

Front to Back

CLARE STRAND

Clare Strand

Front to Back. *(role of Research)*

Hello

Welcome to the last talk of the conference

I've spent some time trying to see how I might fit into this programme. As an image-maker I am always responding to the world – the more things shift, the more interesting and exciting... I have a good acceptance of the landscape of visual culture changing. I am also a very keen student of technology – my husband and I marvel at our new iPad, our digital TV etc...

I recently took part in a workshop entitled 'Post Digital' and had the great experience of working with young digital artists of whom I found challenging and inspiringly arrogant, a prerogative of the young, and in this case young people with intellectual agendas and foresight.

Their rejection of objects 'things' was illuminating – I quote.

"Why have a comforting teddy bear when you can have an iPhone?"

They questioned the need for objects in a digital age and felt that it was up to us to change our perception of the value of digital art and that an online interaction or a social meeting is a worthy if not a worthier contender to art and 'stuff' you can physically store and hold.

Their argument is convincing - I like it - and by the looks of things it is where we are pushing to.

iCloud Slide → **1**

In their early 20's they reminded me of my stepson, who communicates with his girlfriend through Facebook, whilst sitting next to her. They have just moved into together and their lack of the need of a TV and 'stuff' was a case in point. I know my stepson Stan loves TV, but the computer, YouTube etc....is more than sufficient.



Slide 1
iCloud logo
From: <http://www.apple.com/uk/icloud/>
(access on the 1st of July)

Indicative of my practice a hybrid of analogue and digital.

At 39, I am of a generation that has one foot in and one foot out of this transitional period. I am not in my 20's and though the digital does play a sizable part in the production of my practice it is not my exclusive medium. I find my position a curious one – one to which I have found no particular conclusion and this to my mind is the best curiosity to have.

Practice Venn diagram

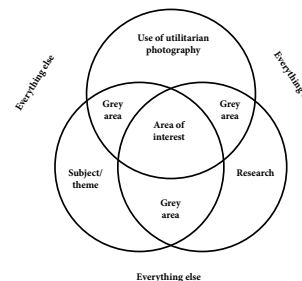
SCROLL 2 *CLICK*

I make much about how I work at making of my images. I am a keen researcher – but it is not necessarily what you might understand from an academic perspective. It is a more of a sniffing around, intuitive weaving process. Psychologists have a term for senior citizens who have trouble focusing their thoughts and go off in random directions. It is called "off topic verbosity". This could quite well explain my research methods but perhaps... "Off topic visualosity" is more appropriate.

Trying to break my system down – I believe there are different phases.

- There is a visual and thematic initial hook – where the foundations are laid.
- I then go out to find new information and then it is bought back in to the core.
- I then go back out again to find more information.
- And so on.

Richard Ogle the author of Smart World refers to this method as Reach and Reciprocity. However, not all findings in the dust heap of information are useful but occasionally a truth appears that makes sense or brings me to terms with the visual world.



Slide 2
Diagram of Research Process
© Clare Strand

A couple of years ago Florian Ebner wrote a text about my work and referred to me as a 'ragpicker.'

~~Below is the~~ *let me quote:* ~~walter Benjamin text~~, I assume Mr Ebner was referring to.

Florian's
 "....the ragpicker, is related to the collector, but with the particular feature that the ragpicker sifts through refuse and garbage. This pile of refuse is filled with "rags of speech" and "verbal scraps." Words themselves can become things that are thrown in the trash, and which the ragpicker, in his isolation, is the only one collecting. And if we wish to gain a clear picture of him in the isolation of his trade, what we will see is a ragpicker, at daybreak, picking up rags of speech and verbal scraps with his stick and tossing them, grumbling and growling, a little drunk, into his cart, not without letting one or another of those faded cotton remnants—'humanity,' 'inwardness,' or 'absorption'—flutter derisively in the wind."

