

As a kid, he would toy with his dad's Minolta rangefinder and as a high school student he fancied the idea of designing sports shoes for a living. That or getting into marine engineering for the joy of travelling or commercial art, so he could paint and draw to his heart's content. He settled on the latter; cracked the entrance to Sir JJ Institute of Applied Art, Mumbai; took up photography as a specialisation in his third year and there has been no looking back since, for **Mihir Hardikar**, whose last project called *The 'Multiply Diary'*, for the design firm Breathing Space, is getting more than its share of recognition, and for all the right reasons. Hardikar talks to *Asian Photography*, about his journey so far.



Mihir Hardikar

Ideas That Work

Photography, the profession

An interest in photography was something that kept growing from the first day I was introduced to it as a subject of learning. By the end of my graduation it was my only choice of profession. But after JJ, I wanted to dedicate a couple of years to learning it in detail and specialise in it further. That's when I applied to the Light & Life Academy in Ooty. Spending a year and a half in Ooty under the guidance of Iqbal Mohamed, the founder of the academy, has made me the photographer I am

today.

If it wasn't for these two institutions and Iqbal sir, I would probably be doing something completely different with my life.

Play of light

I love to mix and match different types of lights like daylight, tungsten, HMI, flash, etc. whenever I get a chance. The effects that can be achieved from using different sources of light complementing each other, always fascinate me.



Loves to shoot

I love shooting environmental portraits, moonlit landscapes with light painting, and people for ad campaign. I also love to shoot food and interiors. Though professionally I have not had many chances to work on food and interior assignments, but I hope that to change in the future.

Travel revelations

When not shooting commercially, I try and travel whenever I have some money saved or have time on hand. Travelling helps bring a fresh perspective to many things. I love to shoot travel portraits,

landscapes and travel stories. There have been many times when shooting for personal work, something inspired me which I applied in my assignments, whether it is the way a prop is used or how a model looks in a specific type of lighting. I also love to use my 50mm lens a lot when I am travelling, to shoot different types of food dishes that I come across.

Artists' works

Though I am not much into reading books, I invest in photography books; usually the ones which showcase an artist's work. I have quite a few of those,

Steve McCurry, Max Vadukul, David La Chapelle, Jan Saudek etc. I am not much of a social media buff either but I spend a lot of time on the internet looking at international artists' works and also follow a few photographers' work.

Post production

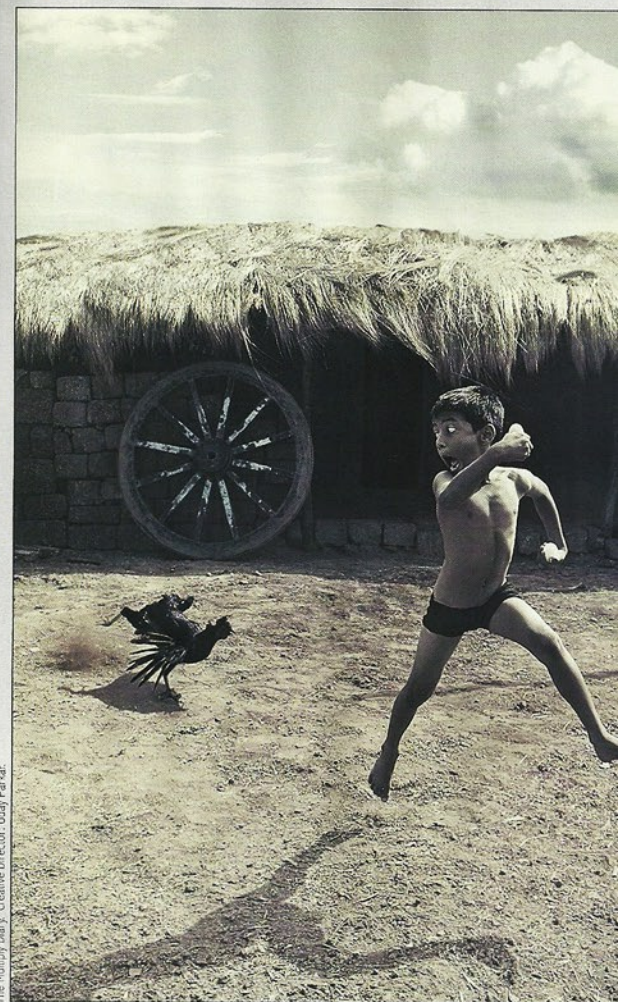
One of the biggest boons of digital photography is the freedom to play around with your images on image editing software. As much as it helps making bad photos into good ones or helps enhance good photos into better ones, an overkill of everything is always bad. Never depend on the software



