

From the "Rio Tinto" Series – "Dark Fire", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 39.3"

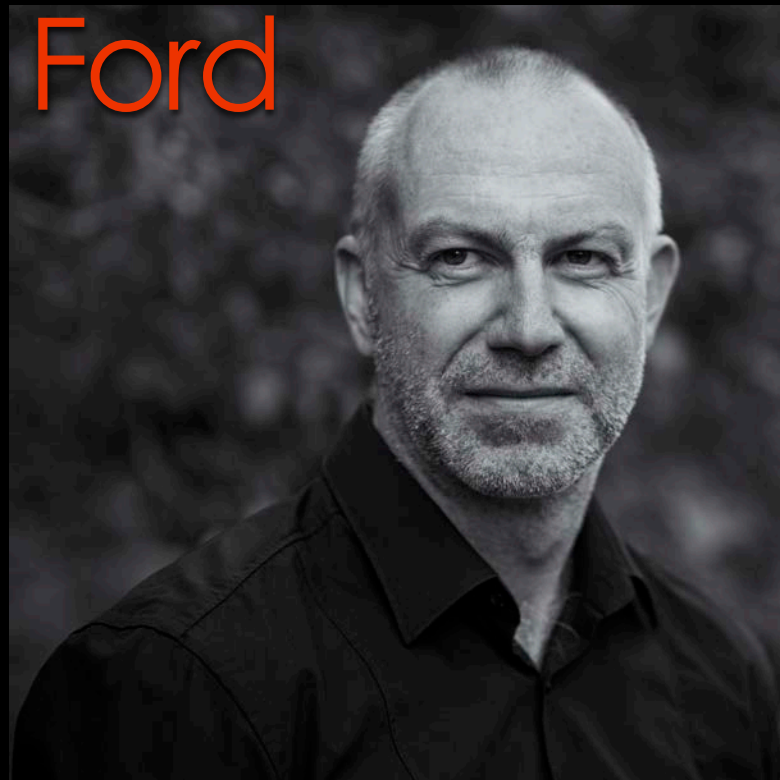
# Mark James Ford

## England

by *Viviana Puello*

English Photographer Mark James Ford specializes in depicting nature and producing artworks that are highly impressive technically and aesthetically. He was born near Birmingham, England, and currently, lives and works in Wiesbaden, Germany, being both a photographer and a chemist. His work is one aiming at expressing both the beauty and perfection of nature, presenting a wide array of images that can be present either in remote places of the world or even right in front of our eyes, but always reminding the viewer of nature's grandiosity.

The primary subject in Ford's photography is nature, as such the human figure is absent throughout his work. This feature enables him to



