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The Photography Zine by Ewen Bell



Edition #11
October 2026

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KATHMANDU

Nepal



THE COVER

Streets of Boudhanath

I walk past this wall every time I head to Boudha, and have been wanting to capture an image with it. Today I got my chance, with this good boy posing in the sun for me. Most people who visit Boudha are fixated on the stupa, and rightly so. It's amazing and you get to enjoy it from every angle of light. But the back streets around the stupa are interesting too.

I spent a few days in a hotel here and really liked it. I could take a walk and do some laps of the stupa, then go back to the hotel to work on my documentary. It's hard to walk anywhere in most of Kathmandu. Thamel for example is so intense and you risk getting knocked over by a motorbike anytime you step onto the street. Boudha is far more peaceful.



THIS EDITION

Seen

The Doco

Mala & Friends

Doubt

October 2026

This month I have arrived in Nepal early to work on my documentary project. I have picked a "quiet" corner of Kathmandu to devote some attention to the task, stepping out for food and to stretch my legs during the day.

Most of my day is immersed in the story of a monk who wants to be a photographer. I started this documentary project in early 2025, and took a break for most of 2026. My head is filled with the journey of a young soul, excited by the world around them and excited by the art of photography. This documentary brings together elements of Buddhism and elements of photography. Mostly it's about the joy that comes from photography and connecting with your subject.

This edition of the zine is a chance for me to step away from the documentary and editing footage. I haven't taken a lot of photos on this trip so far. I have a few weeks ahead of intense photography, and trying some new lenses. I will be sharing more of that in the next zine edition :)

A quick word of thanks to the sponsors who make this publication possible.

I need to say thankyou for ongoing support from my sponsors. They help to make my life on the road a little easier, and help to keep my photography viable.

I don't want to fill the pages with too many adverts, so please allow me this little reminder that the folks at TT Artisan, Peak Design, OKKO, Neewer, Pergear, Tamron and Angelbird have been generous in their support for my work.

A special thank you to all my YouTube subscribers as well. It's great to have you here :)



TAMRON

OKKO

NEEWER

PERGEAR



TTARTISAN


BOUDHA
Kathmandu / Nepal



SEEN

Being Present And Being Heard

A photograph will always reveal your connection with a subject at the moment of capture. The better you see your subject, the better the camera can too.

I am often torn between how much of a frame should be about the subject, and how much about myself. The photographer is always present, whether we like it or not, but it takes a little bravery to step into that with intention. We make choices that reflect in the images. Choosing one subject over another can direct the story in one direction instead of another. It says something about a photographers mood when they shoot for candid street scenes, without permission of the subjects, versus shooting portraits on the street with full complicity of those in the frame.

Portraits are a particularly hard place for photographers to hide, although the telephoto lens is a great way to obscure yourself. I do my best portrait work by shooting very wide and standing very close. I keep no secrets from my subject, in the hope they will share a little more of themselves in return. My goal is to enrich both context and intimacy, to bring more of everything into a scene. My next challenge is being so immersed in a scene without changing it entirely. I want to reveal something of the subject, not merely emphasise my own predilections for compositions.

A tension exists between intimacy and authenticity.



Many people have been told to smile for the camera since they were children. It becomes second nature, and the mere presence of my camera can trigger this response. Nobody wants to be seen without a smile in photos, and yet most people do not realise how little they smile in daily life. We are a cranky species. In my experience pretty much everyone does posses a great smile, just not always the one they offer to a camera. It's as if they hide behind the smile itself, like a mask that obscures who they really are and how they really feel.

This is one reason I love travelling in places like Nepal. You encounter a lot of genuinely happy people who feel no shyness about sharing their emotions. People in Nepal laugh a lot. They shout a lot. They talk a lot. They get intense about little things and then go back to smiling about something else. They don't mind being seen.

