

# **OPEN EYE GALLERY**

## **ARTIST INTERVIEWS**

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**15 APRIL - 5 JUNE 2016**

## **OPEN 2: PIECES OF YOU**

**PETER WATKINS**

**PHOEBE KIELY**

**STEPHEN ILES & NICOLA DALE**

**SAM HUTCHINSON**

**THOM ISOM**

All interviews have been conducted by Pauline Rowe, who is currently at Open Eye Gallery on a PhD placement from the University of Liverpool.

Pauline is also facilitating a series of three creative writing workshops that respond to the exhibition through an accessible and joyful engagement with poetry.

This pack is available to download from our website:

[www.openeye.org.uk](http://www.openeye.org.uk)

# PETER WATKINS

**Pauline Rowe:** *As children we are given received versions of someone's life/death, not to be questioned. Is *The Unforgetting* challenging this in its presentation of items of evidence – evidence of your Mother's life?*

**Peter Watkins:** To an extent I think I was looking to substantiate my mother's life in some way; to dedicate the necessary time to understand something of my families shared history that has at once been very present in my life, but yet throughout my childhood had been a source of deep repression. In that sense *The Unforgetting* was about taking memory as a starting point—my memory—but reassessing and reconstituting this memory through objects, documents, and creating staged situations that I guess rest somewhere on the fringes of a documentary practice and something more metaphysically oriented and difficult to pin down.

Early on in the process I interviewed my family, and came to realise that the series of events leading to my mother's death had been reduced down to simple narratives, as if the ensuing years had stripped away any palpable sense of complexity and depth or accuracy, and had been replaced with a few factual occurrences and a good measure of reverence for the dead—the kind that is almost always afforded to those who die young and in tragic circumstances. My memories of her manic episodes before her death far outweigh any other memory I have of her, and so in a way I've been trying to come to terms with the trauma of this experience. The objects have this totemic, monumental quality about them, and I think because they have been isolated, obscured from a greater whole, and reimagined as photographic representations, they take on this heightened sense of purpose, and we are offered to meditate over them as such and look for connections in the space between the images. They are evidence of lived experience, things that remain from a person, but they obscure as much as they reveal, and speak universally, rather than with a sentimental, overtly personal tone.

Walter Benjamin described aura as a things 'unique existence', and wrote that the aura of a thing is stripped away by the photographic representation—the object loses its uniqueness in the face of potential innumerable reproducibility. But through the transformation of object to representation the resultant image also has this innate connection to time, to place, the specific moment or situation that it was created in – that is forever irrevocably lost to the past. So in this sense the object is not only lost in the act of transformation from object to representation, but the moment is forever lost, along with the object: In this way it can be a mournful act to photograph an object, and the representation becomes something quite different to the object itself.

**PR:** *For each of us there is importance in finding our own stories or narratives that make sense – do you feel you can't make sense of your story fully because you are compelled to search after something unanswerable?*

**PW:** I think that there is so much that is unanswerable when you go out in search of some form of truth or authenticity in your past, something which I think we all feel compelled to do at some point in our lives. To make sense of the past is to attempt to ground our lives, to afford it meaning and a sense of deep-rootedness, even if it's painful to go in search of this. These stories and narratives that are passed through families are just that—they're stories. They have narrative arcs and moral punch lines, shared through generations in a way that builds a foundation of meaning that justifies our experience and offers purposefulness. I think with this work I was holding up these narratives to account somehow, even if this is not perhaps fully evident from the works themselves. There is a futility to making sense of your story, and a delusion in searching for truth. What I've made is an abstraction, it doesn't capture the essence of my mother, or my wider family history, but looks at that which can't be fully grasped, which lies somewhere in the space between fact and what is only partially remembered / a kind of forced remembering.

**PR:** *When a parent dies there is a risk of secrets and silence – has this been important in your formation as an artist?*

**PW:** I started working on *The Unforgetting*, or earlier iterations of the project shortly after my father passed away, so yes, the possibility of never finding out about my past became a very real possibility. It suddenly felt like something that was really urgent to me as I came to realise that we had never talked about what had happened to my mother, about this shared experience. I read somewhere that the sudden loss of a loved one can spark in us the repressed memories of a past loss, and that instead of focusing on that immediate loss, we look to the past, to that which we failed to come to terms with previously.

