

My ARPS Experience by Neil Maughan

"The alarm went off at 1 am on Weds 14th March and an hour or so later, my wife and I were in the car for the 6 hour drive to Bath for the Visual Art Associateship assessment at the Royal Photographic Societies HQ. The assessment wasn't starting until 10:30am but as I was bringing my prints on the day, rather than posting them in advance, I needed to be there for 9:15am to hand them in to the RPS officials.

For those new members who don't know much about the RPS, for some general information check out the website at www.rps.org . If you are interested in applying for a distinction, then click on the relevant "Distinctions" tab for specific information on this subject. Alternatively have a word with me on any Club night and I'll be more than happy to help.

So why apply for a RPS distinction? Well I can only speak for myself, but it has given me a goal to aim for, plus the distinctions are recognised as measures of achievement throughout the world. I have also found that working for the Associateship has improved the quality of my work. To be frank, I needed to improve as the standards required for Associateship are pretty tough. You have to show creative ability and also a strong personal style. It goes without saying that a high standard of technical competence and a high standard of presentation are also expected.

Most people present their work for assessment using prints and this was also what I decided to do. For Associateship this means 15 prints that work together and form a cohesive panel. After quite a long time mulling this over, I decided to show 15 black and white "people pictures" arranged in 3 rows of 5 prints.

The audience of nervous applicants and interested observers were asked to take their seats in the darkened room and the RPS Fellows who would assess the work submitted entered shortly afterwards. The assessment panel is made up of 5 Fellows and was chaired by Rikki O'Neill from Scotland who has lectured at Durham several times.

The first panel up consisted of landscapes images, a mixture of colour and black and white prints. It was excellent and there was no surprise in the room when it was quickly approved as Associateship standard. The panels are shown in an entirely random order, but I was still taken aback when my panel was next up. It did look rather good displayed in the 3 rows of 5 under properly calibrated daylight lighting but I was very nervous when the Fellows left their chairs to closely inspect the prints. It is at this point where you really hope that you've got your highlights under control and there is detail in all the shadow areas and there are no other technical errors! Plus of course, would they approve of the image content? I only got more nervous when several of the Fellows started to discuss one particular print in hushed tones. Despite straining my ears I couldn't hear what they were talking about. After several minutes of studying the prints closely the Fellows returned to their chairs and Rikki O'Neill asked them for their opinion on the panel as a whole and the quality of the

individual photographs. Fortunately for me, they were very complimentary, they thought the panel worked in its entirety, the individual images were strong plus they were happy with the technical quality, so it was approved for Associateship.

For those interested in having a go for a distinction, there are Distinctions Advisory days locally – this year at Backworth Hall, near Newcastle on 22nd April. Several DPS members are already booked in. If you'd like to book, ring Brian Pearson on 0191 2575051. Tickets are £10."

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