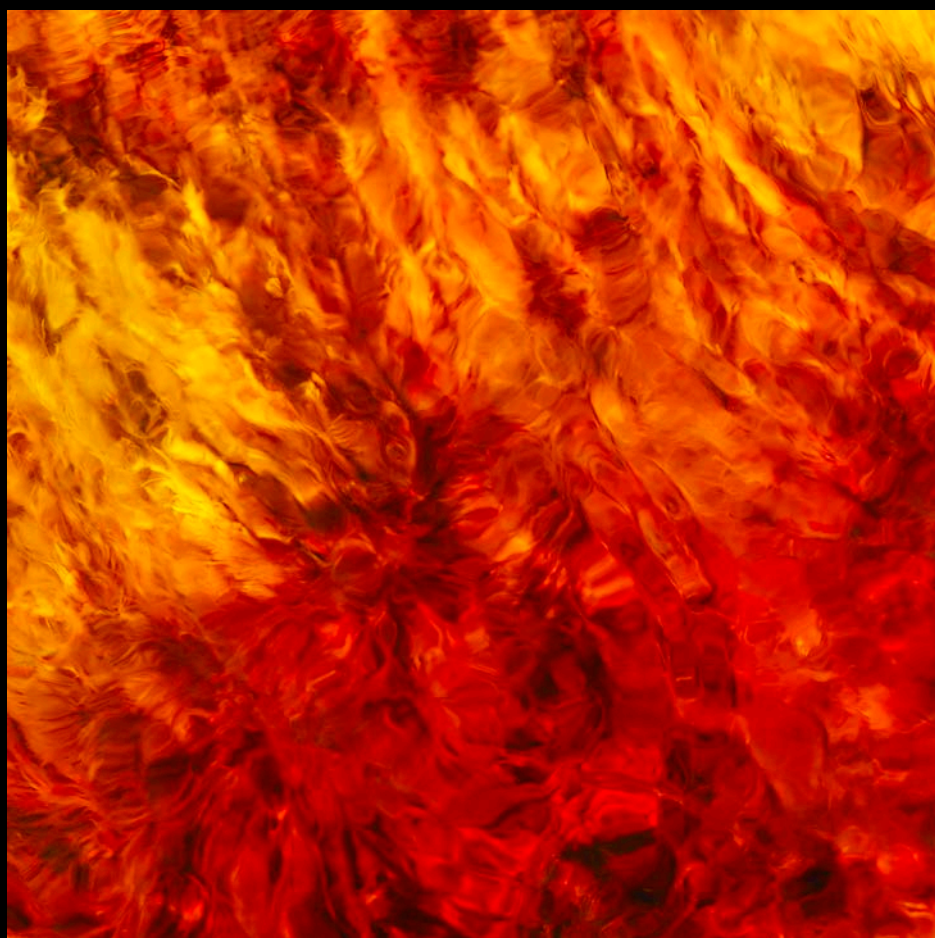


focus entirely on his unique approach to photography and produce artworks that manage to describe nature's glorious creations poetically.

Throughout his series of photographs, many aspects of life are presented thoroughly, combining many elements that are present on our planet. One can witness majestic trees, the serenity of water and towering mountains in dramatic landscapes, images that cannot fail to be awe-inspiring. Ford handles these images with extreme care, to the point where every single aspect of them, every single pixel of the final picture presented helps in the orchestration of a marvelous outcome.

His approach to nature photography is not quite a documentary one; he focuses mainly on the artistic value of his photographs, not only balancing them but also delivering pictures that many times tend more towards a pure abstraction. Often with these works the viewer can experience abstraction not as a conceptual idea but rather as

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From the "Rio Tinto" Series – "Cold Flame", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"



From the "Rio Tinto" Series – "Life Blood", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"



