

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

PHOTOGRAPHIC ART, NEWPORT 2013



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Preface

'This must be the place'; a phrase we might employ upon arriving at a location we have not visited before but have been seeking. We are uncertain of our surroundings possessing only scraps of information to determine our precise location.

Can this interpretation not also be applied to photography graduates today? While today's students spend three years learning the technical and theoretical facets of their medium, refining their unique voice as arts practitioners; the fact remains that photography's own unique voice is becoming rapidly unstable. It is now no revelation that photography has undergone dramatic transformations at an unprecedented rate over the last decade. The rise of Web 2.0 ensures that the making and dissemination of imagery in contemporary society, is for many a daily habit. We snap, upload, share, post and consume with little consideration for content, caring only for the immediacy of communication. The inevitable result therefore, is that photography (a traditional view of it at least) becomes devalued; the sheer volume at which these images are produced results in a mass of visual clutter and banality. Photography's unique voice is lost because access to it is no longer exclusive, we rarely even think of 'taking a photograph', it becomes automatic, a necessary middle man in achieving the main objective of communicating to all; 'I am here', and now it seems more than often 'and this is what I'm eating'.

How can today's graduates be confident of their place in photography when the photographic world itself is prone to such constant mutation? Moreover, this is not the only uncertainty facing this new generation of image makers. Additional cuts to arts funding threatens the longevity of institutions, and with them

the scenes and grass roots activity they nurture. It is worth noting that at the time of this publications printing, Newport Art Gallery's temporary exhibition programme has been cut and the town's iconic chartist mural faces destruction; By all accounts Newport is witnessing austere times for culture.

'This must be the place.' More than that, this must be the place right now!

The student cohort featured within this publication, have made a commitment to Newport and to photography. As such, this title should not communicate uncertainty, rather it is definite; Newport is the place, it has to be. Despite recent university mergers and government cuts, Newport remains the identity with which these students associate themselves. In a London-centric art world there is something appealing in this small Welsh city, both in its geographical, historical and socio-political landscape, lacking in many metropolitan locales. Newport presents fertile ground for artistic enquiry. Furthermore, these artists remain confident in their position within the photographic world. In order to find a route through this sea of images, practitioners must embrace the shifting nature of the medium, becoming not just image makers but mediators of imagery. While photography may be losing that which made it once unique, via embracing the now multifaceted nature of photography, artists are able to re-establish a new voice both for themselves and their medium. Photography has not lost its voice, its voice has simply changed. We can see an engagement with such themes throughout this publication. Michael Fitzsimmons demonstrates an acknowledgement of photography's ubiquitous nature, forging a path through images via more organic processes of intuition. Luke Sztymiak's work interrogates the reappropriation of imagery from social media platforms for political agendas, while the large amount of video work featured indicates recognition of photography's symbiotic relationship with the moving image and time based mediums.

In short, these graduates demonstrate a simultaneous commitment to photography and Newport in the here and now. While cuts and economic downturn can signal the end for institutionalised art, could it also signal the inauguration of a new *modus operandi*? The same could be said for photography, this transient period in the medium's history demands new means of image making and a fresh exploration of the medium. In this way lens-based practices can hope to keep pace with photography's agency in the wider world. This is the place we now occupy within photographic discourse, and this place; Newport, sits at its heart.

Matt Simmons - Editor

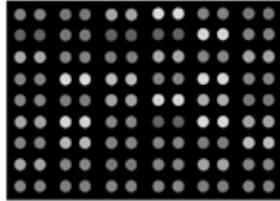
Lecturers

Peter Bobby, Eileen Little, Magali Nougarede, Liam Devlin, Matt White, Ronnie Close, Mark Durden, Helen Sear, Paul Cabuts, Russell Roberts, Gawain Barnard, Denis Lewis, Wayne Stevens and Ian Lleweyn

001

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Ogle Goggle

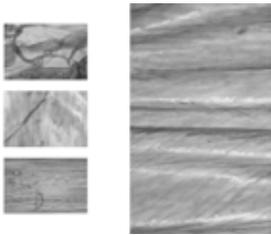
Installation

We can distinguish millions of colours and thousands of smells, feel the lightest touch on our skin, or hear the faintest sounds. It all seems effortless; we open our eyes and the world streams in. Yet these seemingly effortless functions require millions of synaptic connections within our brains to perform innumerable intricate calculations. But what happens when these calculations cannot be made?

