

COVER STORY



Show and tell

Photo professionals from around the world descended on Birmingham this July for three days of portfolio reviews. Here we present the best work chosen by the reviewers, with interviews by [Simon Bainbridge](#) and [Isy Andrews](#)

Launched in 2000, Rhubarb-Rhubarb provides an annual showcase for photographers to present their portfolios to reviewers from Europe and America. These publishers, gallerists and curators look over portfolios in 20 minute sessions over three days, providing advice and, maybe, an opportunity to publish or exhibit the photographers' work.

Inspired by the Houston FotoFest in Texas, the granddaddy of all folio reviews, Rhubarb founder Rhonda Wilson thought she could add something to the formula at her own event in Birmingham. 'We wanted to do it in a way

that was minimum stress for the photographers and reviewers,' she says, 'so we developed an online booking system. And that's what makes Rhubarb unique still: people can prepare properly and research the reviewer to make the slots really count. It's like a great match-making agency.'

That reviewees £500 pay for this advice some people find incredible, but for photographers ready to sell to an international audience, it has often proved a worthwhile investment, not least in providing an opportunity to network on an international level.

And the reviewers are also

appreciative of the chance to see so much new work under one roof.

'Portfolio reviews are an absolutely great way of finding new work,' says Christopher Rauschenberg, co-director of Blue Sky Gallery, a non-profit space in Portland in the US. 'Of the 24 artists who had solo shows here last season, we met 15 of them at FotoFest, Photolucida [another folio review in Portland] and Rhubarb.' But not everyone is necessarily looking for the finished article. 'I saw quite a few people had work in progress,' says Craig Auckland, the director of Fotohaus Gallery in

Bristol. 'I like that because you can see where something might be heading, offer your advice and then hopefully see the finished work sometime in the future.'

Ultimately, most photographers are pitching at reviewers rather than looking purely for feedback. 'Very few – too few! – are looking for actual advice, says Kathy Aron Dowell of the Society for Contemporary Photography in Kansas in the US, who finds around 75% of her shows through folio reviews such as Rhubarb. 'Everyone wants a show, and that's understandable, but not always realistic.'



Frederic Delangle

www.fredericdelangle.com

Proof of Rhubarb's global credentials is found in the number of photographers who travel to it from abroad – a phenomenon that wasn't planned when Rhubarb began as a vehicle for British photographers to meet international buyers.

Paris-based photographer Frederic Delangle is typical of the foreign reviewees, who are often well established in their home countries. With five shows lined up over the next six months and several bodies of work under his belt, Delangle came with three series of new work, one of which included *Coit*, a portfolio of images of couples making love, shot in exposure times lasting as long as the act itself.

'It allows me to represent loving acts without staging a pornographic scene,' he explains.

'Blur enables me to not show the bodies in their raw nature, and the two lovers are mixed, superposed and entangled until

they become one sole mass of flesh. The spectator creates his own choreography with his own fantasies.'

Deborah Robinson of New Art Gallery in Walsall was impressed another series, his images of Ahmedabad. 'It's a city that was once one of the richest places in India, boasting amazing architecture, and is now one of the poorest'. She adds: 'The photographs were beautifully shot, taken at night using long exposures, which created ghostly effects. The images are rich and compelling.' She was not the only reviewer to express an interest in exhibiting the work.

Astrid Kruse Jensen

www.astridkrusejensen.com

One of a number of Danish women who made a big impact at this year's Rhubarb, Astrid Kruse Jensen showed two bodies of work, including *Hypernatural*, which goes on show at Paris Photo next month as part of a special exhibition focusing on Nordic photography.

'*Hypernatural* was made in Iceland depicting the geothermally-heated pools which act as a social gathering point,' says Sian Bonnell of Trace, an artist-led initiative based in Dorset. 'These pools are all lit by artificial light and are devoid of people. What I liked about the work was the feeling they provoked that you are in a familiar yet alien domain. The images themselves are all about the colour blue and so are very beautiful and mesmerising, but at the same time you feel a sense of unease while regarding them.'

Kathy Aron Dowell of the Society for Contemporary Photography in Kansas in the US was another reviewer impressed by the work. 'She has a very defined, well-honed personal language throughout her projects. But the projects themselves are quite different from one another, and I like that. She moves from one "problem" to another, explores the idea in an arresting and resolved manner, and then moves on to something else.

