

DIGIT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY DIGITAL IMAGING GROUP
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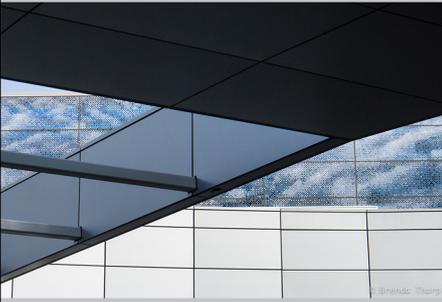
Upcoming DIG events

Details of all DIG events are available on the Group's website at
tinyurl.com/sxzl487



Event programmes are still subject to disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, please check on the RPS website or with the Centre Organiser for the latest status of any event.

Digital Imaging: Online
Saturday 17 October 2020
Online



Brenda Tharp
online event
**Photography
Close to Home**

www.rps.org/DIGONLINE10

Digital Imaging: Western
Sunday 18 October 2020
Online



Di Wilkins ARPS
**'A Mixed Bag'
of her creative photography**

www.rps.org/DIWesternDiWilkins

Digital Imaging: North West
Sunday 25 October 2020
Online



Glenys Garnett BA Hons
Getting Creative with Glenys
Discover your inner spark

www.rps.org/dignw-oct2020

Digital Imaging: Southern
Saturday 5 December 2020
Online



Kevin Maskell FRPS
**'Flowers in Ice'
and Other Projects**

www.rps.org/digsouthern-2020-12

Digital Imaging: Western
Sunday 31 January 2021
Online



Ralph Snook ARPS EFIAP
**'Wildlife Snaps From My Travels'
"The Good, Bad and the Ugly"**
covering anecdotes, techniques,
memories and frustrations.

www.rps.org/DIWesternRalphSnook

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Cover image: The Confetti Fields by Martin Addison FRPS

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From the chair

Ian Race



We are now in the middle of the Digital Imaging year, six months on from the AGM in February and six months away from the AGM in February 2021. Six months way from our Annual Print Competition.

It is time to start the planning.

We will, I think, have to plan for two different days. Firstly, for the usual, normal, AGM where we meet in person at Smethwick Photographic Society at Oldbury which has brilliant hospitality, excellent facilities for the day, good transport links and a choice of local hotels. Secondly, for a virtual online AGM.

We have been running online talks for some weeks now and can get 400+, 500+ attendees at these talks. The AGM needs to be an interactive meeting where the current committee members present their annual reports to the membership, and answer members questions. The new committee is elected, and then the Annual Print Competition takes place.

This year our membership has increased, and an online meeting offers all members the opportunity to participate. However, with over 1500 members how we run the AGM successfully is the challenge.

The same questions apply to the Print Competition. Many members bring their prints with them on the day, though others have sent them in and some entries we print for the day. This year we had over 400 prints submitted from 137 members. Again, we have some thinking to do in how we might run this as an online event.

Fortunately, we are not the only group with these issues, so we will look to see what we can learn from other's experience in running online AGMs and online print competitions.

Editorial

Gary Beaton



By pretty much any measure, this year has been rather strange. But amongst the upheaval that the coronavirus pandemic has caused, for many it has offered time to devote to one's interests...

although sometimes without the freedom to pursue them as widely as one might like.

In this issue we have articles to offer photographic inspiration when we can get about without restrictions once again and showing the results that are possible to achieve without leaving home. Martin Addison shares some wonderful images captured at the Confetti Fields in Worcestershire and Simon Caplan shows what can be done in a garage with a torch and a table.

On a slightly different topic, photographers tend to be a conservative bunch and tend to be loyal to a particular brand or system. Michael Berkeley recently made the jump from Nikon to Sony and he tells us whether the change - and the investment - was the right move.

We revisit Little Hope, the village somewhere in England of Julie Warrington's imagination and we get to meet a new character sure to bring a smile.

Frank Adams also gives us a masterclass on digital monochrome printing based firmly in darkroom principles.

Add in a couple of Challenges and we have a bit of variety to appeal to everyone. I wish you good reading and I hope this issue provides you with interest inspiration for the coming months.



Confetti fields



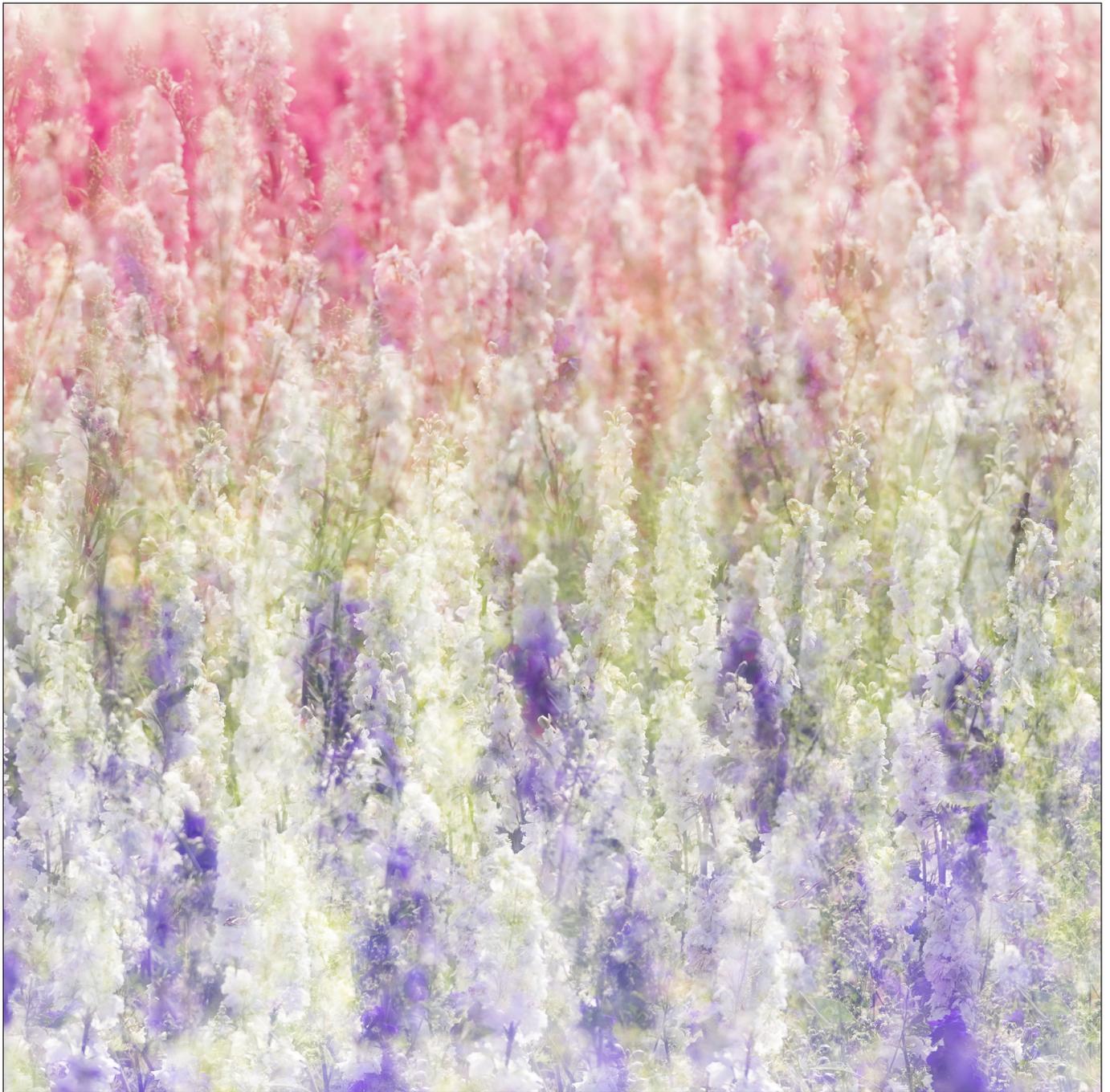
MARTIN ADDISON FRPS has been photographing flowers. Not content with just one, he has been to the Confetti fields. He shares with us some of his images and some tips for capturing similar images.

