



## TROPICAL LIFE



ROBERT ZUCKERMAN

**CHANNELING LIZ:** Robert Zuckerman, below, says of his photo of Mia Kirshner, above: 'Mia liked to 'channel' figures she admired. ... In this photograph, done in 1997, I suggested Elizabeth Taylor in 'The Sandpiper' and this is what we got.'

# UNGUARDED MOMENTS

In an exhibit at the Betsy Hotel, Robert Zuckerman treats celebrities and regular Joes alike: as collaborators in photography

**BY LYDIA MARTIN**  
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Whether he's training his lens on megawatt movie stars or taking impromptu shots of regular folks he encounters on elevators and street corners, in car rental joints and hotel corridors, photographer Robert Zuckerman is after the same thing: that fleeting, unguarded moment when the camera disappears, artifice drops and subject and shooter really start talking.

"Somewhere along the way I decided not to see myself as a director trying to get people to pose this way or that way, but as a receiver," says



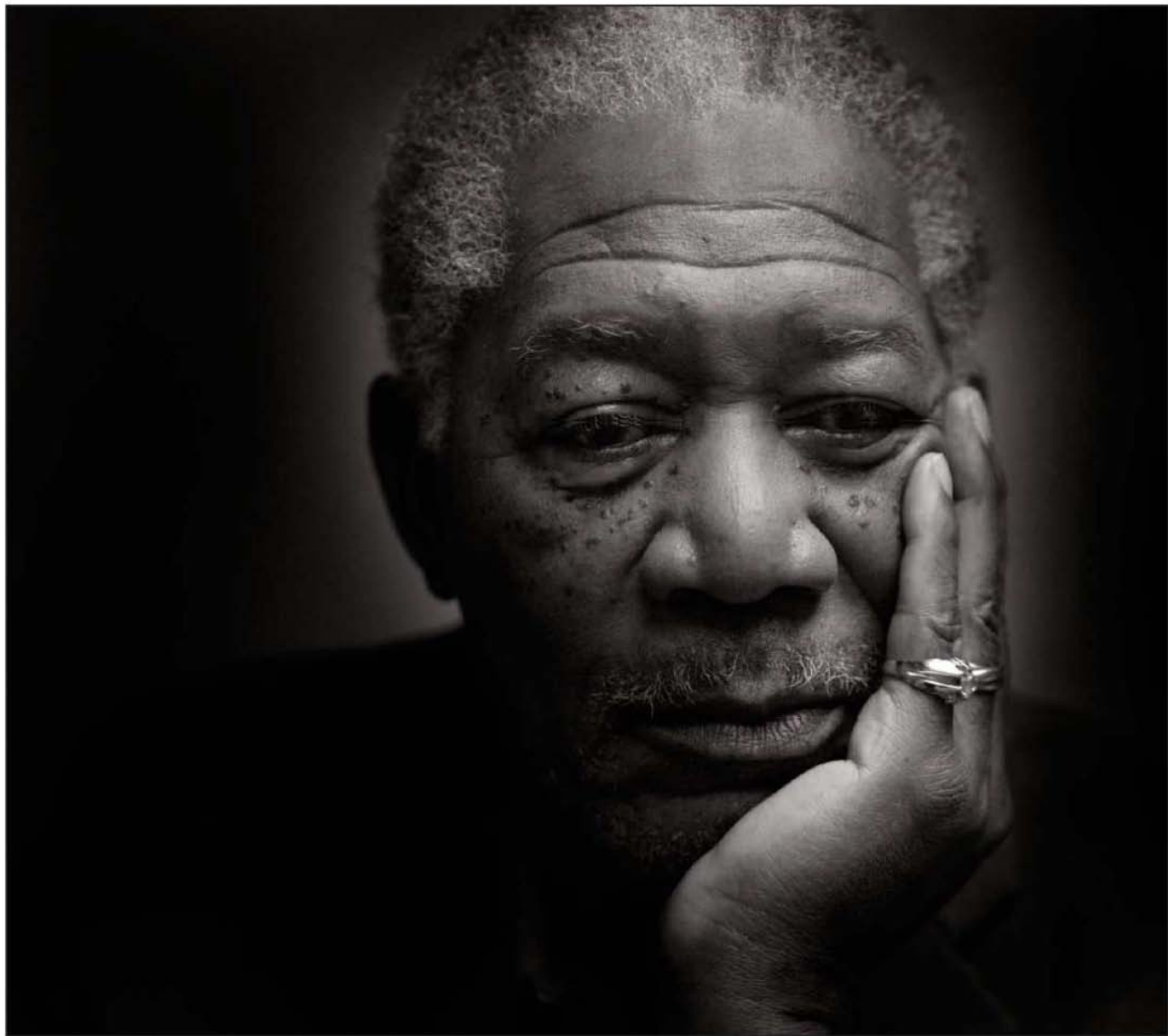
MARSHA HALPER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Zuckerman, who has spent more than 20 years working on Hollywood sets as a still photographer. Among his movie credits: *Any Given Sunday*, *Training Day*, *Bad Boys 2*, *Transformers*, *Pursuit of Happyness*.

