

Given the right location, Lorenz and his subjects are able to create stunning images like this

World in motion

Lorenz Holder explains the shooting process behind his astonishing images of snowboarders and the simple but effective lighting arrangements he uses to capture them. He talks to **Oliver Atwell**

PROSPERING sports careers can often be cruelly cut short or put on hold by injury. It's not an uncommon tale to hear of a star player having to take time away from the field to recuperate, or even to take retirement long before age would have sent them to the sidelines. Take snowboard enthusiast and photographer Lorenz Holder, for example. Lorenz was a natural at snowboarding. In fact, he was so good he was fast rising to semi-professional status. However, in 2003 an injury forced him to vacate the slopes – but that wasn't the end of the story by any means.

'I couldn't just sit at home and be bored,' says Lorenz. 'I decided that I was going to borrow my parents' camera and hang out with my friends in the mountains. I thought that if I could perhaps document their activities, then I would at least have a role there. In the end, I was so fascinated by the process I've stayed behind the lens to this day.'

We've interviewed sports photographers many times in the pages of AP. While their visual styles and methods of working vary, they all have one piece of advice – know your sport. It should be immediately



Above: Lorenz shoots in such a way that his subjects often become vital components in the compositional balance



Right: This unusual shot shows Lorenz's ability utilise elements of various genres, such as portraiture



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clear from Lorenz's meticulously crafted images that he is a man with his mind firmly in the game.

'That was, of course, the thing that really benefited me when I started out,' says Lorenz. 'I was able to anticipate certain positions. I knew the moves and, in some cases, could discuss beforehand with the snowboarder what I wanted to see in the image, so I can effectively communicate with my subject.'

This means that Lorenz is able to visualise every shot before he takes it: the composition, the lighting – everything.

'It would, of course, be a totally different story if I was shooting a cricket match,' he says. 'It would be more than likely that I would capture all the wrong moments. While visually the images would work for me, someone who understands the sport would recognise the subtleties that show I've captured a moment that's one second too early or too late. Every scene has a sweet spot.'

LOCATION

These days, Lorenz is the staff photographer in Europe for Nitro Snowboards. It's a role that sees him taking on the mundane task of product shots, but also sees him get out to capture the action in the mountains.

One of the reasons that Lorenz's images work so well is that they almost defy being chained to one genre of photography. Take a look through Lorenz's ever-expanding body of work and you'll see why that's the case. You have portraiture in the depiction of the snowboarder; you have action in the incredible stunts exhibited by the athletes; then you have landscape in the stunning locations that Lorenz finds himself shooting.

Lorenz adds: 'One of the first questions in my mind when I produce an image is, "Would I hang this on my wall even if it didn't include the snowboarder?" My images are essentially landscapes that contain action. The snowboarding is an added element. I don't mean that the snowboarding is secondary.

'My images are essentially landscapes that contain action. The snowboarding is an added element'

What I mean is that the image must be built from the ground up. The landscape element must stand on its own before anything else is added.'

Some of the locations in which Lorenz shoots are truly beautiful, whether it's out on the Bavarian Alps or in Munich shooting a behemoth satellite dish (see page 38). It's a real testament to Lorenz's skills as a photographer that he is able to distil the awe-inspiring power of a location into a single shot.

'I come across the majority of these places myself,' says Lorenz. 'Much of my research is done online and in bookstores. I always have a good idea of what I need in a location and I'll find a location that will really speak to me. Then I can make the decision of what I want to shoot and how exactly I'll do that.'

