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# THE HERITAGE ISSUE





# Dancing with decay

Photographer Denice Hough loves abandoned urban spaces, which provide rich fodder for her inspired works of visual art

TEXT: GERRIE LIM  
PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF DENICE HOUGH

American photographer Denice Hough has come a long way since she was an architecture student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Ever since she sold her first photography piece in 2001 at Chicago's Echo Gallery, she hasn't looked back.

She is also quite literally a long way from home, having moved in April 2011 to Hong Kong, where her work is sold by Cat Street Gallery in Sheung Wan. Shot with her trusty Canon in a style that slyly deconstructs architecture through a relentless search for meaningful details in the name of irony, Hough's work attempts to find perfection in decay.

**How did you make the transition from architecture to photography?**

I went to Ball State for architecture and when I decided to go into photography, I knew I needed a good art school so I went back to Chicago, to Columbia College, where I graduated with a BA in photography in 2000.

**How did you come to shoot your 'Abandoned' series?**

I used to only shoot people and fashion. But I like to tell stories and I wanted to do that with pictures. The first picture I took of an abandoned building happened in 2008, when I was living in New York. I was walking down the West Side Highway, past Pier 57, which used to be the old CTA (City Transit Authority) building. It was huge and it looked like lights were on in there. Literally, I pulled the door open and just walked in. I wandered around even though it was actually quite scary. Apparently it had been abandoned since 2002.

**Then you shot what's left of the famous Palace Theatre in Gary, Indiana?**

Yes. Before I moved here I lived in South Korea, but just before I left Chicago I shot some photos with one of my brother's friends from high school, who is a cop in Gary (Indiana). I thought,

"Ah, Gary! That town has some totally messed-up, crazy spaces!" So I started doing some research on it and found a lot of websites dedicated to abandoned buildings. At that time, Michael Jackson had recently died. Gary is the town where he's from, and the old Palace Theatre was where he first performed. They haven't torn it down but it's completely disintegrated. I find it amazing that people spend time and money and effort to build something beautiful and then they discard it like an old shoe or something. Except it's a building, and they just don't care about it anymore. It's weird to me, to not care.

**Where was the shot of the beautiful old church with the piano taken?**

That was also in Gary. It was a Methodist church and like everything else in Gary, it was abandoned when the people left. It was a booming city back in the day, and then the steel mills closed down and people moved out, closer to Chicago, where there was more work. Once, the people were gone, the buildings became unimportant. There were tons of apartment buildings that I couldn't get into. I tried to, but I was with a cop who said, "We're not breaking into anything. If you can walk into it, fine. I've got the gun in case anybody bothers you."

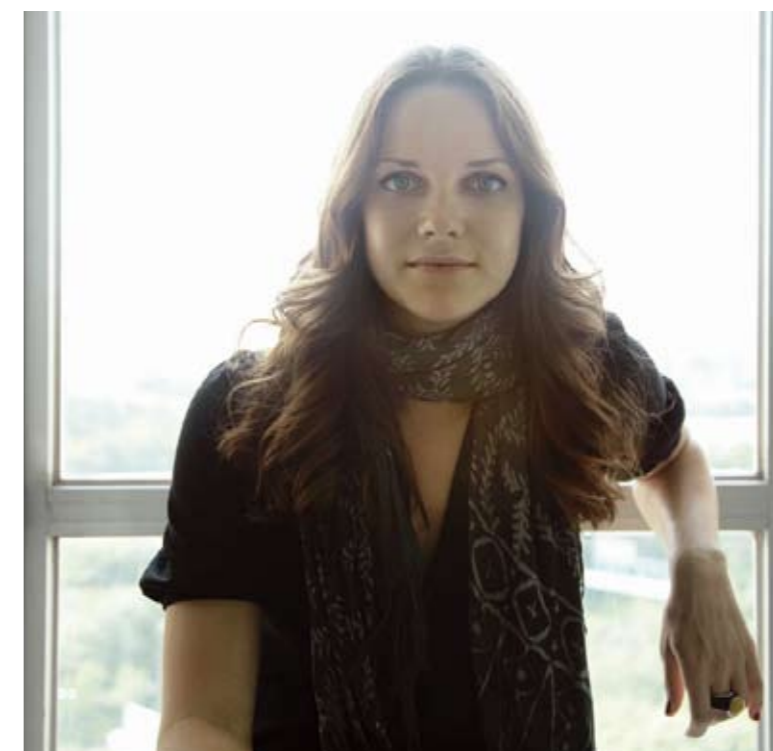
**That was nice. You had your own security detail!**

He had a big shotgun with him. Or else I wouldn't have gone. A white girl walking around alone in Gary? Uh-uh. I had Mace (chemical spray) and a knife on me when I travelled and shot in Africa. I've been lucky. I've never been attacked.

