

# INTO THE LIGHT

Giles Hugo

A collection of photographs philosophical

Opening June 5<sup>th</sup> at 6pm, NOLAN GALLERY



Giles Hugo, photographer, writer and journalist (b 1949) first wielded a 35mm camera with intent in late 1968 in his native South Africa.

Black newspapers there and in Swaziland taught him a range of photographic skills — shooting, developing and printing a photo in under 45 minutes, or less, and tackling any subject from portraits to beauty pageants, soccer, motor sport, boxing, ghetto jazz and rock musicians, and street life.

Most of that was black and white work, with an occasional roll of slide film for special projects and artistic exploration. He upgraded through 35mm SLRs to Leica rangefinders and various lenses. He still enjoys using older lenses, mostly Leica and Canon, to explore subjects and qualities of light.

‘It’s a bit like the difference between analogue and digital sound,’ he observes. ‘Many modern lenses have some plastic elements and digital cameras software “corrects” resultant aberrations to produce “perfect” pictures.

‘However, I often prefer to choose very fast, legacy lenses, up to 50-plus years old, that have a certain magic to them —that dreamy, swirly, out-of-focus bokeh, and colour rendition that is suggestive of Kodachrome slide film or early Polaroid.’

Although digital photography and Photoshop processing can be used to create ‘perfect’ or hyper-real images, Hugo ignores most digital manipulation.

He asserts: 'All my images are just one exposure. I do not combine, super-impose or stack images. I abhor the reliance on High Dynamic Range shooting and processing to create a kind of "hyper reality".

'I do not clone in or out elements in an image, or selectively "dodge" or "burn" areas, or make selections and layers to treat parts of the framed image differently. What I see in the viewfinder when I squeeze the shutter release is, basically, what you see in these prints — with some cropping and tweaking of exposure, contrast, colour temperature, saturation and sharpness. I probably do less in Photoshop than I might have tried in a "wet" darkroom with film.

'I find great joy in certain visual phenomena — extreme abstraction, symmetry, chaos, fractal iterations, surreal pairings, vivid hues, shades of darkness, textures, polarised tones, tactile implications, trompe-l'oeil, and objects imbued with rhythm and movement.

'Cameras and lenses "lie" much of the time — seeing things in ways that our eyes and brains cannot. Human sight cannot "freeze" motion at 1/4000<sup>th</sup> of second, or enlarge distant objects as a telephoto lens does, or extract detail from extreme shadows in dim available light. For me, photographic art often relies on these "lies" for its effects and interpretations of the visible world.'

'Macro lenses transform tiny objects into unimagined realms, William Blake's "world in a grain of sand". At 1:1 magnification, the image of an object on my camera's 16 Megapixel digital sensor is the same size (13x17.3mm) as the object — and light behaves in unexpected ways. Things are not what they seem, appearing much stranger than expected. Weirdness is — then I blow it up to A1-poster size for maximum effect.'

What makes Hugo's vision so different?

He muses: 'I believe that the way I see things is different to others partly because of a medical condition I inherited: a heavy squint and (hence?) a "good" eye and a "lazy" eye that refused to focus enough even to read the largest letter on an optician's wall chart.

'An operation at the age of four failed, and I grew up wearing a "pirate patch" on the "good eye" for all my school hours, aiming to force the "bad" eye to learn to focus. The experiment was concluded seven years later with no lasting good effect. The squint was permanently corrected by a kick to the head in a rugby game at the age of 14.

'Thus I see sharp detail for the span of one eye, but only a blurred field, like peripheral vision, for the other. The sharper eye dominates my brain and effectively gives me a two-dimensional view of the world from the "good" eye.

'People with stereoscopic vision use their brains to combine the views of two separated eyes, each with a slightly different angle of view, for 3-D perception.

'I believe that my 2-D vision — while it made me hopeless at ball sports — suits a two-dimensional medium like photograph, allowing unusual connections, contrasts and juxtapositions.

'I use suggestive, allusive titles for images, rather than just factual descriptions. I hope my titles spark strange personal imaginings and associations in relation to these images.'

While this is Hugo's first photographic exhibition, his work has been used extensively in journalism, as the cover pictures for three of the late Geoffrey Dean's short story collections, and as covers for several poetry collections and a CD.

Ongoing projects include daily 'street' photography, his macro fascination with spiders, and a narrative series about 'Lola, Spiny Norman and Black Dog. He consciously uses photographic work to help to counter long-standing depression: 'Engaging with beauty promotes greater resilience in times of loss, darkness and shadows,' he concludes.