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# A Life Devoted to Vision: Howard Schatz at the Lumiere Center

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Pascale LeRoy, Smuin Ballet, photographed in San Francisco, February 1997. **Schatz / OrnStein 2013**

For a man who only took up photography in earnest at a time when others might be considering early retirement, Howard Schatz has had a truly prolific career. Curator Olga Annanurova and her colleagues at the Lumiere Center for Photography trawled through thousands of his images published in over 20 books to decide on the material for their latest exhibition: "Howard Schatz: 25 Years of Photography."

"He's an artist that works in many different genres, but when we looked through the huge array of photographs that span his career the most interesting for us were those that took the human body as their subject," said Annanurova in an interview with The Moscow Times. "We wanted to show the diverse ways in which he works with the human body in all its different incarnations: be it a portrait or simple fragments of the whole."

While Schatz only published his first photography book "Gifted Women" in 1992, in a

way, his whole life has been dedicated to vision. The photographer had a successful career as retina specialist until the pull of his hobby drew him to a second, no less successful profession. Since focussing his efforts to photography full-time, Schatz's photographs have been published in the likes of Vanity Fair and The New York Times Magazine, not to mention countless commercial and advertising assignments.

His training as an eye doctor gave him a natural flair for the technical side of photography: lenses, optics and an exacting, almost medical preoccupation with the human body. A significant proportion of the current exhibitions at the Lumiere Center are devoted to dancers and athletes — in them you not only appreciate the evident beauty of the human body, but also its power. Graceful movements belie taught muscles and straining tendons: bodies drip with sweat or contort in their physical exertion. Schatz's photographs are exhibited around the world for their artistic beauty, but there's a technical, often scientific approach to the shot he is trying to achieve.

Another aspect of Schatz's success has been his ability to form quick, trusting relationships with his photography subjects. This easy "bedside manner" allows him to capture the unguarded, intimate moments that characterize his images. For his series "Caught in the Act: Actors Acting," Schatz presented actors with imagined scenarios and photographed their spontaneous responses. From Colin Firth struggling to remember the name of a woman he once had a one-night stand with to Allison Janney berating her philandering husband, the videos and accompanying photographs make for entertaining viewing. From the beginning, Schatz's photography has been characterized by him asking his subjects to tell a story, be it real or imagined.

His third book — and the one that brought him international recognition — features portraits of homeless people on the streets of San Francisco. Still practising as a retina specialist during the week, Schatz spent his weekends walking the streets, talking with people sleeping rough and taking their picture. A number of his black and white portraits are on show at the current exhibition alongside revealing accompanying quotes.

Now a world-renowned photographer with the power to turn down commissions, Schatz is still fascinated by the breadth of human society. In 2010 he created a series at Suffolk County Corrections Facility, where he talked and photographed inmates to create unexpectedly powerful and intimate portraits.

"Some of the prisoners resemble clothing models. Schatz is asking you to consider the way you view the people around you," said Annanurova. "That's why his photography is so interesting, because it has a democratic span — we can see how people differ, and at the same time, how they are similar."

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