The Confetti fields

The Confetti fields at Wick in Worcestershire were started in 1998 by Charles Hudson to provide an alternative to paper confetti and have resulted in beautiful fields of colour ever since. Now it is open to the public and is a popular tourist attraction in July each year. This

year was the exception of course and sadly it was closed, however they planted a second crop this year and were able to open in August. I visited in 2017 and came away with some very attractive delicate images.

When I photograph flowers and wish to get a soft image with lots of out-of-focus areas I use



a long lens. These photos were all taken with a 70-200mm lens mainly at 200mm. I now have a 100-400mm lens and would definitely use that if I went there again. The lens need to be at its widest aperture, in my case $f/4$ and the technique is to crouch down and shoot through the flowers, allowing the nearest ones to be out of focus and picking out perhaps a single flower at the furthest focus point of the lens. This is not always easy and you have to spend some time making small adjustments to your position to pick out the one flower while everything else is a blur. It is usually easier to use manual focus and move yourself back and forth to focus.

The flowers are Delphiniums and are mainly

pink, white and blue.

Poppies

When photographing these Poppies, I used the same 70-200mm lens but added a Canon Close-up attachment 500D, which moves the closest focusing distance from infinity to 500mm. This creates a lovely softness to the out-of-focus areas. Again, I use the largest aperture possible and focus manually.

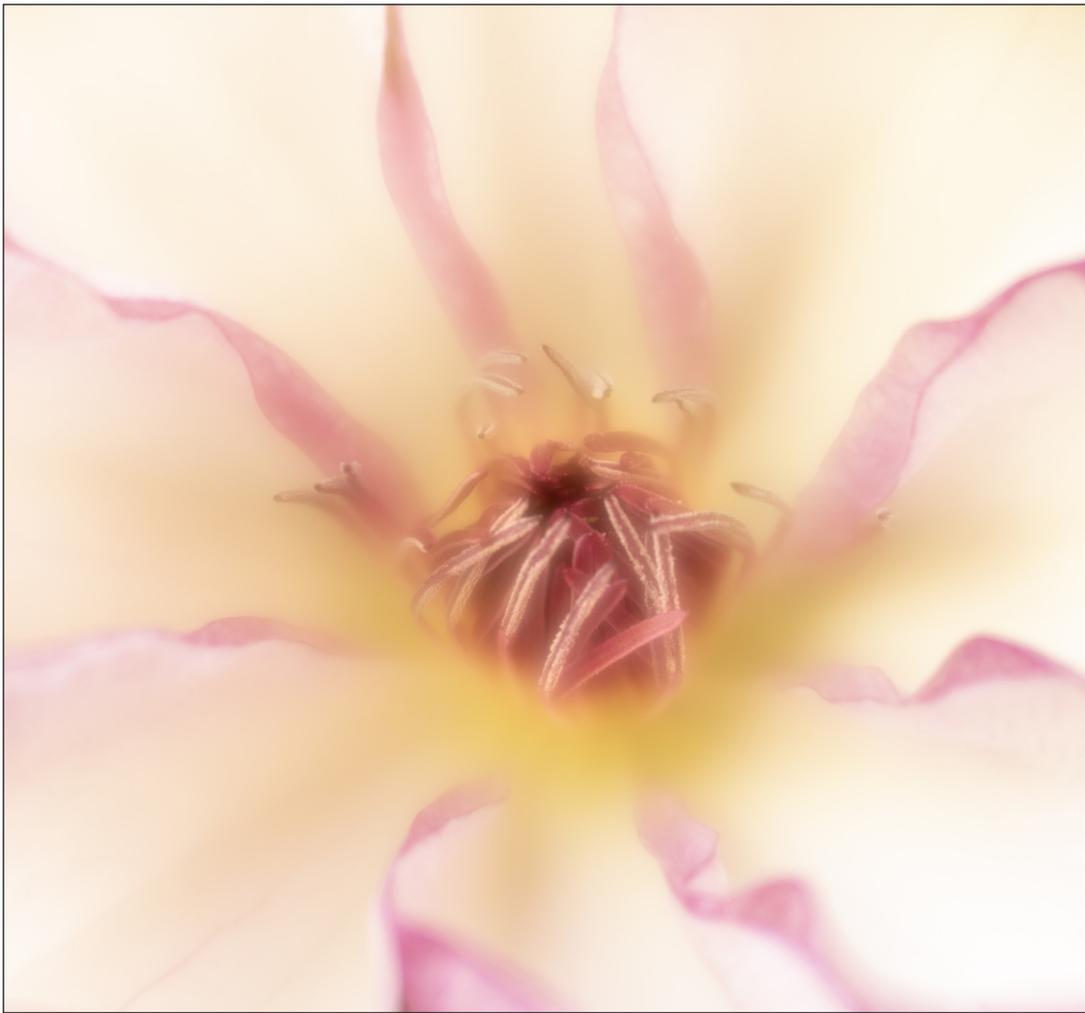
Lensbaby

I also use a Lensbaby Velvet 56 on my Sony A7r3. Although I have never used it successfully for anything else, it is great for shooting flowers.



Poppies

CONFETTI FIELDS



Lensbaby shot



Post processed example

It is a manual focus lens and I use it mainly at its widest aperture which is $f/1.6$. The out-of-focus areas are quite different to when using a macro or long lens and can be used to emphasise these effects.

Post processing

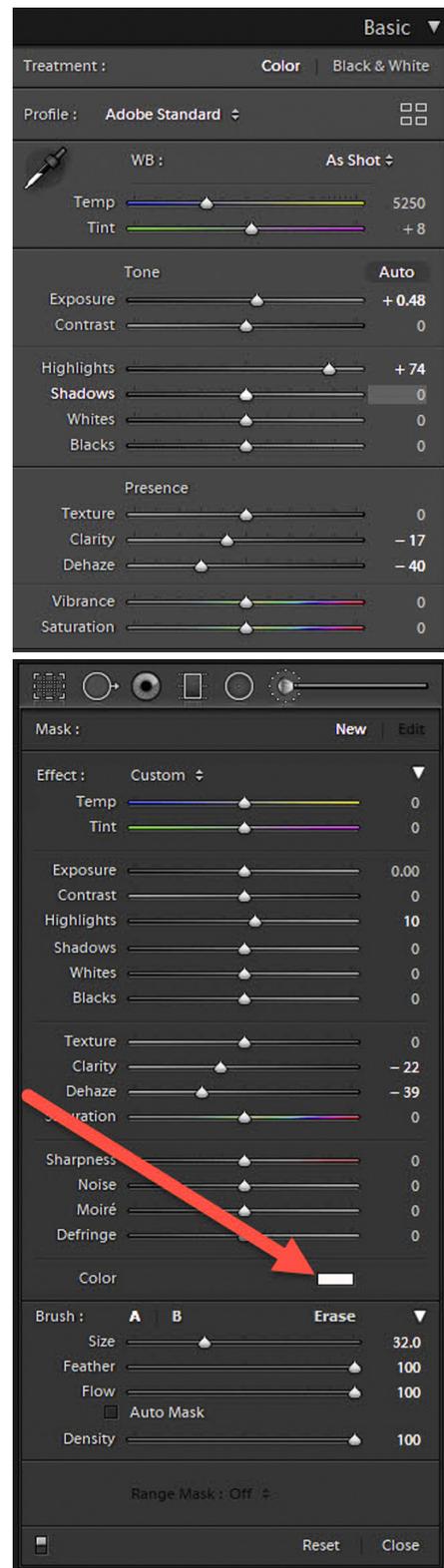
I believe in getting the picture right in the camera and then there is very little post processing required, perhaps this is a result of many years of photography on slide film. I use Lightroom for all my work and very rarely need to use Photoshop. In the Confetti example shown (previous page, bottom), I have simply increased the Exposure and Highlights and this is the case for most of the other images shown. The starting image is shown below.



