

# REPREHENSIBLE DIGEST

FEBRUARY 2020



Special Guest

**MISSY BURTON**

Photographer

WHERE CULTURE MEETS CHAOS



# THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF MISSY BURTON

*Photo by Sarah Rangell*



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For the month of February, Blacktooth has reached out to creative photographer and historian Missy Burton. In honor of Black History Month, we will celebrate this extraordinary artist by taking a closer look at Missy's phenomenal work behind the lens. In addition to her stunning compositions, we will also explore the full dynamics of Missy's passion, her background as an artist, and her unique perspective on being a woman of color. Beyond this you will discover an artist brimming with confidence, integrity and pride. Indeed, Missy is fearless. She is a delightful trailblazer who takes bold chances with her camera. She is also a strong reminder that we must always believe in ourselves if we are going to make a difference, that our finest statements must come from a place of courage and truth. Regardless of your background, your race or color, your gender – you can always take control of your destiny with a little faith and fire. But let's not dilly-dally around. Let's find out exactly how Missy sees this thing called the universe...

**Missy, welcome to RepDigest. It's such a pleasure to feature your story. Please share a little about yourself – your background, where you're from, what you specialize in as an artist.**

Thank you for having me! It's an honor to be featured. I'm originally from Tulsa, OK, but currently live in Dallas. I use photography and poetry as my preferred mediums to express my interpretation of life, love and the world around us.

**You are the first photographer to be featured on RepDigest. How long have you been working as a photographer and when did you first take an interest in the craft?**

My grandfather gave me my first camera when I was five. It was a Polaroid Instamatic. From the first click I was fascinated by how this camera instantly gave me the "super power" to freeze time. I took pictures of everything at first, then I started focusing on moments that I never wanted to end.

**Do you work exclusively in digital, or did you have previous experience working with film?**

I guess you can say the first half of my photography life was film, but I never got the experience with developing my own work in a dark room. For the last 20 years or so I've been all digital. The last couple of years I have developed a keen interest in the warmth of film imagery. I've been doing some research on which camera to get in order to try my hand at it. I have a Brownie camera from back in the day, and although I think that would be interesting to explore, I think I want to try something a little more complex.

**What are your favorite brands to shoot with and which lenses are you accustomed to using?**

I'm a Canon shooter. Me and my Nikon friends are always arguing over which brand is the best. Honestly, it's the one you think is the best. My favorite lens is an 18mm - 135mm. I like it because it pretty much gives me what I want in just about every scenario. My other favorite is a 70mm - 200mm. I also like to use the 55mm sometimes, but not as often.

**Do you work with programs like PhotoShop or LightRoom to enhance and edit your visuals?**

Yes. I use PhotoShop, LightRoom and a few other applications in post processing. I like to think of these tools like they are my paint brush. Every image starts in my head. I begin each photo-shoot with a detailed, carefully designed set. I am deliberate when choosing my subjects so that they complement the imagery that I ultimately want to convey. The key is to get the image out of the camera as close as possible to what I originally envision. Then I run it through various applications to get the final result. For example, I may use LightRoom on one image, but on another I may go in a LightRoom and PhotoShop loop to get the final image. It's a spiritual thing when I know it's done. I always know when an image is complete. It's like my imagination and my heart synch up and my brain gives me a thumbs up.

**Do you shoot in Camera Raw? Is there a significant difference on the other side of production?**

I always shoot Camera Raw because I want all the pixels available when I begin my creations. I also like having the original image to go back to should I decide to do something different with it.

**What are your favorite subjects to shoot? Explain what you enjoy most about the subjects you choose to compose in your lens.**

My absolute number one favorite thing to shoot is butterflies. That is my spirit animal. I'm a certified butterfly gardener and I've been known to travel far and wide just to capture a certain species. I recently went to Costa Rica to capture the Blue Morpho and the Glass Wing butterflies in their natural habitat. That was the hardest thing I ever did in my life, but it was so worth it.

