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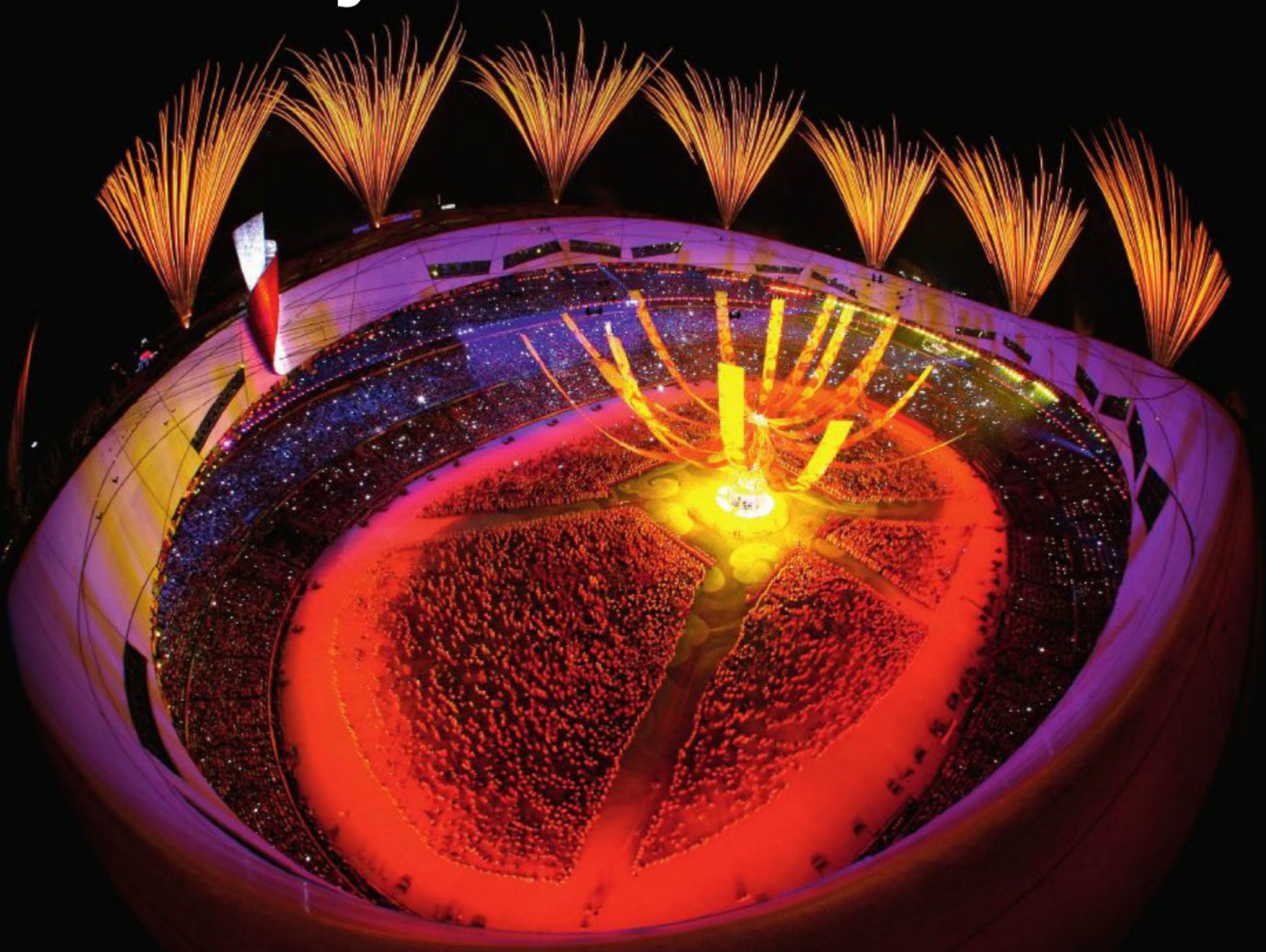


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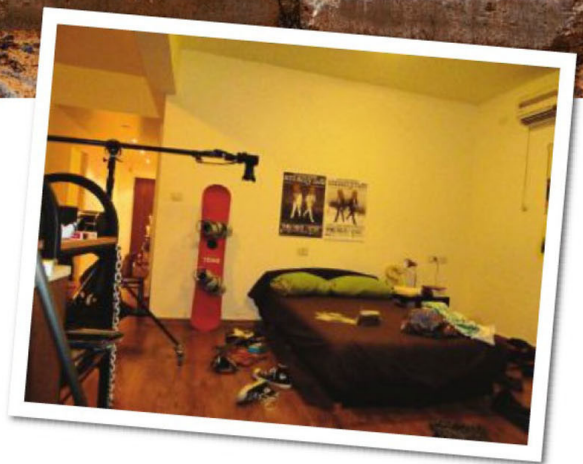




Nathan Oxley, competition director, said: "Gil's image was a well thought out and constructed piece that conveyed a strong message on the elements and dangers of a young person's life."



