



## Brent Lewin

Toronto/Bangkok | [www.brentlewin.com](http://www.brentlewin.com) | Rep: Engine Gallery ([www.enginegallery.ca](http://www.enginegallery.ca))

MY PHOTOGRAPHS ARE expressions of the way I see and experience the world. My camera motivates me, takes me places and gives me access to people living on the fringes of society. I've documented stories in countries like Thailand, India, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Bangladesh. The foreign places and otherworldly situations I have been in never fail to leave me with a sense of wonder and awe. The people who have allowed me into their lives have been a constant source of inspiration. A girl who lives on the pavement in India with a smile that cannot be erased or unemployed farmers living side by side with elephants eking out a living on the streets of Bangkok. It is through their struggles that they reaffirm my faith in the human



spirit and it is when I'm documenting their experience that I feel most alive.

After graduating from the University of Toronto with a degree in psychology, in 2003, I decided to explore the world. I travelled to Thailand and taught English. Then I returned to Canada and landed a job with a logistics company in Budapest. I was dispatched to manage the office in Afghanistan in 2006. Once there, I decided to explore the country. This was where I first picked up a camera, to meet people and photograph them. After six months, I decided to quit my job and pursue photography full time.

When I came back to Canada, I started to fill in the gaps in my knowledge by spending time with

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<above> An elephant scratches its head on a wall in an abandoned housing development in Bang Bua Thong, Thailand. <opposite, from top> A crowd swells an underground pass near Churchgate Station in Mumbai, an area from which thousands of pavement people have been relocated, to suburban transit camps. A buzkashi player races with a headless goat at a match held in Kabul to mark the inauguration of the first Afghan parliament.





photographers I knew, absorbing everything I could. I learned to become very versatile, shooting everything from commercial work to stuff for newspapers, to weddings. I do what I can here to finance the projects I have been documenting abroad. I'll be going back to Thailand [in February 2009].

I am not alone working this way. Last October, I was selected to go to a three-day Eddie Adams workshop in Jeffersonville, New York, where I met a lot of the names I admire in this [documentary photo] business. They'd say to me, "I have to shoot a lot of stuff I don't like to shoot to make ends meet."

I don't know if it is possible to make a living doing this type of photography. But it's what drives me. While commercial photography isn't my main interest, I have sought out clients who I am on the same page with, like the United Way and Greenpeace.

Lately there has been a lot of interest in the "Urban

Jungle" series of elephant pictures I took in Thailand. In this suburb of Bangkok, there are hundreds of destitute squatters who occupy abandoned buildings from the country's failed construction boom. In the furthest reach of the complex, five families live with their 10 elephants. On the strength of this work, I've been selected to participate in a group show called Google Earth, at Gallery 44 in Toronto. I'll also be in a group show, Exposed, as part of Contact in May, followed by my first solo show at Pikto Gallery in June. And I received an honourable mention in the photojournalism category of the 2008 *American Photo Images of the Year* competition. I was also a winner in *PDN's World In Focus Contest*. Gallery sales may be worth exploring—after all, the documentary and artistic sides go hand in hand.

The truth is, it doesn't take that much money to live in Thailand. But if I want to come back to Toronto and do anything here, *that* takes cash. ☹

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<above> Labourers pose at an informal recycling yard on the outskirts of Mumbai, India. <opposite, from top> Revellers celebrate Holi inside the Banke Bihari temple in Vrindavan, India. A worker shields her face from toxic fumes at the Stung Meanchey Municipal Waste Dump—or "Smokey Mountain"—in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. An estimated 2,000 workers travel to the dump from nearby slums every day to scavenge through the soggy and smoldering rubbish in search of recyclable materials, such as metals, plastics and glass, which can be sold to scrap shops.