**You've displayed many classical depictions of the working black woman in the past. From a historical context, how is this subject important to you?**

I consider myself an Activist. My inspiration comes from my perception of the effects of social influences on human rights. As a woman of color, my vantage point tends to hover around women and more specifically women of color. I want people to know our history. I want people to see our humanity. Most of all I want to convey the magnitude of women's contribution to humankind. Nobody gets here without us. Nobody. That is divine...



**As February is Black History Month, what special message would you like to send to other black artists – whether they be painters, photographers, poets or otherwise?**

Always be true to yourself and never let anyone tell you that you are not enough. You are enough and the only thing you should be concerned about is being the absolute best version of yourself that you can possibly be. Let your light shine because that gift you have inside of you is divine.

**As a woman of color, do you find it more challenging to make an impact as an artist? Are there still hidden barriers, stereotypes or discriminations in society that you have encountered or experienced? If so, how would you like to change these things?**

Absolutely! I have to deal with so much discrimination as a female artist I probably miss most of the shade thrown my way as a black female artist. Every once in a while it's blatant though. That's where folks see my work and look the other way because "it's just too black". Other times are when I notice that I get invited to exhibit my work only during February (Black History Month) and June (Juneteenth). But you know how I get around that? I create my own lane. I finance my own solo shows and more recently I'm the co-founder of Msanii HOUS Fine Art located in historic downtown Carrollton, TX. My grandpa always told me to "Go around it, go over it, or go under it... just keep going." That's exactly what I'm going to do.

**What kind of cultural impact do you think African Americans have made in the art industry over the past century? Do you feel there is a level playing field in 2020 as far as opportunity and relevance, or is there still much more work to be done?**

I believe African Americans have made a huge impact in the art world despite there not being a level playing field. There are opportunities out there currently because African American art is very popular, but there is still so much work to be done.





**How would you like your incredible works to be remembered by future generations? What is the most important lesson you are trying to express through your lens?**

I want people to see the passion in my work and remember the stories that I tell. I want my work to be so impactful that people are discussing it a hundred years from now. I want them to see me as a great artist and a photographer that just happens to be a woman of color. The lesson I'm trying to convey through my lens is "I see you, but do you really see me?"

**Missy, provide at least three important role models or mentors you've had in your life as an artist? What did these individuals mean to you as a professional?**

- I inherited my grandfather's "eye" and his love for photography – for that I am eternally grateful.
- My husband because he is notorious for pushing me off the cliff and yelling "pull the chord baby!"
- Evita Tezeno is an amazing artist who took me under her wing as a mentee. The art world is cliquish and it's difficult to find someone to teach you how to navigate it. I have learned so much from her and the lessons continue.
- I'm also a part of a female artist collective. There are 20 of us and I can't even begin to tell you how impactful this group of women have been to me. They are all my muses.

**Explain how you approach a new project or creative idea. From A to Z, what is your logical approach to establishing a scene, composing your shot and executing in post-production?**

Typically, I'm awakened at some random hour with an idea that I have to go to my home studio to vet out. I begin each photo-shoot with a detailed, carefully designed set. I am deliberate when choosing my subjects so that they complement the imagery that I ultimately want to convey. This sets a strong foundation for the final result that I meticulously develop in my studio using digital manipulation. I then use specific care when deciding on the paper, mounting and framing for the final reveal, as they are all part of the story. Although I love working with color I am particularly drawn to black-and-white images because I strongly believe that the absence of color encourages the viewer to look beyond the obvious to explore the subliminal. I often use poetry to accompany my works to give voice to the walls.

**When composing a visual, are you working to tell a particular story or theme? Also, do you find it difficult working with models or getting them to understand your vision or direction?**

I love the storytelling aspect of photography and I'm a story teller. For example, my latest series follows seven generations of women. The story is an extension of the piece called "Dada" which is my interpretation of the archetype American Mammy. Viewers have connected with "Dada" in such a way that they started asking me questions about her personally. This dialogue inspired me to create an entire story of "Dada" which chronicles where she came from and how long it took her lineage to return to freedom. I worked with a historian on each character in the story to make sure everything was historically accurate even though my characters were fictitious. I'm very excited about the reveal of this work in 2020 as I think it is my best work to date.

