



Still Life with Smoked Fish

A DESIRE *for* LIFE

TEXT: ANN TSANG

IMAGES: DOMINIQUE LAUGÉ COURTESY OF PICTURE THIS

Based in Gaillac, close to Toulouse in France, photographer Dominique Laugé combines beautiful natural light with bountiful fresh produce that the region yields to produce striking still life images which have captured the attention of galleries worldwide and keep him in demand by leading publishers who consistently value the quality of his work.





Tondo 1



Tondo 2



Still Life With A Pear, Apples and Prunes



Still Life with Vegetables

Photographer Dominique Laugé was born in La Rochelle, France in 1958. He studied at the Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara, California from 1982 to 1984, during which time he also studied the Zone system under Robert Werling and Ansel Adams. In 1985, Laugé began his career as a professional photographer, moving to Milan in 1986 and returning to base himself in France in 2005.

"It's a good place to shoot still life because it's easy to find beautiful fruit, vegetables and nature," says Laugé. "I use a lot of produce from my garden – apples, pears, quinces, prunes...and we also have incredible markets where I can find the freshest of everything."

Still life is something that has always appealed to Laugé. "I started when I was very young, shooting for advertisements when I was living in Italy. When I decided to focus on photography full-time, I kept shooting still life but without a client, which was actually far more interesting for me."

As is quite evident in his work, Laugé photographs using only natural daylight, always from the same window in his studio and always from the same direction, "like a painter with only one window," he says. "My cultural background is not in photography, it is in painting. That is why the images look like oil paintings; I love 17th Century paintings, and it was an important period for still life."

In order to achieve his desired effect, Laugé works with a digital camera and then adapts the images for the paper onto which they are then printed, a handmade paper made especially for him by a paper maker based in Sicily, which took two years to create. "It's a very thick, acid-free, Egyptian cotton paper which is very smooth and precise; even though it's quite heavy, you have the feeling of a beautiful paper but it still retains the precision of an industrial paper," says the photographer. "I also use mineral pigments to print the images so that they will last a long time, and are resilient to air and light."

In addition to fruit, vegetables and other subjects of an edible nature, Laugé, also an enthusiastic cook, often uses creatures of the sea in his work. "I like fish a lot," he muses, all the while pointing out that whatever the subject, in still life composition is of primary importance. "To achieve the perfect equilibrium, you have to consider the balance of light, shadow and the mass of the object. There few photographers who solely focus on still life because it's very demanding," he points out.

"When photographing wine, you have to consider the light reflections on the bottles or the glasses, and this is a further challenge when you only use natural light," states Laugé. "Last year I did a series of wine images that were particularly well received because I think the composition was just right. The equilibrium was perfect, the colour...images that makes viewers feel like it would be a perfect moment to pick up a glass of wine themselves."

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"You have to make it [the produce] look appetising, most of the time," states the photographer. "But it can be interesting to let time pass and see how the items on the set change. It may be that I wait three or four days before I choose to photograph, because sometimes the fruits are more intriguing as they grow older. I often just let nature do its work."

Intimate, sensitive, with the resonance of soft colours, sometimes ethereal and always beautifully crafted, Laugé's work has a wonderful dreamlike quality, but in his opinion, this was not always the case, specifically when he was restricted by the conventional boundaries of advertising upon first embarking on

his career. "What was frustrating was the layouts I had to follow," he states. "Of course it's natural to have limits in the advertising industry, but at the end of the day, it's all about the brands, which to a photographer becomes less and less interesting as time goes on. I had fun with advertisements, but then there was a kind of divorce. We left each other with no anger; I just felt that I couldn't do it any more."

Today Laugé seems perfectly content pursuing his way of doing things and currently works on editorial projects for various prestigious European magazines and publishers, as well as exhibiting his work at leading photography galleries in Europe, the US and Asia, including Picture This Gallery in Hong Kong.

It seems for him, there is a great deal of life still to be lived, not to mention photographed...

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