Weapons of Choice

My personal kit consists of a Canon 5D Mark II and Canon 16-35 f/2.8L, Canon 24-105 f/4 L and a 50mm/f1.4 lenses. I use CaptureOne to process my RAW files on my 15inch Apple MacBook Pro, 2010 model.

When shooting advertising assignments, I usually rent a Hasselblad with a Phase One 39 megapixel or a Phase One 65 megapixel digital back. And I love Profoto flashlights and the Broncolor parabolic umbrella.



The Mujib Diary. Creative Director: Uday Parakar.



Tips of the Trade

- Understand the brief well. While estimating for a project, get all your doubts about it cleared. Nothing should be left for later.
- As a thumb rule, before every assignment, draw a rough diagram on paper of how you plan to do the lighting set up. If I am clear of what my lighting set up is going to be when I arrive at a shoot, more than 70% of the job is done in my head. It helps me be confident about what I am doing on the set.
- In complex lighting set ups, once the shoot is done, take pictures of the set up. You never know when something similar might happen and the set up pictures make a good guiding point.
- Be humble. I make it a point to be involved in every stage of a shoot. Just because you are the main guy does not mean you cannot help the light man to pack up. Being grounded in a commercial world is overrated but I believe it helps in the long run.





The not-so-good part

As someone who is fairly new in the business, I really wish we had 'Artist Representatives' in India like there are in Europe and the US. Digital photography makes the whole process look easily achievable, which is a misconception. This, in a way, has resulted in less appreciation of the art. Also, the process of making an estimate, getting a job, shooting and then delivering the product needs to be streamlined.

Future plans

For now, my plan is to enter *The 'Multiply Diary'* project in as many photography festivals and awards as possible and hope for the best. I plan to work a bit on my food photography portfolio and owing to the opening of Pripyat, Ukraine for tourists; I wish to visit Chernobyl and photograph it and fulfil an adulthood dream.



My Roadies - Season 8. Art Director: Paraschottam Laha.

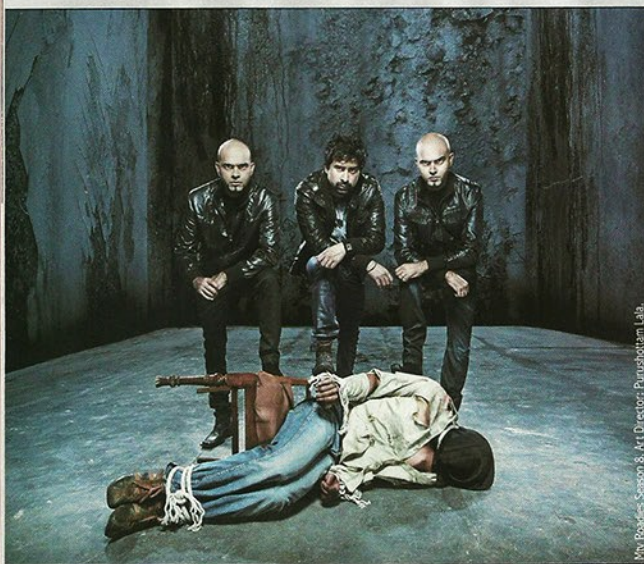
to create great pictures. The client is paying for your talent, not for the use of Photoshop.

An important stage of any personal shots I do is to pre-visualise a picture as to how it will look as a final image and what kind of post production I am going to use on it to get the desired image and then work accordingly on it. My post production is limited to colour corrections and enhancements, contrast, sharpening, skin retouching and colour toning.