When I want to soften the picture, I use negative Texture or negative Clarity. Another useful option is to use negative Dehaze, which softens and blends. This results in the image below, with the sliders in Lightroom shown (right, top).



Although I haven't done so here, all these sliders can be applied to selected areas by using the Adjustment Brush - one of the best tools in



Lightroom. One tip when using the brush to fill in areas is to pick the colour of the main subject in the colour picker (shown with the arrow, right, bottom). Click in the picker and drag the cursor into the image to choose the colour. This will blend the colours much better.

I find photographing flowers a very rewarding activity and something almost everyone can do at home, which is so useful in today's situation.



A rubbish still life

Out of the dark

Creating still life images with a touch of Renaissance atmosphere



SIMON CAPLAN LRPS puts his garage to good use, but there's no room amongst the masterpieces for a car.

Today we take for granted the ability to attach a flash to our camera, plug in a continuous lighting source or use the natural light coming through windows to illuminate our still life or table top photography.

However, the great Renaissance painters had

no such advantages. They had to make do with candlelight or whatever seeped through narrow and poorly glazed windows and skylights. Caravaggio famously even punched holes in the thin walls of his dingy lodgings (much to the chagrin of his angry landlady) to create extra



Coffee break

shafts of directional light whenever he needed them.

As a result, the paintings of these artistic giants have very specifically directed light and plenty of moody shadow - and are imbued with a drama and atmosphere we can find very hard to replicate today.

So when I set out to try to give my own still life images that kind of classic feel and atmospheric drama, I found it far from straightforward. There was almost too much light available to me.

The solution was to work in complete darkness (in my case, in my garage with the windows and doors covered by blackout curtains) and to paint the light on to the subject matter with a hand held torch - mine is a simple LED one bought from a camping shop. This approach enables me to control the amount of light in the scene and keep it focused on the subject matter in a way that replicates the limited light available to those Renaissance masters.

It's not as easy as it sounds. You can fail to adequately illuminate the darker, less reflective areas or, more commonly, paint in too much light where it shouldn't be - blowing out the

highlights on particularly reflective surfaces, and leaving unsightly pools of excess light on the table top itself. A great deal of care has to be taken and the brightness or output of the torch, the angle you hold it at, how close you bring the light to the subject, the reflective qualities of the items you are photographing and how long you dwell on each of those different elements are all factors. I don't use a diffuser over the head of the torch, but if you can find a way to make the beam more specific and focused more precisely on the smaller elements of your subject matter then that might be helpful.

My approach is to shoot the whole 'scene' in one long exposure. The camera is supported on a tripod and put on Bulb setting, using a cable release to control the length of the exposure.

I shoot most of these particular kind of images at $f/18$ on a 50mm lens. The camera is set about 3-5 feet away from the subject matter - usually level with or only slightly above the level of the table top. I manually focus on the front edge of the table top itself, with the subject matter usually positioned a few inches back from there. The background might be a further 3-5 feet away from the very back of the set-up. This is



Romance in self isolation

because I usually want all elements of the main subject matter to be sharp but the background slightly out of focus. Some people feel a still life has more atmosphere and 'three dimensionality' if they use shallower depths of field to create an image where most of the subject matter falls away into a delicate softness. This can be true, depending on your subject matter and the effect you want to create - there is no right or wrong. It is an artistic decision for you.

The direction of my lighting is very important. The light available to Renaissance painters usually fell through a narrow aperture on one side or from above. That light would brush

across the subject at an angle, leaving much of it in shadow but highlighting some features and reflecting off others. Such directional light creates drama and a sense of 'three-dimensionality', something I think all good photography in any genre should seek to achieve. For this reason I light the set up from the side, usually at quite an acute angle. Flood something with light straight from in front of it and you'll see how flat and lifeless it can make an image.

Once I've settled on the direction and angle for my light, I open the shutter and keep the torch moving with the head angled. I try to 'skim'



The workman

the light over the surface of the subject matter rather than just flood it with light. This helps replicate the way limited natural light would flow in a dark setting and enables me to better manage how much falls on each element. I tend to dwell less on brighter, reflective surfaces and more on darker ones - keeping the torch a few inches away from the item being lit but taking it closer in if that item is particularly small.

After lighting the subject itself I always shine some light on the background - mine is most often just a basic piece of grey, heavy-duty, textured, weed-suppressant fabric I bought from a garden centre. I usually aim this light

immediately behind the largest or most important element of the set-up. I feel that having some limited light on the background draws the eye through the image from front to back and helps create that elusive sense of 'three-dimensionality'.

It might also be a good idea to start by practising on a simple object - like an egg or a piece of fruit or even a length of fabric.

Some photographers light, shoot and process each element separately - piecing together the final image through a series of layers in Photoshop. It is a complex and time-consuming approach but may give you more precise and



Is there a doctor in the house

polished results and is worth considering as an alternative way of working.

Once I have an image I am reasonably happy with, I seek to improve it further in post processing. I usually have to warm up the white balance as LED torches generally give off a blue light. In addition to subtle dodging and burning, I may also create a blank layer and gently dull down the brightest 'white' reflections and highlights with a very soft black brush set at opacity of just 3-6%. A carefully and selectively applied Gaussian blur can also help restrain particularly harsh highlights and create smoother, more realistic reflections. In addition, I will often create another blank layer and use a white brush of a similar low opacity to enhance any natural shine or reflection that should be there - such as the reflected light along the rim of a plate or the edge of a metal handle or blade.

Of course, before you even start lighting and shooting an image, you have to decide on your subject matter and work out how to arrange it.

I see many still life images that appear to be a random collection of objects that don't normally

go together. In my view, this rarely works. I feel that the content of a still life has to make sense to the viewer - either telling a story or representing something innately beautiful that might potentially exist in an everyday setting. Some of my images are the collective tools or objects associated with a particular profession or task - as if the person working with them has suddenly upped and left, leaving clues behind as to what has been going on. Other shots are simple representations of a meal or household items that, to my mind at least, feel right together. There is no right or wrong answer here though - your subject matter has to be an artistic decision for you.

I sometimes roughly sketch out an idea for a set-up on paper and then spend weeks or even months looking for the right items to stage it - browsing in charity shops or flea markets or borrowing items from friends. I can spend significantly longer planning and setting up a shot than actually taking and processing it.

A big influence is the work of the 18th century French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. He was probably one of the first artists to realise



John P. Caple
© 2020

Feeling blue



The passing of time

that everyday foods and kitchen equipment could make attractive subject for paintings. In fact, studying the work of still life painters is a useful starting point. Chardin and other Renaissance masters like Pieter Claesz are worth considering, but it is also useful to look at how contemporary still life painters such as America's Sarah Lamb or the UK's Lucy Crick choose their subject matter and structure their paintings.

What you notice with all these works is that the careful placement of each item matters to ensure they work together and give the overall subject matter a sense of flow and balance.

Objects that overlap slightly work better than those that are placed too far apart. Objects that offer a gentle step up or down in height from whatever is next to them, create a better overall sense of proportion and balance. Long, thin or flat objects that run horizontally across the frame - or point straight at the camera - rarely work well. Colours that subtly complement each other work better together than those that clash.

Personally, I like to create a simple triangle with the different elements in my set-up. This often

starts with something leading the eye in from one side of the frame (sometimes a piece of fabric) followed by a series of items building in steps towards the image's highest point, with the most important element ideally on the third of the frame. The shape of the set-up will then often drop down again in steps before reaching an item that takes the viewer out of the frame again on the far side.

Whichever approach you take to lighting, subject selection or post processing, I can promise you one thing: being able to create a still life image is very rewarding. It has got me through the isolation of lockdown during this COVID-19 outbreak - giving me plenty of opportunities to continue enjoying my photography despite the restrictions.

And unlike Caravaggio I have been able to get the most from my art without upsetting my landlady.