Ogle Goggle presents a pair of specially constructed goggles. When worn, these goggles generate a storm of colour visions, inducing geometric hallucinations via strobe light patterns. Akin to standing in a blizzard, these pulsating colour fields result in the wearer's complete disorientation.

These increasingly bright patterns of colour known as 'form constants', permeate the entire visual field, altering the spatial experience. The participant has the impression of being "in" the space of colours, not merely gazing upon them. Subjected to what could be termed a form of 'non-space', the wearer does not move bodily, but is effectively transported to a different space all together, one constructed entirely by their consciousness. Ultimately, if our brains construct reality; and do not reconstruct it, then how can consciousness alone cause matter to materialise; did consciousness in fact exist prior to matter?

www.newport13.co.uk/001



002

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Ambivalence

Video: 25 minutes

Ambivalence is a visual tease, deliberately creating a sense of unease, discomfort and frustration within the viewer. The use of Latex as the video's subject draws upon the sexual and fetishistic connotations of that material. However the absence of other signifiers results in an ambiguity, urging the viewer to make their own interpretations.

Encompassing a rhythm and pace similar to that of a heartbeat, a sense of anticipation and strain is played upon throughout the work which at no point indicates a definite direction or conclusion. This notion of anticipation leads to a further frustration, when the viewer is denied the climactic snapping of the material once it has reached full stretch.

www.newport13.co.uk/002

003

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Journey

C-Type prints

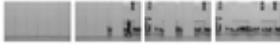
Exploring a personal journey taken through three years at University, abstract images are used as metaphors for emotions. While emotions can be unpredictable, they can be controlled through certain methods. Through disguising the subject and withholding information from the viewer, the photographs come to possess a certain ambiguity. Consequently, the viewer is invited to come to their own interpretations of what these images signify, both physically and symbolically.

www.newport13.co.uk/003

004

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The Spatial Sense

Video: 6 minutes 10 seconds

French philosopher Michel Foucault spoke of 'dividing practices' as a means of objectifying the subject. These practices can be used in both social and spatial ways. One physical manifestation of this practice is the construction of walls. Walls have always been used to keep us in and others out, creating a distinct boundary between us; the subject, and the other or the object.

We all create walls, both visible and invisible which inevitably means that sometimes we are the subject and sometimes we become the object.

005

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Transient Landscapes of Life

Video: 5 minutes 47 seconds

The objective of leaving the educational system that has governed my life thus far, forcing me to remain static whilst suppressing a burning urge to travel the world is coming to a stage of fruition.

As a new era of transition dominates my horizon, the time has come to leave behind the country and landscape that has in essence nurtured my pursuit of creativity, and passion for the landscape and travel. Inspired by literature of hardened motorbike travellers, circumnavigating the globe on two wheels and the sense of freedom this conveyed, I myself felt motivated to take to the road. *Transient Landscapes of Life* arrests the viewer through a bombardment of fleeting landscapes, prompting the mind to wander into more meditative states. While paying homage to those places of beauty to which I owe my fascination of the world, the work hopes to provide a simultaneous glimpse into my imminent future.

www.newport13.co.uk/005



006

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On The Surface

Giclée prints

On the Surface focuses on an area of land in South Wales, the function of which has changed substantially over the past 60 years. The artist's own history with the site forms the basis for the work, where she would use the land as a child to build dens and ride bikes with friends. Areas of personal significance to the artist are concentrated on; however the overall atmosphere remains ambiguous. A fenced area marks the traces of the lands previous function but ultimately the viewer is denied the knowledge of what this past entailed. Subsequently the viewer is invited to form their own narratives for the land, as the artist did themselves during childhood.

www.newport13.co.uk/006

007

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The Forest Where I Died

Lightbox, mounted Flintlock pistol

'Live Action Role Play' (LARP) is a form of role-playing game where the participants physically act out their character's actions. Through adopting the mask of their character and living out their life, the boundaries between fiction and reality become increasingly blurred.

