

Jack Bamford DPAGB APAGB AFIAP

"My Style of Photography" A talk to Durham Photographic Society 19th July 2012

A review by John Cogan

Jack Bamford.....

You could tell he was an engineer just by the way he revels in every eclectic detail that captures his eye. There is a love of the intricacies of things. Even within the vast landscapes there is a still moment, and an attention to the detail: the crazy, abstract Moorcroft-pottery style of lines at Yellowstone; the white trees in a bleached landscape. But these are as much an exercise in colour and shape as expositions of land formation and the geological underpinnings of a geographic area. Jack betrays himself as much as a Colourist in the Glasgow Boys' tradition as a photographer in the Ansel Adams's style.

Jack, one of Rochdale's sons, when visiting the American Car Show at Tatton Park chooses to concentrate upon the detail: the Dodge badge set against an emphatic square of vivid red; the droplet of water running down the bonnet of a Chevy; the rear-light and fin of a Cadillac. Each carefully considered in a square format.

A visit to the Languedoc and though Jack uses a contextual shot allowing him to start his presentation soon changes to detailed studies of doorways and walls and vernacular typography. The traditional street plaque, *Rue Porte D'Aud*, is caught in that evocative French blue enamel. His narrative is carelessly studded with throw-away lines telling us of a subtle use of a filter here or a 20% outline filter there but, on the whole, what you see of Jack's work is what he saw without an imposition of filters and HDR. However, there is a very Ansel Adams thread to his work in that you feel he KNOWS how the final image will look before he presses the shutter. He admitted to using Nik colour software but that was only once.

For a while last night I sat looking at Jack's landscapes and townscapes admiring the brass door knocker and the other street furniture but wondering where were the people. Those of us who remember Faye Dunaway in "Three Days of the Condor" may find our minds turning towards the empty landscapes, images deliberately devoid of the potential horror human intervention. Space and detail, geometric patterns and the inclusion of typography (the Gucci sign in Hong Kong) were all brilliantly accomplished and to be admired for their clarity and cleanness, their sharpness and simplicity. Even the lupins, though a complex enough shape, were meticulously rendered. Though sometimes compromised by geographical factors Jack has the uncanny knack of knowing just where to position himself to render the best of the image.

It was in Hong Kong that he started to see people. People captured as they worked or sat talking. No one minded their photo being taken and Jack obviously made good use

of this openness. However, there were moments when, in his narrative, he decried a shot because there was something he couldn't clone out; for example: the two men talking, with the grey, metal pole interposing itself between them. I would have taken issue with Jack about the pole. For me it was an integral part of the emotional composition of the image: it provided both a physical separation between the two men and allowed the face of the man on the left to be clearly seen against the solid block of a neutral colour and differentiated from his companion. The grey pole also adds to the structure of the image by creating a vertical off-centre. Now, I'm a believer in a rough and ready type of reportage photography (which might be seen as just a lazy man's way of excusing his lack of sharpness and inability to get things right). Perhaps it's because Jack was an engineer that such lack of precision is not for him. On several occasions he bemoaned the fact that an image wasn't "pin-sharp" or not quite up to competition standard. This, I understand. We have an ethical imperative to strive to produce the best that we can and this imbues all our work. Yet, within this responsibility and desire for improvement is there not a space whereby we can experience the heart and soul of an image. Now, the two are not mutually incompatible as so many of the images of the DPS reveal. Perhaps it's because I'm partial to a bit of rough! Oh dear, here I go again!

Lisbon, and the girl with the yellow trousers showing us how vibrant an intrusion into a series of repeating shapes can be. The vibrant orange wall cut into by the curve of the dark tree. In his images of Yellowstone National Park there was the repeated use of trees cutting through the frame; those silhouettes leaping out of the image and throwing the background back and just out of our reach. These trees, similar in purpose to Helen Herbert's mythic trees though louder and larger, become a leitmotif with repetition; they have assumed an importance in Jack's work cutting through frames, becoming frames within frames and providing the contrast to the dominant image. Even in amongst the vivid red Mesas Jack finds at least one tree to enhance the composition.

At the end of the evening we had experienced lands both east and west through Jack's eyes; everything from Asian fish markets to the Durango and Silverton Railway snaking its way through mountainous countryside. But of all the images that remain in the consciousness the one that stands out in my memory is the red chair in Bannock. Abandoned, alone, once useful and integral to family life the chair is now merely a curiosity in an abandoned mining town. There is a whole story in this single object; a history of the bums that have taken advantage of its services, the lives it has been attached to and, like Van Gogh's chair, it has its own discrete shape and form: the classic image for the engineer to capture... architectural yet with a strong human connection... a compromise, one rendered with great care and subtle colour, detail and vibrancy. I can only dream that such an opportunity will come my way; either that or travel to Bannock.

John Cogan