The writer of modern life essays on baudelaire

Walter Benjamin description fits me quite closely – in particular the grumbling and growling drunken bit. My faded cotton remnants are however fluttering derisively in the boot of my car and in the shed.

I would like to introduce you to the core of my practice.

As a research method

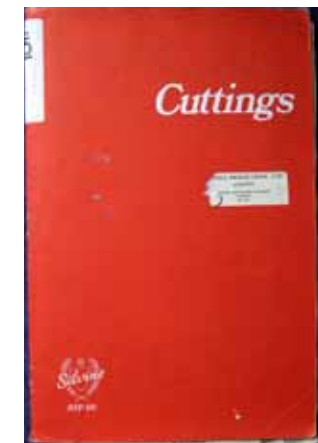
CLICK *Scrapbook SLIDES 3*

These scrapbooks are the essence of me – since a young age I have looked at them, thought about them, been scared of them. I have lost them, I have found them, I make things up about them, I lie about them, I hold them, I forget about them, I remember them...but mostly...I don't like anyone else using them. I feel more protective over them than any artwork I have made – they are the visual core to my work and me.

Keep going

They have helped me to navigate my way through my career – they have reminded me of my interests and helped me to understand or how not to understand photography. **They comprise mostly of utilitarian images, images that show how photography, since its inception, has been used in a functional way.**

end on blue Scrapbook.



Slide 3
 Clare Strand's Research
 Scrapbooks
 © Clare Strand

CLICK

THROUGH

INSTALLATION
SHOTS
WHILST TALKING

Over the last decade it has been my determination to plot the utilitarian aspects and uses of photography - of how, photography has been used in a 'working mode', where primary need and functionality are prioritized over aesthetics. I invite interruption in my practice, and therefore my work does not have one specific style. I have never seen the point in repeating 'successful' formulae and have a need to challenge my own and others' taste as well as to select the most appropriate approach to my chosen subject matter.

I am very keen to continue to re -evaluate my work. Over time, existing bodies of work evolve and take on different forms and a new relevance to me. I don't believe imagery should stand still and occupy one place. My work attempts to comment on the very nature of photography, what it shows and what it conceals - it's many uses and it's numerous limitations.

My work has taken inspiration from forensic imagery, instruction manuals, the conventions of signage, the mechanics of spirit photography and photography employed to offer evidence of an event or a task, at all times treading the boundaries between the expected and the absurd.

Connect to Internet .

Recently I was asked to do a project for the academic website, Interact. I have a collection of old 50s Kodak adverts. I selected the advertisements that made glorious claims about photography all starting with 'because'.... I found only 7 - so they became the 7 Basic Propositions.

Show site - explain! (4)

I separated them from their context by just using the tag lines to drive Google image searches.

~~XX~~

GORDON'S TEXT FROM WEBSITE

↓
"The Seven Basic Propositions project point to the early excitement about the possibilities for photography as a mass participatory medium. But when removed from their original context and time, and used to drive Google image searches they take on a different meaning, pointing out the proliferation of photography into every area of our lives.

The advertising statements are unequivocal and definite. The Seven Basic Propositions project however, consciously and playfully reveals the end-point of this promise and reports that, when everything is recorded and made available to everybody, nothing is really unique or individual, and certainly nothing about photography is definite."

STAY ON WEBSITE

It is a simple website, it was hashed together but for me sometimes the 'best work' is not the most interesting. I am far more interested in seeing the grappling with an idea than the emergence of a polished placebo.

The Internet is surely a researcher's dream - it is certainly mine. The Internet is the quintessential tool for the modern rag picker. A labyrinth of delights within a serendipitous and perverse structure. But *The Seven Basic Propositions* Seven had some confounding results. The tag lines were supposed to generate new pictorial outcomes and links every time one clicked on the title, however checking, from time to time, I was faced with the same set of images. This made me start questioning the supposed serendipitous nature of the net.

