

Kayung Lai

On screen cultural breakdown

Hazel Pitt

Illustrates symbolically the journey man takes in reaching spiritual union with his/ her god self

Federica Landi

Remembering and preserving traces of sacred and personal memory

Francisco Gomez de Villaboa

The creatures of our hidden world are given a stage for transformation

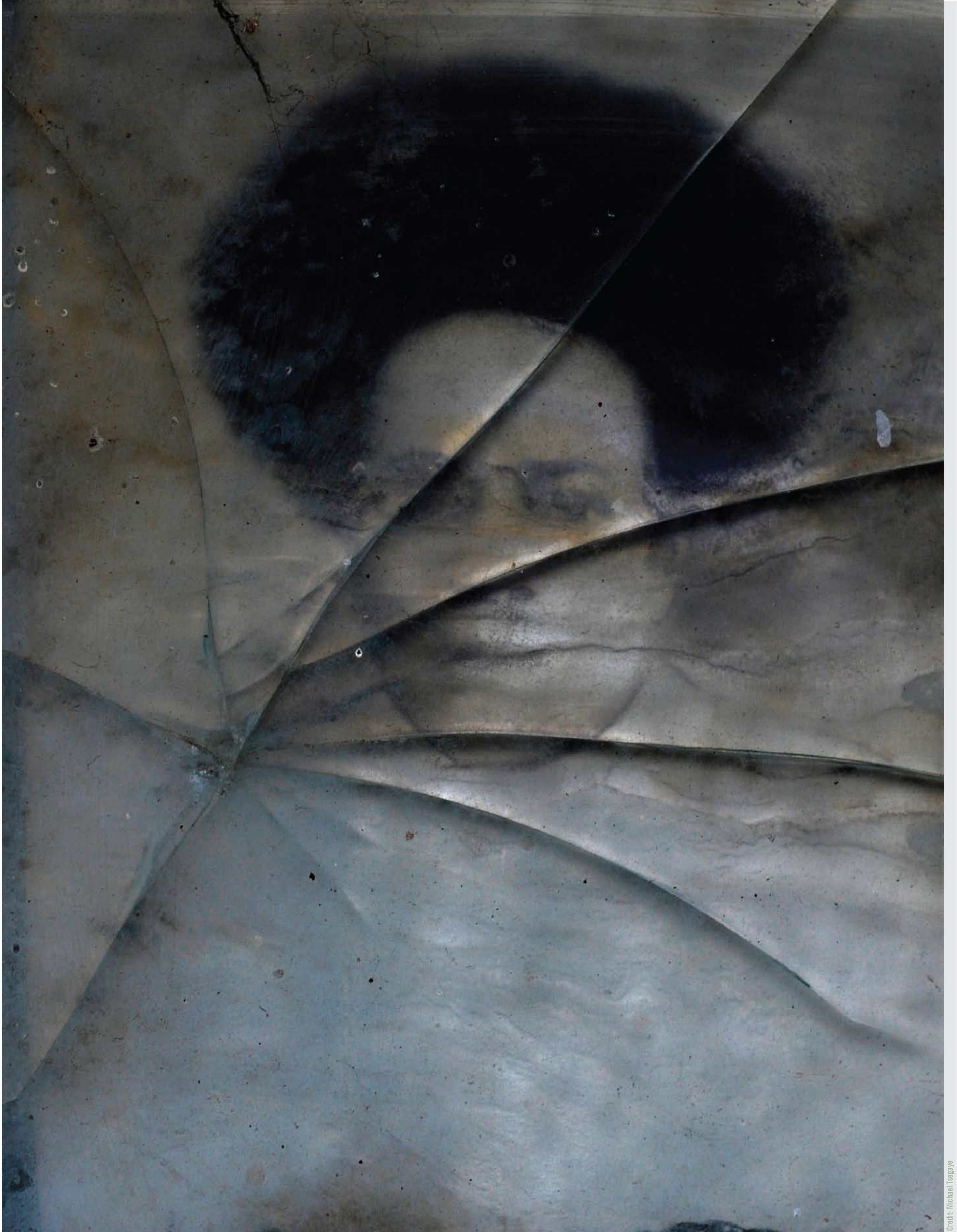
Lucy Williams

Clinically looks at the spaces of fantasy and desire

Simon Thorpe

Distorting our myths in search of some truth

UNCERTAIN STATES / 09





FRANCISCO GOMEZ DE VILLABOA

The Dream Creature

While immersed in the dream, beyond a simple status, the subconscious substantially reveals parts of ourselves we thought lost and I would argue, omitted. Stressful situations, aggression, abuse and discrimination (sexual and social), can be a continual punishment on the mind, so much so that it is often stored and archived in the subconscious as an auto defence mechanism. This is what I call the creature. There is so much more hidden in the sheets below, a secret world where you can find yourself. Once inside this world, fears, insecurities, strengths, and much more can be revealed. The complexity of human nature is hidden in those parts we do not understand.