**How much manipulation do you actually do after you shoot?**

I start by spending hours staring at it. Looking at it and asking myself, "What does this need?" I'm not a documentary photographer, I'm not a journalist, I don't owe anybody the truth. What I show you is what I want you to see, after hours of retouching. I use Capture One software, and Canon is integrated with it, so I can shoot with my Canon straight into my laptop and see exactly what I'm shooting.

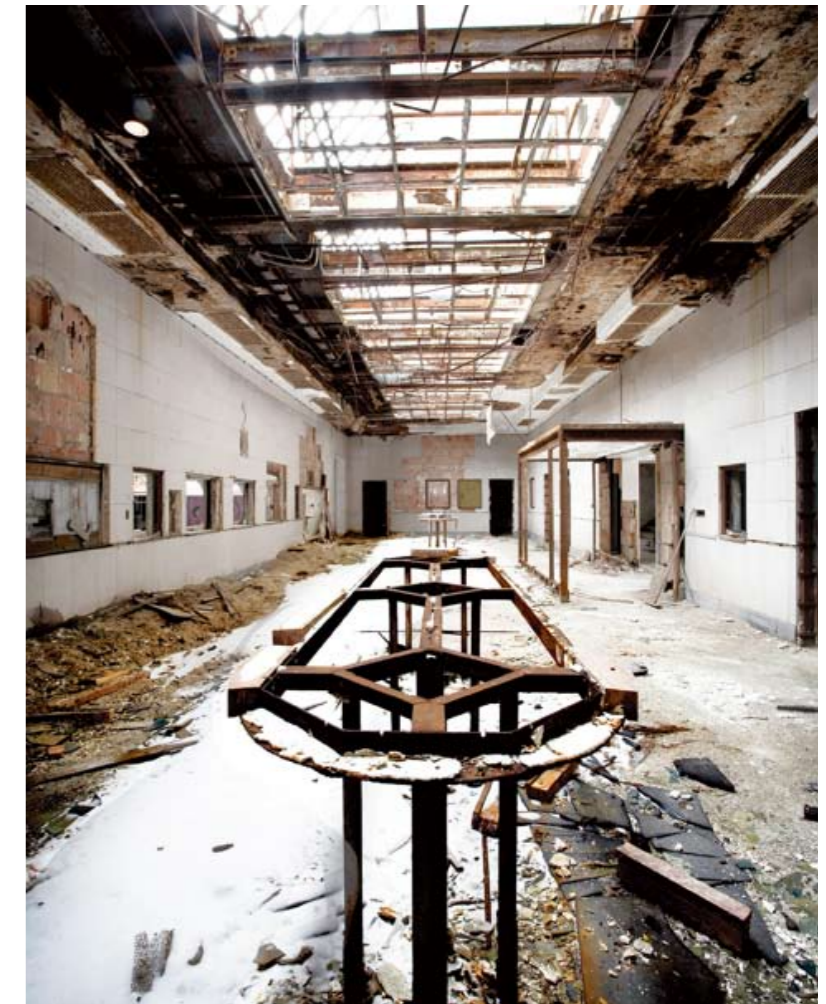
I've been doing photography since 1998 and I've been using Photoshop for 12 years now. I think Photoshop is just as important as a tool as your lighting. When I shoot these old buildings, I shoot with natural light which usually means you have one light source, which is the doorway. I wasn't going to drag lights in there. There's no power and it's often too big of a space. I would need so many lights.