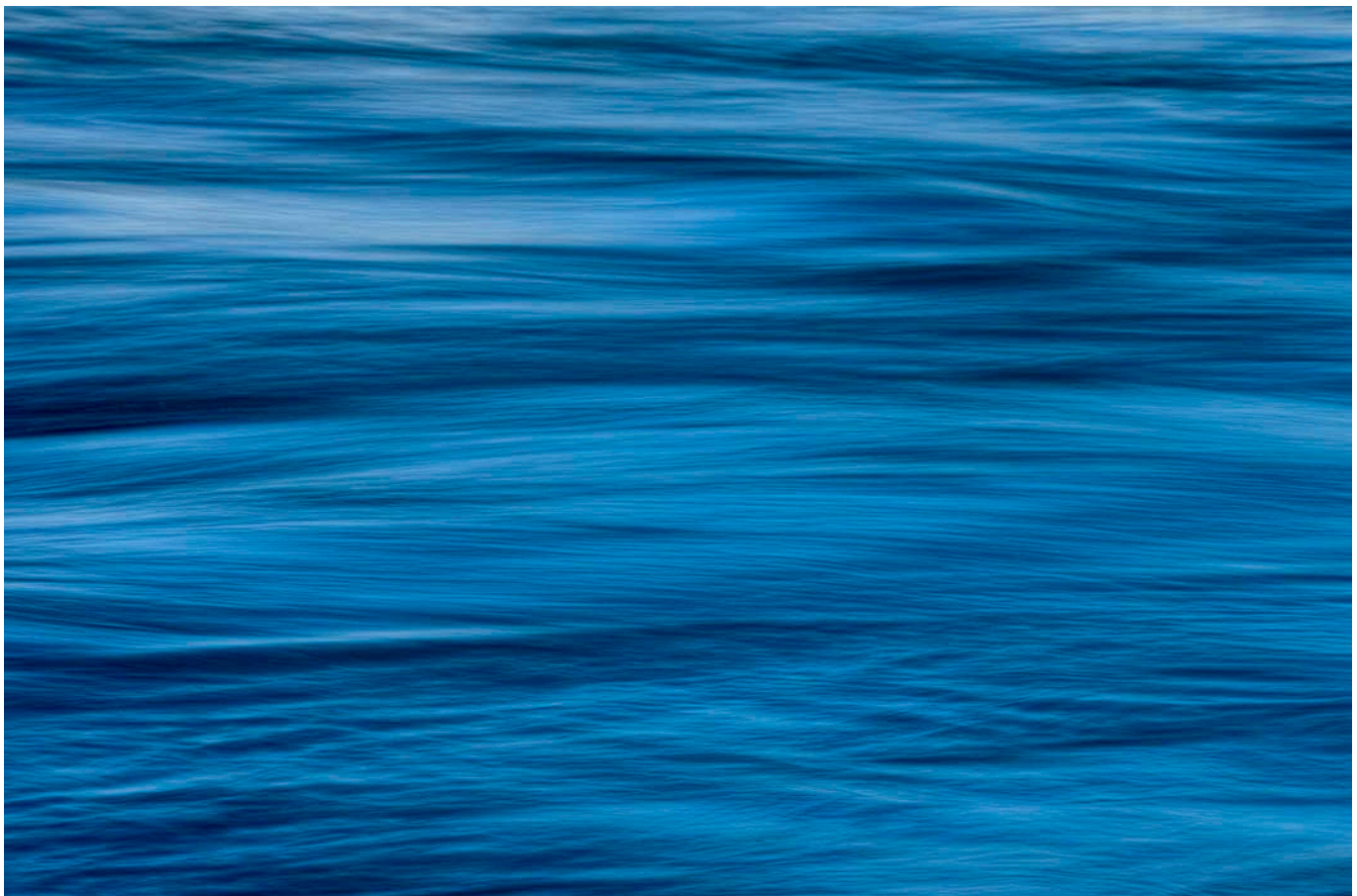


"Essence Of Winter II", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 69"

a very real one, a form which is rendered abstract from the point of view, thus commenting on the very nature of reality. This highly intellectual approach to photography is an essential feature of his work, as one could mistake his pictures of a flower or a spiderweb, which is wet from the morning dew, for a painting made by one of the abstract masters of contemporary and modern art.

Ford's work depicts flowers, capturing details to expose their immense beauty. Images of flowers are frequently treated as portraits throughout his work, as they are focused on a very detailed level, blurring the environment surrounding them. The resulting artworks emphasize the aesthetic value of a single flower within nature in all its magnificent beauty, an image hard to witness without the masterful treatment of Ford. Similarly to the way that portrait artists worked

"Blue", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"





throughout the ages, the subject in focus is the one entirely dominating the picture, and all other background elements serve as tools that orchestrate this complete dominance. The presented background is blurred to the point of becoming entirely abstract, as grass and foliage turn into an almost monochromatic canvas on which the shape of the flower is imprinted.

Movement is also a prominent element used in a very masterful way in Mark Ford's work. The frequent depiction of water in his work is something that dictates a reconciliation between photography and movement, something which is many times hard to do as one needs to know when to seize the right moment and have a precise result. The liquid element is portrayed as it is, something both serene and mysterious, frozen in time but never static, as the photographer manages to capture the real momentum of the flow. This dynamic representation is evident in both the waters of powerful streams and rivers, as well as in the crushing waves of the sea, scenes that remind the viewer why water is considered the strongest element on earth.

