

Jottings



Welcome to the latest edition of Jottings

I must first of all apologise for the late posting of this second edition. My excuse – a long holiday in Australia and an appalling computer virus that completely knocked out my ability to communicate via e mail and Word. I had the nightmare situation of 250,000 old e mails that I thought had been permanently deleted continually bouncing back into Outlook Express. It was just like a recurring nightmare. I watched as Word and other programmes disintegrated before my eyes. The only solution was to have everything reinstalled and start again. Fortunately all of my images are on another computer with no internet connection.

One has to ask who are the idiots that send these malicious viruses – what pleasure do these acts of vandalism give them?

Another reason for my tardy efforts to come up with edition 2 of Jottings is my dissatisfaction with the new format. I feel it is neither one thing nor the other. It is no longer a newsletter of the sort I produced for the last few years – nor is it the sort of lively less formal – more intuitive document that I hoped members would contribute to.

Since the first edition was published I have received just one contribution from Peter Mathews. It would therefore seem to me that members are not really interested in participating.

Please do not misunderstand me – I think it was the correct decision to end the publication of the old style newsletter. It was becoming far too expensive to produce.

I no longer feel that I am the right person to carry the concept of an electronic newsletter forward (I do not have the technical skills and I am not sure if we really need one). This therefore will be my last effort.

Perhaps we should admit that we no longer need a newsletter. We have an excellent web site. I hope in the future we still find somewhere and some way to post articles, ideas, opinions and comments and not just news but that is for others to decide.

My thanks to all those who have helped to produce Newsletters in the past and the small but significant number of members who submitted articles for publication.

Colin New Editor.

The President Ron Walker

Well here we all are, over the Christmas hump and all that white stuff seems to have gone. I hope you all managed to stay on your feet and have not given the motor car bodywork industry too much work.

I hope also that you are enjoying the programme we have put together for you. Since taking on this job I have become aware of just how much effort goes in to making things swing and how much it costs to bring in good quality speakers these days, nevertheless, council feel that is exactly what we should be doing.

Now for my rant

Am I right to make a plea for all of us to think hard about whether or not the picture we are submitting for any competition or exhibition is or is not a copy of something we have seen authored by someone else. The cliché can be defined as unoriginal work and in my book should not carry the same value as a fresh approach.

Students of the arts learn by closely examining the work of acknowledged masters and even go as far as outright copies in the case of visual artists, just to see and learn how something was put together. None of them (other than the out and out fakers), would suggest that what they had produced as an exercise had any validity beyond what they had learnt.

In photography things are a bit more complicated because there are so very many images about and in most cases those images are never seen by huge numbers of people in quite the same way that a Mapplethorpe or Adams might be. Nevertheless I certainly see a good many images that I know I have seen numerous times before and frankly they bore the pants off me.

My problem is that club judges do not seem to share my opinion. They must see ten times as many of these tired pastiches as I do, yet they still seem to award them the same regard as original work. Technical prowess is one thing, wonderful and all that (wish I could do it), but it don't do much for the soul. So come on Sheffield if you've seen it before — we don't want to see it again.

Ron Walker

Hugh Milsom

On Saturday 16th January I attended the judging of the Annual Exhibition by Hugh Milsom. I was bitterly disappointed to have missed his lecture on the Friday night but the bad Winter weather made a journey to Greenhill inadvisable. Fortunately it has been my privilege to see and hear Hugh on 5 previous occasions.

