



# Caroline Fraser

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER

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Caroline Fraser's images from New Zealand have made some think she hails from down under, so an interview with her is a good chance to clear this up (she lives in Sussex).

However busy Caroline's work-life balance may be, she always finds time for photography – or setting down her thoughts (mostly about photography) in her blog. Being out with her camera is both a creative outlet and essential part of her well-being.

## What is, for you, the appeal of landscape photography?

Landscape photography allows me to unwind in the natural world. As I walk and make images with my camera I often feel a sense of elation at being alive. Being able to express this gives me more pleasure than almost anything else. I never tire of walking the same paths if I have a camera in my hand.

## How did your relationship with the camera start?

It started with a box brownie at the age of about 8. My first images were of my brother and sister in the sandpit and on the swing in the garden of my first home. My camera has always been one of my most treasured possessions; my first SLR camera was a Fujica ST705 which has a lovely feel to it, and which is now enjoyed by my son, Ian, who shares my interest in photography.

## Does your background (childhood passions, education, and career / vocation) influence your photography?

In my work as a doctor I spend a lot of time listening and talking to people in a very intense way. Spending time alone with my camera is a wonderful way to recharge my emotional batteries. My father was a GP, but died when I was very young. My favourite uncle was a keen photographer and walker. Hiking with him and my younger brother on the Pennine Way at the age of 17 was one of the first times that I experienced the really wild landscapes that I now hanker for. He encouraged me in my photography, and I treasure the photos that he took of our family on a narrow boat holiday in 1971.

## Who (photographers, artists or individuals) or what has most inspired you?

Paul Kenny, for creating images of immense beauty from found objects, both natural and man-made. I consider his works to be precious objects, more valuable than any jewels.

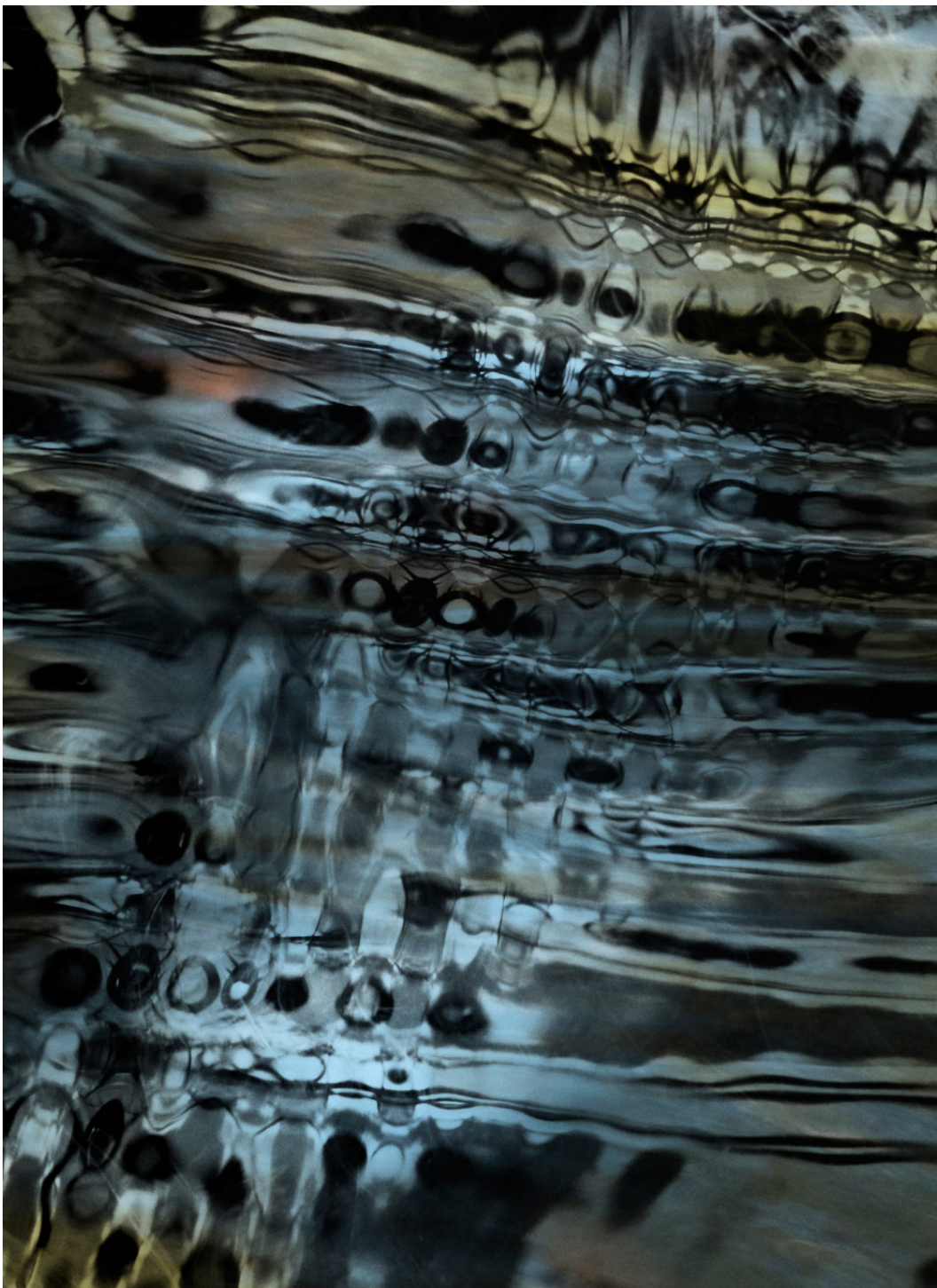
Jan Tove, for his gentle landscapes in subtle muted tones that I tried so hard to emulate when I first got into landscape photography seriously. His book "Borton Redan" was the very first of my slowly growing photography book collection.

