Jordan Matter has struck a chord by taking his subjects out of their comfort zones and putting them onto the streets of America. ‘From the first moment I picked those photos up from the developer, it was sort of a hallelujah moment...’ says Jordan Matter, the New York portrait photographer whose distinctive images have drawn the attention of the world’s media and captured the hearts of the public. ‘My grandfather was a very well known photographer (Herbert Matter, Swiss-born American photographer and graphic designer known for his pioneering use of photomontage in commercial art) and my grandmother was a painter. Everyone was a visual artist of some kind, my father is a film-maker and my mother was a model – but photography wasn’t something I considered at first.’ Jordan spent the former part of his working life as a baseball player; turning to acting once his playing career came to an end. His choice of vocation, location and a chance bike ride, set him on a path to professional photography. As it turned out, it was quite a short walk. ‘I was on a bike ride with my wife and we went up to the top of the mountain.’ he explains. ‘I looked out over the view, grabbed my Instamatic camera and tried to take a photo of the landscape – and then I realised that I didn’t know how to take that photo. On the way back down I decided I would take a photography class, so I could have an hobby and could learn how to take that picture. From the first moment I picked those photos up from the developer, it was sort of a hallelujah moment. I knew that was what I was supposed to do with my life.’ Because I was an actor, I had a lot of actor friends and back then headshots were basically a black and white portrait in a studio with a grey background. I didn’t have any interest in shooting that way and I also didn’t have the technical skill to do it. So I started doing headshots but I went outside on a roof or in the woods, trying to get some of the subject’s personality across – and I started to create this look that hadn’t really been seen before. Suddenly, agents were sending me their clients to photograph before I was really ready to pursue the profession. So I figured why not let people pay me to learn how to shoot – which was a great luxury. ‘I thought there are about a half dozen places in the world where someone could make a good, consistent living as a headshot photographer. There are two in the states, Los Angeles and New York – anywhere else, you gotta work in other fields to supplement. So I was in the perfect place and I was connected to the industry.’ Jordan had a steady supply of actors and actresses to photograph and one of the most iconic cities in the world for a backdrop. His shoots took him all over New York and it was during this time he heard about a peculiar state law that allows women to be topless in public in the State of New York. ‘I thought it would make an interesting art project to photograph girls topless around New York. But when I did the first topless shoot in Times Square, the actress I was photographing hugged me and said, ‘You have no idea what you’ve just done for me.’ She told me she’d never been topless outside before, not even on the beach. This was because she had body image issues but the shoot was the start of either being able to resolve them. Then the idea really began to take shape I thought it could be more than an art project and could be about women’s body issues in America.'
to The Paul Taylor Dance Company and
So I asked Jeffrey if he could get me access
the beauty and fantasy in everyday moments.
if seen through the eyes of a child, showing
that I could use dancers to create a world as
and fantasies play out. Suddenly it hit me
cynical) and I loved seeing his imagination
comprehend (because I’ve gotten older and
this joy when he was playing that I couldn’t
son who was three at the time and he had
really impressed with the athleticism of the
dancers. I had no intention of doing
some portraits and invited me to a show so
I wasn’t really looking for anything else. Then
a full time career shooting everyday, so I
exhausted from it and I had
of thing you should do only once in your life
It was six years in the making, so it was a lot
of effort and that experience really is the kind
of thing you should do only once in your life
(Laughs) I was exhausted from it and I had
a full time career shooting everyday, so I
wasn’t really looking for anything else. Then
dancer called Jeffrey Smith hired me to do
the resultant book was
Uncovered

Dancers Among Us

The Breast Cancer

ASSIGNMENT

a

The online reaction was spot on
With Dancers Among Us making it
into the New York Times bestseller
list and being cited by
Amazon and
Oprah Magazine
as one of the best books of the year.
Jordan’s new project is Athletes Among Us, some of whose images have already been previewed online. For this particular type of photography, it has to be Nikon. I’m using the D3S and the 85mm as my primary camera of choice. Early on I was using the D3S too, but ever since I started photography professionally, I’ve been Nikon. As far as lenses go I use the 14-24mm a lot, the 28-70mm and the 70-200mm at f/2.8 and then the fixed 28mm f/2.8, 50mm, 85mm f/1.4.

I shoot at high shutter speeds in natural light – I don’t do any lighting at all, so I only used what light is available at the time. For interior or evening shots, I tend to use the D3S because the noise is a little more pronounced with the higher ISO, but the D3S is amazing. I was asked to test the a medium format camera recently, which I didn’t really shoot, but they asked me to test it anyway. The photographer that I was trying to take a photo and then post it on the joins and the more you show them, the more social media is, it humanises you, people the images resonate. For example, when I post a BTS video and people see what I went through to get a shot – they have a greater investment in what I’m doing. But you still have to have the strong ideas first. Of course being so active online, for its benefits can have its problems. Jordan get’s his fair share of tribute acts but with a string it was all documented as Dancers Among Us, it’s pretty easy to see where the concept came from. Sometimes however, the fan worship can be a little too close for comfort. Sometimes people come to my shoots, and this is the strangest – stand next to me, take the photo and then post it on their website like it’s their shot. After I’ve conceived and executed it and everything – if it’s crazy! I mean, I totally understand the impulse to have a great idea – but you don’t want somebody to steal it before you’ve done it. But then if you hide all your ideas away, nobody knows about them, so they will probably never happen. When the plagiarism is that blatant you just have to keep telling yourself that imitation is the greatest form of flattery – I’ve had to remind myself of that a lot and I think it is true, it is a huge form of flattery but itprefered it didn’t happen quite so heinously.

To see more of Jordan’s work visit: www.jordanmatter.com

J ordan’s new project is Athletes Among Us, some of whose images have already been previewed online. For this particular type of photography, it has to be Nikon. I’m using the D3S and the 85mm as my primary camera of choice. Early on I was using the D3S too, but ever since I started photography professionally, I’ve been Nikon. As far as lenses go I use the 14-24mm a lot, the 28-70mm and the 70-200mm at f/2.8 and then the fixed 28mm f/2.8, 50mm, 85mm f/1.4. Need for speed

When you’re shooting athletes, you need a fast camera.