

# LIGHT SPEED

**Tobias Hutzler:** resonance and the art of light

By: **MIKE BRANNON**  
Photography: **TOBIAS HUTZLER**





To say renowned photographer, director and visual artist Tobias Hutzler is accomplished would be equal to saying the sun is bright. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Annenberg Space for Photography and the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Beyond that, he has worked on global campaigns for Apple, Aston Martin, Audi, BMW, British Airways, Columbia Records, Infiniti, Lincoln, Mercedes-Benz, MTV, Porsche, Range Rover, Sony, TIME, Toyota, VH1, Volkswagen, Volvo and WIRED. Clearly producers from a wide variety of industries seek out his visionary style and knowledge of what can be done with light and drone technology to realize their visions.

Hutzler's editorial work can be seen in Vogue, Rolling Stone, the Smithsonian, Fast Company, The New Yorker, Condé Nast Traveler, GEO, Men's Journal, New York Magazine, Popular Science, Road & Track, The New York Times Magazine, the Wall Street Journal, TIME Magazine, Travel + Leisure and WIRED.

Having received his MFA in the United States, along with a Fulbright Fellowship, DAAD and European Union scholarships, Hutzler has also studied and taught photography and film at some of the most prestigious universities in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Hutzler was named one of Photo District News' (PDN's) 30 photographers to watch.

71 is honored to discuss and share Hutzler's legendary visual artistry and process for the fourth annual Light + Sound Issue.



**71: Can you talk about how you got started in photography and your journey?**

**TH:** It has never been a decision for me. It was always meant to be my path, as far as I can think back. As a teenager, I set out to explore the world, backpacking through Europe, Africa and Asia. I crossed the Sahara Desert by myself, and it was there, for the first time, that I consciously saw light and space in its pure form. I took photographs. To me, that medium became a new way to process, structure and communicate. It's also the perfect excuse to explore and have fun.

It has never been about the concept of photography itself. The medium served as an extension of my mind and interaction with the world. Life and work is truly one and inseparable.

**71: As your background is in fine art, do you credit that experience with developing your eye and unique sense of light?**

**TH:** The way we see the world and what we want to communicate comes from within. It's who we are in the deepest sense, and we only have limited control over it. Everybody has a unique story to tell; it's our job to find this story and to tell it in an authentic way. Once found, it's an endless source.

Voltaire writes, "judge a man by his questions rather than his answers." This is our true task: to ask questions, to see what others don't, without trying to give answers in any form.





I believe photography can be best compared to poetry: arranging language for its meaning, sound and rhythm. Feeling and ideas intensified, a good picture is always about something else. It's simply about telling a story – your very own story.

**71: You work in high-end commercial and editorial photography, but your personal work seems to be pure art. What is that juxtaposition like for you: the space where art and commerce meet? Is there compromise, or does it open a new world of possibilities for you?**

**TH:** Commercial projects are all about collaboration. That's something I enjoy very much. Working with top creatives with a true, unique vision is truly exciting. We push each other to create a memorable project together. I learn a lot from working with creatives all over the world. In Asia, Europe and the United States, there is a wide variety of perceptions and cultural codes of how to tell a story.



For editorial projects, I traveled all over the world, from the White House to the rainforest in South America, from mega-cities in Asia to mountain tops in Africa, to more than 60 countries. In editorial work, there is more flexibility and spontaneity – being a problem-solver under the most challenging situations sometimes. The job is to tell the story through your visual language in a unique way in teamwork with the editors.

In my personal work, I explore new territory, build new tools, improvise, play. I let my work guide me.

**71: Do you feel gear has much to do with quality of output?**

**TH:** It definitely has. It has to be the ideal tool for your expression. The technical aspect should not be a limitation, but an extension of yourself and your creativity. That requires daily practice. Technology and software alone are useless. All they provide are answers. As mentioned above, it's raising questions that allows us to advance, and that's our true job.



**71: As you're also a filmmaker, does working in film affect your methods or concept?**

**TH:** Film and photography share only some common grounds. Coming from photography, there is an emphasis on composition and visual rhythm – to very carefully translate the aesthetics and power of the single photograph into moving images. For that reason, I work more closely with DPs than most directors.

