sand. This is helpful in order to overcome the motif, the purely descriptive comprehension of pictures. And then the gaze remains fixed on a particular picture and there are no more words left to explain this amazement. After the selection process is carried out, I try, to extract that which captivated my gaze. It is difficult to grasp this purely visual process with words. Thereby we would lose exactly what this work constitutes, that which is not comprehended in words falls away. Working at the computer basically is like taking a picture of a picture.

**When looking at your images it seems that space, scale, color and light are all very important to you. Do you strive to create very graphic images?**

Although there's the same expression in German I am not sure what a "graphic image" is supposed to be. A constructed picture? Or a picture whose linear movement is in the foreground? An abstract or somehow clean image? During the process of creating the image, a series of questions is produced in relation to space and proportion, color and light. On one hand I need to have full control of the image in order to come to the point, but on the other hand it's important to grant sufficient space to random-elements that always emerge in pictures. In this respect the editing process is always a balancing act. Understanding "graphic image" as a term which relates to another artificial media sounds a bit like constructing a hierarchic relation between photography and graphic art. However, I think there are far more points of reference to different artistic medias than just that one. For example, often I ask myself sculptural questions, perhaps, how the spatial experience of a three dimensional object in a picture is reproduced, or what is visible from a specific position. Summing up the finished work is a result of a multiplicity of decisions; there is nothing done in a predetermined style.

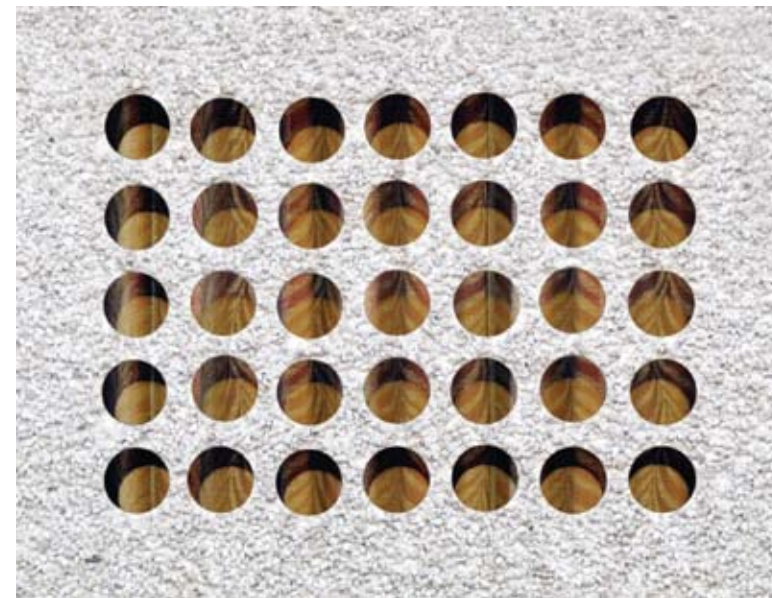
**The color in your images is often very saturated, do you manipulate or enhance the color in the darkroom or on the computer? Do you try to shoot against grey skies purposely to make the color of the subjects pop?**

The world is still more colorful. The color space at the photographers disposal is pathetically small. But within these constrictive limits is color on an abstract layer, that stands in relation to the expectation of the viewer. It can fulfill or disappoint; it can also create wonderment: when shadows are blue, then they are blue. The coloration is always a decision that I make from image to image. I have also created a series of images with very quiet color.

The question about the sky in conjunction to color is very interesting. In the real world the sky is the vastest observable space. Everyone that has stood on a beach before the ocean and over it the deep blue, cloudless and limitless sky, was probably overwhelmed by it and took a picture of it. At home you then have a small photo in your hands with three stripes: the yellow-gray of the sandy beach, a blue-grey sea and the blue-white sky. There are few flatter pictorial spaces as a cloudless sky in a photograph. That this is often grey is the product of the European climate!

**Also, most of your pictures are people-free, which makes them feel somewhat artificial, a bit like abandoned movie sets, do you use any photoshop tools to remove people from the pictures?**

Rarely, but it has come up. It is important to me to control the spatial and time disposition. I arrange how concretely an image is associated to a time and place. I like to have the opportunity of confusion and the resulting opening of perception. When people appear in pictures often they "obstruct" the view. There takes place a very rapid classification. However, not showing people in the pictures is not some basic principle to which I adhere.







**Do you feel that there is a lot of new, interesting photography being created in Düsseldorf right now?**

Yes, lately there has been a series of very interesting work in the field that comes from former students of Jörg Sasse.

**Do you shoot in Düsseldorf or do you usually travel elsewhere to capture your images?**

Both Düsseldorf and abroad. One picture of my Zanzibar series taken from my kitchen window. Another is from Quito, Ecuador. The territory of my work is very sweeping.

