

HUNTER KENNEDY EFIAP MPAGB

Hunter Kennedy gave an RPS lecture to Durham Photographic Society, 23rd February 2012.

Here is an appreciation by John Cogan

An evening with Hunter Kennedy could be likened to having your perceptions put in a tumble dryer. His mild-mannered Scottish brogue coupled with his unassuming wit and homely demeanour lull you into a world of carpet-slippers, log fires and a wee dram before he starts to expose you to the subtle beauty of his work. From then on it's a helter-skelter of a ride as his "Evening" develops into a master class.

Oh, you soon come to believe that there is a vital need to have a file of images of mist. Mist is a must, as are wellington boots for the perpetually soggy Scottish moorland. Before you recover from a few of the early images he's shown you, and the laughter has ebbed away, you slowly engage with his prints and begin to see the logic of his work. There is nothing hit or miss about Hunter's images; each one is carefully planned and worked on: the gently illuminated light path leading to the main part of the picture; the use of aerial perspective to give depth to the image and his clever use of the various Photoshop knobs and twiddly bits to enhance the overall impression. NOTHING escapes his eye and, therefore, nothing escapes his influence.

Seascapes become images dedicated to the sea, like Lowry's 'Roker' paintings (yes, LS Lowry took his mother on many a holiday to Roker and not for the football... it takes all sorts!). The subtlety of textures and the nuance of Hunter's photo-narratives may appear at first sight to be minimalist but that's their trick: like a Japanese Zen painting you engage with the image because you're tricked into supplying the "missing" pieces and thereby come to a modicum of ownership over the photograph.

Hunter, you feel, must have spent hours experimenting and working out his approach before arriving at his current "style". Money does not appear to be the motivation, nor is there an obvious desire to win competitions though he must have a room full of certificates and medals and cups. This is a personal journey into obsession.

Look at any of his images and you can see the honest artisan at work. None of his photographs claim to be TRUE. To claim truth one has to believe in the answers one possesses. You could only reply to the inevitable question, what is the *truth* of a particular situation, with a subjective reply. An HONEST photograph, on the other hand, is one where the maker (or author) is prepared to have their feelings, reactions to and observations of a situation, scene or event exposed and considered for they are an integral part of any end result.

Ansel Adam's maxim that you MAKE a photograph NOT take it is personified by Hunter's portfolio. There, amongst the lochs and castles, the mountains and bogs, in the faces of the people he's talked to and beguiled with his Gaelic charm and twinkling eyes is Hunter's excitement with texture, his drive to de-mystify what to many may seem an alchemical process and the never-ending process of constant discovery.

For many of us, we strive to find our own voice; we experiment and plot and plan and discard the failures. No doubt Hunter went through many of these stages yet his own "VOICE", his photographic signature, is crystal clear. It is as clear as one of his early-morning captures (mist supplied, or not, from a file of past suitable misty mornings) that he is comfortable with the way he sees the world

and presents that view to us. Take it or leave it; it makes no difference. I see what I see and print what I print.

An evening with Hunter Kennedy is one of the most thought-provoking couple of hours you could spend and there is little wonder that the Royal Photographic Society has taken him under its wing.... Assumptions are challenged; ways of working are held up to scrutiny and the implicit question of what constitutes a good photograph is a sylvan thread running through the two hours. There is no arrogance in Hunter telling us his story. There is no desire to make us all his clones, his acolytes. NO, far from it! All he's doing is holding the mirror and raising an eyebrow, showing us what he's done and how he's done it. The rest is up to us.

John Cogan 2012