

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY



Self Portrait with Work by Danica Soldo

By Danica Soldo

Submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III

2004

I hereby declare that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own independent work and that all sources consulted or cited have been indicated in full.



Signature

25-11-2004.

Date

This mini-thesis on fine art photography consists of the following four essays:

1. The History of Fine Art Photography
2. The Working Environment of a Fine Art Photographer
3. Techniques in Fine Art Photography
4. Discussion of Own Portfolio

THE HISTORY OF FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY



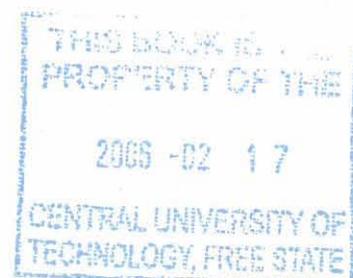
Figure 1; Alethea by Julia Margaret Cameron

(<http://www.blogs.law.harvard.edu/amurray/2003/07/09>)

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March 2004



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1. INTRODUCTION

Art is a subjective term as it is subject to personal taste and opinion. It is impossible to definitely define what art is. In fine art photography there is no distinctive subject matter, there is no one thing that is photographed like with other fields of photography. Art is not guided by any specific rules or techniques. Any subject can be photographed or explored. It is a favourable opinion that fine art is about personal expression, emotion and symbolism. Fine art is more about the way the artist sees his subject than it is about the subject itself (Leggat, 1999:1). Photographic art comprises those images that meet the criteria of any visual art. The basic nature of photography is first, its registration and second, the artist's choice and control of the pictorial elements. For photography to be transformed into art, the observable world must be seen artistically (Kaufman, 1989:3).

When photography used the conventions of painting, either replicating subject matter or simulating painterly effects, it achieved limited success. The result was found to be either artificial or unacceptable to the medium's unique potential to record facts. Pictorialism was responsible for gaining photographs entry into art museums around the world, despite its drawbacks. It also paved the way for photographs to be included in fine art exhibitions and in determining that photography was not just a mechanical process but a creative art form (McAdam, 2003:1). In the earliest stages of the history of photography there already existed a strong conflict with regard to photography being a science or an art (Leggat, 1999:1).



Figure 2; The Lady of Shalott, 1860-1861 by Henry Peach Robinson

(<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/news/press/2001/nr091301robinson.jpg>)

In discussing the paradoxes of art, science and photography Henry Peach Robinson said (Ward, 2002:1): *“No possible amount of scientific truth will in itself make a picture. Something more is required. The truth that is wanted is artistic truth – quite a different thing. Artistic truth is a conventional representation that looks like truth when we have been educated up to accepting it as a substitute for truth.”* Figure 2 on page 1 is an example of the type of photography practised by Robinson. *“The Lady of Shalott”* is an Albumen print made from three negatives.

2. HIGH ART PHOTOGRAPHY

It is believed that fine art photography began with the high art movement in the 1850's. Up until the second half of the nineteenth century photography was mostly about representation. Its main purpose was to document history. Because the camera captured subjects so realistically, people started asking if it was perhaps too realistic a medium. People began to tire of the mere reproduction that photography offered at the time. At this particular point in history painters held greater respect than photographers and this caused some photographers to break away from documentary style and to start employing more artistic effects. They started using new techniques to make their photographs look more like paintings. This was known as high art photography (Leggat, 1999:1). Photographers wanted the same acclaim that other artists enjoyed. In order to achieve this, photographers started using painterly effects and themes in their works. They drew on theatrical and romantic themes. They created scenes that were inspired by modern literature and poetry as well as historical events. The Bible was often used as a source of inspiration during this movement. Photographers were warned by critics to stay away from the regularity of everyday things. They were advised to leave certain truths about the reality of life to other artistic mediums. The viewers during this period were fond of images that unfolded a story in front of them. In order to earn photography the recognition that is deserved among the other more acceptable mediums, photographers had to do what was expected of them. They hired models who would pose in their "stories". They used lots of props and arranged their subjects into the desired poses and dressed them in costumes to aid the artistic approach to picture making (Langford, 1998:102-103).

Oscar Gustave Rejlander

The photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander was one of the more controversial high art photographers of this time. He studied painting in Italy and moved to England in the 1840's. By 1855 he was working as a photographer in London. His most famous and controversial work was called "*The Two Ways of Life*" (Figure 3, page 3). It showed a scene where two young men enter manhood. The one man looks on fondly at what is meant to represent the evil elements in life, namely alcohol, sex, gambling and laziness. The second man looks less fondly at what represents the pure elements of life, namely family life, religion, industriousness and good deeds. The man standing between them is meant to symbolise repentance, urging evil to turn to good. This photograph was made by combining thirty negatives to show a group of nearly twenty five people in one room. Rejlander was the first known photographer to use combination printing. He and his wife worked on the picture for six weeks, which is what makes it such an amazing image. The event never actually took place. The groups were posed and photographed separately. To photograph this scene in one actual photograph would have required a huge studio and an enormous amount of light. It was controversial in that people of the time were used to seeing nude figures in paintings but not in photographs. They were shocked at the realism the camera produced. They were also surprised to see that the evils of real life were being exposed so openly. It was greeted favourably by some critics though. On April 28, 1857 a reviewer in the *Photographic Notes* commented on the photograph saying (Leggat, 1999:1): "... magnificent ... decidedly the finest photograph of its class ever produced...".

Henry Peach Robinson

Henry Peach Robinson, another high art photographer, made use of similar combination techniques. He too started his career as a painter and turned to photography in 1857. Robinson was one of the pioneers of the pictorialist movement. According to Leggat (1999:2) he was "*the king of photographic picture-making*". He also employed techniques such as vignetting and hand tinting. "*Fading Away*" (Figure 4, page 3) was his most famous work. It was a combination print of five negatives showing a girl in her bed, dying of Tuberculosis. She is surrounded by her family. Many critics felt this type of theme was acceptable in paintings but not in photographs. Many viewers were unaware that it was a combination print. When Robinson explained his technique to the Photographic Society of Scotland in 1860 he found that the members were distraught. They believed Robinson had lied and misrepresented his work. Here he learnt that it would be a better approach not to discuss his methods, but rather to let people appreciate the final photograph for what it was, and not how it was created (Leggat, 1999:1). Robinson used his knowledge of the aesthetics of painting and implemented them in his photography. He had a good understanding of aesthetics and wrote many books on pictorialism. One of his major works was called "*Pictorial Effect in Photography*". His dedication to the mission of uplifting photography to an art form allowed him to publish eleven books on the subject of aesthetics (Davenport, 1991:165).



Figure 3; The Two Ways of Life by Oscar Gustave Rejlander
(<http://leda.ucsd.edu/~bwalker/teach/collage/rejlander.gif>)



Figure 4; Fading Away by Henry Peach Robinson
(<http://www.guma.powernet.pl/historia/muza.htm>)

Julia Margaret Cameron

Julia Margaret Cameron, a British photographer, was one of the most underrated photographers of her time. She only received much deserved recognition for her work in recent years. She made use of soft, sometimes, completely out of focus techniques. She took up photography after receiving a camera as a gift in 1863. She was so inspired by the gift that she started taking photographs immediately. She photographed many famous artists including: Tennyson (Figure 5, page 4), Darwin, Lewis Carroll, Robert Browning and Ellen Terry. She made some of the most beautiful pictures, all with a very romantic feel. Cameron had the ability to see and take a photograph in a way that was unique. She often used women and children as her subjects. Some of the best examples of her work are included to illustrate the type of romantic approach to photography during this period (Figure 1, on cover page & Figures 6 & 7, page 5). Her work was sentimental and was often criticized for its soft focus. She was criticised for her lack of technical expertise, since her negatives often had dust particles and her plates showed uneven coatings of collodian (Leggat, 2000:1).

She was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite school, which was a brotherhood started in 1848. The school was made up of British artists, all of whom rejected the neo-classical style that had become so popular at that time. The group wanted to go back to a purer form of Early Renaissance art. The name was derived from Raphael, who they thought had caused this neo-classical style. The group went through three main phases, the first of which was a realist phase. In this phase historical and religious paintings were the main focus. The second phase was "*truth to nature*", in which contemporary scenes were the main interest. These scenes had surreal detail. The third phase dealt with the Middle Ages, here medieval themes and styles were drawn upon. Pre-Raphaelites were inspired by the past and their pictures were often historical, mythological or religious in content. Even though the group lasted only a few years, the ideas that it promoted continued to linger after the group disbanded in 1855. Some believe that perhaps the group never existed in essence, but that the same ideas were shared by some photographers at that time (Leggat, 1998:1).

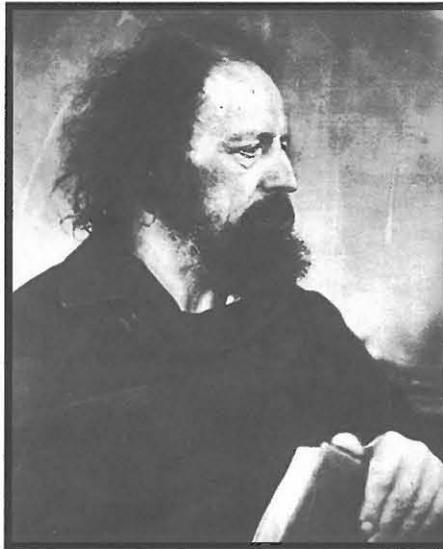


Figure 5; Alfred Tennyson 1865 by Julia Margaret Cameron

(<http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/britlit/tenn/tenn2.jpg>)



Figure 6; The Anniversary 1865 by Julia Margaret Cameron
(<http://www.musee.photo.infonie.be/permanent/cameron.htm>)



Figure 7; Pomona by Julia Margaret Cameron
(<http://www.victoriaspast.com/JuliaMCameron/Pomona%201872.jpg>)

3. NATURALISM

Henry Peach Robinson wrote (Leggat, 2002:1): “Healthy human eyes never saw any part of a scene out of focus”. Probably Robinson’s biggest critic was the naturalist photographer Dr Peter Henry Emerson, a medical student who eventually gave up medicine to become a photographer. Emerson was a firm believer that photography should be true to the human eye. He stated that the centre of a photograph should be sharply focused and the edges less sharp. This was, after all, the way the human eye would see things, it was true to human vision. He found that the pictorialist movement was unnatural. He promoted the idea that photography was an art form, separate yet equal to other forms of fine art. He encouraged other photographers to study nature as subject matter, rather than imitating painting styles. He loved nature and was an exquisite landscape photographer. He looked to nature and everyday regularity for inspiration. “*Gathering Water Lilies*” (Figure 8, page 6) is a perfect example of the type of photographs that Emerson was known for.



Figure 8; Gathering Water Lilies 1886 by Peter Henry Emerson

(<http://perso.club-internet.fr/alphalac/elements/plaem2.jpg>)

In 1886 he published his book, “*Life and landscapes on the Norfolk Broads*” which consisted of forty unretouched prints. He never made use of any techniques which would alter the appearance of his photographs, they remained natural. Years later, in 1891, Emerson read research published by Hurter and Driffield. This research proved that there was a fixed range of tones in photography and therefore the photographer could never have complete control over his work. Emerson retracted all his previous statements on photography being an art form in a pamphlet called *The Death of Naturalistic Photography*. The movement had gained support and continued regardless. This defeat was disappointing, considering how dedicated he was to naturalistic photography. He so easily abandoned all his beliefs and years of hard work simply because some people disagreed with his methods. Many saw this abandonment as a cowardly way to deal with being proved wrong. Instead of standing his ground he just gave up his beliefs (Langford, 1998:104-106).

4. PICTORIALISM

Pictorialism was the first attempt to turn photography into an art form with its own aesthetic value. Pictorialism as a movement was aimed at elevating photography to an art form in its own right (Goldberg & Siberman, 1999:1). Pictorialists believed that the subject matter being photographed was not as important as the artistic quality of the picture (Leggat, 1999:1). The one big difference between the naturalist school of photography (which thought prints should be natural and straight) and the pictorialists, was that the former wanted one to be true to the medium, while the latter demanded that the photographer be true to his own artistic expression (McAdam, 2003:1). Pictorialists were more interested in making pictures that were aesthetically impressive, rather than just documenting events. The final image was of greater importance than the content or subject matter. Any form of fine art advocates the importance of viewpoint, mood, artistic content and atmosphere over the subject being photographed (Langford, 1998:101). This kind of artistic photography was heavily influenced by such art movements as Impressionism, Post-impressionism and Symbolism (Goldberg & Siberman, 1999:1). Techniques like combination printing, soft focus, negative manipulation, hand-tinting and gum bichromate were used to give photographs a more artistic feel. Any technique that reduced the detail of an image was favoured (Leggat, 1999:1).

Pictorialism was greeted with little enthusiasm, as it was a completely different approach to artistic photography compared to the high art approach. It was thought too modern and was still experimental. High art consisted of posed, constructed scenes, while pictorialism consisted of more natural subjects (Langford, 1998:102). The first generation of American pictorial photographers, between the 1880's and the 1910's, attempted to break free from the constraints of commercial and professional photography. As the second generation of pictorialists came to the fore between the 1910's and the 1950's, the original ideals of the movement were expanded to include commercial and professional photography, which showed that without having sacrificed artistic integrity, photography had gone all the way around the circle, from beginning to end (de Ferra, 4004:1). The portrait "*Alfred Steiglitz and Kitty*" (Figure 9, page 7), taken by Edward Steichen, is a good example of how painterly effects were used. The image is slightly out of focus and is not merely documentation, it is a posed portrait.