These series of pictures metaphorically represent the transformation of oneself into the creature alive in the dream. Through surreal states, transformations and different facets within the same character, it describes the trip the protagonist follows in this unconscious stage. The end of the trip is represented with the awakening of that Dream and shows the disconcerted dreamer discovering that they had become the creature hidden inside. Beautiful, strong, rough, and clever exist in parallel with insecure, weak and foolish and describe the nature of human beings

www.GomezdeVillaboa.com

THINKING ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHS

PAUL DEVEREAUX

A As artist/photographers we live in a visually demanding and complex society where nothing we see is fixed and the perceived or traditional signifier has undergone an aleatory shift or are in perpetual flux. The Artist and writer Suzi Gablik says, “There is more and more information and less and less meaning; each image signifies less and less”, but rather than seeing this as a fixed negative, it is within this reduction of easily recognisable context that the space for creative exchange and dialogue can take place.

How artists or photographers negotiate this effectively is dependent upon a wide range of external factors and not all are easy to recognise or engage with.

Framed within a post modern context there has been a re-ordering or altering of past meaning into new spheres that is exploited by the market to re codify thinking and values. This is not an explicit or consciously defined process and may not be recognised by the majority and, if it is, most feel powerless or lack the political will to negotiate this evolving paradigm.

Its core value is singularly economic and ignores any societal or spiritual engagement. It permits a vacuum of responsibility that appeals to our survival instinct which is essentially selfish, and therefore allows us to shrug our collective shoulders and ask what can we do when faced with the consequences of this system and our actions within it.

It desensitises us to the experience of others yet exploits an innate sense of the collective. Adorno and Horkheimer believe, “The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them”. This essentially takes place for profit and requires no moral or social obligation as the consumer will make their choice by buying in to the idea, or not.

This apparently soulless view stems from a historical perspective that saw the development of this system from its post war drive, to grow economies, to the recognition of its ability to control peoples habits by focusing on the narrow and singular relationship with the individual.

We are no longer tied to the beliefs of our parent, tribe or clan but can choose to follow how and what we believe, or not at all, or only sometimes.

This form of communication between elements of society reinforces a culture where value is essentially “valueless”, placing the consumer outside any moral or spiritual obligation for the potential negative consequences that may result from the transaction. Behind all this is the notion that society, the thing that holds people together in common, is a commodity, a hyper real nebulous cloud of economic or digital relationships where you can find yourself friends with more people than you can count.

This nihilistic doctrine and cultural conditioning that influences our behaviour and beliefs has devolved social interaction and negates previous human experience. This displacement of communal interaction has caused changes

within the structural and economic equilibrium of modern society but has failed to negate a characteristic within humanity that drives us to seek out relationships with others.

This desire to connect and communicate is not a product or an economic exchange, although this is constantly being exploited, but an essential shift where people are seeking to participate socially, moving away from the focus of desire as object, toward relationships.

This is a fundamental human quality, not necessarily recognised by those who exploit the common held views of social structure but without it we create disengaged and anti social individuals who are not able to recognise the subtlety of feeling and emotional connection or empathy for others.

It also produces a counter reaction to the nihilistic conditioning where extreme reaffirmation of beliefs are promoted through fundamentalist views, religious or secular. Often the opinions appeal to base instincts and emotional reaction and this produces an unhealthy situation for artists where work can become the focal point for the fundamentalist and the freedom of expression currently enjoyed, threatened by mainstream political reaction looking to capitalise on the growing popularity of extremist views.

B Working within the current value system we are free to explore (exploit) visual ideas without any obligation or connection to its origin and without any real fear of significant censure of criticism. Even if this does occur, the nature of the socio-cultural economic exchange allows the exploitation of negatives and reinterpretation to be seen as a positive.

