

**How I screwed up a photography shoot in Mexico this week.**  
by Paul O'Connor paulo@undercurrents.org



So there I was, standing in the central Plaza of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, commanding a long line of Classic VW Beetles. The drivers sat patiently, engines humming, all waiting for my signal. The vision was clear: domed Beetles snaking gracefully around the cobble- stoned plaza, framed perfectly by 16th-century Spanish colonial arches under a deep blue sky. It was going to be a stunning, iconic photograph. Exhibition-worthy even. Sure, it would cause traffic chaos — but only for two minutes I figured. People wait longer for coffee.

I gave my most trusted assistant one simple task: stop traffic coming from the right. Just stand there. Politely. Like a human pause button. The sunlight hit perfectly. I waved my arm like I knew what I was doing. The Beetles rolled left. I lifted my camera. Looking through the viewfinder it was perfection. White arches. Red pillars. Blue sky. A rainbow convoy of Beetles rolling in harmony.

But then...Beetle number three.

Now, I don't speak much Spanish, but I'm fairly confident that "stay as close as possible to the car in front of you" does not mean "leave enough space for a bus or a taco truck".

But honestly? That wasn't even the real problem.

At that exact moment, instead of calmly stopping traffic, my assistant decided to fully commit to the role, by throwing herself onto the road.

Not tripping.

Not stumbling.

A full theatrical collapse.

I looked up from my camera and she was lying on the cobbles. She hadn't anticipated the almost instant concern from other pedestrians who came to her aid. Instantly, a crowd forms. Concern spreads faster than gossip. An osteopath materialises and loudly announces she has badly twisted her ankle and needs urgent treatment. A traffic cop strolls about trying to look important.

Then a man with a metal prosthetic right leg steps forward and begins telling my horizontal assistant, in great emotional detail, about how the pain of his own injury had led him to beg doctors to amputate.

By this point, the photography session is over, especially after a taxi driver surveys the chaos — injured woman, crowd, traffic cop — and decides the best possible move is to drive straight for the giant gap between the Beetles thus rendering the photographic shoot totally pointless.

I sprint over to the crowd, genuinely worried now, pushing my way through. I find my assistant still lying on the stones, surrounded by sympathy, medical opinions, and unsolicited life stories.

She leans toward me and whispers, "I'm totally fine. I'm faking it."

Once enough people started caring, she felt it would be too socially awkward to just stand up. Two paramedics arrive out of thin air and declare she needs an ambulance. This day clearly needed extra seasoning so a local safety campaigner shoves a petition into her hands while she's still on the ground, asking her to sign in support of removing the troublesome cobblestones, using her "injury" as evidence.

Eventually, the crowd disperses and I help her limp dramatically down the road until we're out of sight. The moment we turn the corner? Instant recovery.

That was just one afternoon whilst preparing a series of photo exhibitions about VW Beetles in Mexico.

So if you like photographs, Beetles or accidental street performances please join me for the exhibition opening night:

February 14th, 2026 — 8pm (runs until Feb 21)

**[El Paliacate Espacio Cultura](#)**

Av. 5 de Mayo #20, Centro

San Cristóbal de Las Casas

Mexico

Full details on

**<https://www.undercurrents.org/vocho.html>**