

SEEING THROUGH

There were many more magazines and books. And some connections to be made: an art hardback, a definitive work on Irving Penn, a collection of a life work. He wondered about his own life's work. Folders and boxes everywhere in the office or was it the studio – to - be or the think room? An accretion of temptation and distraction and what to do. Or not, of course.

There were layers, stacks of papers and some redundant equipment or underused or bought in a panic of acquisition. He trawled through the monographs and catalogues and art magazines. A whole body of work. Willingly obscure, effectively strategies of intent, obscured by pages of explanation. Some of it fooled you or to the extent that the writer fooled you about what photographers intentions were or about a medical condition similar with the reviewers own.

There was now a pattern of thoughts, photographs now were staged; a still film, a still life, a part of something congealed, light enfolded. A set up, a fake or an imagined life acted out with objects to indicate. Galleries liked obscurity; it made their work richer. They had a duty to explain but only so much. After all photographs used to be treated as a true record,

a crime scene, a chalk outline on the floor proved that there was a body there. Now the obscurity was built in to the “work”. There were references to an older art or movement just enough to give a clue or a rearrangement; an ironical nod to your shared art knowledge. A mixture of reference, a soup of meaning.

Increasingly the references would multiply. For a photograph to be an artwork it had to have a meaning. And you had to find it. Or you failed to join in this wonderful coagulation of style.

He sat back, the latest pile of expensive magazines put aside. By accident, on a ramble to avoid going to the library, he almost stumbled at the entrance of the magazine that he had been reading. There was the latest copy framed in a dove grey alcove. The front door was pale turquoise gloss paint. Fitting for the entrance to the deep concentration inside.

Maybe, when the thoughts were clearer he would return with his portfolio. The metal one for the tough portraits or the chrome leather for the “considered” landscapes.

Portfolios were essential, as useful and demanding as the leather jacket or the Burberry or the mid grey suit reserved for the Cork Street galleries. Don't even knock on doors; find other alleyways of introduction. All in all an exercise in meditation; mediation between perceived value and presentation. The photograph is a new example of what there is in front of you but only if you can see it in the first place.

There were some contacts lying on the floor in a transparent plastic case tinged with blue. The contact sheet composed of twelve images, two and a quarter inches square. They were out of focus without the glasses but he could make out the shape. One angle, slight variation on attitude to camera. He remembered the session, the calm arrangement of light and shade. The tangible evidence of someone now passed away.