

# DISTINCTIONS

Discover how these successful Fellowship and Associate portfolios reveal humanity's connection to land and ocean



## Fellowship Landscape

Alister Benn FRPS

**I got into photography in 2001** and became interested in landscape via my travels in Canada and the Himalayas, and living in China. My relationship with the genre really came into focus in 2004, and by 2009 I moved away from my previous

passion for bird photography to focus on landscape photography completely.

For me, the landscape is somewhere to escape to and relieve stress. Landscapes show us we're part of something bigger and photographing them helps me understand who I am.



### WHAT ARE RPS DISTINCTIONS?

Working for a Distinction takes you on a personal journey which will improve your technical skills, develop your creativity and broaden your understanding of photography

### LICENTIATE (LRPS)

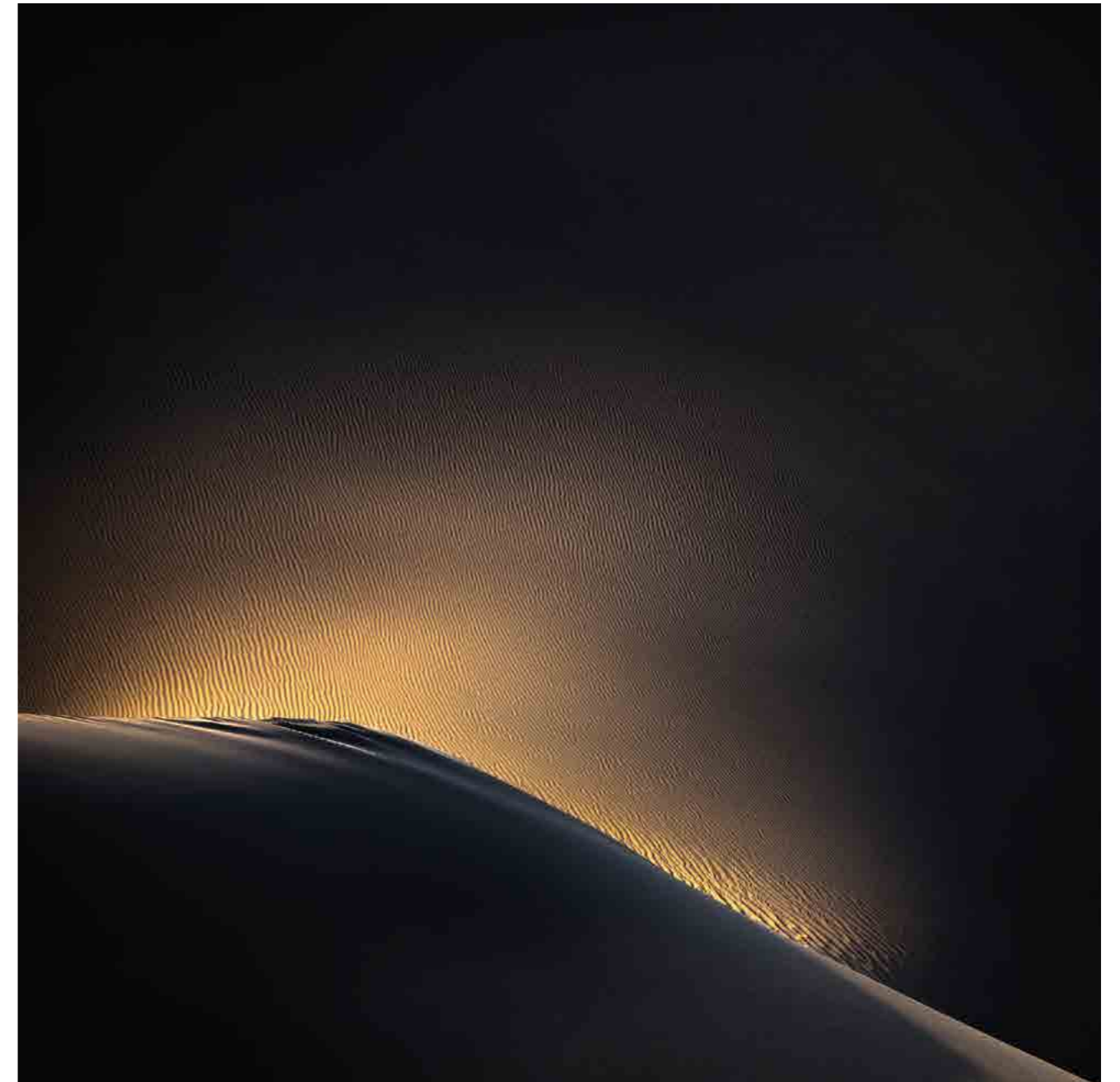
Applicants must show photographic competence in approach and techniques

