

Adam Hinton

“We were walking back to the car and a sixteen-year-old kid came over with a gun...”

At the age of 12, Adam Hinton wanted a camera. “Photography was what I was going to do,” he states. Despite money being tight, his father saw his desire and bought him the model he so desperately wanted.

Years later and Adam has fulfilled his childhood premonition and is a renowned photographer who is highly respected among his peers. He works across the advertising and documentary genres, and some of his clients include the BBC, British Airways, HSBC and Nike, to name just a few.

At the moment Adam is extensively travelling the globe and documenting the redevelopment of the slums in Third World countries; he is establishing how people live in poverty and what the future has in store for them. Beginning this intense project in

the famous slums of Dharavi, India, Adam wanted to show how ordinary people cope in poverty-stricken circumstances. “Dharavi started off as a place where immigrants arrived,” he explains. “It was on the outskirts of what was then Bombay. Of course now the city has extended massively, so the slums are now in the heart of it. Dharavi has a massive history: it has about a million people living there, and because of its growth and size it comes with political issues. It cannot be bulldozed out of the way as others in the past have been because there would be a massive outcry.”

“Interestingly, Mumbai has a very good record for recycling, and something like 70-80 per cent of all recycling in Mumbai goes through Dharavi. The poor can’t afford not to recycle so I wanted to take a closer look at this place and record the situation

LAUGHTER IN KHAYELITSHA
A group of local women waiting at the hairdressers in the Khayelitsha township of Cape Town, South Africa



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“People were talking about crime on a daily basis, about people getting killed in their neighbourhoods”

HANDS UP
Scene from a commission for AXA UK, Africa



in a documentary fashion to try to grasp some of the issues going on.”

As he initially wanted to take images of architects and local government figures, Adam was trying to get a broader perspective of how the area was going to be redeveloped. But he found it almost impossible to get anything substantial out of these people, as no one wanted to be photographed or interviewed on film. “It’s almost that the poor are very happy for you to photograph them and to be with them, whereas the richer people seem very suspicious of the whole thing,” he pauses. “It’s probably because of their wealth. With government officials I couldn’t even photograph their development maps showing how they were going to segregate the area.” So considering the project from another angle, Adam realised that to address the subject matter he would need to go into the heart of it and into the slums.

Walking into and documenting the slums is not something to be approached in a blasé manner, and for Adam there was a great deal of pre-planning that needed to be done before the practical side of the project could begin. “It took a while to organise,” he states, “but luckily I had contacts for people in there from a previous photography job, so they basically arranged for me to meet up with people who could help. You have to have a translator with you and [Adam’s translator] Ravi came with me everywhere.”

Adam found large families to be both a key part in his projects and a quick way of introducing himself into the community. “If they have young children it usually means the kids have lots of friends so you can get involved straight away.” Adam also found the people to be extremely friendly and approachable. “I’m fortunate as people are open with me and they are willing to talk quite freely in such a short space of time. I’ve found that they have the same desires – they’re just much poorer. These people aren’t different, it’s just situations and economical

MUMBAI, INDIA
Homes and workshops built along the Mahim Sulochana Shetty Road, Dharavi, Mumbai, India





“Dharavi has a massive history – it has about a million people living there”

►► circumstances have led them to live in poverty – and that can be changed. It’s a human economy and we govern it.”

During his time in Dharavi, Adam began to think about the issue of slums on a grander scale, so to extend the project on a global level he travelled over to South America. “I worked in a slum in Rio, and it’s interesting because there they are very organised. You go to the leaders, talk to them, and if they allow you to work there then they talk to the gang leaders. If the gang leader says you’re fine, then you’re okay. I had to be out by five because then all the drug deals would start happening.” However, Adam found this particular slum to be too restrictive and decided to continue on with the project elsewhere.

