



Beyond black and white with photographer Claudio Basso

Nancy DeFelice, Contributing Writer Updated 12:22 p.m., Wednesday, May 18, 2011

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Claudio Basso relaxes at his Woodbury studio. Photo taken May 07, 2011. Photo: Walter Kidd / The News-Times Freelance

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Five minutes with Claudio Basso and one thing is clear -- he's a man used to being in charge. How he directs his guests to a specific chair in his living room, or has them remove their shoes, reveals the artist within. He scrutinizes his world with an intensity that leaves one wondering, is that how he managed to get the light just so on Cindy Crawford, or capture those cherubic expressions of celebrities' children in his famous collection for charity, A Star and a Baby?

Basso's discerning eye, mastery of detail and enormous talent to create beautiful enduring photographs made him a legend in fashion publishing -- his work splashed across the covers and pages of American Vogue, New York Woman, French Elle, Italian Vogue, Vanity, Bazaar, Amica and Grazia. Like his art, the photographer is a work in progress. These days he's

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electrifying the world with his fine art images of nature and personal portraiture created in his Woodbury studio.

Next month, a selection of Basso's fine art work, "Being the Flow," will be published, a compilation of stunning black and white photographs accompanied by spiritual writings from Bodhipaksa, his guru.

"Claudio Basso is a masterful artist adept at capturing the spirit and soul of any subject matter. In his first landscape series, he was able to make even trees look like sensual and organic creatures. Claudio is truly a gifted artist who has the ability to change the way in which we perceive the world around us," said Jennifer Blei Stockman, president of the Guggenheim Museum, in the book's foreward.

Intriguing, but it also begs the question -- how and why did Basso redirect his talent from editorial fashion to fine art and nature? When it comes to Basso, nothing is simply black and white. There's a subtext to the barefoot man in the white polo shirt with a shock of dark tousled hair. He is complex and seemingly full of contradictions that all appear to foster the soul of the artist. He's a Buddhist, meditates and sips green tea.

He's also had three marriages, smokes cigarettes and likes fine wine. Listening to a Sheryl Crow song, his dark eyes twinkled as he gave a wicked but charming grin.

"That's all about me. All I want to do is have some fun before I die," he said.

Basso's life is an intricate tapestry of extraordinary experiences. His work is legendary on four continents. He thinks, speaks and dreams in five languages -- Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English. To understand his brilliance and how his art evolved, it's best to start at the beginning.

Global beginnings

Long before the world embraced the concept of global community, Basso was living it. After he was born in Paris in 1959, his parents moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, then Italy, where he spent his childhood in the "small fishing village" of Portofino.

"Growing up in a culture-rich country like Italy, you are constantly exposed to art," Basso said. "I became a photographer on my fourteenth birthday, when my mother bought me a Russian copy of a 2 ¼ Rolleyflex camera."

A few years later, when he was a sailor on the Italian National Team, a seasoned racer, who was also a "super famous" fashion photographer, offered him work.

"I packed my bags and moved to Milan. I worked as an assistant for a small stipend and slept on the couch in the studio," Basso recalled.

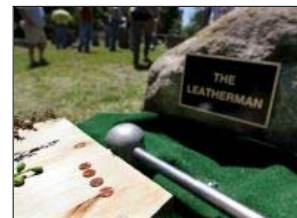
At age 21, he struck out on his own and got his big break. Alberto Nodolini, the renowned art director of Italian Vogue, took several great photographers under his wing, including the young Basso. "Alberto let me look at the light box of master photographers like Richard Avedon and Irving Penn," he said.

Four years later, Basso departed for Paris. When he made his name on the pages of French fashion, he went to London, then Monte Carlo, building his global recognition.

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