BACK TO F

David Norfolk ARPS discusses his exhibition *Neverwhere, Somewhere, Anywhere*, - photographs of alternative 'neverwhere' realities - at Fenton House through April

Right: A reflection on Trafalgar Square. Below: The roots of my current self-portraits were laid 30 years ago, well before I discovered Photoshop.

I first became interested in photography at university in Australia, around 1978. A friend lent me his camera, and I then quickly invested in a secondhand Olympus OM1 and some lenses.

I became a keen camera club member, but, finding that the most interesting images were in colour, in glossy fashion magazines and TV adverts, I rebelled against the prevalent idea that 'art' photography had to be monochrome.

"We see reality through a fuzzy-logic extension of the brain – which means – if the viewer contributes some effort – I can use the camera to create alternative realities"

I went on a colour darkroom course, which taught me how to manipulate colour images in surreal ways, by controlling contrast in Cibachrome prints with lith masks. The roots of my current self-portraits were laid 30 years ago, well before I discovered Photoshop.

Because the world seemed awash with images, and I didn't see much point in adding to the chaos, I gave up serious photography when I came back to England. I didn't know anyone to share non-representational art with anyway; and to cap it all, a camera club judge told me that one of my images, made using sandwiched lith masks and food dye, was 'very clever natural lighting'.

It was my discovery of the DSLR, Flickr and The Society that led to my return to photography years later. I like working in Lightroom. It feels more like a darkroom workflow than Photoshop does, and means that, rather than the physicality of film and the time needed to deal with it, the limiting factor to my photography is now only my imagination.

Flickr gives me feedback on experimental images from a worldwide community with a huge range of photographic and artistic experiences; while my membership of The Society,

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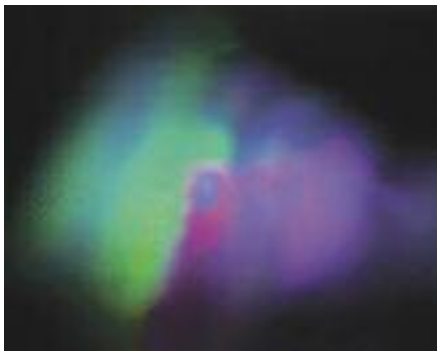
Above: Some legs in Bath.
Left: Reflected in the lake at Stourhead. "I'm fascinated to see a real-world impressionist painting laid out before me on the surface of a lake".
Below, far left: A parked car in Bath. "I like finding things that people 'look at' all the time but seldom stop and 'see'."
Below left: Puddle in Bath.

Right: An office building in Reading.
Below right: A hole in a pavement at the Inns of Court. "I'd rather visit a beautiful landscape than see a photograph of it; but a wet pavement, say, just about anywhere in the world, might help me to see into a different one."
Below: A reflection of New York.
Bottom: A reflected 'ooferie'.



and gaining my Licentiate and Associateship Distinctions, gives me feedback from photographers I know in person and trust. Hopefully, they help me avoid mere self-indulgence.

Although I'm still interested in capturing ephemera such as graffiti, stage performances and flowers - and take the odd landscape to keep my eye in - I am less and less interested in photographic records of pretty things.

Instead, I like to explore alternative realities: the 'neverwhere' of the exhibition title.

While I'll take out extraneous elements, highlight parts of the image, and expand or contract the tonal range, I won't usually add things. I'm fascinated by the idea that surreal images exist 'somewhere' in front of the camera lens. They're not purely imaginary (as a painting might be): they are patterns of real world light that people could potentially see 'anywhere'.

Humans don't see reality through a camera, they see it through a fuzzy-logic extension of the human brain - literally, as the retina is specialised brain-matter - which means I can use the camera to create alternative realities for the viewer - if the viewer contributes some imagination and effort.

My exhibition is devoted to explorations of reflections, the 'looking glass world'. I'm fascinated to see a real-world impressionist painting laid out before me on the surface of a lake:

I like finding things that people 'look at' all the time, but seldom stop and 'see', on parked cars, perhaps; or reflected in puddles or the windows of utilitarian buildings:

I'd rather visit a beautiful landscape than see a photograph of it; but a wet pavement, say, just about anywhere in the world, might help me to see into a different one:

It is, I suppose, all about finding 'beauty in the mundane', and moving out of my comfort zone. And, I'm profoundly unhappy with the idea that only some subjects, places or even times of day are 'appropriate' for the making of photographs.

Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to Sir George Pollock HonFRPS, past RPS President, and champion of photographic innovation for many years. I've found Sir George's pictures of pure light and explorations of out-of-focus 'ooferies' enormously encouraging - photographs don't have to be 'obvious' to be art!

Moreover, perhaps 'ooferies' started me on my artistic journey: when I got my first pair of glasses, my world collapsed from a fairyland of stars and patches of colour into a mundane world of street lamps and red buses. I've been trying to get back to fairyland ever since. **David Norfolk ARPS**

info

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Fenton House
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