

Tim Bowditch and Nick Rochowski

Hind land

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Could you tell us who some of your earliest influences in photography were?

Tim Bowditch: When I was studying a few years ago, Paul Graham, Paul Seawright and Melanie Manchot were my main sources of inspiration. I am now more likely to say Miskha Henner, Dan Holdsworth, Seba Kurtis and Rinko Kawauchi.

Nick Rochowski: Josef Kudelka, Peter Bialobrzewski, John Gossage. Dan and Rinko are definites for me too!

Motorway pedestrian underpasses are spaces pushed to the periphery of our social consciousnesses. What inspired you to take a closer look?

NR: I used to pass underneath this one a lot on the Metropolitan line from Amersham to London, and I also like concrete. I'm interested in architecture and its relationship with the natural environment, how this forms and changes over time. Around 2005 I was interested in the intersection between a local woodland and an M25 viaduct. The idea evolved into a different project altogether and it wasn't until meeting Tim that we decided to pick it up and take it in a new direction that interested us both.

TB: Like Nick, I also like concrete. I met Nick at Roof Unit, a studio space in Bethnal Green for photographers I used to run alongside Toby Smith and Alexa Montgomery. With the focus on London this year the photographers at Roof Unit set the very open brief of 'London' to encourage each other to make a body of work. Nick approached me to see whether I would be keen on working together.

TB: I knew he was planning on focusing his attention on the M25, 2012 being the 25th year since its completion, and developing on his initial ideas in Immense, where we see the motorway carving through and breaking up the landscape. I was very interested in this idea of the motorway's imprint on the landscape. However, I tend to work with an 'anti-aesthetic' and rather process-led approach, which is why we have veered away from the lush green daytime images represented in Immense. We began working together and were intent on depicting the voids under the motorway as otherworldly landscapes.

The series so far has been shot at night. Was this a conscious effort in your search for 'otherworldliness'?

TB: The intention was to definitely steer away from the scale and structure of the motorway by avoiding showing it and the outlying landscape in the same frame. By photographing at night we give the camera and technology we're using a blank canvas devoid of highlights or contrast.

NR: The influence of surveying has been very important: the precise and technical method has informed us at all stages of the project. We use the day to assess, but to survey or measure something accurately you need a neutral playing field to begin with. The lack of artificial, direct or reflected sunlight gives us a consistency. It also incorporates the anti-aesthetic Tim refers to – we don't want to capture a typical view, we want to observe and study a focused area within the void we are engulfed by. By doing so intently we begin to see something far more interesting, textured and even epic in scale.

I find it curious that you identify in your artist statement, the “no-man’s land” as a hidden space buried beneath the motorway, whilst the land above is bustling or gridlocked with traffic at various times of the day. How far did you read into the relationship between the above-ground and the under-ground?

TB: The imprint and impact of the motorway on the landscape is our main focus. This imprint is best depicted from above, and the aerial views accessible through online maps. We were keen on the idea of the blueprint, which lends itself to thinking about things in a multitude of layers. The way the motorway from above unforgivably divides the landscape is incredibly aesthetic. We've been searching for pre-M25 aerial maps to see what's been removed, covered up and hidden by the concrete. What remains is the void, obstructed from mapping technologies but accessible by foot.

NR: Something which developed straight away in the project, that we weren't initially thinking about in great detail, was the acoustic footprint of the M25. This audible relationship has so many different facets, it is intoxicating in its expanse from a distance and haunting and almost mesmeric up close. You can get lost in the layers of beat and drones from eight lanes of traffic.

You've said that you utilise online maps to locate the areas you photograph. Do you think that employing such methods has affected the way you approach locations, and also the photographs you've taken?

TB: The online mapping tools are a means to an end. We use them only to distinguish whether an underpass is accessible or not, but this is not foolproof and we came unstuck on a couple of occasions. The maps give very little indication as to what we'll find at each location. It's generally the case that the locations are incredibly different to what we have assumed. We arrive in the day and normally spend about an hour upon arriving, scouting out two or three shots to work on after dark. We take each location on merit, shying away from dramatic shots that might arise as the sun is setting, instead focusing on smaller, more abstract features.