My grandmother has been the archivist of the family, and her house has a museum quality about it, and had always given me that false sense of unchanging fixity. She has kept everything of my mothers exactly as it was, and would archive everything from achievements, photographs, to newspaper clippings that reminded her of her lost daughter, each annotated on the spine explaining why the article had triggered some memory in her—often unwittingly forming image-text relationships. All the work was shot in the village where my Grandmother lives, in the house where my mother grew up. I would convert her old shop, which was at the front of the house, into my studio when I'd come to visit, and then create these object assemblages from the things that she kept, shooting mostly at night. You see the shop windows and fabric curtains from this room in a couple of the photographs.

**PR:** *The objects depicted suggest that one important aspect of life is **sound or music** (the accordian, the tapes, the audio cassette – again suggesting evidence, something to be replayed and heard). Can you comment on this?*

**PW:** There are layers of narrative hidden behind the images. The accordion, for example, was my Grandfathers, and playing it was how he met my Grandmother. The rolls of Super-8 film contain moving images of my mother and family on various holidays in the 60's and 70's, invariably smiling, happy, bathed in sunlight. The still life image became a way to conflate all of these images into a single, unified one, albeit withholding somehow the image of happiness. My mother was a linguist, and she used to teach herself languages by recording her own voice on a Panasonic tape recorder from the early 80's, carefully recording the words and phrases she was practising, and checking back for good diction. She would sit cross-legged on the dining room floor with the tape recorder between her legs and practise. The tape I photographed was actually a mix tape that she had made, and left in my Grandmother's car, and as the radio never worked, this became my soundtrack to the project. Another tape I have is of me, at two years old, singing nursery rhymes with my mother, the only recording I have of her voice.

**PR:** *Another important aspect of life here is **shared history, warmth** (the wood), drink, **books**, stories, the forest etc., Does this mean for you that the necessities of life include cultural matters as well as family archive – other photographs?*

...About wood, about this idea of shared history, the glasses, the forest? The glasses are called Roemer glasses and are a traditional German wine glass, and the inscription carries the name of my Grandfather, and they were given to him for each years full attendance of choir practice, something he kept up his whole life, and each represent a milestone of time. He is also pictured as a young man in a small photograph rested against the blade of an axe. He passed away during the course of this project, but one of the last things we did together was to chop wood, and I had a sense at the time that this would be the last time we would carry out this repetitive, masculine activity together. I filmed the whole thing, and took a log away which appears in this exhibition cast in concrete, and repeated three times. Wood is repeated throughout the project. For me it speaks of the folkloric, of Germany, of this German sense of 'Heimat', but also of the passing and splitting of time. In the photograph of my brother suspending a large piece of beech wood for the camera, the wood appears to flow from his arm, and there is a certain liquidity to the image, or sense of suspension, which I think is echoed in the photograph of the baptismal dress, and the books.

**PR:** *Did the making of this collection feel like an honouring of your Mum? And what do your family feel about it? Have you been able to respond differently as a son/brother to bereavement because you are an artist?*

**PW:** I think the pain of loss is something that never really leaves you. If you have experienced it young there is a certain shift to the way you think about life, and you consider questions of mortality too young. I think I've approached it with a willingness to understand something that has oftentimes been difficult, but everyone deals with mourning in different ways. I think as more family members have passed away, I have unwittingly become the family archivist, although my approach is from an artistic standpoint, and not how you would traditionally catalogue a family history.

**PR:** *Is this an archive of memory – an attempt to understand more about your self in relation to loss?*

**PW:** I suppose it's an archive of sorts, but I don't really think about it strictly that way, although it does obviously reference certain display methods used in museums and does tap into the archive, but I was very careful not to include too much information, or rather careful about how much was out there. The *Black Bag* and the *Letter from the Dutch Police 1993* are the only actual objects on display in the project, and come to stand as a kind of dark star around which the rest of the works revolve. Their significance is made more prominent by their selection ahead of the multitude of other things. Supplementary information such as this interview, or articles that have been written about the work, can always be looked at to offer an expanded experience of the work, to peel back some additional layers, but really I'm more interested in what the viewer can bring to the experience. It's very personal work, and I'm hyperaware of the fact that I'm putting it out there, so I have had to be careful about how much personal information gets out into the open.

**PR:** *What lies between these images seems so important – do you know if they have helped other people to approach loss/grief in a different way? Would that be important to you?*

**PW:** I think I touched upon the space between the images in some of the previous answers, how there is space for connection, and how the works stand to reinforce each other and make each other stronger and have an implied narrative that is completed or reinterpreted by the viewer.

People do write to me sometimes when they have come across the work or read about the project, and tell me how they have related to the work in terms of their own

experience, and they often tell me things that have happened to them. These correspondences seem to always come out of the blue, and you only then get this sense that the project is out there in the world, and that there are people who attempt to relate to such things. Mostly, though, people seem to wonder whether carrying out the project has helped me in some way to come to terms with my past and my place in the world, and its something that I guess is forever an ongoing process.

