

LOCKDOWN

21 + 14



On the 26th of March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the lockdown of South Africa due to the coronavirus, initially for 21 days, followed by an extension of 14 days. This gave birth to my photographic book - Lockdown 21+14

To mark each day, I posted one of my images to social media. These images are a combination of my past work, covering portraits of the Khomani San, buildings and cities, friends and family, and travel and adventure. These are images I love, places I love and people I love.

What stood out for me during this time was how quickly Mother Nature reclaimed Earth with us humans locked away, reiterating my favourite saying: "In the end, nature will win..." Some of my images reflect the timeless beauty of nature – a stillness and beauty that is perfection if only we (man) can move out of the way.

My question is: Once the Big Lockdown is over, can we find a new better way to live, love and coexist with our environment. We are not separate from nature, we are part of it, and the sooner we realise this the better for all.

I hope you enjoy these images as much as I love them.

Ryan Fire-Starter James

Ryan James

This image was taken at the San Clan Main Burn at AfrikaBurn 2012. Before the Main Burn, all the fire dancers did a mass performance. This dancer was mesmerising with her fire dance as she twirled on the spot. It reminded me of whirling dervishes, who reach a state of bliss through spinning. It also reminded me of a dancing ballerina in a child's jewellery box...

DAY 1

Fire



Working with the African Safari Foundation (ASF), I got to spend time with the Khomani San community in a place that has fallen off the map. This image is of Tina, who works as a librarian in Andriesvale in the far Northern Cape. Not only does Tina live in the middle of nowhere, she is also deaf, and one of her greatest joys is to read, which she does by candlelight. My camera flash exposes her reading in bed one night; otherwise, the room is lit only by the glow of a small, diminishing candle.

DAY 2

Tina



I always say, "Surround yourself with good people." One of our shining lights, our friend Leigh-Anne's joyous smile, is like drinking liquid sunshine, I wanted to capture her in all her beauty and joy, and it was only afterwards that I noticed I was reflected in her glasses.

DAY 3

Self-portrait



As our city was locked down, we all started to seek normality in a life interrupted. Joburg is a massive place, one with which I have an ongoing love/hate relationship. This image was taken from Northcliff Hill, long before the pandemic. As the city was in lockdown, nature had her way of showing her hand - we saw and heard more bird calls without the sounds of cars, planes or even people.

DAY 4





This image was taken years before the lockdown, but COVID-19 started shutting more and more activities down and all sporting events were cancelled. Years after this image was taken, this is what every stadium around the world looked like. One of the things I missed was watching rugby.

DAY 5

Stadium



What always amazes me is how well the missionaries did in spreading religion in Africa. Even though we are now going through the decolonisation of everything, God seems to be the one genie we can't get back into the bottle. This was shot along Main Reef Road, which stretches along the underground gold reef that brought people to this mining town.

DAY 6

Faithful



On the edge of the world, the Khomani San community is in a battle to retain its identity. These cultural practices are best displayed and ingrained in the minds of the next generation through storytelling, song and dance. Seeing the trance dancing firsthand was the closest I have been to time travel; these stomping feet and songs have traversed the land over space and time for thousands of years.

DAY 7

Fire dance



Aidan is a free spirit and a whole world unto himself. Always a lover of water, this image beautifully displays all his attributes and joy. But living in quarantine with kids is a whole other world.

DAY 8





One of the joys of living in South Africa is our wildlife.
Zebras are amazing animals to photograph - I love how
the lines cause a moiré pattern and play tricks with your
focus. This is nature's way to confuse any predators.

DAY 9

Zebras



2

Baobab trees are as crazy as they look. In Africa, the story goes that they were planted upside-down, standing as guardians over the landscape for thousands of years. These beautiful trees are a reminder of what a short time we have on this earth. Tread lightly and leave only footprints.

DAY 10

Baobabs



Umhlanga Rocks on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal is a coastal town that Denise loves – her family spent many holidays here. This was the view from our room at the Oyster Box. We all needed some guidance and light in our lockdown lives.

DAY II
Lighting



Joburg is always in flux, and this image reminds me of how there was once a thriving business within these walls, and now all that's left is a faded façade of a bygone era never to be regained. The city is always changing, morphing, but the grittiness stays the same.

DAY 12

Faded façade



One of the Khomani San children, Celeste, is full of joy. You can see she was laughing at the balloon she was playing with, a gift from Dr Julie Grant (I call her the Mother Theresa of the Bushmen). Even in the face of hardship, Celeste was always beaming and joyous.

DAY 13

Celeste

ste



The serpent is a symbol of danger and death and the black mamba is one of the deadliest snakes in the world. One early morning walk on holiday in Plettenberg Bay, while pushing Aidan in his pram, we came across this mamba. I took this photo with my 50-500mm telephoto lens and then we moved on as quickly as we could.

DAY 14

Mamba



After a four-day walking trail in the far northern Kruger National Park within the Makuleke Contract Park, I looked down at my feet and this was the image I saw. Once again, Mother Nature has a way of making you realise how small you are, and walking among the great animals of Africa is a sure way to realign your thinking.

DAY 15

Looking down



h

Sometimes in Africa we have such great names for creatures and the Shongololo (millipede worm) is one of the best examples. To protect itself, it curls up, creating a spiral circle. I photographed this Shongololo on a homemade table and love the repetitive patterns of its outer shell, a sacred symbol of evolution and growth – and coming full circle.

