

### **1.3/ The Making of reveal**

#### **From Idea to Exhibition – Realisation / Installation**

The means of presentation affects the context of any work. By its very nature as a large body of work, reveal is a difficult project to present in traditional means. In a gallery, 120+ prints will need space, and if they are to be presented democratically, each must share the same space and not compete.

In terms of a published work, a book for example, it would be possible to present the photographs of each person in their own double page spread, however this is again a large 100+ page edition, but would give the viewer their own timetable for looking at the images.

At the time I began to find partners in the community for the work, the director of Watershed Media Centre, Dick Penny, agreed to present the work as part of a community based website. It was with this as a final outcome in mind that I was shooting the work. It is interesting that the use of the web is a very democratic form of presentation, in that anyone with a computer can access the work and the web, and is able to interact with the work on many levels. Another feature of the presentation is that there is a digital café in Watershed, where viewers can access high speed internet and have the results projected on a large screen instead of a personal screen. This virtual gallery solves many of the problems associated with presenting such a large work as outlined above, and enables anyone to walk in off the street and access the work. The exhibition becomes a web based entity, remaining available for as long as required. It can be updated to add new features, keeping the content fresh. It can be linked to other sites to encourage traffic, and also include links of its own to other sites of interest. User feedback via email, to web hosts, Watershed, and to the artist are encouraged, and it is possible to construct an online comments book so that viewers can find out how others have responded to the work.

Another area for placing the work is editorially in magazines and journals, and this has happened already in Blueprint Magazine, in the September 2001 issue. It is hoped that the work can be placed again, but I have yet to find anyone in the UK to take this on. I have been told by friends in the photography business, that editorial possibilities would be better overseas, and they will be explored in 2003, now the project is complete.

In practical terms, the website idea was the one that had the best chance of being realized, but I am finding that as the work progresses, and more people see it, new opportunities arise.

I ended up making an exhibition based on the idea of picture narrative seen traditionally in examples like the Bayeux Tapestry, made to record the invasion of England by William the Conqueror in 1066.

The pictures were edited to form a selection representing 18 people, and displayed on four panels, mounted on aluminum. I chose to edit the pictures in a way that provided a continuous narrative based on the content of the pictures in purely visual terms. In a project of this nature, it is impossible to expect every shot to have as much artistic merit as each other, and the strongest pictures from the strongest sets were chosen to be represented in the exhibition.

I designed the panels with the tapestry in mind, thinking of how the images could relate to each other, form a sequence, and therefore, tell the story of Bristol at the beginning of a new millennium through the eyes of an artist and young people living in the city.

The panels were designed in Adobe Photoshop, an image editing program, after scanning the negatives on a high end film scanner. File sizes for each image came to about 300 megabytes. The whole file for the exhibition comes to over 1.2 gigabytes, saved as a Tiff file. I had compressed the file to a JPEG in order to fit it on one CD to send to the printer. The exhibition was printed on a Lightjet Photographic printer in London, on one piece of photographic paper measuring six meters by two meters, and then cut into the three panels, and mounted on aluminum for presentation. The fourth panel, that of the two lads, was produced separately, the same way.

I wanted to create a digital document that could be printed easily anywhere in the world where such a photographic printer existed, in order to facilitate any future international exhibition. The other advantage is that the three panels can be joined and mounted into a book form, folded concertina-like to make a book that can be opened to be six meters long- in keeping with the idea of the Bayeux Tapestry. As well as acting as a portfolio, this form of presentation makes transportation easier, and enables me to show the work to galleries and editors, who can judge the print quality for their own particular uses.

I hope that reveal becomes a book in this format, and I can design more panels/ pages to this effect, as the format is flexible enough to change and modify.

Combined with the website, the panels in book form or mounted, give people a chance to be introduced to the work, with the website acting as the main image bank where the work as a whole can be presented. In this way, and through editorial presentation in magazines, many people can see the work, which is the main point of all presentations- to make the work available to as wide an audience as possible.

## Research Sources

A project of this nature has some theoretical back ground, but I based my motivation on empirical experience. I have looked at portraiture, in particular reference to the concept of 'look back'. In short, the concept of 'look back' is taken from the movies, where the actor breaks convention and addressed the screen (the audience) directly through looking or conspiritorial glance, or by direct verbal communication. In still photography, the portrait artist often has the sitter look at the camera, and it is a normal convention. With this project, I am trying to link the idea of autobiography with the collaborative process, and the colour detail shots, to the idea of the sitter looking back at the viewer, knowing they are part of this project, presented as evidence of who they are. The exposure times are long, all available light, often at 1 second, to emphasis the 'look'.

In practical terms, I could not make this project without the help of the participants, and the organizations that let me find them. I approached schools, and local ethnic community leaders to find youth groups where I could pitch the idea and ask for volunteers. The contact with Multi-a was vital, as they have a well established reputation for working with artists in the community and are well respected in Bristol. They are a legitimatising force, with other contacts in the artistic community, which has lead to the presentation of the work, and meeting with organizations like the Watershed.

The main stress I had when I met with potential participants, was that the integrity of the project, and their images, would be safe in my hands, and those who I chose to partner me in presenting reveal. This element of trust is vital in work of this type, and without the trust the participants have put in me and the work as a whole, reveal could not have been made.

I always say that 90% of photography is 'being there.' You can have all the technique in the world, but if you are sitting at home, pictures are not going to take themselves. For me, access is crucial to find images that remain concealed, private places and moments that reveal themselves in curious pictures. reveal allowed me to find these private pictures based on a level of trust and cooperation that needed a sound theoretical base before the project was started. What started as an idea has turned into a philosophy of picture taking. What began as a desire to investigate a city through the lives of its inhabitants, has led to a project where the city is revealed by the places its people invested their youth, and formed their future.