Nick, you've photographed liminal spaces before in your series Caumont Caves and The Liminal Points Project. Did you come to this work with an agenda based on past experiences?

NR: Caumont Caves, the last project I did before we started Hind Land, was an evolution of The Liminal Points Project in terms of aesthetic outcome. It was much more abstracted and subtle, which was partly due to the fact I was working in total darkness, aside from flashing a light every now and then! They both followed the same working practice, which involves exploratory research and repeated visits to the same location. I came to this project with a new stance, eager to see what a collaborative approach could bring and ultimately push our photographic language. The subject matter and overall idea were pretty clear, but the direction and working process weren't. Only through many discussions and research with Tim were we able to set our agenda proper.

Tim, how much did your previous work influence you?

TB: I think it's clear to see that there are influences from Nick's architectural and personal project background in here, and this was certainly the catalyst for the project. I tend to prefer working in a collaborative way and generally move away from my documentary background when working with others. I prefer to work with set parameters from the outset. These rules are incredibly important and sometimes hard to stick to when presented with alluring, perhaps 'safe' imagery. We have only known each other for eight months, but we seem to be on exactly the same wavelength. This may come from the formality of the rules we adhere to, but it's interesting to see how we instantly agree on what shots we will make at each location. There is no debate about what we leave in or out of the frame.

When I first looked at these images I was struck by their aesthetic quality. The achromatic digital back that you've used produces a wide tonal range for black and white photographs. Why did you decide to shoot with this camera?

TB: When Nick first approached me about collaboration I was adamant for us not to be seduced by the colours of the landscape in the day or twilight/night-time, and immediately sought to reduce the palette by making a decision from the outset to photograph in black and white. Nick mentioned the existence of the Phase one Achromatic back to me. I had never heard of this bit of technology before but was certainly interested. It was more of a pipe dream as these backs are incredibly hard to get hold of.

NR: We are fortunate to get hold of it. The camera body we are using is essentially a large format camera, but designed and built for digital use, so we could have used a colour digital sensor. Our methodology follows a large format process aside from a laser and other bits and our final output is pure and untouched. We sought to reduce the palette from the outset and we didn't in any way whatsoever want to shoot colour and convert to black and white.

TB: The sensitivity difference is remarkable, as the Achromatic back reads into the UV and infra spectrums. We did a test shoot with it under the motorway at night,

allowing it to scan a completely black scene. The results were incredible and the detail immense giving the escarpments and water surfaces an almost lunar quality. The detail is read in a hyper way due to the different spectrums captured and any scar or history is bought under scrutiny.

***Hind Land* comes under the banner of Rokov publishing, which aims to promote collaborative work across creative platforms. What affect do you think collaborating has had on this series?**

TB: The collaborative element is extremely important on this series. I don't think either of us would have produced work like this without the input from each other. I enjoy collaborating as it doubles the input and gives you an instant soundboard so you can right a wrong path much quicker.

NR: I couldn't agree more, the input from each other is so important. Our styles are quite different, but we are still on the same wavelength and that is really important because it means you can openly and honestly talk about aspects that are critical to making the project work. Collaborating opens up parts of the creative process that may otherwise be dormant when shooting alone: you are pushing the potential of what you're able to do.

TB: Nick and I are now also working on putting out a book under Rokov of a collaborative project I have been working on with Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau.

BR: That was always the aim of Rokov, to offer a platform for collaborations to manifest. It's in its infancy though, and I hope that the more it develops the more it can offer for future projects. There are music and moving image lead projects that are also coming into view.

What are your plans for exhibiting *Hind Land*?

NR: Currently we are looking at a few funding options and photo festivals. This could lead to a number of alternatives for settings and installations for the work. For now, the aim is to finish the project which I'd say is about 50% done.

TB: Yes, as Nick mentioned, we are about halfway through the project with still many accessible points on our map to visit. With the incredible detail produced by the technology we are using the idea is to show the work on a very large scale. Since the beginning of the project I have had the slightly ambitious idea of showing these images as billboards on the side of the motorway. Who knows, we may be able to achieve this! Regardless, the work should be seen on a large scale in smaller edits of around four to five images.