Putting yourself on the line and documenting some of the poorest places in the world is not an easy task, and Adam has encountered his share of traumatic experiences on his travels. In Caracas, Venezuela, Adam was a victim of a gun crime. “I got held up on the first day I was there,” he says. “I was doing a scout of a location with a producer on a Sunday when it was quiet. We were walking back to the car and a 16-year-old kid came over with a gun.” Adam explains what was going through his head at that point: “Great, that’s it. My

cameras are gone and I’m back on the plane. I just got here and the project is finished.

“Another kid went around my pockets and he was pointing the gun at my stomach while trying to get my wedding ring off,” he continues. “Then two guys rocked up on a bike, and one jumped off the back. The guy who jumped off the bike had a gun to my head behind me but I wasn’t aware of it. They grabbed my camera bag.”

But at that point Adam had slice of good luck, as someone else came along. “He must have been an older brother as he started having a scuffle with the others,” Adam says. He must have known he wasn’t going to get shot and he got some of my gear back. I managed to borrow some more gear and carry on the project with one camera.”

Despite leaving the situation physically unharmed, Adam explains the psychological impact an encounter like that can have: “It clipped my wings a bit. I like to wander around these places, so it reminded me that you simply cannot do that. I had been told it was a dangerous place – one of the most dangerous cities in the world – but I hadn’t bothered to look. Nothing had happened before so I was being a bit naive. That night when I got back I looked ►►

STREET LIFE
Street scene in a local market on Dharavi Main Road, Mumbai, India



RUBBISH IN THE STREETS
Goats picking through rubbish left outside people’s homes. Mahim Sion Link Road, Dharavi, Mumbai, India



◀ COPS AND ROBBERS

A young boy plays with a toy gun, Rafah, Gaza

GETTING TO KNOW...



Adam Hinton

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Kit: I've got the smallest kit bag you could carry: two bodies (Canon EOS 5D), four lenses and a mic now. The quality of the digital stuff is so good and you can film with it so I've switched. The trick with filming is to keep the camera moving. Hold it in your hand and don't try to

stay still. It's an aesthetic now, that slow movement with the camera. If you keep your hand moving very, very slowly it doesn't freeze up.

Stills or the moving image? As a tool for documentary a DSLR is amazing. I can show a place with still pictures and talk about some of the issues and then I can go in and hear what people are saying. Most of the people I interview are women as I go into people's houses. I want to find out what their hopes are and how things should change. My wish is people will see and want to help change it.

How did you get into photography? Initially commercial photography interested me; however, I was a bit naive as to what I wanted to do. I failed all my O-levels, but I went back to college and retook all five of them and an O-level in Photography. From there I decided to do a one-day-a-week diploma in Photography at the college, and then I got a job with a local photographer, which I did for two months, but it was awful and I hated it. Things got bad for him and he couldn't employ me any more. I was working for my dad four days a week and I got a book to go and do a degree in Photography. I went off there.



▲ STOP AND SEARCH

A prostitute protests to a police officer after her friends are searched as the police look for a reported gunman. Caracas, Venezuela

▶▶ it up online and there are over 20 people killed a day, and they have a 3 per cent clear-up rate with the police. The crime rate is absolutely debilitating the poor there, and I've never been anywhere like it. People moan about crime in the UK where there really isn't any. These people were talking about crime on a daily basis, about people getting killed in their neighbourhoods."

For the future, Adam explains how he is soon to be off on a trip to South Africa on an assignment for the Save the Children charity, and he is also trying to start a project about poverty in Britain. "It's difficult to do it here as there is more red tape to get around and people are less inclined to let you do it. I find working in this



▲ EMBRACE

A young couple kiss at a birthday party. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

country very difficult as I get diverted all the time. When I'm away I can switch the phone off. It's funny, but it seems to work like that for me."

As for expectations and the preparation that goes into each job, Adam informs us of his worries: "I get stressed and I think, 'Can I get decent pictures from the trip? Am I good enough to do it?' I'm human and I have the same fears as many." Adam also takes into account his personal safety, and he recently turned down a trip to film and photograph the Niger Delta. "People get killed and disappear there. I don't want to do that. I've got a family and I can't leave them behind."