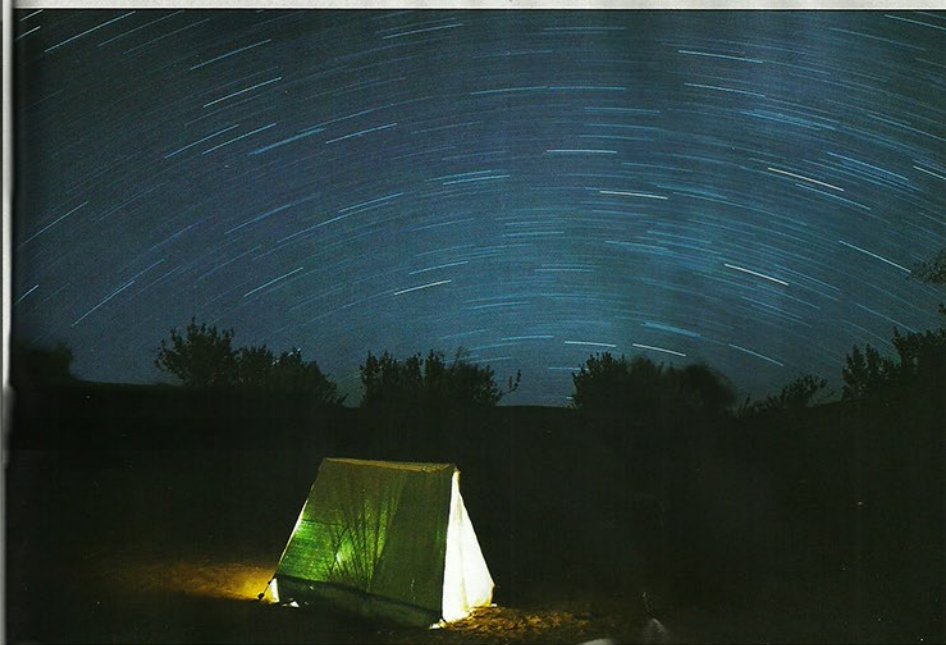
I refrain from digital surgeries in my personal work. All my personal work is single shots, just enhanced. For commercial work, the level of Photoshop required depends on the idea or the effects required.

Most enjoyable part of profession

What makes it enjoyable is variety. No two assignments are the same, no two art directors are the same, and no two places you travel to are the same. I enjoy the fact that my art/profession gives me a different experience every day.

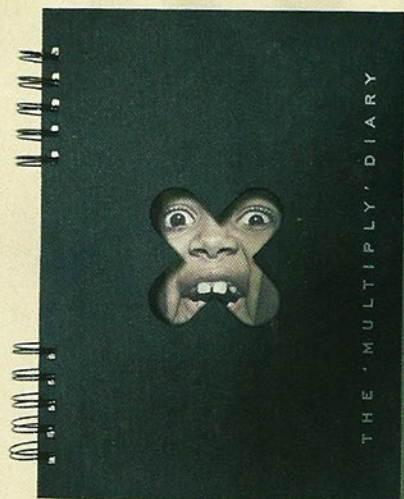


My Roadies - Season 8. Art Director: Paraschottam Laha.





The 'Multiply Diary' - Creative Director: Uday Parkar.



The 'Multiply Diary'

The 'Multiply Diary' is a project that started more than a year back, in February 2011 and took almost till November to complete.

Uday Parkar in his own design firm called Breathing Space, during one of our friendly tea talks mentioned doing a project; a diary, whose subject is common and simple, but to do it in a way no one has ever done before. Over a few talks, we discussed ideas, approaches, the pros and cons of each and finally locked in on kids as the subject.

As a team, the biggest challenge we faced was to handle all the kids since they were not professional models. So the whole unit/studio used to turn into this day care centre trying to keep the kids happy. With limited shooting schedules, we had our work cut out in getting the right emotions from them. A lot of post-production also went in making the final files as per the visuals, but Uday Parkar made sure he kept the realism in the photography as close to the actual shots as possible.

The props we used in all the pictures were crafted. A 10ft long paper boat, a rocking horse, and an umbrella stitched with green leaves are few of the many things which were custom made for the shoot. We made small sets in the studio to create an environment for the visuals to shoot the kids. We even went to his coastal village in Konkan, called Aachra to shoot the kids on locations. 4-5 batches of shoots resulted in close to 40 visually rich images that are now part of The 'Multiply Diary'.

TEXT: TAPSHI DHANDA