

My Personal Investigation

“Photography is an art of selection rather than invention”. I do not invent a photograph; I select something out of the world that is full of information and make it my own. This idea has really influenced my personal investigation.

I began with the research and creation of my first photobook. To improve my understanding of photography and sequences of images, I researched some practitioners who have made diptychs. I decided to experiment with creating some of my own images. For example, John Maclean bases many of his diptychs on colour, viewpoint and composition, pairing images that complement or contrast one another. I researched various photobooks and those featuring colour and still life stood out to me. ‘Home and Abroad’ by Martin Parr presented unconventional approaches to portraiture and the use of super saturated colour in a street photography style. ‘Utatane’ by Rinko Kawauchi was also an inspiration as she explores the genre of still life but with softer colours and high key lighting, giving the images a dreamlike quality.

After discovering that saturated colour and still life were key features of images that I found very interesting, I began to develop a body of work for my own photobook, incorporating these elements. I researched the work of William Eggleston. His approach to colour photography is very poetic. The viewer is put into a daydream as s/he analyses the photographs. Because his work was produced in the 1970s, to me now, his work seems very retro and washed out. However, with his use of particular film stocks and dye-transfer printing, his photographs were very modern at the time. I also researched Peter Fraser, however, he photographs bold, vibrant colours, taking a more trustworthy approach to colour, his photographs are a realistic way of presenting the world. By realistic and trustworthy I mean that I feel I am being told a non-fictional story of facts about the colour of the world as opposed to a fictional fairy-tale of how colour is perceived. What I am interested in is creating photographs that could have been made at any time in the last 40 years. I am interested in the relationship between how photographs look, the ways in which they are made and the assumptions we have about the times in which we think they were produced. Photographs can be very nostalgic. They can remind us of things we have lost and take us back in time. What happens when this link between the photograph and the past is troublesome?

I was inspired by those photographers with both approaches in mind. I photographed close-ups of rubbish in saturated colour. Subjects included abandoned furniture, discarded equipment and litter on the floor. I selected those images that I felt best expressed my ideas and sequenced them based on colour and shape associations. Because this was my first attempt at a photobook, I felt it needed refining. I was not certain about how I wanted the images to be presented on the page. However, I am very happy with the photos I made and their sequencing to represent an idea.

Since making my first photobook, Peter Fraser has continued to be a massive influence and I decided to delve deeper into his work. His visit to my school, Thomas Tallis, not only helped the class to gain a better understanding of his work and his thought process behind the making of his projects, but it also gave us a deeper understanding of how photographers think. His approach to photography in terms of solid, vivid colour, close-ups, and most importantly using flash has interested me most.

His approach to photography appears trustworthy, like every photograph he takes is a true representation of the world. Of course no photograph is 100% reliable as you are taking what you want from the world, deciding what you want in the frame and how you want to portray it. A photograph is not real, it's not a real representation of the world we see. However, I feel that Peter Fraser's work is rooted in things and how we see them, if we are attentive and take notice. The colour in particular; the bold, solid colour makes what he is photographing real and trustworthy.

I decided to photograph a whole sequence of images using flash photography, and when reviewing this piece of work, I found that the images were very similar to Fraser's. I felt that it was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of a digital camera, focusing on using it manually instead of automatically. This really helped me when responding to Fraser's work as I knew what aperture and ISO would be necessary in order to control the light. To develop my understanding of his way of photographing and projects he has accomplished, I researched his pieces of work and found his 'Material' series fascinating. I loved the collection of images. The composition and colour revealed the shape, texture and form of the objects. The subjects were photographed as the main focus, with little context to them. You were pulled in by the material of the photograph and the single subject matter. I was inspired by Fraser's description of various textures. The idea of portraying something that only you can see in real life - like texture - through a photograph is what I am fascinated by. I decided to photograph a series of images using flash and then without flash, as a way of experimenting with techniques to see what I preferred. I also photographed indoor and outdoor materials, again, as a way of seeing what I found most interesting.

All my research lead to texture. Through the 'Instagram Tag' challenge, the outcome of my first photobook and the influence of various photographers, I decided on texture as my main subject. I wanted to display texture realistically, truthfully and in a way that people will feel that they are being shown an honest representation of the world. I wanted to photograph all surface texture close-up with bold colour. I also feel strongly about the fact that, in order to make texture significant in a photograph, a flash is useful. The artificial light captures the surface of an object that natural light cannot always do. The result is almost hyper-real.