Creative expression is perceived as a commodity and it is within the vacuous realm of commodity transaction Artist/Photographers negotiate their creative discourse and without fixed norms to govern the exchange can produce work that leave the viewer struggling to find an anchor.

I see the range of images presented in this edition of Uncertain States following a seam of ideas around death and dreams, dissection, desire and decay with reference to remembered or invented memory, shadow traces left by departure or dislocation and a sense of searching for meaning and discourse.

There is also direct reference to a symbolic religious notion characteristic of western cultural appropriation and a rediscovery or acknowledgement of the immaterial or sacred. Within the images and text I believe there is a desire; for an exploration of experience and sensation offering a dialogue that may encourage the viewer to contemplate or acknowledge a connection with the subject or the ideas they address.

It is not my aim to appropriate the images and give them a different reading but to consider the potential; of meaning as a more generalised/ immaterial process. It is within the psycho-physical structures of display and audience where the intention and reaction occurs in a dynamic and often troubled interplay. How does a viewer react to work and what is the audience seeking by taking time to look?

Although some of the work in this paper may appear explicit in their intention such as the evidential photographs by Michael Tsegaye of tombstones in Ethiopia, others may appear to conceal it with their choice of subject. The inclusion of photographs by Lucy Williamson of vacant room sets with no real personality offer an interesting counterpoint, apparently used for making pornographic films.

Louise Harrington dissect the human form and reconstructs an image made from repeated sections of a single element to create abstract, almost mechanical shapes. There is a sense of undercurrent with reflections of Muybridge in the frozen action but this is more dehumanised, less celebratory in its response to function and form. The use of black and white photographs adds to the industrial quality and could be seen as questioning the role people play in the current socio-economic model. In China today we hear of vast factories employing thousands of humans in the near mechanical production of digital goods they cannot afford to own In Britain we managed to reject those conditions but instead of being free of this economic servitude we are simply the less restricted side of this bi-polar relationship spinning on an axis of financial commoditisation. We can afford the goods but only if we tie ourselves in to contracts or sustained employment often requiring two adult working for a combined average wage that always fails to fulfil their expectation or needs. More colourful abstracts are the images created by Hazel Pitt. Superficially reminiscent of Art Deco cosmetic advertising but with type quietly tagged on to the geometric design, unassuming in scale but disquieting in meaning for such short combinations of text. Their controlled structure and cryptic use of words is complimented by the superficially formal photographs reminiscent of religious paintings from Catholic Europe by Francisco Gomez de Villaboa that expose the complexity of cultural and personal influence by religious ritual (not necessarily a belief in any form of deity) and the ability it still has in defining elements of our character. The photographs are more guarded than unconstrained and possibly more disquieting for this.

Clarice Lispector, the Brazilian writer expressed a view that, “...life, the most truthful one, is unrecognisable, extremely interior, and there is no single word that gives it meaning” and this inner self in informed by a range of experience that feeds its purpose and make it tangible.

The formal reference of Villaboa's photographs demonstrate quite lucidly the separation between religion as a function of observance and compliance, from the immaterial; a quality of experience that cannot be simply defined but is sometimes referred to as spirituality. The human connection or connectivity found at the core of any set of beliefs is, however, manipulated through this inner spiritual quality of human experience that is difficult to define, understand, reject or suppress.

Taking time to consider the images implies possible readings of the work that may have no link to the purpose of the artist/photographer in its making but speaks to the viewer and draws out a response connecting to the interior life suggested by Lispector and Villaboa's.

C Michael Tsegaye's layered association of photographed over photograph, a synchronised process that draws attention to our own ephemeral existence quietly extends an opportunity to engage with a memory of relationships removed and reconstructed within the current liquid culture.

The fractured image and faded quality are visually connected to the work of Federica Landi with related but opposing sentiments, a bitter/sweet interplay about their genesis. Tsegaye is exploring the loss of something spiritual, a decaying humanity and a moral decline while Landi is rediscovering or uncovering a spiritual sub text within places of religious worship found in London.

Although Michael Tsegaye is evidential in his presentation of the photograph, there is a quality of hope as this negotiates loss and keeps present the immaterial bond he clearly feels by making present the subjects in their absence with compassion and humility.