**So how many of those photos at Cat Street Gallery are from Gary, Indiana?**

All of them. On my website ([www.denicehough.com](http://www.denicehough.com)) there is the series from Gary and there are some from New York, and then I went to New Orleans to shoot it after Hurricane Katrina. I'm planning to go to China soon to shoot, hopefully in or around Guangzhou.





**Are you trying to subvert architecture, like you're trying to get people to see buildings and interiors in a different way?**

I like the idea of finding beauty in something that's not a perfect, pristine building. If you can find beauty in destruction, then that to me is an oxymoron but kind of an interesting one. If everybody looked like Claudia Schiffer, then everybody would be sort of boring.

**How do you feel about Hong Kong as an urban environment?**

I really love the old buildings but it's a very European feel. Like the police station on Hollywood Road, which is a bit colonial Greek-ish.

It's a bit of a hodge-podge. It's not Chinese. There is a heavy Western influence here. You can tell the English built most of it. But I love taking the tram in Central, because the tram has this really great old feel to it. And I can go to Lantau, to Tai O, and see houses on stilts and fishing villages. I love it. If I wanted to stay in a totally Western society, I would've gone back to New York.

**How does it feel to have your work shown at Cat Street Gallery, where they've sold five of your pieces now?**

It feels pretty cool. I feel appreciated. Because I've long since decided not to shoot for anybody else. Every picture I take is just for me. If somebody

else likes it, that's fantastic. It makes me happy to have somebody else say, "It's beautiful." And if they buy something – the fact that they're going to have something that I did hanging in their house... that's absolutely amazing.

If you get paid to do something that you love, the simplicity of that is what I consider happiness and success. Nine out of 10 people will tell you they hate their job, but you'll find that one person that says they love their job and love getting up and going to work. That's what I aspire to. That's what I want.

**Why did you become a photographer?**  
Because I couldn't paint! Seriously.

"I've long since decided not to shoot for anybody else. Every picture I take is just for me. If somebody else likes it, that's fantastic. It makes me happy to have somebody else say, 'It's beautiful'"



# 在殘垣上起舞

攝影師 Denice Hough 戀上城中廢墟，從頹垣敗瓦中孕育出精彩的視覺藝術

撰文：GERRIE LIM  
攝影：DENICE HOUGH 攝錄



美國攝影師 Denice Hough 自從畢業於印第安納州曼希市波爾州立大學建築系後，多年來的努力沒有白費；2001年，她首張攝影作品於芝加哥 Echo Gallery 賣出，期後一直昂首闊步，踏上攝影生涯的漫漫長路。

這段路不但漫長，而且遙遠。2012年4月，Denice 離鄉別井移居到香港，於上環的 Cat Street Gallery 寄賣作品。Denice 拿起與她並肩作戰的 Canon 相機，掏盡心思在廢墟中找尋

帶有嘲諷意味、富意義的細節，拍下一幀幀靜悄悄解構建築的相片，試圖在一片頹垣敗瓦中找出完美的感覺。

你如何從建築走進攝影的世界？

我在波爾州立大學讀建築。當我決定要做攝影師時，我知道我要在一間優秀的藝術學校學習，所以我回到芝加哥，就讀哥倫比亞學院，於2000年完成攝影學位。

為何拍攝「廢墟」系列？

以往我只拍攝人像及時裝；但我喜歡說故事，而且想透過相片來說。我在2008年第一次拍攝廢棄建築，當時我住在紐約，正沿著西邊高速公路走，經過紐約市運輸局舊大樓所在的4號碼頭。那棟建築很大，內裡看來亮了燈。我毅然拉開大門走進去，雖然著實滿怖的，但我還是四處徘徊。那裡顯然自2001年起便一直被丟空。

然後你便去了印第安納州加里市著名的皇宮劇院遺址拍攝？

是的。我移居香港前住在南韓。我弟弟的高中生朋友在印第安納州加里市當警察，我在離開芝加哥之前，與他一起拍了些照片。那時我心想：「啊，加里市！那個城鎮有一些亂糟糟、瘋得很的地方！」於是，我著手研究這個城市，發現了一些專談廢置建築的網站。那時，米高積遜剛去世，加里市是他的故鄉，而舊皇宮劇院便是他首次演出的地方。劇院雖未拆卸，但卻是一片頹垣敗瓦。我對人們花了心機、時間和金錢去建造美麗的建築，卻又將之如舊鞋般隨意捨棄，任其荒廢感到奇怪。除了知道它還是棟建築外，他們都不再關心它的任何事。對我來說，這種漠不關心觸發我對這些建築的關注。