Taking its title from an episode of *The X-Files* named 'The Field Where I Died', in which themes of reincarnation and past life regression are depicted; *The Forest Where I Died* explores these beliefs through the death of the artist's own character.

Displayed on a large light box, we view the image as if suspended in a dream state, gazing in to a past life of our own under regression hypnosis. Presented as crime scene evidence, the weapon used to kill the character is also displayed. Through the utilization of clinical language, the weapon, titled *Exhibit A* seeks to further challenge the viewer's notions of reality.

www.newport13.co.uk/007

008

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Exposé

Giclée prints

Exposé is a body of work that questions our perception and respect of celebrated historical figures. According to a BBC survey from 2012, there are 573 statues in the UK that depict people; a mere 15% of these are women. Of that small percentage just under half are mythological characters. With this in mind, *Exposé* queries where decisions lie in who becomes a figure of historical note.

Recent media cases documenting the rise and fall of celebrated public figures reveal a fault within contemporary society; namely, our elevation of these figures to near heroic status. *Exposé* takes these revelations of dubious celebrity pasts as its starting point, extending its investigation historically and prompting enquiry into past heroes, celebrities of their day.

Focussing on statues and the public commemoration of historical figures, *Exposé* uses digital manipulation to subtly convey the lesser known, negative traits of those depicted. This subversion of a traditional sculptural language often overlooked within the urban landscape, begins to question the inherent respect we hold towards these individuals. Do these revelations on their character make them appear more “human”, or do they create further distance between us and them?

www.newport13.co.uk/008

009

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Fading Traditions

Installation - Video: 5 minutes, 3 lightboxes

Georgina Stylianou's work reflects on the fading traditions of the mountainous village Lefkara in Cyprus who's main trade is the traditional Cypriot lace named 'Lefkaritiko'. In contemporary society, the diminishment of traditional customs is an issue that affects most cultures. In truth, it would appear that certain Cypriot traditions are more practised within the British Cypriot community than those in Cyprus, perhaps stemming from a need to connect to their ancestral heritage.

Fading Traditions explores Stylianou's attempts to reconcile the two cultures to which she belongs. Brought up in Britain, Stylianou has endeavoured to rediscover and revive the traditions of her Greek Cypriot heritage, introducing the Cypriot lace making trade to her family. The act of stitching aims to repair, whether that be the hope for the people of Lefkara, or the hope of Georgina herself to resurrect the tradition, and consequently fuse both national identities.

www.newport13.co.uk/009

010

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Clinical Waste

Sculptural Installation

'...we only become what we are by the radical and deep seated refusal of that which others have made of us.'

Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1976)

Clinical Waste looks back at a period of my childhood, where from an early age I was submitted to intense medical observation, enduring years of diagnostic tests and examinations. Through the cathartic process of art, *Clinical Waste* presents itself as an opportunity to re-visit a traumatic period of my life, to reflect and make sense of the past; creating from it new, and positive meaning.

Clinical Waste explores the powerlessness and confusion of a child caught in a dehumanizing medical maze. Through sculptural installation the work navigates between conflicting emotions of disaffection and empowerment, with each figure symbolizing childhood loves and aspirations. Coated with the ashes of a plethora of doctor's letters and medical records, these sculptures convey the fragility of childhood yet simultaneously reject the documents original contents and assumptions. Reproductions of these clinical records are also displayed, photocopied over and over and echoing the repetitive nature of the medical process they indicate. However, in *Clinical Waste*, this repetition again, marks a refusal of the documents content, continuing the process until all detail is obscured, until the records destroy themselves.

www.newport13.co.uk/010

011

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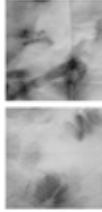
Paradise is now, and can only be now

Video: 30 Minutes

Frederic Rzewski talks of the “Paradise” of the now. Paradise to Blackledge, is a realm of pure consciousness, pure communication. Our modes of communication in contemporary society are limited by technology - the image is confined by the screen, the sound by the speakers and the three remaining senses are left numb. The imparting or exchanging of information is essential to intelligent life. Now more than ever we depend upon communication. This body of work seeks to explore the limits of modern communication within the context of musical improvisation.

