

NOT QUITE AN INTERVIEW

**SOME CONVERSATIONS AREN'T CONSTRUCTED,
THEY'RE GATHERED.**

This isn't a traditional interview, but a shared moment between two friends who have travelled, from different angles, through the worlds of fashion, light, and vision. Today they live just steps apart, but this closeness only reflects a deeper creative bond: made of memory, instinct, and a beauty both lived and seen.

I stayed silent, just watching. And like with the best photographs, I ended up seeing and feeling more than I expected.

THIS IS RAPHAEL, BUT SEEN THROUGH WARD'S EYES.

WORDS SABRINA BOLZONI





Grooming LISA MAZZUCCO
Lighting Director ARIEL SADOK
Style Assistant DUSTY

WARD STEGERHOEK IN CONVERSATION WITH RAPHAEL MAZZUCCO

WARD: How has your art evolved over the past 20 years?

RAPHAEL: It's evolved — not all at once, but slowly, with force and feeling. Twenty years ago, I was chasing beauty with a kind of wild urgency—capturing the , moment. It was instinctual, raw, and driven by movement and desire. I wanted to document the world as it was. Now, it's more layered. My work has become more about memory, texture, and the emotional residue a moment leaves behind. I've started ripping things apart—literally, with paper and paint—so I can put them back together differently, like memory does. I've also become more interested in the unseen: the energy between people, the quiet space in the frame, the story behind the surface. There's still beauty in my work—but it's not just about the physical anymore. It's about the soul underneath it. So, it's less about chasing now, and more about listening. Less about control. And in a strange way, I think that's made the art even more alive.

W When did you realize photography was your language?

R I think I always spoke in images—I just didn't know it was a language until I held a camera. As a kid, I'd see light pouring through a window and feel something I couldn't put into words. I'd watch the way someone's hair caught the wind, and it felt like a secret I was meant to translate. The first time I looked through a lens, it was like everything made sense. The world slowed down, and suddenly I could speak without speaking. Photography became the place where silence turned into poetry. It wasn't just about capturing beauty—it was about honoring it. That's when I knew. Photography wasn't just something I did—it was how I felt.

W How does your photography reflect who you are—when you're not being "the artist," just being Raphael?

R When I'm not being "the artist," I'm still doing the same thing—I'm feeling everything. I walk through the world collecting sensations: the way light hits a wall, the way a stranger's eyes hold a story. My photography is that quiet version of me—the dreamer, the wanderer. It's less about control, more about surrender. I'm not trying to stage perfection; so even when I put down the camera, that part of me is still there. Watching. Feeling. Waiting for the next moment to say, "This is it."

W What part of your journey do people never ask about—but you wish they did?

R The days when the inspiration hasn't come yet, and you're just sitting with the ache of waiting. They don't ask about the heartbreak that fuels the work. The personal losses. The long walks. The

moments when you doubt if you've already said everything you had to say. I wish more people asked about the silence before the idea—because that's where the real soul lives.

W What drives you to keep creating after all these years?

R Creating is how I stay alive. Not just breathing—but feeling, deeply. Every new work is a conversation between where I've been and where I'm still going. I don't create because I have something to prove—I create because I have something to remember. Because I still believe in magic. Because I still believe that one image can hold a thousand lifetimes. And because even after all this time, I'm still trying to capture that one moment where the world opens up and says, "Yes—this is it."

W What's a typical day like when you're deep in a project?

R Sometimes I'll shoot all day without speaking a word. Other days, I'll tear everything apart and start over. I follow instinct more than schedule. I lose time. Hours vanish in that trance of creation where nothing else matters—not food, not sleep, not anything. And in the middle of it, there's always this strange kind of peace. Like I've slipped into a secret world where everything makes sense. It's not really a day. It's more like a fever dream. A beautiful one. And when I come out of it—days or weeks later—I'm never quite the Same.

W Do you ever feel like you're chasing something with your camera—an emotion, a memory, a person?

R Always. Every time I lift the camera, I'm chasing something I can't quite name—but I know it when I feel it. Sometimes it's the ghost of a memory, the echo of someone I once loved, or a moment I never got to live but somehow remember anyway. It's like there's this invisible thread running through my life, and the lens is how I follow it. I'm chasing a feeling more than anything—a kind of beauty that's raw, imperfect, and fleeting. The look in someone's eyes just before they turn away. The quiet between two strangers. There are people I've photographed who still live inside the work, long after they've gone. Places too. And moments that feel like déjà vu. So yes, I'm chasing. But it's not to catch—it's to feel. And to share that feeling with whoever's willing to look closely enough.