Looking at and trying to connect with Artistic/ Photographic images is a process equivalent to wandering through the streets of a city with a map but no idea of where you are on it or even if it is the right one; you may be looking left but turning right after every junction. Victor Burgin illustrates this when he says, ‘There is no ‘language’ of photography, no single signifying system upon which all photographs depend; there is, rather, a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw’.

How we negotiate the mass of visual information and social disassociation, and make sense of it, is where the craft for the maker of the image lies. To give it meaning for others or ourselves can be a very complex process reduced to simple and often misread expression.

Pornography is promoted by popular culture as sexual liberation for women and religion is a lifestyle choice. The extent of this re-codifying of values has led to a complex mix of ideas that are difficult to challenge without the risk of being perceived negatively.

Within the economic sphere of mass media, even those who portray themselves as objective, hook into the idea of pornography as a life style choice no worse than going on a blind date, but with greater rewards.

Its popularity as a subject has reached such acceptance that a “Porn Star” can be interviewed by the BBC on their Newsbeat programme where she describes her life in short sound bites with throw away lines, “I get paid ridiculous amounts” and “if I want plastic surgery, I get my plastic surgery” or “if I wanted a new car they would buy me a new car”. Even the sex side of the exchange, is, “you are safer sleeping with someone in the industry than if you go on a night out, pull someone (and) take them home...”. Aimed at young people from the age of fifteen, there was no counter argument or opinion to frame this contextually or objectively to the moral or social implication of pornography as a rational and profitable lifestyle choice.

The depth of exchange within the sexual experience is lost, viewed from a single reductive stance, the act, and is as devoid of any connectivity. It is as impersonal, unfulfilling and incomplete an experience as the sets photographed by Lucy Williamson. Pornography is not about desire and it holds no exchange with relationships or connection between those engaged in the performance or the consumption.

It is not pornography that is caustic but the social vacuum in which operates freely. It does not allow for any emotional connection or empathy for others experience and works on the level of primary function. Suzi Gablik describes an “...electronic landscape, where the real and the imaginary, the catastrophic and the trivial coalesce on a single plane...” and it is an extreme form of discourse within sexual relationships exploited through current media, more damaging as it widely accepted and therefore portrayed as harmless, where female liberation is coalesced with sexual exploitation as a single frame of identity.

We can choose to be implicit or explicit in how the work is made and displayed providing, what we may believe, to be clear direction allowing the viewer a way in, or chance to relate with the work.

There will be those who dismiss quickly any idea of meaning or disagree with the intention of the artist. Others will superficially agree and move on while a few might linger and consider what there is to see in the image and what it holds for them.

It often requires a reaction to seeing that is not a direct intellectual process but something more Ineffable; excitable and fearful with a sense of the near recognition or understanding. This plasmic tug generated at this moment may be gentle and tenuous or of the lightening bolt variety with the sensation of profound understanding, but unlike the potentially deep emotional response that can be found to music, the visual relies on the interconnection of signs and sensations through a myriad of synapses and can be quickly lost if the gaze is broken and engaged by another frame.

Often there is a need for intent, an intellectual desire to “look” for something within the image dependant on a multiplicity of meanings and cultural understanding of viewpoints. What is really at the base of this is a desire for a recognition of the immaterial connection; we look for signs to associate with an images to direct our thought and understanding. We read images using a language codified by our experience and knowledge. Collectively or singularly, photographs are a pictorial window, open to our interpenetration, rendering and opportunity to find some form of connection. I think it was Buñuel who said “the most important ingredient in any art is the quality of mystery” and through images we can inform the viewer of the possibilities, suggest the validity of the intangible or immaterial and offer another way of looking.

Paul Devereaux is an Artist who works in education. Current interests lie in experimental analogue photography and film.





KAYUNG LAI

This body of work explores the breakdown of my cultural heritage. The initial images were taken from home video stills of my childhood which were reminiscent of the time when family ties were unaffected by language barriers, as I used to be fluent in Cantonese. The chemical weathering of the stills addresses the nostalgia experienced for a time before conflicting cultural identities.

www.kayunglai.com

SIMON THORPE

A personal exploration of parenthood and the conflict between the desire for telling the truth; in order to prepare my daughter for the ups and downs of life and the desire to distort the truth as a mechanism for protecting her from the inevitable ills of life and society.

