



Viewpoint Mike Smith

A portrait can reveal the subject's true character or create a persona - let the history of the genre inspire you

Creating an 'authentic' portrait has long been the goal of photographers and, as the cliché goes, the eyes are the window to the soul. But actually eyes are the windows to emotion... Paul Ekman's wonderful book *Emotions Revealed* (W&N, £6.99) shows that emotional expressions are the same across all cultures. If you can capture that fleeting moment, and particularly the eyes, you will delve into the emotional state of your subject.

What does vary between individuals and cultures is their management of facial expressions – that is, the extent to which they hide emotions. Emotional response is definitely a goal of street photography and reportage, but the requirements of portraiture are wider. Informal portraits will want their subject in a familiar setting, capturing that visual imprint, or essence, of the individual. Formal portraits will seek

a stylised response. The photographer will deliberately look for moderated facial expressions, directing the subject. This poses the questions, what persona does the individual want to present, and how can we use visual media to attain it?

Portraiture has developed this latter aspect since its earliest experimentation simply because exposure times were long, with the mid-1800s portraits of David Hill and Robert Adamson being prime examples. In fact, our exposure to portraiture will also be influenced by the works of Cameron, Evans, Brandt, Lange, Beaton and Avedon, for example. And this is where it pays to pause – portraiture suffers the same inimitable fashions that we see in all areas of photography.

Aspects come and go, but we can all take inspiration from what's gone before. Immerse yourself in portraits from photographers old and new, across the decades. See how styles have changed. Understand the setting and technique, what the photographer wanted to present, and what the subject wanted to show. The image shown here is of Frank Wild, deputy to Ernest Shackleton on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-1916. What does the image say of the man?

For inspiration, I've found the following examples invaluable. I'm all too conscious that at times I follow fashions, work at technical elements or become too concerned about expressions. Portraiture is difficult and it pays to stand back, look at the breadth of history and retain a sense of the tactile, physical impression of a portrait and your emotional response to it.

- *Film-Star Portraits of the Fifties* by John Kobal (Windward, approx £50).
- 100 Postcards from Penguin Modern Classics (Penguin Classics, approx £15).
- The eastern stairwell of the Royal Geographical Society's HQ in London, SW7 2AR, is hung with portraits of Gold Medal winners from 1840 to the present.
- The walls of The Lamb pub, in London's Lamb's Conduit Street, WC1N 3LZ, are covered with portraits of performers from the old Holborn Empire theatre.



© FRANK HURLEY (LICENSED UNDER PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA COMMONS)

'Frank Wild' by Frank Hurley – scanned from *The Endurance* by Caroline Alexander ISBN 978-0-74754-123-3. This photograph was first published in Ernest Shackleton's book *South*, William Heinemann, London 1919

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

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British Life Photography Awards: Portfolio 2

by Dewi Lewis Publishing, £24, hardcover, 160 pages, ISBN 978-1-90789-388-9



Can one image sum up what it means to be British? The inaugural British Life Photography Awards – a competition launched in 2014/15 seeking entries that best portray what it is to be British – certainly

believes so. With the wealth of competitions out there, it would have been easy to roll your eyes and prepare yourself for another glut of familiar images. However, it soon transpired that the BLPA was playing host to some of the best competition images we'd seen in quite some time. Some images were moving, some were technically brilliant and others were laugh-out-loud funny. Back for its second year, this year's competition is no different (see article on pages 24-29). If anything, an already brilliant competition has bettered itself. It's going to be exciting seeing the images that arrive in years to come, but for now we have this collection to satisfy ourselves. ★★★★★

This Land

by Joe Cornish and Roly Smith, Frances Lincoln, £30, hardcover, 256 pages, ISBN 978-0-71123-504-5



Joe Cornish has been a fixture in AP for years – and with good reason. Along with figures such as Charlie Waite, Cornish has established himself as one of the UK's great contemporary landscape photographers. Familiar

scenes around the country are offered a fresh perspective through the lens of his camera, inspiring many of us to get out there again and see how it is we could have missed it first time around. Cornish demonstrates that a landscape will never look the same way twice, due to weather, light and the general shifts of the landscape in flux. In this book, his fine photography takes in the vast and diverse geology of our land – from the Scottish Highlands to the southernmost reaches of England. Meanwhile, text by writer and campaigner Roly Smith explains the ins and outs of the formation of these lands and the stunning elements that come together to create such incredible vistas. This is really a very beautiful book. ★★★★★