

## Upclose with Edward Burtynsky

Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky is famous for his visually striking and disarmingly beautiful large-format photographs of industrial landscapes. During his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong, he talks to Penny Zhou about his industrial background and the messages behind the images.

By [Penny Zhou](#) | published Oct 07, 2010



**HK Magazine:** Did you always want to be a photographer?

**EB:** Pretty much, yeah. I always liked it but didn't know if I could make a living out of it. Well, actually I couldn't for a long time so I had to do a lot of other things—working in car factories, mines, places I later photographed, basically. Those experiences gave me a perspective, a language and an understanding of that world. So I just kept extending that idea further and further.

**HK:** What did your parents do?

**EB:** My father passed away when I was 15, and he was a factory worker. My mother had four kids to raise by herself so she had to work at whatever she could find. She once worked at a zipper factory, but then the Japanese zipper company YKK took over and she lost her job. But the story of the Asian workforce and pricing competition forcing a lot of companies in the west out of business has unfolded a thousand times. So in my life, I've been watching the whole transformation of the industrial revolution—and now it's firmly planted in China—and I've found it astounding.

**HK:** But you only focus on a very specific aspect of industry in your photography.

**EB:** Yes. I divide the life of materials into three phases: the making of them to the point they're sold; and when you buy them from the showroom and use them till you lose them or they break down; and eventually they enter the third history of ending up in the bottom of a landfill. So I only focus on the first and the third histories. As for the middle one, I figured there're already enough people photographing that one.

**HK:** Do you view your role as neutral in the progress of natural landscapes giving away to artificial ones?

**EB:** I call it the natural versus synthetic environment. And I think the movement from natural to synthetic is inevitable given the scale of our population. Our living conditions are under a lot of pressure, from resources to nutrition. So instead of debating whether it's right or wrong, I think the more useful reaction is to search for the truth, because you've got to watch out whose interests are being served when you're given misinformation. My works don't necessarily offer solutions for the environmental problems we're having, but I hope they can provide a platform where people can recognize the problems and start discussing them.

Visit his [exhibition](#) at **Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 57-59 Hollywood Rd., Central.**  
Through Oct. 23