A retrospective of his work, featuring portraits of Al Pacino, Leonard Cohen, Kate Winslet, Javier Bardem, David Bowie and other famous folks, along with images of Average Joes from his post-9/11 series titled *Kind-sight*, is on display at The Betsy Hotel on South Beach through the end of the year.

"Traditionally, photography has

•TURN TO ZUCKERMAN, 3M



PHOTOS BY ROBERT ZUCKERMAN

**MAGAZINE COVER:** 'Morgan Freeman I photographed here for the cover of Venice Magazine, a long-running, coveted arts and entertainment magazine in the Los Angeles market. We made this photograph at Morgan's office in Santa Monica, beneath a skylight in the main area.'

# Aiming for those unguarded moments

• ZUCKERMAN, FROM IM

involved aggressive, acquisitive language," says Zuckerman, who splits his time between Los Angeles and Sunny Isles. "Shoot. Capture. Take. I never use those words. I ask people, 'Can we make a photograph?' That way it's framed as a collaboration."

Spaced throughout the ground floor of The Betsy — along the walls of BLT Steak, in the hotel's lobby, adjacent to the bar, hanging outside a row of guest rooms — you find Zuckerman's digitally printed, mid-sized images, in both color and black-and-white, all offering that feeling of collaboration. Zuckerman's presence behind the lens won't be denied in the low-light portrait of Will Smith, caught in a wistful, weary moment at the end of a gray day spent shooting a new album cover.

That sense of a real exchange between subject and photographer also reads clearly in a portrait of Maya Angelou, rich in the red and gold tones of her Harlem brownstone's living room. She sits still against her favorite armchair, shoulders squared to the lens, possibly weighing what to say next.

"I sat at her feet for an hour," Zuckerman says. "Whatever you said to her, even if it was about the weather, she gave you something back wrapped in a lot of thought. I managed to shoot about 10 frames, I was so captivated by that rich, deep voice. Afterwards, she sat at her dining table and sang a couple of old spirituals."

## HIS STYLE

Zuckerman learned early on that a mild-mannered style always trumps an in-your-face stance when you're trying to get people to drop their guard in front of a contraption that can come across as obtrusive, impolite, even thieving. That low-key approach is critical for a photographer who values

emotional content above anything else he might be able to capture with his cameras.

"I think with anything you do, the intention you put behind it resonates in the results. It's not something you can easily put into words, or teach to someone else, but if you have the intention of finding a glimpse of someone's true character, that somehow comes through. It's like magic. Or alchemy. It's about a connection you can make, even for a moment, with another human being."

For that connection to spark, you especially have to know when to put your camera down, says Zuckerman, 56, who believes in being a mensch first and photographer with killer instinct never.