The first time I came across Hugh's work was many years ago when Alan Jackson invited him to lecture at Sheffield Photographic Society. At the time Hugh was just beginning to make his way on the national lecture circuit. The fashion at the time was for heavy contrasty monochrome prints – greatly influenced by the East Europeans. Hugh on the other hand was making light high key prints using Infra Red or Technical Pan Film. His pictures were very beautiful. Many just glowed. It was

one particular sequence of pictures of trees in a wood that really made a huge influence on me and my attitude to photography. Although the photographs were of trees I also realised they were about the human condition. These were pictures that were as much about his wife's illness and her struggle to survive as they were about trees in a wood. I realised that the subject matter of photography was often irrelevant – it was the emotion and meaning that the pictures evoked that counted. A brilliant recent lecturer to SPS put it very eloquently “Photograph what you feel and not what you see” – Steve Gosling. I also remember seeing a Don McCullin exhibition where a number of his still life's were shown. I had no idea that a vase of flowers on a shelf could show such sadness and melancholy. They were images as much about war and conflict as his other pictures.

I have followed Hugh's career with much interest and it has been wonderful to see his beautiful images of the Outer Hebrides and his lovely subtle colour pictures of land and coast. So many of his pictures are those you would be proud to own and put on your wall.



Earthsong © Hugh Milsom

His latest self published book is called Mood and Colour ISBN 978-0-9556747-0-9 Also it is well worth having a look at his website.

Colin New

Why Make Prints?

I was recently giving a talk at a Photographic Society and at the end someone asked “Why do you make prints rather than show your work as projected images?”

It is an interesting question and there are many ways I could have answered. First of all in spite of the huge advances with digital projectors and in spite of the convenience of the format – there is a huge difference in quality between the projected image and the print. The subtlety that is present in a good print is often

missing. However, this is not the only reason.

I am not at all satisfied with the necessity to sit in the dark to view images which is needed with both transparency and digital projection. I like my prints to be seen in a lit room – preferably day light but that is not always possible. It just seems more natural to me. I am one of those strange people that prefers to watch films from the comfort of his armchair at home rather than in the darkness of a cinema. No – I am not afraid of the dark and remember I spent many years making prints in my dark room at home. I just prefer looking at images in the light.

But I suppose the main reason is that I regard the photographic print as the final statement about an image. The negative, the transparency and digital file are just half way houses on the journey the photographer is making towards his image. The print – something that can be studied and viewed, framed and put on the wall or held in the hand is to me a much more satisfying end product. It is another reason why I like to make my prints on best quality paper. The photographic print for me needs to feel good in the hand. Of course when the print is mounted and framed behind glass – no one can tell if it is on good or poor quality paper. But I know. I like the photographic print as an object – it is something to be treasured. It is more than a piece of paper with some ink sprayed on to it.

Perhaps this shows something of my darkroom past where the making of a fine print took a very long time with the prolonged sequence of exposing the image, developing, fixing, toning, washing, drying, spotting and mounting. Things are much quicker now – but that does not necessarily mean we are producing higher quality work. There is just more of it. When working in the darkroom the printer was aware that an error at any stage in the process could mean having to go back to the beginning and having to start again. I have ruined many a print at the unpredictable toning stage. Making a digital print does not have as many possible pitfalls.

The time needed to make a fine print ensured I valued them if they turned out to my satisfaction. Yes they were objects to treasure and I have tried to continue with something of the same attitude when working digitally. I guess most young people coming into photography think differently and regard the photographic print as just another disposable object.

Remember the vast majority of photographs are never printed. The flash card is plugged into the computer or television and people view their images on screen. I have to confess only a fraction of the pictures I take are printed. My editing is all done via Lightroom or Photoshop and only a selection of the images are regarded as good enough to print. This was true when I worked with film. I would carefully mark up my contact sheets and only a small number were printed. What has changed is the ratio between exposures and printed images. Because I take more and more pictures nowadays the percentage that makes it to print is very small indeed.

Of course the history of photography is very much related to those small prints of loved ones that people put in their wallets and took with them when they went away – when they went off to war or overseas to find work. There was the thought

that with the photographic images they were taking provided something of the loved one to take with them – it was more than just a likeness. More than a tracing of light on photo sensitive paper. Something of this feeling is for me still there with the print – it is more than just a likeness – it holds and carries something of the original place or person. For some reason I don't get this feeling with a negative or a digital file. It is something that comes when the image is committed to paper.