Figure 9; Alfred Steiglitz and Kitty by Edward Steichen

(<http://www.thispublicaddress.com/depression/timeline.html>)

5. THE LINKED RING

In 1891 members of the Photographic Society of London started experiencing differences of opinion with regard to commercial and scientific photographs being exhibited along with artistic works. In Britain in the 1880's having a photograph exhibited was considered a major achievement by all pictorial photographers. This was one of the main objectives at the time (Langford, 1998:106). Henry Peach Robinson, vice-president of the Photographic Society, became impatient with the Society's reluctance to accept that photography had both artistic and scientific qualities. Robinson and photographer George Davidson left the Society, followed by many respected photographers. Months later, Robinson started a new society in London. It was a brotherhood of photographers with the aim of *"enhancing photography as a fine art"* and it was called The Linked Ring. The name was meant to represent unity between the members (Leggat, 2002:1). It was an elite organisation where members were not allowed to apply for membership, membership was by invitation only. Membership was held by well-known photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz, Frank Sutcliffe, Frederick Evens, Paul Martin and Gertrude Kasebier, who was the first female member of the brotherhood. She later helped co-found the Photo-Secessionist movement. She is an excellent example of the quality of photographers that were invited to join. *"Young Indian Man"* (Figure 10, page 8) is one of her most moving portraits. She was said to have contributed more to portraiture than any other working artist of her time, painter or photographer. Kasebier explained her motivation for making images was, *"not to inform, but to share an experience, to evoke an emotional response from the viewer"* (Leggat, 2000:1).



Figure 10; Young Indian Man 1898 by Gertrude Kasebier

(<http://www.andrewsmithgallery.com/exhibitions/kurtkoegler2/GSK1059.html>)

Edward Steichen studied painting and later worked as an apprentice lithographer. In 1895 he started experimenting with photography and went on to become one of the highest paid fashion and portrait photographers of his generation. In 1899 he had some of his work exhibited in some amateur exhibitions in America and this is where Clarence White first spotted him. He suggested that Steichen meet Alfred Stieglitz. After doing this, Steichen was invited to join The Linked Ring. Much of Steichen's early work was of the typical pictorial symbolic variety, using techniques to hide photographic detail. One of his most controversial portraits was of the capitalist J.P. Morgan (Figure 11, page 9) sitting in a chair facing the photographer. The high contrast lighting lends a feeling of powerfulness. The light falling across his arm appears as a knife in his fist. There is also a watch chain

and the white collar of his shirt. The watch is meant to symbolise the industrial process by which human labour was combined and timed to the clock. (Marshall, 2004:1). The photograph was destroyed by Morgan's office as they felt it would portray him unfavourably. They then discovered that it wasn't in fact a knife, but a shadow on the arm of the chair and ordered another print from Steichen (Anon, 2004:1).

For about fifteen years Steichen and Stieglitz worked together on many projects that changed the face of photography forever. They were members of The Linked Ring, The Photo-Secession and they collaborated in the magazine *Camera Work*. In 1893 The Linked Ring held their first exhibition and called it The Photo Salon of The Linked Ring. The name was specifically selected with the aim of affiliating the photographic exhibition with painting exhibitions. In America, groups with similar intentions were being formed, one of which was the Photo-Secession. Some of the more respected Photo-Secessionists were then invited to join The Linked Ring. In 1908 many British members noticed that the majority of the photographs in the exhibition were by American photographers. It is thought that the British members were more upset by the American's style than about their numbers. This caused the British members, who were still in the majority, to alter the requirements for exhibition in the following year. This in turn led to some of the American members leaving The Linked Ring. Among these were Alfred Stieglitz and Clarence White. This resignation was one of the main causes leading to the brotherhoods disbandment. The Linked Ring's successor was the London Salon which is still running today (Leggat, 2002:1). Leon Robert Demachy, the leading French photographer in the 1890's, founder of The Photo Club in Paris, member of both The Linked Ring and The Photo-Secession movement, said (Leggat, 1999:1): *"A straight print may be beautiful, and it may prove... that its author is an artist; but it cannot be called a work of art... A work of art must be a transcription, not a copy, of nature... This special quality..."* (which makes it a work of art) *"is given in the artist's way of expressing himself... If a man slavishly copies nature, no matter if it is with hand and pencil or through a photographic lens, he may be a supreme artist all the while, but that particular work of his cannot be called a work of art..."*.

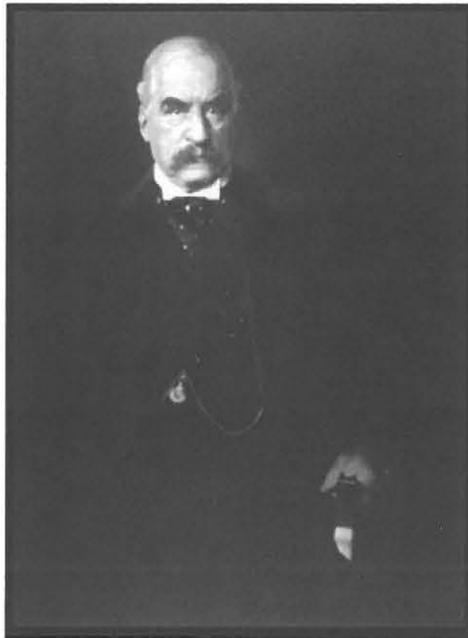


Figure 11; J.P. Morgan by Edward Steichen

(<http://www.sandor-collection.com/SFCSTEICHEN/JPMorgan.html>)

6. ALFRED STIEGLITZ AND THE PHOTO-SECESSION

The Photo-Secession was started by Alfred Stieglitz on February 17, 1902. Stieglitz was an incredibly talented photographer with the ability to control lighting. He was able to overcome the difficulties of capturing high contrast scenes, which was so difficult to do in the 1880's. The members of the Photo-Secession were mostly avant-garde photographers (Markowski, 1984:107). They all wanted to move away from the conventional approach to photography. Stieglitz managed to lead this organisation for almost fifteen years, doing so in a somewhat dictator-style fashion. There is no doubt that his contribution to photography was great. He always did what he believed to be right. He was stubborn and unreasonable but non-the-less, brilliant. In a pamphlet printed by the Photo-Secession in December 1902, the group put forward the following objectives (Leggat, 1999:1):

- *To advance photography as applied to pictorial expression;*
- *To draw together those Americans practicing or otherwise interested in the art; and*
- *To hold from time to time, at varying places, exhibitions not necessarily limited to the productions of the Photo-Secessionists or to American work.*

While speaking in New York in 1902, Stieglitz commented (Leggat, 1999:1): *"Artists who saw my early photographs began to tell me that they envied me; that my photographs were superior to their paintings, but that unfortunately photography was not an art...I could not understand why the artists should envy me for my work, yet, in the same breath, decry it because it was machine-made – their... 'art' painting – because hand-made, being considered necessarily superior... There I started my fight...for the recognition of photography as a new medium of expression, to be respected in its own right, on the same basis as any other art form"*. The Photo-Secessionists held their first exhibition in 1905 at what became known as The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession or 291 which was the address on Fifth Avenue in New York. The gallery exhibited the work of many contemporary photographers and in later years the work of famous painters like Cezanne, Picasso and Matisse (Homer, 2003:1).

"The Steerage" (Figure 12, page 11) was one of Stieglitz's personal favourites and possibly his most well known photograph. It shows the use of repetition of shapes, namely a hat, a winch, chains across the gangway and it has dynamic lines and triangular forms formed by various elements. He said of his feelings, while taking the photograph (Marshall, 2004:1): *"-a picture of shapes, and underlying it, a new vision that held me: simple people; the feeling of ship, ocean, sky; a sense of release that I was away from the mob called 'rich'"*.

Stieglitz worked as an editor for the newsletter *Camera Club of New York* and took full advantage of this position to promote his ideas about photography. This eventually angered many members and he left the newsletter to start up his own magazine, *Camera Notes*. In 1903 he started editing undoubtedly the most well-known, impressive and expensively made photographic magazine ever published, *Camera Work* (Homer, 2003:1). The first issue states (Leggat, 1999:1): *"Only examples of such work as gives evidence of individuality and artistic worth, regardless of school, or contains some exceptional feature of technical merit, or such as exemplifies some treatment worthy of consideration, will find recognition in these pages"*. Stieglitz's unending preaching about the quality in art annoyed so many subscribers that the circulation of the magazine diminished. By the publication of the last issue in 1917, a measly 38 subscribers were left. Fifty issues of the quarterly magazine were published between 1903 and 1917. Today there are very few of the original issues left and they have become collector's items, they have also been republished by Taschen Publications. Photographers like Alvin Langdon Coburn, Clarence White, Edward Steichen and Gertrude Kasebier were among the greats that were published in *Camera Work* (Homer, 2003:1). Stieglitz's stubbornness caused many fights among the members of the Photo-Secession and eventually in 1912 the group broke up. Stieglitz didn't speak to Steichen for twenty five years.

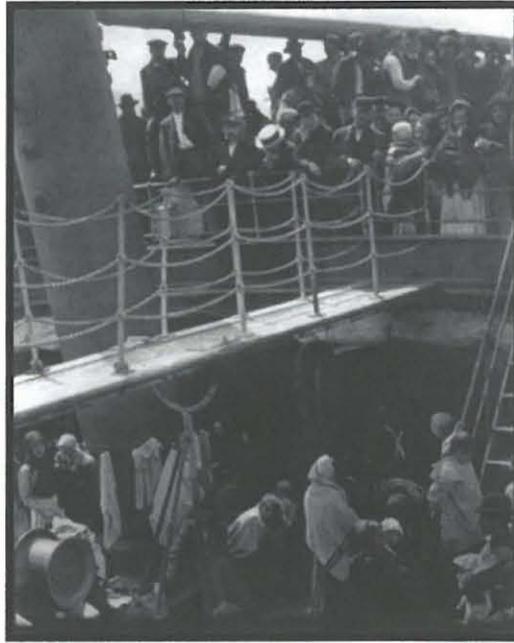


Figure 12; The Steerage 1907 by Alfred Steiglitz

(http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/pics/The_Steerage_by%20Steiglitz.jpg)

The last two issues of *Camera Work* showcased the innovative work of Paul Strand, who would eventually become one of the true masters of photography. He is known to be the first photographer to reinvent the old style of pictorialism favoured by the Photo-Secessionists. This reinvention was known as straight photography (Solbrig, 2001:182). Even though experiments were being conducted in similar avenues by other photographers, it was Strand who opened the door. Strand's work was heavily influenced by the modern art that he had been exposed to. Stieglitz spoke of Strand's work as "*brutally direct, pure and devoid of trickery*" (Markowski, 1984:115-116). This was probably the highest compliment that Stieglitz was able to give. Strand's work was characteristic of the Cubism and Abstract movements in painting. He tried to find out if the modern European styles of painting and sculptures could be achieved in photography. He photographed still life close-ups of plant forms, landscapes, architecture, portraits, and experimented with abstract patterns. A good example of his work is "*White Fence*" (Figure 13, page 12). He went into the streets of New York and photographed them in a brutal and tough way. His subjects were fat, gritty and old. The soft focus sentimentality of earlier pictorial work was dead. He proclaimed that photography was the first and only important contribution thus far of science to the arts. Strand proved to be an extremely important photographer in that many pictorialists of his generation followed his pursuit. They slowly exchanged their soft focus style for that of sharp focus and their subject matter went from sentimental to real (Goldberg & Silberman, 1999:1).

During the First World War, in 1917, Steichen joined the army and was made commander of the photographic section of the U.S. Army Air Service. While serving in the army, Steichen started shooting aerial photographs which completely changed his photographic style. He witnessed shocking things. This is when he started moving towards realism and denounced Impressionism. Steichen said (Anon, 2004:1): "*I am no longer concerned with photography as an art form. I believe it is potentially the best medium for explaining man to himself and his fellow men*".

He opened a commercial studio in New York when he returned from the army. He worked in the fashion industry for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* magazines during 1923 and 1928. He took beautifully dramatic fashion shots and took bold portraits of celebrities like Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo and Shirley Temple, as shown on page 14, figure 12. At this point he had completely resigned from the old pictorialist ways and was practicing a newer, fresher, cleaner style of photography, which had been introduced by Stieglitz and Strand just before the war started (Marshall, 2004:1).