Musical improvisation, and its relative success, relies almost entirely on communication between musicians. As such, an ineffable connection through sound and vision is forged between each member. Filming each musician during improvisation, *Paradise is now, and can only be now* demonstrates a deconstruction of the traditional band formation. With each musician occupying a separate screen, the spatial proximity between subjects is unknown. Through means of facial expression and body language, the musicians endeavour to communicate with one another, maintaining their suspension in paradise.

www.newport13.co.uk/011



012

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FACE OFF

FACE OFF is an exploration of the way women present themselves to society, examining their daily use of makeup and its removal. Over several months Hynes has collected her own makeup removal wipes, along with those from a variety of women aged 18 - 80. In doing so, the daily routines of women, all with differing roles within society; students, nurses and the elderly, are explored. As such, these wipes become a record of an individual. The collection process becomes a key element within the work, with the wipes becoming their own referent, a canvas for the makeup worn on a particular day.

FACE OFF aims to explore the "face" individuals present to society, investigating why, when and where they would consider wearing more or less makeup. The participating women were asked to fill out a questionnaire answering how long they spend applying makeup as well as removing it. When displayed, each wipe communicates its own individuality, with some barely colored while others are covered with smears, smudges and eyelash marks. Through displaying these discarded items, and focusing on their formal qualities, Hynes elevates the wipes to the status of an art object, offering them up to the viewer as records of an individual's relationship with makeup.

www.newport13.co.uk/012

013

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The Doctored Oath

Video: 2 minutes 29 seconds

In contemporary Western culture, powerful synthetic hormones are generally prescribed as the undisputed solution to fertility. But is fertility a disease that must be cured? The contraceptive pill is a staple icon within the history of the sexual revolution, but with numerous associated health risks and billion-dollar incomes for pharmaceutical companies, is this notion of liberation for women misguided?

The Doctored Oath aims to challenge our preconceived notions of trust and superiority in science, through vocalizing the powerlessness and ill-informed nature of the female experience endured under a patriarchal hegemony. As such, the work provides an important insight into the politics of hormonal contraception, one that is typically disregarded or concealed. Moreover, *The Doctored Oath* hopes to generate awareness for the harsh reality of women's current social standing.

www.newport13.co.uk/013



014

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Circus Orphans

Video Installation: 5 minutes 30 seconds

An intimate peep show into Bowen's ancestry, this experimental video montage stems from an exploration into the relationship between lens based media and travelling performance in early twentieth century Europe. This cyclical, almost tribal existence of such entertainers can be traced throughout history.

Herself on a personal journey of perpetually unravelling cultural and social identity, Bowen has created material and utilised found footage as storytelling aids in order to re-invigorate a mysterious family photograph (circa) 1928.

Her late father; tragically estranged and orphaned from a family of travelling acrobats, handed down the photograph, with word of mouth accounts as the families only link to this rich cultural heritage.

Circus Orphans attempts to make sense of these stories of fame, tragedy and abandonment through the imagined nostalgia of Bowen's mind's eye.

www.newport13.co.uk/014

015

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WANG KAR

Multichannel video: 7 minutes 38 seconds

WANG KAR explores linguistics; specifically the controversy surrounding swear words, questioning what gives a word its meaning? Swear words are often thought of as offensive, particularly when said in more formal social contexts. It is this reaction that society has towards swearing that forms the basis of the work.

Taking the form of two video works, *WANG KAR* firstly presents the viewer with a lecture theatre setting. While initially producing an uncomfortable and awkward atmosphere, the work gradually becomes more comical as the authoritative role and setting is subverted, challenging society's constraints and behavioural expectations.