Some especially interesting photographs that are a part of his artworks concerning water are those pictures shot at the Rio Tinto, in Andalusia, which is a river that has both fiery and earthy tones. The unique color palette of this river is caused by the mines that are present in this area, which contaminate the water with iron and sulfide minerals. Ford seized the opportunity to depict scenes from this river, and the resulting photographs turned out to be unique and fresh. The visual borders between fire and water are blurred, as the reddish water, with its dynamic flow and vibrant

color, resembles tongues of fire that are both marvelous and catastrophic. It is another prime example of the way that the artists uses an initial reference found in nature, decomposes it to the point that its identity is not recognizable and the resulting abstract image created is reformed into a whole new concept, one that may even be contrary to the original one.

In Ford's work, we find mountains and trees depicted as silent giants. Entities that when evident in his artworks play a prominent role, one that can be compared to a human figure, similarly to the way that he makes use of flowers. Trees are thoroughly exploited for the gorgeous patterns that are evident in their branches and foliage, offering a wide array of shapes and colors, elements that largely depend on the season during which the photograph was taken. This feature directly adds the element of time in the exhibited photographs, something that can play a prominent role when picturing nature. Thus the viewer is welcome to experience the full splendor of any given season, in a way that may rekindle personal memories but at the same time, it has dream-like qualities offered by the pure digital manipulation that the artist uses to perfect his pictures.

Mark James Ford creates photography of exceptionally high technical quality, carefully positioning every single aspect within his frame to produce vivid images that captivate the viewer. Balancing between images that are abstract and others that are representative,  
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"Blue Ice", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"



he accurately manages in both to convey a timeless aesthetic, ultimately letting the viewer ponder on the majestic physical reality that surrounds us all.

Enjoy the following interview with the artist.