Of course life would be much easier for me if I only had to carry a cd with my digital files to my talks instead of heavy boxes of prints, lights and a print display unit. Some clubs are very good at helping to fetch and carry but others are not.

I have made many prints over the years and storage is a problem. Where do you put them all? When I die the vast majority will go to the skip. My children will only want a small selection of my work. It would be absurd to keep it all. The prints that have over the years meant so much to me have limited meaning to anyone else. Perhaps I should concentrate on making hand made books to hold my collection – so much more manageable. But then I am not making my work for posterity I am making it for now and I enjoy sharing my pictures with members of photo societies etc. Books are not good for communicating with an audience – although there is nothing quite like cuddling up in a armchair with a book for personal enjoyment.

My response to the member of the audience who said “Why do you make prints?” was therefore “I am a printer – that is what I do. I want my work to be seen at its best and the print the best photography I can do.”

Colin New

Mapplethorpe and Comedians at the Graves

There are presently two excellent photographic exhibitions running at Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield. Please make the effort to attend. We get so few photographic exhibitions in our galleries in Sheffield – it is important that when we are lucky we demonstrate our interest. Having waited so long for some photography in Sheffield – not one but two exhibitions come along at the same time.

The two exhibitions are very different and yet they are very similar. Both are almost entirely monochrome. Both predominantly show portraits. “Comedians” show cases the work of many photographers – many of whom were unknown to me. These are celebrity portraits.

I often feel that the celebrity portrait is one of the easier areas of photography. The public are often satisfied to see a face that they recognise and often don't expect much more. Some of these portraits do attempt to get beneath the surface and show the man behind the mask – the tears behind the face of the clown - but many are just publicity shots and no more. It is still well worth seeing.

Mapplethorpe on the other hand was famed for his homo erotic photography and was often at his best when he was most edgy. Most of the more controversial images are missing from this show – perhaps that it was thought that the good people of Sheffield would be too easily shocked. There is an emphasis on Mapplethorpe's portrait work although I did not recognise many of the celebrities on show. I was particularly impressed with the photographs of Andy Warhol and the self portraits (probably the most difficult of all types of picture making to make convincing.) I would have liked to have seen some of Mapplethorpe's Flowers – he was one of the great flower photographers – but that is not what this exhibition is all about.

Mapplethorpe's print quality was legendry and if you want to see monochrome photography at its technical best do not miss this exhibition.

Colin New



Self Portrait 1985
© Mapplethorpe



Patti Smith 1986
© Mapplethorpe

It has been a funny old summer! - Peter Mathews

Having meticulously cleaned each lens and camera body, to prepare for three months of shooting in glorious weather, I hauled my photo rucksack over my shoulder and set off for the great outdoors. How things would have been different if my camera equipment had come with me, rather than slipping through the open zip of the rucksack and landing with a sickening thud on the porch floor.

After several phone calls to my insurers I finally managed to establish the precise clauses in my personal possessions cover which relieved the broker of any responsibility for the damage. So, with a tear in my eye, I waved goodbye to my camera equipment for two months, handing it a blank cheque to take with it to the Nikon Summer Repair Camp.

The funny thing about photographers is that we never switch off. Even without a camera, my thoughts have been with photography and, undeterred, I set about an ambitious project to compile a dictionary of photographic terminology.

Drawing upon years of photographic experience, extensive reading of photographic journals and hours of dedicated research on the web I finally managed to complete my project and I am pleased to be able to present to the members of Sheffield Photographic Society the definitive A to Z of photography.

A

Anti-aliasing Filter

A means for finding out someone's true name

Autofocus

A system for getting sharp photos of cars.

B

Backlight

The red light at the rear of a car

Backup

A small town in Lancashire

Baseplate

The bottom plate in a pile, usually the one you want to use.

Bitmap

A large scale map covering a small geographic area in detail, usually not the area you are in.