See more of Simon's work at simoncaplanphotography.co.uk or at [flickr.com/photos/simoncaplan.](https://www.flickr.com/photos/simoncaplan/)



Digital black and white



FRANK ADAMS FRPS blends traditional darkroom techniques with digital technology to produce stunning monochrome prints.

My first attempts at digital black and white were just awful although my colour work was acceptable and replaced my Cibachrome printing. It was not until 2010 that I started making digital black and white prints again when I purchased an Epson 3880 that uses three black inks and a dedicated black and white programme. The colour casts had gone but the prints did not challenge a well crafted silver gelatine darkroom print.

There was very little technical information on the printer or the papers. Sun Tzu, the military strategist said "Know thy enemy". For an engineer that's 'know your problem'. So I set out to discover the issues and solutions using practical experiments.

I compared digital papers with silver gelatine paper 'tell tales' to determine the maximum blacks (D_{max}) and the minimum white (D_{min}). The comparisons were made using an AGFA digital densitometer, this showed that tonal range of digital papers compared favourably to silver gelatine.

However, digital printing of Stouffer 21-step wedges (copied on a flat-bed scanner) showed an anomaly. A clean D_{min} was impossible, the whites were grey by 0.5 stop or more.

Clearly the problem lay with the printer. Armed with this information I had discussions with Epson representatives, they were most helpful and they came back with the answer.

For successful black and white printing with

DIGITAL BLACK AND WHITE

Epson 3880 or Epson P800 printers, the high point shift must be turned off, otherwise the highlights are grey and the print is degraded. This is found in the Epson print panel - Print settings-color-advanced B/W-mode-advanced-high point shift 'OFF'.

The printer should be used in the 'Printer Controls colors'. The printer programme does not use paper profiles, it has its own. The high point shift is necessarily on by default when colour printing.

Digital prints that compare or exceed silver gelatine in tonal range can now be made. Post processing software controls the printing map. I found the paper attributes were slightly different; easier highlights with silver gelatine, but superior shadow detail in digital.

My digital printing paper choice is Hahnemühle Gloss Baryta although there are many other excellent alternatives.

Post processing

My darkroom analogue past now shines through. I am uncomfortable using multiple layers; the technology gets in the way of the visual picture art. The workflow I use is controversial, being similar to darkroom procedures. The picture is built up in stages with each stage saved and printed. This allows the tones to be viewed by bright light reflected off the print. A picture viewed by transmitted light on a LCD screen is not the same

The images are in RAW and I make only basic image corrections in the RAW converter to obtain the widest tonal range. The white colour temperature is checked, and then processed by the use of AUTO. PPI is set at 360, this means that each pixel is below human visual perception on the print; 16-bit is used. The image is now sent to Photoshop.

The very first action is to determine on the screen what the picture composition is going to be. This is now cropped and saved.

The overall tonal range is now constructed using Curves; the white and black clipping points are set using the eye droppers. Then a mild S-shaped contrast curve is imposed. This is printed to see what the picture looks like which is then used as a printing map, with the zone and tone requirements marked on the print.

The most important element is where the light

falls. The image is still colour at this stage. A decision is made; do any of the colours need tweaking by using 'Hue and Saturation' to differentiate them before converting to black and white? Particular care has to be taken with skies as blue can badly striate.

Now the best bit, where the fun starts, where the image is converted into a picture. I use the black and white function in 'Adjustments' as it employs all the positive and negative colours. The converted black and white picture is again checked in curves.

The zones to be worked on, are in turn selected with the biggest feather that is practical and processed again in Curves to the appropriate tone and contrast. After the basic tone map has been constructed, it is saved and a print is made. This is viewed and decisions made where to fine tune (or start again!!). Small tonal corrections are made using the Dodge and Burn tools. Avoid flat black and white tones as they appear muddy.

There is one overriding issue; if there is a band of light, this must be the brightest and most contrasty part of the picture, the shadows are obviously darker and low contrast, sometimes I Gaussian blur them by 1 pixel. If there is a major sky element it is Gaussian blurred by 1 to 2 pixels. This reduces noise and makes the sky realistic as a sky is never sharp. The image is now processed in small adjustments; every 20 adjustments it is saved and printed to check the progress. This allows retracing to make alternative corrections. Many of my pictures have five saved steps with up to 100 total small adjustments. When the work is completed the saved steps are discarded.

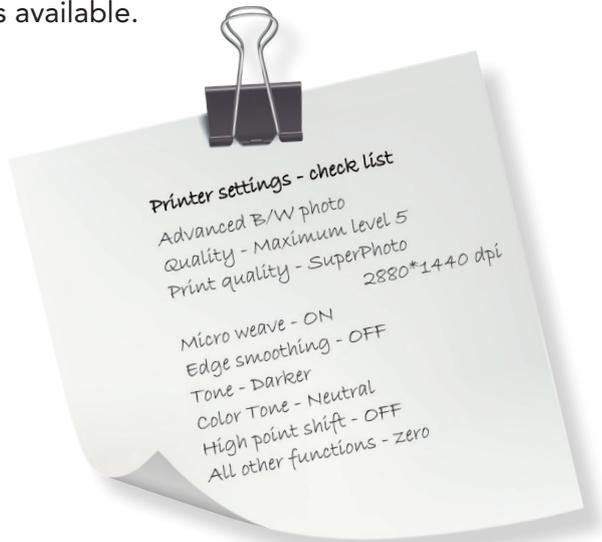
When the picture is finished the highlight area only will be sharpened. I do not use the Sharpen functions in 'Adjustments'; I think they are an abomination not intended for photography. I use 'Others', High pass and use it sparingly, 1 pixel. This will brighten up the highlights and lift the picture by giving a sparkle.

The unsharp mask function can be used imaginatively for special effects to produce very small artefacts that will lift the image and not be obvious, for example in water spray.

There is a problem when using selections with large feathers, the corners are rounded where it tries to go out of picture edge. The solution is to make a large canvas, then the selection can go out of the picture frame at any angle required.

Crop the picture out of the canvas later.

Here is a checklist for the printer set up. These settings are for Epson, check your printer for what is available.



Two of my black and white prints are illustrated here. Both of them are an interpretation and printed to give the ambience I felt in the scene. I like taking images just after rain with light diffused, directional light, as I feel this gives the best chance for good black and white pictures.

The first one was taken in the Orkneys (see page 17) on a stormy day with very high winds. We travelled to the centre of the island and found

a small lake and sat sheltered in the car park to have our flask of coffee. The wind and rain died and the scene with the small fishing boat appeared, making a foreground. Fortunately the lake became quite calm and made a middle distance. The distant torn, wind-swept clouds were unsuitable for a quiet scene. Later, several suitable quiet cloudscapes appeared and these were photographed. In post processing, the most suitable one was selected and married to the bottom half to make the complete picture

I was fortunate, the wind came back with a vengeance and the scene was completely lost. This image won a PSA silver medal.

The second example is of Lindisfarne (below). Of course, pictures of Lindisfarne Castle have been taken many times. I wanted to make a personal interpretation of it. Fortunately the rain had just stopped, making the road glisten and the grass wet and shiny. A low camera view point was selected to make the castle dominant. Several dynamic cloud formations were also photographed to be combined with the foreground in post processing. The grass and the road were processed to give two contrasting elements to the top. This picture featured in advertising a major exhibition.





Defecting from Nikon to Sony



Photographers tend to be a fairly loyal and conservative bunch when it comes to camera systems. MICHAEL BERKELEY LRPS decides to change systems and tells us how things went.

I read an article in a *Which?* magazine not so long ago about brand loyalty and it commented on how photographers stay with one make of camera equipment for many years. This will be no great surprise to DIGIT readers. Once you have invested a lot of money in one particular make, it's a big step - not least financially - to switch to a different brand.

So why have I just done exactly that and defected

from my trusty Nikon DSLRs to Sony mirrorless cameras?

