



Photos by Ryan Mason



Balancing science & art

Graduate student finds passion in photography

For third year doctor of physical therapy student Ryan Mason, photography is a way to not only make some extra money, but to do something completely outside of the science world, just for himself.

"What started off as something that was just kind of fun on the side became almost a necessity for me to have a break from (school)," Mason said. "It basically got to the point where I was like 'No, I need this. I need this break. I need something that's non-scientific where I have complete control and can do whatever I want and there aren't all of these regulations.'"

Regulation-free, Mason has been taking pictures with his Pentax camera and equipment of any kind of subject imaginable: from portraits to Spanish landscapes to pictures around Elon University. He cites his dad, who is a firefighter, as his initial inspiration to getting into photography.

"My dad used to photograph all of the fires that he used to go to, so I got my first influence from him," he said. "And it happened to really perfectly coincide with a study abroad I was doing as an undergrad to Spain. Everything over there can be pho-

tographed and everything is so picturesque. I think that was probably the biggest leap, where I went from casually shooting to 'I must photograph everything I can see.'"

While he was abroad, Mason shot all over Europe and even ventured into northern Africa, specifically Morocco, a trip he was initially reluctant to take. But what started out as a last-minute, halfhearted decision to go to Morocco ended up being one of his best life experiences.

"I will say that that was probably the single most exciting part, especially because I was so against going, and I ended up having the time of my life," Mason said. "A lot of people go on these experiences and maybe they bring a camera, maybe they don't, but I'm just so glad I had mine with me because it's just so cool to relive those memories one shot at a time."

Once Mason returned back to UNC Asheville, his undergraduate school, he was invited by an adviser to display his photographs from abroad in an exhibition hall.

"It was so cool for me to have this passion of mine, but also being able to share that with everyone else," he said. "Everybody had a different favorite photograph and everybody wanted to know the story. My favorite thing was telling people the

stories behind the photographs."

An important element to Mason's photography is the type of equipment he uses. He favors Pentax cameras and lenses, an unusual variant on the more popular Canon and Nikon brands, because Pentax provides something other brands cannot, he said.

"I'm actually kind of proud of using (the Pentax) system because no one else does," he said. "With Pentax cameras, (shake reduction is) built into the camera body whereas with the Nikon and Canon ones, it's built into the lenses, so I get the shake reduction benefit with these 30-year-old tanks."

Even though Mason doesn't plan on pursuing photography as a full-time career following graduation, he hopes to continue what he is currently doing – shooting portraits in his free time while earning an additional income to his primary job, which he said is too important to him not to do.

"Being able to help people on a regular basis doing physical therapy is also a pretty big plus. I think even though (photography is) my passion, there's just something about going home at the end of each day and having improved at least one person's life that day."

Ashley Fahey

Print & Online Journalism Major