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HORIZON: RUSSIAN CAMERAS, KERALAN LANDSCAPES BY JAKE POLONSKY

'[T]here may be possibility of artistic expression in a pictorial photograph. How far the camera is responsible for the result or how far our own modification of its record, we venture to say is not the question; the sole point, as between you and ourselves, being whether our prints have aesthetic qualities and will stand the test of the kind of criticism that you apply to other pictures.'
Amateur Photographer 1902, describing the Photo-Secessionist movement.

This exhibition contains a selection of work that is the culmination of a period of technical and artistic experimentation which began seven years ago, when I was wandering around Prague and found myself looking in the window of a dusty camera shop under the arch of one of the old town gates. As photographers I think we all are familiar with the excitement of seeing a piece of equipment that we've never seen before – and here was a strange looking

plastic camera with the legend 'Horizon 202' inscribed on the top. Even better was the pleasantly modest price tag on it. What the hell, I thought, it's only 600 crowns.

The camera turned out to be a swing lens type 35mm rangefinder panoramic camera, spring driven, free of any batteries or electronics, with a little handle that attached under the body so you could avoid taking pictures of your hands. Oh yes, that's the other thing – it has a 28mm lens, which in the dual 35mm format is very wide angle indeed. I took a few shots with it on that trip and found it a fun piece of kit to tote around – light and unfussy [there's no focussing – that's governed by your aperture].

It was maybe two years later that I had the idea of seeing how it worked with my favourite emulsion, Kodak HIE black and white infra red. On a trip late in the year I found myself in a crisp Derbyshire Dales landscape with a dramatic tree illuminated by November sun dominating my frame. I pressed the shutter release, and thought



how much I was looking forward to seeing the image when processed. I took the film to Melvin Cambettie Davies, whose Master Mono darkroom I had previously printed in myself. Melvin called me at 8am a few days after I'd ordered a few images to be printed up. He was very excited. 'Jake, I've done something a bit different with these, I think you need to come and have a look at them.'

I got in later that day to be confronted by a stunning split toned print [selenium/sepia] which had a wonderful warmth to it, and where the split happened some unusual and unique colour effects had entered the image. Somehow the combination of subject, technique and chemistry seemed to be working in a special way, and I have found myself refining the style ever since.

The Horizon is not the sharpest camera in the world by any means, but somehow the grainy glowing nature of HIE enhances what it is capable of. Likewise the frame size and shape is something very familiar

to me from my work in moving images, where the 2.4 aspect ratio is part of the anamorphic (Cinemascope) format. My sponsors, Panavision, are the undisputed experts in this field.

Over the following years I have rarely travelled without my collection of Horizons – Horizons plural because they are stunningly unreliable cameras, tricky to load (especially in darkness as HIE requires), and unpredictable in operation. I found myself drawn to a particular type of landscape photography – one which evoked to me images from early photography. The texture of the prints reminds me of some of those from the Photo - Secessionist movement; the process for my images lessens detail to emphasize texture, in the same way that Steiglitz and his associates employed Photogravure and Gum Bichromate printing.

The Photo-Secessionists reacted against the novelty of the realism of captured images from the early days of photography, and likewise I find myself

involved in this sort of photography as a reaction to the relentless march of digital capture with its megapixels and sensors, its instant histogram gratification. I am trying to make images that stand up as artistic images, not just as ones created by a camera. I am no Luddite – I use digital tools in my cinematography – but for my personal work I choose to enjoy the surprise of traditional silver based photography.

Travelling in the state of Kerala in Southern India in 2006 I found a variety of subjects that responded wonderfully to my process, and it is these images that are on display at the exhibition in November. Though through experience I have a good idea of what my results will be, working with HIE is not so much a process of documenting or recording landscape as of transforming it, because the material itself has this unknown quality - we are after all photographing part of the spectrum not visible to the naked eye. It is that magical quality that I hope you will come and enjoy at this show.