I had been watching a series of videos by Jared Polin (froknowsphoto.com) who - like me - had been a Nikon user for many years. Unlike me, however, he has vast experience of other cameras and he reviews new equipment as it is released. In his videos, he was saying that mirrorless cameras are the future and he was singing the praises



Sony α9ii with 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 lens at 600mm; f/6.3; 1/1000th sec; ISO 250

of Sony, to the extent that he was switching his allegiances from Nikon.

In particular, he was saying that the Sony α9ii is an outstanding camera for sport photography, which naturally sparked my interest as a sport and small venue, live music photographer. Although all sport has been cancelled for much of this year, I normally photograph a lot of football, polo and cricket - and any other sport that I can find. It's the old adage that the photographer is more important than the equipment, but I do believe that good equipment makes all the difference with sport photography.

Fast forward a few months, my Nikon kit is on eBay and I am now the owner of two Sony bodies and three Sony lenses. I am glad to say that we have some sport being played again, although it may be some while before we have live music again in small venues. I bought my main camera at the end of last year and my long lens (200-600mm) during lockdown, so I have only recently been able to test it properly in action.

Having been a Sony user for a little while now, was it the right move - and was I right to listen to Jared Polin?

It's important to say from the outset that my

new kit is not directly comparable with my old kit. I had an obsolescent full-frame D700 and a 'mid-range' crop-sensor D500 which, although excellent for sport, is not as good as the 'top of the range' Nikon D5 - although it does have the same focusing system as the D5. Some describe the D500 as a professional camera, but it is in a 'more affordable' price range.

The Sony α9ii is, however, most definitely a professional camera. It can shoot 20 frames a second electronically and is 24.2 megapixels. I have also bought a Sony α7iii (at about a third of the price) as a backup camera, which is essential in certain sporting situations. The lenses I have bought are the 24-70mm f/2.8; 70-200mm f/2.8; and the 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3. As you can imagine, this was not an insignificant investment... The two shorter zooms are truly excellent lenses and, while the long lens is good, I couldn't justify buying the 400mm f/2.8 at over £10,000, which would give me the shallow depth of field that I would ideally like.

But was it worth it?

One of the reasons people give for going mirrorless is that the equipment is a lot lighter and, when you get to my age, that is very

DEFECTING FROM NIKON TO SONY

attractive. But my experience of my Sony kit is that it isn't any lighter. Although the camera bodies are significantly smaller in size and weight, the lenses are 'top glass' and are every bit as heavy as their Nikon counterparts. If weight is important to you, buy different lenses!

If not the weight, what do I like about the Sony camera and, in particular, the $\alpha 9ii$? Many things, but here are the top ten:

1 - The best word that I can find to describe the focusing system is that it is astonishing and the Eye Autofocus is a revelation. The camera automatically searches out the eye and tracks it as the person moves - you can even select which eye to track. Once the camera has 'locked on' to the subject you want in focus, the tracking is superb. In the image below, the focus tracking kept locked onto the player in the middle although the horses on the left were moving in front ...



Sony $\alpha 9ii$ with 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 lens at 600mm; f/6.3; 1/800th sec; ISO 125

2 - Some say that the Sony menu system is very complicated. I suppose it's a question of what you are used to, and I don't find it an issue now. But the real benefit is being able to programme three Custom Buttons and twelve Function Buttons however you want - so that you can access the functions you use the most, literally at the touch of a button. And, in addition to the usual P, A, S and M mode options, there are fully programmable user modes (three on the Sony $\alpha 9ii$ and two on the Sony $\alpha 7iii$). I currently have one set up for sport and a second for music photography, so all I have to do is to select one of these modes and I know the camera is fully ready.



Function setup on the Sony $\alpha 7ii$

3 - Of course, one of the obvious features of a mirrorless camera is that, well, it doesn't have a mirror. This means that there is an electronic viewfinder (EVF), which shows you precisely what the picture will look like - focus, depth of field, exposure, colour etc. Change the exposure and the EVF will show you the consequences. There is therefore no need to check your images on the back of the camera after you have taken them, because you have already seen what they will look like. This is particularly helpful at live gigs where the lighting is outside your control.



Sony $\alpha 9ii$ with 24-70mm f/2.8 at 70mm; f/2.8; 1/160th sec; ISO 800

4 - While on the subject of gigs, the Sony performs extremely well in challenging lighting conditions. I usually set the aperture and shutter speed, and then leave the ISO on Auto, within parameters. In the photo below, the ISO has gone up to 16,000 and there is minimal noise (see next page, top left).

5 - One of the biggest changes from my Nikon is the ability to shoot silently. I once used my D700 at a concert given by a harp player and each time I took a photo everybody looked round and glared at me. In sports such as golf, where you cannot photograph the golfer on their down



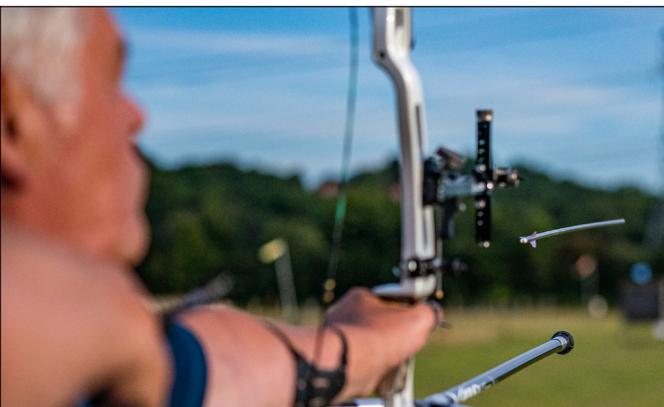
Sony α9ii with 24-70mm f/2.8 at 24mm; f/2.8; 1/160th sec; ISO 16,000

swing for fear of distracting them, it is also a big bonus, but is useful wherever you want to avoid annoying your neighbours, such as in a crowd of away supporters at an ice hockey match when their team is losing.



Sony α9ii with 70-200mm f/2.8 at 70mm; f/2.8; 1/1000th sec; ISO 2500

6 - My old Nikon D500 could shoot at 1/8000th second – whereas the Sony α9ii can go as fast as 1/32,000th second, which is helpful when trying to capture an arrow in flight...



Sony α9ii with 70-200mm f/2.8 at 70mm; f/2.8; 1/32,000th sec; ISO 3200

7 - Being 'electronic' has other advantages because issues with the camera can be resolved

remotely. I was always a bit concerned that the sensor was fully exposed to the air when changing lenses, with the risk of attracting dirt or - in the case of the image below - spray from the sea. There has been a firmware update since I bought the camera, and this has added functionality that now closes the mechanical shutter automatically when the camera is turned off - problem solved!



Sony α9ii with 200-600mm f/6.3 at 600mm; f/6.3; 1/2500th sec; ISO 640

8 - The anti-flicker shooting can detect flickering/blinking from artificial light sources such as fluorescent lighting and times the shooting of images to moments when flickering will have less of an impact. This is really helpful when shooting music, but I also had it switched on while photographing basketball in the sports hall.



Sony α9ii with 70-200mm f/2.8 lens at 73mm; f/2.8; 1/1000th sec; ISO 16,000

9 - I am impressed by the quality of the photos that the cameras will take. For example, the image at the top of the next page was taken from the far end of the football pitch and it is possible to read the barcode on the ball quite clearly. This is not of course unique to the Sony but,

DEFECTING FROM NIKON TO SONY

considering the lens is not the 'top of the range', I am more than happy with that level of detail.



Sony $\alpha 9ii$ with 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 at 588mm; f/6.3; 1/3200th sec; ISO 640

10 - I was also happy with the dynamic range when I was photographing surfers on a gloomy day in Cornwall (see below), although I confess that I would have preferred a sunny day!

There are other reasons to like this camera for action shots: 242 RAW shots without buffering; zero blackout in the EVF; 693 autofocus points covering 93% of the screen; in-built WiFi so that you can transmit direct to a laptop; and, of course, the 20 frames per second....

But did I make the right choice in moving to Sony?