**You've been featured in many exhibits in the state of Texas. Any prominent shows on the horizon?**

I currently have work in Cleveland at Framed Art Gallery. I have also been published twice this year in FotoShoot Magazine. I was chosen as one of the artists to be featured in the international FOTOFEST BIENNIAL 2020 in March 2020. This will be the first time I have exhibited on a large scale and I'm very excited about this opportunity.

**What are your long-term goals as an artist and what would you most like your legacy to be?**

I currently have a corporate gig in addition to being a full-time artist and now a gallery owner. My long-term strategy would be to retire from corporate America and focus on my work and building global awareness of the gallery. I hope that my legacy as an artist is that I was never afraid to pay it forward. For everyone that has helped me get to this point, I want to do the same for others.

**Anything additional you'd like to share – fascinating statements or facts about the artist known as Missy Burton?**

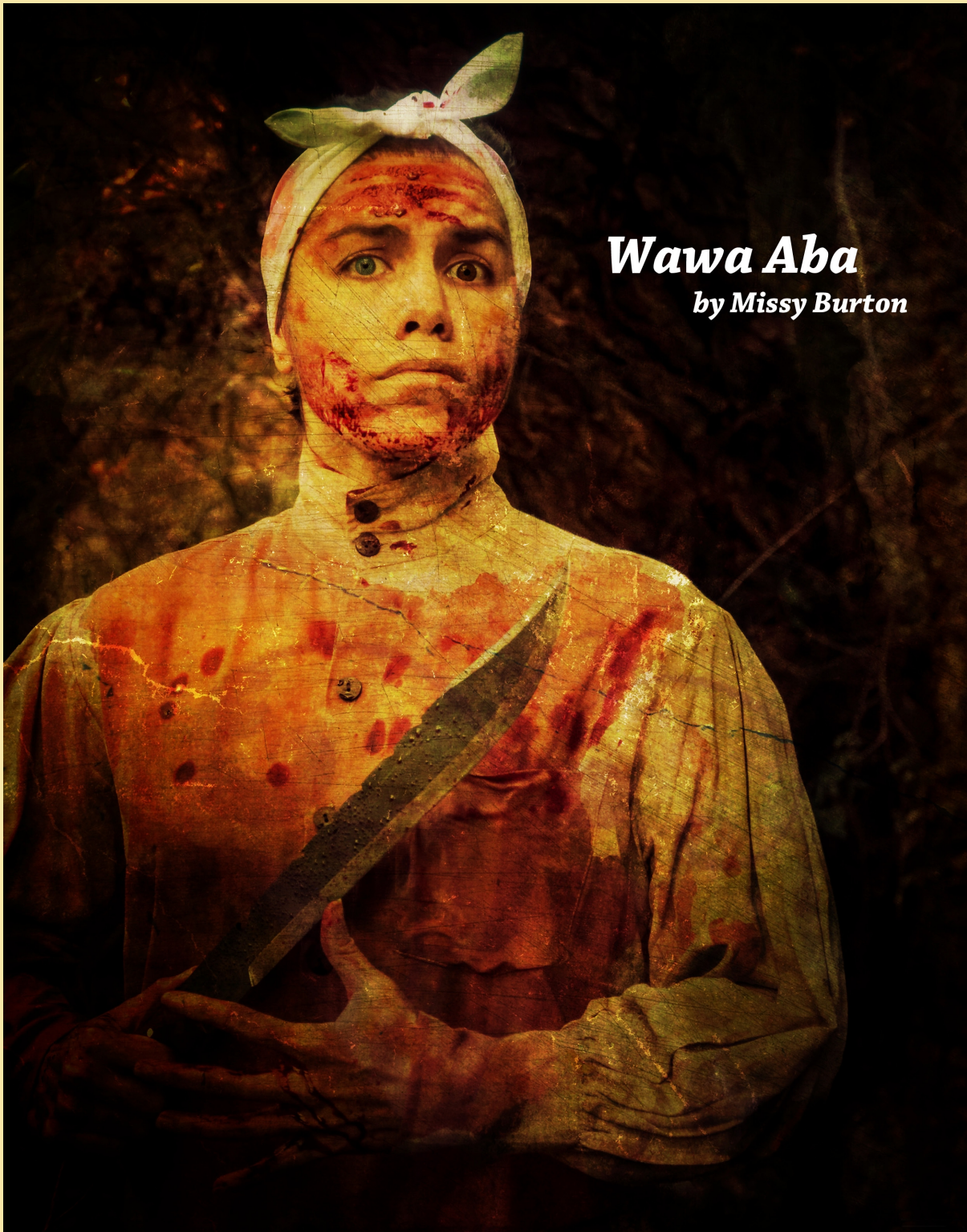
I am also a mentor for aspiring artists. I am passionate about teaching children to see beauty where ever they look. I want to develop after school and summer programs for creative children so they have a place to go to explore their gifts.





