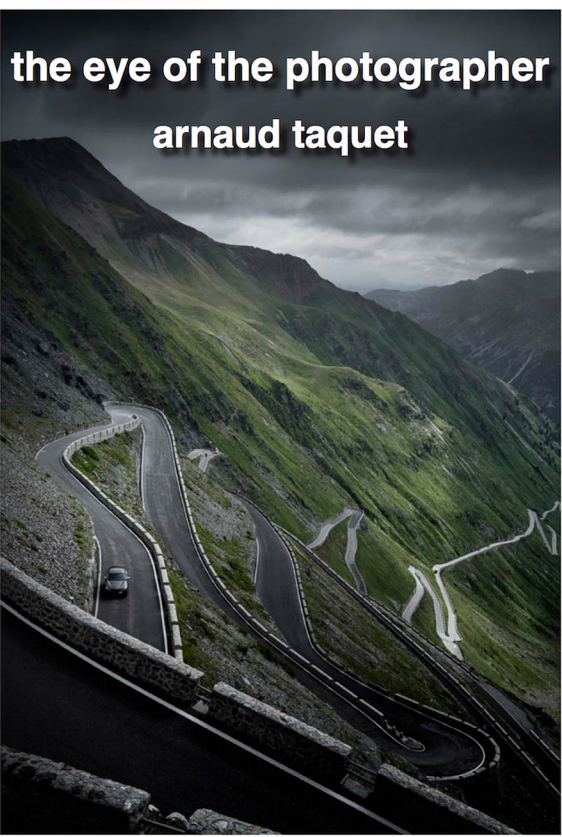


the eye of the photographer

arnaud taquet



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At Auto Class we know that photography is the beating heart of an article. Where words struggle, there is nothing better than bringing the reader in the middle of the action, just as if he was there with us, and allowing him to really live the fantastic emotions of a day driving a supercar on some road that seems literally borrowed from the wildest imagination. A few months ago we deepened our knowledge with one of the most influential photographers in the world, the French Arnaud Taquet. We have chosen him among the many professionals for the fact that with his unique style he's able to range from minimalist shooting, to an incredible ability to enhance locations created by Mother Nature, passing through an exceptional vision of what is around him. His are some of the most beautiful shots you see in the advertising field and in this second interview, after discovering how his passion for photography was born and what cars he drive, we decided to focus entirely on his art of photography. Yes, because there is a border (and it is not a thin line) between a simple photograph and this form of visual art and he represents one of the best example.

What cameras and lenses do you use?
What's in your bag?
 I'm definitely not a gear addict and do travel light. I'm more into cars than photography so I'd better focus on how to give my best with what I have instead of finding a way to have more and more equipment. I'm shooting with a Sony A7R1I, a pretty tiny camera helped by three different Zeiss lenses matching the compactness of the body: 55mm, 55mm and 24-70mm. I'm also representing Irix Lenses as an ambassador and often use their 15mm. I got to test their 11mm which is also very interesting but definitely too extreme for my professional use.

Which is your favorite lens? And what is the best combo for automotive photography?
 I don't have so many lenses so each of them suits a situation better than the others. I mean, I was tempted to answer my favorite lens is the 24-70mm 2.8 because it's the only zoom I have and it obviously is more practical. But it also is the biggest lens I have which ruins the practical side of having light equipment. Also, it depends what for. For detail shots, I'd rather use the 55mm 1.8 instead. For landscapes and car interiors, the Irix 15mm is mindblowing.

What is the most important ingredient for a proper shooting?
 Having no pressure and being as free as possible. What clients sometimes don't get is 1) that I'm a lot into cars and once the brief is given, I'd do everything on my own for the car to look great, not only the image itself, 2) I'm putting enough pressure on myself for other people to add some more. So...yes, most important ingredient is to be believed to please the client, but then to be left alone for me to manage my own amount of pressure.

What is the piece you can't leave home?
 The only thing I couldn't shoot without is a CPL (circular polarizing filter) in front of every single lens I have. I'm not even often using flashes (I still have some Profoto equipment) or tripod. It's not about being lazy but more about feelings. I feel like there's no need to spend hours on a picture if you're satisfied with one shot and have enough material on the image to post-process it the way you want. Also, it's a good way to make sure the image will stay natural and won't look like 3D or CGI helped by dozens of light sources.

How do you choose your locations?
 It depends on the car. Some locations suit some cars better. It makes no sense for me to shoot an S-Class on a racetrack and a Lotus in front of an old mansion. Also, it depends on the guidelines and permits. Actually, I'm not really choosing my locations but more often have to pick my favorite out of a shortlist.

What about indoor shootings?
 Indoor shootings often mean bringing more equipment and especially lightning equipment. I love it when it's rare enough. Working on having the perfectly lightning and reflections on a car and in the background is always pretty exciting since you're basically replacing the sunlight with your own little suns. It gives you a proper freedom but since you have so many options, shooting takes way longer. I'd say an indoor commercial picture take me 3 to 10 times longer than an outdoor image but it's often worth it.

