

Meet the artist: Donn Delson

[A affordableartfair.com/inspiration/interview-with-photographer-donn-delson](http://affordableartfair.com/inspiration/interview-with-photographer-donn-delson)



Donn Delson shares his eagle-eyed aerial inspiration

In our latest Meet The Artist series, Donn reveals his creative process and the extraordinary logistics behind his mesmerising aerial photography, soon to be on display at [Affordable Art Fair Melbourne](#).



We love that *Xylophones* was photographed from a bird's eye view. When did you become interested in taking aerial photographs and how has this process progressed in your artist practice?

I've been an active photographer for almost 60 years. Back in high school, I read *The Once and Future King*, a historical fiction novel about King Arthur. In the book, Merlin the Magician turned the young boy-king into an eagle, so that as a bird he could see how fences, borders, and barriers on the ground became insignificant. I appreciated the philosophical

lesson T.H. White shared and it also influenced my love for flying. Riding in a helicopter without doors at heights up to 10,000 feet is nothing short of incredible. Being able to use that as a creative outlet for my photography is like making my work, my play.

I draw inspiration from artists such as Piet Mondrian and Paul Klee, and search for photographic opportunities that incorporate the use of basic form and colour. As an example, in my Points of View collection, Periodic Table is an homage to Mondrian's Composition with a Grid 8, and Fan Dance to Klee's Farbtafel.



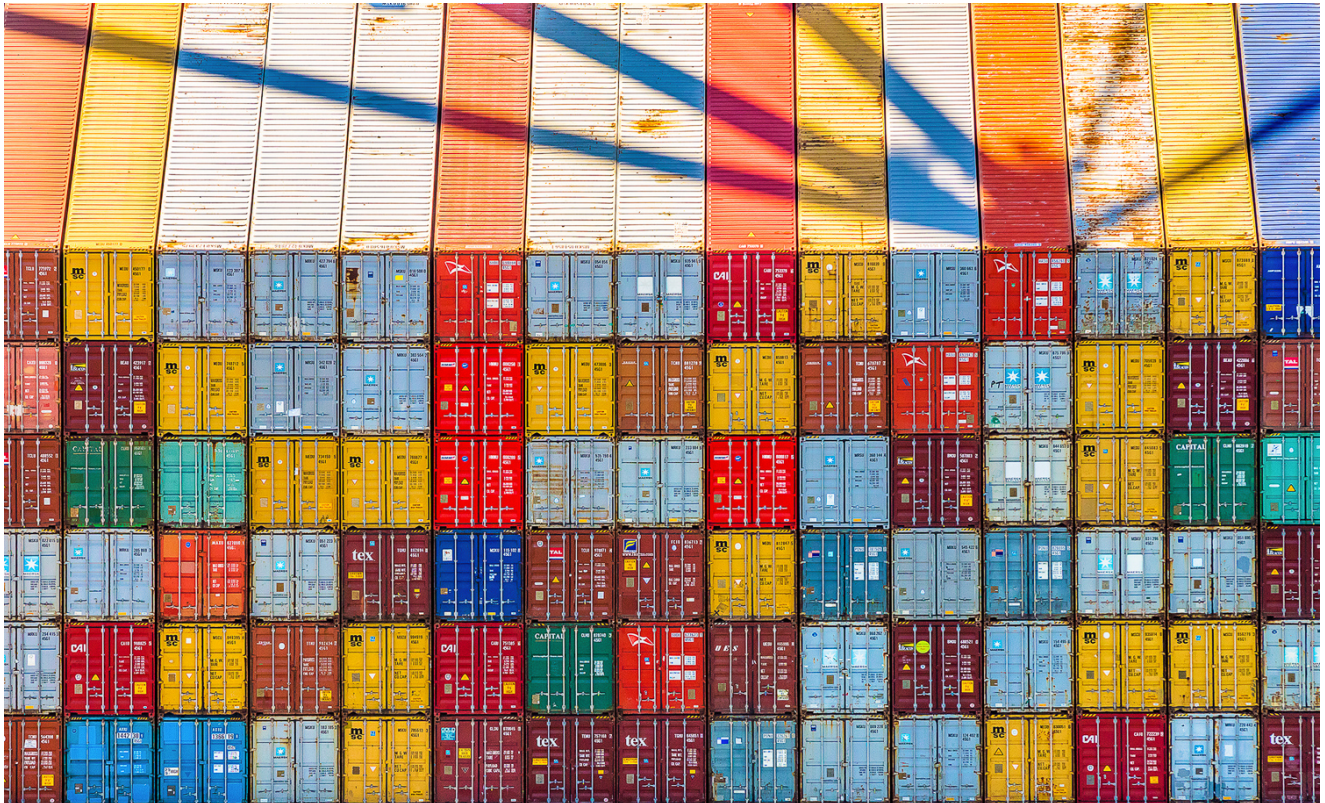
What other subjects are you looking forward to photographing next?

I'm looking forward to my trip to Japan in April where I will fly primarily over Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. I've always been in awe of the beauty of flowering cherry blossoms, and if Mother Nature is amenable and my timing is right, I hope to make that the subject of my next aerial series. I anticipate that there will be urban abstract opportunities during these flights, as well. Every flight is an adventure as I never really know what I'll see until I get up there.