### ASSOCIATE (ARPS)

Requires a body of work of a high standard, and a written statement of intent

### FELLOWSHIP (FRPS)

Requires a body of work of distinctive ability and excellence, plus a written statement of intent



Opposite page clockwise from top left 'Out of Darkness I, XII, VII and XVI'

Above 'Out of Darkness IV'

**“Landscapes show us we're part of something bigger and photographing them helps me understand who I am”**

When I'm shooting it's less about capturing subjects in the landscape and more about understanding my own inner emotional landscape.

There's an extremely close relationship between my emotional state and the landscape. Some places make you feel calm, others leave you thoughtful or energised. My whole philosophy with my photography is about finding that connection between the stimulation in the landscape

and our own inner landscape and emotional preferences.

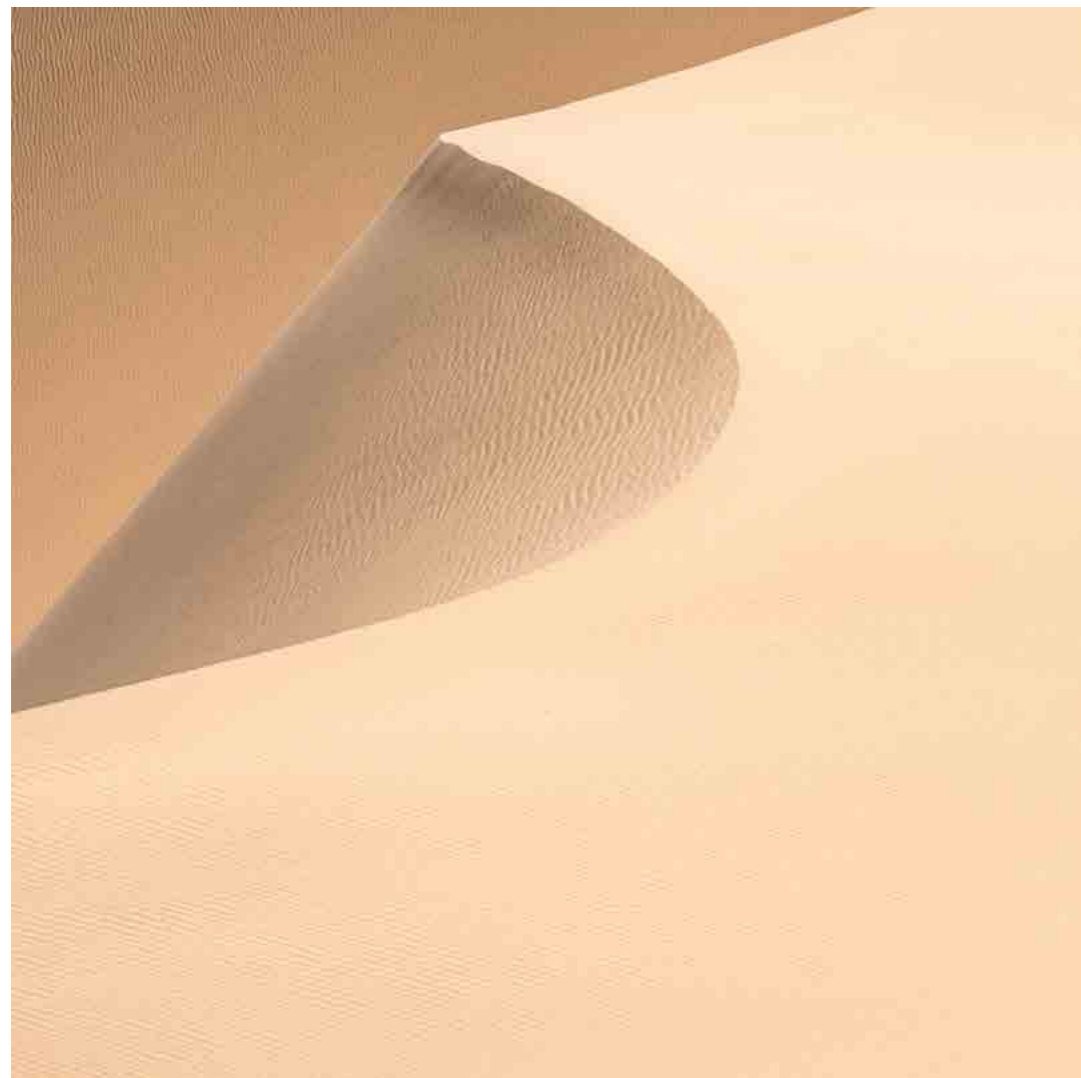
Landscape photography is my therapy these days. I feel different when I get out into the landscape – and not necessarily with a camera in hand. Being in the landscape, we look and we engage.