Photography campaigns covering sensitive topics can be a tough artistic encounter, where creativity is sometimes curbed. Lorna Dockerill goes behind the scenes with Israeli photographer GIL LAVI and discovers how he nailed an award-winning photograph to raise awareness about HIV



Military protocol and attention to detail is something Gil Lavi is used to. With precision, caution and carefully laid out props, the “hipster kind of room” was the setting that turned an Israel AIDS Task Force campaign featured in *Time Out* magazine into an internet hit.

Having served three years compulsory service in the Israeli army as a combat engineer from the age of 18, an injury during training saw Gil put his love of photography on the frontline when he became head of the still photography department at the Israeli Defense Forces.

Gil reflects: “Operating in a military environment was extremely dynamic and interesting with aspects which went beyond just being a photographer. Some of the discipline and patience I learned in the army helped me become much more of a long-runner in my career.

“I started my post-army life when I opened my studio in Tel Aviv five years ago and I’m already here in this amazing exciting place.”

It was because of his vast experience that the 27-year-old, who hails from Tel Aviv, was approached by advertising giant Y&R, to shoot the AIDS Task Force campaign which centred on the slogan ‘unprotected sex leaves you with a doubt.’

Gil explains the concept and how he established the set up. “As HIV infection rates are rising, especially among youngsters refusing to worry about the risks, I was trying to portray in the image some intimacy to create the feeling of realism and false calm.

“I wanted to move the viewer from the homey, secure atmosphere that the image initially emits to what may be hiding behind it.”

The oblivious teenage atmosphere Gil talks about was made up of the creases of a worn

green duvet, Converse trainers, a guitar strewn across a hardwood floor and the emerald shadow of a lethal bottle of Jagermeister; sketching archetypal symbols of tainted youth.

But because this scene was being shot from above, these objects could have easily fallen by the wayside and have ended up two dimensional, with no effect.

He says: “This was the first time I’d mounted my camera so high above that it was touching the ceiling. But all of the elements in the pictures were rather flat, as well as the angle, and I wanted everything to pop out of the ad.

“Lighting played a significant role and it was what I worked on most after composition. As difficult as it was to compose the frame in an interesting and clean yet messy way, lighting really had to elevate and carry the whole shoot to move it from a nice picture to an amazing image.”



What moves me as a photographer outside the commercial world are the things that I can't accept

Gil worked with two large, soft light sources positioned on the left for depth, and used several more flash heads with snoots and honeycomb grids to create the highlighted area in the right top edge and for the clothing. He then set about mounting the camera.

"On a large dolly with an arm, I used a Canon EOS 5D Mark II for as much resolution as possible within the pro-bono budget, and pulled it to the ceiling above the bed. We then connected the camera to the computer and watched the scene in live view.

"I used a Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8 L USM lens as I wanted to get as much depth as possible from the room, black foam boards were really useful to also block the light in different areas."

Gil and the rest of the creative team then placed the lettering made up of clothing which spelled out 'HIV' on the floorboards for the final touch to the photo, which catapulted him to global acclaim and won silver in the 2010 International Aperture Award in the Commercial Category.

He said: "This project gave me lots of satisfaction, from when I was working on it to afterwards when it achieved great results. I was also happy to raise awareness about the


campaign which is a very important cause."

Although Gil is now a fully fledged New Yorker residing in the United States and has photographed campaigns for the city's Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, he is still passionate about his Israeli roots - where his iconic award winning scene was shot, and where he served all those years ago.

His 'City of War' work, which documents how the town of Sderot on the Gaza-Israeli border has been subjected to 10,000 rockets over the last decade, was televised on national Israel TV and was truly intimate for him. And it's the personal work which brought him to photography.

Gil says: "What moves me as a photographer outside the commercial world are the things that I can't accept. I will for sure keep dealing with the causes I've been involved with in the future.

"When it comes to portraiture, my greatest expertise is the excitement to discover things about the human in front of me through my lens, may it be political, an actor or just someone from the street.

"And I'm in love with the idea of making photography more accessible and part of the public discussion, helping to shape culture through images." 

THE INTERNATIONAL LOUPE AWARDS

Formerly The International Aperture Awards, these awards aim to bring greater exposure to excellent photography all over the world. A panel of 15 headed by Australian Professional Photographer, Peter Eastway, judge the eight categories and a cash prize of up to \$20,000 is on offer in the final round. www.loupeawards.com

BIOGRAPHY



Gil Lavi was born in Jerusalem and at the age of seven began playing with his father's camera. By the age of 14, he began writing for local Israeli newspapers, but was uninspired by their photographs so began shooting his own. Two years later he began working for Israel's second largest newspaper, Ma'ariv and has since worked on commercial projects for Orange Telecom, Knorr and other national campaigns.

www.gillavi.com