



Open College of the Arts

Formative feedback

Student name	Catherine Smith	Student number	517189
Course/Unit	EYV	Assignment	1
Type of tutorial (eg video/audio/written)	Written		

Overall Comments

This work struck me immediately for its authenticity, maturity of vision and visual experimentation. You really have managed to make unpretentious photographs of *real life*. And that is a big achievement because many photographers try and fail at it because they don't *observe* keenly enough or because they layer their own prejudices, politics or aesthetics on the images - even unwittingly. And that is one of the great strengths of this work - your observational skills are very strong and will only get better as you progress through the course.

Your theme is also quite deep, using Ashford as both the subject and the backdrop (or context) for your portraits. It's about the continued affect of the 2008 financial crisis, the way people cope, Everything's £1 or it's closing down, and hold on to the addictions that make things feel consistent! This could well be the beginnings of an on-going documentary series about life after the crash. But none of these photographs are heavy-handed or blatantly attempt to hammer home a message. I'm sure that different viewers will interpret different messages in these.

My few criticisms are mostly visual things that can be fixed quite quickly, or have to do with maintaining the strength of the series.

Feedback on assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

1

Signs are always a bit disappointing in images and this close shot feels out of place. It's the only photo without people - I mean real ones. It's also framed as a square format picture, which is not consistent with the other images. For these reasons you should cut this one. It just doesn't have the same power of communication the others have. One thing you can write

in your learning log is the rationale behind placing an image in a sequence – why this image first? If it has something to do with reducing people to sign graphics, you can then look for other ways of communicating that in-keeping with the rest of your work.

Of the close ups, I prefer the shot of the cigarettes stubbed out on a window sill.

2

Your theme really begins with this shot. The young hoody, looking pretty disenfranchised, squatting outside an off-licence with a fag and a phone. The advertising seems to form a barrage of hopelessness in the guise of elegant labels and glamour behind him.

3

An everyday sight, the TO LET sign signifying the demise of a business. The cyclist, like so many of your figures here, acts as a resilient living point on the stage of political and economic life. Some of your figures seem lost, some overcome, others embroiled in the problem. This connection between a lone figure and the resonant environment is very strong in these pictures. You should see it as a visual strategy and try to work on making more pictures. Having said that, it's good you haven't overdone it. Or relied on one strategy alone.

4

This is one of the strongest images here. The woman seems overwhelmed by the stuff of commerce - which looks like it's evolving as she sits there! You've managed here to make a strong composition with a complex and messy subject.

5

Well snapped at just the moment the chef hands the customer his burger! Your theme of obesity is interesting and kind of unusual. You're not making a big statement, which would be crass, you're trying to observe life, register things going on in an objective and sort of light-touch kind of way. There's no strong sense of criticism here, just a looking and wondering.

This shot made me wonder whether some of these photos are a bit underexposed. You could maybe lift this shot's brightness a bit. If you don't know how to use Camera RAW or Photoshop, you should practice basic image improvement skills. Dodging and burning would be really useful, but do it very subtly. Here's a quick lesson:

Dodging & Burning

Dodging and burning is a darkroom technique for *selectively* lightening or darkening parts of your image. There are various ways of dodging (lightening) and burning (darkening) in Photoshop.

You can use the Dodging and Burning tools on the image layer itself – usually called Background in the layers palette. You should generally use a brush opacity of about 5% - 10%. The problem with this approach is you can't then reduce the effect. Aim at subtle changes.

Another – more controllable - way to do it is this:

Create a New Layer above your image and choose Edit> Fill> 50% Gray.

Change the blending mode of this layer to Overlay.

Use the Brush at 10% opacity to paint black and white on this layer (check the swatches in

your tools palette). This will lighten or darken the image selectively. You can then reduce the opacity of this layer itself to make the dodging and burning less noticeable. You can also delete this layer and start over again if you're not happy with the result.

Always Save As a PSD file (Photoshop) so that the layers are saved.

6

The shot through the bin opening shows you're looking for angles and different ways of seeing your subject, which is excellent. Often this is a matter of luck – for example, a strong subject just happens to walk passed the view. There isn't really anything to see through this frame within a frame, but just wait next time and you'll get your subject. (Actually, you have a much better shot in your contacts, with the women).

7

A market trader having a drag. A good portrait. When making portraits of people who know you're photographing them, you could consider using fill flash to give yourself a bit more foreground illumination. Good that you've shown the man, his character and surrounded him with the environment he creates with his wares.

8

For some reason this bank just doesn't look healthy! That could show that you've managed to find a shot that maintains the gritty quality of street photography and social insight, even when photographing this ubiquitous sight.

I should mention that using a 24mm lens can warp the image. It's usually okay for street portraits but with angled subjects the bending becomes noticeable. You should use Lens Correction in Photoshop to correct these.

9

Another of my favourites. It seems such a simple, innocent photo, but I like the angle, the use of the reflection and the soft focus. The way the shop window looks like an empty mirror.

10

Another strong shot that much like Erwit's famous photo, uses the little dog as a counterpart for the owner! The poor dog looks pretty sad. Really confident of you to get so close.

11& 12

These are really excellent. One of the best shots here. You end on two names from the past: Mecca bingo and Woolworths! They look like images from another era of British history - some kind of post-war depression. Excellent use of a single, lonely figure in a stark, closed down environment. It really looks like the last resort.

Contact sheets

These really show how extensively you've searched for images. This searching is the key to great photography. In future, make sure you put the image numbers on the contacts so I can refer to them quickly. The shot of the woman with the white handbag walking passed closed shops, or the photo of the man walking into Barclays – just notice how much of a decisive moment that is with these three figures.

Coursework

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity

Looking at your coursework shows you've been studious and the assignment certainly shows you've learnt about composition and camera handling.

Research

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Your research looks like a really good start. I can see some of the inspiration you gained looking at Keith Arnatt and Bruce Gilden. Especially Gilden's *Iowa State Fair*, with its in-her-face honesty has affected the raw look at the down side of your town.

Learning Log

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Summarize how you have applied what you've learned from the course to your assignment photographs. Also note down what you've learned from other photographers in executing the assignment.

I've put some comments in the above text that should help with your learning log. It's a good start. You don't need to reiterate what is written in the course folder. Just put your own thinking and analysis - which you have done.

Suggested reading/viewing

Context

I could recommend a whole host of street and documentary photographers to look at, but it may be best for you to get hold of some good collections and just see which one's resonate for you. I suspect Martin Parr will resonate - check out his *The Last Resort*. Have a look at Sophie Haworth's *Street Photography Now* and also check out the Magnum website extensively. <https://www.magnumphotos.com/>

Try to find one or two photographers to look at *in depth*.

Pointers for the next assignment

You're doing really well, you are inspired and motivated and this work shows a very promising photographer.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong, authentic, objective images.• Clear vision of economic recovery Britain.• Great commitment to the subject.• Strong visual skills and visual experimentation.• Good communicative skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A little more processing knowledge would help.

Please inform me of how you would like your feedback for the next assignment: written or video/audio.

Tutor name	Robert Enoch
Date	31st October 2017
Next assignment due	15th January 2018