



Southern Cross Station takes on a surreal edge in Hionis' panoramic vision.

# Finding an urban symmetry

Con Hionis is an accomplished photographer who has captured his beloved city Melbourne in a new way. Thomas Andronas talks to Hionis about his new photographic book 'Melbourne Symmetry'.

STAND up and look straight ahead. What can you see? Now turn to your left, and keep turning until you've gone full circle. Many people never consider what mysteries lie beyond their current frame of sight. Photographer Con Hionis tries to capture those mysteries.

Hionis' latest passion is cylindrical panoramic photography. His latest venture, a book entitled *Melbourne Symmetry*, features many of his favourite panoramas.

"When I look at a photograph now, my eye automatically goes to the edge of the photograph, and I want to see what's around the corner, and that's what's caught my eye and my interest," he says.

*Melbourne Symmetry* is a collection of lushly coloured and atmospheric black and white photographs by Hionis, of iconic proportions at times reflecting medieval and later Renaissance tapestries.

Hionis' infatuation with photography began as a young child in his father's studio. "Dad had the photo studio in Lygon Street, next to the Greek church there up until the late seventies, and photography was part of our lives." Young Con grew up there, spending weekends and school holidays buried in photos and film with his father.

"I remember the first christening I shot," he says. "I was about fifteen. Dad couldn't go, so he basically just threw the camera and a flash in my hands and said, 'Just go do it.' and I did it."

Shift forward thirty or-so years to 2000, and Con's enthusiasm for photos had given way to the need to feed a young family, and the pursuit of his art had led him into a career in digital printing sales. That was, until he found himself in his mother's village on the island of Ithaca in Greece, where shooting a single roll of film rekindled the passion.

"I knew there was always something there but I never knew how or what to do with it, and I think I've found the medium for it now," he explains. "I came back here and put it all together, and that was what sort of ignited the passion again, and ever since then it was just like an addiction for me."

Hionis' love of photography is rivaled only by his fervour for Melbourne, the city in which he was born and raised, and which features most prominently in his photographs. "I've been walking through Melbourne now for thirty or-so years, from catching trams to go to school or the photo studio or whatever, and it's just full of hidden secrets. If you go out there and walk through Melbourne, and I've spent time in probably four or five cities, the uniqueness of Melbourne, Sydney doesn't have, Adelaide doesn't have, and there are many hidden treasures, which you can see in the book."

Early in 2008 Hionis' panoramas were featured in the *Melbourne-SCAPES* exhibition at the Obscura Gallery of Fine Art Photography and

received positive feedback, which led him to toy with the idea of publishing them in book form. "I never took it seriously," he says, but he finally took a shining to the idea after showing his proofs to friend and publisher Effie Dimitropoulos, who spotted a uniqueness in the images.

*Melbourne Symmetry*, is simply and practically named. "It's just because all the photographs are symmetrical," Hionis says. "It showcases Melbourne, and there's lots of areas where even Melbournians don't know where many of these photographs have been taken."

"The purpose of the book really is to reveal Melbourne in a different light. You look through standard tourism books today and they are boring, all the photographs are exactly the same, there's Flinders Street Station, there's trams, whereas this is a completely different outlook on Melbourne, and that's why everyone's taken to it."

Hionis' only regret is that his father is no longer here to see the book dedicated to him by his son, and those days and weeks they spent together in the darkroom in Carlton. "My father would be very proud of the fact that the book is out there," he says.

The future for Con Hionis is unknown and exciting. "I'm just doing it because I enjoy it at this stage. All I know is that with this book and the photography that I'm doing I think there is something there for me that will evolve, but where it's going to take me I don't know," he says.