

## Sharon Harvey: Photographer

**Reviewer: Samantha Broadhead**

Sharon Harvey is a photographer who undertook her BA(Hons) *Fine Art, Printmaking & Photomedia* at *Central St. Martins College of Art & Design*, London. As well as exhibiting extensively in Leeds, London and Melbourne, Australia, Sharon's images have also been reproduced in various publications and photobooks including *Northern Gothic* (2014), *Ultraviolet* (2014), *Black and White Photography Magazine* (2012) and *Lenscratch* (2013), an online contemporary photography blogzine. Sharon works with a range of photographic processes that enable the materiality of the resulting photographs to become apparent. For example the image below, *Reach 2014*, is a cyanotype; a process that uses two chemicals: ammonium iron(III) citrate and potassium ferricyanide which are applied to an absorbent surface such as watercolour paper, which is then in conjunction with a stencil exposed to ultraviolet light and fixed with water. The materials and techniques that have been employed enhance the physical properties of the artefact; the grain of the paper and the irregular tonality of the blue and at the same evoke the magical properties of the photographic process as opposed to a digital one. The subject shows a person reaching towards a book, stored on a library shelf. The light picks out the texture of the books, hand and arm. The folds and creases of the shirt are similarly illuminated. The timeless humanity of the image is strangely moving, as this picture could have been made in 2014 or in 1914.



Reach, Cyanotype 2014

*I usually shoot with Ilford FP4 or HP5 black and white film, 120 or 35mm. I prefer an intuitive and experimental approach so use Pinhole, Holga and an old Pentax K1000 camera. My favourite would have to be my Zero Image 2000 Pinhole Camera, beautiful wood and brass, medium format. A Christmas gift from my husband. Prior to that I used a round biscuit tin. (Harvey, 2015)*

Sharon clearly enjoys the making and crafting aspects of photography as well as the refining of an aesthetically pleasing image. This enhances the object nature of wet photography as well as the magical properties of light. Although Sharon has mastery over these techniques she also gives the image over to the unexpected; the inconstancies that natural phenomenon contribute to any act of creativity. Thus areas may be blurred, ghostly and evocative of the 'ectoplasm photographs' of Victorian spiritualism. Grimes has commented on the new photographic technologies of the 1880s and 1890s, 'discussions of `imponderable fluids' like ectoplasm blur distinctions between the material and the immaterial, since ectoplasm can both be visible and invisible, tangible, and intangible'.(1) This can be seen in *Forest Hut*, a black and white image of a broken down building; lost within a chaos of encroaching branches that threaten to subsume it. Overlaying the subject are the marks left by the making process that add a veil of gossamer through which we see the forest and hut. This enhances the uncanny aspects of the image.

*I draw inspiration from the dark-side. The otherworldly and uncanny, to be found in books, films and other artists/photographers work. (Harvey, 2015)*

'Uncanny' literally means 'unhomely' (2) and what could be more uninviting as the empty, broken down shell presented to us in *Forest Hut*? It is a dwelling place that once could have been a home to an imaginary forester, or hermit, but how is left in picturesque solitude. The ambiguity of life and death can be seen in the trees; are the twigs green with sap or as grey as dried up kindle? Freud (1919, p.241) said the, 'uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.' (3) Does this image evoke in us a repressed fear of death and decay or that we can become homeless and friendless?



Forest Hut, Hand Developed Silver Gelatin Print, 2011

Finally, a seascape reveal's Sharon's love of Yorkshire: *I love walking in the countryside, Yorkshire is beautiful! The forests and woodlands are magical. Timeless, otherworldly, beautiful and uncanny places. (Harvey, 2015)*



Thornwick Bay 2:55pm, Pinhole Camera 2014

Thornwick Bay 2:55pm was part of a series of seascapes commissioned by Fuse Art Space, Bradford 2014. The techniques and processes used here disrupt the supposed 'realism' of photography, this

image could also be a drawing or a print becoming stylised by the polarisation of the light and dark. Here the motion of the sea water has been frozen in the foam and the froth that caress the rocks. Inherent in all of the images under discussion has been the signification of time. Time as a constant; time as destructive; time as human activity. The cliffs and rocks are weathered and eroded by millennia of shifting tides, this motion has been frozen through Sharon's art of photography. Does this evoke another repressed fear; the smallness of human endeavour in relation to the power of the natural world?

- 1) Grimes, H. Late Victorian Gothic: mental science, the uncanny and scenes of writing, Glasgow. 2006. p3
- 2) Freud, S. The 'Uncanny'.1919. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256. p219
- 3) Freud, S. The 'Uncanny'.1919. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256. p240

Portfolio & profile:

<http://sharonharvey.carbonmade.com/>

Photobooks:

<http://www.blurb.co.uk/b/5522016-northern-gothic>

<http://www.blurb.co.uk/b/5633713-u-l-t-r-a-v-i-o-l-e-t>

Upcoming event: Solo exhibition at Woodend Art & Craft Gallery, Scarborough, July 2015