I'm not really that interested in artists that find a niche and stick with it for years.

'Astrid's images fall somewhere between the real and the imagined, but they are not really fabricated either. They seem familiar and utterly foreign – remarkably seductive and simultaneously unsettling all at the same time. I'm quite attracted to work that defies an easy explanation, which is what keeps me wanting to look.'

Meeting the Dane at Rhubarb was well-timed, as Dowell is currently working on an exhibition exploring the conceptual relationship between architecture and photography.

Charlotte Haslund-Christensen

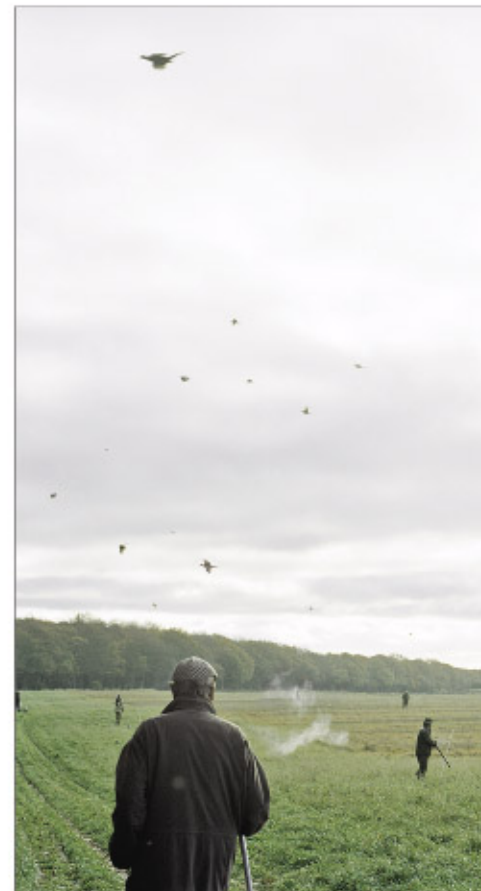
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The Dane who made the most impact on BJP editor Simon Bainbridge was Charlotte Haslund-Christensen, not least because of her unconventional approach to presenting her work. 'The 20-minute turn-

Left: From *Coit*
© Frederic Delangle.
Middle: From *Hypernatural*
© Astrid Kruse Jensen.
Above: From *Natives*
© Charlotte Haslund-Christensen.



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Above: From *Home*
© MARRIGJE DE MAAR.

Middle: From *Now To Hunt*

© TRINE SØNDERGAARD.
Right: From *Relative*
© SPENCER MURPHY.

around of the folio reviews doesn't leave any time for pre-variating,' he says, 'and Charlotte was almost aggressive in taking control of the session and imposing herself. First she demanded to know what I did, then she put down a watch and told me we didn't have time to look at her portfolio of older work and handed me an A4 sheet of paper describing her current project, *Natives*. All of which would have backfired if she didn't have the work to back it up – but she did.

'Fascinated by the photography of her explorer grandfather, and equally perturbed by "racist stereotyping" in modern-day Denmark, she has begun taking a series of images that attempt to "reverse the colonial gaze". In keeping with her assertive presentation style, Charlotte's own position within the project is as important as the work itself. She dresses up in 19th century colonial clothing and travels around Denmark with an expedition box, demanding to photograph locals – or natives. She positions and photographs her subjects in an anthropological manner, consciously visualising them as stereotypes. Provocative stuff!

MARRIGJE DE MAAR
www.ice-rose.nl

Dutch photographer MARRIGJE DE MAAR's deceptively simple images had a lot of reviewers talking by the end of the folio review.

'What I liked most of all about her work is its audacity,' says SIAN BONNELL. '*Home* is a very quiet and beautiful work made over the last three years where she has travelled to Russia, Finland, China and shot images in her home country. It consists of a series of images of the interiors of peoples' houses.

'These are wonderful in their own right, but what I love about the work is how she sought entry to these strangers' homes. She is an older lady and instead of this being a handicap – she could seriously not have made this work if she had been younger – she gained peoples' confidence and was welcomed inside. She said the same thing to everyone at each venue – that she had to make a photograph within 15 minutes of entering the dwelling. I liked the way she was able to capture the strangeness and beauty of these environments without losing the sense of curiosity of what was inside the building.'