**How do you scout out locations for your future photo series? Do you research places to go on the internet? Do people tell you about places that you may find of interest? Or do you randomly travel somewhere with the hope of finding something interesting to shoot there?**

Actually I only have to take my camera in hand to make a picture. However I do research as well and the research is a motivation to locate a specific place. But it often happens that idea of a new picture is not made in this location, rather along the journey.

**What is your favorite architectural movement/style? I love Berlin because I love the mix of architectural styles there, from super contemporary and modern, to communist-influenced GDR, to more classical, Baroque, (etc, etc). Do you find that most German cities have this mix of styles? Which architectural style are you most attracted to for photographic purposes?**

In Berlin the difference in building culture between the two former German countries is naturally quite apparent. A vision of "modern" life was developed here also, at least for a time, roughly the "Hansaviertel". I like it also very much. In other German cities the extent to which the building styles have been mixed depends upon the degree of destruction in the second world war. One can stroll through the central part of Hamburg and only see the chic, renovated old buildings from the Wilhelminian style. Conversely, Köln or Düsseldorf are strongly marked by post-war architecture.

For my work I cannot say that there is a particular building style that interests me. Of late it is more important to me to ask how the present time will be remembered in 50 years. What will be forgotten, what remains waiting to be recorded in images?

**Did you travel to Zanzibar to shoot the "Sansibar" series? Did you explore the Michenzani area while you were there? Were you interested in Zanzibar because of the East German tower blocks constructed there in the 1970's and the contrast between this area and the more tourist friendly Stone Town?**

It is interesting that you are aware of the GDR buildings. Very few know about them and that a relationship existed between Tanzania and the GDR. It is strange that the GDR is relegated to history in Europe, but survives in Zanzibar, museum-like. I would, for example, be interested to know if the faucets or the light switches came from the GDR and what happens when these parts break. Are there still original replacement parts or is there a special post-socialistic style evolved?

As I visited Zanzibar, I found that the apartments are highly sought after and that the neighborhood is thought of as a good place to live. It is funny that tourists are drawn to the old city, with the notion of experiencing the "real Zanzibar". What will happen in 200 years, assuming that the GDR buildings are conserved for so long? Will they also become a tourist attraction?

What led me to name my work "Zanzibar" is the fact that most people have already heard the name of this island once. Actu-



ally, everyone knows "Zanzibar". But few know where the island really is or that it all has to do with an island off the coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. So "Zanzibar" is one of these strange words that remains diffuse by association. And that is a good starting point for my work.

**Are the images for the "Innen-Aussen" series taken in the same area or are they grouped together based on other factors?**

The series "inside-outside" begins chronologically before "Zanzibar". The images are composed of different locations, amongst others around Köln, Berlin and Nijmegen. My interest referred to (and could still be considered to be) the borderline between a very limited enclosed space and a potentially unlimited environment. How much are these two spaces intertwined? What relationship exists between them? How do these spaces change when they are reduced to two dimensions? These are the questions which have led me from concrete motifs to this more abstract theme.

**Could you tell us a bit about the Raumzeit series? Is this series named after the architectural firm Raumzeit who seem to be developing a kind of "cookie-cutter" architecturally similar group of sites throughout Germany.**

The name of the series is "/ Spacetime". The origin was a folder on my hard drive, rather than an image concept. It comprised the pictures at the beginning of my above-described work process. Along with the approximately 150 pictures that until now can be seen online, there are still many hundred more. The pictures are all somewhat smaller than 20x30cm. For exhibitions I have assembled together blocks of pictures, 3x6. In contrast to "Zanzibar", every picture in this series has a fixed point of reference in a spatial-time coordinate system. I am excited about how these pictures will change in the future. Will I think, "this is how the first decade of the new millenium looked"?

**Do you have an art studio or a space that you dedicate to your photographic practice?**

Yes, I have a space reserved for working on art. But it does not mean that much. I actually only need a table and an electrical outlet.

**Have you ever been to NYC or the USA? Do you have any interest in making images of/in the US?**

I have unfortunately never been in New York City, but a long time in Los Angeles. I would very much like to visit New York.



There are so many pictures of New York, that a kind of vacuum arises from the name. To me it sounds like "Zanzibar"

**What artists do you admire? Contemporary? Past?**

What fascinates me so much about art is not something I can pinpoint on another time.

**Is there an art historical movement that you relate to or wish you had been part of?**

I do not want to live in another time, not at all in the past. And I don't want to be part of a movement.

**What people / places / things inspire you?**

A few weeks ago I bought a little pumpkin plant and every day I observe in amazement how this pumpkin grows bigger and bigger. I have already spent hours gathering information on pumpkins. I ask myself where the ones I bought from the nursery have come from.

**What could you imagine doing, if you didn't do what you do?**

I do not wish to do anything else. Possible would be everything.