Bounce Flash

To drop a flashgun

Bracketing

The supports for a set of shelves

C

Camera Club

Tool for hitting your camera with when it fails to work at the decisive moment.

Colour Management

Witchcraft

Compact Flash

Small flashgun

Contact print

To hold a photograph

Cross process

The way in which someone becomes annoyed

D

Decisive Moment

The period of time during which you are changing lenses, memory cards or film.

Depth of Field

The depth of mud experienced whilst out walking.

Depth of Field Preview

The use of a monopod or walking pole to assess the depth of mud whilst out walking.

Developer

Person who buys land to build on

E

Exposure bracketing

Taking a spare jumper just in case (also see 'under exposure' and 'over exposure')

F

Face Recognition

Seeing someone you know

Fixer

Someone employed to mend broken photographic equipment

Flare

Lens aberration that makes trousers seem wider than they were

G

Grey Graduate

Boring person leaving university

H

Hard Drive

Narrow winding road in the rain at night

High Dynamic Range

Description of the range of noise made by a photographer when dropping a lens

High Key

Someone who leaves their house key on top of the doorframe when they are out

High Resolution

Determination to produce larger prints

Hotshoe

The effect of walking on black tarmac in mid summer

I

Image Stabilisation

The act of repositioning a TV aerial

Incident Light

Blue flashing light on top of an ambulance or police car

Insurance

A wide spread scam to extort money from unsuspecting photographers

J

Judge

Someone who hangs around with photographers often accompanied by a guide dog.

K

Kelvin

A temperature scale for colours in which hot objects are cold and cold objects are hot.

L

LCD

Recreational drug

Lens brush

Brush used to clear up after a lens has been dropped on the floor

Lens Cap

Restriction placed on your purchase of new lenses by your spouse.

Lens Hood

A thug who steals photographic equipment

Low Key

Someone who leaves their house key under a plant pot when they are out

M

Macro Lens

Cheap lens bought from a trade cash and carry store

Microdrive

Short journey in a car

Multi-Coating

Dressing up for cold weather

N

Negative

The way digital imaging makes traditional photographers feel

O

Over exposed

Not wearing enough clothes

P

Photo Album

Compilation of songs about photography

Photoshop

Harrison's Cameras

Pixel

Female pixie

Polariser

A controversial photograph that people either love or hate

Post processing

Royal Mail sorting office

Printer Profile

The shape of an inkjet printer when viewed from the side

Q

Quick Release Plate

Any plate or other item of crockery when held above a hard floor

R

Rangefinder

A map of the mountains

RAW

The sound a lion makes

Reciprocity Failure

Sending a Christmas card to someone who doesn't send you one back

Redeye

Optical aberration most commonly exhibited by mirrors the morning after a night out

Rule of Thirds

Rule which stipulates that there will always be two better photos in any competition you enter.

S

Secure Digital (SD)

The act of putting camera equipment in a safe

Self timer

Wrist watch

Single Lens Reflex

Involuntary reaction when dropping a lens

Slide film

Specialist film used for photographing your children at the playpark

Spot meter

Medical process for monitoring the spread of measles

Stop Bath

To turn off a tap

Street Photography

Terrorism

T

Teleconverter

Digital set-top box to receive freeview

Telephoto Lens

Specialist lens for taking photos of television

Test strip

Job interview for a lapdancer

Tiff

Minor argument

Tilt and Shift Lens

The movement made by a lens before it falls

Twin Lens Reflex

Involuntary reaction when dropping two lenses

U

Under exposed

Wearing too many clothes

Unsharp mask

The result of using too slow a shutter speed when photographing a carnival

V

Vibration Reduction

Photographic effect achieved by using a tripod or having a glass of whisky

Viewfinder

Map used for locating a good spot to take photos

W

Wetting Agent

Rain

X

X-ray machine

The reason we remember all our holidays abroad as being foggy.

Y

Yosemite

A type of Marmite, favoured by Ansel Adams

Z

Zone system

Method for finding your car in Meadowhall's Car Park