

Chris Friel Photographer/ Artist

For some time I have been wondering to myself if there is a difference between photographers whose work is so profound and evocative that it is rendered Art and artists who use still cameras to create their work rather than paint or stone or objects or film or sound. I'm sure there are many who will tell me I'm wrong because by creating those two distinct and separate groups I'm basically saying that not all photography is art. Doesn't Susan Sontag says in her book *On Photography* that even the most amateurish photograph is rendered *Art* by its age once it becomes old, but I cannot for the life of me find the quotation which is quite annoying. (Her book slipped down the back of my headboard a week ago or so and has been there ever since... I have not stopped reading but am reading two other photography related books and of course will retrieve Susan Sontag's book soon enough. She is quite hard going - harder than Roland Barthes and his devotee James Elkin I think). The conundrum I have in my head is not an easy one to address, I should think.

Chris Friel is an artist. He was born in 1959. He used to be a painter. Then in 2006 he picked up a camera and, so every entry about him across the internet tells us, has not painted since. He is a prolific photographer and says in an interview when he first started this process his success rate was 1000:1, i.e. for every 1000 he took he arrived at 1 image which went some way towards achieving what he was after. His ratio is now much smaller. But he recommends taking as many photographs as it takes. This is good news for me given the amount I took for the last assignment - and even then I feel I should have kept trying as many of my images fall short for me.

Chris Friel uses long exposures, 2/3 seconds, camera movement, sometimes but not always a tilt shift lens. He also uses an ND filter and a polarisor.

In an interview with [Andrew Gibson](#) dated November 2012 Friel says he concentrates on land and seascapes and doesn't think he is very good with people although that must have changed because I have seen a lot of people orientated images of his lately and they are incredibly evocative. I like them in particular.

Most of his work is black and white and very dark. However, he has also produced a series of coloured landscapes which is interesting considering he is reportedly colour blind. Added to the warped, blurred images he takes, he also scratches and distorts the prints too.

What I like about his work, especially the ones with people, is that they seem to come from

somewhere outside our material reality. I am reminded of inner worlds, dreams, nightmares. I recognise the scenes as something intrinsically human and am reminded of a collective consciousness because he is producing something so recognisable but difficult to grab hold of. For me he creates a feeling that is universal and perhaps even prehistoric, something that is viscerally tangible and takes me back to a place I can't quite place or remember. I love that about his work.

The list of artists and photographers who have influenced him is extraordinarily long. And he is kind too. I followed him on Flickr - and when I have commented on his work he has replied privately to thank me, which suggests to me a conscious rejection of modern narcissism. He eventually followed me back and sent me a link to the artists he lists as having being influenced by on his site when I said I was studying here. I have had time to look at a few but the list is so long it's going to take me ages! I will of course be writing about the people whose work I particularly like in my blog.

[Alexey Titarenko](#), who I came across a few weeks ago and was so enamoured by is one of three he lists as being key.

I do not fully understand why I am drawn to this sort of photography so much and am torn about whether I want to pursue an artistic style of photography such as Chris Friel's or a photographer's style of imagery. I took some pictures of my children recently and am quite pleased with a couple - I would really want to keep doing that especially from a work point of view. I have no idea what else I might do with it - documentary style photography perhaps? Who knows? It would be wonderful to work for a charity; heh, me and a million others, much younger and less tied down than me. But I also love creating images that are interpretative. I feel utterly compelled to do so especially when I see photographs like the work I've been describing in this post.

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