For the past four years I've been producing a book, *Out of Darkness*, an extension of the themes my Fellowship panel explores. Prior to beginning the project I captured photographs

in a formulaic manner. I knew how to take photographs that would be deemed pretty or popular, but I didn't feel like the landscape images I enjoyed capturing for myself fit this structure. My version of landscape photography is less about rules and more about personal and emotional engagement.

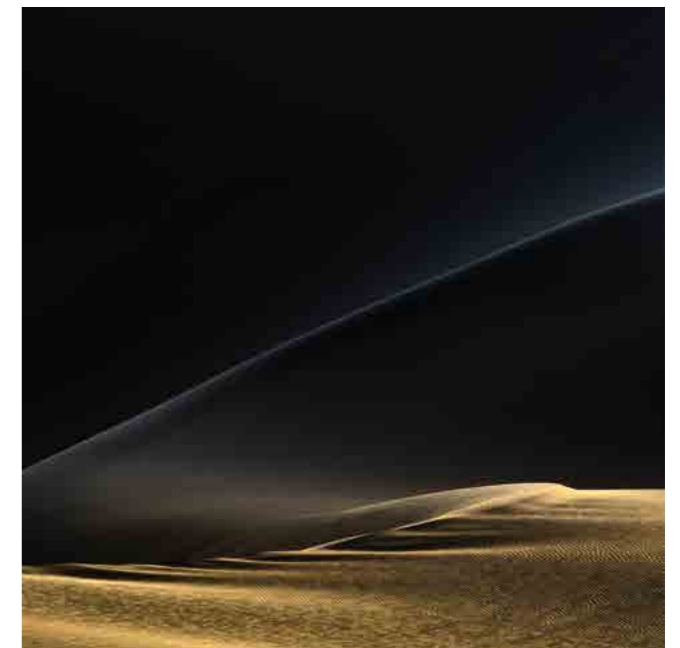
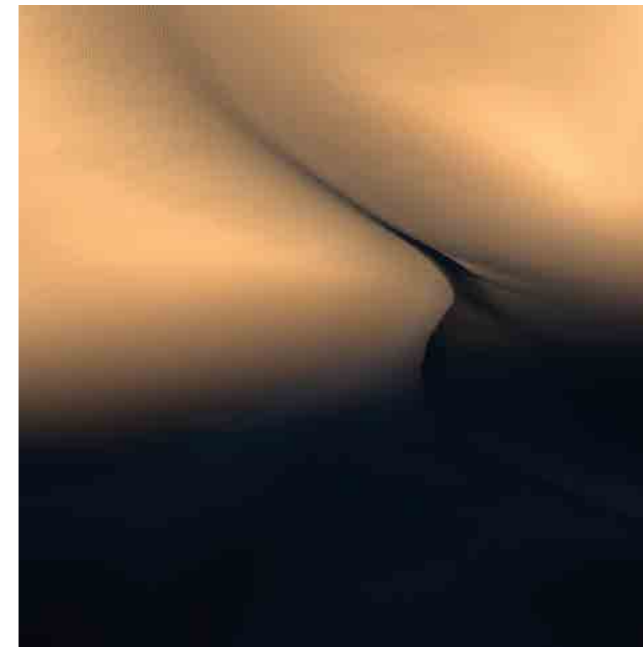
I went to the Gobi Desert for the first time in January 2017 – I've been seven times since. It's a desolate and hostile

**“There's a close relationship between my emotional state and the landscape. Some places make you feel calm, others leave you energised”**



**Left**  
'Out of Darkness XIII'

**Opposite page clockwise from top left**  
'Out of Darkness IX, XV, VI and X'



## Statement of intent

In January 2017 I made the first of seven expeditions into the Gobi Desert of northern China. Having travelled hundreds of miles off-road I found myself in a remote and hostile environment where at night the temperatures fell to -26°C.