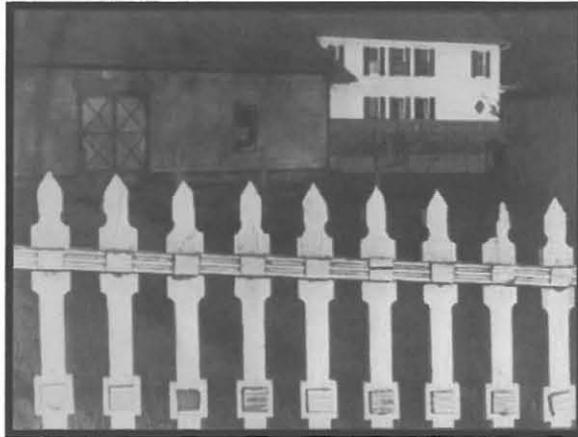


Figure 13; White Fence by Paul Strand

(<http://www.photoman.co.kr/photo/photographer/strand-WhiteFence.jpg>)



Figure 14; Shirley Temple by Edward Steichen

(<http://www.artfacts.net/exhibpics/14992.jpg>)

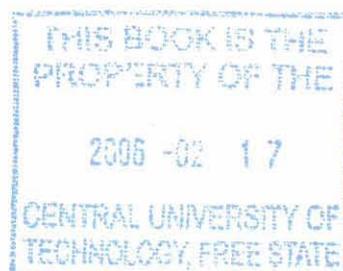
7. CONCLUSION

After the final issue of *Camera Work* in 1917 Stieglitz closed the 291 Galleries and started concentrating on personal projects. He received work by the painter Georgia O'Keeffe and started a relationship with her and eventually married her. He started photographing hundreds of portraits of her, which were very different from the traditional portraits that had been socially acceptable at this time. He photographed her hands, feet, and her clothes, sometimes the portraits were faceless. When he finally finished with this series, he exhibited them and they got great reviews. His subject matter ranged from portraits, to landscapes, to urban photographs of New York City. After his retirement and while he continued with his private work, he was encouraged by artists and friends to open two more galleries and to continue arranging exhibitions. He opened The Intimate Gallery in 1925 and The American Place in 1929. Stieglitz continued working until 1937 when his health deteriorated. Throughout his life, he remained an advocate for photography as art. In 1946, he had a heart attack and passed away only a few days afterwards (Markowski, 1984:116).

It was thanks to his never-ending commitment that photography succeeded in obtaining recognition as an art form of its own aesthetic merit (Marshall, 2004:1). The road to recognition was long and hard, and even to this day there is still debate about photography's aesthetic merit. Some still believe that photography is purely a science, while others celebrate it as a modern form of fine art.

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**THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF A FINE ART
PHOTOGRAPHER**



Figure 1; Inspiration in Black by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimple.com/inspiration%20in%20black.htm>)

By Danica Soldo

An essay submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III

May 2004

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1. INTRODUCTION

The start of the twentieth century opened, in many respects, a new era showing a definite departure from the past. It marked an enormous breakaway from the conventional photography of the past. The works of the 291 Gallery operated by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen succeeded in immediately opening the American art world to the ideas of the new European avant-garde genre. It was because of the work of Stieglitz and Steichen that photography gained the recognition that it deserved. Their work played a profound part in elevating photography into an art form in its own right (Mi-belbeck, 2001:5).

Today photography is in the process of change. It is moving away from being an isolated medium towards its own branch of fine art. It is doing so with unlimited freedom, for it no longer has to imitate painting or prescribe to any specific style (Mi-belbeck, 2001:5-13). In researching the working environment of a photographer in the field of fine art a few things became very clear. There is no specific or defined physical environment in this field (Anon 1, 2004:1). If I were to examine my own personal working environment I would not be able to define one physical environment specifically. I have taken fine art photographs of fashion and landscapes, of objects and architecture. I have worked in a darkroom, in a studio and in front of a computer. I have made images on my bedroom floor using all kinds of mixed media as well as using conventional methods. All of these photographs started out as ideas. They all took a lot of thought and imagination.

The photograph "*From Childhoods Hour*" by Lars Raun (Figure 2, page 1) is a perfect example of the lack of a specific working environment in this field. The photographer took a picture of a figure in a landscape and then digitally manipulated the image. The image was then exhibited on the internet and is available for purchasing. What is his working environment? Is it nature or is it behind a computer screen. Is it a gallery or a museum or the internet? One thing is clear, this image took planning and imagination. This image was created in his mind before he actually made the image. Raun worked in more than one environment to make this image. This image proves that it is almost impossible to define a specific physical working environment. It is my opinion that all fine art starts in ones mind. The working environment of a fine art photographer is therefore their own creativity (Anon 2, 2004:1).



Figure 2; From Childhoods Hour by Lars Raun

(<http://www.usefilm.com/image/411172.html>)

2. THE MIND AS A WORKING ENVIRONMENT

In order to discuss a working environment, it is necessary to first understand what the photographer's motivation for photographing is. Before an environment can be discussed, the field must be understood. Artists work in all environments and are driven to create, not to document or to be objective. There is no specific subject matter in fine art as there is in other, more restricted fields of photography. The main driving force behind any art is the need to create, to express something. Artists work from inspiration and therefore they work wherever their inspiration takes them. They are free to explore whatever they want to and this freedom is unrivaled in other fields (Feininger, 1965:328-332). Creative artistic photography is primarily intended to enrich the soul and to provide some form of stimulation for the mind. If photography were to be compared to writing then documentary photographers would be journalists and biographers and fine art photographers would be poets and fiction novelists. Artistic photography concentrates on the meanings of things, on the interpretation of its subjects. Artistic photography is more about expressing feelings, mood and beliefs. Most artistic work is the result of wanting to put forward a specific idea or opinion. A fine art photographer will first decide on what subject will best portray his ideas and then take the photograph. It is plain to see that the creative process starts in the mind and this is the environment in which any artist works. This is the essence of fine art photography (Feininger, 1965:9).

Since creativity starts in the mind as an idea, as an intention, and is intended to express something, then it is my opinion that there is no need for a physical working environment. The actual physical environment is unimportant. Art can be created anywhere and always starts inside. An artist's work always starts inside themselves, not in a gallery or a studio (Feininger, 1965:9-12).

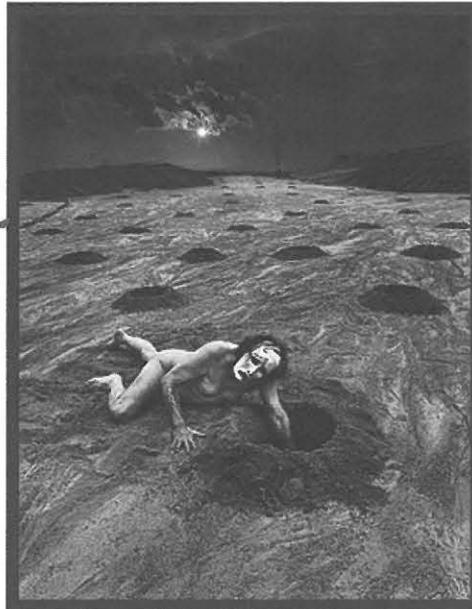


Figure 3; Mole by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimple.com/mole.htm>)

The photograph “*Mole*” by Misha Gordin (Figure 3, page 2) was created in a traditional darkroom without any digital manipulation. It is a combination of sorrow and of loneliness and despair. It is a conceptual photograph which means that the planning and thought that went into the creation of this image was quite considerable. This part of the creative process occurs before the image is made, this stage is possibly the longest stage and is all done in the mind. This image is personal and expressive and it is defiantly not intended to be objective. What makes this a fine art photograph is that the motivation behind it, the interpretation of it and the emotion it exudes all come from within. This image was created within the artist himself and it shows a part of himself – a part of his soul (Gordin, 2004:1-3).

There is the opinion that since photography earned its rightful place in the art world there was no longer a need for photographers to classify themselves as artists. A painter is considered an artist whether he is a cubist or an impressionist, so too is a photographer an artist whether he is a fashion photographer or a nude photographer. The difficulty in defining a physical working environment in the fine art field is possibly due to the fact that hardly any modern day photographers classify themselves as fine art photographers. The majority of the so-called masters of photography are either documentary or fashion or landscape photographers. They are photojournalists or portraitists or nude photographers. There is no longer a need for photographers to classify themselves as artists, as all photographers in all fields are classified this way. This can be seen as a giant leap forward. It also makes it difficult to define what fine art photography actually is. What one person might consider art another might consider reproduction. What some perceive to be avant-garde others might perceive as commercial. Art still is, as it always has been, subject to personal taste and interpretation.

A landscape photographer might make fine art landscape images or make commercial landscape images; it all depends on his motivation and his style. The photographer Lars Raun is fond of photographing landscapes. His work is very much fine art. Why? He digitally manipulates his images by using high contrast for visual effect as he did in “*Dusk*” (Figure 6, page 4), or by placing figures in the landscape for symbolic effect as seen below in “*Twisted*” (Figure 4, page 3). His images express something more than just nature. They express personal feelings and show emotion, while other more commercial landscapes express only the beauty of nature, and might not represent any part of the photographer or his emotions. This kind of commercial photograph is created in a physical environment, not within the mind or soul of the photographer (Anon 2, 2004:1).



Figure 4; *Twisted* by Lars Raun

(<http://www.usefilm.com/image.276672.html>)

Photographers now classify themselves according to the subject matter that they photograph, not by their style of photographing. This is one of the reasons that it is so difficult to determine what fine art photography actually is. Considering that all photographers, in all fields only have limited subject matter, the artistic quality of an image must be determined by the photographer’s personal style, imagination and creativity not by the subject matter photographed. When one considers the basic subjects that can be photographed, namely people, places, objects and scenes from everyday life, then one must realise that imagination is necessary to make a good photograph. The subjects are very rarely

special or unique; these subjects are made to appear this way only if the photographer photographs them in a special or unique manner (Feininger, 1965:328). The photograph “*What If*” (Figure 5, page 4) is a good example of limited subject matter. I have seen many photographs of railway tracks, but this image is different. The tracks lead the eye inward and the bright white sky makes you think that there is something brighter on the other side. This image has mood and it allows the viewers imagination to wonder. One could get lost in another world just by viewing it. It is scary but inviting, and it is both visually and mentally stimulating. This image is different from other similar photographs because the photographer uses emotion and his own creativity. It is an imaginative image made so by an imaginative photographer, not by the subject matter (Anon 2, 2004:1).

In his book, *The Complete Photographer*, Andreas Feininger said (1965:328): “*Photo technical knowledge and skill in its use can be acquired; the principles of composition can even be mastered in time; but no one can acquire imagination. One either does or does not possess this magic quality.*”

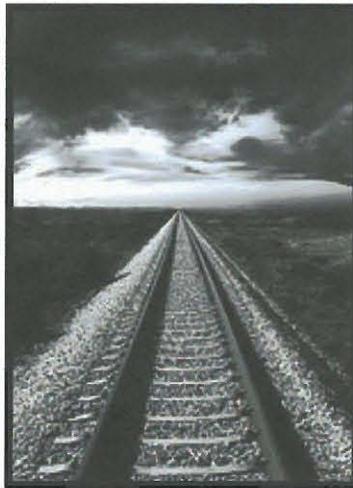


Figure 5; What If by Lars Raun

(<http://www.usefilm.com/image/419946.html>)



Figure 6; Dusk by Lars Raun

(<http://www.usefilm.com/image/328536.html>)

3. MISHA GORDIN AND JAN SAUDEK

Misha Gordin - Latvia

Misha Gordin was born in 1946 and grew up in the predominantly Russian part of Latvia. At this time, Latvia was under Soviet occupation. Gordin studied aviation engineering at technical college although he ended up working as a special effects equipment designer at the company Riga Motion Studios. Of his days as a youth in Latvia he says (2004:1-3): *“I was in my early twenties and mostly ignorant about art. At this time social realism was an official culture of the country and I did not care about it too much.”* Under communist rule there was very little, if any, information about Modern Western art. At the age of nineteen, Gordin started photographing portraits and dabbling with documentary photography, but was unsatisfied. He felt that he could not express himself properly by these methods. At this point in his life he turned to the writings of Dostoevsky and Bulgakov and to the films of Parajanov and Trakovsky for inspiration. He felt an urgent need to create his own style and to portray his personal vision, which could not be done by photographing things as they really were. He was driven to express his inner feelings and thoughts, and he did so through photography (Gordin, 2004:1-3).



Figure 7; Echo by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimple.com/Echo.htm>)

He started photographing concepts. He took his first conceptual photograph in 1972 and never turned back. Having to live under communist rule for so many years finally took its toll and Gordin emigrated to the United States of America in 1974. Although his creativity was greatly restricted by the ruling body, he could not resist making art. His mind was never stifled and his soul could not rest unless he had the freedom to create. Conceptual photography is very much a form of fine art photography. In the image *“Echo”* (Figure 7, page 5) Gordin portrays two people, on opposite sides with a moon in the distance. The woman’s face on the right is covered and she rings a bell, while the woman on the left shows her face. She is not ringing her bell. This is a haunting image and to me it represents conflict. The bells represent good and evil. Evil is cowardly and she hides behind a mask, she hangs her head down and covers it up with thick cloth, while conducting noise and chaos and despair. Good is less ashamed, more courageous, she lifts her head and looks straight into your eyes, her head uncovered, her face bare. She has the power to bring evil in her hands, but she resists it. There is conflict in that under one moon, before one ocean, two opposites stand side by side. This is my interpretation of this image, and the next person might find some other meaning. That is what conceptual photography is all about. What the artist wants to portray might not always correspond with what the viewer sees.