**CONCLUSION:** It's not every day you have the opportunity to work with an artist who embodies the full spectrum of their passion. She has the talent, the vision, the wisdom, and the coolness factor all wrapped up in a neat little snapshot. Yes – Missy Burton is the real deal. She possesses all of these traits and more. As an artist, she knows exactly where she stands. She knows what she faces in the world and what she must do about it. She makes no excuses and quietly makes her mark behind the lens. Although Missy is very professional, she retains just enough rebellion in her veins to make you slightly uncomfortable. Indeed, there is a much bigger world out there with a completely different story to tell, and Missy shares this experience through her thought-provoking visuals. She bravely takes her camera into the heart of history. She tells the naked truth from the perspective of a woman and stands proud behind her African American heritage. Missy Burton is an icon and she demands respect. She has certainly earned mine... Please click on each of the buttons to learn more about this outstanding force of nature. Thank you!





## *Wawa Aba*

*by Missy Burton*

**OBSERVATION:** Although I love all of Missy Burton's compositions, *Wawa Aba* strikes a dark psychological chord – a personal favorite if you will. The ghostly expression is not only terrifying, it captures the very essence of something sinister. Minor details: the different colors of each eye – one of which is striking blue... the confidence in which *Wawa* holds her blade... the proper Victorian attire (smeared and dabbled in blood). There is much more than meets the eye here, and this is where Missy excels – a sinister drop of heresy, cerebral to the very core. You must decide for yourself what happened, something diabolical in a time long-since passed. Perhaps this is New Orleans, a crime of passion, of vengeance, a Lizzie Borden style mystery that never made the papers... simply because of the color of her skin. Yes, I'd say Missy has created an atmospheric gem here that demands greater detail, a photographic journey waiting to be explored, the perfect model willing to reprise her dastardly role. The possibilities are endless...





# *Akofena*

*by Missy Burton*

**Many of your black-and-white compositions are tinted with an antiquated sepia tone. Is this a personal fingerprint on your style? If so, what attracts you to this particular motif?**

This is definitely a personal fingerprint and to be honest, I'm just now learning to save my process steps so that I can go back to reuse these tones when I need to. My printer used to call my tones sepia until they realized it was something else. They are used to it now and they call the tones MB Custom. The funny thing about it is, I didn't mean to do things this way. It just happened and right now in this very moment as you ask me this question I realize it's a thing! I believe what attracts me to this motif is the look and feel. The stories I tell tend to be of a historic nature and it feels like the images should look time period appropriate.





***Kokou***  
***by Missy Burton***

**Tell me about The Missy Burton Experience. What is the objective behind of this concept?**

TMBE is an interactive concept I created that connects the viewer to my work using all five senses. I'm still working to refine the concept but ultimately it means that each exhibit has the perfect lighting, sound track, refreshments and interactive components to enable to viewer's full attention. I'm very excited about this way of showing my work and now that I have Msanii HOUS, I will have more flexibility on how to refine the concept going forward.

