

Nic Madge - Photographic Statement



I stood on the steps above the Damascus Gate, Old Jerusalem. So many people I wanted to photograph. Palestinian. Jewish. Bedouin. Arab. Israeli. European. A thousand personal images. But I was nineteen and did not have a proper camera.

I sat at a table in a pavement café deep in the souk of Marrakesh, my camera concealed. Veiled women. Men in flowing djellabas. But the photos were rubbish. The objects (for that, in reality, is how I viewed them) rushed by. They (rightly) guarded their own images. There was no consent. There was no contact. No relationship. It was wrong.

I interrogated my heroes. Kertesz, who taught me light and composition. Cartier-Bresson, who showed me culture and context. McCurry, who portrays beauty with great power. McCullin, stark and brutal. Hockney, who sees and records what I fail to see. And Nan Goldin who opened up her life, shared her tragedy and showed me how to photograph people.

I travelled. I saw. I listened. Magazines published my travel writing. I researched and wrote *English Roots: a family history*, published by Alan Sutton. And I photographed the people I met. I curated a permanent exhibition of my portraits *one world one view*, ascending the central circular staircase at Harrow Crown Court. The photographs reflected the diversity of the court users. It exhibited at the Jam Factory, Oxford. I published it as a book. One hundred photos of people from thirty countries, reflecting how much we, as humans, have in common. (And the exhibition and the book raised over £25,000 for charity.)

I was a human rights solicitor. I was a judge. I wrote legal text books. I published learned legal articles. The law was a framework and an intellectual challenge. But it was always the people, the clients, the witnesses, the criminal defendants who were vital.

In the heat and dust, I knelt down on the streets of Dhaka. I sat in mosques. I hung out with rickshaw drivers. I walked muddy lanes and river banks in Sylhet. I talked with tea pickers and women in niqabs. Over one hundred street photographs. People in context, going about their everyday lives. The resulting exhibition *Faces of Bangladesh* was shown as a slide presentation in the BP Lecture Theatre at the British Museum. It exhibited for a month at the Swiss Cottage Gallery.

I walked through villages in the Omo Valley, in remote Southern Ethiopia. I sat in mud huts and under trees with a local guide and local people. They told me about their lives. And I took photographs. Striking photos, but the life stories were even more captivating.

The development of my practice was individual, even isolated, in the sense that I was not part of the wider photographic community. I had though a vision of where I wanted to take my practice. I wanted to share and collaborate. I wanted to be challenged. I wanted to

question and be questioned. I wanted to explore new media. I wanted to experiment and to expand my thinking.

So, I enrolled on an M.A. in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the University of the Arts London (London College of Communication). There, in a demanding and stimulating academic environment, I collaborated with and learnt from a wonderfully talented group of fellow photographers with very diverse backgrounds and experience. Collaborating with *Reprive*, international artist David Birkin and fellow students, we produced *Covert Feathers*, highlighting UK involvement in torture and rendition. It formed part of the London College of Communication *Visible Justice* exhibition. With the help of guerrilla projectionist Feral X, I beamed *Selling Off Our Silver*, my text and images of court buildings which have been closed and sold off, onto the outside walls of the former Bloomsbury County Court. And I made *Closer to the Earth*, a photo book and multi-media presentation portraying the beauty and fragility of our earth in a time of Climate Crisis.

Now, M.A. completed, I am embarking on exciting new photography projects, including [*Pandemic Portraits*](#).