W How does music, scent, or place influence your shoots?

R They're everything. They're the invisible language underneath the image. Music sets the emotional temperature. I'll play something slow and haunting if I want the room to breathe a little deeper, or something wild and tribal. You don't see scent in the photograph, but you feel it. And place... place is the soul of it all. I don't just use

locations—I let them speak. I listen to the energy in the space and let it guide me. Sometimes I think I'm not creating the image at all—I'm just translating the music, the scent, the feeling of the place into something visible.

W Your work is so tactile—how did you begin incorporating texture, paint, and torn paper into photography?

R It started with a restlessness. A feeling that the photograph alone wasn't enough anymore—that the image was just the beginning, not the final word. I wanted to touch the work. To break it open. To let the imperfections in. I started tearing paper, spilling paint, scratching the surface—almost like I was trying to feel the memory instead of just see it. It became this dance between control and chaos. The photograph gave me the form, but the texture gave it breath. Torn paper felt like emotion—raw, uneven, honest. Paint brought in the pulse. And layering it all gave the image a kind of soul, like time had passed over it, leaving its fingerprints. I wasn't interested in perfect. I was interested in truth. In memory. In the way we hold onto things—weathered, messy, beautiful. And once I started working like that, I couldn't go back. Because the moment I put my hands on the image, it became mine in a new way. It became alive.

W What does “beauty” mean to you now, compared to 10 years ago?

R Ten years ago, beauty was about —the instant impact, the flawless curve, the way light kissed the body. I was drawn to the fire, the intensity, the surface that made you stop and stare. Now... beauty feels quieter. Slower. It's not something I chase—it's something I recognize. It lives in the cracks, the undone, the almost-forgotten. It's in the way someone looks when they think no one's watching. It's the sound of an old door opening. The softness in someone's voice when they speak about something they've lost. I've learned that beauty isn't always pretty. Sometimes it's haunting. Sometimes it aches. And sometimes it shows up in places you'd never expect—like a torn edge, or a scar, or a shadow that won't go away. So now, beauty isn't about perfection. It's about presence. It's about truth. It's about feeling something so deeply, you can't look away

W Is there one photograph that has haunted you ever since you took it?

R Yes. There's always one. And it changes, depending on where I am in life—but there's one that's never left me. It was a woman standing alone on a beach just before a storm. Her back was to me, her hair whipping in the wind, and there was something about the way she held herself—like she was both waiting for something and letting it go. I took the shot instinctively, quickly, quietly. And when I looked at it later, it felt like I had captured a memory that wasn't even mine. There was this ache in it. This longing. Like the frame held something unresolved—like it wanted to say more but couldn't. That image has followed me. Not because of the composition, or the light, or the subject—but because of the feeling. It's as if the photograph knew something I didn't yet understand. And maybe that's what haunts me: the knowing I can't explain. The reminder that sometimes the camera sees deeper than I do.

W How does memory show up in your work?

R Memory is in everything I make. It's the invisible layer beneath the surface—the thing that gives the image its weight. I'm not just capturing a moment—I'm reaching back to something I've felt before. A place I walked through years ago. A scent that lingered. A conversation I never finished. Even when I'm working with someone new, there's always a feeling of familiarity. Like the camera is trying to reconnect me with something I've already lived, or maybe dreamed. That's why I use torn paper, weathered textures, paint—it's how I show the erosion of time. The way memories fray at the edges. They're never clean, never whole, but they're real. And they shape how we see everything. Sometimes I look at a finished piece and realize I've stitched together fragments of places, people, and feelings that no longer exist—except in me. So, memory doesn't just show up in my work. It builds it. It's the echo, the undercurrent, the reason I keep creating.

W Do you believe there's a spiritual or energetic presence guiding you when you shoot?

