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Fighting Back: The Punishing World of Professional Boxing

By [David Rosenberg](#) | Posted Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2012, at 9:30 AM ET

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Boxing Study 1772 Julio Cesar Chavez.
Howard Schatz.

Howard Schatz's 19th book, *At the Fights*, is a 224-page opus on professional boxers, or, as he puts it, "rare and unusual individuals" shot both in studio and on location at gyms and stadiums around the country.

Schatz initially came into contact with boxers while working on his book *Athlete*, which covered just about every sport from baseball to wrestling to table tennis. But it was the boxers who really caught his attention.

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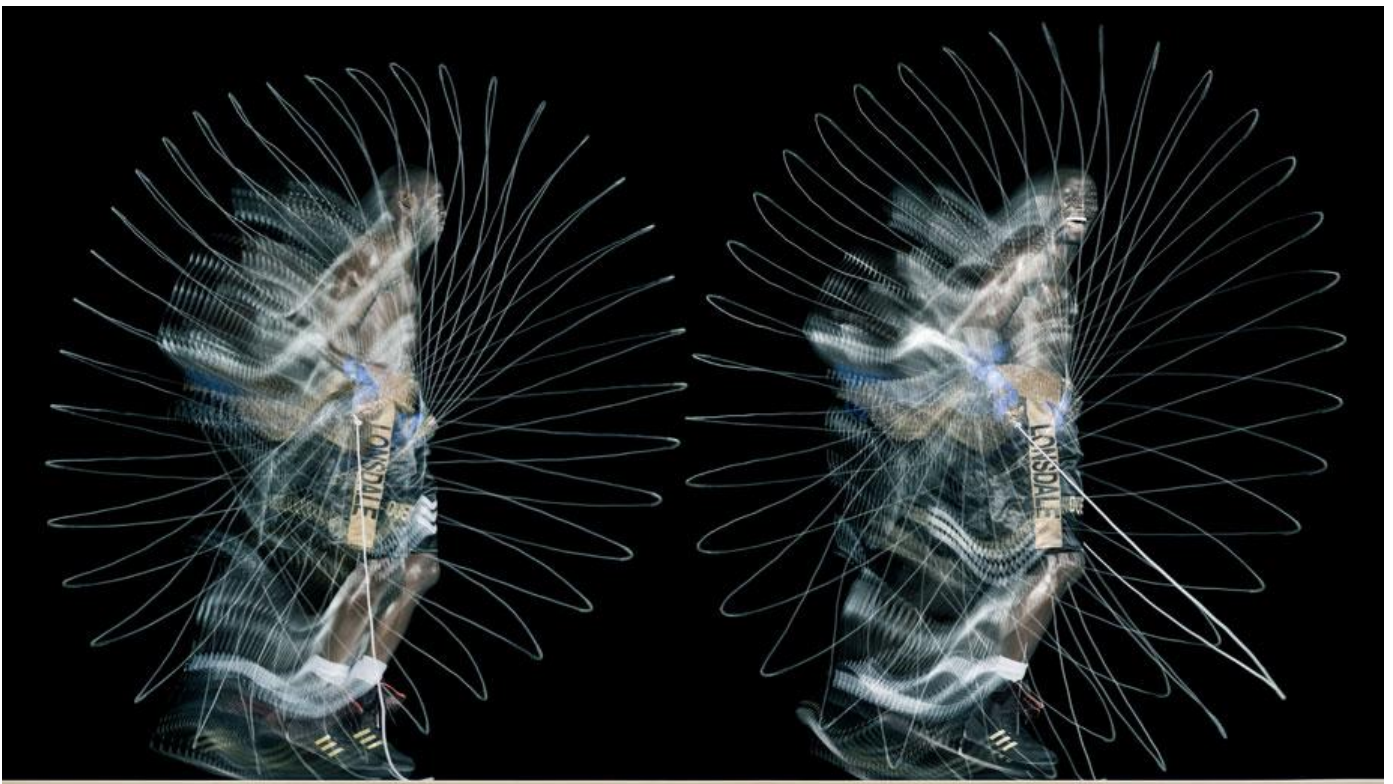
"I realized the individuals who are boxers, no one is like them," Schatz said. "Their level of courage ... that they would participate in an endeavor where their opponent wants to make them comatose—that sort of courage really is awesome to me. I still cannot understand it."



Boxing Study 1286 Joshua Clotey.
Howard Schatz.

Schatz worked on the book for six years. He was able to develop relationships with many of the boxers, which enabled him to gain their trust and focus on getting shots both in his studio and in the ring. No small order, considering Schatz often shot more than 1,000 frames during a single studio visit using strobes and sometimes dousing the boxers with water to create dynamic effects.

"I said I want to make an image where people say, 'Oh my God!' and that's really hard to do," said Schatz. "And they [boxers] understand 'really hard to do' and they worked along with me."