**PR:** *When you exhibit a collection are you presenting a narrative or hoping the observer will make their own narratives from your work?*

**PW:** There certainly is an implied narrative, but it's non-specific and requires audience participation. I think that there is a space between the images where connections can be made, and an oscillation between photographs that are representationally clear and others that are less straightforward and ambiguous in nature. Materially there are connections made between everything, in terms of playing with the opacity and transparency of materials, their spatial relations to one another in space, and how the viewer must navigate the space of the exhibition to view the works. It's important to me that the audience feels a sense of embodiment in the space, and I think that this encourages a certain amount of participation.

**PR:** *Unforgetting is very different to remembering – it feels like a hard won fight. Would this be overstating the difference between the two for you?*

**PW:** Chris Marker, the late filmmaker and artist wrote that 'I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting but rather its lining', by which he was in part referring to how memory is not something that is fixed, that it is always subject to change and reinterpretation, much in the same way as history is subject to being rewritten. The more you dig into memory the more it seems to move away from those seemingly pure flashes of memory that we hold onto from childhood. The image of my mother became irrevocably changed once I started to dig into the past and into my memory.

**PR:** *Can you say something about the Christening gown?*

**PW:** The Christening gown was something that came very late in the project. When I thought I had sifted through everything my Grandmother pulled out the dress, along with a lock of hair of my mothers from a cupboard. The dress is pale yellow and is photographed in black and white, seemingly impossibly suspended in front of a fabric

net curtain, in the makeshift studio where I shot most of the work. Both materials appear to float weightlessly, and perhaps have that feeling of liquidity I mentioned earlier. The circularity of the baptismal act and my mother's death by drowning is perhaps what drew me so magnetically to the dress. The photograph is framed behind yellow glass, and here I was really thinking about the idea of putting colour back into the work, and about the falsity of artificially putting yellow back into the dress; the strangeness of applying this wash of colour over the piece. Yellow is the colour of warmth, of light, and colour brings with it emotion, whereas black and white can signify a more evidential, calculated approach to working. But the colour yellow is also the colour of decay, of death, of the hallucinatory space in the mind, and of dreams. The work is almost uniformly monochromatic, so when colour comes into the work it introduces colour to all the work—but it's a false colour, something applied to the work after the image has been made.

**Poems for further reading linked to some ideas in Peter Watkins' work:**

*The Wild Iris*: Louise Glück

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-wild-iris/>

*My Son, The Man*: Sharon Olds

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178285>

*In the Museum of Lost Objects*: Rebecca Lindenberg

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/243894>

# PHOEBE KIELY

**Pauline Rowe:** *Can you tell me a bit about how and why you became an artist?*

**Phoebe Kiely:** That's an incredibly difficult question. It has and probably will always be a drive and compulsion to first capture my life and the people around me. From the age of 13, I was curious to collect, it became second nature to me quite quickly. I remember consciously thinking one day that everything I saw, I framed in my mind. When I opened my eyes I began to look at things differently. I remember it becoming irritating, having to see everything like a photograph. I have no other way to describe it. I think back to this time and I think it was my mind training my eyes to see what I wanted my photos to capture.

I began with a digital camera but it didn't take me long to change to analogue.

I took three years out, between college and university. It was a wise choice for me. I gave myself time to think and to shoot. Three years I shot colour film. It gave me a purpose.

**PR:** *So you use the same camera – why do you like to use it?*

**PK:** I use a Yashica twin lens reflex. I moved on from 35mm at the beginning of my third year. It proved to be a wise choice for street photography. Medium format just allows me to slow the whole process down. Initially it made me much more careful.

It's a trust thing, too. I trust this camera. With analogue I feel like that's one of the most important things.

However, I am moving on to my Hasselblad now. I bought it almost two years ago and I didn't use it. I feel like now is the right time. For the foreseeable future that is what I will be working with. I feel like I need to feel comfortable with it for this next chapter.

**PR:** *Some of your pictures are enigmatic, others have a documentary feel – others are close-up studies of the environment. How do you decide on which images make up an exhibition?*

**PK:** I was told during university that most photographers can't edit their own work; they're too close to it.

It's almost like a secret, it can't be too obvious. The way that I work, the edit is always changing. There's so much work, there's no wrong edit, really. It's difficult to commit with new work always surfacing.