**How did you become an artist?**

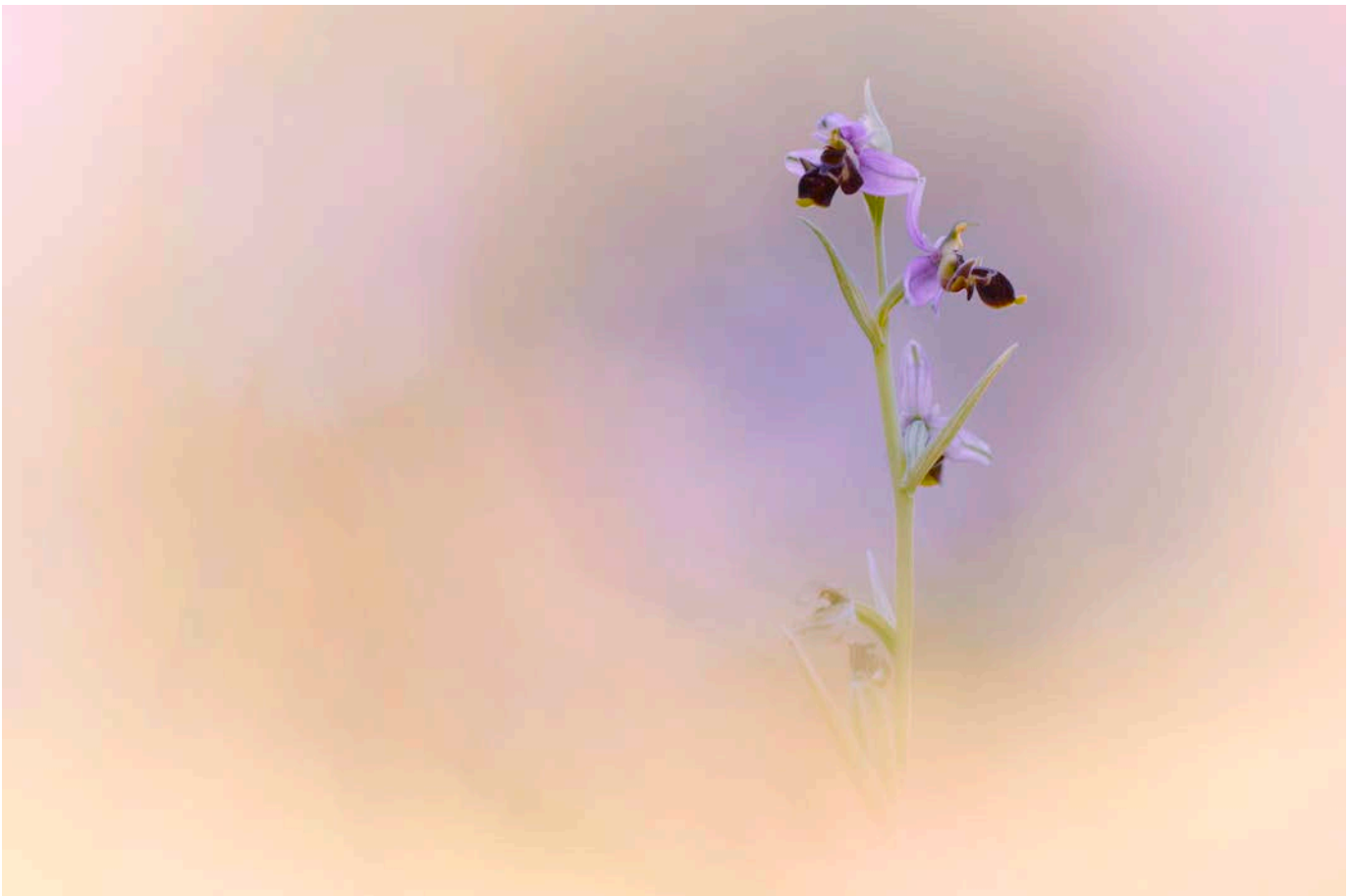
"Since school age, 8-9 years old or as long as I can remember, I have always been very creative. Between the ages of 11 to 16 I spent almost every evening in the school in an informal group that did nothing but draw, sketch, paint, developing ideas and methods continuously. I have always been interested in everything that is around me: What I see, what I can't see, and what lies behind the beauty that is the natural world. This curiosity led to a passion for the sciences and particularly chemistry which I think is the most creative science. Unusually I guess, I pursued chemistry with just an equal passion, combining the two, when, between the ages of 17-18, I was allowed to use a fully kitted out dark room (photography was not on the school curriculum). Here I photographed and developed black/white film learning all the development techniques and the actual meaning of 'dodge,' 'burn' and 'mask.' The images themselves were naïve and immature, but sometimes the seeds of future work could be seen in pictures that did little more than show a structure or shape. Ultimately, however, loving chemistry and art equally, I decided

that it would be 'easier' to pursue a career in chemistry than the arts and went on to study chemistry obtaining a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry in 1988. Although the photography went into hibernation for a good while, with the advent of digital technologies I began to explore working with digital images and in 1997 I bought my first digital camera.

Four years later I took a picture of a New York Skyline, a 250cm x 30cm panorama to a framing gallery in Frankfurt, Germany, to which I had moved in 1996 from my native England, to ask about framing the image. Having been invited to 'open the picture' on the table, since the table was not large enough, I began to unroll the photo on the floor. Immediately attracting the attention of two customers to whom the gallerist was talking, the gallerist proceeded to sell my picture, using nothing more than eye-contact to ensure 'approval' at various points of the sale. After that, further discussions with the gallery ran on a very different footing and the rest, as they say, is history."