Misha Gordin poses two very important questions that every photographer should ask themselves at some point in their career (2004:1-3):

1. *“Do I point my camera outwards to the existing world or turn it inward towards my soul?”*
2. *“Am I taking photographs of existing reality, or creating my own world, so real but non-existent?”*

All of Gordin’s work is done in a traditional darkroom and is not digitally manipulated. He believes that digital photography will open many doors for younger artists that are emerging and he feels this will gain even a higher respect for conceptual photography. He believes that this will help them to give shape to their inner-most visions. Gordin uses analogue methods to make his images and says (2004:1-3): *“I still prefer glowing quality of original print and the laborious process to achieve it. I believe, that it is only a matter of time before digital technology replaces analogue and the conceptual approach will receive its well deserved place in art of photography”*.

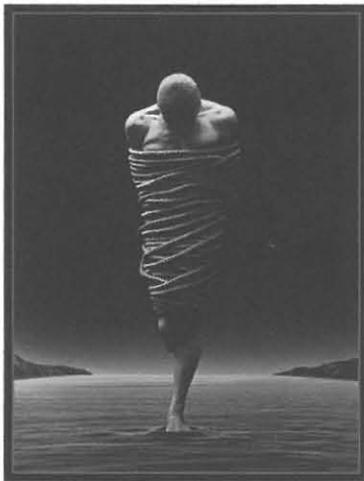


Figure 8; Doubt 6 by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimple.com/doubt16.htm>)

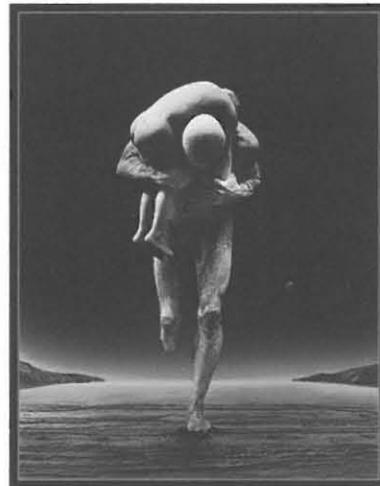


Figure 9; Doubt 16 by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimpl.com/doubt6.htm>)

The main purpose of Gordin’s work is to act as a vehicle to transport his emotions onto paper. His work is the result of an amazing ability of transforming his concepts into reality. This is an essential aspect of all kinds of artistic photography. Gordin’s images are almost real. They are overpowering and allow the viewer to step out of reality into another world. His work is made, based on the premise that a weak idea, even if it is executed flawlessly, will still produce a weak photograph. In fine art photography one must combine creativity with deliverance. The idea or concept must be successfully delivered. Gordin creates a concept that expresses something within him, something personal and then executes it flawlessly in his photographs. Two personal favourites of mine are his series *“Doubt”* (Figure 8 & 9, page 6) and the series *“Shout”* (Figure 10, 11 & 12, page 7). The *“Shout”* series is breathtaking. It features different heads planted in the desert sand. One can not tell if the heads are planted and growing out into the world or if they are breaking out, breaking free from the underworld (Gordin, 2004:1-3).



Figure 10, 11 & 12; Shout Series by Misha Gordin

(<http://www.bsimple.com/shout.htm>)

work are; ageing, death, life, love, desire and humour. He has the most innocent way of seeing his subjects, and of portraying them. “*Heroin*” (Figure 14, page 9) is a good example of this. A girl stands half naked in a room, injecting herself with heroin. The viewer doesn’t feel pity for this subject, for she is not portrayed as a drug addict. Rather she is portrayed as an innocent young woman, probably going through an adolescent phase of experimenting. This is exactly how he portrays his subjects, innocently, humanly and without judgement. His images are dark, dreamy, funny and even true. He believes that all of us have something beautiful, something worth photographing. His work can best be described as the realisation of dreams. It amazes me that after living in his brothers shadow and having to survive life in a communist country, after having his negatives stolen by his own family he can still celebrate life and easily find the beauty within it. This beauty is seen in “*Zuzanka’s Night Window*” (Figure 15, page 10), a woman sits on the floor in front of her window, naked, staring out into the night. She is alone, peaceful and beautiful. This image shows true sentiment. His work walks a thin line between sentiment and sentimentality, and has often been misunderstood as the latter. What his work is really about is humanity (Wood & Crump, 2002:7-9). Sometimes the world can be rude, sad, dark, funny, but it is always beautiful. His work has been called pornographic, although some see it as romantic, innocent and humorous. Saudek said (Anon 3, 2002:1): “*What I really do is (make) portraits of the soul*”. Saudek has never shied away from the human aspect in art. We are all born, we all go through puberty and we all get old. The thing is, adolescence and aging are marked by comedy and pathos and cannot be avoided (Wood & Crump, 2002:10-23). If one looks at the image “*That Pretty Girl I Loved*” (Figure 16, page 10) one would not consider her beautiful. She is physically deformed, missing a leg and arm, and she is looking at herself in a little mirror. Saudek finds her beauty and photographs it, this is what makes his work so inspiring, and this is what makes him so talented. In his retrospective book “*Realities*” he wrote of this picture saying (2002:102): “*For the entire one year this girl and I have been trying to lose our bashfulness and our fears and to face the Reality. How many times we’ve met in that year! How many bad photographs we made, how many litres of good wine we drank together! At the very end of that era we succeeded: the final picture shows her how I’ve seen her (and I will, for the rest of my life).*”



Figure 14; *Heroin* by Jan Saudek

(*Realities*, 2002:73)

The reason that I chose to discuss Saudek and Gordin in the context of the working environment is because they both had very limited creative freedom living under communist governments. Saudek worked for most of his life inside a little cellar, placing all of his subjects either on the floor in front of the same window or in front of the same wall. Gordin had to immigrate to the United States to find the freedom to express himself fully. Jan Saudek worked in constant fear and never fully gained the respect of his own country as an artist. Both lived in countries where no form of free artistic expression was tolerated and yet continuing to create works of art. Their creativity could not be stifled and they are a

constant inspiration to me. A physical environment does not exist in art. An artist creates in his mind first, not because it is easy or because the physical environment allows it, but because he has to create, under any conditions, under any restrictions, without freedom, without ease, the drive to express is still there. Therefore the working environment of any artist is the creative process, his ideas, his mind and not his physical environment.

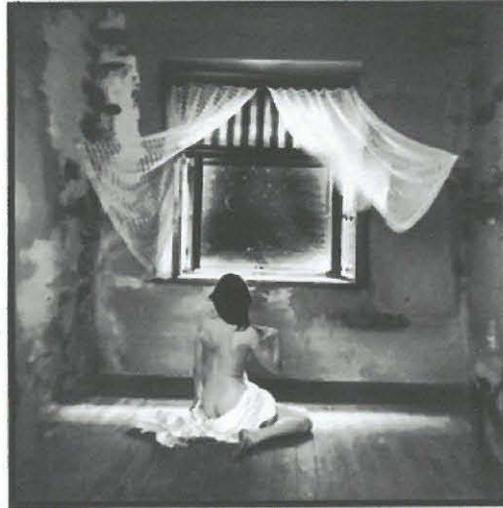


Figure 15; Zuzanka's Night Window by Jan Saudek

(Realities, 2002:17)

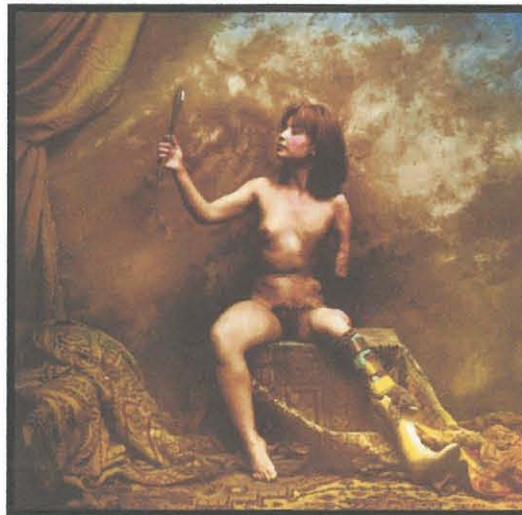


Figure 16; That Pretty Girl I Loved by Jan Saudek

(Realities, 2002:103)

4. CONCLUSION

Most fine art photographers make images for the main purpose of self expression. But these artists still need to make a living. For lack of a better defined working environment in this field one could say that the physical environment is an art gallery, auction house or museum. This is only one aspect of the working environment in this field. The galleries and museums serve as a vehicle for their photographs. Artists can work in this environment in order to make a living; this is not where they create their art. Artists will exhibit their work and try to sell it in order to survive or they might work for these institutions by photographing artworks held at these institutions. Although this is not really what a fine art photographer wants to do, it does help to pay the bills. Although most of these institutions do not hire full time artists, there is still the opportunity to do freelance work. This kind of work would entail taking photographs of other works of art, paintings, sculpture, antiques, etc. This line of work requires the photographer to photograph the artwork the way the artist intended it to be viewed. These photographs might be used in brochures, sales catalogues, exhibition catalogues, coffee table books or for teaching aids. The quality of the photographs will therefore need to be excellent and great care will have to be taken not to damage any of the items being photographed. This kind of work is very similar to that of a still-life advertising photographer. Mostly the photographer is assisted by a gallery manager or curator. Doing this kind of work might put the fine art photographer in the right place at the right time. The photographer might get to travel extensively and have the opportunity to meet the right people. The photographer will be in constant contact with other artists, gallery owners, managers, auctioneers and museum curators. One might be faced with many opportunities to show off a portfolio. This kind of work is the ideal opportunity to promote your own art (Howard, 1989:48).

I maintain that any art is subjective and open to personal interpretation. Since photographers classify their work according to the subject matter they photograph, it is up to each individual to decide whether that work is art or commercial. The artistic content of a photograph is determined by the photographers personal style, imagination and creative ability. Melvin Sokolsky is classified as a fashion photographer and has worked for many well-known magazines. When describing his work he says (Sokolsky, 2004:1): *"I consider my photographs conceptual atmospheres...memories transformed by the camera..."* He does not call himself a fashion photographer, but an artist. Some might consider *"Tutu Paris"* by Sokolsky (Figure 17, page 11) a fashion photograph while others might see it as a fine art photograph. It all depends on personal taste. The only similarity it bears to a fashion photograph is that there is a thin woman in a fashionable dress. This image says more to me; the model is all dressed up and sits waiting at a table, alone. The room is deserted, and she looks lonely. This image has a lot of mood (Sokolsky, 2004:1).

This field is very subjective. If it is so difficult to defiantly define what fine art photography is, then how can one define the environment. The working environment in this field is undefined, not physical and unrestricted. Therefore the working environment is in the mind of the photographer and the artistic quality is determined by the viewer.

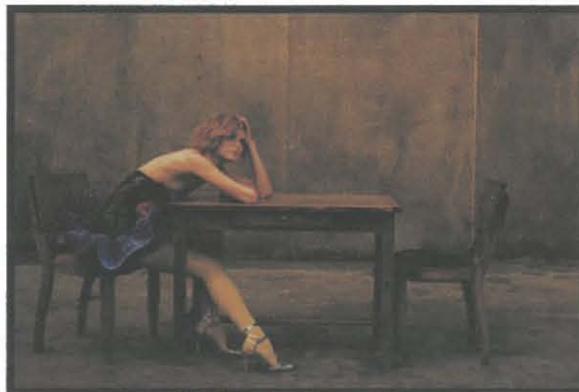


Figure 17; Tutu Paris by Melvin Sokolsky

(http://www.melvinsokolsky.com/192_2-tutu-paris.html)

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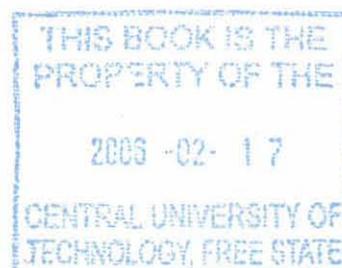


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TECHNIQUES IN FINE ART PHOTOGRAPY

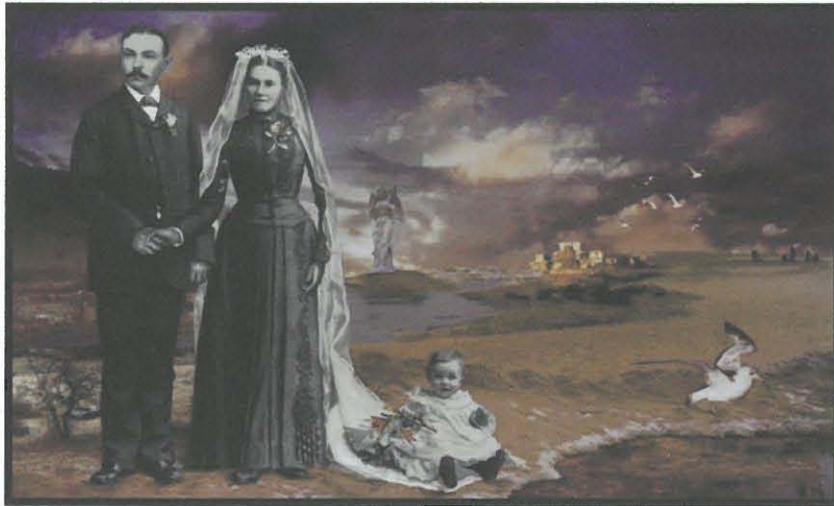


Figure 1; Questioning Nature's Way 1 by Martina Lopez

(http://www.art.uh.edu/dif/lopez/questionNature1_lg.jpg)

By Danica Soldo

An essay submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III

September 2004

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE
SENTRALE UNIVERSITEIT
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22. Figure 22 on page 13: Nude in Window with Bats by Dan Burkholder

1. INTRODUCTION

There are so many possibilities when considering possible techniques to use in fine art photography. Each technique lends a unique appearance and feeling to an image. Since fine art is such an open field of photography, it is difficult to decide on what technique will best compliment a photograph. A creative technique should only be used if it is to enhance the image. Very often techniques are used and have an adverse effect. The first step in selecting a technique is deciding what kind of technique is needed. Then one has to consider what purpose the photograph will serve and who the target audience will be. Who is going to view the image? What are they looking for?