Chris Friel, for his relentless experimentation and for pushing the boundaries of photography in beautiful and unexpected directions.

Thomas Struth [2], for his 'Paradise' series. Standing in front of one of these vast photographs of a forest is as close to paradise



Caroline Fraser  
[carolinefraser.org](http://carolinefraser.org)



as I have ever been in a gallery. I have yet to capture the chaos of forests in a successful way.

**Have you had any moments where things become clear, or new directions were formed?**

No doubt about this one. 10 years ago I got breast cancer and had a gruelling 6 months of treatment. This was, without doubt, the most liberating thing that has happened in my adult life, as it changed my perspective on many things. I realised that life is for living, and stopped sweating the small stuff. A few years before I was diagnosed I had been hiking on the West Highland Way with my brother and our children. We passed Inversnaid Photography Centre, on the shores of Loch Lomond, and I had said to myself 'I am going to go there one day'.

Not until I felt my life was limited did I realise that 'one day' could, and should, be 'now'. The fear of recurrent disease gave me a sense of urgency that was entirely liberating. My son and I attended a course at Inversnaid entitled "Art in Nature" run by André Goulancourt in 2005, and from that time on I have been completely hooked. I made images unlike any I had made before; of grass, water, trees and bark. Ten years on I am still inspired by the same subject matter; the wilder and more remote the location the better.

**You studied for a postgraduate certificate in photography at Central St Martins College of Art and Design, London, in 2011. How helpful was this?**

This was an immensely positive experience. One of the benefits of the course was to visit many exhibitions and to observe how work is curated and presented. I worked incredibly hard for a



Interview by  
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year, and learnt about book binding, making books and different ways to present images. I gained a much deeper understanding of photographic history and the photographers that influence so much of today's photography. I was interested in the overlap between art and photography, discovering and enjoying artists such as Uta Barth [2], Gerhard Richter, Susan Derges and Paul Graham.

**You spent 4 months living and working in New Zealand last year. What was this like and did it change your photography in any way? When you go back, do you have any new photographic objectives?**

I spent 3 months working as a GP in Gore, down in the south of South Island. I chose the location for its proximity to so many beautiful landscape locations, in particular Fiordland and the mountains and lakes around Queenstown. Every weekend was a photography mini break. I took off in my car to different places to explore, walk and make images. The most noticeable difference for me between the UK and New Zealand landscapes is the intensity of colours due to the glacial water in the lakes and the colours in the sea. I made a lot of very abstract images about light and colour, using multiple exposures. I wish, in retrospect that I had had a specific project to work on, as I came back with a lot of images, with no clear thread. When I go back I will plan to work in a more focused way. I would like to find a way to express the wonders of the temperate rain forests and the geology of the area now that I know where the most interesting locations are. The bird song in New Zealand is joyful. I would like to capture that properly on video too.