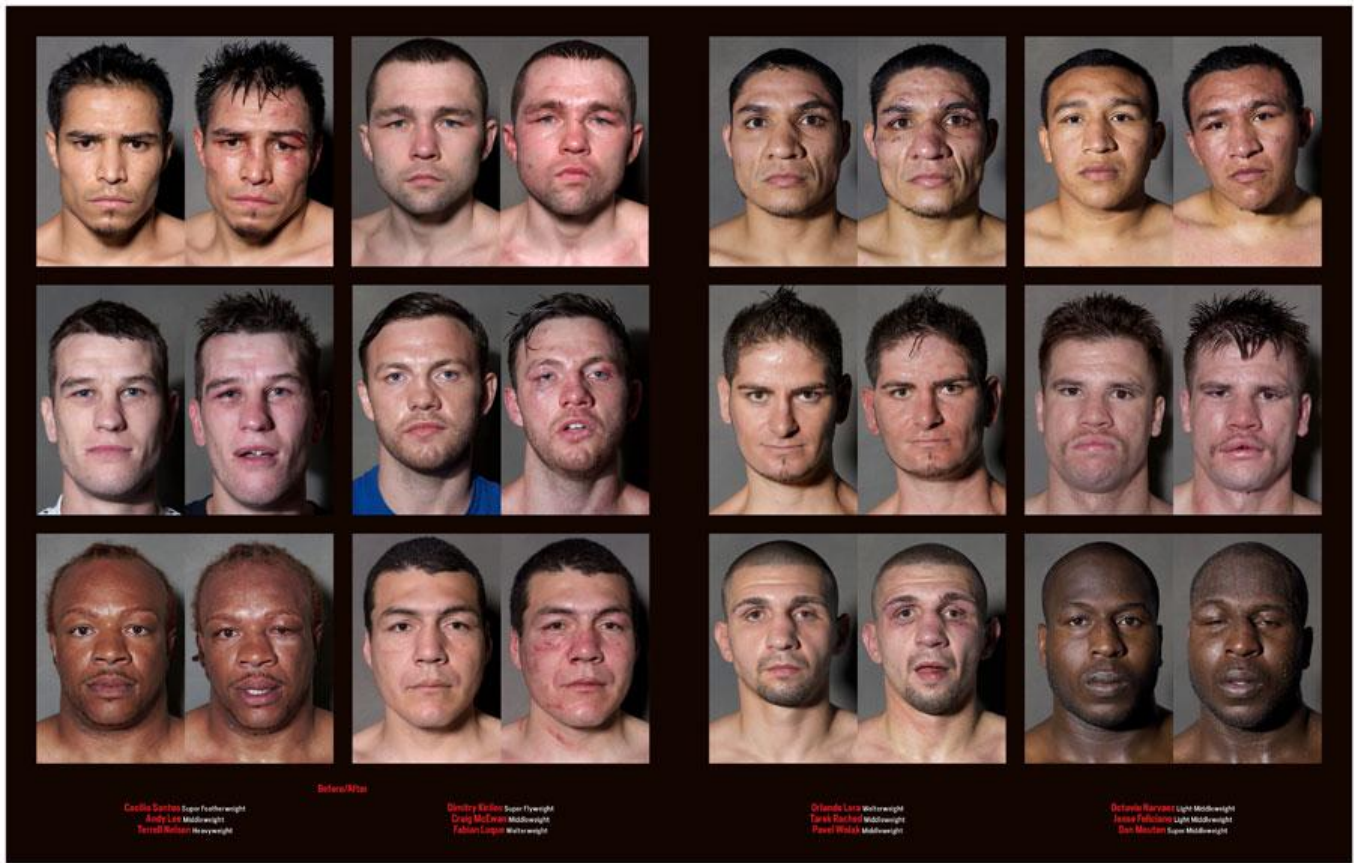


Boxing Study 1809 Steve Cunningham.
Howard Schatz.

"They are performers. Great athletes are performers. They understood that if they made a lousy picture everyone would think they were a wussy—and I told them that," Schatz laughed. "Any champion athlete is able to take direction. Somebody who is a great athlete who isn't able to take direction doesn't become a champion."

Some of the more arresting images in the book are a series titled "Before and After." In many ways, they are the most simplistic images found in the book, but they are also some of the most profound. To get the shots, Schatz set up a studio at stadiums and clubs just outside the boxers' locker room. Before entering the ring, the boxers had to pass the studio to take the before shot and again once the fight was over.

Schatz said getting the boxers to agree to the project, specifically after a fight, was especially difficult. "After a boxer loses, he doesn't want to talk to anybody. He's ashamed, embarrassed, and defeated—it's awful. To get someone to stand there and have someone take a picture of them after they've been knocked out or lost on points—its' really tough."



Before/After.
Howard Schatz.

For a portrait of Mike Tyson, Schatz said he went into the session with an idea of how he wanted to shoot Tyson, but he was also open to anything that might transpire during the creative process.