If the image is intended for a more “sophisticated audience” then it is almost imperative that it be creative. In this case it is preferable to use creative techniques such as blur, multiple exposure, grain, lens flare and soft focus as the viewer will appreciate the artistic quality of the techniques. The more educated and sophisticated viewer might know more about photographic art than the less educated viewer with simpler taste. It makes sense that the more one knows about art the more one expects from it. A viewer who has little interest or knowledge about art and aesthetics might not appreciate soft focus or intentional unsharpness and misjudge the image as being out of focus and therefore a bad photograph (Feinger, 1966:43-44).

If an image is intended to be used in a photographic magazine then it is important that it be creative and that it is technically well executed. On the other hand, an image that is intended for a women’s lifestyle magazine does not need to be impressive. Creative techniques might be wasted or unappreciated under these circumstances. The viewer of this magazine might not be interested in photography, but in baking or sewing for example, while the viewer of a photographic magazine is certainly interested in photography. The choice of technique and equipment should always compliment or relate to the image, the subject, the intention of the photograph and the audience (Feinger, 1966:44-45).



Figure 2; Abandoned Fire Engine, Kentucky by Dan Burkholder

(http://www.danburkholder.com/Pages/LargeImagePages/pigment_over_platinum_pages/abandoned_fire_engine_page.html)

According to Andreas Feininger in his book “*The Complete Photographer*” (1966:337-338) photographic techniques can be divided into two sections, namely:

1. **Basic Techniques**
These are techniques that can be taught and mastered. They include exposure, focus, developing and printing. These all follow a certain set of rules.
2. **Selective Techniques**
These are mostly adjustments or alterations of the basic techniques. These involve the choices the photographer has to make involving types of cameras, films, lenses, filters, creative techniques, etc.

With the fine art photography of today having so few limitations and restrictions, it is possible to create nearly anything that one desires. Certain techniques such as blur, solarization, reticulation and bas relief were once considered to be trendy or erroneous but are now practiced by some of the most talented and creative photographers in the field of fine art. This goes to show how far this art form has come since the days of Edward Steichen and Alfred Steiglitz. Photography has evolved into a major force in the modern art world. Photographers have earned the freedom to express themselves using any technique, method or subject matter they desire (Feininger, 1966:12).

The question that has plagued me for so long is, does any photograph altered by a creative technique constitute art? I have thought long and hard about this question and have come to realise that any photograph that is artistic in content and that expresses some form of emotion, belief or opinion, in my mind, constitutes art. The images “*Abandoned Fire Engine*” (Figure 2, Page 2) and “*Tree and Fence*” (Figure 3, Page 3) do not have any emotional content but are still artistic in that they are visually stimulating and make use of creative techniques. I would consider them fine art photographs. Whether the images are intended to be visually stimulating by using creative techniques or whether they are intended to be spiritually or emotionally stimulating they remain artistic.



Figure 3; Tree and Fence, Louisiana by Dan Burkholder

(http://www.danburkholder.com/Pages/LargeImagePages/pigment_over_platinum_pages/tree_and_fence_la.html)

2. CAMERA TECHNIQUES AND INFRARED FILM

There are endless varieties of techniques that can be achieved with a camera. The important thing is how the techniques are executed. I believe that a bad photograph, no matter what technique is applied, remains a bad photograph.

The Pinhole Camera

This is one of the simplest forms of photography still used today. By no means is it simple in use, but simple in that it is basic. This method makes use of the bare essentials needed to produce a photograph. With technology constantly improving at an increasing rate it is understandable that photographers have forgotten how photography started. This camera is made by using a light proof box. A pin hole is made on one side of the box in order to let light through to expose the film inside. There is no lens. There is very limited, if any, control over the process. It is not possible to precisely predict the outcome of the photograph. By using such simple means to create an image and by avoiding the use of technology the results may be inconsistent. Lengthy exposures are needed to create these images and therefore the images might be out of focus or contain large amounts of movement. On the other hand some parts of the scene may be missing or even abstracted (Wilson, 2004:1).

The images created using this technique are often difficult to identify as they have a distant, surreal appearance. This method shows the world in a different light, almost callously. It confronts the ordinary conventional way of seeing things by showing them in a faraway, dreamy manner. This type of technique lends perfectly to surreal images (Wilson, 2004:1).

Double or Multiple Exposure

This occurs when a negative is exposed to more than one image on a single frame. Once an image is taken instead of forwarding the film, another image is taken in the same frame. Because the same frame has been exposed to additional light from the second exposure the second image will have a ghostly appearance. This is the ideal way to merge two or more unconnected images into one eerie photograph. This technique is often used in surreal photography because it has a dreamy, distant appearance (Wilson, 2004:2).

Painting with Light

This technique does not have to represent subject matter realistically; in fact, I find that this technique is lost when it shows subjects naturally. To view something in the darkness invokes a sense of wonder, of fear, of some sort of emotion (Polaroid, 2004:1).

There are so many sources that can be used to achieve this effect. The most common among them are torches, car lights, candles or lighters and streetlights. The results are always better when a slow film is used. This process is done by lighting your subject with alternative light sources. It results in strange lighting effects and, depending on what type of light source you use, strange colours. A steady tripod and cable release are necessities because of the long exposure times. For creative use of this technique, coloured filters can be used over the light source or the lens. Blur and movement or freezing movement also add to the creativity of this technique (Polaroid, 2003:2).

Some professional photographers make use of costly lighting equipment in their studios to produce creative still life images (Frost, 2003:12-13). Other, more daring photographers use more accessible light sources and work outside. I personally prefer this approach. This technique requires a lot of patience and is subject to trial and error. Figure 4 on page 4 is an example of the creative use of this technique.



Figure 4; Light Painting 2 by Sheila Malone

(www.sheilamalone.com/photography/light_paint.jpg)

De-focusing for Effect

This effect works best when used with familiar, bold subjects photographed in front of light backgrounds. Once the subject is in focus, slowly de-focus by turning the focus ring until the image is still recognisable, but blurry. This technique is not effective if it is not executed properly. If the viewer cannot make out what the subject is without too much thought or if it is just a big blur of colours, then it is unsuccessful. The best subjects for this technique are people. People are easily identifiable even if they are severely distorted or blurred. De-focusing can produce distorted views of the human body, making subjects appear taller or shorter. This technique also reduces detail and therefore subject's faces may not be visible. These make mystifying images (Frost, 2003:52). The image "*Blurred Guardsmen*" (Figure 5, Page 4) is a classic example of the use of bold subjects to successfully execute this technique. A Nikon F90X handheld was used with an 80-200mm zoom lens at 200mm to make this image. It was shot on Fuji Velvia film at 1/250sec at F/2.8 (Frost, 2003:53).

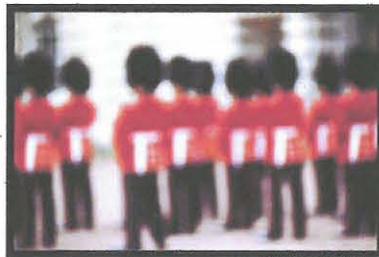


Figure 5; Blurred Guardsmen by Lee Frost

(*The Creative Photography Handbook*, 2003: 52)

Filters

Filters are translucent devices used in front of a camera lens in order to transmit light selectively with respect to colour, wave motion or amount. This is done to affect the film in a predetermined way. Filters should only be used for technical purposes and only to enhance a scene. They are so often misused. Not every photograph needs a filter to improve it, although if not used when necessary, the final image could suffer severely (Frost, 2002:6-9). Filters are used in all fields of photography, not only in fine art. They help to control contrast and to improve colours. Polarizing filters could help to darken a sky or to cut out haze for example. "*Wicken Fen*" (Figure 6, Page 5) is a good example of how a polarizer can enhance a scene. In both colour and black and white photography polarizer filters can reduce unwanted reflections (Frost, 2002:21-32).

There are so many effects that can be achieved by using filters, and they provide a good source of creative quality to many photographs if used properly. A good knowledge of filters is required in order to use them to their full advantage. Most filters affect colour and black and white film differently with a few exceptions, namely UV and polarizer filters. Filters can be used to eliminate colour casts or to add colour to a scene. “*Stonehenge*” (Figure 7, Page 5) was taken using an 80A filter to add its own to a significant dusk image. The deep blues add to the mystery of this well known site. This image is far more affective than other images of the same subject taken in natural lighting conditions. Before choosing a filter system one should first be sure of what effect one wishes to achieve. Without the correct knowledge about filters and their effects a good image cannot be created (Frost, 2002:66).



Figure 6; Wicken Fen by Lee Frost

(The Photographer’s Guide to Filters, 2002: 21)

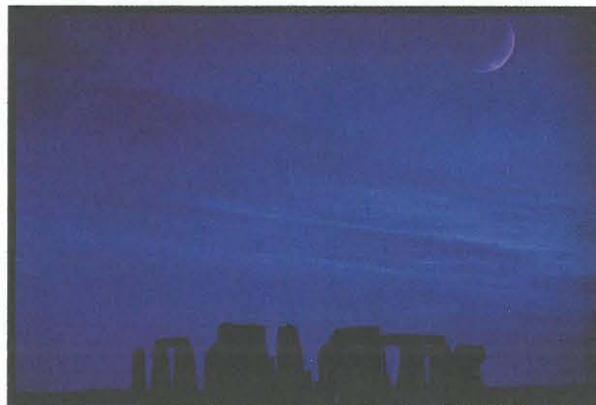


Figure 7; Stonehenge by Simon Stafford

(The Photographer’s Guide to Filters, 2002: 66)

Infrared Film

Infrared light is not visible to the naked eye although it can be captured onto special film. This is called infrared film and it has many odd features and creates out of the ordinary images. The reason that infrared light is invisible to the human eye is because it falls out of the visible spectrum which is only a part of a bigger electro magnetic spectrum. This spectrum consists of a range of wavelengths (measured in nanometres) of which violet is the shortest and red the longest, and infrared is even longer than the red wavelength, therefore we cannot see it. Visible light is between 400nm and 700nm while infrared is between 700nm and 0.1mm. By using infrared film we are able to capture this light since infrared gives off heat/energy. This film is treated with dyes which are sensitive to these heat waves.

This film was originally created for scientific purposes but has since become an ideal way to create surreal images. Since these films are also sensitive to normal light they need to be shielded against it by using filters. The best results are achieved with a special infrared filter which is intensely dark. Most of these films have to be loaded into the camera in a darkroom or in a changing bag, while some only require restrained light (Bargh, 2004:1).

The best subjects for this technique are grass, leaves, skies, gravestones, dilapidated buildings, and people. People produce a peculiar effect, where eyes appear black and veins might appear over the skin, not under it. Skin appears white as snow. All of these subjects will produce a dramatic, almost sinister effect (Bargh, 2004:2). The image below (Figure 8, Page 6) is one of the most alluring infrared images I have seen. It is eerie and there is little detail. It is a frightening image, but I like images like this one.



Figure 8; Example of Infrared by Simon Marsden

(<http://www.ephotozine.com/techniques/viewtechnique.cfm?recid=183>)

3. DARKROOM AND PROCESSING TECHNIQUES

There are too many darkroom techniques to discuss in detail. I have decided to discuss only the ones that I find produce the most interesting results.

Solarization

This technique was supposedly discovered in 1857. The original inventor is speculative, but there were two photographers who rediscovered this technique between 1929 and 1930 and gave it a new face. They were Man Ray and Lee Miller. Man Ray learnt how to control the effect, and soon became the master of solarization as seen in "*Nude, 1929*" and "*Solarized Self Portrait*" (Figure 9 & 10, Page 7). This image was executed with the utmost control. It is almost as if the image turned out exactly as he intended it to (Wilson, 1997:5-8).

This technique involves making an image where the tones are reversed. This means that parts of the positive appear negative and vice versa. This is done while making the print in the darkroom. There will be no white tone in the image. After normal development has taken place the image is then exposed to light and returned into the developer for an additional time. The print is then put into a stop bath and then into a fixer. The extent of the effect depends on the amount, type and distance of light it receives. The results can range from almost no difference from a normal print to total reversal (Wilson, 1997:1).

As with most artistic techniques, solarization is not meant to show subjects realistically. It is used for artistic appeal. High contrast subjects that contain little detail work best for this technique. It can be used in colour and black and white printing (Wilson, 1997:5-12).