What about commercial photography?
How much does it differ?
 Commercial = guidelines. The most frustrating one is confidentiality. Because the car can't be seen ahead of its official unveiling a few months later, the locations shortlist becomes even shorter. Also, commercial means working for brands and agencies so they are at least two people in charge of telling you what to do. Some people would trust you and first see what you offer. Some other would just tell you exactly what to do and take away your tastes, freedom and motivation to give your best. But after all, commercial means a lot more work: on location, to light every single part of the car, enhance textures, avoid reflections and please the brand's design department. - post-processing, to sort out the images and put together 10 to 30 images that will make one and only in the end.

It definitely is a challenge. You're not as free as when you're shooting for marketing or editorial use, but you have much longer to shoot and commercial projects always end up being the most exciting part since it does involve a lot of pressure from yourself and people who believe in you and that you can't frustrate.

How long does the editing process take you and how much is that important to valorize your work?
 I must say I'm always retouching my images. 90% of the time, post processing takes me from 5sec (Instagram filters) to 5min (editorial, marketing, digital). Commercial projects imply at least as long shooting as retouching but it's pretty rare when I do spend longer than half a day retouching an image. Commercial average might be like 3 to 4 hours. It's super important as photography is a way for your eyes to express themselves and post-

processing offers almost as much possibilities. Digital work helps you leading your clients to what you want them to look at. It just helps you building more precisely the world that your taste is asking you to create. I'm not only shooting. I'm shooting knowing in advance how I'm gonna retouch the image. That's sad for some, but since the retouching work helps you being more and more precise with what you want to show, I honestly feel like Photoshop improves the creativity and possibilities.

It's like having a unique engine on a perfect balanced chassis but having old school tires not matching with innovative technology and performances. Photoshop is the double clutch sequential gearbox of photography, if you wanna explore new limits and kill lap times, you just can't use a manual transmission anymore.

Can we consider automotive photography as a form of art?
 I sure is. Photography is the extension of your eyes but also the proper image of your taste and feelings. When you show people a picture, you're indirectly forcing them to see it the way you want with the lightning you want and the angle you prefer. As long as you're creating something on your own, I'd call it art, especially because the possibilities are endless.

What is the secret recipe in order to be motivated and full of ideas not to repeat the same kind of photos?
 There's no shame I think repeating the same kind of photos as long as you're happy with it. Even better when your clients also are satisfied. It's just a matter of vision. If you're a photographer because you love aesthetics in general, you're always gonna find a way to break the comfortable situation you're in to explore new horizons. If you're a photographer because you realized you could earn your living showing people what they want to see, that's pretty different. There's no secret, it depends on your nature and on how passionate you are about photography.



Rig shots (almost static) or rolling shots?
 Because I like true moments and images smelling tires and showing powerlines: rolling shots. Because I love sharpness and working on the lighting: rig or even virtual rig. Also, it's a matter of shooting conditions. I'm just back from Norway where I honestly found it more clever to shoot static shots becoming dynamic images later instead of freezing by -20°C for half an hour and ending up having more blurred images because of bumps and shaky hands (haha).

Golden hours, night shots, or midday?
 Night shots are close to indoor shots. Same pros and cons. Midday is annoying unless you're in the shade. Golden hours may be the best but I hate it when it's too gold especially when the orange light ruins the true color of a car.

Road trip shooting essentials. What do you bring with you?
 I was tempted to say "someone I love" but I must admit some of my best days were when I was road-tripping alone by night in Yosemite, for a few days in New-Zealand or even in southern Europe with supercars.



Sharing unforgettable moments during road trips is also part of my life's best moments. With my girlfriend all around Europe, with my best friend in the US or in Iceland or with my family. Although, I've got to say it's frustrating when I don't have my camera with. Also, I do have a DJI drone and can't stop myself from taking it with everywhere I go.

If you could choose any car and any road, what would you take and where?
 That's a tough one. Thanks for ruining my day struggling picking my favorite option between having a manual LP640 Roadster in Iceland or riding a manual 991 GT3 all along the Route des Grandes Alpes (almost 700kms from Nice to the northern part of the French Alps). Also considering a 7-speed manual V12 Vantage S in New-Zealand.

What advices do you give to someone starting to look at automotive photography?
 I never wanted to get any advice from anyone. If you're enough into it, you're gonna work day and night without feeling that you're working until people will understand how motivated you are. Well...there's only one advice I'd have liked to hear: help your eyes and taste getting more and more experience to progressively get to know yourself better.

What is the best moment of your career so far?
 I'm pretty happy now actually, sharing my time between commercial projects and test drives (I'm also writing stories) for sports cars magazines and lifestyle websites. Working with car-makers and agencies is professionally speaking really engaging and exciting and helps you being always more self-demanding. Finding myself behind the wheel is a good way to keep in touch with what pushed me into that business: sports cars. Also, I'm basically free when it comes to editorial and marketing photography. Commercial projects involve lots of guidelines and shooting editorials allow me to do exactly what I want to do. It's like paid personal projects. I'm still looking forward to see what's next but I can't complain about the current situation.