在 Cat Street Gallery 中展出的照片，有多少是來自印第安納州加里市？

全部都是。我的網站 ([www.denicehough.com](http://www.denicehough.com)) 上，有加里市的攝影系列，亦有一些紐約的照片。颶風卡特里娜吹襲新奧爾良後，我到過當地拍攝。我還打算稍後到中國拍攝，希望能到廣州一帶。

你有張相片拍下美麗舊教堂中的鋼琴，是在哪裡拍攝的？

同樣是在加里市拍的。這間循道宗教教堂的命運與市內的其他建築同樣坎坷，人去樓空後落得廢置的下場。加里市是個繁華的都市，但是鋼鐵廠倒閉後人們便紛紛離開，搬到更接近芝加哥的地方，因為那兒有更多工作機會。人們離開後，建築便變得不再重要。那裡有很多公寓大樓我進不了的，我試過強行闖入，但與我同行的警察卻說：「我們不可以非法闖入。如果你能走得進去，沒問題。如果有人騷擾你，我有手槍在身。」

那很棒。你有私人保鏢！

他帶著一支巨型散彈槍。要不是這樣，我才不敢去。一個白人女孩獨自走在加里市的街上？太可怕了吧。我在非洲旅遊拍攝時，隨身帶著梅西防身噴霧和小刀。我很幸運，從未試過遇到襲擊。

你如何處理拍攝後的照片？

我一開始會花上數小時來盯著照片。我凝視它，問自己「這需要些甚麼？」。我既非紀錄攝影師，亦非記者，無需向任何人交代真相。照片上的都是我理想人們所看到的，經過數小時的修整而成。我使用支援 Canon 的影像處理軟件 Capture One，所以我可以直接以 Canon 相機拍攝，然後立刻在手提電腦上看到自己拍攝了甚麼。

自1998年起，我便一直在拍攝，而我使用 Photoshop 已21年了。我認為 Photoshop 是與燈光同等重要的工具。我拍攝這些舊建築，都只能靠天然光，即是說只有門口這個單一燈源。我不會強把光線引到室內。這些建築都沒有電力供應，而且很多時空間都大得很多，需要許多盞燈。

你有否試圖推翻建築的既有概念，如同你試著讓人們以不同的角度去看建築和室內空間？

我喜歡在維持原狀、不完善的建築中找尋缺陷美。如果能在一片崩毀之中看到美麗的東西，我會覺得雖然矛盾，卻十分迷人。倘若每個人都與名模歌地亞雪花長得一模一樣，世界便會變得沒趣味。

你覺得香港的都市環境如何？

我真的很喜歡這裡的舊建築，但卻帶有濃厚的歐洲味道。以荷李活道的警署為例，就略帶點希臘的殖民地色彩。這有點像大雜繪，並不是中式建築，深深受到西方影響，一看就知道大多都是英國人興建的。不過，我喜歡拍攝途經中環的電車，因為電車的古老感覺真的很棒。我亦可以到大嶼山和大澳，去看看高蹺屋和漁村，我喜歡得不得了。如果我要留在一個完全西化的社會，就不用留在這裡，可以回到紐約去了。

你在 Cat Street Gallery 賣出了五件作品，你對那裡寄賣有甚麼感想？

這很不錯，我實在很感激。因為我早就決定不會為任何人拍攝，每張照片都只是為自己而拍。如果有人喜歡這些作品，就好極了。聽到別人說「這張照片真美」，會令我很高興。而如果你們把它買下來，把我的作品掛在屋內；這真的是美妙得很。

倘若做自己喜愛的事能賺到錢，我就會很直接的認為是幸福和成功。你若問十個人，九個都會告訴你他們討厭自己的工作，而餘下的一個就會說他喜愛自己從事的工作，每天都滿心歡喜地起床去上班。這就是我所嚮往的，亦是我所渴望的。

你為甚麼會成為攝影師？

因為我不懂繪畫！說真的。E