**Which cameras and lenses do you typically take on a trip and how do they affect your photography?**

I am trying to lighten my load, and work with one camera, one lens when out travelling. My camera of choice is my Canon 5D mark iii, as it has the best multiple exposure facility. I keep a 24-105mm lens on it, as I don't like to keep changing lenses and having to deal with dust spots. Dust spots are a real problem with long exposures. When exploring cities and hiking I use a Fuji X-E1 or my tiny Panasonic Lumix LX-3, but I miss the optical viewfinder of the SLR. My husband keeps reminding me that I have gone for a whole year without buying a new camera..... but I have recently invested in a scanner with the idea of revisiting my old photographic negatives that currently reside in a safe in my cellar.

I have very few prime lenses; a Sigma macro 105mm and a Canon 50mm (the cheap version). I would love to have more. I recently bought a second hand Canon tilt shift 24mm for both blur and with the intention of using it properly to get my landscapes more in focus. I hanker after a Canon 85mm f1.2 with the intention of making more portraits.

**How important is post processing in realising your vision? Tell us a little about your workflow.**

I work in two ways; one a very straight, documentary approach, particularly for my urban landscapes and images for my blog. For much of my more expressive work there is a fair amount of post processing, layering

of images and experimentation. I can rarely repeat what I create. It is a very fluid process and depends entirely on my mood that day. I use Photoshop and Bridge. I am trying to get to grips with Lightroom so that I can better find and catalogue my images. It has taken a while for me to understand that you need to back up your catalogue regularly, and I still don't have it fully mastered. I am learning it the hard way.

**Do you print many of your pictures printed and, if so, how?**

I print at home using an Epson R3000, and predominantly use heavyweight matt

papers. If I want larger prints or C-type prints I outsource to The Printspace. Subject Matter Photographic Art prints my work on acrylic in large sizes, which gives a very different look. I make gift boxes of greeting cards on different themes as a way to share my work in a less formal way.

**Can you choose 2-3 favourite photographs (of your own) and tell us something about them?**

One from each of my favourite places: New Zealand, the Hebrides and Iceland.



ONE OF MY FAVOURITE PLACES IN THE WORLD IS HARRIS IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES. THIS IMAGE LOOKS TOWARDS THE ISLAND OF PABBAY, AND WAS PART OF MY ARPS PANEL OF SAND AND WATER IMAGES FROM THE BEACHES OF HARRIS. IT HANGS IN THE BEDROOM OF THE US AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE IN TOKYO, AND IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW PHOTOGRAPHS OF MY OWN THAT I HANG IN MY HOME.



THIS IMAGE IS ONE OF MY FAVOURITES FROM ICELAND; ANOTHER IRRESISTIBLE LANDSCAPE. IT IS ONE OF MY MORE SUCCESSFUL IN-CAMERA MULTIPLE EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPHS. IT HAS A SERENITY TO IT, AND SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME FOR A PRINT. THAT IS THE HIGHEST ACCOLADE THAT I COULD WISH FOR.



This image was taken last summer at Camber Sands. I just happened to walk onto the dunes late one afternoon as this storm cloud blew in. It was a sight that had everyone on the beach transfixed, and soon after I

took the photo I had to run from the beach as a massive sand storm blew up and it started to pour with rain. I believe it is a 'tsunami' cloud, and is a very unusual sight on the English south coast.







**Reading your blog, I get the sense that words are important to you and are part of the outlet that photography provides you with?**

I started my blog as an experiment whilst doing my postgraduate certificate at Central St Martins. I wanted to keep a diary of my thoughts and progress as part of my course work. I found it therapeutic to put words to paper, and it helped me to work out why I was progressing in certain directions. I enjoyed the process, and have kept it up. Life can be very mundane at times, and it is good to reflect on the ordinary as well as the less ordinary. If I can inject a little humour into the process then that is a bonus. The blog has become an outlet for my obsessions such as the contrast between nature's chaos and man's determination to impose order on the landscape, be it neat hedges in suburbia, pollarded trees or visual instructions on how we should behave. I am almost through my hazard warning tape obsession, and now see orange traffic cones everywhere that I go. Health and safety impinges on our visual world in so many ways, and I feel compelled to take photos as a record of this. Sad? Mad? Probably both.

