

## Johnnie Shand Kydd interview

**SB:** How did you get into photography?

**JSK:** Purely by accident. I was working in a gallery for many many years and got bored and didn't know what I was going to do next and sometimes it is a good idea just like having no idea about what you are going to do with your life because fate suddenly acts in your favour and I didn't have any photographic training at all but found myself in the middle of a rather extraordinary world of the London art world. Being in the right place at the right time with a great story is more important than being technically brilliant or with no story to tell and so that is how I kind of how I started taking photographs of the artists.

**SB:** Is that how the photographs of the London art scene came about?

**JSK:** Yes. Originally I had an idea of editing a book and working with professional photographers and then I just realised that this extraordinary thing was happening, and you know, if someone didn't start taking pictures quickly it would all be over, and in fact, it hasn't stopped, but there was a moment when there was much more sense of community and somehow taking photographs of artists when they're on the brink of success, just about to get there, but they weren't household names when I was photographing them is more interesting than taking photos of people once they have achieved more notoriety or success.

**SB:** Do you feel that your photographs make a part of that history?

**JSK:** Yes, but the thing I am kind of worried about the photographs in a kind of way, I think I am kind of perpetrating a myth in a kind of way because that story is much more fragmented than the image I project and it kind of looks like everyone is very lovey-dovey and getting on, but lots of them loathe each other's guts. Somehow by editing the book in a certain way you can get the impression there is this huge community that work together and love each other. Some of them do, some of them certainly don't.

**SB:** Are any of the artists you photographed close friends?

**JSK:** Lots of them. There was a funny moment when Thames & Hudson commissioned 'Spitfire' which was about halfway through the book. To begin with I was taking photographs with no real aim, it was just the way you might have a camera in a pocket at a party, or on holiday for a weekend. People were very relaxed for that, but as soon as it actually became a project which was going to be published then the whole thing became a little more dubious; I hope that I didn't become a complete voyeur, but I went from participant to observer, and I think a few of the artists were a little suspicious of my motives quite rightly - I would have been a bit suspicious, but I think in the end, I didn't abuse anybody's trust, and I have got material that would upset a lot of people if it had been published, but I think I have quite a good reputation for being honourable.

**SB:** What were you trying to create by photographing the artists in their studios?

**JSK:** I am an instinctive photographer and not an intellectual. I don't think of concepts and things like that. I just did it. I didn't see an end result, it is just an intuitive thing.

**SB:** So you did not have a kind of agenda for capturing that informality? I did not have any training as a photographer, so I could not really do the formal shots, you know it was just snapshots. I actually get really bored of the portrait with the white background with people looking really pensive, and really intelligent, that idea that you can kind of capture somebody's inner creative spirit through a photograph, some people might have done, but very few. I think it is much more interesting doing portraiture of people in the context of either their friends or in their studio or just London, **continues..**

**SB:** Is there a favourite photograph amongst those that the Gallery has acquired and that you like most?

**JSK:** I actually love the picture that is behind you. They do have a copy of Sarah working on the Fag show she did with Sadie, and actually that goes completely against what I was saying, there is an intensity in her eyes as she is working. That one there, where she is completely engrossed in the work she is doing. She has got an incredibly beautiful face which comes out very well in that picture.

**SB:** How did you come to photograph say for example your Damien Hirst with cows?

**JSK:** I was commissioned to do all the portraits for the Sensation catalogue and I had done all of them except for Damien. I've known him for ages, it was a case of when can we meet up in London? We always seemed to be just missing each other and were running out of time so I said I'm coming to Devon, which is quite mean, as he uses Devon as a place to retreat from all the media frenzy that surrounds him, I think he felt a little bit uncomfortable and that's why the picture works so well, **continues..**

**SB:** And how about the one of Georgina Starr, Gillian Wearing and Tracey Emin, dancing in Whitstable?

**JSK:** Tracey owned a hut on the beach at Whitstable and she just asked a group of us down for the weekend and she had a ghetto blaster and they were dancing, and again you know I didn't realise at the time that actually the hut in the background she was going to take to pieces and sell to Charles Saatchi. It was one of those weird things. The hut we had a picnic in is now sitting in an art gallery, it's kind of sort of one of those weird quirks of history really.

Interview by Susan Bright