What do you hope viewers experience from viewing your work?

Xylophones is part of the current *Points of View* collection represented by Axiom Contemporary. It's playful aerial abstract photography that's something other than what it may appear to be at first glance.

Most of us don't often get to view the world from the sky. When we do, we often find ourselves in awe of the unexpected perspective. I make my photographs available in large format sizes, 60" x 60", 72" x 48", 90" x 60", as I believe the size invites the viewer to "enter the image".





How would you describe a typical day in your studio?

Many artists create in their studio. My creativity takes place far above in a helicopter. I guess you'd call that my studio. I direct the pilot to the area I want to shoot. The travel to and from gives me a few moments to relax and take it all in. While shooting over beaches, docks, harbors, city centers, or junkyards, I am constantly searching for quiet symmetry, or splashes of color, or imagery that appears to be other than what it really is. It's intense work, physically and creatively, but it's often magical.

When I've spotted something that looks promising, I vary the altitude to decide what height works best. Then I determine the best direction from which to shoot. We fly through and circle back. Where is the sun relative to the image? Do the shadows add to or distract? Is this the best time of day, even season in which to capture this image?

The mechanical logistics of shooting from a helicopter must make each shoot unique and intense, could you describe the experience?

As there are always vibrations from the helicopter rotors, in the daytime I shoot at shutter speeds of up to 1/2000 second. If the winds aren't too intense, and in an effort to minimise movement, we may hover as I shoot.

When flying at night, I need to be able to open the aperture to let in more light. To minimise noise in those images, I try to keep the ISO as low as possible and as the camera needs more light to enter the lens, I reduce the shutter speed and use a hand-held gyroscope attached to my camera to minimise the vibrations. Overall focus and clarity are essential. Until I am able to see it on my studio monitor, I won't actually know if a shot is eligible for enlargement.

Sometimes there's a lucky sighting, like what happened with *Xylophones* when that lone truck began driving down the road between the parked containers. We got quickly into position enabling me to catch the shot just at the instant when the truck neared the end of the row. A few seconds later, the truck and the balance it provided in the scene were gone.

Some people have asked if I fly drones. While many drone operators are able to get great shots, legally they are supposed to fly below 400 feet. Most of my shots are at altitudes from 1200 feet up to almost two miles, where drones aren't supposed to fly.



What has been the most memorable moment of your career so far?

With respect to my aerial photography, two moments come immediately to mind:

One was the never-to-be-forgotten first time I flew directly over Times Square at twilight. Having been on the ground there innumerable times, viewing it from the open door of a helicopter at about 1400 feet just as the evening lights were coming on was one of the most magical moments I've ever experienced. I was so enthralled with the people, lights, and colors that I almost forgot to click the shutter.

The second most memorable moment I must admit, was when Affordable Art Fair contacted me through my gallery [Axiom Contemporary](#) to tell me that *Xylophones* was chosen as the branding photo for the Affordable New York Spring 2018 fair. It was an unexpected honour.



What advice would you give to aspiring artists?

Believe in yourself. Ignore the naysayers and pursue your passion with confidence and tenacity, without concern for commercial success. If it feels right to you, then it probably is. An honest presentation of your work communicates that integrity to others. Adopt a can-do philosophy and visualise yourself accomplishing your goals. Goals I've pursued that nourish me spiritually, creatively, and emotionally are consistently the most rewarding. When I wake up in the morning, excited about what I'm doing, I know I'm on the right path.

To experience Donn's photography in person, book a ticket to Affordable Art Fair Melbourne (5 – 8 September, Royal Exhibition Building) today.

BUY TICKETS

Main Image:

Donn Delson, Xylophones, 2016. Photo on metallic paper with lucite mount. Edition 7+2 AP. 48"x72". \$8,500, Courtesy of the artist.

Featured images from first to last:

Portrait image of Donn Delson on an aerial shoot

Donn Delson, Cassette Deck, 2017. Photo on metallic paper with lucite mount. Edition 7+2 AP. 48"x72". \$7,500. Courtesy of the artist.

Donn Delson, Headress, 2017. Photo on metallic paper with lucite mount. Edition 7+2 AP. 48"x72". \$7,500. Courtesy of the artist.

Donn Delson, Fan Dance, 2017. Photo on metallic paper with lucite mount. Edition 7+2 AP. 48"x 84". \$8250. Courtesy of the artist.

Donn Delson, Periodic Table, 2017. Photo on metallic paper with lucite mount. Edition 7+2 AP. 32"x60". \$4300. Courtesy of the artist..

Donn Delson on an aerial shoot.

Donn Delson's image Xylophones featured in the [Affordable Art Fair New York, Spring 2018](#) campaign.

Author

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Worldwide adventurer and art buying addict, Stephanie hails from New Zealand, but has spent the last decade living in London, Singapore and Hong Kong and now Australia, collecting a vast amount of art along the way! Her favourite piece is "Cape of the Pacific Voyages" by Rebecca Jewell – inspired by indigenous capes, complete with feathers, it is hand-etched with the names and images of the ships that explored the Pacific during the 18th and 19th centuries.