The edit for my degree show changed over and over. It changed every time I shot more,

every time I printed more. It was only about a week before the degree show that I finally had to stop at an edit. I find it difficult committing to one sequence of images.

I constantly look for human presence in the images I capture. Occasionally people will feature in the work. I feel like there needs to be some balance between photos, therefore there can't be too many photos of people.

**PR:** *Can you tell me about the title of your exhibition- They Were My Landscape?*

**PK:** It's a quote from *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. When I first read it I pencilled underneath that particular line.

I always avoided titling anything during my time at university. Edits are more comfortable things to decide than the titles. My work, it doesn't refer to a specific place or person but – there – it's my landscape. The unifying factor is my experiences. There is no concept behind it. It is a way of fixing me into the frame, into the story. The dream like sequence, it's about the human condition. The peeling paint, about my human condition. My way of making it permanent.

**PR:** *Will the work be framed conventionally?*

**PK:** The work will be pinned to the walls. Frames feel too permanent, they would fix the work too much. Pins make everything seem more temporary.

**PR:** *Do you have plans for after the exhibition?*

**PK:** To sort my own dark room. Then the next step is a residency.

**Poems linked to ideas, energy and themes in Phoebe Kiely's work:**

***The Moulting***: Jen Hadfield

<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/moult>

***A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island***: Frank O'Hara

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACpLm3qNamU>

# STEPHEN ILES

**Pauline Rowe:** *How and why did you become an artist?*

**Stephen Iles:** I'm not sure if being an artist is something you choose to become or something you are. At first it is a title conferred upon you when as a child you show an aptitude for drawing or creative activity and you subsequently begin to assume it as an identity. Sometimes I'm an artist and sometimes I'm a photographer. I'd say I'm an artist in the approach I take as a photographer but not necessarily that everything I produce is the work of an artist.

It may be common to photographers to equivocate with the term 'artist' given the rather complicated history between photography and art. I'm happy to be called either but what interests me most is that as we transition from the title photographer to that of artist we do not automatically confer the title art to all our images. We may call our photographs art but they are most resolutely still photographs with properties that resist consumption by 'art'. The way photography can equivocate in this way, being art if we call it such whilst still having an independent authority all its own allows me to work with a camera to explore what art might be, pointing the camera at art in the hope that it may reveal itself.

**PR:** *Can you say something about the camera you prefer to use and why?*

**SI:** In these times the preference expressed most often concerns the choice of medium, either film or digital. I use both medium, preference often being dictated by technical suitability for a particular application, other times because it is the camera at hand.

I have owned and used many film cameras over time, each with their different qualities and quirks. Currently I prefer a 6x7 medium format camera when working with film, the more squared format of the image more easily references painting, maybe creating a more settled image whereas a more stretched 35mm image references cinema, television and suggests movement.

Working with digital more often these days, I am aware how some of the preferences I had working with a film camera bleed into the digital environment. I prefer a digital camera with a more squared crop for example and the lenses are the same for both medium and have as much to do with the resultant image as the camera does.

The question of style in relation to the camera and subsequent technical processes is always prominent. Style is something we develop through doing, it becomes a signature

of ourselves as the artist but it is also tethered to the quite specific and narrow characteristics of the technology. Working with digital I've found the greater flexibility and less distinctive thumbprint [than that we find with individual film types] encourages me to search for a more neutral, less stylised space and to employ multiple styles in order to try and escape the notion of style. Working and collaborating with many different artists I try not to impose my style upon their work but rather try different approaches and cameras depending upon the context.

In a sense a preference for a particular camera is like a fetish, as objects they combine magical and tactile properties so well. Their complexity makes them different to a tool, [like a brush or a chisel.] Cameras bring with them their own character and characteristics, affording them their own voice and a quota of authorship, becoming a part of the collaboration.

**PR:** *Also, how do you select, edit, process your images and then decide on a final sequence and order etc.,?*

**SI:** It's hard to define a specific process relating to selection. With each different collaboration the approach is likely to be different, either confirming or disrupting narrative, depending again on context. Though I do find it interesting that as much as we make selections, we still seem to have thousands of them, maybe when we press the delete button to deselect we are making a most definitive selection!

**PR:** *What is the difference for you between photographing an artist/sculptor as a collaborative work and a photograph as portraiture?*

**SI:** In a sense photographing an artists work is always a collaboration, between both the individuals involved and between the object and the camera. Working within a premeditated collaboration allows an exploration of the intersection between the work being completed and it being photographed.