Figure 9; *Nude, 1929* by Man Ray



Figure 10; *Solarized Self Portrait* by Man Ray

(<http://www.cchem.berkeley.edu/%7Ewljeme/Chapt3.html>) (<http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/images/1/05320301.jpg>)

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Reticulation

Reticulation is a deformation of the emulsion layer of a film. It results in a very fine and irregular pattern forming across the entire negative area. This happens when a film experiences an extreme temperature change, for example, when it is transferred from a warm solution to a cold one or vice versa. The gelatine swells up and then expands or contracts which will result in grain clusters. It is very difficult to obtain this effect with the technologically advanced film of our time. The reason for this is that reticulation was considered a fault with the emulsion of film so makers of film have done everything possible to fix this "problem". Although there are a few older types of film that still use softer emulsions, like Adox Efke, it is very difficult, if at all possible, to obtain these films. Most modern films have a harder emulsion which also reduces scratching (Bargh, 2004:1) Figure 11 on page 8 is an example of reticulation.



Figure 11; Example of Reticulation by Peter Bargh

(<http://www.ephotozine.com/techniques/viewtechnique.cfm?recid=72>)

Uneven Development

This technique will certainly add to the artistic quality of a photograph. This is a technique that many photographers might have come across accidentally while developing their film. This technique more often than not achieved by accident or error during development of the print. Because of its erroneous nature, most photographers would consider it a mistake to purposely use this technique. This does not have to be the case. It produces very dramatic effects. It is one of the easiest of the darkroom techniques and is perfect for enhancing the creative quality of an image. It occurs when the print is put into the developer and then not agitated enough. This effect can be achieved in a number of different methods. The first is by dripping the developer onto the paper after it has been exposed under the enlarger. If concentrated developer solution is used then the process will take less time. Since the image is not put into the developer tray it is necessary to reapply the developer to the chosen areas a few times so that those areas can be fully developed. The solution can be applied by using a spray can, paint brush or sponge. After this, the image can be put into the stop bath and then rinsed as normal (Powell, 2004:1-2). Figures 12, 13 & 14 on page 9 are examples of this technique and the variety of effects that can be achieved.

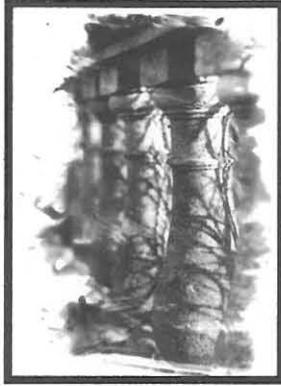


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Examples of Uneven Development by Heather Powell

(<http://www.ephotozine.com/techniques/viewtechnique.cfm?recid=182>)

The image “*Doubt 9*” (Figure 16, Page 10) was created in a traditional darkroom by way of combination printing. It is an extremely difficult technique to be executed flawlessly. Very few photographers can master this as well as Misha Gordin can. The technique involves placing two or more negatives together and making one print. It requires extreme precision in order to be truly effective (Gordin, 2004:1).

The photogram “*Rayograph*” (Figure 15, Page 9) is an example of another darkroom technique that can be used for creative effect. This technique doesn’t make use of a camera at all. It involves placing objects on to light sensitive paper and then exposing it under an enlarger. It is imperative to have a good idea about what the desired effect should be before any attempts are made. On the other hand, many ideas are thought of at the spur of the moment and this is when some of the most amazing images are made. The fact remains that even if all the camera techniques are mastered, the creativity of the photographer is still what defines the image. The choice of technique is heavily influenced by the personality and style of the photographer, as well as the ability to execute the technique effectively.



Figure 15; Rayograph by Man Ray

(<http://www.cchem.berkeley.edu/%7Ewljeme/Chapt3.html>)

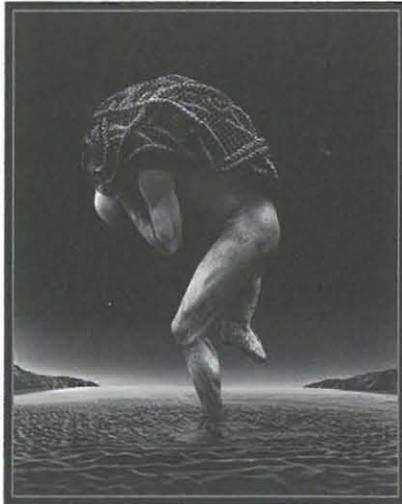


Figure 16; Doubt 9 by Misha Gordin

(<http://bsimple.com/doubt9.htm>)

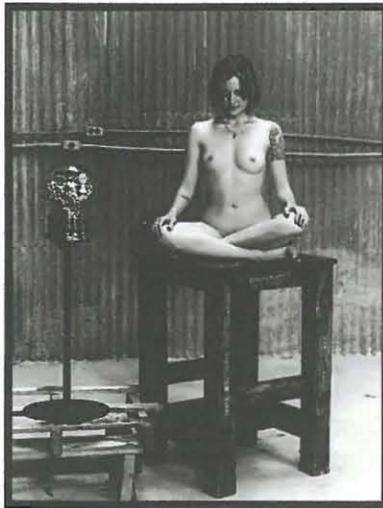


Figure 17; Bubblegum by Richard Prehen

(<http://www.aros.net/~zxorb/w-7.htm>)

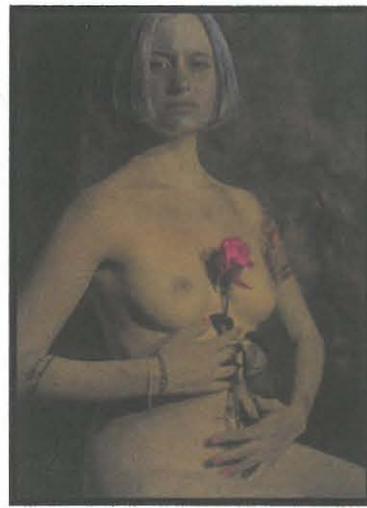


Figure 18; Mask by Richard Prehen

(<http://www.aros.net/~zxorb/d8.htm>)

4. ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES

With technology improving at an alarming rate, nearly anything is possible. There are so many techniques that require skill in their execution and digital techniques are no different. Contrary to popular opinion, not just anyone can create a good digitally enhanced image. The digital age may well have made photography more accessible to the non-photographer but that does not mean that anyone can create an outstanding work of art. With the invention of Photoshop and other similar “digital darkrooms” one must wonder if there is any future for analogue printmaking. I believe the answer is yes. Fine art photographers will always experiment with different techniques; they will always try new things, and try to improve old methods. Even if an image is created or altered in a “digital darkroom” it still requires skill, practice and creativity on the photographer’s part. After all, the method of making a photograph should not matter; it is the artistic quality, the meaning and the execution of the image that is important (Worobiec & Spence, 1999:118-133).

Hand Colouring

This technique was perfected and face-lifted by Jan Saudek. It involves using photographic oils or dyes to paint over black and white photographs. I personally feel that it has been butchered by the commercial market over the last two decades. The innocent beauty that Saudek so perfectly portrayed in his work have regressed to pictures of little grey child couples sitting on sepia toned suitcases holding red roses. This technique is possible in both traditional form or in digital form. Some people believe that this technique has lost its appeal over time. I believe that the reason for this is that it is an extremely difficult technique to execute manually. Even so, there are still photographers that make use of this technique today (Brandt, 2001:1-2).

One of these photographers is Richard Prehn. He makes interesting and provocative hand coloured images like “*Mask*” (Figure 18, Page 10) while also making some traditional black and white analogue print nudes like “*Bubblegum*” (Figures 17, Page 10). Some of his work resembles the work of Jan Saudek, but it is special in that not all of his work is the same, in fact it is quite varied. All his works are filled with emotion. One can tell that his work is intensely personal. What makes his work so interesting is that much of it takes on a photomontage appearance and it looks like it has been digitally executed, while it has actually been hand painted. His use of symbolic colours helps convey his feelings successfully. The images “*Love Circuit*” and “*Purist*” (Figures 19 & 20, Page 11) are two of his more “traditional” hand painted images, while “*Motherboard*” (Figure 21, Page 12) leans more to the photomontage side of his work (Daugovish, 2004:1-2).



Figure 19; Love Circuit by Richard Prehn

(<http://www.aros.net/~zxorb/b-w1.htm>)



Figure 20; Purist by Richard Prehn

(<http://www.aros.net/~zxorb/b-w4.htm>)

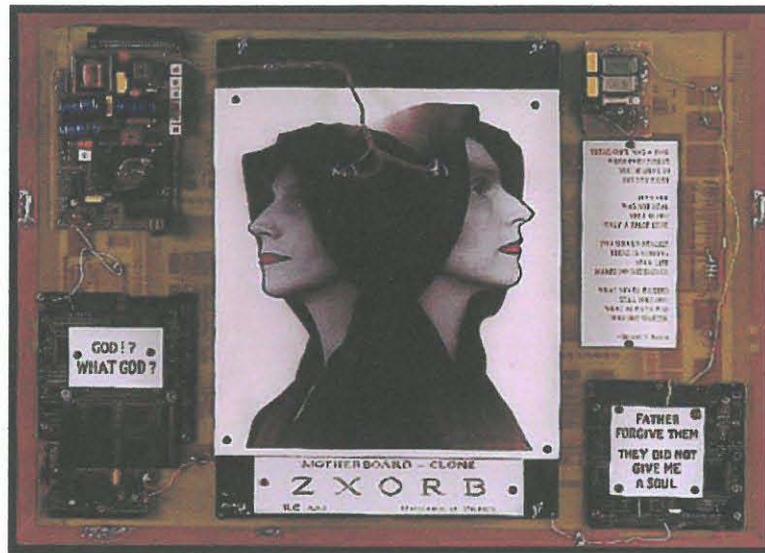


Figure 21; Motherboard by Richard Prehn

(<http://www.aros.net/~zxorb/b-w4.htm>)

Prehn's work has been described by art critic E.T. Nada (2004:2) as: "*Strikingly intense and pure; disturbingly real and surreal; strangely familiar yet mysteriously alien. Richard Prehn's work is a continuous blending of life's contradictions. His images defy conventional definition, for the boundaries between art and photography magically merge and dissolve into one another.*"

Digital Manipulation

One of the first professional photographers to welcome digital photography was Dan Burkholder. Some time around 1990, Burkholder began making digital images that appeared to be "real photographs". His philosophy was to avoid the appearance of graphic designs. His technique is a combination of wet and digital darkroom printing. In fact, in 1992 he invented the digital-negative process and published an award-winning book on the subject. His technique is the pigment over platinum print method, which is in essence a combination of, as he puts it, "*hand-coated platinum/palladium print with digitally applied archival color pigments*" (2004:1). "*Nude in Window with Bats*" (Figure 19, Page 13) is an example of this technique.

There are countless digital techniques that can be applied for creative visual effect in a photograph. The image "*Questioning Nature's Way I*" (Figure 1, on cover page) by Martina Lopez is only one example of how well digital manipulation can work. This is one of my favourite photos. Most of her work is made by using old family photographs and then superimposing them into landscape photographs that she has taken. This is a technique that I make use of quite regularly. The results are breathtaking, as they are not meant to look realistic, but surreal. She has used her personal experiences and memories to create images that express a part of her soul. These images communicate with the emotions and inner soul of the viewer as well by reminding them of their own personal family situations. I find her work most successful in expressing emotion as well as visual beauty and creativity (Lopez, 2004:1).

5. CONCLUSION

There have been so many inventions and technological changes over the last few decades that it is almost impossible to discuss all the possibilities available in photography. Fine art photography is an especially open field and therefore it would be ill-advised to try and limit the techniques that one could use in this field. In my opinion, artistic content does not only come from the visual aspects of an image, but also from its meaning and symbolism.

Since its inception, photography has seen a number of improvements and these have opened many doors for the fine art photographer. Many of the original techniques such as the gum bichromate, the cyanotype process and salt printing have faded out over the years. Some photographers still use these techniques today but mostly because they are inquisitive. Modern variations of these processes are few and far between. They are being replaced by quicker and more accessible methods (Worobiec & Spence, 1999:96-97).

In essence, photography is an objective medium. The camera records what is in front of it and the rest is up to the photographer. It is the photographer's contribution that gives photographs subjectivity. There are so many tools at the disposal of the fine art photographer to facilitate expressing thoughts, beliefs and emotions. The trick to fine art photography is learning how to use these tools to their full advantage and how to think creatively in order to make images that stand out from the crowd and that say something worthwhile (Worobiec & Spence, 1999:5).

Photographer Bill Brandt said (Worobiec & Spence, 1999:5) that: *"No amount of toying with shades of print or with printing papers will transform a commonplace photograph into anything other than a commonplace photograph."* I believe that these words are far more relevant today than they were at the time when they were spoken.



Figure 22; Nude in Window with Bats by Dan Burkholder

(http://www.danburkholder.com/Pages/LargeImagePages/pigment_over_platinum_pages/tree_and_fence_la.html)

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DISCUSSION OF OWN PORTFOLIO



Figure 10; Innocence on Trial by Danica Soldo

By Danica Soldo

An essay submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III

October 2004

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE
SENTRALE UNIVERSITEIT
VIR TEGNOLOGIE, VRYSTAAT

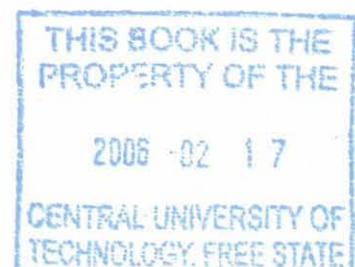
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1. INTRODUCTION

As a photographer specialising in the field of fine art, it is difficult to find a specific type of art to specialise in. There are so many types of photography that could possibly fall into the fine art category that it is very difficult to decide which type to specialise in. There is nude photography, decorative photography and digital manipulation just to name a few. There are some fine art photographers who only make use of techniques such as Polaroid transfer, Bas Relief and Solarisation for example. With this field being so undefined and unrestricted, there are endless types of photography that one could specialise in. In this essay I will be discussing my own portfolio.

