

David Buckland

Video Interview Transcript for the Portrait Explorer in the IT Gallery

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Do you see yourself as an artist working with photography, or a photographer?

I'm very much an artist in my approach to the way of using photography, so I consider myself an artist. There is something about the photographic image that totally fascinates me. You know, it's *the* most international language, I can show anybody anywhere in the world and they know how to read a photograph. It's extraordinary, you don't understand how invasive in both a good and a bad way that's been in terms of our culture, in actually meshing together cultures, which is probably a bad thing. But you know 'Coca Cola' ads, that... big picture of Lady Di, everybody in the world knows how to read a photograph and it's incredibly powerful. So I use all of that known language when I work - that's what I think about when I make photographs, when I make these kind of pictures - they are accessible to everybody, and that's very exciting. Then you can have a huge audience which is already geared up in thinking, and brings to you - looking at your pictures - a whole knowledge, which they've spent their life accumulating.

What particularly fascinates you about digital backgrounds?

It's very interesting working with theatre, you have a completely different discipline - it's very physical, it's very large, it's very immediate - you have an incredibly direct conversation with your audience, your audience is there and you visibly watch them or be there with them and I think that's influenced my work. But it also influences the kind of story-telling. I think, I always think photography is basically story-telling, that's all it is; it's how you tell a story. You know even being minimalist, like sort of Avedon whatever, you know, he's saying concentrate on the face or whatever, but it's still basically telling a story within a different way and the kind of stories I like to tell are the ones that like to rely on having lots of placements and lots of imagery in the background so that when I build up an image in the background that's almost as if ... I'm inviting the audience to read my photographs, not look at them - you know you look at pictures endlessly, you look at photographs, but I actually want people to read my photographs and if there's something in there then usually it's something that's been thought about. So I guess that... I'm not sure if it links directly to theatre. I'm not sure how direct that link is. I think theatre is an influence, but it's not directly, I think actually photography came first. I think photography influences much more what I do in the theatre, than actually the other way round. I love the whole concept and idea of photography.

How much of your idea for a portrait do you communicate to the sitter beforehand?

The one of Siobhan is - because it is such a constructed image - you can almost sit down and draw it exactly and say I want this there, this there, this there, and this is the kind of performance I want out of you Siobhan, in this kind of again porcelain, very, very calm almost timeless kind of image. The one with Fiona, you know all I said to Fiona was that I want to do this shoot with an eagle so it's you and a live eagle, and I really don't know what's going to happen but it's the dialogue, the energy between the two of you, after which I will construct an image. But it's that that's the basis and she went along with it, which was fabulous. It was a risky thing for her to do, it's physically risky, it's a dangerous bird, but that was enough to actually, you know afterwards I showed her the pictures, and we just talked through them, she said 'what are you going to do now?' I said there's this landscape in the Pyrenees I will probably use that but it has to be dramatic and it

has to be almost Wagnerian. The whole thing became sort of incredibly dark Wagnerian image so therefore all I could tell Fiona was 'start here'.

In the past you used front-projection to create the backgrounds - how were these created?

Before these images, which are all computer generated, there was a lovely process, which was used in the movies and still is, which is front projection. It is a total nightmare of a process but what you do basically is create the whole image in one shot in a camera, and what you have to do is project an image on to this very incredibly intense screen and then put your person in front of the screen and you then photograph down the same path as the projection so then you don't get overlap, then you have to light the person but not light the screen, and then you set the whole thing up and all of those were done on four-by-five so it's almost like a tableau, it's a theatre piece, again. And so all of my early work in this image construction was done in that process, so the picture of Daley Thomson the one of Harold Evans and Tina Brown, there's a whole series I think there are probably about forty-eight, forty-nine pictures which are part of that series were all done with that process. Part of me misses the old tableau complete set up photograph, where you do everything in the camera and I'll probably go back to that in a different format but the liberation actually to be able to do this, to work this way with computers, just take pictures and build them like the one with Fiona Shaw. Is that real? Isn't that real? I mean it's stupid you can't have her with a real eagle, that would never happen, but that is the only bit that actually is real.