There is always a tension between what a photograph is and what we might want to say about or attribute to it, a tension between notions of intention and authorship. When we describe a photograph of an artist or their work as a portrait we confer the authorship to the photographer, the artist submits themselves and their work and with it authorship of the image to the photographer. The artist is still the author of the work shown in the image but not of the image itself.

In submitting to be photographed, the work goes through a metaphysical process whereby it becomes something else. It is not necessarily a copy, as it is now

represented in another medium. Its dimensions and materiality have been altered. The image begins to take on multiple identities, the relationship between the original object and its image begin to blur.

**PR:** *It seems important that these images not only question the framing and stillness of photographs but also capture internal spaces - can you comment on the space in which the images are set - and why this is important?*

**SI:** A camera gobbles up space with a voracious appetite, in a fraction of a second it can render an inordinate amount of information. When the camera photographs a space it photographs all the things in that space and a narrative begins to emerge where the image can be seen to be about that space, or the content of that image can be subjected to further narratives and concerns.

By working in a more neutral studio space, [which provides minimal visual information about itself] the notion of space as it exists within the camera begins to become more prominent. It's about trying to address the idea of a ubiquitous space as opposed to a specific one, to marvel at the cameras ability to dialogue with space rather than to simply copy it.

**PR:** *Has this collaboration with Nicola been challenging in ways you did not expect - and, if so, how?*

**SI:** Through collaboration we can take this event, [photographing a piece of work] and begin to stretch it. We can explore the degree to which a physical work may be conceived as image as much as object and reflect upon the fact that works are seen, [and therefore known?] more by their image than by their physical presence. We can ask to what degree does the object serve the image when the more accepted scenario is one of the image serving the object.

**PR:** *Is there anything else you think important to add?*

**SI:** The majority of my photography work is to some degree or other in collaboration with other artists where the challenge of representing art through photography is the central concern. The ambiguities that exist between a work and a photograph of that work and the ensuing skewing of things like intention determine a constant adjustment of expectations.

Poems linked to ideas, energy and themes in Steve Iles's work:

*Rembrandt's Late Self-Portraits*: Elizabeth Jennings

<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/rembrandts-late-self-portraits>

*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*: Wallace Stevens

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174503>

# NICOLA DALE

**Pauline Rowe:** *How and why did you become an artist?*

**Nicola Dale:** I became an artist because I wanted to develop my own language. Art affords both making and thinking which are of equal importance to me. I want to make work that looks like thinking. I have a consistent need to ask questions that don't necessarily have answers and art offers a space to do this.

I relish how difficult art is – it's so slippy and surprising; it's the ultimate devil's advocate, always presenting a different point of view. Art encourages argument, wrong answers and mistakes. It absolutely will not be pinned down. I find this comforting.

**PR:** *Can say something about your work with Steve – did it feel in any way more challenging than other collaborations? How did you discuss and agree your work together?*

**ND:** It took a while for myself and Steve to work out how we could work together on this project, even though we already knew each other. Steve had previously taken photos of my work, but that is, of course, not the same as collaborating in the traditional sense. We wanted to see how on earth we could possibly meet in the middle in some way.

Our initial discussions were fascinating (though somewhat scary for me) because Steve is very much about "making nothing", whereas I am all about the making process. We were also both aware that in terms of hierarchies of art, a sculpture is traditionally seen as occupying a loftier position in the art world than a photograph. What would it therefore be saying to put a sculpture of some kind in a dedicated photography gallery?

I began by telling Steve one of the issues I have with photography. Whenever I see a photo of a sculpture, I am immediately frustrated by not being able to see the back of it. I want to be able to turn the photo over and see the rest of the piece! Steve says that he often cannot remember whether he has seen an artwork in real life, or just as a photo. My memory does not work in this way. I always know whether I have seen an artwork in real life. This gives you a sense of the difference between a photographer's and a sculptor's visual world, despite both operating under the banner of "art". This is not something that had ever occurred to me before. It was a good starting point actually and we both buzzed off it, once we had got our heads around it.

So, the project started in a challenging manner because our eyes and our heads work in

such different ways. I have collaborated with all sorts of creative people before, but this has been both the most difficult and the most rewarding because we managed to get over the question of how to submit to each other without unhappy compromise.

What we have ended up doing is using me as the sculpture. I have previously done some performance work, so this was not too much of a stretch and, given Steve's existing interest in how artists present themselves to the world, it seemed a natural way forward. From our discussions of the lack of a "back" in the photograph, we moved towards trying to work out how to break that sense of the flat plane - how one might suggest 3-dimensional movement through flatness, i.e. breaking the frame, thinking sculpturally, whilst using a photo. We will play with this also through the way in which the work is presented in the gallery...

