

SHOWCASE: ROXY HASTINGS: BOUNDARIES AND BORDERLANDS



Roxy Hastings © Gilles Simard

Brief Introduction by Heather Kuchma, Program Chair

Captivating is the first word that came to mind when I tried to summarize Roxy's member showcase. The 19 images he selected to share with the membership were incredible; then combined with his exceptional storytelling ability he created one very remarkable and memorable presentation. I must commend Roxy for full-heartedly embracing my request to try something a little different with his member showcase this year, by adding a greater amount of context around the images included in the presentation.

Boundaries and Borderlands by Roxy Hastings, IACC Member

Boundaries and Borderlands is my current photographic project. I've been actively shooting this project since my trip to Scotland in the spring of 2014 but I have gone back and used images from 2012 when I was shooting in Turkey and in the spring of 2013 when I was in France. The basic premise for the project is that the shot has to be taken within a few kilometers of a geographical, cultural or political border, or at a spiritual or temporal boundary. While the actual boundary or border that controlled the location of the shot may or may not be immediately evident, some element of its presence has to be visible.

Turkey: Mind the Gap—Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul is the only city in the world that straddles the border of two continents, Europe and Asia, so it is naturally rich with boundary and borderland subjects.

This shot was taken in the old quarters, near Hague Sophia. The title comes from the Gap shirt one of the young men is wearing. This shot captures both the European and Asian flavor of Istanbul, for many reasons. First, we have two Turkish men, but the Gap guy is very proudly sporting a European shirt and his pants are daringly at the knee. Short pants are just not worn by Turkish men ... so this guy is rather bold and pushing his own boundaries. His companion is more conservatively dressed in a modern Asiatic Turkish casual fashion.

We see a small alleyway café with a mix of blonde Euro-style women and Asian looking men.

I like the strong leading lines of this image that draw you into the scene and the timeless black and white works well here, at least I think so, in part by removing the clutter of colour and making you focus on the busy scene. This shot was done in an instant. I walked across a narrow street, heard a motorcycle, turned, saw these two guys out of the corner of my eye, raised the camera, made the shot, and scurried on to catch up with the rest of my group. Just see, shoot and run.





Men of Mardin
Mardin, Turkey

Mardin was the most dangerous city I have ever visited and certainly the most dangerous that I have photographed. In the space of some six hours, I was involved in three potentially lethal situations and my small group was constantly on the edge of being challenged. Mardin is on the border of Syria, in the Turkish part of Kurdistan, so not only is there a political boundary, but there is a strong clash of cultures. Caucasians are not very common and those carrying DSLRs are even less so. They attract attention, not always welcoming!

As we skirted the edge of a large plaza we heard a young man's challenging voice ring out: "Hey F***ing Amereeeecan, take my damn peeecture. Hahaha." We spotted four young men smirking at us from across the courtyard. By this time, I was tired of Turkey and irked by their attitude.



Scotland

By the time I got to Scotland, after over two years of serious travel photography, I had evolved away from trying to shoot reality and was more interested in trying to capture mood and feeling. The soft cloudy light of Scotland was the best I had ever shot under; it was perfect for my head space. I was also more aware of composition and lighting in general.

I raised my Nikon to my eye and started slowly walking towards them. Beside me my friend Laurie hissed, "Roxy, what the f*** do you think you're doing?" "They said take their damn picture and that's what I'm doing." "Oh, all right," Laurie sighed, "but this could turn into real s*** you know?" "I know," I replied, in a voice a lot braver than I felt!

When I got to within a few meters of the group, three of them could not contain themselves and burst out laughing. No one had expected what I had just done. The fourth guy called out, "Hey, where you from?" "Canada," I croaked. "Oh, Canada! Hey Canada, you're all right!" This is my favourite shot of Turkey.





Mordor – Trotternish Mountains, Isle of Skye

The Trotternish Mountains are some of the oldest highlands on earth. Their core was formed during the Silurian, at a time when you could walk from this spot to Newfoundland and not get your feet wet! Here the Atlantic was just a few kilometers away, creating my geophysical boundary. It was early spring; the weather was rotten, with both mist and rain; perfect for shooting!

In terms of composition, this much photographed view was set up to capture the three peaks with a rise from left to right. It was shot with my Olympus in Dramatic Tone art mode, which is basically a grainy in-camera HDR. This created a high contrast, yet gritty look and it accentuated the distal fog. In Photoshop, I loaded it as a RAW image and used a graduated filter to enhance the structure of the sky. I used a grayscale action filter called Dawn Treader, which softened the image and then dodged and burned to bring in local contrast. The end result was intended to create a rather foreboding and fearful looking landscape. But the small s-shaped path left of center gives a bit of human touch.



Eilean Donan Castle

Again, a spot that was on my lifelong bucket list, and apparently that of almost every other traveler on the planet! Eilean Donan is known as “the most photographed castle in the world!” The castle has been fought over and occupied by several cultural groups: the Scots, Vikings, English and Spanish; sits on the boundary of three big lochs; and is a long stone throw from the ocean—easily qualifying as a borderland’s shot.

The on-site challenge here was to shoot this castle from an uncommon angle, get good light, and to avoid the usual mass of tourists crawling all over it! This was all accomplished thanks to a great guide who insisted that we not shoot the Saturday evening that we arrived, but instead who got me back to the castle a half hour before opening on a Sunday morning. This gave me time to scout my site and be first in a very short line. The light was a fantastic soft and warm golden hour. I let the small crowd rush ahead of me and to get into the castle. Then, having the entire causeway area to myself, I set up my tripod to take advantage of the strong leading lines that the causeway provided. I think most photographers don’t get this shot because the place is usually just too crowded.



Where She Rests—Kilmuir Cemetery, Isle of Skye

This cemetery, on the northeastern tip of the Isle of Skye, is the final resting ground of Flora MacDonald, saviour of Bonnie Prince Charlie. It fits the theme because it’s a graveyard and thus a place of spiritual transition.

Kilmuir was on my lifelong bucket list of places to see. But when I got there what attracted me was the haunting loneliness of the scattered ancient graves in a very rugged and vast sweep of land. So, while everyone else rushed to Flora’s grave, I walked to a far edge of the cemetery got down on my knees and tried to capture the loneliness of the spot.

This was again shot with an Olympus, but is a combination of the Dramatic Tone jpg and a camera raw file. The raw file was used to sharpen and brighten the overall image and a graduated filter was used to pull out the sky structure detail. Gravestone shadow depth was burned in with Photoshop.