**What are some other subjects that fascinate you as an artist and photographer?**

I am fascinated by the concept of lights and shadows as well as light writing. That will definitely be a point of interest for me going forward.





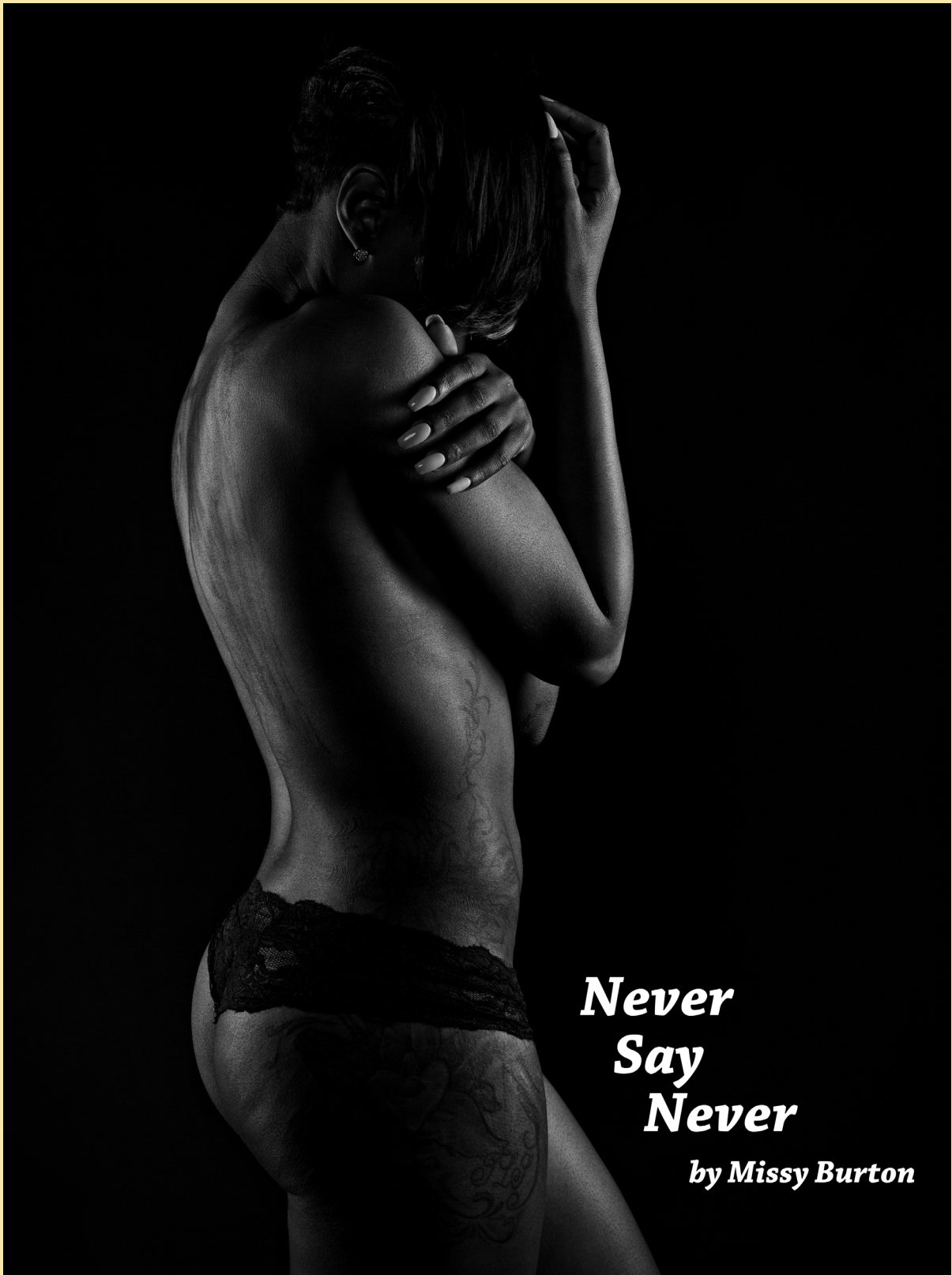
*by Missy Burton*

## ***A Woman's Work***

**In today's divisive political landscape which is charged with female empowerment movements, where do you stand as an artist making a statement?**