**PR:** *In presenting your own body as sculptural in this exhibition are you emphasising yourself as a physical being/ body that makes and creates - and does this in any way relate to your love of Spinoza, and your interest in knowledge?*

**ND:** I think the emphasis is on information rather than knowledge. (I find the difference between these endlessly fascinating and perplexing in equal measure.) I'm not sure the photos are about my physical body as the site of creation - I think they're more about questioning physicality itself: are our frames of reference regarding physicality diminishing in a screen mediated world?

I do love Spinoza and he does have some relevance here (though he is not someone Steve and I have ever discussed). As far as I understand it, Spinoza's emphasis was on everything being one "substance" - man, world, universe, are all interconnected. There is therefore no "outside" - everything is... well, everything! This suggests to me a kind of infinite touch, where the tiniest tap reaches the farthest shores. The world of information does not suggest this kind of physicality to me. It is flatter, it is a dull thud.

**PR:** *What is the difference between your art being photographed (as in promotions or information for previous exhibitions) - and the idea of making something to be photographed with the photograph, rather than sculpture, being the exhibited piece?*

**ND:** The difference comes from where you or I think the "art" exists I suppose. A photograph of my work is not my work, it is a record or a document of my work (in the same way that a musical score is not the music itself.) If I make the decision that a photograph is an artwork, then its contents are almost irrelevant, they could be sculptural or painted or performed, depending on the idea I am trying to convey. The art will exist as a photograph.

I happen to love making things, so I tend towards the "real", the sculptural; however, I always try to stay true to an idea so if that means a sculpture only existing as a photograph, then so be it! I guess the question always has to be "What would I like the viewer to see?" In the case of the collaboration with Steve, I would like the viewer to see that Steve and I are playing with the "flatness of information" - photography seems a better starting point for this than sculpture.

**PR:** *Each of the images seems distinct, to be saying something different. They don't suggest a connecting narrative. The head and shoulders picture where the frame is broken covering your right eye seems to be questioning the very framing of photographs and portraits. Would it be fair to describe these images as philosophical or are they all studies of you?*

**ND:** It is interesting that you think of the photos as distinct pieces. For me, the connecting narrative is the idea of framing, or rather, breaking the frame (*Pieces of You!*)... I would say the images are philosophical. I don't think they tell the viewer anything about me personally. They provide a certain amount of information about a woman in a certain place at a certain time, but I could be replaced with someone else and the images would still stand. This is how I feel information works - it flattens stuff out.

**PR:** *You said that you could be replaced with someone else and the images would still stand - and that they are not about you. Wouldn't such replacement make them images staged in a different way and somehow affect their authenticity especially as they were formed through collaboration?*

**ND:** The images would still stand in that the ideas they present would still stand. In a very literal sense the images are about "me" but the-life-and-times-of-Nicola-Dale are not the focus.

The images would of course look different with a different person, but the notions of breaking the frame; of 2 versus 3 dimensionality; of the difference between photography and sculpture; of the fact of the collaboration between Steve and myself (and the camera) would still resonate (by this I mean that this work, these ideas, came out of a specific collaboration, regardless of who is pictured in the photos - assuming of course that we did not allow this other person to bring their own ideas to the table and that they were just a model!)

Where does authenticity lie? Is it in the idea? In the action? In the process? In the "spirit of collaboration"? In the lens of the camera? In our eyeballs? In our minds? In a mixture

of all of the above? I don't feel philosophically qualified to answer the question, but my gut says the authenticity lies in the idea, the need to question. I say this because my work always begins when I ask "What if?..."

**Poems for further reading linked to some of the ideas in Nicola Dale's work:**

***The Curator:*** Miller Williams  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/176491>

***When the Copperplate Cracks:*** Imtiaz Dharker  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkAhvoUzakE>

***Information:*** David Ignatow  
<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/information-3/>

***The Visible World:*** Jorie Graham  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/242176>

# SAM HUTCHINSON

**Pauline Rowe:** *How and why did you become an artist?*

**Sam Hutchinson:** I have no idea how I became an artist, I've always enjoyed making, sculpting and painting since being a child, and the mediums I work with now are a natural progression of years of experimenting with different media and working out which I feel the most comfortable using.