When I was a boy the worst thing you could be is "seen". I grew up feeling I was invisible, and just leaned into it. The less I was seen, the less trouble in my life. It was the opposite of attention seeking behaviour; if I could melt into the walls I would. Every now and then a school teacher would notice me, and it came as such a shock. Adults are supposed to notice each other, not me, and it was very rare that anything good came of it.

My biggest challenge when trying to step into photography was allowing myself to be seen. I am usually the one standing back, looking for a wall to melt into. I have to step out of myself in order to step into a scene. By letting my subjects know that I see them, I am also placing myself into a situation where I am seen.


ASA HOTEL
BUDDHA STUPA RESTAURANT
GUEST HOUSE
RIMT
SUSTAINABLY HANDCR

This is one reason I like small cameras, the ones barely bigger than a phone. A big camera can be intimidating or even threatening. Cameras are often designed to look serious and attract attention. I don't want my subjects to be thinking about the camera, I want them thinking about this moment in time and maybe something that makes them smile. The real smile, the one that pops up when they are not even trying.

It's hard work to connect wth your subjects, and even harder to avoid tainting the scene by simply being in it. These are the considerations I need to balance. How much of my own style is beneficial to the image, and how much is a distraction from the subject? Do people like my photos because of what I bring to composition, or because I have selected worthy subjects?

My role as a photographer has changed a lot over the decades. I am no longer simply someone who takes photos, it seems I have to be a "brand" as well. I have to literally be seen on social media and online. It's not enough that my photos are seen, but I have to be seen as well. I have even started a YouTube channel, to fill the void where my blog once used to flourish. My favourite videos on the channel are the ones I don't appear in. I know, you're shocked to hear it! Alas, they don't rate so highly with the algorithm.

In one sense I've never been more seen than I am right now. I am not hard to find if you go looking. And yet I have also never been more invisible. My social media presence is barely a grain of sand on the beach, routinely washed away by rising tides of influence and slop. I have never been so prolific and expressive in my entire life, and yet I have also never been so irrelevant.

So long as I can continue to make a living doing what I care about, this doesn't matter in the slightest. I like being invisible. I like being small. I like blending in with the furniture. I like quiet conversations, instead of crowded noisy spaces.

Aside from being invisible, my other great skill is being an introvert. A good many people have zero understanding of what introverts are. We get labelled as anti-social, when in reality I find introverts are especially rewarding to socialise with. They are observant, intentional and thoughtful. When an introvert gives you their attention they are really paying attention. They are in the room with you. They see you. This is why introverts avoid big crowds, because it's utterly exhausting to be paying so much attention in such a busy environment.

Introverts don't believe in noise for the sake of noise. It's not that they avoid social contact, it's that they seek quality social contact.

The introvert label is useful to me in one sense. Most humans will understand, "Oh he doesn't want to be the centre of attention, he'll go melt into a wall somewhere." More often than not it's deemed socially acceptable for introverts to sit back and observe. This is a super power, to take things in that other people don't notice. To watch our subjects and learn about them. To study them and reflect on what is inspiring you to capture their photo. To see when patterns repeat themselves, and predict opportunities for a composition. Then, when needs must, we step forward and connect with our subject. We take that risk of being seen, just for a little bit. We step out of the wall.

I'm often told that it takes courage to be seen. I think it also takes energy. There are days when I simply do not have the mojo to push myself out there. Those are the days I sit inside and write 2,000 words about introverts and dysfunctional families. It's a big ask to step out of your shell, but you only have to do it a little at a time. And with each moment of bravery you grow a little more conviction. I won't say confidence, because that's a complex word and deep down I think all humans lack confidence; we just express it in different ways.

Conviction is good. Conviction is simply stumping up to do the thing you decided you would do. You don't have to feel confident to do something, you just have to decide to do it anyway. I have rarely felt confident about any of my success stories. Mostly they were instances of simply showing up and seeing it through. It makes a world of difference to be that person who simply did what they said they would do.