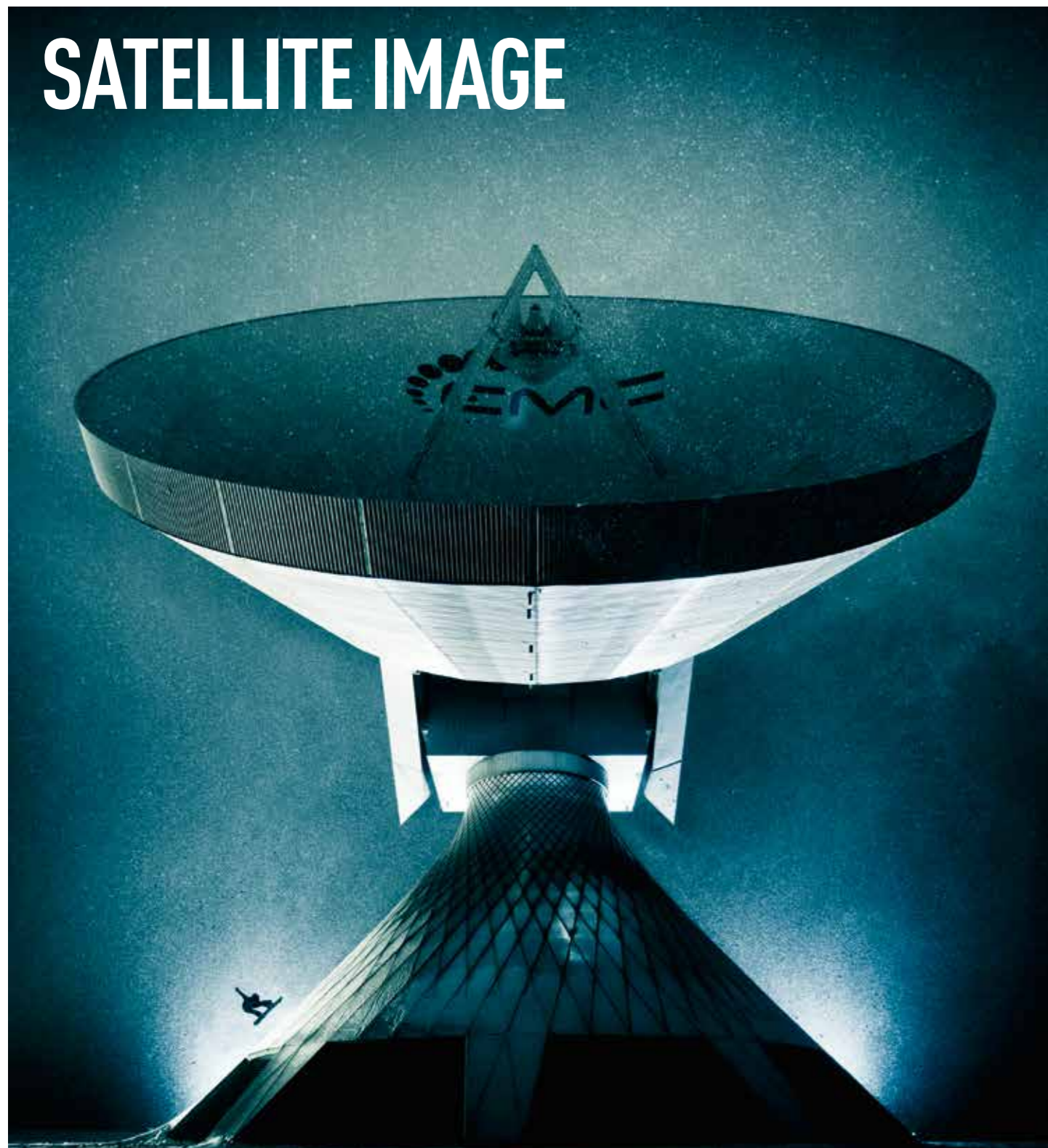
LENS AND LIGHTING

Once Lorenz has his location and has arrived on the scene, he is able to move through a series of steps that will lead to the final image. The first decision may seem like the simplest, but it will eventually determine how the rest of the steps land.

'The first thing I need to think about is my camera position,' says Lorenz. 'That can either come as a result of where the action is going to unfold and the position I want the subject caught in, or my position can determine where they will be. Then I must decide what lens will be appropriate.'

One of the key components of Lorenz's images is that the landscape must be beautiful enough to work as an image, even without the snowboarder

SATELLITE IMAGE



THIS breathtaking image by Lorenz bagged him an award at the 2013 Red Bull Illume contest. He discusses how he captured such an incredible scene.

'This image was taken in my home city of Munich, Germany,' he says. 'The satellite is just incredible. I arrived on location with the

intention of shooting the incredible architecture. I hadn't intended to include the snowboarder. The image was taken at around sunset, and as the sun disappeared fog began to appear around the location. I remembered that I had big studio flash in the back of my car and that's when I had the idea

to include the silhouette on the left-hand side. It just so happened that on that day we had the biggest snowstorm for a long time. Basically, the image had to be taken that night or never. All the elements lined up in that brief period.

'The only continuous light source in the image is from the moon.

The overall exposure was 4secs. Had I shot with a standard flash setting of 1/200sec, then I would have near enough the same picture but I wouldn't have the detail you see within the dish. Obviously, I can't get a flash in the dish so I had to run the exposure for a little longer.'



Usually, Lorenz mounts a Canon EF 70-200mm f/2.8 onto his Canon EOS 5D Mark III, saying that the optic gives him just the right of scope and range.