**PR:** *You are very interested in Kant's idea that there's no objective property of a thing that makes it beautiful. Can you say a bit more about this in relation to your own aesthetics?*

**SH:** I am very interested in Kant. My graduate work (*The Anarchy of Aesthetic & Judgement*) was a large study loosely taking items from Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and studying certain aspects of them. I strongly feel that everything exists as an abstract concept unless it is put into context, and in terms of aesthetics, everything can be re-arranged and re-contextualised to produce different ideas; using images as a creative language that can be manipulated 'for' or 'against' whichever side you come from. A large part of this is taking into consideration how we process images too, and this leads on to how they can be manipulated for our own benefit. As a predominantly image based artist, I like to test how we process the differences between the physical and the constructed and make decisions about what we see within an image. There are a lot of inbuilt and natural responses to images that work without logic or reason, and my work acts in ways like a study of these situations.

**PR:** *Can you say something about the camera you prefer to use and why?*

**SH:** Cameras and equipment aren't important to me. Personally I just want to obtain the image, so the camera is really only giving context to my work. I like the fact that a phone image looks like a phone image, or that the work in *I Used to Think You Were Normal* can be reduced to bare pixels when the images are seen at large-scale. This gives the images various depths, and can draw you back into realising that what you are looking at is made up from these small squares of colour. With this work being photographed off a curved, glass screen, the bars of light projecting the image on the screen are very visible, and I like to see the entire body of work as being interchangeable. All images can exist as crops of themselves, and appear multiple times in different forms.

**PR:** *How do you select, edit, process your images and then decide on a final sequence and order etc.,?*

**SH:** Depending on what I feel like showing, the mass of images can be seen as purely texture, or objects, portraits, or studio based studies, yet it all directs you to the same outcome. Some are more visual than others, and I like the idea that each time this work is displayed it can take into consideration those I am working with, and let others influence and manipulate how the final edit will be. Rather like the manipulation of the mind when it comes to influencing children and adults, these factors depend on its agendas for broadcasting, whether they will be hidden or not. This is also another part to the work that I see as a main concept, in that like a performance it can be adapted and changed in meaning rather than exist in concrete.

**PR:** *What was compelling about the subject matter, the 90s TV quiz show Crystal Maze, and your medium?*

**SH:** A lot of this work stems from trying to understand what influenced me as a child, not only positive influences, but trying to understand my rationale for my judgement and where this came from. I think a lot about ideas which I used to hold without reason - as my younger self I was trying to comprehend the meanings of the world and what goes on, and especially when you're consistently learning, I feel you can make judgements that you hold onto for a while until you start growing up, then you begin to question these.

I don't watch too much television anymore. Since being born I constantly watched TV, and I became very interested in looking back to how I understood what I saw on the screen. It has always seemed like a different world, like a non-reality that you understand as being real. It's just that little bit harder to visualise that the people on the screen are like ourselves, it's always struck me as a bit disconnected. It's like how you assume that a photograph depicts reality whereas it has been directed as such, and manipulated by the photographer to depict their vision of the content.

Gameshows and the related programmes are the most bizarre in that they use the contestants as the entertainment, in fictional scenarios and settings that are either made to look authentic or made to look completely alien. There isn't much in-between. I liked the idea of taking these out of context, as well as the locations being very visual and sculptural. The human element is interesting in that the contestants are acting as players to win a prize, a game, money, a holiday etc., - all of which are presented like treasures or sacred artefacts. Yet they are also playing for entertainment, and for the entertainment of the audience.

**PR:** *To whom does the "I" and "You" refer in the title?*

**SH:** These pronouns I feel I like to use come from the way in which the TV as an object comes directly between the viewer and programme, 'them and us'. So onto the title of the project, 'I Used to Think You Were Normal', the 'I' refers to myself, and the 'you' refers to the whole TV itself as an object, but also that of the countless programmes in which influenced me to understand their content as something very 'normal' as a commonplace practice, as if all adults would be gameshow contestants at some point, that it was something 'we' all did as humans. As if what I saw on the screen was 'normal'!

**PR:** *Would it be fair to see your work as questioning or distrusting the imagination as well as judgement of yourself as a child?*

**SH:** I feel that the work questions the imagination as well as judgement, however I don't feel that it really is directly critical of any of any of these ideas, rather determining an understanding of how it can predetermine judgement and its outcomes. So maybe distrust isn't something I would encourage, instead a 'question everything' approach, being logical about judgement and our understanding of what we see and process. I do also see television as a form of religious object, in the sense that so much blind trust and belief is placed into the screen, this could be again linked to how staged and detached from reality television programmes can be, being young and naive I always felt that it had to be fact what was fed to me, yet I now realise anyone can have an agenda.

