

**‘RETURN TO WONDERLAND’****50 Years of Analogue Photography 1950 – 1999**

GALLERY46

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RETURN TO WONDERLAND is now on display at GALLERY 46 comprising more than seventy analogue portraits coming from the darkrooms of many well-known photography professionals, such as Andy Warhol, Sebastião Salgado, Sandra Lousada, Eve Arnold amongst many others. The portraits are part of a private collection belonging to, and curated by, art director and curator David Edmunds, and photographer and curator Zelda Cheatle and others.

This exhibition frames a specific timeline that goes from 1950 to 1999, when photographic practice and culture in general had a different pace to nowadays. With analogue photography, framing narratives as portraits had a different duration in their making, or, in this case, a different exposure in time. During the fifty years that RETURN TO WONDERLAND is focused on, analogue photography took its own time in the darkroom, immersing its varied photographic papers in development baths, while light exposure was a variable mastered according to a certain length of time. Analogue is a gamble between variables, and any calculation beforehand is a method that doesn't guarantee certainty. It is, actually, in-between the states of possibility and surrender that the analogue photograph happens.

There's also an element of joy in calculating the outcome from the interplay of variables onto a photograph: adjusting the lens' focal depth to the amount of light entering the camera through F-stop and within the sensitivity parameters of a film's ISO - these are the early variables that constitute the making of the photograph. Afterwards, every step of the process continues as a measurement between exposure and chemical development, turning the darkroom into a place

for possibility and uncertainty. There's no analogue photography without this sense of interval, and the in-between-states that are crucial to both creation and enthusiasm. The multi-variable gamble is also an interplay of joy via suspense. And after the creative gamble - creation becomes tactile.

From the 1950s to 1990s, culture went from post-war structured conformity, driven by family-unit consumerism, to a progressive decentralisation of the self from the nuclear structure, leading to the advent of individualism as a plausible form of expression. The massification of music genres such as rock 'n' roll in the '50s led to a mass youth consumption, only to encounter its opposition in anti-consumerist and political punk rock in late '70s. Throughout the '80s to late '90s, photography focused on high-fashion icons, accompanying a society that was actively participating in technological mass-commercialism (the Sony Walkman, CDs, affordable co puters, etc) whilst watching music videos on MTV.

Coming from these non-linear decades, a specific kind of iconography was created, fixating its own portraits in analogue photography. We can find testimonies of these cultural portraits in RETURN TO WONDERLAND, featuring artists across the spectrum of the entertainment arts, such as Marilyn Monroe playing pool, James Dean shot on set of "To Catch a Thief", Mick Jagger being bitten by his drummer Charlie Watts, captured by Andy Warhol, or Frank Zappa being photographed in the bathroom at the Royal Garden Hotel in London. And many more! On the other side, from the camera-eye side, RETURN TO WONDERLAND presents works from Nan Goldin, Jane England, Joel Peter Witkin, Duane Michals, David Bailey amongst

many other renowned photographers.

With digital photography, many other aspects come together as a new practicality of image creation. Immediately, it comes to mind that it bypasses the darkroom, which is the same as the removal of analogue manual manipulation of light exposure within its chemical development.

It was during the 2000s that analogue photography companies suffered a serious decline in revenue, as customers and professionals shifted their interest towards the digitalisation of images. In 2001, the Polaroid Corporation filed for bankruptcy and ceased all film production in 2008 (until revived by enthusiasts years later); in 2005, Agfa-Gevaert went bankrupt; and Eastman Kodak Company filed for bankruptcy protection in 2012.

There was no doubt that technology development was, yet again, putting pressure on existing art mediums and also making its impact on mentalities. However, I would argue that the clash between digital and analogue was less smooth and had a more disjunctive effect than when photography competed with painting. For painting received influence from photography by creating new angles and visual formats on canvas, despite the competition. Also, and still on the positive note, the impact photography had on painting led to significant art movements that were supported theoretically by science, like optical science and the discovery light wavelengths, which led to Impressionism, as one example.

For analogue photography, such influential benefits seem more unlikely, as an either-or situation is more evident. It took a few years until instant film cameras came back, as public interest and sufficient numbers to increase profit became a reality (Polaroid and Fujifilm Instax, for example); but an instant camera, even with an built-in timer and double exposure, isn't digital. These settings were available before digital cameras. Therefore, a disjunctive coexistence between film and digital seems more likely as a reality to both realms of photograph-making. It's an either-or coexistence.

It is no surprise that digital photography, as an art medium, accompanies its own times where everything is faster, where emails, social media and other fast communications are taken for granted, as if they had always been here. RETURN TO WONDERLAND is an invitation to a durable rewind, or to a revisiting of the interval as a plausible duration in time, manifested in fine art portraiture.

## CATALOGUE



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