Ultimately my 'real' role as parent -being the one responsible for preparing my child for flying the nest directly through my teaching-is at odds with how we are culturally informed and pressured into guiding our young ones through the passive feeding of fairy tails, myths, legends and silver linings.

Life goes on in it's gloriously unstoppable way and change is an inevitable part of that. Certain life changing events have come to pass recently which will subsequently, no doubt, have affected the life of my daughter. Fairy Tales was triggered, if not inspired, by this resulting in my work looking 'inward' for the first time rather than 'outward' where the integrity of the work can be compromised by external commercial interests.

"Change is good" someone said once, maybe so, we shall see.....

www.simonthorpeimages.com



LUCY WILLIAMSON

These are places of fantasy and dreams, of hopes and desires and of short lived fulfilment. They are places where the minimum of details help shape the bare form of a story which is told to the camera in all its simulated pumping, gasping, jiggling, erupting, spread eagled glory. Before being wiped down for the next time.

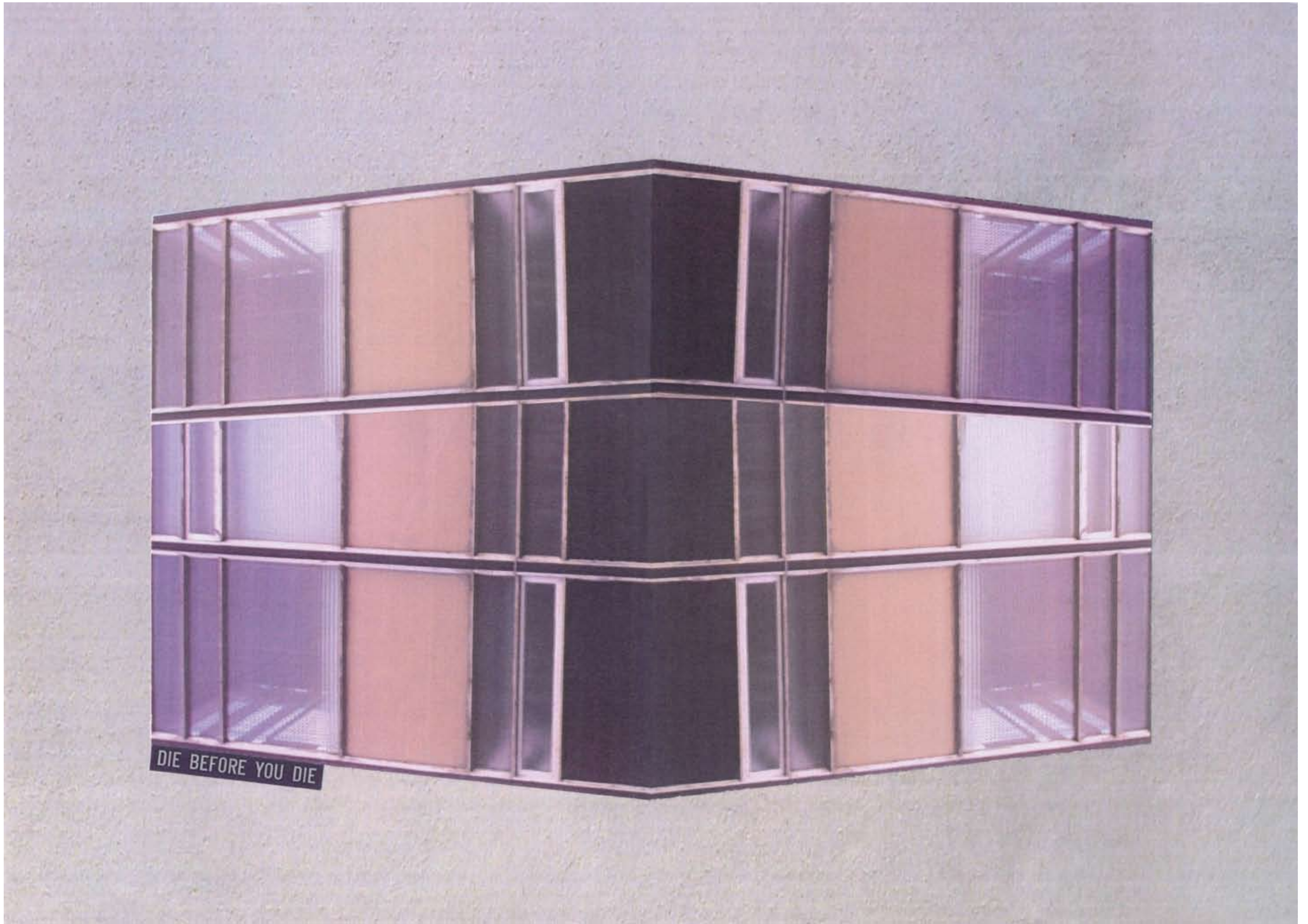
These photographs are the in between moments, the before and after.