**How do you approach your creation- can you elaborate on your working process?**

"Photography is a very individual pursuit. Seeing a view, structure, shape, be it natural or man-made - I want to understand it - why does it excite me? What emotions do I feel? The question I then ask myself is when I look through the viewfinder of the camera -



"Romantique", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"



do I see and feel this? I shoot images for myself - if I have an emotional response to a picture, if it portrays what I wanted to capture, then I know I am starting the beginning of the creative process in the right way. Ultimately, I take that image and explore the essence of what I wanted to capture. Although sometimes I only want to show the beauty of the natural world as I see it, this process may perhaps end with an abstract work - or at least a work where color, form, and structure are more important than the documentation of a particular scene or object. Just as a diamond needs light to show its real beauty, often it is the interplay of light and subject, which is critical to that which I am trying to achieve."

### **What are the primary themes of your work?**

"Although I started with hand-stitched ultra-wide panoramas of cities and occasionally landscapes, my main subjects are now driven more by the natural world. Color, form, structure, the interplay of light, the essence that lies behind the beauty we perceive. However, beauty is very personal. Modern advertising concepts and much of popular culture assume 'youth' and 'unblemished' is equivalent to beauty. I do not. I see a deeper beauty in the aging of a flower. As the 'perfection' matures and develops, structures, lines, the 'blemishes' of age, show, for me, the real character of the beauty of a subject. The interplay of color and light with form and structure is never more present, though here in a very ageless form, than when looking at water and it will thus be no surprise that this is a motif in all its manifestations to which I regularly return."

### **Who are your favorite artists and why?**

"I do not follow the work of other photographers - neither wanting to be influenced by them nor wanting to tie myself, unconscientious or not, to any modern convention of what makes a 'good photograph.' I pursue my goals and artistic ideas. Artistically, I find the most abstract pieces by William Turner a real inspiration. 'A Snow Storm At Sea' especially, captures a dynamism and power which has never left me from the first day that I saw it, and yet, there is barely anything 'recognizable' to be considered in the image. A real use of form and structure to display the power of the natural world. For inspiration, I need to look no further than the work of my partner, Ines Mondon, and her photographic representation of the aesthetic and perfection of the natural world. Her challenge and support are a constant drive within my creative process."

### **Why do you think art is important for the world, and why is it important for you as an individual artist?**

"Art makes us truly human, or to put it differently, the ability to appreciate the beauty in form, color, shape and structure of an object, painting, sculpture or



"Silver Green", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 60" x 39.3"

photograph makes us human. It can define who we truly are. People, our species, can be and are (regularly) mean, selfish and even cruel. Art shows us, or better still the appreciation of beauty tells us, that this is not all that we are - all that we can be. For me, it is a more rewarding and fulfilling and ultimately, undeniably, real and fundamental alternative source of meaning as opposed to that most pervasive of human inventions: Religion. Art is, or can be, a window to a 'better' world. An appreciation of art and the artistic process of the wonders of the natural world, (and the fundamental processes which lie behind it), can define us and make us, actually human."

### **What do you hope to communicate to the viewer and how does this specifically affects the final result?**

"When somebody looks at my work, I want them to feel an emotional response whether they 'like' the image or not, is 'irrelevant,' or at least not the goal. Have I managed to capture a small part of our world and given the viewers an opportunity to see it in a different light perhaps, or given them a chance to appreciate the natural world around us? I strive for the perfect representation of this idea (though rarely achieve it) and seek perfection in every part of the

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photographic process to create this. I am the strongest critic of my work (though my partner perhaps tempers this). If the image doesn't move me, or if I don't feel that the photograph is more than just a picture, then I know that I have not achieved that which I truly desired."

