

Weekend Review
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The Syrian boy washed up dead on a beach. That's a photograph. The sole protester defying the tanks in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Definitely. But what appears to be an abstract painting of the swirl and froth of the sea... Hmmm. How does that fit in a photographic exhibition?

That's the challenge set for visitors to Photo London next week (May 18 - 21) by a group of gallerists who are pushing the definition of photography by presenting works by new, emerging and very different artists.

All the familiar - and important - names will be represented such as Herb Ritts, Robert Mapplethorpe, Helmut Newton and Irving Penn and there will be an exhibition of Image Atlas by Taryn Simon, which investigates cultural differences and similarities in countries around the globe by using search engines to discover their priorities and interests. Other highlights include a recreation of the work by Victorian pioneer Fox Talbot by Mat Collishaw and a 70th birthday celebration of Magnum Photos curated by David Hurm and Martin Parr. These images, often classic, have no place in the Discovery section where fresh talents defy pre-conceptions of what makes a photograph with works that range from the conceptual to the abstract to installation.

And in the case of the swirling sea scape, an image that does not require a camera. This is the work of American Meghan Riepenhoff who, by chance, submerged colour photo paper in the sea near her home by the Pacific Ocean. She was amazed and delighted with the result. By bathing cyanotype paper in the water, letting the waves rush over it, allowing it to mingle with the sand, the salt and the chemicals, she created her distinctive abstracts - photographs that are not so much of the sea but by, with and from it.

What is the collector expecting to buy a Helmut Newton nude or one of Guy Bourdin's sexy fantasies to make of that? Tristan Lund, curator of the Discovery section says: "I'd like to put up a big sign - 'Be open to photographs that are not pictures of something or somebody.'"

"I hope all the names in the section will be new to visitors. There is a slight focus on process-driven work, work that is pushing what people's expectations of photography are. This is not representational but conceptual, by artists who are excited and inspired by the medium itself, the paper, the digital work, the chemistry. Many of the galleries in the section are interested in photography as an object rather than as transient image. If you speak to an editor of a newspaper or a photo journalist the way they publish the idea of a photograph is as a transient image. They use it as a tool to document and explore social and political concerns. It is something you can illustrate text with in the telling of a story. Many of the images on display here are more about the primacy of the physical object, the photograph itself."

Lund himself by no means eschews photo journalism. He and photographer Harriet Logan have created the Incite Project, one of the latest private collections of news and documentary photographs in the UK, and he argues that separating these images from the original text changes, or reinforces, the perception of them. "Where there is a market involved, as there is in Photo London, you have to focus on the physical object. One of the nice things about process-driven works is that often they are unique and that appeals to the collector. They stand without reference to words, they aren't an addition to other work."

Nevertheless, for the galleries and the collectors some of the process-driven work is a challenge. In fact, the Discovery section has doubled its number of galleries to 16 compared with 2016 which is a substantial slice of the total 87 galleries. They are drawn from 17 countries while the galleries represented in the section are primarily from London, with overseas contributions from Japan, the US, Iceland and Italy.

"Photography is definitely under represented in this country compared with New York or Paris," he says. "But the fair is trying to find a gap and encourage the art-buying public to take photography more seriously as an art form. In the early years, familiar images such as Kate Moss in the nude were useful in drawing in the collectors. Now there is a lot of tension between what people think photography is and what they feel when they find that kind of photography is suddenly quite absent."

Inevitably the commercial imperative is paramount: money must be spent, pictures must be bought. Limited editions sell for £1,000 (Dh4,100) to £1,500 and occasionally for tens of thousands. In his programme notes Lund admits: "The truth is only a handful of art is a good financial investment so look out for what you truly love. These are young galleries exhibiting emerging artists and their prices reflect this so this would be the time to take a risk."

Those looking for "traditional" works of contemporary photo journalism should head for the Italian gallery Raffaella de Chirico where black and white pictures by Fabio Bacciarelli, Guillen Vale and Mann Brabo capture the plight of Syrian refugees, war and devastation. "We needed to include them, otherwise you feel, 'I have come to a photograph show but where are the photographs?'" says Lund.

He believes photojournalism is similar to fashion photography in that the market grows for them after a couple of decades when nostalgia kicks in and the event does not feel so raw. "If Robert Capa's *The Falling Soldier* (it depicted the instant of death of a Republican soldier during the Spanish Civil War) was taken now people would struggle with it but time lends a romance to the image. I can imagine people wanting a print of the boy on the beach in 30 or 40 years time when time has softened our perception."