*I Am Woman...* Everything I do and everything I create is to showcase her divinity. I'm a huge fan of the Guerrilla Girls. I support the work they are doing to expose gender and ethnic bias as well as corruption in politics, art, film, and pop culture.





# ***Never Say Never***

***by Missy Burton***

**What have been some major high points in your career? Some breakthrough moments that have given you more confidence as an artist...**

A huge breakthrough moment for me was when I decided to not be defined by other's definition of a photographer and pursue my gift through my lens. It was exhilarating for me the first time I took my camera out to shoot what I wanted to shoot instead of what someone else wanted me to shoot.

**What are some other hobbies you pass the time with? Anything that lends to your passion?**

I'm a certified butterfly gardener. Wildlife photography is my hobby. I'm also a singer, songwriter and playwright.





**Do you operate an advanced studio with bright lights and technical gear? Double as a family portrait photographer?**

I used to do family portraits up until about two years ago. Now I'm completely focused on the art of photography. Depending on my inspiration, I may shoot in a studio with bright lights and advanced technical gear, or I may be in a field next to the river surrounded by dragonflies at the golden hour.

**How supportive have your friends and family been in your creative endeavors?**

I grew up in a family of creatives so I have always had the support of my family from day one which is a blessing. I also have the undying support of my friends that push me forward on those days you feel like giving up. For that I am truly grateful.



# **Dada**

*by Missy Burton*



# **Grandma's Hands**

*by Missy Burton*



**How does faith or prayer play a role in your work? Is God an important factor in your life as an artist? Discuss the relevance of spirituality as it pertains to your creative confidence.**

My entire creative process is spiritual as I believe my gifts were bestowed upon me by my Creator. I practice daily prayer and I often use meditation to remove creator's block. I have all these muses that guide my creative process – I don't take credit for any of it. I'm just a vessel and for that I'm grateful.



# ***Ashanti***

*by Missy Burton*



**Do you have interests in other forms of art or literature? Any favorite books, paintings or historical references that have influenced or shaped you as a creative force?**

I have always been a big fan of African American and Native American history. I love poetry and I'm a voracious reader of both. My favorite photographers are Gordon Parks, Brian Lanker, Mickalene Thomas and Cindy Sherman. I also really like Kehinde Wiley and Genesis Tramaine's work. There are so many amazing artists out there.

**What advice would you give to struggling artists trying to discover their path?**

There is no honor in being a starving artist. Don't be afraid of a steady paycheck that will afford you the ability to focus on your craft. You are at your best when you are not focused on survival.