"The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh".

-- Edward Weston

Weston asserted the true meaning of photography at a crucial time in its history. Capturing the reality of the world and what each thing is made of is fundamental to the photographic image. I was inspired by this idea when thinking about the next steps of my investigation.

Texture is about being able to feel something. To feel the bumpiness, the silkiness, the smoothness or roughness of the thing you're touching. It's about being able to see (and imagine) the 3 dimensional form of the thing. I decided to install a set of images in an unusual location in school, the bin area maintained by the site managers, exploring their ability to be both 2 and 3D. The installation would have a texture of its own. I chose to make 3D blocks, made out of wood, that would have my images fixed to the front.

I knew that I wanted to develop my first outcome whilst maintaining a focus on texture. Of course I wanted to keep some of the original photographs but I also wanted to add to my collection of photographs. I had planned to keep the blocks that I used originally as I felt they were a good way of presenting photos about texture. However, I wanted to install them on a blank wall instead, so that it would be as if the blocks were working as part of the texture of the wall. I didn't want this to stop there. I wanted more texture and more chaos in my installation. I wanted printed photographs on paper and photographs on the blocks. I wanted photographs in different sized frames and I wanted all the photographs to be projecting out from the wall.

Nicholas Mirzoeff noted in his book 'How to See the World' that it is impossible to just see the thing in front of you. Memories affect your view of the world. You cannot see a thing just as a thing. The thing has connotations that come with it because of your memories affecting it. This was a great influence for me as I was able to understand a different approach to not only photography and what the camera sees, but a way of viewing the world, with it relating to texture and the surface of different objects. You can grasp the texture of an image from previous connotations of the thing, the colour or the subject.

I proceeded to take more photographs, using the same technique: flash, colour, close-ups. I took my images, I edited them by saturating the colour a touch, building the contrast and sharpening the image so that the texture was emphasised fully. After editing and selecting my images, I selected thirteen photographs. I printed two of my images A1 size, both of which complimented each other in terms of colour and would work well with other images placed on top. I then printed two of my images at 16x12", another three of my images at 10x8" and then printed the rest of my images at 8x8" to be placed onto the blocks I made before. I bought black frames, and repainted the wooden blocks jet black so that all was uniform and the main focus would be on the images. I presented my images so that they were overlapping, with the two A1 images diagonally from each other, stuck on a white background and the various smaller images in frames and on wooden blocks placed over and around the two bigger photos.

When we look at the world, we don't just see the thing that is in front of us. Or the thing that we're told to look at. We see everything at once. Everything connects and everything overlaps. If you're told to look at an object in front of you. You don't just look at the object. Of course the object may be the main focus but whether it's consciously or subconsciously, you identify the thing that is next to that object or the thing that is beside it. It is impossible to focus solely on one texture or one object. Distractions are inevitable when looking at the world. This was the key idea for me when thinking about my installation. I felt it was necessary to install my images in a slightly chaotic way with elements that overlapped and connected so that I could reflect my idea behind it, that there are always distractions. However, I was also keen to achieve a sense of overall balance in the entire composition. The world is both chaotic and ordered. Often the order sits just beneath the surface so that you have to spend time and look deeply. When you observe the world, things obstruct your view and distract you from your main focus.

The world is made up of texture. Whether that be smooth, rough, soft or hard, every thing in the world is texture. If I were to develop my project, I would make this idea relevant. I would emphasise how the minute detail of the smallest, insignificant thing demonstrates texture but I would also show how everything as one is its own form of texture.

Photography is not about a pretty picture.

This, I feel, is what I have learnt most when completing this project. Photography is not about taking a pretty picture, as I once thought it was right at the beginning of my A Level course. Instead, I have learnt that photography is about the world and what you *want* to take from it. Before this project, I felt that I needed to take what was pretty from the world. I needed to take pretty photographs as opposed to what I actually wanted to take photographs of. From this project, I have learnt that photography is about taking what I want from the world and finding interest in these photographs. Taking a photograph of rubbish because the idea of discarded items is interesting to me. Or taking a photograph of different types of texture because it is interesting to me.

I find that photographing the unusual bits of the world is far more interesting to me now after this project. Having real meaning or ideology behind a photograph is much more interesting to me now than just a pretty picture. Unless of course the pretty picture signifies true meaning too.

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