He argues that what is interesting or part of the distinction about a photojournalist is that the shock is in the content. "The composition should be classic in good photo journalism," he says. "It will be unchallenging. When you turn a page of a paper there is only half a second to grab the viewer. The photographer has to choose an image which is instantly readable but many of the artists here are more excited by the qualities and possibilities of the medium itself. They are not so interested or concerned with tying experience to the composition."

arts



Jason Shulman, *Wizard of Oz (1939)*, 2016. Giclée print on archival paper

Photography redefined

Photo London offers an insight into what exactly is caught in the camera's lens - and how to interpret the images on show

The work of the photojournalist is a far cry from the compositions of London-based Jason Shulman, whose *Photographs of Films* is a series of images which capture an entire movie in a single exposure. It's technical stuff. There are about 130,000 frames in a 90-minute film and Shulman has recorded every frame of each film with the result that movie classics such as *Citizen Kane*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* appear as abstract works - almost painterly with shades of Turner and his misty impenetrability. Look carefully at *Wizard of Oz's* *Rear Window*, for example, and you can see Jimmy Stewart in his wheelchair against the fragmented lines of window frames.

He says: "You could take all these frames and shuffle them like a deck of cards, and no matter the shuffle, you would end up with the same image I have arrived at. Each of these photographs is the genetic code of a film - its visual DNA."

Liz Nielsen also plays with abstraction using negatives with transparent colour gels, which she applies in bold shapes and layers. As the paper she uses is a negative rather than a positive paper, the colours of the gels are reversed and create dramatic combinations.

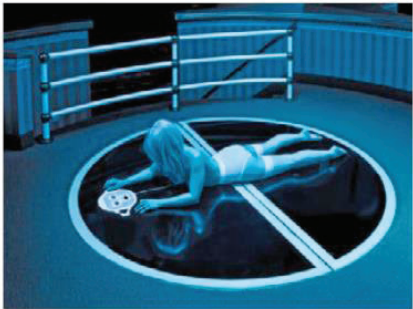
Again, no camera is involved, instead her technique owes something to the photograms developed in the early 1800s, in which objects were placed directly onto the surface of a light-sensitive material such as photographic paper and then exposed to light. This technique was pioneered by early photographers such as Anna Atkins, a botanist who made cyanotype photograms (a cheap way of making copies of drawings such as a blueprint) of seaweed, algae and other seaside specimens by laying the plants on the paper and leaving them in the sun until there an outline in white of the plant emerges. The most famous photograms were those by Man Ray who dubbed his surrealist images 'rayograms'.

These are photographers who feel frustrated by the limitations of the conventions of traditional and conventional photography. There are also those whose work is based on documentary telling. "I am interested in the photographers who tell a story about something in the outside world that they feel strongly [about]," says Lund. "There is a definite move in that direction. It is becoming more and more acceptable for photographers to tell their stories without adhering to conventional notions of telling. They are saying: 'I can convey this story better by collaborating with the subject or creating something that is posed and staged in an obvious way'. It is a particularly exciting direction."

London-based Juno Calypso puts herself firmly in the picture. In *The Honeycomb Hotel*, one of her best known pieces, she spent several days and nights in an American hotel - all pinks and hot tubs. In her alter ego *Love* she photographed herself naked save for an extravagant auburn wig in a huge pink tub, covered in green body paint and in wedding veil and suspenders.

Maisie Cousins from London investigates the body and themes of beauty and feminism with a gaudy, indulgent splurge of colour. It's all splendidly over the top and unashamedly grubby.

Sakiko Nomura, a Japanese photographer whose works have been acquired by Tate, London, and is destined for wider recognition, also specialises in naked bodies but her male nudes are altogether more restrained. Nomura was a long time assistant of Nobuyoshi Araki, notorious for his bondage pictures of naked women, but her atmospheric



Juno Calypso, *A Solitary Love Affair*, 2016. Pigment print on archival paper

images, often in grainy black and white reveals the vulnerability of her subjects without a hint of prurience.

If she is waiting for fame and fortune Peter Fraser is almost a rediscovery, but says Lund he has not had the exposure he deserves. He is very much part of the British 1980s social documentary style of Martin Parr but never had the same attention. He makes the ordinary interesting. In an interview with the *Guardian*, he nominated his favourite photograph. He had been visiting a small church in Wales when his eye lit on a polystyrene cup with cocktail sticks poked through it. "I tried to stay calm," he said. "And took several photos, unable to believe my eyes. Minutes later, I was breathing the air outside, delirious with the thrill of being alive."

The Italian Guido Guidi also specialises in finding the fascinating in the banal, with pared back, calm landscapes of scenes that others might not think worth photographing such as street corners, concrete fences or road signs.

If Guidi rather leaves it to the viewer to draw his own conclusions about the apparent ordinariness of his images the American Daniel Shea makes his point with neat juxtapositions. In his series *Removing Mountains* (2007) a documentary on the coal mining industry's impact on the culture and landscape of Appalachia he captures an angler smoking a cigarette while great factory towers belch out smoke in the background or in a different set a fully covered woman in a niqab and burqa sits with her naked baby or again, he contrasts a leafy orange tree against the bark of Los Angeles.

It is work that is world's apart from Shulman or Meghan Riepenhoff, but as Lund says: "Sometimes today's work is hard to understand and to categorise. So many artists are inspired and excited by the medium that I think there is a wonder that photography even works at all."

Richard Holvedge is a writer based in London.