Chris Rauchenberg puts it another way: 'Suppose that you arrived at my house for dinner and I greeted you by saying, "Come on in. I'm just going to run to the store to pick something up and I'll be right back." While I'm gone you wander around my house and get to know me through the delicious process of snooping around and looking at my books and CDs and the rest of my stuff. The work of MARRIGJE DE MAAR provides a similar mix of voyeuristic and scientific satisfaction as it gives me clues to help me understand about what it might be like to live in China or on one side or the other of the Russian/Finnish border.'

TRINE SØNDERGAARD
www.trinesondergaard.com

Another Danish woman, TRINE SØNDERGAARD, showed work from her documentary work on Copenhagen's red light district, *Now that you are mine* (which was published by Steidl and reviewed in *BJP*, 13 August 2003), along with *Now to Hunt*, a series she has shot with her husband Nicolai Howalt.

The series combines conventional photographs with digital

montages, and consists of images of hunting scenery taken in typical Danish landscapes. It is the first time that SØNDERGAARD has focused on landscape-based work. Usually producing documentary photography, SØNDERGAARD is fascinated by the idea that many of us rarely come into contact with nature, which she attributes to 'the circumstances for living today'. Through photographing pheasant shoots she was able to explore the way people interact with nature and found that the principal theme of her documentary work – life and death – was also key in her landscape series.

'I appreciate the careful balance the work achieves between digital intervention and traditional landscape,' says LESLEY MARTIN, executive editor of books at the Aperture Foundation in New York. 'While on one hand it's a documentation of the Danish ritual of hunting, on the other, the technique expands the viewer's perspective by digitally layering the flow of human figures over the land, allowing one to glimpse a few hours of action in a single frame.

'The effect is used with restraint and achieves an elegance of sort; in the book, the



digitally enhanced images blend seamlessly with the occasional straight shot of the Danish countryside. While Simon Norfolk remains the king of "Chronotopia", I thought this was a very engaging perspective and means of presenting the passage of time and human activity over a single stretch of land.'

Spencer Murphy

www.spencermurphy.co.uk

'This year was the second time I've been to Rhubarb and it's definitely a good idea to go,' says young British photographer Spencer Murphy. 'Last year I got an exhibition out of it and I also learnt about several useful competitions.' Murphy has been pretty successful with competitions since graduating from Falmouth College of Arts, most recently collecting the Association of Photographers Bursary, worth £15,000. And now he's also received a grant from the Arts Council of England.

One project that had reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic talking was *Relative*, a series motivated by memories of his childhood and an investigation of the way he viewed family members. Originally

conceived as an exploration of his judgement of his family, rather than to portray the individuals, the series is underpinned by an intensely personal approach. Having looked at family photographs, he felt they didn't reflect his memories of childhood or his dislocated relationship with his family, following his parents' separation and the evolution of new families. But what began as an experiment evolved into an exercise in accepting his family and coping with difficult memories.

'Spencer Murphy's photographs have the overwhelming power of quietness, the capacity to seduce while taking you to dark places,' says Bruno Ceshel, editor at Chris Boot books, who was one of several admirers. 'Whether exploring his relationship with his extended family or documenting tons of waste, Spencer's images trap us in his own unsettling cinematographic world.'

Antony Crossfield

www.antonycrossfield.com

'It was the first time I have been to Rhubarb and it was fantastic,' says artist Antony Crossfield. 'I got a lot of pro-

ductive and honest advice. One of the best things about the event were the free-roaming ['floating'] reviewers in addition to the booked reviewers, which means that you can get the most out of your time there. It's a really good opportunity to network in a compressed environment because often these things can be a bit protracted. It is something of a baptism by fire because you are exposing your work to people and I'm not good at being forthcoming, but it does provide a very comfortable environment to hear advice and talk with people.'

'His work is both technically innovative and extremely original,' states Stuart Cox, head of Creative Imagery at Photoshot. 'He is the quintessential "New School" fine art photographer, not afraid to use digital tools to execute his creative vision, whilst shooting predominantly on film and using digital techniques in post-production.'