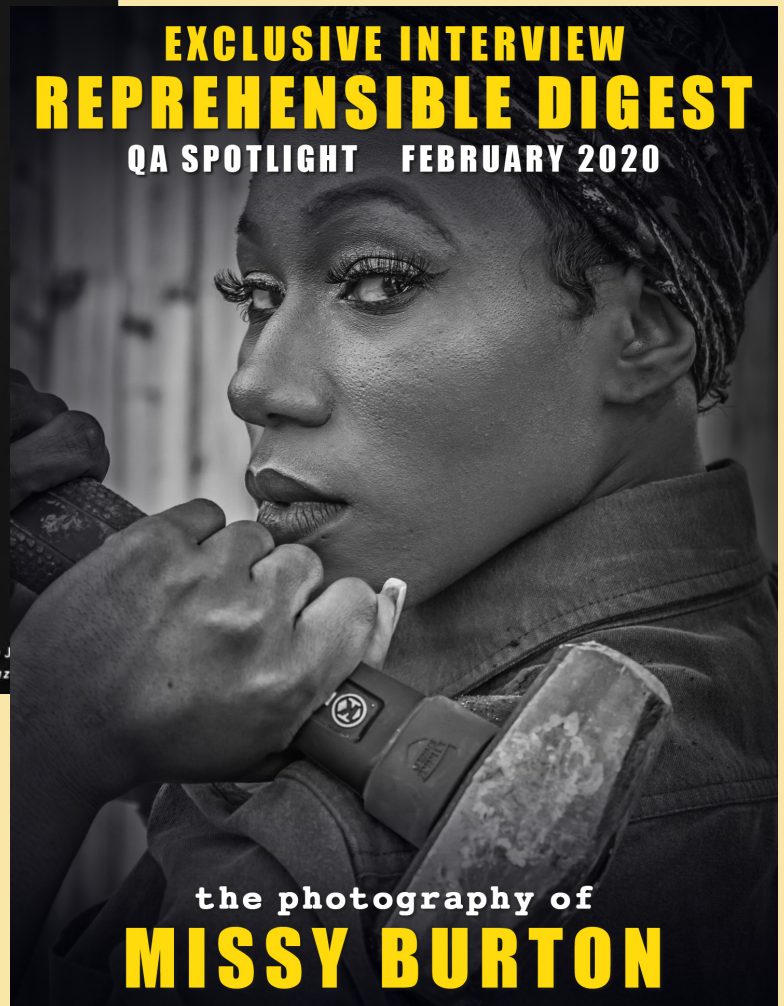
***Black Girl Magic***  
*by Missy Burton*

**The End of Innocence**  
**Poem By Missy Burton ©**

I saw this little girl crying  
and this lady trying  
to console her and  
dry her eyes  
She was saying something about  
“Good touch” and  
“Bad touch”  
Wait...what?  
My ears perked up  
This lady needs to sit down and  
Shut the hell up  
Because the way I see it in my mind is  
All touch is bad...all the time  
Especially when you are small  
and surrounded by evil ass people all big and tall  
Hovering above you like vultures and  
Distracting you with candy and  
Puppies and

Peanut butter  
I know that shit don't rhyme  
But sometimes you gotta get your point across  
I hate puppies and peanut butter makes me gag and  
THERE AIN'T NO DAMN SANTA CLAUS...now...hashtag that  
Naw...it aint no good touch  
Aint nothing good about somebody touchin' on me  
Especially on my privacy and  
I'll be damned if I ever let somebody caress me  
Cause touching don't lead to nothing but  
Black and blue skin and  
Bloody thighs and  
Nightmares and  
Barren souls and  
Invisible tears falling from lifeless eyes  
Naw...it aint no good touch  
That lady better go sit her ass down somewhere and  
Shut...the...hell...up!





## LINKEDIN PROMOTION

Happy February creative peeps! As the calendar changes over to a new month, I am pleased to present my latest edition of QA Spotlight. As February marks the celebration of Black History Month in the U.S., I wanted to reach out to a talented individual who embodies the full scope of her heritage and passion. She is bold, fearless and has a razor-sharp sense of style behind the lens. She is none other than Missy Burton – photographer extraordinaire out of Dallas.

Missy's photographs and unique development process tell an incredible tale which honors the rich history of African-American women in our country. What makes her visuals even more impressive is her dedication and strict attention-to-detail. Missy stops at nothing to portray the past as it was – beautiful, difficult, and at times a direct reflection on our current state of affairs. Indeed, a lot has changed, but not much has changed... and this is where Missy strikes gold.

My very first guest photographer at RepDigest, Missy is also an avid butterfly collector, poet and musician. She delivers her humble perspective on key social issues facing women and allows her full sense of expression to emerge through the lens. Please join me in celebrating this dynamic and iconic artist – Missy B!