Throughout the second video, language is broken down, effectively erasing meaning and formulating a new language, thus forcing the viewer to make connections between words to reveal their more familiar root.

www.newport13.co.uk/015



016 Luke Sztymiak

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Paradise, Lamented. (TheLovelySyria)

Video: 13 minutes 35 seconds

'The image of humanity articulated in image spam thus has actually nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it is an accurate portrayal of what humanity is actually not. It is a negative image.'

Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 2012.

With the rise of globalization and the exchange of visual imagery via online platforms, an ever increasing mass of ubiquitous visual information dominates our contemporary society. In *Paradise, Lamented. (TheLovelySyria)*, Sztymiak considers this phenomenon in relation to social and political upheavals.

The appropriated imagery within the work derives from a twitter page entitled 'TheLovelySyria', an initiative of the Syrian Electronic Army. This page seeks to permeate our collective consciousness with a sentimental representation of reality that does not exist. Heavenly sunsets, virginal landscapes and serene cityscapes become images of ideological contempt through their reappropriation. Through the montage of these images and text from Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave', Sztymiak depicts these images as the shadows, or false realities referred to in the allegory. Undermined by their watermarks, they reveal their original context and the subsequent politicization of their representation.

www.newport13.co.uk/016

017

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Automatically Sunshine

Installation- various print types, mix CDs, audio

Ooh baby let's take life's highway
It's automatically yours and my way
No road is too rough to travel
We'll walk barefoot on life's gravel

Together whatever we express now
Automatically means success now
Whatever mystery life's about
There's no doubt we'll work it out

Cause you're mine and I'm yours
So who cares if when it rains it pours
I'm yours and you're mine
It's automatically sunshine

www.newport13.co.uk/017



018

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Everything All At Once

Giclée prints

Everything All At Once concerns a failed attempt to slow down and document the world as it quickly passes by. It pays homage to an infinite number of untaken photographs and unseen visual curiosities. My hope is that through accepting the loss of almost everything, I can learn to embrace and love more deeply those things I choose to direct my eyes towards. To achieve this I looked back at the hundreds of photographs I've taken over the past couple of years; taken whenever I felt compelled to photograph. Upon reflection, and through an editing process as instinctual as the original act of photographing, reoccurring motifs and themes began to emerge. Connections can be established between images, culminating in a piece of work that encourages visual exploration and abstract thought.

www.newport13.co.uk/018

019

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The Biological Destinies of Clayomies

Giclée Prints

Surrealism was originally based on a mythical attempt to pin down the most fleeting of human experiences, the moment when two worlds, inner and outer, sleeping and waking meet and coincide. These moments were believed to hold the ultimate truth, a hyper-reality.

The female nude as a Surrealist muse is a familiar image, in *The Biological Destinies of Clayomies* however, the hyper-reality behind the Surrealist muse is also exposed, resulting in a revelation of the figures, but also their unresolved desires.

Taking male Surrealist artworks from the 20th century as a reference point, these images address sexism and prejudice against women at the time of the original artworks creation, as well as highlighting current feminist issues.

The Biological Destinies of Clayomies depicts strong women whose decisions and struggles still lie ahead of them. Although their form has evolved to one of greater physical strength, these living dolls are still concerned with conforming to society's view of physical beauty and biological destiny. Nature will always ensure they must make tough choices against the biological clock. Ultimately, *The Biological Destinies of Clayomies* asks us whether women are held back by society and biology, or is it ourselves that set the bar for what we should achieve?

www.newport13.co.uk/019



020

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Failure to Launch

C-Type prints

I always wanted to be an astronaut. From a very young age I was gripped by a desire to reach dizzying heights, to slip the surly bonds of gravity and roam amongst the stars, to stand on strange planets under strange suns and explore the infinite wonders of the universe.

Alas, life has burdened me with a crippling fear of heights, and transpired to guide me in a different direction. I have always tried to keep a hold on the things I loved as a child, and yet this dream has slipped from my fingers.