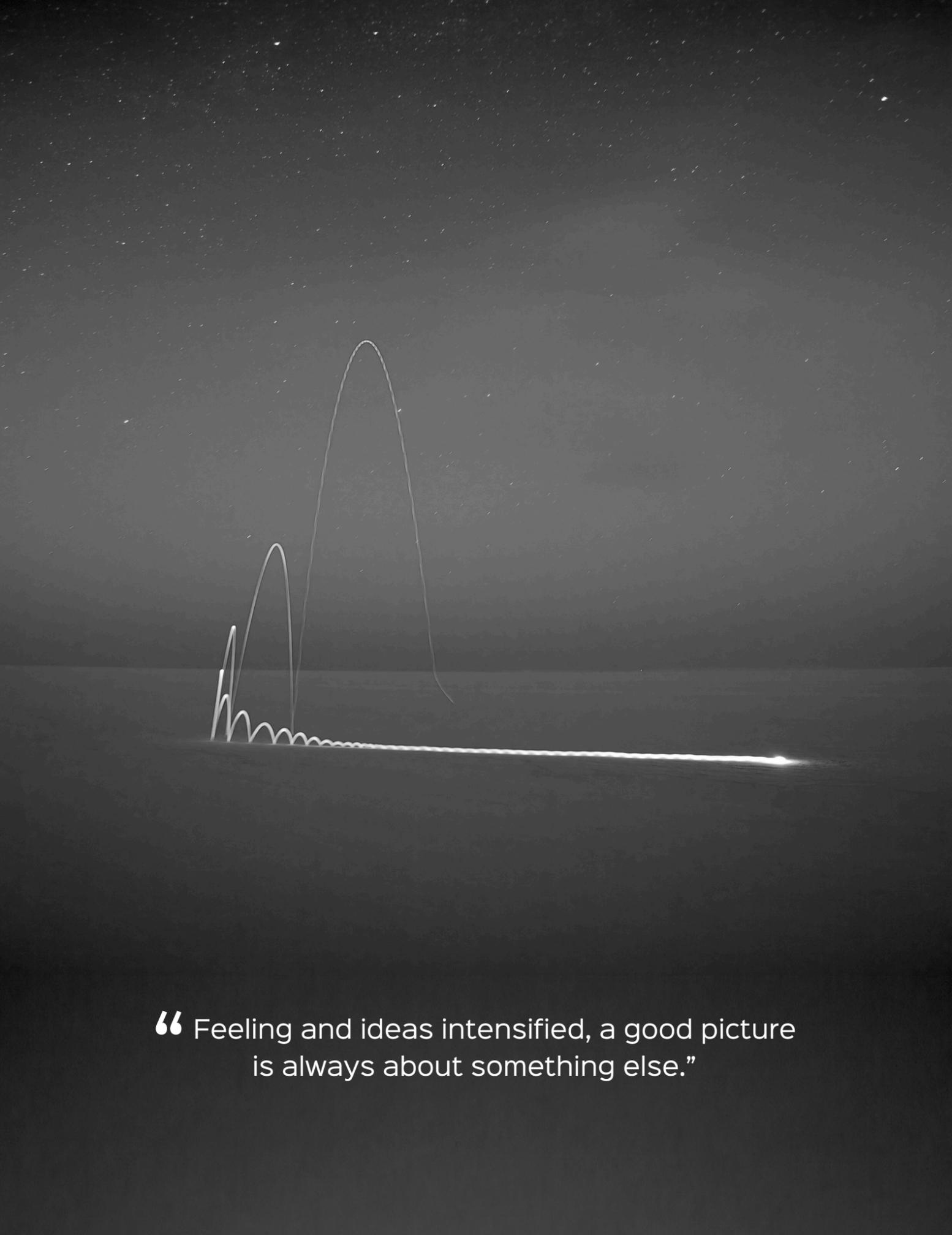
The preparation for a film project is fundamentally different from planning a photography project. I usually work with the heads of different departments throughout the process. The story is in the center, and it has to be told on all levels.





“ Tobias Hutzler is “one of the most exciting new artists working in photography.”

– *AD Magazine*



“Feeling and ideas intensified, a good picture is always about something else.”

**71: What have been among your most challenging and successful projects?**

**TH:** Every single project has value, unique challenges and possibilities; therefore, every shoot added something new. In retrospect, projects are often stunning. We made impossible possible, step-by-step, carefully crafting the piece with attention to details. That's the beauty of it.

**71: What would you say to aspiring photographers and/or filmmakers? What do you wish you'd known early in your journey?**

**TH:** I give talks and workshops in universities in the United States, the United Kingdom and Asia. I truly enjoy working with students. I want to tell them to value each single day in university (there won't be a time like this again) and to explore oneself and one's work.

Many try to fit into a certain genre or approach, but it is in embracing what makes you different and weird, your contradictions and the strange, that will be your safest path forward. Trying to play it safe by fitting in is the riskiest way to build a body of work. Do the hard and painful process of truly exploring yourself in your work. That will be the safest foundation.

**71: How would you guide people to “see” and develop their sense of light?**

**TH:** Talk to it. I'm serious. Have a dialog, and get to know it – its character and its voice. Then look at it. Look at light itself, rather than the object it reflects on. Look at what it reveals. Feel it. Feel its presence in space. Even if you can't see it, it's right there. Touch it.



“ Judge a man by his questions  
rather than his answers.”

– *Voltaire*