The jump from DSLRs to mirrorless cameras is not as seismic a change as the leap from film to digital, but it is still a significant step forward in technology. I am sure that Nikon will catch up in the mirrorless race - and Canon already appear to be doing so - but I am delighted by the quality of the images that I am getting with the Sony and enjoy using the functionality that mirrorless cameras bring.

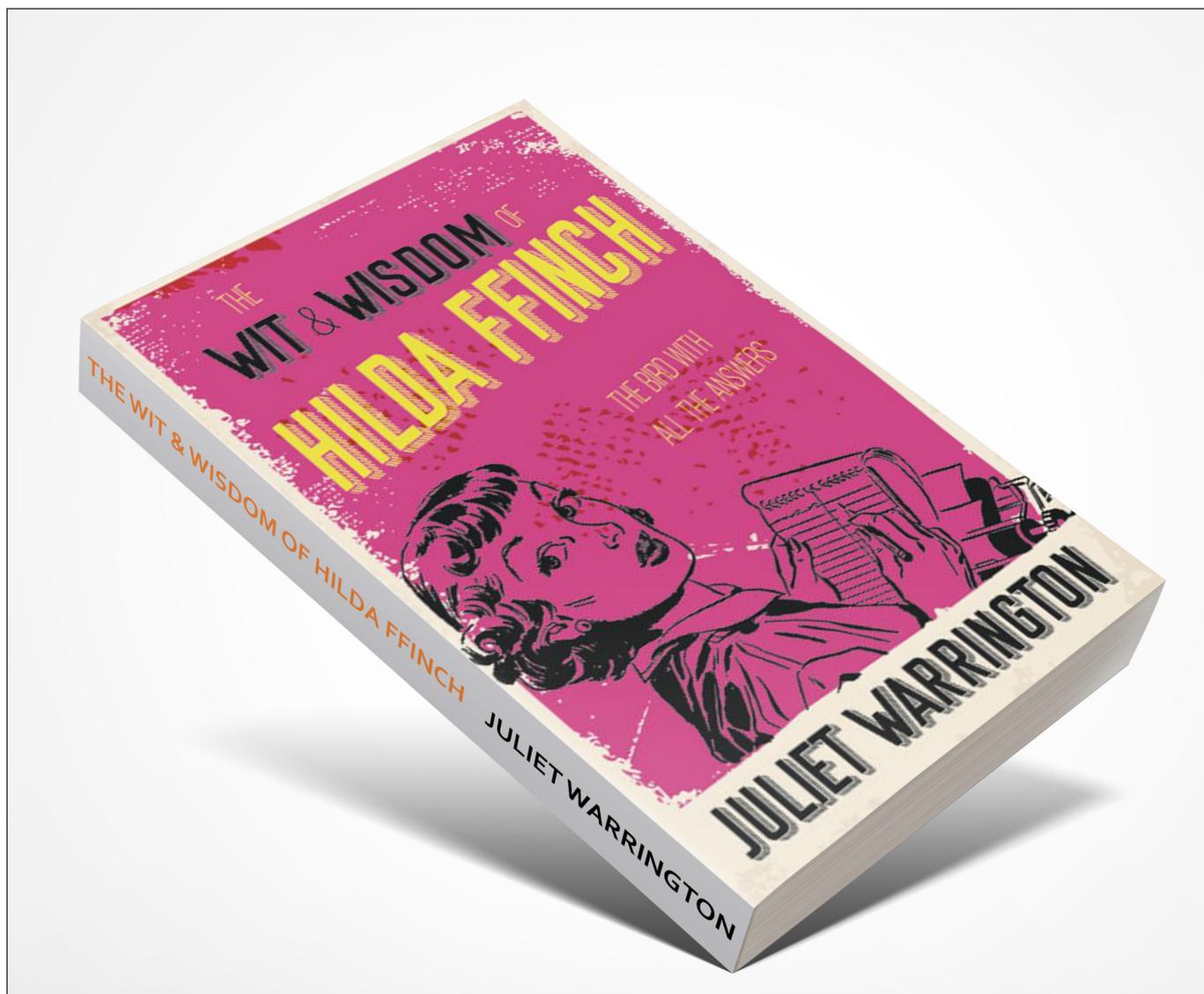
If I were asked if I would go back to Nikon if (or, I hope, when) they bring out a camera of similar quality to the Sony $\alpha 9ii$, the answer is almost certainly 'No', for the simple reason that it is an expensive business changing brands. I am pleased to have made the change once, but I would have to think twice about doing it again.

For now, my loyalties are with Sony and I am in love with photography again.

If you are interested in sport photography, Michael has written a series of blogs on how to photograph different sports, which can be found on his website at michaelberkeleyphoto.uk/how-to-.



Sony $\alpha 9ii$ with 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 lens at 600mm; f/6.3; 1/640th sec; ISO 125



The Wit and Wisdom of Hilda Finch



In this issue we make a return visit to the village of Little Hope. JULIET WARRINGTON gives us an update on life in her imaginary 1940s village and we meet some of the villagers seeking the advice of the new local agony aunt, Mrs Hilda Finch.

Three years ago I was fortunate enough to be asked to write an article and submit some photographs to the Royal Photographic Society's 'DIGIT' magazine. As an amateur photographer and budding writer I was both thrilled and excited to have been asked, and thus it was that in September 2017 my article

'Mrs Fox Goes To War' was published. The Mrs Fox of the title was an eccentric no-nonsense sort who lived in darkest Yorkshire in a fictional village called Little Hope, which was inhabited by an array of colourful characters, who were played in my photographs by my long-suffering family and

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF HILDA FFINCH

friends.

At the time that the article was written, the project - intended as a tribute to our wartime generation - was almost entirely photographic in nature, but a pile of papers on my desk labelled 'Mrs Fox The Book' (a working title!) was beginning to grow. As weeks turned into months, the written word gradually took precedence over my photographic work, as the characters in my images, took on lives of their own and began to people the pages. My manuscript, originally intended to be a conventional story about Mrs Fox herself, shifted focus somewhat as my villagers knocked on the door of my imagination and spilled out their woes and worries to me as soon as I opened it. They had concerns about evacuees and Anderson shelters, they worried about sea-mines bobbing merrily along in the North Sea off Cleethorpes, about air-raids and light pouring from the tops of their chimneys during the blackout and about getting their gravy browning to just the right consistency to enable them to successfully paint their legs now that stockings were rarer than chicken's teeth.

As they stood there in line at the open door of my imagination, tapping their feet and waiting for answers (preferably before the sirens went again), it occurred to me that they'd actually come to the wrong house. What they really needed wasn't little old 21st century me staring back at them blankly, but a good old 1940s agony aunt to whom they could take their woes and who would sort them out in double quick time. Thus it was that Mrs Fox's erstwhile neighbour, Hilda Ffinch, stepped up to the plate.

Married to a long-suffering colonel in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and as rich as rich could be, she was in every sense the archetypal lady of the manor. Glamorous, unshakeable and bored enough to take on the post of agony aunt at the local newspaper, Hilda was exactly what the villagers needed - or would have been if she'd possessed even a modicum of tact and laid off the gin occasionally - but hey-ho! She knew more about the ins and outs of wartime life than I clearly did and so I gave her full rein as the villagers flocked to her banner.

The letters to Hilda Ffinch flowed in then and Hilda's less than helpful replies flowed out, and very soon my book *The Wit and Wisdom of Hilda Ffinch* was finished and scheduled for publication in September. A very excited me then decided to

create a couple more images to run alongside it, my first photoshoot in a year or more!

Of course, we all know that 2020 hasn't exactly gone to plan. As a descendant of some of the real-life plague villagers of Eyam in Derbyshire, I'd often wondered what their lives might have been like as their world suddenly lurched out of control and nothing could be taken for granted anymore. 2020 saw a parallel drawn for me certainly, and as not just the UK but large swathes of Europe ground to a halt, it became clear that my planned photoshoot wasn't going to happen anytime soon. It just couldn't. In the wider scheme of things it was utterly unimportant. There was no way that I could gather my villagers together and cart all of my photographic equipment about, it wasn't safe to do so and it could easily have endangered others.

