



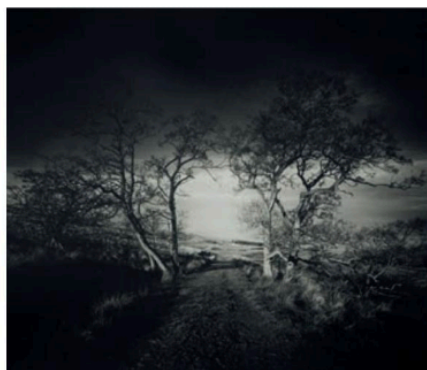
LANGUAGE OF THE LANDSCAPE

The dramatic scenery of the Forest of Bowland is captured in a series of stunning images by photographer Simon Sharp, who uses traditional darkroom methods that make his work totally unique

Film maker and award-winning documentary photographer Simon Sharp is staging an exhibition in the Ribble Valley featuring his monochrome images that reflect the wild landscapes of the Forest of Bowland.

He has travelled the world documenting social injustice through his photography as well as capturing awe-inspiring imagery that reflects the cultures and communities in faraway countries.

Living and working internationally since



2002 across Asia, Africa, Australia and North America, Simon has accumulated vast real-world experience of working conditions and practices, particularly in developing nations.

Closer to home, his recent body of work focusing on the Forest of Bowland, features haunting images of the rugged landscape – scenes that have often taken hours to evolve.

Simon takes a mindful approach to his work concentrating on subjects that are thought-provoking and meaningful – he then uses traditional darkroom techniques to develop and tone the images.

“The landscape of Bowland is very fractured and I think you have to have a deep understanding of it to capture it on camera. On the surface it looks barren and the weather is simply northern, but there’s



an originality to it. It’s very raw,” he explains.

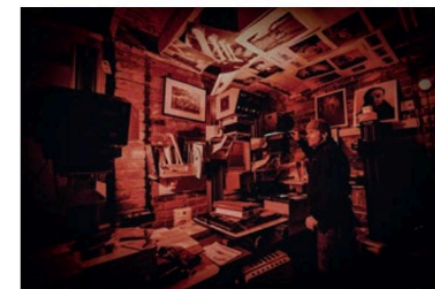
“I really discovered photography through travel. I was photographing all these new things and worked on documentary projects while I was in India and Nepal.”

Returning to his Lancashire roots, Simon has continued his work as a professional photographer using a Sinar Norma camera manufactured in the 1950s and Kodak Tri-X – a legendary film introduced in 1940 and used by world renowned photographers.

The traditional nature of the camera and film means it takes time and skill to set up a shot, during which the light or the subject may have changed or even disappeared: “I have to be very disciplined as the film is expensive, so it really concentrates the mind. Unlike a digital camera, I can’t just delete a shot, I can’t check the image to see if I am happy with it, it’s coming home with me so I have to be very considered.

“I have to learn to trust what I’m doing and I’ve also had to accept failure – but I’ve learnt from that. These are the life lessons in film – you have to respect it. We should all respect the materials we work with and

if you don’t respect film, if you lapse for less than a second, then you’re done. There is no ‘command Z’.”



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On digital photography, Simon adds: “We live in a disposable society. People take thousands of photographs and either instantly delete them or add filters to make them beautiful which belies the creative process, it negates time and the reflection of that reality.



“If you are doing something worthwhile you have to take time, be mindful and considerate. Whatever comes out of the darkroom is never forced. The images develop and they are toned in a gentle, nuanced way. They are a bit like an etching and have a painterly quality to them making them classic, timeless and unique.

“As the print is made by an individual it is, in itself, unique. It’s all handcrafted in Lancashire and what you see is my history in an image, not a computer algorithm or fancy filter. There’s no Photoshop to correct the mistakes, just light, time and introspection and it’s the honesty within that process that I hope will resonate with others.”

While the digital age may have some merits, for Simon, who admits to being somewhat of a maverick, a photograph needs to be a tangible reminder of the changing landscape capturing a moment in time that is spontaneous: “You have to let things happen organically. I don’t plan to catch a sunset at a certain time or place – everything is by chance, it’s an encounter between me and the land, a one-off moment. I’m working towards authenticity which, I believe, is never planned.

“I put my heart and soul into being creative as I want my photography to resonate with people. We are all individuals and we have different views but I think the majority of people appreciate reality and that’s not always pretty, life and ways of seeing, are much more than that.

“The Forest of Bowland is like a rough diamond and you have to understand that to appreciate its beauty. You can keep going back to it and its keeps revealing itself. I don’t know what images I’m going to get when I go there. This isn’t ‘capturing’ or ‘taking’ it’s discovering and learning a sense of place and that doesn’t always mean you have to do something. Just looking is fine.

“You see farmers high on the fells in the depths of winter, isolated trees, twisted and bent, permanently cowering from the prevailing wind. The Forest of Bowland is always speaking to you and if you listen, you begin to understand its language. Then you can start to photograph.” ■

Simon Sharp’s Forest of Bowland exhibition at Longitude Gallery in Clitheroe runs until the end of April. He is also represented by Padiham Picture House, Padiham and Saul Hay Gallery in Manchester where his work is available.

simonsharpphoto.com