**If you were told you couldn't do anything photography related for a week, what would you end up doing (i.e. do you have a hobby other than photography.)**

This is the hardest question you have asked me. Thinking about what to say has forced me to admit to myself that I am completely obsessed.

The short answer has to be 'I suppose I would have to do the ironing'.

The longer answer is 'Go for walk or to the cinema with my other half. Cook a meal for friends. Enjoy a good novel. I have just started 'H is for Hawk' by Helen Macdonald, which is incredibly poetic in style and a beautiful read.

Get into my garden and hack some bushes into order.'

After that I would go to the woods with pencil and paper and see what transpired. Very occasionally a poem comes along. I wish it were more often.

In reality.....

I took my camera to the woods the other day, but there was no memory card in it. I resorted to collecting objects that I could later make into a still life. I don't think it is possible for me to stop thinking about photography.



**Are there any achievements of which you feel particularly proud?**

Becoming a doctor despite my career's teacher's advice "medicine is too hard for a girl; have you thought of chiropody?" I have been so lucky to have a wonderful job without any worries about job security.

My first proper exhibition as an invited artist at Greenwich Viewfinder Gallery in the exhibition 'Painterly Photographs'. I was on a high for weeks.

My book 'Hawkwood' which was created (as part of my coursework at Central St Martins) for my husband and children. The book contains images from, and a poem about, our local woods; my sanctuary in suburbia. I went on a bookbinding course and had to master Indesign as a means to achieving a handmade book which I later made into a Blurb book as well.

**What kind of things do you think might challenge you in the future? Where do you see your photography going in terms of subject and style?**

A hard question to answer. A lot of what I do is serendipitous. The seawall is being rebuilt at Camber Sands, using vast granite blocks from Norway, so I have decided to document that. There is an element of rebellion in this project as always; trying to get near the vast piles of rock without being asked to leave by men with cones pointing out their hazard warning signs is half of the fun.

I really can't predict where my style is going. I love trying new things, so anything could happen. I am a really big fan of bright colours, but also cannot resist a high quality monochrome image, so I like to try creating both.





Creating books is something I plan to do more of. I am currently learning the art of compositing and hope to use this for the purpose of making images with more of a story telling approach. A lot of my work was made with the aim of leaving something of me behind. As that drive has lessened over time the challenge is to maintain the momentum in a focused way. Striving to keep learning and experimenting is my main goal at present.

My dream is to reach a point where I can use Eliot Porter's quote 'when I gave up medicine for photography'.....

