

## **Q&A with TIM FLACH**

***Q. Although, you have an extensive portfolio covering a wide range of subjects you've become known more as an 'animal' photographer. Could you explain how this came about and what if any is the relation between you and those subjects?***

**A.** I'm interested by the juxtaposition of chaos and control. By that I mean when I set up a photographic shoot using animals in a studio environment I am bringing an unexpected element into a controlled situation. In doing this I become an observer to the unpredictable events that unfold in front of my lens. And in another way, I want to explore people's tendency to superimpose 'human' characteristics and emotions onto animals, to anthropomorphise the animal.

***Q. You graduated as a fine artist from St Martins School of Art, do you think your fine art background as had an affect on the way you see and take photographs?***

**A.** Looking back it has helped me to go through the 'fine art' process as it encourages you to view shape, form and symbolism in relation to the world around you and the work you produce. But, at the beginning of my career as a photographer I had no idea that my early art training would be so beneficial to the way I see things today in such an image conscious world where fine art photography has become so influential.

***Q. In an interview you once said, "I'm interested in pulling the viewer away from reality." Could you explain what you meant by this comment?***

**A.** What I mean is that, by using studio techniques such as lighting, I am able to visualise an 'outside' subject in a way that stylises that subject, making the final image more accessible and easier to experience by the viewer and in doing so brings the subject closer to reality.

***Q. You have produced some very memorable images, non more so than those you shot for the Breast Cancer and Millennium ad campaigns. Can you explain where did the inspiration come from to produce these images and others like them?***

**A.** It is important as a photographer, an image-maker that we look at the world around us. I feel that we all should observe this world and explore the legacy of creativity that the world's great artists, both past and present have left behind. I believe that we must be open to new ways of seeing, to understand and to explore our environment.

In relation to the advertising campaigns for Breast Cancer and the design for the Millennium stamp the concepts were discussed within an art director and a designer respectively to produce a creative solution for each project.

In the case of the final image for the Breast Cancer campaign it was decided that we would pay homage to the artist Eugene Delacroix by using a painting entitled, 'la Liberte Guident le Peuple.' The revolution and fight for freedom theme of the painting was deemed to be the ideal theme for the campaign. With some minor changes to the visual content of the image: the substitution of the French flag for a 'Pink' flag which, is symbolic of cancer research. The final image is thus enhanced by the subliminal link to the original painting showing the fight for freedom from breast cancer.

In contrast, to the Breast Cancer image, I suggested the idea for the Millennium stamp design to the Royal Mail. The image was based on the theme of birth, a new era, a new day. The shape of the pregnant woman visually echoed the architectural shape of the Millennium Dome, a structure that was built in London to celebrate the new Millennium and in doing so, the two images were inexplicably linked.

***Q. Can you define what is the relationship between fine art and commercial photography in this day and age?***

**A.** The divide between fine art photography and commercial photography has become more blurred as fine art photography has become more accepted in the commercial sector. The main area of this 'invasion' of fine art photography is the fashion industry. Thanks to people like, Martin Parr, Nan Goldin, Terry Richardson, Steven Miesel, Jurgen Teller, Glen Luchford, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Larry Sulton and Mario Sorrenti these two very different worlds of photography are slowly coming together.

***Q. Can you tell us, in your opinion what are the main differences between the way you work as a professional photographer and the way Chinese professional photographers work?***

**A.** As a commercial photographer you tend to work with a team of people where, some may not be visually literate and are more concerned with 'brand' value and awareness in a congested market place. And as such the final image has to have a clearer meaning as opposed to fine art photograph where you have less pressure to compromise your ideas, unless your gallery or agent tells you otherwise. The fine art photographer has more freedom to produce the images that cause the viewer to think, to assimilate their own interpretation rather than to be pre-occupied with a clear meaning.

From my observations, I see the major difference between Chinese commercial photographers and myself is that they have had to evolve a whole industry in a very short time. And although, there are creative commercial photographers operating in China their client base may not be up to speed with their abilities. In order to get the best out of these photographers' agencies and clients must be willing to take risks to push things forward.

***Q. Attitudes towards using photography in advertising has changed in recent years with more and more agencies and their clients using 'fine art' photographers as opposed to the traditional advertising photographer. Why do you think this has happened and do you think the trend will continue?***

**A.** In recent years, visual language within the applied arts (the deployment of photography applied to advertising, editorial, corporate brochures etc) has been influenced more by fine art photographers. As a result, commercial photographers have observed the phenomenal growth in the intrusion of fine art photography in the commercial sector and refined their visual reference point to accommodate these changes and in doing so opened up an exchange of ideas between fine art photography and the applied arts industry.

***Q. Could you explain why abstraction plays such an important part in your photography?***

**A.** Amongst my interests I have in producing my images is the way they are given emotional value. For example, in the case of the neck of the horse from the 'White Horse' series, by reducing the visual evidence I am allowing the spectator more space to find their own interpretation of the image - it's a case of showing less to say more.

***Q. Why do you think contemporary photographers such as, Martin Parr, Wolfgang Tillmans etc have been so successful in the blurring of the line between advertising and fine art photography?***

**A.** Today all of us whether, we are photographers or not live and breath in a sea of images that leave an indelible mark upon our sense of reality. This 'sea' can be roughly broken-down into two areas- the Cinematic and the Snapshot.

The Cinematic approach epitomised by Philip-Lorca diCorcia and Gregory Crewsden is a direct result of the impact that 'film' has had on our reality. While the Snapshot genre has the underlying believability and truthfulness that comes from a candid photograph that we can all relate to when we pick up a camera as amateurs or professionals.

***Martin Parr***, a British social documentary photographer and member of the internationally know Magnum Photos, has spent most of his life photographing

how we as human beings make judgements on others with respect to taste and style particularly in the area of consumption. His works have become very influential in the world of advertising.

***Philip-Lorca diCorcia***, is an American photographer known for his 'cinematic' approach to picture taking. This is evident in his 'candid' shots of ordinary people going about their lives in Time Square, New York. His subjects were totally unaware of being photographed until his flash fired. These illuminated images created a stylised look out of an authentic situation. A recent book of diCorcia's entitled 'A Storybook Life' shows images that were not conceived as a series, but rather as a collections of single images taken over a period of time but all showing diCorcia's preoccupation with subject, colour, structure and lighting technique.

***Corinni Day***, a British former model turned photographer has been influential in the world of advertising where her 'Dirty Realism' has gained favour. Her work draws a comparison with the photography of Nan Goldin and Larry Clark who use their cameras to record their personal and immediate life, which includes their family friends. In this way the viewer becomes a voyeur into the photographers private world.

***Wolfgang Tillsman***, a German born photographer that has been an exponent of the 'extended' view or as he says, 'The unprivileged view' where he investigates the 'social fabric around him.'