**PR:** *Is there some regret that your imagination was disrespected in some way by the world of television?*

**SH:** I feel no regret by my imagination being manipulated as I feel the aesthetics are really something, certain sculptural elements to these TV shows have always amazed me, I guess the human element is the bit that slightly troubles me. It's more thinking about the set design and the fact that these locations are completely one of a kind and designed to replicate something real, that they only appear within these games. It changes our perception of what we are looking at. I guess these elements interest me a lot more. Especially in the way that they link with photography, for example, the way in which the TV film camera composes the screens to hide the edges of the set, its a contained representation of what actually exists outside of that composition, just as if it were a photographer framing an image. I think technology has the ability to make these environments possible. To me they appear as studies into looking objectively at these locations and re-contextualising them to give them a platform to be analysed for their

visual forms and similarities. It is a questioning about the way in which we understand reality.

Poems for further reading linked to some of the ideas in Sam Hutchinson's work:

*The Synthetic A Priori*: Kathleen Graber  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/241276>

*The Vacation*: Wendell Berry  
<http://www.americanlifeinpoetry.org/columns/425.html>

*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*: Wallace Stevens  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174503>

# THOM ISOM

**Pauline Rowe:** *How and why did you become an artist?*

**Thom Isom:** I never had any specific intentions to become an *artist*. My practice as a designer over the years has led me to collaborate with a variety of people in different practices – arts, music and film. As time has gone by I've found my ideas as a designer expanded into these different areas. Calling myself an artist is just an easy way to describe what I do.

**PR:** *Do you have a favourite medium in which to work?*

**TI:** Typography, illustration, video and animation. I've found a lot of cross over with these different mediums and feel each complement one another well.

**PR:** *Can you tell me about your approach to making the publication for the exhibition?*

**TI:** Conversation has been key in the production of the publication. I started with meeting and chatting to each of the artists in person or over Skype. Rather than just request their images and pick and choose my favourites to put into the publication I wanted to learn about the process, methods and stories behind their work.

After several conversations it was clear a new format was needed to present the work. Rather than imitating the photos in gallery and prescribing the order I decided to create a format that encouraged play and self curation. This is when I decided to produce a box with prints, introducing materials that reflect the work and ideas each of the artists explore.

**PR:** *What has been most difficult in collaborating with other artists? What have been the best aspects of collaborating?*

**TI:** Trying to establish a format and outcome that best worked with each of the artists ideas has been the most difficult part of this project. Although themes and ideas are similar the artists intentions differ. The best aspect of collaborating on this project was learning about these different intentions and approaches to photography.

Poems for further reading linked to some of the ideas in Thom Isom's publication:

*The Little Box*: Vasko Popa

<http://allpoetry.com/The-Little-Box>

# CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS

Throughout our current exhibition, Open 2: Pieces of You, six emerging artists share a curiosity in exploring how we gather and make meaning of our experiences.

Led by poet Pauline Rowe, join us for a series of three creative writing workshops and respond to this new exhibition through an accessible and joyful engagement with poetry.

The workshops are free, however booking is required. To reserve your place please call +44 (0)151 236 6768 or email [info@openeye.org.uk](mailto:info@openeye.org.uk).

## Creative Writing Workshop: Unforgotten Objects

**Thursday 28 April / 6pm-7:30pm / Free / Booking required**

During the first workshop in the series we will spend time looking at and thinking about the exhibition – in particular noticing the objects depicted in the images. We will explore the differences between ‘remembering’ and ‘unforgetting’, reflecting particularly on Peter Watkins’ exhibition and Rebecca Lindenberg’s poem *In the Museum of Lost Objects*. We will write a group poem.

## Creative Writing Workshop: Ways of Looking

**Thursday 5 May / 6pm-7:30pm / Free / Booking required**

During the second workshop in the series we will spend time looking at the exhibition and thinking about how we look and what we see. How does an image change when it is put inside a frame or presented without one, or when it is deconstructed or looked at in close up? We will explore our own reactions to images and frames, reflecting on the collaborative work of Nicola Dale and Steven Iles, and the work of both Phoebe Kiely and Sam Hutchinson. We will read together Wallace Stevens’ iconic poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* and respond to it through a group poem.

## Creative Writing Workshop: Human Presence

**Thursday 12 May / 6pm-7:30pm / Free / Booking required**

During the third workshop in the series we will spend time looking at the exhibition and exploring aspects of human presence in the images, whether overtly there or imagined in the person of the photographer. Is a photograph always some kind of biographical statement? We will read and consider the poems *The Vacation* by Wendell Berry and *Rembrandt's Late Self-Portraits* by Elizabeth Jennings and write our own individual pieces in response.