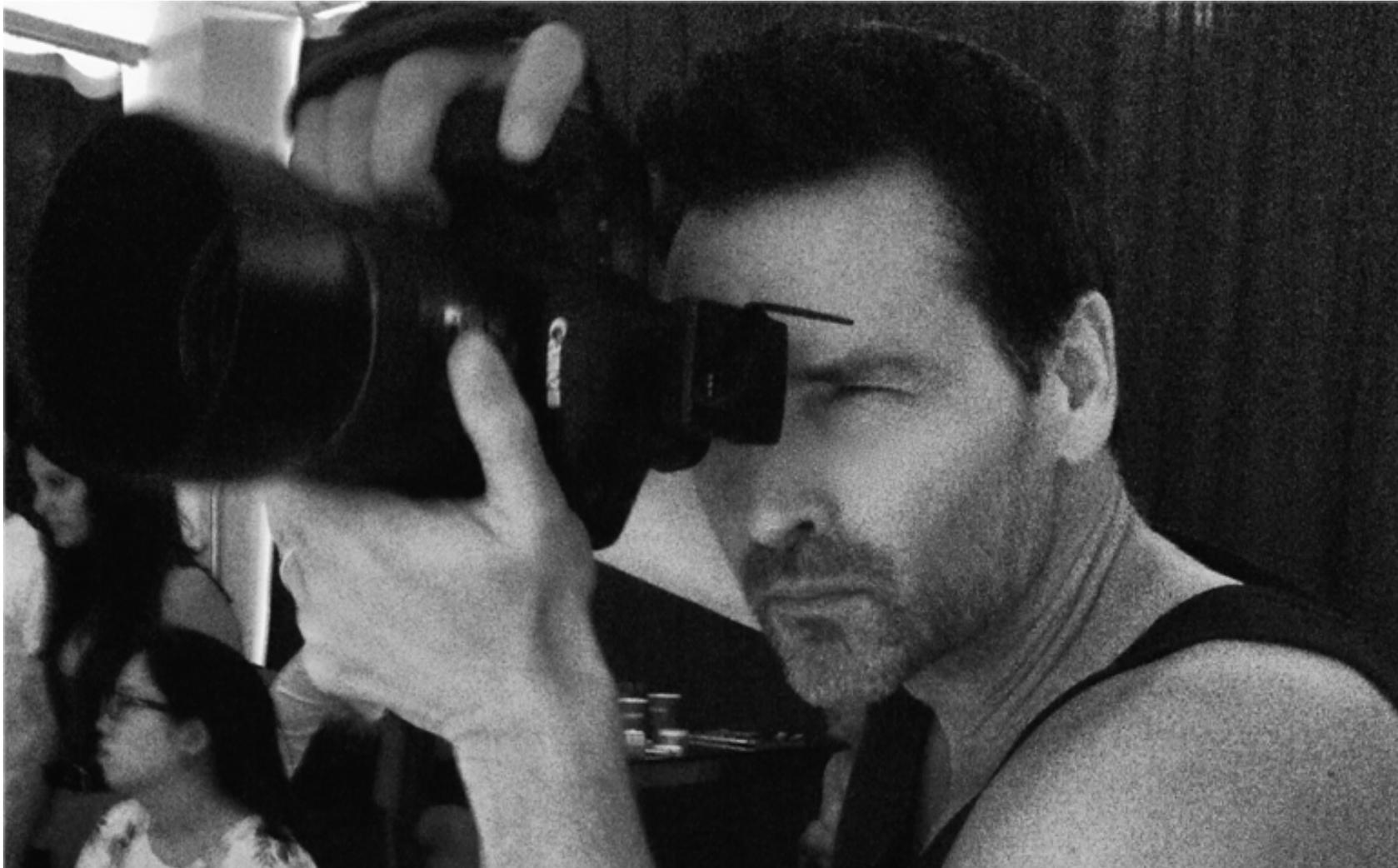


CONTRA

ideas. people. culture.

[HOME](#) [FEATURES](#) [EDITORIALS](#) [CONTRA TV](#) [BACK ISSUES](#) [MASTHEAD](#)

 Search



Get ads like this.



Frame The World: Todd Anthony Tyler

by Matt Ho

November 21, 2012

Todd Anthony Tyler's resume reads something like this: Model, Nature Photographer, Fashion Photographer (in that order). Given the chronology of his experience, the 'model-turned photographer' label isn't wrong, but is it fair considering some of its negative connotations?

Not really.

Todd's interest in photography began at the age of five when he inherited an old school 110 pop-in film camera from his mom. At 13 he saved up for a Minolta X-700, and as he got older, he graduated to more expensive SLRs. A self-described nerdy kid from Canada, he spent weekends taking snapshots of insects, animals and landscapes. He even entered contests and won a few of them.