It is often assumed that digital images within the new technologies offer vastly increased options. This may be appropriate to the Librarian or Picture Researcher but could obscure the delights of the role that research can play in the life of the Artist. Bodies of information have an independent existence, an individual smell and touch, a perversity of structure and a tendency to lead the Seeker deeper into the unknown.

KEEP ON SITE

I have indeed tried to create files of interest on my computer desktop but for some reason they never have the pull that the images in my shed or books in my car boot offer – there is no coveting, there is no apprehensive thrill and no desire to weave.

PHOTO OF NABOKOV WITH BUTTERFLIES
CLICK

This quote from Nabokov seemed appropriate,

" I have hunted butterflies in various climes and disguises; as a pretty boy in knickerbockers and sailor cap; as a lanky cosmopolitan expatriate in flannel bags and beret; as a fat hatless old man in shorts.... Few things indeed have I known in the way of emotion or appetite, ambition or achievement, that could surpass in richness and strength the excitement of entomological exploration. ..."

Vladimir Nabokov, **Speak Memory**, Weidenfeld and Nicholson London 1967.

KEEP WITH NABS.

In case you are still confused, I hope my trajectory will start to reveal itself. In response to the young digital artists in my workshop, I am not sure if I want to give that teddy bear away so quickly for that iphone. (I actually have neither.) But I believe there is still a good case for both.

The digital will always play a part in my work, its infiltration to all places is unavoidable – once a week I help in my daughter's school. Dolly who is 7, is learning Power Point, InDesign, Internet research tools etc..... the digital world is truly wondrous, fast and utterly contemporary.

But there are a few things I bear in mind. For example,

1. The Film Blade Runner used special effects technology to enhance the telling of the story and at the same time the technology was an intrinsic part of what the story was about. At the other end of the spectrum we have Terminator 3 a pure showcase of special effects to little end..... In simpler terms whatever the medium there is nothing if it isn't backed by good ideas.



Slide 4
7 Basic Propositions of Photography
2011
(Screenshots)
© Clare Strand

2. ~~With the rise of digital technology, art can often be misunderstood as a functional enterprise and easy to understand. Therefore negating specialist knowledge in specialist areas.....~~

With every thesis there is its antithesis. In a recent conversation, a fellow artist suggested that the Internet needed humanizing to make it more meaningful - that it needed to be made more awkward and less easy.

I have been interested to look at what might be considered a reaction to the move away from object-ness and craft in digital art. One example of this is the emergence of practitioners choosing to fly in the face of the intangible by visualizing digital data.

Here is another London collective called, The Very Interesting Group who has made snowmen using 3D Printers from tweeting algorithms' – the bigger the snowman's head the more followers you have. I have also notice a trend in my town of the rise of 'making' with the development of the Sewing shop. And in reply to the ipad the Raspberry 'do-it-yourself' computer for £22 is being distributed to children in schools to keep computer programming alive. There is also new breed of photographic artists interrogating the surface of images employing craft, montage and found imagery. However negating Photoshop should not bring automatic validation... sometimes solutions can bring about new problems.

However
 ↑
 I am aware of a shift in my work— it's been brewing for a while and was explored in a recent work entitled *10 least Most Wanted*. It is here where my research has crept in to take centre stage. The work initially started by choosing my 10 most wanted images from my research collection. ^{the simple task of.}

CLICK → EXPLAIN CABINET SHOW IMAGES X10 (5-15)

After a while I just happened to turn the selected images over to reveal their backs. And it is these unchosen images I choose to exhibit. The are the *10 least Most Wanted*. Above all it is this physical serendipitous act that is of the greatest interest to me —the simplicity of going front to back highlights, for me, the shift between intention and realization and the confounding of an objective by the random

• **CLICK** ~~SHOW~~ SHOW POP Tower.. (16)

I have noticed that I am extending my photographic practice to reflect on my scrapbook core. Here (show tower) is my research-based art or if you will, my art based research, construction made from a proliferation of my Popular Mechanics magazines. For the purposes of this conference they are expressed as a photograph but they are a living, smelling, touching, precarious construction, that also allows people to get round the back. As indeed are the scrapbooks (show scrapbooks) that are re contextualized and confounded every time an image is taken out or ripped or lost...