Specimen, an image from which is shown here, is typical of Crossfield's approach. It is an investigation of ideas about childhood, and in particular, the view that childhood is connected with purity and simplicity. The photographs are a hybrid of computer-generated

babies combined with a photographed jar. Crossfield uses the digitally-generated distortions on the babies to physically embody what he perceives to be distorted ideas held by society about childhood. In addition, the work also represents a challenge to the viewer to question the idea of truth in photography. While the children are deliberately created to look like scientific specimens and therefore reliable, recorded information, they are computer generated.

'Thematically the subjects sit between the twisted and often arcane vision of nightmares, through to associative states of the human condition,' says Cox. 'Although presented in a highly unusual way, these concepts were identifiable and relatable without being too obvious.'

Frank Herholdt

www.frankherholdt.co.uk

What's someone like Frank Herholdt doing at Rhubarb? Having established himself as one of London's leading commercial photographers in the mid-1980s – and now boasting a blue-chip client list that includes Sony, Pepsi and the Halifax – he says he went 'to



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**Above: From
Species**

© Antony
Crossfield.

Middle: From Roost

© Frank Herholdt.
**Right: Marie Claire
RIP** © E-J Major.

get some feedback on a new direction'.

He explains: 'I don't work like I used to as a jobbing advertising photographer. I work from home [in an old pub] doing my own thing and every now and then a big job pops up.' And that suits him nicely: 'I'm fulfilling my fantasies and at the same time renewing my reputation. New clients react very positively to personal work,' and, he says, the fine art market is a 'slightly more realistic prospect now'.

Herholdt showed reviewers pictures from his *Roost* series, for which he hired a location to shoot a young woman alone in a house. He's the figure seated in the picture above. 'It's a little bit about me. I'm a voyeur. I always have been. I'm interested in watching people, and I've always had clandestine affairs.'

Herholdt was another of Stuart Cox's recommendations: 'The work Frank showed, like much of his commercial work,

has a strong conceptual edge that exudes leading creative thinking around the thematic, compositional, lighting, styling and technical photographic aspects. The production value of his work demonstrates that he has the innate capacity for edgy and highly original thinking, but also the structured capability to capture this vision photographically. It smashes the traditional snobbery barriers between traditional fine art photography and commercially viable photography.'

E-J Major

www.ejmajor.co.uk

Working from film stills and materials she has collected in her ongoing exploration of issues of difference and identity, London-based artist E-J Major has been showing two bodies of work at folio reviews for the past year.

Marie Claire RIP is a series of 12 self-portraits which have been digitally manipulated

with extraordinary precision to portray a process of self-disintegration. They are, in fact, based on an article published in *Marie Claire* featuring police mugshots of a woman taken over a 14 year period, warning against the dangers of heroine addiction. The unnamed woman was found dead, the article revealed, shortly after the last picture was taken.

'The piece was motivated by a desire to memorialise an unnamed person,' says Major, 'a woman who had already died and had no control over the use of her own image. I wanted to give her a name and through the text titles to suggest more to a life than can be summed up by 12 images.'