The emptiness of the landscape, while at first daunting,

seduced me, asking questions and demanding engagement on an intimate level. Leaving my tent in the dim light before dawn, I would climb to 1,600ft above an endless vista, devoid of scale apart from the occasional scrubby bush.

For a while the cool, frosted shadows would resist, but finally

succumb to the delicate kiss of sunrise and daybreak. I became very much aware of my changing emotions and perspectives as I watched the landscape emerge from darkness into light.

The interplay of luminosity, contrast, colour, geometry and space opened my eyes to a new way of seeing and photographing.

Below  
clockwise  
from top left  
'Out of Darkness  
XIV, II, XX and III'

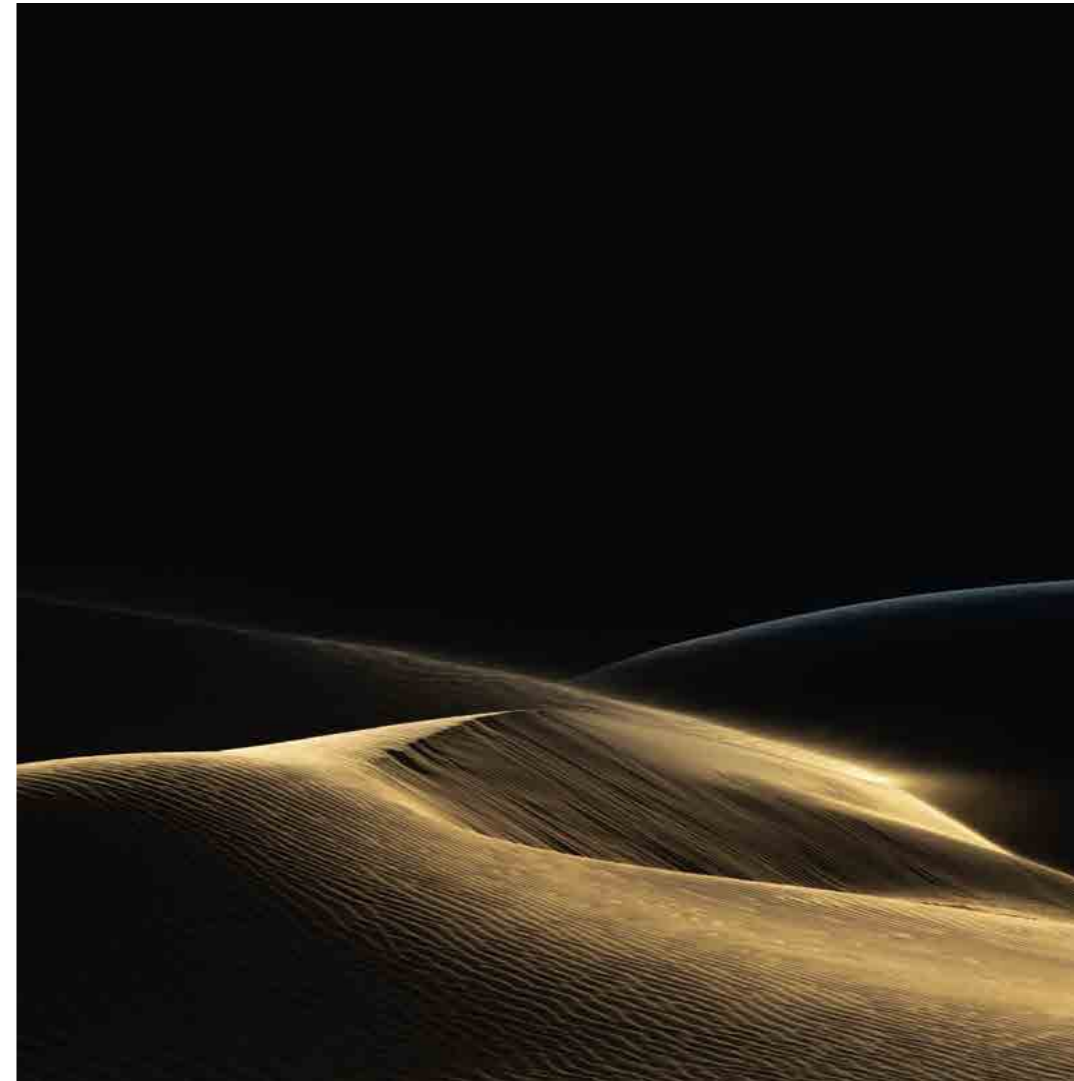
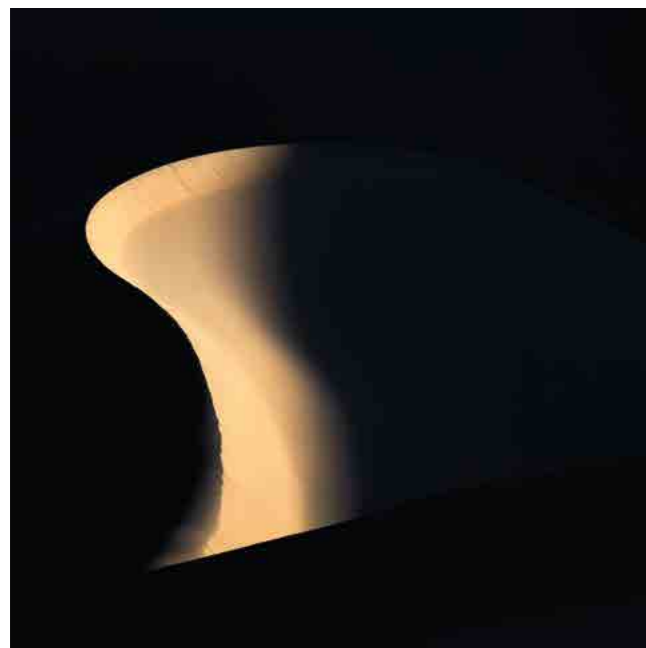
environment that doesn't lend itself to that templated, rule-of-thirds, leading lines mantra that gets drummed into photography students' heads.

