



# Chris Friel

Best known for his mysterious, 'blurry landscape' fine art photography, former artist Chris Friel is as intriguing as his award-winning work. **Nick Smith** hears his extraordinary story...

Chris Friel is a colour-blind painter who bought a camera in 2006 and has not painted since. By qualification he is a doctor, while by profession a sound recordist working on TV travel documentaries with Lonely Planet, as well as with electronic musicians, such as Matthew Herbert. By temperament, though, he's a photographer.

While on audio engineering assignments

across the world, he never brings his camera because he has no time to use it. And so his work is confined to shooting 'blurry landscapes' at home in Kent. Chris' painterly images have seen him shortlisted for *The Sunday Times Landscape Photographer of the Year* for the past four years, and in 2011 he won a Judge's Choice award in the same competition.

His photographs have been shown in the

South Bank Centre, on the Santiago subway in Chile, and projected behind the London Sinfonietta in the Royal Festival Hall.

As one critic, landscape photographer Tim Parkin, noted: 'Chris Friel is a photographer with a wonderful, natural eye – a modern day Fay Godwin, perhaps.' Chris says his aim is to take a photograph that he still likes in a month's time, 'but I don't think I've got there yet.'



## 1 When did you realise you were going to become a photographer?

I was a painter for many years and I bought a camera to document my painting for websites, really. I'm red-green colour blind and I get weird migraines when I look in a viewfinder. So, it was the advent of Live-View that really got me started as a photographer.

## 2 What was your first camera?

I bought a Canon 40D about six years ago, on a whim, and got rather excited by what I could do with it. And then I stopped painting.

### CHRIS - IN BRIEF

**Age** 52  
**Time as pro** amateur for six years  
**Where based** Whitstable, Kent  
**Specialties** 'blurry landscapes'  
**Digital or film** digital  
**Website** www.chrisfriel.co.uk

## 3 What formal training do you have?

I have none at all, neither as a photographer nor as an artist. The internet and social media have taught me more than anything, especially as I live way out in the sticks where the libraries are pretty rubbish.

## 4 How important is it to specialise?

I shoot blurry landscapes, really, just for myself, and if anyone else likes them I get quite pleased. I tend to take them locally because of time constraints. Maybe, if I lived in the Outer Hebrides I'd do something more representational.

## 5 What is the best assignment you've been on?

I was recently in Paris for a week and that was my first self-imposed decadent photographic holiday. It was a disaster because it rained all week.

## 6 What's the worst thing about being a professional photographer?

Sitting at a computer. I really mean it. I hate being inside and I don't do much post-production.

## 7 Film or digital? Why?

Digital. It was the advent of digital that made it possible for me to take photos. I was never interested in film cameras, although I admire a lot of film photographers. I can see why the images are better, but I've never gone down that route.

## 8 What's the most important thing you've learned from another photographer?

I was in Kiev last week, where I saw an Antoine D'Agata show. I was blown away by it. My biggest influence is Frank Grisdale, in that he produces and sells blurry photos. When I came across his work, it cheered me up and made

me think this sort of stuff could be taken seriously.

## 9 What does photography mean to you?

It's a complete escape from real life. If I had a week to live, I'd spend seven days taking photos. It's a blind obsession. Sounds bad, doesn't it?

## 10 What makes a great landscape photograph?

Anything that elicits a response. I'm not actually sure it needs to be positive or negative. It just needs to be a response. A lot of people email me and say they hate my photography. That's fine. ■

### CHRIS'S GEAR

**Cameras** 2 x Canon 5D MkII  
**Lenses** Canon TS-E 24mm f/3.5 L, TS-E 45mm f/2.8, 50mm f/1.2  
**Filters** B+W ND6, circular polariser