"My theme song when I'm on a movie set is [*The Gambler*.] 'You have to know when to hold 'em. Know when to fold 'em. Know when to walk away.' You don't need to get every shot. You don't have to make people uncomfortable. You can

## If you go

**What:** A retrospective of photographer Robert Zuckerman's work, spanning four decades and featuring many of the famous faces he has worked with over more than 20 years as a movie set photographer, plus portraits of regular folk shot for his post-9/11 series, 'Kindsight!'

**Where:** Betsy Hotel, 1440 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach.

**When:** Free and open daily from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. through 2011.

**Information:** [artsandculture@thebetsyhotel.com](mailto:artsandculture@thebetsyhotel.com)

have a camera in your hands and still be a decent guy."

Zuckerman, knew, for example, to tread lightly around Denzel Washington the first time he worked with him, on 2001's *Training Day*.

"As an actor, he's someone who really believes in his methodology. With some actors, you can photograph during takes. But with someone like Denzel, who really believes in staying focused on character when he's acting, you have to be mindful of only making images between takes, or during rehearsals. The first time I

worked with him, I just stayed on the fringes for a while and eventually he let me in," Zuckerman says.

"We wound up working together several times. When he was directing *The Great Debaters*, he asked me to be the still photographer on set. He was totally different as a director. Very relaxed, not uptight or regimented at all. But after that I worked with him on *Unstoppable*, and he was back in his zone."

## NAMING NAMES

Some of the celebrities he found easy to work with?

"Susan Sarandon and Goldie Hawn, on *The Bangler Sisters*. I could walk up to them in the middle of a take. They didn't care," Zuckerman says.

Who was difficult?

"Faye Dunaway. It was on the set of *The Temp*. She was hyper-sensitive to my lens. I could be hiding behind someone and she would still say, 'Not now.'"

Zuckerman, who fell in love with photography as a young boy growing up in Connecticut — he carried an Instamatic everywhere he went and sometimes "borrowed" his stepfather's twin-lens reflex camera before he came home from work — has shot famous folks for movie posters, magazine stories, record albums. Some folks, like Debra Winger, have become friends. Others, like Will Smith, have learned to rely on him for crucial on-set feedback.

"Still photos of them at work can give them help with their characters," he says. "Will Smith would see me walking around with a

folder in my hands and he would stop me and say, 'Got some heat for me?'"

Zuckerman has one secret on how to get celebrities to open up. He doesn't mind sharing it:

"I just treat them like real people," says Zuckerman, who has a knack for making easy conversation, whether it's with an interviewer, a famous figure such as Allen Ginsberg or Marcello Mastroianni — or a retired schoolteacher on vacation from Cleveland.

## GENTLE PERSUASION

Here's Zuckerman, talking about a group of images from the *Kindsight* series that hangs in a first-floor corridor at The Betsy, when Diane Bertin, the retired schoolteacher, overhears him on the way to her room.

"This is you, isn't it?" asks Bertin, in Miami Beach for the first time. "What an eye you have!"

They get to talking in the hall. About taking pictures. About writing. About Kafka. About the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

"May I make a photo of you?" Zuckerman asks eventually, pulling a small Lumix digital camera from his pocket.

Bertin pats her hair. She's not sure. She's been taking sun and salt breezes. She must be a fright. But Zuckerman thinks she's lovely just the way she is. And that's enough. Bertin is his.

Even the legends are taken in by Zuckerman's low-key style.

"I was shooting Marcello Mastroianni at a press junket for *Used People*. I have to admit that I was a little intimidated. It was Marcello Mastroianni. But I just started making small talk. At some point I asked him what his favorite movie was of all of those he worked on. He thinks about it for a while. Then he says '8½.' I still have no idea what it means. But it's my favorite."

Somewhere in there, Zuckerman got his man.



**'THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE 1977':** 'The three chairs were by a tennis court in Westport, Connecticut, at dusk in the fall of 1977. ... At that time I was into using a flash on the camera to give a 'hyper real' look..'