

Couvrette Studio

SOLUTIONS – Photography

By Heather Seftel-Kirk

Paul Couvrette has created portraits of every Prime Minister since Pierre Trudeau. Besides portraits, Couvrette has an interest in landscapes and still life images, designed to bring spaces to life.

Photo: Couvrette/Ottawa



A world-renowned and award winning artist, Paul Couvrette continues to survive and thrive in the competitive, and sometimes trendy world of visual arts.

Through Couvrette Studios and his new Fine Arts Photography venture, he brings the craft of photography to new levels, whether it is through portraits, weddings, or his new interest, still life and scenic imagery.

Educated as a journalist at Carleton University, Couvrette's photography began as a hobby. "I worked as a freelance writer on stories about artists and I used photography to illustrate them. I realized quickly it was my photos that had the greatest impact and garnered the most feedback," he says.

Leaving Canada to travel in Europe he spent a year working on Bond Street in London, England, consulting high end clients like David Bowie, Princess Anne and Peter Ustinov.

That early contact with celebrities and icons would be the beginning of a lifetime photographing such famous people. He

has created portraits of every Prime Minister since Pierre Trudeau, photographed every Ottawa mayor since 1975 and has captured the images of other famous names ranging from Cowpland, Matthews and Potter to Romeo Dallaire and including politicians, architects, ambassadors, judges, actors and royalty. He has created more than 450 magazine covers for publications including Time and Macleans and his product and fashion photography has appeared in magazines like Chate-laine, Vogue and Architectural Digest.

"My business has grown organically, driven by client demand. The first wedding I did was for Paul Anka's sister who had seen my work and approached me to cover her wedding. I've been fortunate because people see my work, like it and want more."

Though Couvrette finds it hard to pinpoint his specific style he says people like his brother, who know his work, say they can pick it out when they see it without photo credits pointing the way. Perhaps the one stylistic feature he will

admit to is technical precision. "I come from the age of film and a lot of what I do is bound technically to that. You had a roll of 12 shots so you had to get it right. There was no taking 50 shots to get one good one; it had to be exposed correctly, have the clarity and right color balance. That old-school dark room precision required time and care and a different way of taking pictures."

Admitting there can be 'happy accidents,' but rarely, Couvrette says people need to understand not everything can be fixed in Photoshop and, while there is a trend for tricks and fads, he prefers classic photography, without gimmicks, which will always stand the test of time. "Trends come and go but if you look at a great photograph from 20 years ago, it still has value."

Couvrette says he always creates the image he wants in his mind's eye before trying to capture it on film. "I believe a photo should tell a story. I research my subjects when I can and look for the story behind who or what I'm photo-

graphing. A smiling photo of a child has less impact than an image of that same child with an ice cream cone melting down the child's hand. I look back at the work of Karsh (a friend and mentor) and the images all tell a story about the subject."

His passion for people, and his art, combines to create a unique experience for everyone involved. "Some of my most enjoyable moments have been spending time with people, famous or not, who have done amazing things. While we're working we spend time talking about their careers, their joys and disappointments. What other profession would allow you into people's lives like that? People's stories and what makes them tick, it's all really interesting."

Besides portraits, Couvrette

has an interest in landscapes and still life images, designed to bring spaces to life. "As you visit places in Ottawa, hotels and offices and such, you see pictures and art not at all connected to the city. It is so classic to be from a city and not appreciate what is there. If you visit the Rideau Club you see a collection of Malak (Karsh) images that really represent the city – views from the Peace Tower, the Parliamentary Library – parts of the city everyone should see."

Saying the impact of large sized prints on the wall can't be beat, Couvrette is hoping more local companies will want to present a share of their city, and this is part of the inspiration for his new site. And he says, while the focus is on other forms of art as investment, people need to

remember the value of photography. "I have two pieces of art hanging on the wall behind my desk at home. One is a portrait by Karsh that has gone up in value by 50 times what I paid for it. There is very little in life that can earn those kinds of returns."

Couvrette believes the digital age is one reason the art of photography has taken a downturn but hopes people understand, on some level, that digital imagery is fleeting. "People take pictures with their phones and digital cameras, file them away on a hard drive somewhere and then never look at them again. Where is the value in that?"

Couvrette, who says his family always managed to afford good portraits when he was a child, fears people have lost that means of connecting. "There is a glut of digital images out there and people forget the value of an actual, physical photo until they lose someone and then there is an urgency to get printed images of the person. The world is going around so fast, people are grabbing these quick shots of moments and people, throwing them on websites, never thinking those sites aren't always going to be there. I wonder how many people today actually have a solid photo of their wedding, or a newborn child."

While some might shy away from such a renowned photographer, fearing cost, Couvrette says the market in Ottawa is so competitive, rates here are half of what they might be in Toronto or other centres. "That's one of the reasons Karsh didn't do much work locally and one of the reasons I get called so often to Toronto and Montreal and the States."

Couvrette is involved with the community through several local charities, including the Ottawa Humane Society, WaterCan, MADD, the Ottawa Youth Orchestra and CHEO.

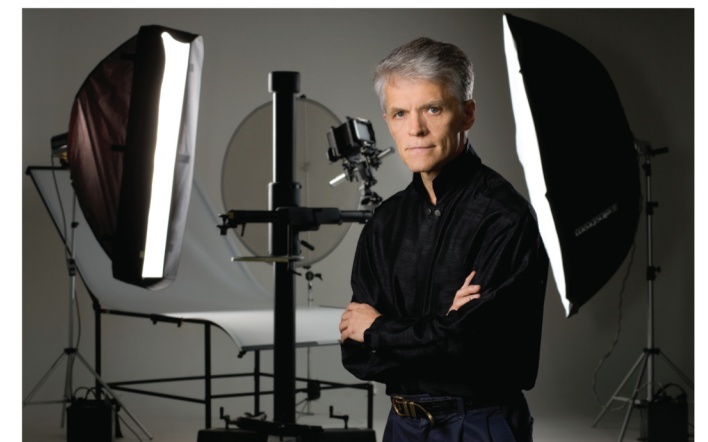
He has been honored with many prestigious awards including Canadian Photographer of the Year, Ontario Photographer of the Year and Ottawa Photographer of the Year.

Paul Couvrette works from his 4,000 sq. ft studio in Centre-town he uses his space, or off-site locations, to create memories and make lasting impressions.

Couvrette Studio

430 Gladstone Ave
Ottawa, ON
K2P 0Z1

(613) 238-5104
couvrette-photography.on.ca



Paul Couvrette