"He (Tyson) understood really meaningful images," said Schatz. "That scowl, he gave me that. He understood. He knows a good photo. The generosity came from the interview, from our working together, and from his trusting me."



Boxing Study 1489 Mike Tyson.
Howard Schatz.

Schatz has shot a lot of work throughout his career, but it's the human body that is in many ways his main inspiration.

"I'm really interested in the body, the muscular/skeletal system and what the body can do: jump, twist, turn, throw, and catch," Schatz explained. "Dance and sports have been very natural modalities for my pursuits." Schatz's goal when shooting the body—as well as for *At the Fights*—is to attempt to create images that make the viewer see and feel motion.

"I use my studio as a research lab to study motion and want to find ways to depict motion photographically that looks like motion. I was able to apply

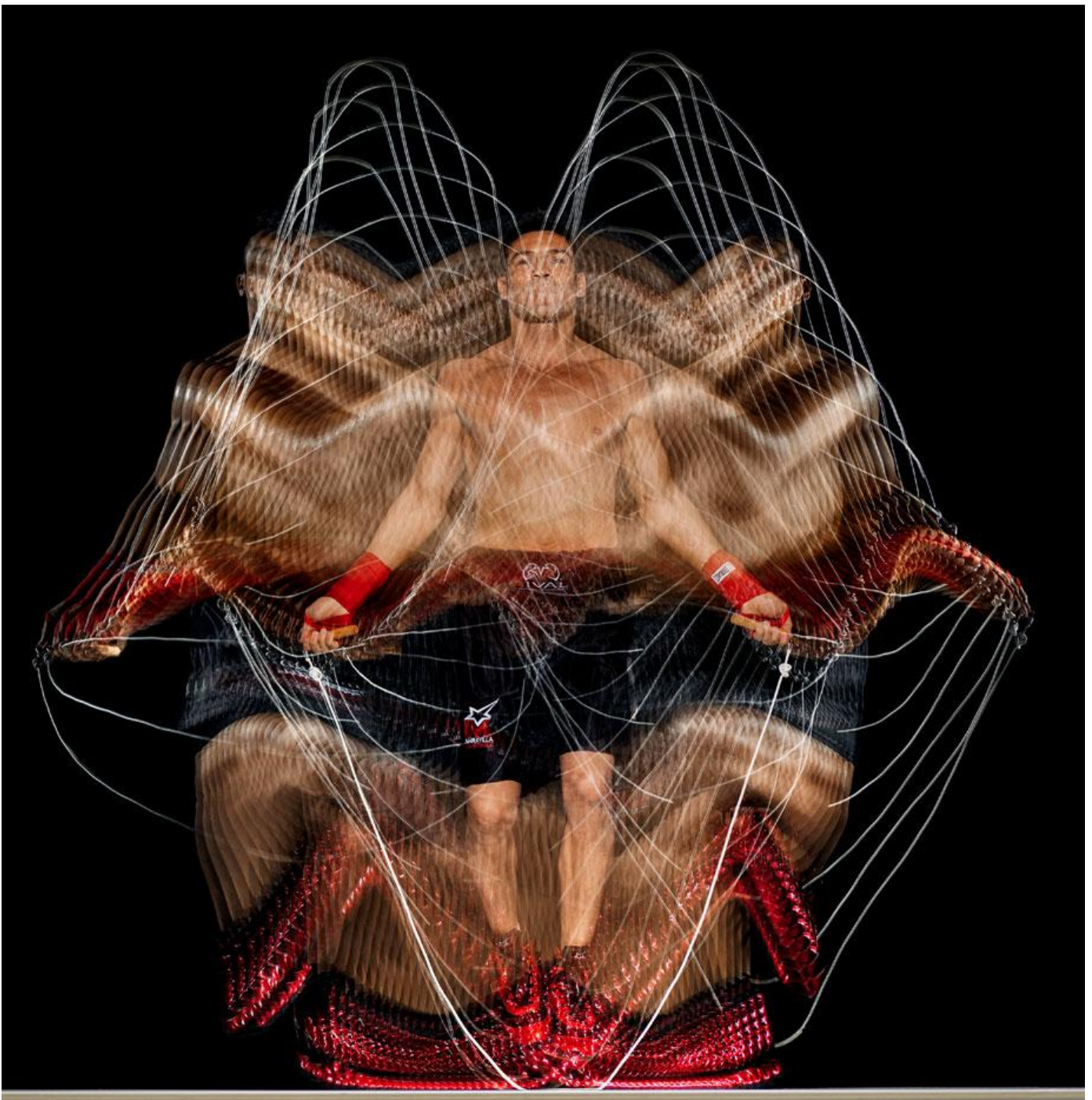
a lot of those techniques to this book.”



Boxing Study 1166 Kassim Ouma.
Howard Schatz.



Boxing Study 1653 Devon Alexander.
Howard Schatz.



Boxing Study 1805 Sergio Martinez.
Howard Schatz.

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