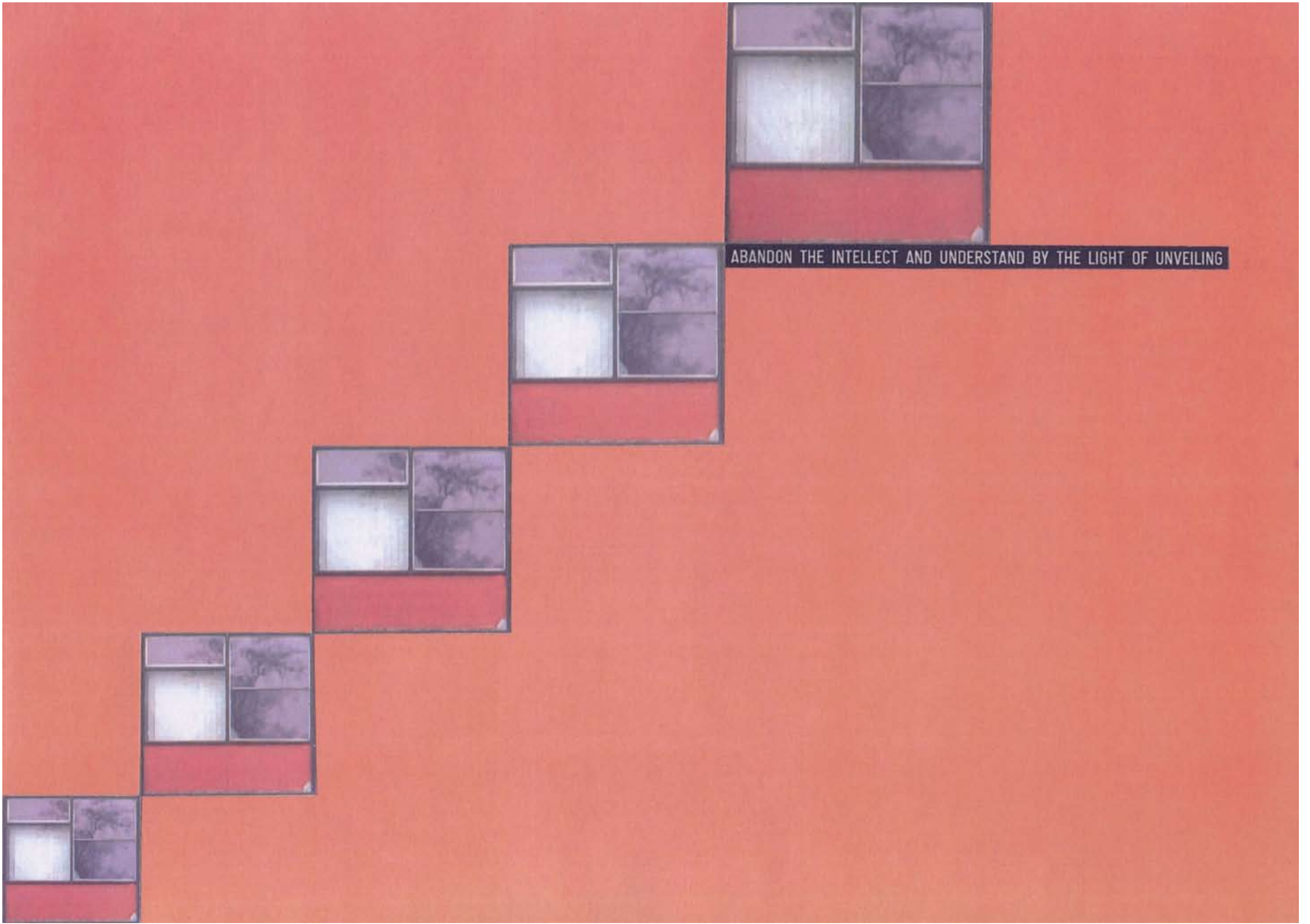
I am fascinated by the world we construct for ourselves, the boxes we put ourselves in and the objects we furnish them with, in order to give them our story and make them a space where we can play out our lives. When we are gone, these places cannot exist any more in that form. They have our marks, the props for our narrative, but without us they are unfurnished and ready for the next tale to be put in place.