But then cue-in a moment of idle finger-tapping thought, as the contagion rate in these parts began to fall, and it was announced that a couple of households could meet up in the great outdoors. The whispering voice of the redoubtable Hilda Ffinch in my ear: 'Leave the box brownie in storage dear and use that thing you call your 'mobile phone' instead. It has a camera on it, doesn't it?' Walter Smith has a large garden and you can snap away at him from behind the hedge! Pull yourself together and get on with it!"

Game on! The challenge I set for myself: use an iPhone 11 to take some socially-distanced images of two new characters: the flat-footed Walter Smith and the man-hungry Miss Delilah Mayflower. My cousin Sandra, who usually plays Violet Millington and with whom I had shared at least 200 socially distanced coffees at the height of the contagion (she leaning over the garden gate and me some 10 yards away on the doorstep), agreed to come over and flit about in the back garden here in character as Delilah, and my old friend Dave - the Reverend Aubrey Fishwick to Mrs Fox's fans - donned some new 1940s togs and took on the persona of Walter in his back garden for me.

It worked a treat! As usual, once the images were taken and safely back on my computer, I set to work editing them in Photoshop and also made use of Anthropics 'Portrait Pro' and 'Smart Photo'. The results were, I think, pretty good - I was certainly pleased with them - and it's certainly opened up the possibility for me of doing more of the same as we gradually move out of isolation and are able to meet up with wider groups of people.



Walter Smith, taken with an iPhone11

Dear Mrs Finch,

I hope it is alright for me to write to you. I don't live in Little Hope, but in another village nearby.

As I have severely flat feet I couldn't sign up, but I do my bit. I'm in the Home Guard though and am very happy to help the ladies in the village with digging and weeding their allotments as I know how hard it can be on those of the female persuasion who find themselves left alone in time of war and, to be honest, my own wife is very keen to get me out of the house most days. She says that my flat feet get under her normal ones and I suppose that she does have a point.

The problem is that when I do waddle off to visit one of my ladies, I find myself subjected to a regular goosing!

Excerpt from Walter's letter to Hilda Ffinch

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF HILDA FFINCH



Edna Muffin, taken on a Sony a500

Dear Mrs Ffinch,

My daughter, Rosy, is now of an age when she's starting to ask questions about 'where babies come from, and I'm not sure what to tell her. I've always been very shy and self-conscious about - well, you know, that sort of thing - and I'm really not sure if I can bring myself to explain the facts of life to her...

Excerpt from letter from Edna Muffin to Hilda Ffinch



Dolly Grey, taken on an iPhone 11

*Dear Mrs Ffinch,
Last Tuesday night I found a man with a pair of binoculars in my back passage, just behind the pig bin. When I confronted him - with a large frying pan and no teeth in - he claimed to be from the War Office and said that he was on the lookout for fifth columnists. I told him to go away before I called a constable...*

Excerpt from letter from Dolly Grey to Hilda Ffinch

Hilda's replies to these letters are, of course, completely lacking in tact, but she's beyond my control! Waving my villagers off into the great unknown to take their chances in the big wide world is a little bit like seeing your children off to

Uni! I'm nervous but hopeful that they'll be OK!

But for the time being, it's back to lurking in hedges with an iPhone and a gas mask for me - the possibilities are endless, as is the patience of my photoshoot models!

The Wit and Wisdom of Hilda Ffinch by Juliet Warrington is available now from Amazon. If you do decide to settle down with a copy, I do hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it!



IN A FRAGILE PLACE

Tony McDonnell LRPS

When not being urged by my wonderful wife to perform 'essential' household tasks, most of my life is spent trying to come up with ways of interpreting photographically the theme of monthly competitions held at my camera club, Beacon, of Malvern. In August 2020 we were given the challenge of "Fragile": this was not an easy theme to visualise and trying to think of something original was proving difficult. The on-line competition is judged only by its entrants and there are four criteria against which to score - Interpretation, Creativity, Technique and Impact. To do well, one needs to try and tick all the boxes and this is where the fun starts! For this theme, images of fragile flowers and insects' wings etc., no matter how good technically, really won't cut the mustard in the competition. So after many hours of contemplating the problem, I quite liked the idea of a house of cards but - again - an image of a just a house of cards in itself is not that creative: it does not really tell a story, or have much impact. I knew I had to have another element to be in with a chance of winning. So, with five daughters to choose from, I decided to ask the eldest - Claire - if she would be a fragile face in my image. She must have been in a good mood because she agreed. So the idea was forming: a fragile person in a fragile place and I even had accidentally discovered the title *In a Fragile Place* which was unusual for me, as normally I spend weeks thinking of an idea followed by the same amount of time again to come up with a title.

The first images I took were of Claire. As she lives 150 miles away and because I wanted plenty to choose from, I photographed her in a considerable variety of poses. The one I settled for finally was that in which we smudged her make-up to create a 'tear' look, also the expression showed a vulnerability which suggested fragile.

Next, I needed a house of cards. After several attempts and a few profanities I realised that a trip to the shops was necessary to buy some glue. I knew exactly how I was going to photograph The House and

what perspective to use. The shot I chose was going to form the main structure of the final result (image 1).



Image 1

Not content with one house of cards and now excited about being able to use glue with which to stick things together, I built another architectural masterpiece. I wanted this to be within the shot and I also wanted it to be starting to fall apart, so as to demonstrate further fragility. To save time in taking hundreds of individual shots, I used the 4k video mode on my camera to record more cards being dropped onto my wonderful building. From this I was able to extract a frame from the video for insertion into the final picture. At 4k, such images are smaller files than are produced by the camera in 'stills' mode and therefore suffer from a lack of sharpness. I then set about increasing their quality by using a Topaz plugin called Gigapixel which does an amazing job in such circumstances (image 2).



Image 2

I wanted to add more falling cards to the image, so again I used the above method to capture a shower of cards which had been placed on a large cushion and then thrown into the air by my son. I found that this method was superior, giving a much better spread of cards.

Then, I needed to add some texture to the main image to give the impression that the house of cards was in state of disrepair and even more fragile than it would be normally, so I took some images of flaking paint.



Image 3

One more source image was needed to complete the composite, and that was of cracks. I found a china dish with hairline cracks which I photographed with a macro lens: I wanted to put these on Claire's face further to imply the growing feeling of fragility.

To build the picture, using Photoshop I started with the base image of Claire (image 3) and used Topaz 'Remask' to extract her from the background. I then added the house of cards and again used 'Remask' to cut out the parts I did not want. Next, I duplicated the image of Claire and positioned her on top of the house of cards.

I added the falling cards and placed them on a layer under the house of cards and Claire. Then I added a 'levels' adjustment layer so as to brighten the falling cards a little. Next, I added the second house of cards (having again used 'Remask' to cut it out) followed by a mask and a black brush erased the parts of the cards I did not want. The peeling paint layer was added using the 'multiply' blend mode. A further tickle with mask and black brush removed the peeling paint from Claire's face.

Finally, to Claire's face I added the cracks from various images I had composited previously. The reason for this was I was using the 'multiply' mode to blend them onto Claire's face, and this caused a darkening of her skin. I found that if I added each 'crack' image individually, they overlapped they got even darker because of the 'multiply' mode and therefore it was impossible to get an even finish. So, by importing them as one composited sub-image, I was able stop this happening. I then added a 'levels' adjustment layer to brighten her face a little. This process was repeated for the cracks on her neck. Then I added an 'exposure' layer on top of all the other layers just to brighten the whole image. The final composite is shown in image 4.