I believe that a portfolio should do two things:

1. Show variety
The portfolio should show that the photographer is capable in more than one field / type of photography. The portfolio should show diversity.
2. Show Specialisation
The portfolio should also show which field the photographer excels in. These prints should constitute the majority of the portfolio.

There are a few prints in my portfolio that are more straight-forward fine art images, while the majority of my prints are surreal digital montages. In making my choice of specialisation within this field I considered the following questions:

1. What type of fine art do I find the most rewarding?
2. What type of fine art do I excel at making?
3. Is visual beauty more important than emotional / personal expression?
4. Do I want to make commercial art or fine art?

I concluded that surreal digital montage was by far my favourite type of fine art photography. It allows me to express my feelings, ideas, beliefs and fears. It allows me to make images that evoke feeling, which is, to my mind, far more important than visual beauty. I also decided that I would much rather practice fine art photography than merely making commercial decorative art. Visually, this type of photography can be beautiful, ugly, scary or inviting. I can create a fantasy or a reality. This field is very open and unrestricted therefore there are very few rules and I have full creative freedom. I find that I excel in this type of art and the freedom it affords me is very rewarding. I will be discussing ten of my fine art portfolio prints in detail in this essay.

2. FINE ART PRINTS

The Face / The Look (Figure 1, page 2)

This is a more straight-forward fine art image. I don't really know what one would categorise it as, maybe a creative portrait or a fine art fashion photograph. I personally like this image because of the mood that it gives. The model has a sort of sad and serious expressive face. I was inspired to take this image by two different sources. The first being a song called "Round here" by Counting Crows (August and Everything After, Audio CD. 1993) and the second being the modern version of the film Titus, based on a Shakespearian play (Film. 1999). In the movie there is a scene where a woman is in a forest with sticks stuck into her arms as fingers and hands. It gives a cold feeling, one of loneliness and desperation. The song seems to fit this scene in the movie perfectly. The song speaks of a girl that is misunderstood and alone. This girl is in search of something, even though she might not know what it is.

I took this image with the intention of a high contrast end product, with mostly strong shades of black and white, with little grey shades in-between. I used black and white Kodak 100TMX film and shot in bright sunlight at about eleven in the morning with a 35mm camera. The shadows on the girl's face add so much mood and aid in making this an interesting and eye-catching image. The negative was saved onto C.D and the brightness and contrast were edited in Photoshop. No burning in or holding back was necessary. The negatives were very dark, resulting in a light, almost ghost like print. The tight cropping and the shallow depth of field are intended to focus the attention of the viewer onto the girl's face and specifically on her expression. I don't think this image would have worked as well with a different model.



Figure 1; The Face / The Look by Danica Soldo

Ransom (Figure 2, page 3)

This is a basic nude photograph. It is not intended to be a nude study or a study of the shape or form of the body. It is a straight-forward nude. In this image the model has been lying down on a bed and is arising slowly, almost with difficulty. There is a religious undertone with the crucifixes and candles stuck above the headboard. The harsh lighting resembles a spotlight being shone onto a suspect. The symbolism of this is that we are all suspect of something. We are all, at some point in our lives, accused or judged for something. The model has a thin and bony build which makes him appear sickly. God watches him from the headboard and he hides his face away. There is a sombre mood to this image.

This image was taken in black and white with a digital camera and the brightness and contrast were adjusted in Photoshop. Since the image was shot indoors I needed artificial lighting. I didn't want to open the curtains as I felt that too much sunlight would ruin the atmosphere of the image. I wanted a dark setting with a harsh front light. For this I used a 60W desk lamp, which I placed on a box under the camera. I made use of a tripod for this image and set the digital camera on the timer setting as to avoid movement. I feel that the natural setting of the bedroom provided far more feeling and atmosphere than a studio setting would have.

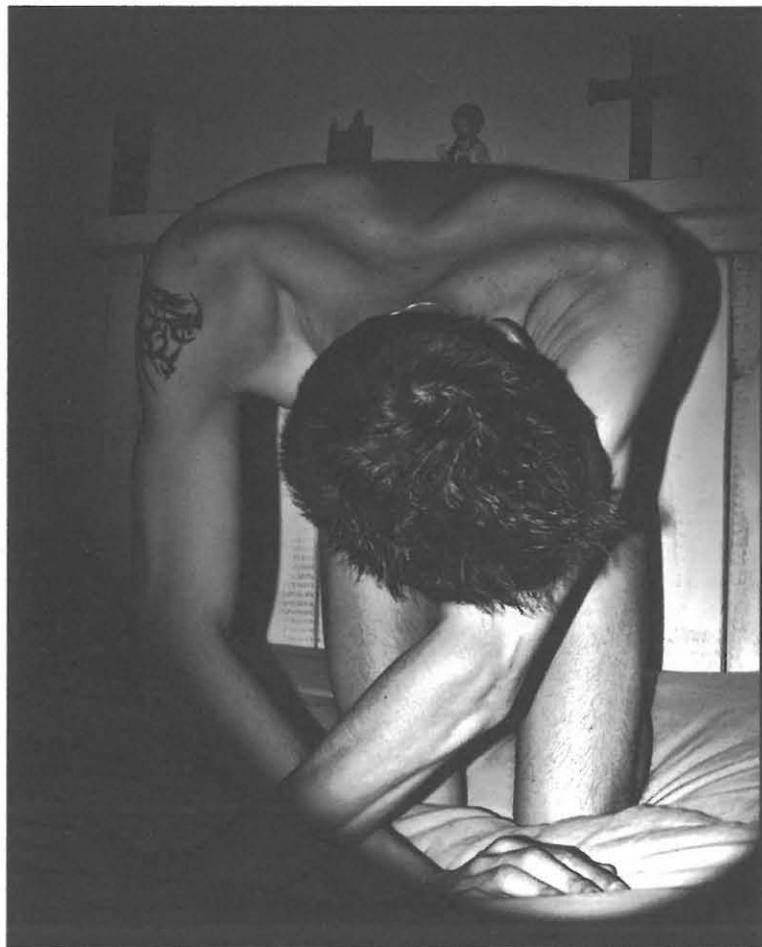


Figure 2; Ransom by Danica Soldo

Sinner (Figure 3, page 4)

The model in this image is my cousin, Katarina, who requested that I take a creative picture of her that shows part of her personality. Even though she is a Croatian citizen, she lives in Switzerland and has visited South African on many occasions. She has a great love of this country and its culture. This is why I opted to photograph her in a scarf wrapped around her head in the traditional manner and an African beaded necklace. This image was taken in her bedroom in Aarau, Switzerland when I visited her for at the beginning of the year.

This image was taken in a studio setting using a 35mm camera, tripod and shutter release cable. It was taken in an almost completely dark room against a black background. It was shot using Ilford HP5 plus film at f5.6. I selected this f-stop in order to get shallow depth of field. The camera to subject distance was quite short. I placed the camera as close to the models hand as possible to aid the shallow depth of field. I wanted to focus on the hand holding the cigarette instead of having the whole person in focus. The light source used was a standard 60W desk lamp which was positioned slightly to the left of the model instead of in the middle.

This image is a straight print and no digital manipulation was used. The shadows on the hand and wrist together with the distant blur of the face make for an interesting image. The intention was for the viewer to pay attention to the subtle details of this creative portrait.



Figure 3; Sinner by Danica Soldo

The Thrill of Sadness (Figure 4, page 5)

This image is not as basic as the other images discussed in this section of the essay as it has been digitally manipulated quite intensely, but it is a single image, not a montage. This image is an expression of sadness caused by being beautiful. This pretty girl thinks she is above all the less attractive people around her and therefore never finds someone to get close to. The tears of blood symbolise a great pain that manifests inside and eventually flows out. The girl in this photograph is clutching at her shoulder and has blood streaming from her head down onto her face. This blood symbolises pain within the mind while the blood from the eyes symbolises pain from within the soul. This pain is caused by great sadness that comes from being beautiful and knowing just how beautiful you are. This image is intended to show that beauty is skin deep. This girl spends so much time working on how she looks outside that her insides fall apart. This blood will eventually stain her skin and ruin her beautiful face forever. The dust and vein-like marks on the photograph make it look like it is cracked. This complements the shape of the blood falling from her head. The image is tightly cropped in order to make the viewer feel close to the subject. This cropping makes the image appear to jump out at the viewer. In this image I am trying to express the opinion that what lies inside a person is more important than the superficial things that lie outside. The physical imperfections can be altered or hidden, but the imperfections in personality and character eventually surface, no matter how well they are concealed.

The image was taken using a 35mm camera on Fuji 100 ISO colour film. This image was created by scanning a slightly out of focus negative at a low resolution. I wanted the picture to appear slightly pixilated, almost vague. I edited this image in Photoshop by adjusting the brightness and contrast and using the paintbrush tool to paint in the blood on the head and face. I used a high contrast in this image to bring out the cracks in the wall and burnt in over the edges of the image to add to the pixilated appearance. I wanted a messy, unclear image. I did not want the image to be crisp with well defined detail. The bottom of the image has a blue glow to symbolise sadness while the white light appears as a halo around the girls head. This, along with the brightness of the yellow shirt, was achieved by putting an unsharp mask filter over the whole image. This filter is great for making an image messy as it highlights certain flaws in the skin. It makes veins and blemishes on the skin appear darker for example and it gives very high contrast. I deliberately avoided cleaning the scanner or the negative when it was scanned, in order to get dust marks and hairs on the image. This image took about four days to complete.

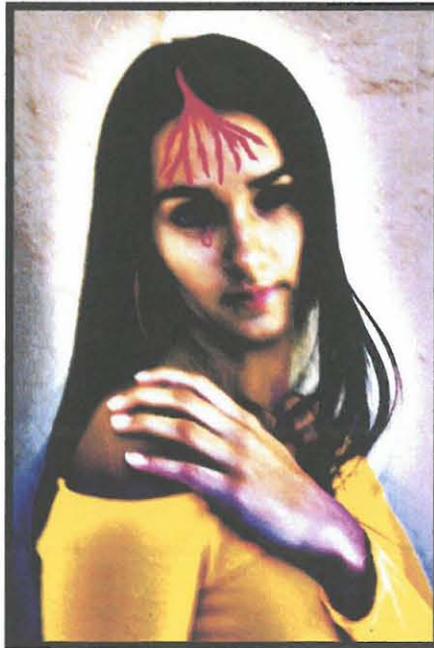


Figure 4; The Thrill of Sadness by Danica Soldo

3. SURREAL DIGITAL MONTAGE PRINTS

These images were all created in more or less the same manner. The selected images are scanned into Photoshop, sized and then blended together. The intention is for the images to be surrealistic. I do not want them to appear real therefore I do not correct the sizes and proportions of the different elements. The idea is to make the image appear like a dream or an alternate reality. While many of the elements might be realistic things or people, they are obscured by their size or position in the image for example. Instead of explaining each tool used in each photograph, I think it is better only to highlight which tools and effects I have used overall.

After selecting the images needed, the desired section of the image is selected using the magnetic lasso tool, feathered, cut and pasted onto the background. Then they are sized, distorted or rotated. Then the colour is adjusted using the greyscale or RGB selection, brightness and contrast tool and hue and saturation tool. I often make use of the blur, smudge, eraser, burn, dodge, crop and paintbrush tools. I work in different layers and save all my images as Photoshop images in order to keep all the layers intact in case I want to make changes later. I save a flattened version of each completed image as a JPEG image too. I scan all of my images either at a high resolution or as a large image size with a lower resolution. This is in order to maintain picture quality when making enlargements. I make use of the unsharp mask filter, the lighting effects filter and the blur filter quite often. This is the basic procedure that I use for all my montages as I feel it is the most effective and efficient way of making a montage.

You Should Have Stayed for the Sunset, If Not for Me (Figure 5, page 7)

This image was inspired by a piece of text that appears inside a Pearl Jam C.D inlay. The album *Vitalogy* contains the following verse (Vedder, 1994:26):

*“I waited all day.
you waited all day..
but you left before sunset...
and I just wanted to tell you
the moment was beautiful.
just wanted to dance to bad music
drive bad cars..
watch bad TV..
should have stayed for the sunset...
if not for me.”*

The image shows a little girl holding a melting sunflower. Her mother’s face appears to be melting or fading away into the wall in the background. The picture shows the inside of a deserted child’s dining room. The little girl appears to be elevated above the ground and the blur around her head suggests that she is floating. Her mother’s face blends into the bricks of the wall, like she isn’t actually there. She is only a ghost, a memory. She has a single tear falling from her eye and a sad expression on her face. A hand stretches out from heaven. The arm contains the verse above written in black pen. This hand is reaching for the mother’s face as if to caress it and lead it upwards. The arm is there to show the mother the way to heaven. The mother appears to her daughter as a ghost to say her final goodbye, and to apologise for leaving her alone in this world. The daughter holds her mother’s favourite flower preparing to let it fall to the ground. The dining room is meant to represent a room where final goodbyes are said, where the dead and the living can meet together for the last time. The dead ascend to heaven while the living will return to earth, to reality. This image is not meant to represent an actual room; it is a symbolic room that appears as a thought or a dream. This image was composed using five different images.



