

transcending time

A conversation with world-class photographer and artist, **LYNDA CHURILLA**

By: **MIKE BRANNON**
Photography: **LYNDA CHURILLA**



a world-class, new york-based photographer and artist,

Lynda Churilla began her career as Bruce Weber's photo assistant on many of his iconic shoots. Working in both analog and digital realms, she transcends time with her vision – going from vivid contemporary model concept shoots to monochrome motorcycle races on the Isle of Man, as a personal project. She's developed her own unique style.

A veteran photographer with over 20 years of professional experience, Churilla shoots for L'Oréal, Ralph Lauren, Tory Burch, Sony Music, Nike, Estée Lauder and Microsoft, as well as editorial clients like Rolling Stone, Interview, Elle, GQ, Glamour, Men's Health and People.

Among the personalities she has worked with are Jewel, Matthew McConaughey, Jean Campbell, Ruby Rose, Cameron Diaz, Bella Hadid and Shaq.



▲ Lynda Churilla and her best friend Anuschka in Tucson, Ariz., 2018





Alex Merrell, international DJ, for Imagista Magazine, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Her work can be found in numerous gallery shows across the country. (Learn more [here](#).) 71 was fortunate enough to be able to ask Churilla about her career for the Style Issue.

71 Magazine: How did you become involved with photography? Why that particular art form?

Lynda Churilla: My mom was a multimedia artist, and I was always immersed in her art. Welding, water color, weaving and then photography. She has her master's in photography, and was an art teacher for 25 years. She was a single mom in my teenage years, and she had a love of foreign films, which I reluctantly accompanied her to. This was so she could keep an eye on me, and keep me out of trouble.

My father gave me a Pentax camera when I was 16. I started shooting my friends. I was drawn to movement and human expression. It's always an adventure when I'm holding my camera.

71: What was your experience as a woman coming up in that world? Mostly positive? What did you learn?

Churilla: I was always the only female photo assistant, and I felt like I had to often prove myself. I carried camera cases and bags – did everything that the guys did, and sometimes more, to prove that I wasn't weaker than them. Often I would work 15-hour days or longer, and I would come home and cry of exhaustion. But I persisted because it's what I loved doing.

71: How do you feel things have changed for women since you began?

Churilla: Well, I certainly feel there are a million more photographers, many of them pseudo-photographers. Everyone and anyone can call themselves a photographer these days. They simply point their iPhone, and "click" – they're a photographer. Gone are the days that you would assist for 10 years, honing your skills and gaining valuable experience in light, shadow, perspective, emotional connection, etc.



Jewel in New York City, 2016, by Lynda Churilla



// i strive to be
a better human
being and
visual artist."



Kristina
Romanova for
Ralph Lauren

Being a woman in this industry has evolved over time, but it has always been a male-dominant environment. I do feel that in the present climate, women standing up, speaking out and embracing their strengths is tipping the balance toward female empowerment in the workplace, but I still feel that we have some distance to travel until we are on equal footing with our male colleagues.

71: How did you develop your eye and instincts relative to the visual arts?

Churilla: My mentor, Bruce Weber, taught me a lot about light and creating while you're shooting. I also think that making your subjects feel good around you is important. Talking to them prior to the shoot, getting to know them and respecting them and, most of all, having fun.

71: What was it about fashion photography that attracted and attracts you? What is that world like today from your professional perception?

Churilla: Working with creative people, creating a story together, telling a story, traveling, witnessing new trends with designers. I used to get W Magazine as a young teenager, and I was always attracted to the fashion stories and advertisements for Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren or Versace. It was this fantasy world that drew me in, and I wanted to be a part of it.

I had so many photos on my bedroom wall. Seeing Brooke Shields in that amazing Calvin ad. Or ads for RL in Africa on a safari with lion cubs. It was alluring to me ... thinking maybe one day, I can be on an adventure, shooting and telling a story.



The world today is shifting to everything being immediate. Advertising and editorial images seem to be mostly viewed online or with Instagram. Clients needing more content to constantly “refresh” the campaign images. People get bored by just one “hero” image for a campaign. Also, moving image is becoming more dominant than still photography. Keeping people’s attention is quite challenging.

I recently had my Tory Burch campaign images as a “painted” mural in Soho, N.Y. It was quite exciting to see a photograph of mine as a large painting on the side of a building. Clients are always looking for new platforms to reveal or show campaign images to inspire people.

71: What are your current and future projects and goals? Please describe.

Churilla: I’m currently working on a Ralph Lauren fragrance project and prepping for a series of photos of cancer survivors for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I’m off to Marrakesh, Morocco, next week for a travel story.

My next personal project is a series on motorcycle racing on the Isle of Man, U.K. I’m also always shooting a series on waves and surfers. I’m a “water” girl. I love to shoot in and around the ocean as much as possible. I find I get strength and peace when I’m near the sea.

I always have goals ... too many to list. I strive to be a better human being and visual artist. Having empathy for others is important to me, too. If I can help someone have a better day and document it along the way – that’s not a bad way to live and work.

They used to say you’re only as good as your last photo. Well ... I have to agree with that. My last photo was of a model falling into a bed of thousands of rose petals on a rooftop in New York City. I’ll let you know how it looks.

Churilla lives in New York City with her British husband, John Walton. She enjoys spending time on the Isle of Man, Miami Beach and Montauk, N.Y.



Polo Blue
Frangrance shoot,
Ralph Lauren
Fragrances,
featuring model
Romee Strijd

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Tory Burch SS18
Campaign – Dree
Hemingway, Jean
Campbell & Martje
Verhoef shot in
Golden Beach, Fla.