R Without question. There's something else in the room with me—always. Something I can't name, but I can feel it. It's like a current moving through the space... a soft pull, a whisper. Sometimes it shows up as light breaking through at the exact right second, or a subject turning their head as if answering a silent call. It's beyond technique. Beyond control. It's instinct and surrender at once. I believe the image already exists somewhere—and I'm just there to receive it. There have been moments behind the camera where I felt completely outside myself, like I was being moved—heart, hand, eye—by something ancient, something vast. That's when I know I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. So yes, there's a presence. Whether you call it spirit, energy, memory, or muse—it's real. And I honor it every time I press the shutter.

W How important is vulnerability—in both the subject and the artist?

R It's everything. Without vulnerability, there's no truth. No breath. No soul. For the subject, vulnerability is the moment they let the mask slip—even just for a second. When they stop posing and just are. That's when the real image begins. That's when the light touches something deeper. And for me, as the artist, I have to meet them there. I have to open myself up first. I can't ask someone to give me their rawness if I'm hiding behind my own self. So I show up honest—unguarded, curious, a little exposed. Vulnerability isn't weakness—it's the doorway to something sacred. It's where the photograph becomes more than a picture. It becomes a witness. A moment of truth shared between two people who trusted each other enough to let the world in.

W What is the most beautiful thing someone ever said about your work?

R Someone once looked at one of my pieces for a long, quiet moment, then simply said, “It feels like I've been here before.” They didn't ask where it was taken or who the subject was—they just felt something they couldn't explain. That stayed with me. Because to me, that's the whole point.

W If you could speak to your younger artist self, what would you say?

R I would tell him to be patient—with the silence, with the waiting, with the not knowing.To trust the long, winding road, even when it feels like no one is listening. I'd say: Keep your eyes wide open, but don't rush to capture everything. Let the world come to you, in its own time. And most of all, I'd remind him that the messy parts—the mistakes, the doubts, the broken moments—are the ones that make the work alive. Because the art isn't just what you create—it's who you become along the way.

W What part of your legacy do you hope will last the longest?

R I hope it's the feeling—more than any image or piece—that lingers. The quiet moments where someone looks at my work and feels seen, remembered, or understood. Not just the photographs themselves, but the stories they carry—the echoes of light and shadow, memory and emotion woven into every frame. If I leave behind a legacy, I want it to be one of connection: a bridge between the fleeting and the eternal, the personal and the universal. Something that whispers, You are not alone. You have been seen. That, to me, is the truest form of immortality.

W What are you still searching for through your lens?

R I'm searching for the unspoken—those fleeting moments that slip through words and logic. Maybe it's not about finding, but about the search itself—the endless unfolding, the opening of eyes and heart. And in that search, I hope to keep discovering not just the world, but myself.

W How do you want people to feel when they look at your art?

R I want them to feel found. To feel like they've stepped into a quiet space where their own stories can breathe. Not just to see an image, but to remember something forgotten—an emotion, a moment, a part of themselves. I want my work to be a mirror and a door-

way—something that invites both reflection and escape. If someone walks away feeling a little less alone, a little more understood, then I know the art has done its job.

W After all the places you've traveled and stories you've told—what still takes your breath away?

R The unexpected smile of a stranger who carries the weight of a thousand untold stories. No matter where I go or what I capture, those moments remind me that the world is still full of wonder—still capable of surprising me, still alive with

W What makes a photograph unforgettable?

R It's not the sharpness, or the composition, or even the beauty—it's the feeling that stays with you long after you've looked away. An unforgettable photograph knows something about you—even if you don't know it yet. It carries a truth, a tension, a breath that hasn't exhaled. It makes you feel seen, haunted, comforted, or cracked open. You don't just remember how it looked—you remember how it felt. It becomes a part of your own memory, as if you lived inside the frame for just a moment. That's what makes it last. Not what you see...but what it awakens.

W What's the most “you” image you've ever made?

R There's one that lives in my mind like a dream—a piece called beauty and I think it lives in my mind because it was the first one that I ever worked on it was a transformational piece like starting all over again and building layers and layers Raw, layered, nostalgic. A little wild, a little broken, full of longing. It held memory, motion, and silence all at once. That image is me—not just as an artist, but as a man who's spent his life chasing beauty that disappears as soon as you try to hold it. It wasn't about the subject. It was about the spirit inside the frame.

Watching them talk, it was like watching a light dance between image and word.

An encounter in which friendship makes no noise, but illuminates everything. And if it is true that every photograph captures a moment in time, this exchange preserves its soul:

fragile, luminous, true.