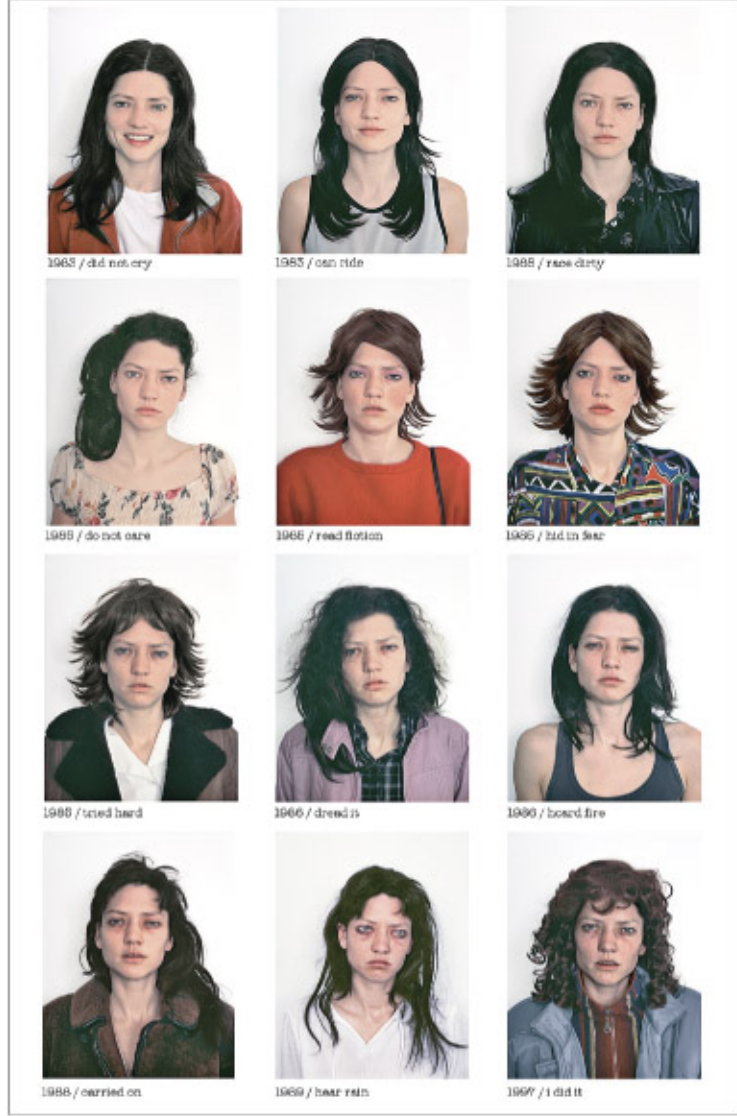
Sourcing clothes and wigs from second-hand shops to match those of the original shots, she tried to duplicate the same look and facial expressions by absorbing herself in an imaginary recreation of the woman's emotional state when the pictures were first

taken. Shot on a 5x4 camera and then scanned, Major retouched the self-portraits at pixel level, matching her subject's skin deterioration through ageing and addiction.

In addition, she has been showing a series called *Love is...*, in which she has created high-res frame grabs from Bernardo Bertolucci's 1972 film *Last Tango in Paris*. Having produced around 7000 images – equating to roughly every second of the movie – she turned them into postcards, which she then hand-posted to addresses in London and Worcestershire. Inviting the anonymous recipients to return the postcards together with a reply on the theme of 'Love is...', she has used the responses to create prints and an artists book collating them together in the same sequence as the film.

Major attended Rhubarb for the first time last year, and has since been to portfolio events in Berlin and Houston, before





returning to Birmingham for another round of reviews this summer. 'I was pretty skeptical before I went last year,' she admits, 'but in actual fact the whole experience was far more human than I'd imagined, both in terms of meeting reviewers and fellow reviewees.'

She showed work in Toronto and Berlin as a result of con-

nections made on her first visit, the latter of which was seen by Trolley Books, whom she met up with again at this year's Rhubarb. Trolley is now interested in publishing her work and exhibiting it in its east London gallery, having already said it wants to show *Love is...* at Zoo art fair this autumn. She is also talking to galleries she

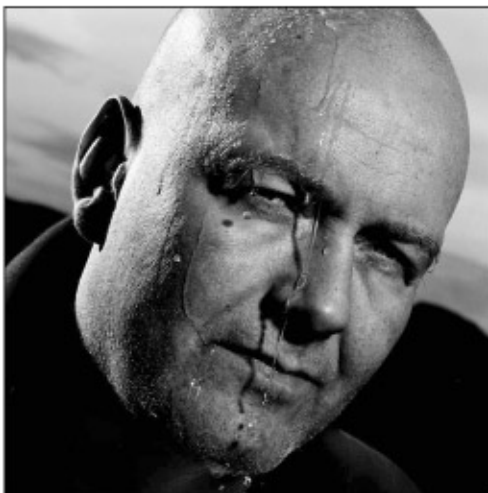
met at Rhubarb and FotoFest about shows in Europe and the US.

'Rhubarb is expensive,' she says, 'but you do have access to all sorts of people that otherwise it would be very difficult to get in front of. It's impossible to judge its worth in monetary terms. The most important things are to have properly

developed the work you want to show, to choose your reviewers carefully, and be prepared for any opportunities offered to take a long time to come to fruition.' **BJP**

Rhubarb-Rhubarb

For updates and details about next year's event visit www.rhubarb-rhubarb.net



Brian Griffin

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