www.lucywilliamsphotography.co.uk









ABANDON THE INTELLECT AND UNDERSTAND BY THE LIGHT OF UNVEILING

HAZEL PITT

The overall rationale for the Configuration's 1 - 5, was to illustrate in a symbolic form, the journey man takes in reaching spiritual union with his or her god self. As inspiration for this, I used the theoretical and visual findings of artists and scientists - my intention being for the resulting artworks to possess both a strange, magical atmosphere along with a scientific, mechanical quality. The accompanying text being the words of a Sufi master.

Proportion, mathematics and sacred geometry became a natural conduit in conveying the mystical; these being present at the core of all form and creation. As I moved through the execution of the configurations, light, colour and abstraction also became the most natural way in conveying the connection with our inner selves.

Although pale colours are often associated with the divine, I felt the need to communicate the brutality experienced on our journey into self. The more difficult the path, the greater the opportunity for self knowledge, hence the heat in the colour.

Abstracting manmade modernist architectural facades from their natural settings gave birth to strange monoliths. My connection with them became both reassuring and unsettling, reminding me of an otherness present within my life at all times. For me, their straight lines and space allow for a sense of peace and contemplation, reminding me of the underlying order present in all things.

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FEDERICA LANDI

“Rettung” is a German word that implies both the act of “saving” something, and of “redemption”.

This is an ongoing research, firstly born as a documentary project concerned with how the space intended for religion and spirituality has been negotiated within the metropolis.

The project developed into research about the “quality” of the sacred space and the ephemeral traces left within it, raising questions as:

What kind of space is the sacred one?

Which kind of time flows through it and how photography can represent it?

Instead of focusing on the structure of the place as a whole, my attention was instinctively attracted to its fragments: the subtle, peripheral, tiny details that compose the space.

I put my lens in basins of holy water, scanning

the floor, the surface of the pews and the edges of the altars.

Looking back at what I had collected over the months I found my camera full of ephemeral objects:

What was I taking pictures of?

Was this a recording of what was there or what was fading away?

The photographic process has thus become a practice for remembering and preserving traces of a cultural and personal memories, a study on the fragile nature of our tradition and where our heritage is embedded.

www.federalandi.com





Uncertain States now has a home for its permanent collection of contemporary photography, 'The Salon', in Highgate, North London. We will also host exhibitions of featured artists and hold regular talks by guest speakers on the first Tuesday of every month. We are open seven days a week

'The Salon' is located at 267 Archway Road, N6. Opposite Highgate tube

For further information please contact info@uncertainstates.com

CRITICAL VISUAL DIALOGUE



EXHIBITION BELONGING CAROLYN LEFLEY DISCUSSES HER WORK

Venue: The Quaters Café, 267 Archway Road, London N6 5BS

Date: Private View Tuesday 7th February 7.30pm



EXHIBITION BETWEEN ME AND YOU MARY GEORGE INDEPENDENT CURATOR, DISCUSSES CURATORIAL PRACTICE IN GUEST SPACES

Venue: The Quaters Café, 267 Archway Road, London N6 5BS

Date: Private View Tuesday 6th March 7.30pm



EXHIBITION PAST IMPERFECT JAMES RUSSELL CANT WILL DISCUSS HIS WORK INCLUDING NEW AND ONGOING PROJECTS

Venue: The Quaters Café, 267 Archway Road, London N6 5BS

Date: Private View Tuesday 2nd April 7.30pm

Uncertain States is a lens-based artist co-operative who are passionate to create and promote visual imagery. In this volatile global climate the work reflects some of our current concerns and challenges how perception is formed in our society on issues as diverse as politics, religion, and personal identity. For your on-line copy, visit www.uncertainstates.com or e-mail info@UncertainStates.com for a hard copy.

We welcome submissions from lens-based artists for further publication. For all enquiries please contact info@uncertainstates.com

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