

Made in Canada

Frame Of Work

Edward Burtynsky
[Photographer]

EDWARD BURTYNSKY WANTS TO START a conversation about change. His photography documents the massive impact of human beings on the earth's landscape. He has filled his viewfinder with nickel mines in Sudbury, marble quarries in Italy and the demolition of the Yangtze River valley in China. The enormous, deeply colorful prints he produces are both sublime and horrible. "I want my work to provoke people to think about where things come from. There is a price behind all of this stuff in our lives, and it is being paid by the environment," Burtynsky says.

Part of the beauty of Burtynsky's art comes from his deep understanding of industry. His father worked at an auto-parts factory in St. Catharines, Ont., and took a 7-year-old Ed to see how molten metal was used to form engine blocks. At 12 he wandered into an abandoned factory and took his first photographs of the bones of industry. "I intuitively understood this was interesting. To me, it was like discovering a ruin. It told a story," Burtynsky says. To pay his way through school, he punched a clock in auto plants and mines in Ontario. "It was awful, dangerous work, but it taught me a great deal," he says. It also reinforced what he already knew: he didn't want to spend his life in a factory.

Burtynsky, 50, graduated from Ryerson University's photography program in 1982 and spent most of that decade building his business, Toronto Image Works. "I've always been entrepreneurial, and it was important to me then to be successful," Burtynsky says. His commercial enterprise almost ate his art. But his fascination with the



PHOTO OP

Burtynsky shoots factories and mines—like those he worked in as a young man—to foment change

world of work continued to gnaw at him.

His photos resonate because he finds beauty where we normally wouldn't bother looking, says Marilyn Kushner of the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York City, where an exhibit of his work begins next month. "The wonderful thing about Ed's work is that he sees like a painter. And he knows how to make us see the beauty he sees."

In 2004 Burtynsky won the inaugural TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) prize, which recognizes outstanding contributions to humankind (other lau-

reates: Bono of U2 and medical-device inventor Robert Fischell). The winners each get \$100,000 to advance their work. The entrepreneur in Burtynsky is using some of the money to elicit ideas about sustainable economic growth; the artist in him will bring his work to a new audience through IMAX theaters. "I don't think art can change the world. Big companies change the world; what we want changes the world; wars change the world," he says. "Art can, however, start a conversation." —By Daffyd Roderick

COREY MIHALIUK FOR TIME