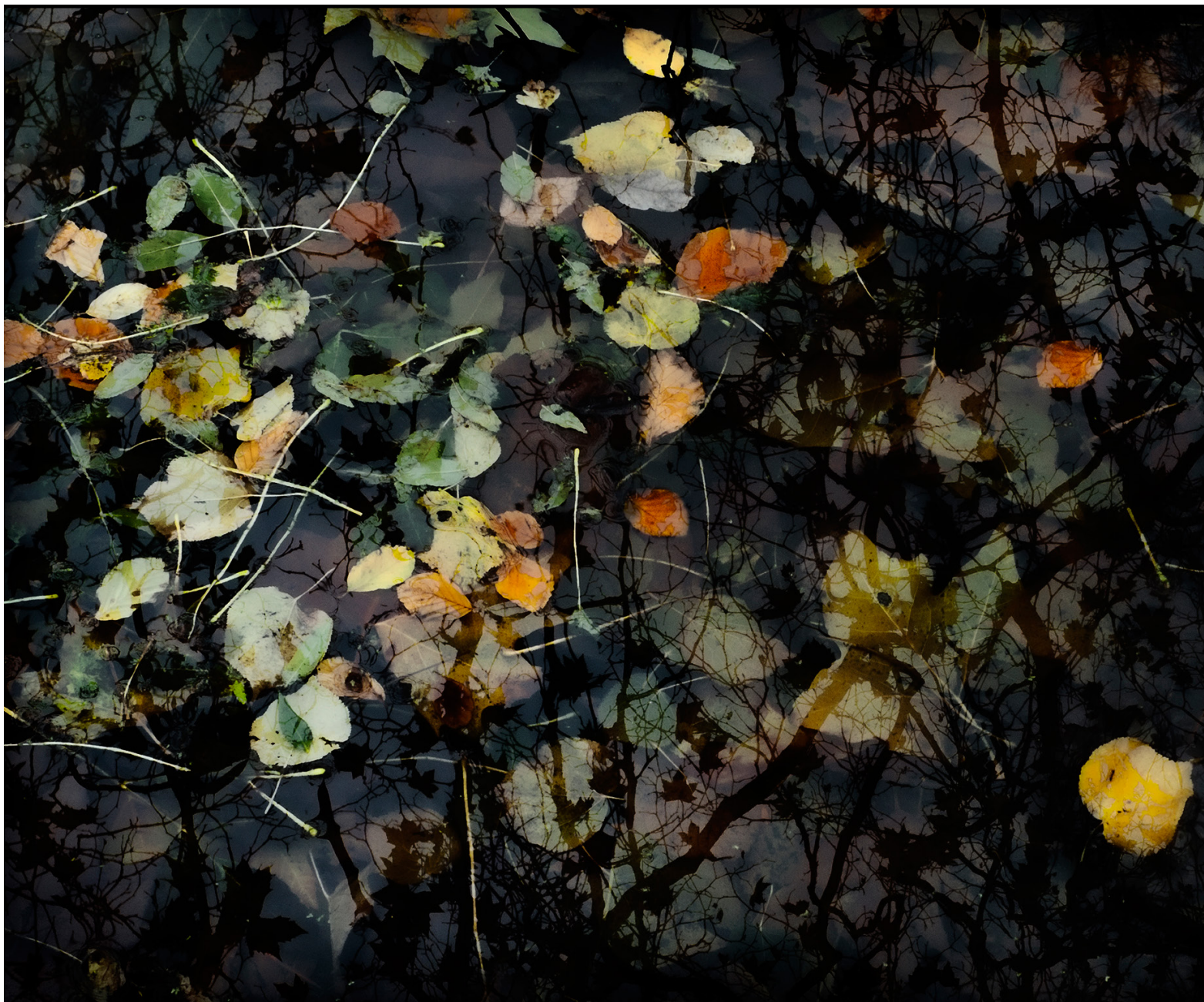
**Tell us a little about your apprenticeship under The Arcanum.**

I applied to The Arcanum having discovered the work of New Zealand's Jackie Ranken and hoping to be taken on as one of her apprentices after seeing her series 'Kitchen Stories'. I was over the moon when she selected me for her cohort, and have been enjoying the supportive nature of The Arcanum for improving my photography. The group I am in is predominantly a landscape focussed group, but we have also worked on portraits and various other photographic challenges.

Getting constructive feedback from a group of trusted peers and from Jackie herself in video critique sessions has been an incredible opportunity to develop my work and learn new skills. I have started using Nik software for my monochrome images, and also for some of my double exposure images.

**Which photographer would you like to see featured in a future issue?**

I discovered Rosa Basurto recently at the London Art Fair; I would love to hear more about her.



You can see more of Caroline's images on her website.

<http://www.carolinefraser.org/>

Her blog is at Caroline Fraser - [An Ordinary Life](#).

### Featured Comments...

**Valerie Millett:** Wonderful interview, very inspiring and the images are awesome!

**Adam Pierzchala:** You have a very interesting vision of your own Caroline and it was fascinating seeing you at work in Iceland and then the images you produced - so very different to the norm. Good work!

**Stuart Westmore:** What a great set of images - I love the ambiguity in some of these pictures, and the way they reward a closer look. And another great interview, Michela.

**Nick Joyner:** Some gorgeous images Caroline; your abstractions are particularly inspiring.

**on** landscape

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