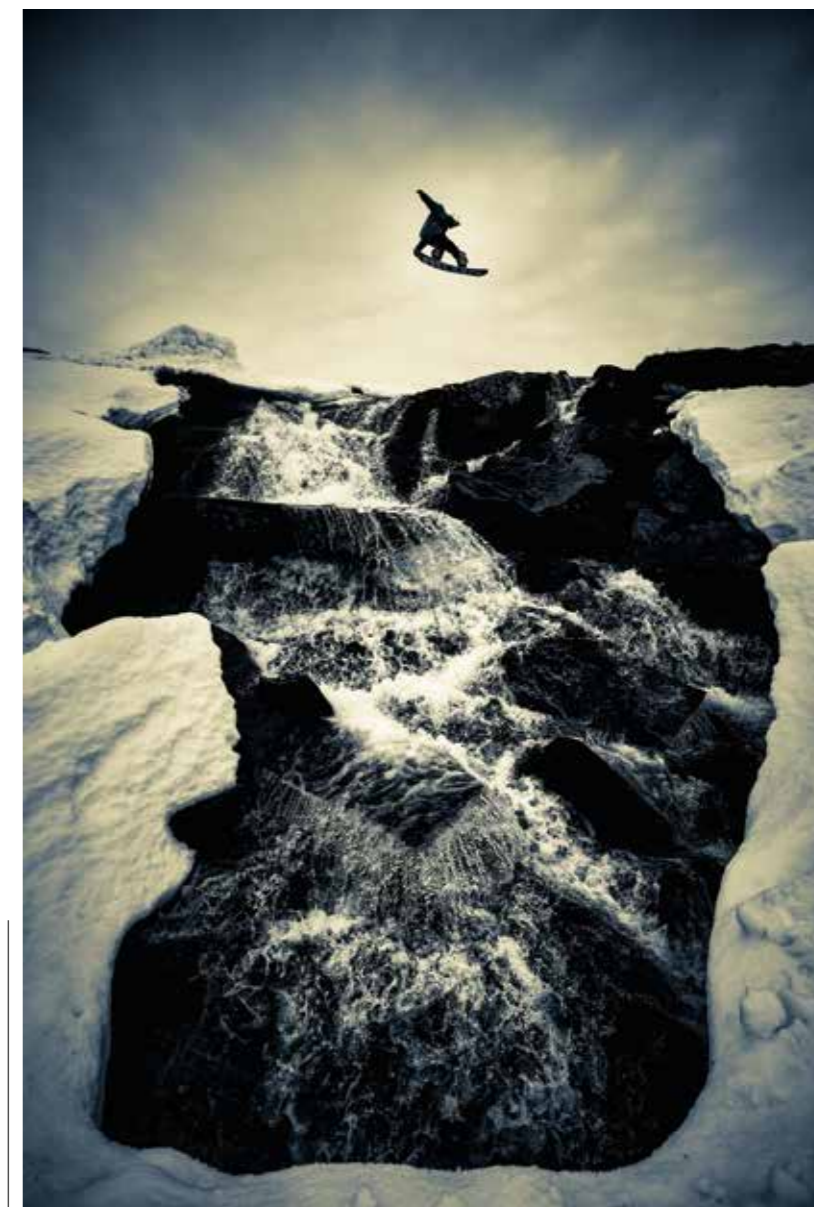
'The 70-200mm is perfect for the amount of coverage I need,' says Lorenz, 'while f/2.8 is also shallow enough to blur the background and ensure that the subject stands out within the scene. Sometimes – and this is scene-dependent – I'll opt for a wideangle, or in extreme cases, a fisheye.'

Next comes the stand-out feature of Lorenz's images – the lighting. You can't help but notice the professional application of flash in his work. Yet to talk to Lorenz you'd think he only had the most rudimentary knowledge of the skill. Clearly, that's not the case looking at his images. Perhaps it's more to do with the fact that he is able to break the process down to its most basic elements. In his words, it really isn't as hard as it seems. In fact, his kit is relatively basic: two Elinchrom Ranger RX studio flashes (rigged to a battery) and a couple of Canon Speedlites.

'People can often be intimidated by flash, but there really is no need,' says Lorenz. 'Take a look at the scene. What parts do you want to highlight? What parts do you want in shadows? You can really shape your image with light. You're essentially sculpting a scene. It's all about the reveal and conceal.'

'Despite what people think, there's nothing particularly elaborate about my lighting arrangements,' continues Lorenz. 'Sometimes I'll use just a couple of flashes, such as in my satellite image [left]. In others, I'll use a few. There are no rules. I'm

Above: Lorenz's images give his subjects free rein to demonstrate their incredible snowboarding skills



adaptable. For example, in my satellite image it benefited me to use less artificial lighting. I just had a flash on one side of the structure and then one on the other side. That worked because the image is quite symmetrical and I was able to balance the image with the light.'

STARTING OUT

Lorenz's application of flash didn't start from day one. He understood quickly that working with artificial light would have to come after he had mastered the basics of aperture, shutter and ISO.

'Had I started using flash from the beginning, I would have broken my brain,' says Lorenz. 'You have to start at the beginning. Then later, you can experiment. Once you have the basics, you can consider adding artificial light. The first images I shot with flash were unusable, but it was all necessary experience.'

Flashes, in the opinion of Lorenz, are easy to understand because they are directional. It's simply a matter of where you point the

kit. Think of it like a scalpel carving bits away and leaving other bits alone.

'The light is always straight, unless you're diffusing it,' says Lorenz. 'It's not something that you're going to lose control of and see it spilling around everywhere.'

The appeal for Lorenz is in the ability of the flash to make an image three-dimensional.

'If you had the flash above the camera, the image would come out flat because you're lighting everything that's in front of the lens,' he says. 'Sometimes that can work, such as in fashion photography. But that gives you more of a snapshot look. For action shots, the light needs to be within the scene.'

So, despite what we see within Lorenz's images, the process behind the seeming complexity is rather easy to break down and to understand. It's not uncommon for photographers to avoid using flash due to a belief that it's a complicated tool. Perhaps the kinds of images and advice offered by photographers such as Lorenz can help to demystify this dark art. **AP**

Above right: Light is a vital element in Lorenz's shots, whether it's natural or artificial

To see more of Lorenz Holder's images, visit www.lorenzholder.com