DAY 16

Shongololo



In 2012, the Keurbooms River came down in flood and changed the landscape of Plettenberg Bay. One casualty was the Milkwood Manor Guesthouse's swimming pool, now washed out to sea. The only remaining sign of the pool's existence was the sign left behind, which I found rather amusing.

DAY 17

Good



There are universal hand gestures and none as good as the “Grrrrrrrrrrrr” sound with the hands held in front of your face, made to denote a monster. Nicholas did this to perfection. Every time I look at this picture, all I hear is “Grrrrrrrrrrrr!”

DAY 18





A sign at AfrikaBurn, but as the lockdown continued we were all forced to slow down; a new pace, a quiet and unnerving feeling, was part of our day. But humans are adaptable and we soon got used to a different rhythm of life.

DAY 19
Slow down



My totem animal is an elephant. This image was taken in Pafuri in the far northern Kruger National Park. He is an old bull, dusting himself from a sandy river bank. I love his sense of majesty. This is one of my all-time favourite images.

DAY 20

Pafuri



We have been fortunate to work with some amazing NGOs and WDB (founded by former First Lady, Zanele Mbeki) is one of those exceptional organisations. For their 25th anniversary, we got to travel around rural South Africa. This image was taken at Kwambonambi (KwaZulu-Natal), where a meeting was held with a group of traditional leaders. The hands of this induna tell the story of a hard life in the history and landscape of our fractured country, but they also tell a story of pride, strength and a warrior spirit. God bless Africa.

DAY 21

Induna



The Fight of Two Wolves Within You

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

This image was taken at the Wolf Sanctuary outside Plettenberg Bay.

DAY 21 + 1





10/6

The symbol of freedom is best portrayed by birds. Seagulls always look like they have just stepped out of a shower or beauty salon with their crisp white wings. As the days dragged on during “hard lockdown”, we all were seeking freedom. In a way, the pandemic gave us time to consider our own freedom and what we can do to live a freer, fuller life.

DAY 21+2

Seagull

all



Our good friends Craig and Robyn got married in Namibia and a few days before the wedding we went on an adventure into the Namib Desert on quad bikes. At one of the stops along the ridge of the sand dune looking back, I snapped this image.

DAY 21+3

Quad bikes



Turning on the same spot as the previous image, this was our view:
endless shifting sands that make you feel as small as you should; mother
nature at her best. The desert has a way of getting under your skin.

“All you have to do is contemplate a simple grain of sand, and you
will see in it all the marvels of creation. Listen to your heart. It
knows all things, because it came from the Soul of the World, and it
will one day return there.”

Paolo Coelho, The Alchemist

DAY 21 + 4

Desert



The best description of Dullstroom that I ever heard was that “it’s a small drinking village with a fishing problem.” Here you live out the fantasy of fishing in the Scottish Highlands and trying your hand at fly-fishing.

DAY 21 + 5

Dullstroom

Plettenberg Bay is one of the country's best holiday towns along the Garden Route in the Western Cape. My parents retired to Plett several years ago and we have the pleasure of visiting them every few years. This image was taken at dawn, showing the beauty and wildness of this beautiful part of the world.

DAY 21 + 6

Plett



Mista

Taken on an overcast day in the Drakensberg at the foot of the Amphitheatre, I noticed how the telephone/power lines stood out along the ridge, these manmade poles still able to connect people across the country and the world. No matter how we choose to isolate or retreat, human connection is essential to our wellbeing.

DAY 21+7

hill



In the dying mining town of Welkom in the Free State, these massive mining headgears stand like lonely soldiers, slowly stolen for scrap metal. As we arrived to take photos of the headgear, thieves ran like rats. I called after them to try to photograph them as well, but they were gone like the wind.

DAY 21 + 8

Headgear



My greatest fear is sharks, but surfers' greatest fear is never to surf again, which always wins. I love that about them. As award-winning South African surfer, Shaun Tomson, says: "...all surfers are joined by one ocean".

"I will never turn my back on the ocean
I will paddle around the impact zone
I will take the drop with commitment
I will never fight a rip tide
I will watch out for other surfers
There will always be another wave."

Shaun Tomson – A Surfer's Code

DAY 21 + 9

Surfer



On the way back from Welkom on one of our trips, we came upon this house made of road signs. This was the first time I had seen such a house. You don't have to travel very far to acknowledge that we are a land of creatives, innovators and inventors – where some see an old tin can, an artist sees a toy car, a picture frame, or a bracelet. When one finds an old sign – a house.

DAY 21 + 10

Sign house

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The only street in the world that was once home to two Nobel Peace Prize winners: Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This historic street in Soweto is where we spent the morning after hearing of the death of Nelson Mandela. A street that knows both joy and pain.

DAY 21+1

Milakangisi St



The strongest grip you will ever feel in your life...

DAY 21+1

Si

2
with



One of the most iconic buildings in Johannesburg is Ponte City.
My stepfather, Rodney Grosskopff, was one of the architects and
has the most incredible stories to tell about the building of Ponte.
Every person who has ever been to Joburg will have seen the
exterior of this building, but the core is where the light gets in...

DAY 21+1

Ponte core

3



What we thought was the last of the extended lockdown; it was only the start.

DAY 21 + 14

Jon



Ryan James is a videographer and photographer. Over the last 15 years he has worked for a variety of clients ranging from the corporate sector to travel and tourism, architecture and IT as well as communications and NGOs. He excels in both filming and editing. His stills photography portfolio includes portraiture, architecture, travel and wildlife.



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