

SPOTLIGHT

The masterstroke of black and white



Colours may reign supreme in our high definition lives, but the charm of black and white has not been lost. Sayeed Siddiqui, with his work with Cats Eye as well as other projects, has been a pioneer in bringing focus back to the wonder and aesthetics of black and white.

"Why people like black and white photography is a debate that has been on-going for years; factually, black and white photography should have faded over the years, but instead, it just gained popularity with time," Siddiqui said. He further added, "Maybe it is the way our eyes see things. In black and white, we see punchy extremes like black against black or white against white that always stands out."

In his opinion, black and white photography can never replace coloured photography in fashion. In fashion, some photographs intend to portray an image while others portray a product. When portraying an image, black and white photography shall always be sophisticated and timeless.

For a photographer, black and white photography is always a challenge and similarly the satisfaction of conquering this challenge, is quite elevated. Our eyes fail to see things in black and white, but a photographer uses his imagination to turn the hues in colours into tones in black and white, before capturing the black and white photograph. A good photographer will have at least seven to eight tones from extreme black to extreme white.

"Black and white product photography can be quite the challenge and very daunting if the product is in one colour. In this case, a photographer has to use 'lights' and 'globules' to obstruct light in a way that creates deep, mid, and light shadows," said Siddiqui.

Not every black and white portrait would be stunning. It depends greatly on the atmosphere. Such as when you are indoors, the face should be treated as an object and a photographer must paint it with light where anyone with lines and contours in their face would look spectacular.

Ansel Adams, the father of modern photography, has always been an inspiration to Sayeed Siddiqui. Ansel Adams was the first to recognize the tones that nature

provided in light. Later, he manipulated those tones to identify that a camera sees everything in eighteen percent grey. Naturally, a camera is built to see light. Once he identified the eighteen percent grey focus point in his photographs, everything else in the environment fell into place.

"Like everything else, black and white photography has its advantages and disadvantages, but someone like Ansel Adams would know how to turn the drawbacks in black and white photography to his benefit," Siddiqui added.

When asked about viewer's response to his photographs, he talked about the age-old controversy in our society where people have a tendency in appearing to look better than we naturally are. "We are more likely to look for things that aren't even there. Similarly, when we see a piece of art, we either like it or we don't – the initial feeling is what stays. Therefore, artists or photographers don't think too much when it comes to creating an art, if their viewers are fond of it at first sight, they would consider themselves to be successful," added Siddiqui.

Sayeed Siddiqui is a man who doesn't consider himself a storyteller. There are storyteller photographers but he isn't one of them. Instead, he aims for the viewer's personal interpretation of the photo and that is what matters to him.

The previous generations were lucky enough to grow with black and white photography. But for the modern generation, it has been slightly challenging to relate. In Siddiqui's words, "In the end it's a matter of personal choice -whether you want to see a product or an image in fashion photography but with black and white photographs, you always have to be very wise and artistic."

Black and white is his first love. Like Chinese calligraphic art, black and white photographs evoke very raw and watery emotions which he believes will always transcend into something of a great quality to be awed at.

By Mayesha Raidah
Photo: Sayeed Siddiqui

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