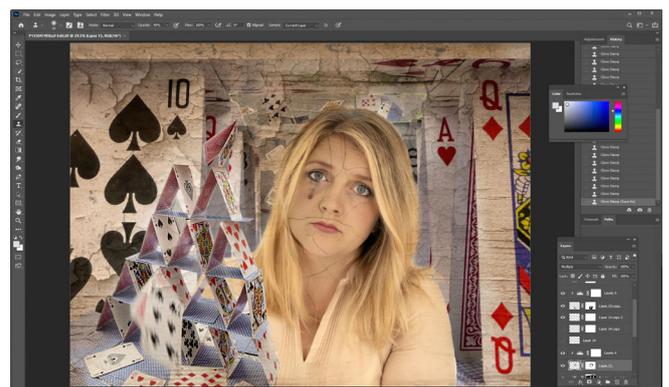


Image 4

The finished image did well in the competition coming first, so all the hard work had paid off!



STILL LIFE

Paul Herbert ARPS

Still Life is an image consisting of two elements that were combined in-camera using a multiple exposure setting. This technique often produces results that are not a true representation of the original subject(s), and I have become increasingly drawn to using it over recent years as I explore more creative aspects of my photography. I took my cue from a presentation by Valda Bailey showing the potential for a more creative and less representational approach to photography, using both multiple exposure and intentional camera movement techniques. For my editing I use Darktable and GIMP – they are approximate equivalents of Lightroom and Photoshop respectively.

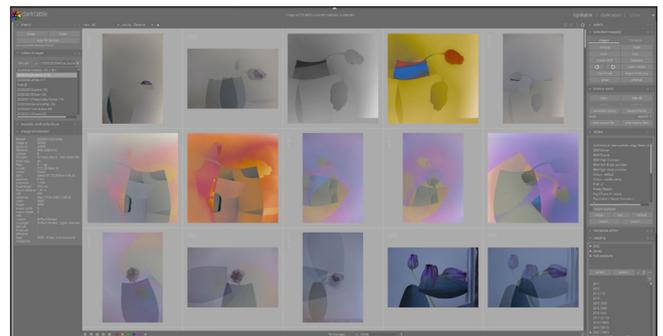
Valda outlined how she made multiple exposure images 'in camera' by changing various parameters between individual shots. I was intrigued and decided to explore this more creative path but I discovered

that making acceptable multiple exposure images isn't necessarily straight forward. For me at least, the process is quite fluid and imprecise, with a large element of trial and error which leads to a high number of mediocre images consigned to 'trash': perseverance is critical. When I take multiple exposures I have my camera set up so that it will take up to 9 sequential images before the 'final' image is automatically saved as a RAW file, but none of the intermediate images (exposures) are saved. This means the total number of images saved is minimised with the downside that I can't look back at the individual exposures, although with Canon Digital Photo Professional software I can identify the blend mode applied for each multiple exposure sequence.

I generally choose either the camera's Light, Dark, or Average multiple exposure control (blend mode) setting for my multiple exposure sequences. I usually check the image on the back of the camera after each shot and re-compose if I'm not satisfied with the result. If I come to a point where I think an image has future potential, I will terminate the sequence and save it. I can then use this image to start a new multiple exposure sequence, possibly with a different blend mode / white balance / aperture / or even (very rarely) a different lens.

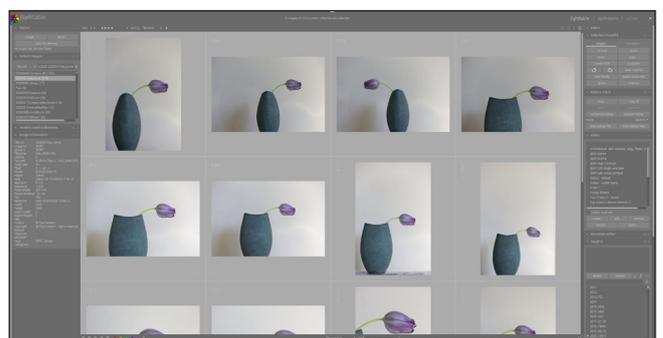
Inspiration for making 'Still Life' came from a YouTube video by Doug Chinnery called, 'Creativity in a Crisis', which provided some tips on making images during lock-down using multiple exposure techniques with objects and artwork found within the home as subject matter. The main subject and first element of the image was a textured curved earthenware vase containing a tulip. I thought that the way that the decaying tulip stems were drooping would complement the curves of the vase. I took a series of images of the vase and a single tulip in natural light with our living room wall as a background using my Canon EOS 5D Mark III with an EF 70-200mm f/4 L USM lens, handheld in aperture priority mode. When I started, I had no fixed idea of what the final images might look like.

Initially I took multiple exposures with the control set mostly to Bright or Average and with the vase / tulip being moved between each exposure but the results didn't really inspire me (see screenshot 1). I went back and took a set of more conventional single images against a plain background. At this stage the images looked very bland and uninteresting and definitely in need of a second element to give them a boost (see screenshot 2).



Screenshot 1

One of Doug Chinnery's tips was to consider other household objects as part of the creative process. With the camera in multiple exposure mode I tried blending some of the single images of the 'vase and tulip' with a second image of a poster of one of David Hockney's 'Pool' paintings, while experimenting with the multiple exposure control set to Bright, Dark, or Average - this produced more interesting results. My next idea was to use one of my own prints that I'd framed and put on the wall (see image 1) for the second element as it also had strong colours and geometric shapes which I thought might work well. So I tried again using a number of the simple vase and tulip images as the starting point for an ME sequence, but now with the Additive multiple exposure control, making sure that the second image was aligned with the first. The results were quite 'washed out', so after seven attempts I decided to select a different image (see image 2) - taken at ISO 400, f/4.5, 1/200s - which turned out to be the starting point for 'Still Life'. With the multiple exposure control set to Dark, I rotated the camera so that the shapes in the second image were aligned with the vase and tulip in the first image before taking the shot: I didn't want the tulip flower to be intersected by any of the lines in the background, and I also had to



Screenshot 2



Image 1

DIGIT CHALLENGE



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

avoid any reflections of the living room being visible in the glass of the framed print.

I felt the resulting multiple exposure had some merit (see image 3), but the tulip stem wasn't really visible so I had another attempt, this time lightening the second image by adding 1-stop exposure compensation. This had the effect of revealing the tulip stem and making the second image less prominent in the combined result (see image 4). There is still some yellow from the second element bleeding through into the blue-green of the vase, but I quite liked this effect. The settings for the multiple exposure image were ISO 400, f/4, 1/13s - the ISO for subsequent shots in a multiple exposure sequence is governed by the initial image although some other parameters like aperture and shutter speed can be changed during the sequence.



Image 5

In Darktable I applied the default haze removal and vibrance modules and used the 'filmic rgb' module to make basic adjustments. The colour was tweaked in the 'channel mixer' module by increasing the blue channel to 0.8 with an overlay blend, opacity of 45%. I re-touched the lower left corner of the image to remove parts of a newspaper that I'd used to rest the vase on. I like using a square crop for abstract images but in this case felt a bit more 'breathing space' was required, so I did a freehand crop which put the tulip flower on an intersecting 'third' before exporting the image from Darktable (see image 5).

I received feedback from an on-line forum that I should try flipping the image horizontally. When I tried this I felt that it produced a better result, so in GIMP I used the Nik Collection Colour Efex Pro 4 plug-in Pro Contrast module to give the image a bit more punch. It was this final (horizontally flipped) image (see image 6) which I entered in the RPS Distinctions ****Official Group**** Joe Cornish competition in April 2020. To my great surprise, it was selected as the winner.

You might ask why I bother making an image like this in-camera when it could be created using GIMP (or Photoshop) - after all 'Still Life' is constructed from just two single images blended together, the first being a tulip in a vase, the second an image of a framed print. I do know that this approach would produce a similar result, but using the in-camera multiple exposure technique is much more satisfying to me: in a way, the constraints of the multiple exposure approach means it is simpler, with fewer choices available to be made by the photographer. Further, checking the multiple exposure image as it is built up means I have the opportunity to make changes to perspective, focal length, aperture etc. as I go along. Although the technique very often produces unusable images, this time I was really happy with the result.

All previous issues are available from the Digital Imaging Group magazine page of the Group's website at rps.org/digitarchive



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