The great irony of photography is that only a few moments ever get seen anyway. The vast majority of what we capture remains invisible, as does the vast majority of effort that went into the capture. The time spent walking the streets, or planning to cross a continent, or watching YouTube videos about how to use your camera. We spend very very little time actually taking the photos. And when we do, there's still more time to be spent editing them, and time to be spent curating a final few images before discarding everything else, and still more time to be spent gathering into a social media post or a zine.



And for a brief moment in time the image is seen, and maybe a little of the photographer as well, before the next wave crashes onto the beach to deposit a fresh layer of sand.

We often think of photography as freezing a moment forever. That can happen, but mostly the art form is far more dynamic. What matters one year may not matter the next. What matters one day may not matter the next. At that's OK, because photography is a conversation not a museum. When your photography is seen, your voice is heard. I realise this is mixing metaphors to an extent, but to my mind they they are one in same anyway. The photo is your voice. To be heard is to be seen.

Share your message, and be seen in the process.

Photo Right:
Tibetan Didi who sells cups of tea opposite the stupa at Boudha.




MASALA CHAI
30Rs at Boudhanath



EWEN'S WORKSHOPS

Intimate photographic experiences with Ewen Bell

Every year I run a handful of workshops and photo tours in various parts of the world. I have been doing this for twenty years now, and every year I try to find ways to make each experience more rewarding. It's never the same workshop twice.

I run my tours in places I know very very well. I don't outsource my expertise. I care about these places and believe they offer something special to my companions. We learn about the cultures and landscapes, as much as we do photography.

Visit the website for more details.

ewenbell.com/tours

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I share a bunch of photos and ideas on my YouTube channel. You can also watch them on the Fediverse via PeerTube for those who prefer ad-free viewing

ewenbell.com/ewentube


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THE DOCO

The Joy of Tashi

Long before I started my zine, I also started making a documentary. It's about a monk in Nepal who wants to be a photographer. This project is currently filed under "it seemed like a good idea at the time." As they say in Nepal, Bistari Bistari.

I started filming in late March 2025, did a bunch of editing, then did a little more filming in October of that same year. Not much has happened in that 12 months, partly due to developments in the story and partly because I needed to take a break from things to make some more money. It turns out documentaries aren't cheap even when you have some solid support behind you.

If you haven't seen anything about "The Joy of Tashi" then I encourage you to visit my website to take a look, or just google "Ewen Bell Tashi" and it should pop up. I posted a full update to my blog just last week.

ewenbell.com/tashi







MALA & FRIENDS

Flower Offerings at Boudhanath

The local name for Marigolds in Nepal is "Mala", and they're big business here. All around the stupa at Boudha you'll find rows of bowls filled with water and mala. People come to donate both each and every day.

The scale of the offerings is hard to grasp. Every little corner of the stupa is lined with them. Shops around the stupa are selling them, and still more shops in the streets behind as well. It's an ocean of mala.

They're popular with both Buddhists and Hindus. Many kinds of devotion can be expressed with these petals. Other flowers are nice, but the Mala is king.



When you see a few flowers being offered at a temple, it feels like something special. When you see such a massive scale of offerings it feels "impressive". But then I start to wonder where the flowers are coming from?

In a small village families will plant a few bushes just for such offerings. It's an organic part of their existance. There's a beauty to that. An offering from your own garden feels different to a large plastic bag full of flowers heads that was bought at a market.

I often think about how small acts of devotion can turn into a commercial opportunity. Does the offering hold any less value because you paid someone else to grow a flower for you? How many fertile fields are now growing flowers instead of food?

Humans need more than food to live of course. We also need art, love, community, and often religion in order to feel safe and fulfilled.











DOUBT

But we keep doing stuff anyway

Had a long chat with an old friend today. We spoke a lot about the idea of doing creative work even when you don't think anyone wants it. Yeah, such a fresh topic huh???