So what's my point? While he does fit the aforementioned typecast, he probably knew a hell of a lot more about the craft prior to going pro than most lumped into the mold. Todd's deviation from the cliché also stems from the fact that making a living behind the lens wasn't his intention; he was well on his way towards a medical career, having graduated with a major in biology. When he did finally decide to take the leap after ten years of modelling around the world, followed by an epiphany in Thailand (at least that's where he thinks it happened), he started off shooting National Geographic-type scenes before making his mark in Vogue Italia, GQ and L'Officiel, to name a few. Todd credits those earlier days in the outdoors for honing his attention to detail in backdrops, and cementing his preference for being on location.

"I am definitely drawn to sweeping landscapes and when I can get a shoot that takes me out to grand natural environments I am really in my element. There is nothing better for me in regards to the heart of myself as an individual, than shooting a fashion story out on a beautiful stretch of beach, windswept desert plain or a densely vegetated jungle scene."

Ironically, in past interviews, Todd claimed to not be into photographing people, or fashion for that matter. It's easy to assume that the glamour of supermodels and haute couture convinced him to jump ship, but the decision was far from superficial. He was drawn to the creative aspect of storytelling in fashion photography.

"I like for there to be narration in my photographs, but there is not one constant thread or theme to the stories I like to tell," he says. "My fashion stories are influenced by location, styling and even the look and character of the model. Even though I have some forethought, I do let quite a bit of the story develop organically as I am shooting and the opportunity presents itself."

Todd is not the stubborn type obsessively fixated on one idea; he's open to exploring different areas. But a thread in his work is the exploration of darker, edgier motifs. While he could be accused of playing the role of provocateur purely to shock, he makes it clear to me that if what he presents does indeed stir controversy, there's never a conscious effort to do so.

“As much as I do like to have the raw nature of humanity present, I would not shoot anything overtly violent or abusive just for the sake of it. The world is filled enough with hate, violence, abuse, disregard for others and limited tolerance,” he explains. “I wish to portray confidence, a certainty in who a person is and to challenge people to stop denying who they are and embrace themselves as humans.”

Living as an expat in Asia for over ten years operating out of his own studio in Shanghai, Todd was forced to be less risqué for cultural reasons — especially when it came to nudity and sexuality. However, he incorporates the imagery when he can, because he feels the added element of sexual energy can bring a sense of liberation to an audience.

“I think in society human sexuality is often blanketed and suppressed, virtually shamed. Being more open about it opens a door to a bit of freedom for the viewer. They are allowed to think as they wish or feel whatever the image stimulates them to feel without being judged. I think sexual energy in photography or art is simply freeing. Expression is important to me because a lot of an image is made in the model’s eyes along with facial expressions. I like to have something more going on than just a pretty person standing in some nice clothes.”

He backs his principle of avoiding stagnant, mundane compositions by shunning mannequin-esque poses in favor of more animated ones. This requires the usual components of a good team, lighting and direction from Todd, but even more importantly, improvisation and initiative from the models themselves; Todd says that models who reciprocate, react and contribute are the best people to work with. The lookbook he shot for **Uma Wang’s Autumn/Winter 2011 Collection** is a perfect display of the movement and expression he’s after. Part of Todd’s method is to approach the concept as if it were a short film. “The trick,” he says, in its execution, “comes in finding where in a continual stream of motion that you take a still that represents an entire scene in the story.”

This probably goes without saying, but the point of a narrative for a lot of artists is self-expression — to engage people and to establish a connection. It’s about conveying a message, provoking thought and posing questions. In the world of fashion, Todd says that writing off the field as superficial and one-dimensional creates a lost opportunity to realize its potential as a catalyst for positive living and self-discovery.

Todd’s next stint is as resident judge for *Asia’s Next Top Model* (yes, it’s Tyra Banks-approved), alongside host Nadya Hutagalung, fashion director Daniel Boey and model mentor Joey Mead King, which is set to premiere on November 25th. I suppose you could call him Nigel Barker’s counterpart on this incarnation of the franchise given their role on the series and eerily similar life story, but keep in mind that he’s got his own way of doing things. Todd’s looking to break a few more stereotypes not just about the business, but on Asian culture as well.

“Hopefully it will stimulate a little thought on diversity; such as the perception in Asia that you need to be snow white to be considered beautiful. I also think in that sort of context, the show can be informative in showing the different genera’s of fashion from high fashion to commercial, and perhaps provide broad explanations on the attraction of different looks while opening a door to a greater appreciation for that diversity.”

It’s an interesting thought. Reality TV’s main attraction has always been drama and *Top Model* is known for its share of it. Whether or not that entertainment factor overshadows Todd’s ambition remains to be seen; still, you’ve got to admire his optimism. Until then, here’s his chance to prove why after 20+ years of being on both sides of the camera, he’s the right man for the job.





RELATED POSTS

No related photos.

Like 1 person liked this.

DISQUS

Add New Comment

Login



Showing 0 comments

Sort by popular now

[Subscribe by email](#) [RSS](#)

Reactions



Trackback URL

Designed by Broken Receiver & Moxy Creative

CONTRA NETWORK

THE **CONTRA NETWORK**