**Which of your artworks is your favorite, or have been most significant to you as an artist?**

"A difficult question: Many pieces have defined various moments of my artistic career and the development of what I want to show within a photographic image. A development that is far from complete and perhaps which I will never complete. 'Two Women and Child,' the New York Skyline that lies behind my first answer is without a doubt and for obvious reasons, an important image to me. At the time, completing such an image on a computer with less computing power than a modern smartphone, was a Herculean task. It is however neither my favorite nor my best panorama image. 'Blue Ice' is a defining turning point in my ability to capture and represent the beauty in the natural world developing into images such as 'Stranded,' 'Afterglow,' and, especially when looking at the interplay of light and subject, 'On The Edge Of Night.' 'Essence of Winter II' marks a turning point in my artistic representation of the world around us, whereas 'A Summers Dream' pushes the nature of artistic, perhaps 'impressionistic,' representation further still. I am very excited about my most recent work from the 'Rio Tinto' which thoroughly explores the interaction of color, form, structure and light."

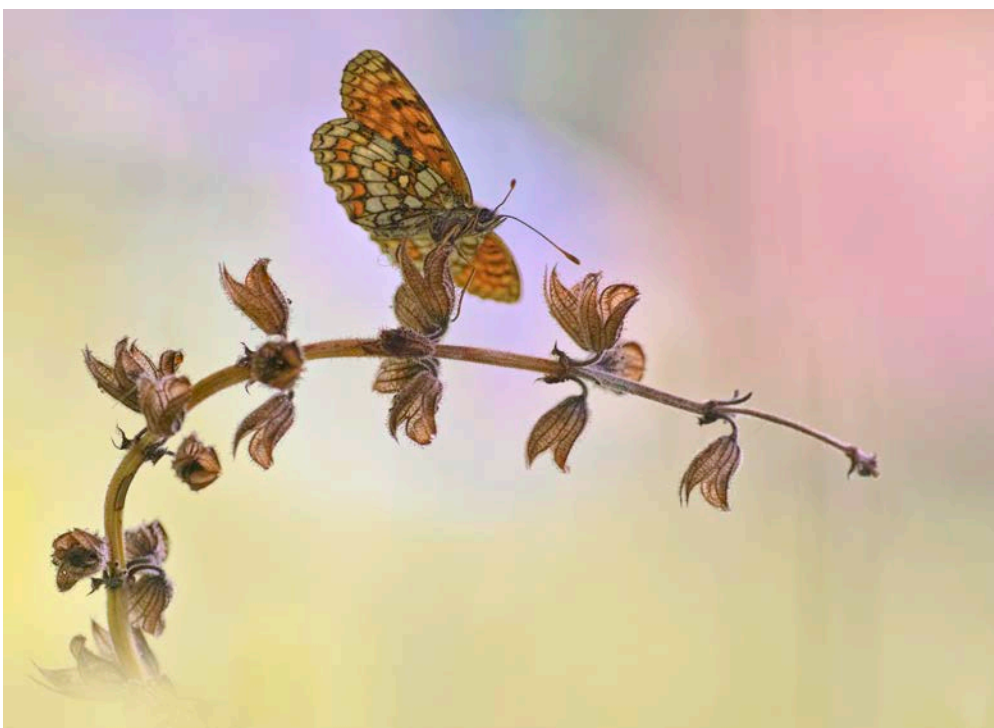
**How do you feel when people interpret your artwork differently?**



"Sun Light", Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"

"How somebody understands a piece of my work is very much up to an individual. They are free to interpret it as they see fit, the way viewers perceive an image is a culmination of every life experience they have had to date, rarely will two people be affected the same way by a picture. I hope they are open enough, or that the image itself can open them slightly more, to an appreciation of the beauty that surrounds us in all things. That to which I have to be most open is when somebody dismisses a piece just as a photograph; then I have to remember I cannot force the appreciation of an artistic idea. Above all, I want them to have an emotional response to the image they see. I want the observer to be moved, to appreciate our world just a little bit more than they did before." ■

[www.markjamesford.photography](http://www.markjamesford.photography)



"One Fleeting Moment" Photograph Mounted Onto Acrylic, 39.3" x 60"