



Viewpoint Mike Smith

Roland Barthes's celebrated critique on photography highlights the responsibility portrait photographers have to capture both the 'moment' as well as the person

In his book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes provides a framework for understanding the 'noeme', or essence, of a photo and photography. He starts by outlining two facets of an image: the studium and the punctum. The studium is the general context and overall impression of an image, and we find interest in these because we can relate to them through interest in a topic, region or style. Conversely, the punctum is something that catches our attention – our eye fixates on a detail, beguiles and forces us to concentrate on the image and understand its meaning.

Barthes then moves on to give a very personal and moving account of searching for the noeme of his mother in the photographs of her.

The photo he finds is titled 'The Winter Garden' and in it he finds 'the kindness which formed her being immediately and forever'. In other photos, he 'never recognised her except in fragments, which is to say I missed her being, and that therefore I missed her altogether'.

Barthes realises that the camera is only ever able to record a moment in time and he realises that expressions are fleeting, that body language passes and the decisive 'Winter Garden' moment is transitory. He rejoices in the ability of photography to record this, to have found

'Barthes realises that the camera is only ever able to record a moment in time'

'The Winter Garden', and yet understands that that moment has passed and is gone.

Yet that is only half the story, as he notes, "The Winter Garden" exists only for me. For you it would be nothing but an indifferent picture.' And that is because we have an image, a visual memory, an imprint of people – their expressions and body language – as a visual way of identifying and remembering them. The more intimately we know and are connected to someone, the stronger and



Mike believes this photo of his childhood friend captures a melancholy moment

deeper that imprint becomes. Our understanding of an individual and the visual imprint we create defines how we interpret a photo of them – my 'Winter Garden' of my mother will be different to my brother's.

Sharing the moment

The photo above shows my best childhood friend, my 'Winter Garden' of him. I think the photo captures his essence, or at least my understanding of it. This is an unguarded, melancholy moment and he is deep in thought, his being is shining through. I both recognise him, and understand and share that moment. I don't expect everyone else to, but maybe if I showed this photo to others who know him they might recognise him as a person.

As a portrait photographer, the burden therefore is not only capturing that fleeting emotional moment, but making it personal to the client.

Can you identify and capture their 'Winter Garden'?

Mike Smith is a creative photographer. See www.focali.co.uk for more information

New Books

The latest and best books from the world of photography. By Oliver Atwell



The Cry of Silence

by Antoine Agoudjian, Flammarion, £50, hardback, 160 pages, ISBN 978-2-08020-216-2



PHOTOGRAPHY as a witness to atrocity and displacement is depressingly familiar. That's not to say the quality and aesthetic of the images are depressing in their familiarity, rather that they serve as a stark reminder of the

struggle of people existing in politically unsound and fractured lands. Strong examples of this can be found in the annual World Press Photo awards, a prize that has become synonymous with images of conflict. With so many confrontational images out there, it can be easy to take on board the concerns that suggest such constant exposure numbs us to the plight of others. It's with this in mind that *The Cry of Silence* lands with such force.

Antoine Agoudjian's book marks the centenary of the Armenian genocide, an event that found the Armenian people decimated and exiled. It's the spectral aesthetic of Agoudjian's images that is the key here. The people featured in the book appear as displaced spirits drifting through a netherworld of purgatory. It's a testament to the strength of the images that, while the aesthetic is disconcerting, a warm glow of humanity shines. *The Cry of Silence* is astonishingly beautiful. ★★★★★

Photographing Newborns

by Mimika Cooney, Amherst Media, £19.99, 128 pages, ISBN 978-1-60895-739-2



IF MIMIKA Cooney's saccharine photography is to be believed, the first year or so of a baby's life consists of it smiling happily and lounging around on pink cushions like a louche French aristocrat. Of course, the reality can be more akin to parents lost in a fug of sleep

deprivation while the baby screams as if it is being subjected to a series of violent premonitions of the future. There may be parents out there who would like to commemorate their newborn, but perhaps there are considerably more tasteful ways to do it. However, if you really want your baby to look like a pickled punk who has been left behind in a fabric shop, by all means consult this book. ★★★★★

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