Figure 5; You Should Have Stayed for the Sunset, If Not for Me by Danica Soldo

Suicide Staircase (Figure 6, page 8)

This image is merely a dream image. It was inspired by a conversation I had with a group of friends about ghosts. I personally don't believe in actual ghosts, but many people do. This image is only meant to be a visual representation of different experiences that people say they have had. It shows the ghosts of three different people haunting an old house. All of these people lived in this house at some point in time, and they all died there. The woman ascends the staircase, the blur shows her movement. All of the ghosts appear in this image in the state in which they died. The man that descends the staircase appears to be sneaking downstairs, afraid of what he will find. He is pressed up against the wall and walking downstairs. There is a little boy at the bottom of the stairs, in the left corner of the image with a gun in his mouth. The boy found his father's gun in the desk draw in the study and shot himself while playing with it, the woman was raped and killed after opening the front door for a stranger and the man was strangled by a robber on the staircase after going downstairs to investigate a noise in the kitchen. This image was made using four different negatives.

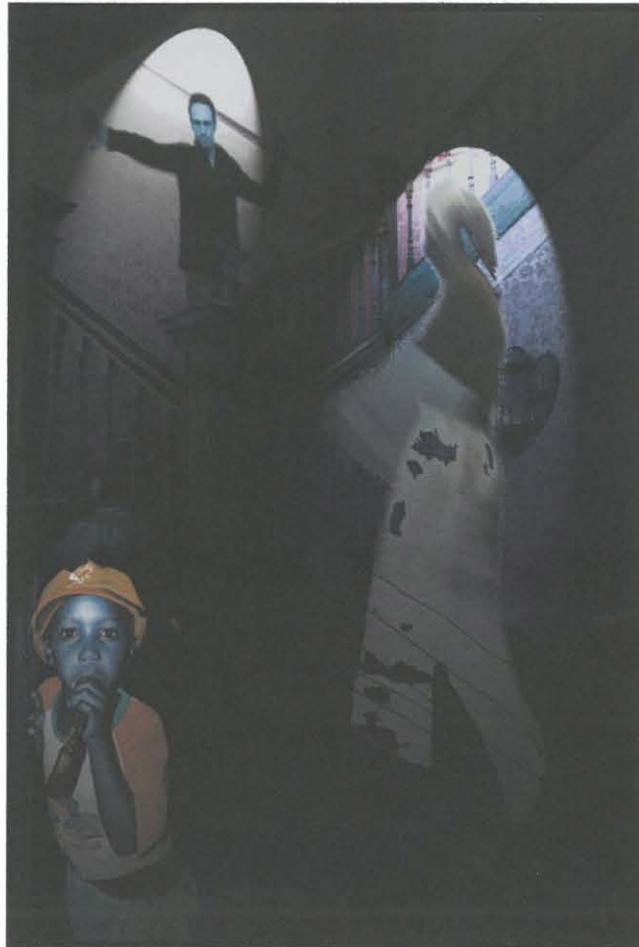


Figure 6; Suicide Staircase by Danica Soldo

Destiny & Freedom (Figure 7 A & 7 B; page 9)

I have done a series of images that visualise my definition of certain words. I used landscapes with other elements placed within these landscapes to represent my ideas of the words meaning. Destiny is represented by the hand of God. God gives us the freedom to make our own decisions. We are able to plan things a certain way and we are only able to control certain things. We may undertake something with the purest intentions but we cannot control other people and certain circumstances. This is represented by the hand of God placing glitter into our hands. We hold it and make our plans for the future, and we blow the glitter in the direction we have chosen, but we cannot see where it will land, we cannot predict the wind that blows. The butterfly represents this freedom of choice which we are given. The hill in the distance represents the unseen future, what is behind the hill remains unknown. We all set out on a path towards this hill with our good intentions but we don't know what our destiny holds for us. This image contains four of my photographs and required scanning in the glitter between two sheets of glass. Freedom is represented by many different elements in this image. Freedom is a sunflower that grows wild in the fields, it is an open piece of land, it is a butterfly, a cloud floating in the sky, a quiet day. The girl's nudity also represents freedom, not in the obvious way of just being naked, but in the spiritual way of being uninhibited, of being oneself. This image was made using three of my photographs and three scanned images of butterflies taken from wrapping paper.

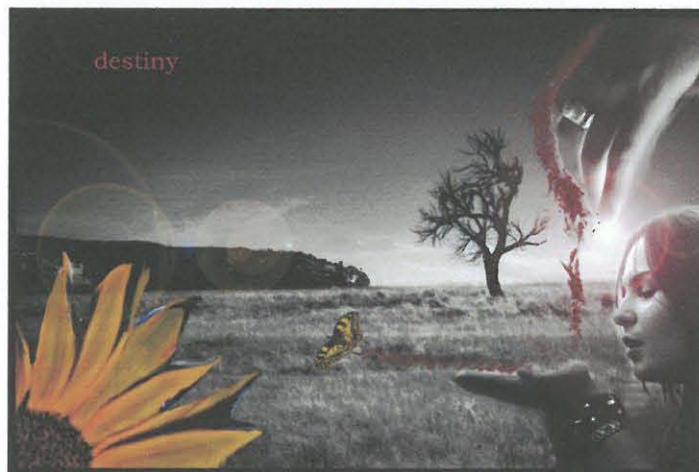


Figure 7 A; Destiny by Danica Soldo



Figure 7 B; Freedom by Danica Soldo

Hollow (Figure 8, page 10)

This image is of the simpler montages that I have done. It only consists of two images. It is a plain black and white landscape taken with a digital camera and the nude girl is simply pasted onto the landscape. This image symbolises a hollow woman. She sits in a landscape surrounded only by her thoughts doing a simple thing like tying up her hair. She is alone but she sits with many versions of herself, not one of which is whole. All of her “clones” are hollow in some way. They are all missing certain pieces of themselves. This is symbolic of a person losing themselves by giving too much of themselves to everyone else. The result is that one becomes hollow. These other people take all the goodness given and give nothing in return. The dripping on the top of the image looks like blood that drips out of the hollow parts, the parts that have been cut out of the girl. She has shared the best parts of herself with other people and they have ripped these things out of her, they have stolen her goodness and she is left hollow, only a shell.

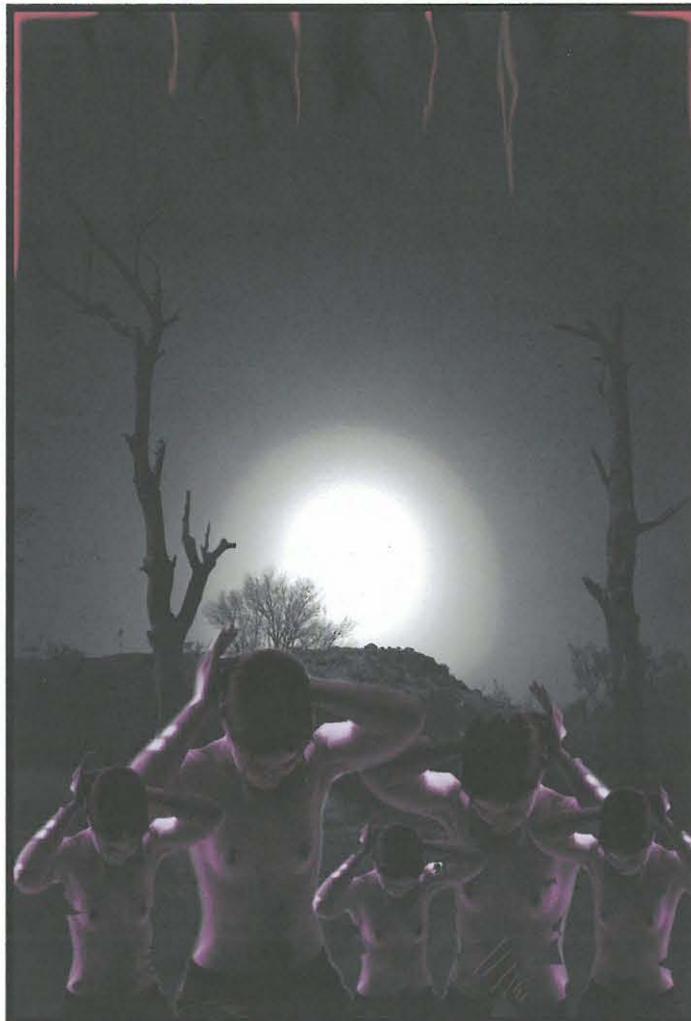


Figure 8; Hollow by Danica Soldo

Superstitious Sunday (Figure 9, page 11)

This image is more for visual effect than for emotional or expressive effect. It is a very basic image which was made using a photograph of a landscape and another image of a woman. The woman appears standing on one leg in a field. Her arm is stretched out as if she is feeling for something and she is looking to the side in the opposite direction. She appears as if she is waiting for something though she doesn't know what it is. I decided to use a high contrast for this image in order to bring out the deep blue of the sky. The grass in the image stands out and looks almost mechanical. The high contrast and the use of the unsharp mask filter give a glow around the edges of the tree and bushes. This image has a kind of eerie feeling. It is a very surreal image. The whole image has a sort of mechanical dream-like quality to it. In fact, the woman looks too stiff to be real; she looks more like a mannequin. This image was inspired by a song by the band Marilyn Manson called "Mechanical Animals" (Mechanical Animals, Audio CD. 1998).

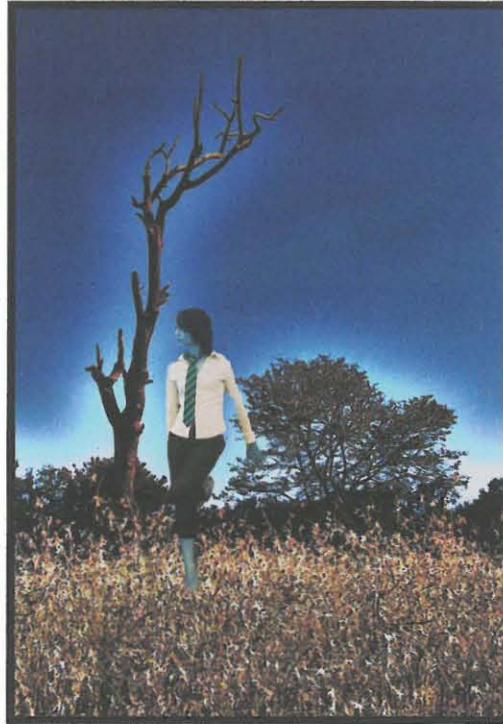


Figure 9; Superstitious Sunday by Danica Soldo

Innocence on Trial (Figure 10, on cover page)

This image is the most complex and also my favourite. It is an expression of innocence and guilt, of sin and goodness. The child sits innocently with her pet dog waving a fairy-princess wand, playfully covering her face. She is innocent, good, pure and unaware of any wrong in this world. She is still so young and small. Across from her lies a man curled up on the floor. He is green and disintegrating into the background. He is a sinner. He is so cold and big. He has done bad things in his life, he has had impure thoughts, he has felt lust, has lied to people who loved him and now he is alone with his stomach pains. He is impure and he is curled up because he is remorseful. The naked woman hides behind a mask. She is naked and she is in a picture frame up on a wall. This wall is outside for the whole world to see. She hides what is inside by showing the world her naked body. She hides her insecurities and her shame by being blatant. She shows the world her marked breasts, with piercings and scars but her eyes are sad. This wall represents a place where people are judged, a place where their innocence in on trial and their sins are laid out for everyone to see. This image contains five separate photographs and the layers were all blended in together to make certain sections appear to be fading away. It was a difficult idea to execute properly and it took about a week to complete.

4. CONCLUSION

After discussing my own portfolio in depth, I feel that it meets, what I consider, the two most important criteria for any portfolio, namely:

1. Shows variety
2. Shows specialisation

I find it so difficult to define what constitutes fine art. Having said that, it is even more difficult to define what constitutes good fine art. Since any art is subject to personal taste it is difficult to determine what the viewer deems good or bad art. This is what helped me in the composition of my portfolio. There is a variety of work, even though much of the work was created in the same way. My portfolio consists of some decorative and visually attractive images as well as some visually less attractive images. It contains some straight-forward prints as well as a large number of my specialised field being surreal digital montage. Some of the images are purely for visual effect, while others are thought provoking and mentally or spiritually stimulating.

The risk in this kind of photography is that because the work is so personal and expressive people might not like it. They might judge you because they don't understand what you are trying to portray in your work or because they don't share the same ideas or beliefs as you. Any art is open to criticism, but when the work is an expression of something personal then a negative response is more hurtful because it is not merely a photograph being criticised, but a piece of your soul. But this risk involves a great reward if the work is looked upon favourably. A bad critique on a personal piece of work hurts, but a good critique on a personal piece of work is very rewarding.

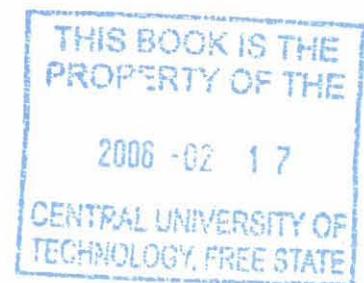
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