And yet as I stand on the threshold of adulthood, I find myself looking back at that childish dream and wanting to give it one more try, to have one last attempt at reaching the sky, breaking through the thin blue line and boldly going where no man has gone before.

Of course, I lack the \$1.7 billion required to build a space shuttle.

www.newport13.co.uk/020

021

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Outside, In

Video installation: 2 minutes

Outside, In is a body of work exploring the world through the eyes of dyslexia. Drawing on the artist's personal experience, the work aims to shed light on the experience that comes from being labelled as dyslexic.

Within the video, two characters are presented to the viewer, signifying both the internal emotion and external facade; the mask used to obscure the truth. The video depicts a conversation demonstrating the internal conflict and confused thought processes occurring within a dyslexic's mind. Autobiographical in nature, the viewer becomes witness to the hidden feelings the artist holds towards her own disability. *Outside, In* however, maintains a relevance outside of the artist's own experience, providing an insight, and raising awareness for the struggles of living with Dyslexia.

www.newport13.co.uk/021



022

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Search

Photographic transfers onto fabric

Taking a Google Image Search as its starting point, *Search* aims to interrogate societies view on gender roles and expectations. Using Google, Jones discovered that gender neutral job descriptions such as; Fire-fighter, Construction Worker and Miner presented dominantly masculine results. As such, it would appear that despite society's claims of embracing political correctness, Google continues to suggest a patriarchal hegemony.

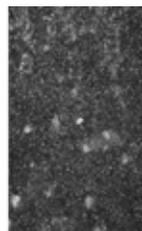
It is this found online imagery that forms the basis of *Search*. Through the stereotypically feminine activity of embroidery, Jones aims to subvert these masculine representations of labour through a physical act of labour visible in *Search's* fabrication. Subsequently, this aesthetic clash prompts us to question gender representation and expectation within our contemporary society.

www.newport13.co.uk/022

023

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Familial Landscapes

Giclée prints

Familial Landscapes is rooted in an exploration of my relationship with home. Using photography as a form of self-expression, this series of photographs was taken when returning home while living away. Using whichever camera is immediately accessible, I have been photographing the people, objects and places that move me sentimentally. Time plays a significant role within the work; there is no linear path through. Made up of small and sometimes abstract parts, this is a reflexive series which speaks of universal feelings and emotions. It is significant that a sense of indistinctness is present in the images; these photographs are familial landscapes, freezing what is beautiful and fleeting in an attempt to embrace inevitable change.

www.newport13.co.uk/023



024

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Recollection of Innocence

Giclée prints

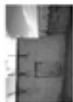
In an interview with Gil Bank for Influence magazine in 2004, Thomas Ruff stated that 'it is impossible to photographically represent a subject's inner life', perhaps this is true, but what if the photograph does not focus on its subject's life as a whole, but rather a specific point in their history. The question *Recollection of Innocence* poses is as follows: Is it possible to capture a person's memory within a photograph? Maybe not memory itself, but it may be accurate to state that emotion can be captured within a photographic image, and it is this emotion, witnessed through the facial expression of the sitter, that is brought to the surface by a re-emerging memory. Therefore we can ascertain that memory itself can become a referent, constructing emotion and in turn, an image's own unique atmosphere.

www.newport13.co.uk/024

025

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Closure

C-type prints and Installation

Closure stems from Evans' long standing curiosity surrounding ruins and their history, the cause for their abandonment. The building that forms the subject for *Closure* was once the cinema in the artist's hometown of Denbigh. This abandoned, rotten structure is what remains of the once proud and popular social hub of the town, where the community would gather to watch the latest films. From 1928 to 1996 the cinema provided a valued service to the small welsh town. Today however, all that remains is a haunting shell, unable to communicate the narrative of its past.

While locked and closed off, we cannot help but remain curious as to what lies hidden behind these doors that once brought joy to a community. However, the past of this building is not as innocent as it first appears, with the last owner being described as the most dangerous serial killer in the whole of the United Kingdom. As such, the closure of this cinema becomes a metaphor for the owner's incarceration, and a community's enclosure and erasure of a traumatic past.

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