



Humans have some of the most highly developed eyes in the animal kingdom, able to perceive colour, depth and speed with a split-second glance. But that doesn't mean that we perceive everything around us accurately. Far from it. As a new Toronto exhibit by German photographer Grit Schwerdtfeger shows, habit, familiarity and closeness can make us blind to uniqueness alongside the everyday. Here, Schwerdtfeger tells Leah Sandals why she holds distance, and its perceptive effects, close to her creative heart.

**Q** You work solely in photography. Why do you like it so much?

**A** That's a seemingly basic question, but the answer but is not so easy. I guess I like to see all the things and people around me. I'm a looker, a viewer. When I was a kid I painted, but never got serious, because if you're a painter you have to create and arrange a landscape or situation. I prefer to find them.

**Q** Where did you find these photographs, then?

**A** I don't like to talk about specific places. But I did all these pictures in Spain and Canada. And you can't see that it's Canada or Spain, necessarily, because I am looking for general places ... places that are open so that you can go into the pictures and imagine it could be anywhere.

**Q** It does seem that these places are all tourist-type locales, though.

**A** Yes, I'm looking for places where people spend their leisure time, and also places where people have constructed something in the landscape so it's not a really "natural" nature there. In

Wiede, where all the people and cows are together, the cows were all put there as a tourist attraction.

**Q** Do you have a favourite picture?

**A** I really like *Platform* because I really like what the people are doing in it. And it seems like it could be a picture from the Bible, with the men under the platform being like the Madonna. It's an ordinary situation but there are surrealistic things in it.

**Q** You are often far away from people in these images. Why?

**A** I always look from a distance to find my pictures. The last time I took a close-up was probably 10 or 15 years ago. Basically, I need to have distance from my daily life to make pictures. So I never do pictures in my city. If you are far away, somewhere you don't exactly know, you can see things better than at home. At home you're almost too close; if you want to see more you have to step back.

**Q** Does this mean you travel a lot?

**A** I don't like to say "travel," because if I take photos I have to stay somewhere a long time. I was in the north of Spain for three months

And I need this long a time to see pictures that are not a snapshot. Then when I go home I need six months or more to finish my work: it takes time to make my first-draft pictures and spend time with those, too. I have to feel that they are not only a "first look" picture, that they will be good after days and weeks.

**Q** That's such a difference from digital photography, where you can see a picture right away and decide whether to delete it or not.

**A** Yes, I could never take my art pictures digitally. It could be great for somebody else, but not me. I take my pictures analog and I print my pictures by hand. That's my kind of taking pictures. For family and jobs I make digital pictures. But for my artwork I really need analog.

**Q** What are you working on now?

**A** Recently I spent the first time in seven years away from my little boys. It was for one month on a small island in the north of Germany. It's a very popular island for holidays. And it looks really natural, but they have to do a lot so that the island looks natural. For example, the sea takes away all the sand on the beach and they often have to put back the sand to make it like a paradise. It was a great experience; I feel this island was really made for me.

**■** Grit Schwerdtfeger: *Distanz 2006* continues to April 27 at Corkin Gallery in Toronto. For information visit [www.corkingallery.com](http://www.corkingallery.com).

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