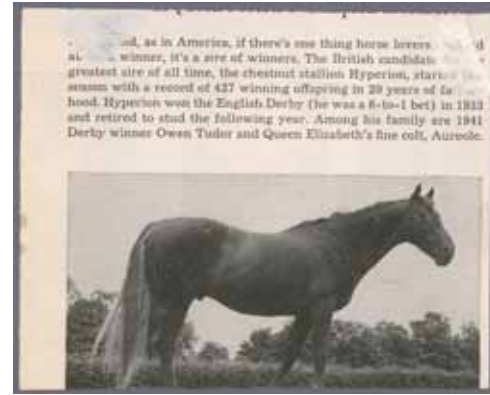
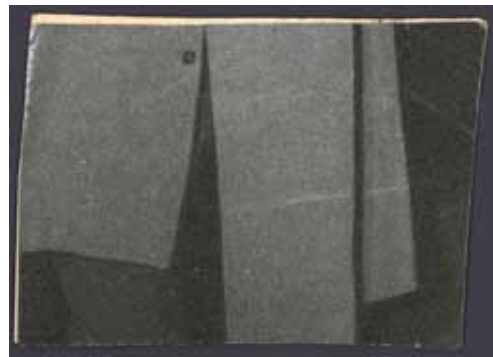
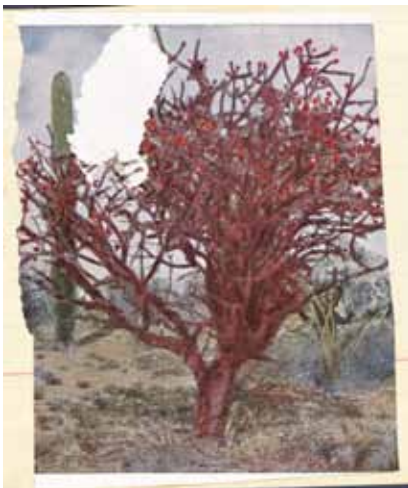
CLICK → SCRAP BOOK EXAMPLES

→ today
 In the context of the World Library I recommend to you the creative power of the Cabinet of Curiosities. A compact and perverse collection of talismanic objects, which do not serve a purpose one day, and make sense the next. My research Labyrinth incorporates the accidental and the random, the front and the back, the torn and the intact, the cherished and the hated... and is a space to be dived into allowing me to come up with unsuspected discoveries. These discoveries then leave me for public exhibition where they take on a life of their own where the Digital is only one of the forces that feed and supplement them.

IN CONCLUSION



Slide 16
 Popular Mechanics Tower
 2012
 © Clare Strand



Slide 5–15
10 Least Most Wanted
2011
© Clare Strand;
Courtesy of Centré Pompidou

Clare Strand is a British Photographic Artist. Her constant passion is the appeal of Utilitarian Photography where aesthetic issues are secondary to specific formulations and generic expectations. Research stimulates much of this dynamic. The hinterland to her image making is provided by a childhood upbringing where a family life in a suburban cul-de-sac was confounded by true crime magazines, ominous supernatural events, Paul Daniels on Sunday evenings, a father obsessed by exactitude and a flasher who lived in the house opposite.

Recent (2011) solo and group shows include, *Signs of a Struggle: Photography in the wake of Postmodernism*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; *Falling Up: The Gravity of Art*, The Courtauld Gallery, London; *Sleight*, Brancolini Grimaldi, London and *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland.

Clare Strand's first monograph published by Steidl and Partners (2009) was launched with her first major show, *Clare Strand: Fotografie und Video* at the Museum Folkwang, Essen.

She is represented by Brancolini Grimaldi, London.