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Seven Dollars and Ninety-Five Cents

VIEW CAMERA

The Journal of Large Format Photography

Photograph by Ian Leake



Patrick Alt: The Art and Craft of Platinum
Wet Plate Portfolios
Chattel Houses in Barbados - Bob Kiss
To Swing or Not to Swing
041708

Figures of Beauty

Photographs and Text by Ian Leake



I am enchanted by beauty, and I love the feeling I get when I can add a little bit of calm to this noisy, chaotic and turbulent world that we live in. I work primarily with female nudes because the human body is a universal language of life – and arguably, anything that is worth saying about life can be said with the body. There are several repeating themes that you will see in all my nudes: beauty, simplicity and elegance are essential, but so is finding something unique about the woman in front of my camera. I try to find this in every model. Often I do not succeed – perhaps because we have not gelled or maybe on that day I could not see properly. But when we find something, it is a really special moment. I will never forget how one of my models reacted when she saw a Polaroid of her derrière. She just stared at it for a while before saying, “I can’t believe that’s really me.” She was an experienced model and knew exactly what her behind looked like, but this was the first time she had seen herself as an artwork – a photograph of her that was more than a picture of a thing. I try to avoid making pictures of things, and I hope that you will not see any ‘things’ in my photographs. Instead I hope that you will see a broader vision of humanity.



Katie's Jump



Yvonne



Honey and Ruby

I prefer to use a view camera because I find that it helps me to discover the photographs I am seeking. View cameras are simple to work with, they are slow (which fosters contemplation and a deeper dialog with your composition), they take commitment, and they are tactile – you are much more physically involved in making the picture than you are with smaller cameras. All of these contribute to my journey of exploration.

This journey starts in the studio and ends with a finished print hanging on someone's wall. It is a spiritual journey that joins different people, times and emotions together. And my print is the map that reveals what was found. So what is in this print? This map? And what makes it so special (at least for me)?

Firstly, it is a platinum / palladium print – a much-celebrated medium that well deserves its exalted place in the pantheon of fine art photography. I work with platinum for many of the same reasons that I prefer to use a view camera: it is simple with relatively few options and confusing side roads, it takes time and commitment to master (although it is also accessible and fairly easy to make your first prints), and it is a very physical medium – both in the making and in the viewing.

Secondly, it is a contact print from an in-camera negative. There is something special about composing on the ground glass, knowing that whatever appears there will be in the final print with the same size and sharpness. And knowing that because you are working with a living, breathing person, your whole composition may have changed by the time you have closed the shutter, inserted the film holder, removed the dark slide and exposed the film. (The print "Pearl Earring" is a great example of this. I made 'A' and 'B' negatives in quick succession, but by the time I exposed the 'B' the model's hair had fallen off her arm and ruined the composition.)

Thirdly, the print is also the starting point for someone else's exploration of the world. A collector once said to me, "Your prints are like a fine wine, and the longer I look at them the more I enjoy them." This was very flattering, of course, but it also made me wonder about the thoughts other people have when they enjoy my prints, and how my work contributes to their view of the world. It feels quite wonderful to have touched someone in that way. The prints shown here are a small selection of my figure nudes made over the last few years. I hope you enjoy them. So where next?

For the last eighteen months I have worked away from home without a functioning darkroom. This forced me to start using digital cameras, and in many ways this has been a liberating experience, but I still have strong emotional ties to the continuity of a fully manual process. Now that I am back in London and my darkroom is back up and running I can not wait to make full use of it. I am really looking forward to continuing my exploration of beauty, simplicity and elegance; and more figures of beauty.

Contact Information You can see more of my prints on my website at www.ianleake.com.



Venus Rising



Nude Back

Technical Details

The prints shown here are a selection of my figure nudes: two made using a rather wobbly homemade 11x14 (“Venus Rising” and “Katie’s Jump”), five with my 8x10 (“Nude, Back”, “Pearl Earring” and “Honey and Ruby”), and one with my 4x5 (“Yvonne”).

All are platinum / palladium prints on Buxton paper.

All were made using a Cooke XVa Triple Convertible lens, mostly at 311mm but the two 11x14s were at 476mm.