For *Out of Darkness*, I started making photographs on a very intuitive level and came to understand that my landscape photography was a counterpart to my own inner landscape.

I suffered with anxiety and depression for about 30 years prior to starting work on *Out of Darkness* in 2017. As I spent more time in the Gobi Desert I began writing about and meditating on my experiences there. I realised the work I was producing was giving me a different perspective on my own mental health. Linking in

with its title, *Out of Darkness*, the creative approach behind this body of landscape photography was the catalyst that literally led me out of my own personal darkness.

I'm no longer affected by depression or anxiety, and I have a different approach to the world, my creativity, and my personal development.



**WHY THIS PORTFOLIO WORKS**  
**Joe Cornish FRPS,**  
**Chair of the Landscape**  
**Distinctions panel**

This outstanding portfolio presents images framing the sinuous, sensuous landscape of the Gobi Desert. These are the distillation of many journeys there, and of a life immersed in image-making.

The simplified forms and shapes of the desert sand transform light and shade into metaphor, into a journey from dark to light, emotionally and literally. The rhythm, flow and pattern of this portfolio appeals as visual art, yet the photographer's editing, intent and experience remain firmly connected to the desert geography where the photographs were made.

These images are evidence of an authentic photographic vision.

**“The creative approach behind this body of landscape photography was the catalyst that literally led me out of my own personal darkness”**

I credit my landscape photography for leading me to where I am today, mentally and emotionally.

The difficulty of dealing with your own work is that it's almost impossible to be objective. Every image to me is important and has value. This is where the help of the Society's Susan Brown FRPS was invaluable. Discussing my submission with an objective outsider was vital

to me putting forward a body of work and statement of intent that captured the essence of my relationship with the work.

Getting feedback is hugely valuable. I'll admit I was sceptical at first because I know my own mind, but that external point of view from someone who understands cohesiveness and the objectives of my work was so valuable.

Above  
'Out of  
Darkness V'