I know these words off by heart. Am I making something that will tank? Will this ever find an audience? Maybe this time will be different. Deep down we really hope that everything do has an audience, and will be recognised. Deep down we have doubts. But we keep trying anyway. In my case it's not out of stoic defence of artistic license. No no no. It's because I keep telling myself that maybe this one will be huge. And it always comes as a shock when the ideal in my mind fails to match the reality of the world around me.

It's not that I don't learn from my mistakes. I do enjoy a modicum of commercial success every now and then. But I revert to type pretty quickly, and always end up trying to make the thing that I love only to get disappointed when nobody else loves it too. It happens a lot. I get very optimistic about the creative process, as though just making something really really good is going to be enough to ensure commercial success as well.



Having scored a few wins can do that to you. It can skew your natural tendency to expect doom and failure.

I'm trying to get better at recognising when I'm pushing back my creative boundaries, versus just pursuing a folly that nobody else is going to understand. We humans are good at convincing ourselves of stuff that is completely irrational. It's our super power. It leads us to make things that nobody knew was possible. It's what makes humans the opposite of AI... we create by making stupid choices while AI creates by giving stupid answers. Totally different things.

Anyway, I'm looking back over my long term doco project, which I've been 110% immersed in for the last week or so, trying to get it closer to the finish line. I've just reached another milestone in the process, which oddly has left me deflated. My first attempt to resolve the ending feels like a misstep. And I've fixed a lot of missteps along the way already.

I gave myself a day to feed my brain instead of working it, and in the process realised how quickly I get bored watching most short films and docos. In the main I don't find them engaging even though actual people have slaved away to make these things, and threw time and money at their production. Most of these films just don't capture my interest enough to settle in. The premises feel less than compelling.







Then I look across to my own work, and I wonder how many people outside of my reality will find this doco compelling like I do?

I'm also working on a very different structure to the expected norms. I'm rejecting some fundamentals that in my view make a lot of modern work very boring and predictable. I'm trying to make something that pleases me, and in a very very specific way. And that means a tonne of people simply may not enjoy it. Or to be more nuanced, they might enjoy it if they actually gave it a chance but given the world we live in there's very little that successfully gets in front of our attention span anyway. The packaging matters more than the premise.

All of which is saying, I have my doubts. Today is a doubting day. They happen. They don't mean I'm on the wrong path, but at this stage I can't be sure. Most things I do in life I chose to do in spite of my doubts. Doubting is normal and in many ways a protective mechanism.

But there are two kinds of doubt. There's doubt from doing a bunch of research and realising you need to change the title of the project. The other doubt stems from fear of change. In a way, this is doubt that happens when you're afraid this thing might actually work. Maybe we need to start calling this ironic doubt.


CAFFEOPHILIA

Until you live that experience of your project reaching fruition, doubt will have ample room to jangle the nerves. If my current challenge was getting a sunrise shot of Mt Everest, doubt would hold no bargain with me. I know I can do the job and could suggest three different ways to tackle it. But my documentary challenge is a totally new one, so that doubt becomes harder to kick out the door.

The flip side to doubt is potential. Put simply, a movie project only fails when you decide to quit. If you don't quit, then the project is not dead. And that's where we are today. A lot of water has gone under the bridge, but I'm still here and still working on finding the best path forward. Still deciding what success might finally look like.

There is more than one solution to these kinds of problems.
Lucky for me.

Photo Right:

Statue of Guru Rinpoche at Boudhanath. The real Guru was much taller of course.







WHO MADE THIS?

Meet The Author

My name is Ewen Bell and I'm a photographer based in Melbourne, Australia. I've been very lucky in life to had the opportunity to make a career from photography.

Photography has changed my world, so I want to help others find their voice with the camera as well. I love sharing my photos, but also love sharing my knowledge about taking photos. That's why I'm making a zine, in addition to my blog and my YouTube channel.

ewenbell.com



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