

IMPRESSIONS AND THE IMAGINATION



Cathy Roberts has explored many ideas and themes over the years but, invariably, they lead to images which are somewhat removed from reality. They are her response to how she sees and tries to show her world. Here, Cathy gives us an insight into her work and discusses the variety of subject matter which attracts her.

My photography has taken me in many directions over the years and I have explored many ideas and themes but, invariably, these explorations have led me towards images which are somewhat removed from reality, whether simplified, abstract or modified in some way. This has not been a very carefully thought-through process. Rather, it has been a response to how I see and try to show my world. I love the idea of seeing something 'in the mind's eye' and then following this imaginative idea through. Sometimes my ideas work while at other times, they fail to communicate but I always find a real sense of satisfaction when the outcomes express

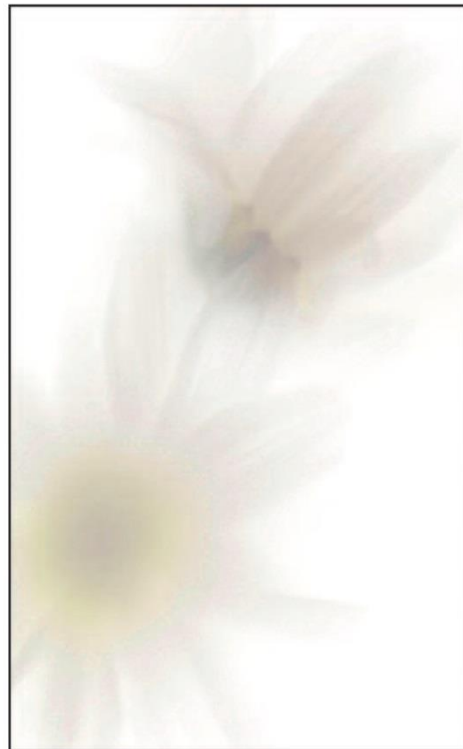
and reflect my ideas and satisfy my imagination.

I tend to work in themes and ongoing projects rather than producing freestanding one-off images. My responses to my ideas change over time, ideas develop and go off in directions of their own and often end up in very different places to the starting point. I find that panels or sets of images often have a strength which can add to the message or impression they are trying to convey; a strength which works in a quieter but, to me, more subtle and satisfying way than the high impact immediacy of some types of image. Some of my images are so abstract that they need the context of other images, similar but more tied to reality, to convey the intended idea.

I was quite an artistic child and spent long hours



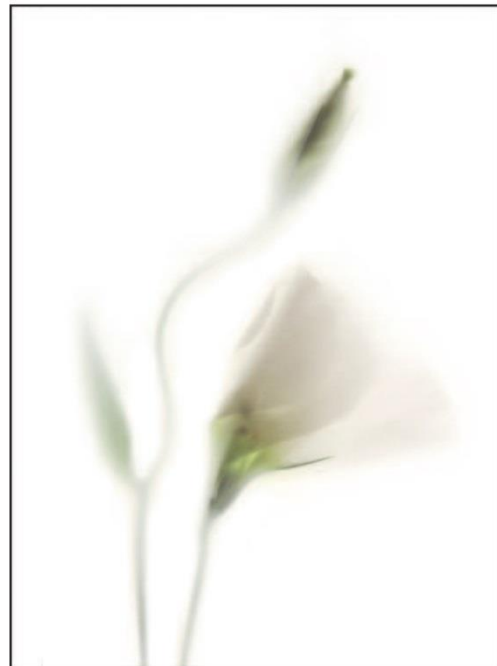
Dying Rose



Pale Flower (From FRPS Panel)



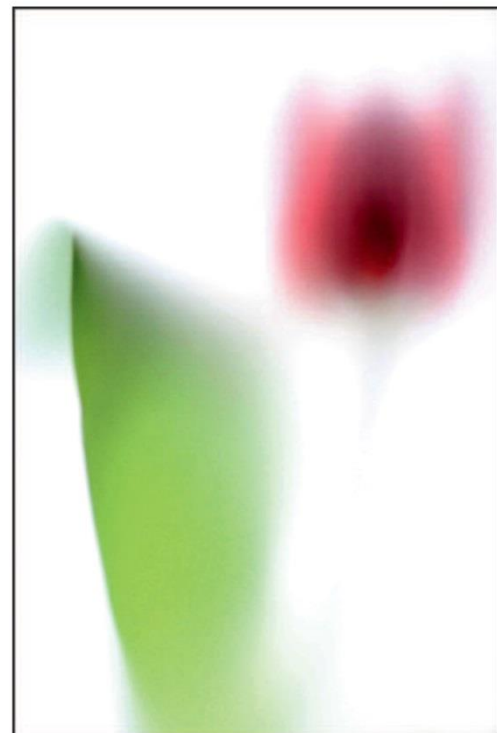
Pale Flower (From FRPS Panel)



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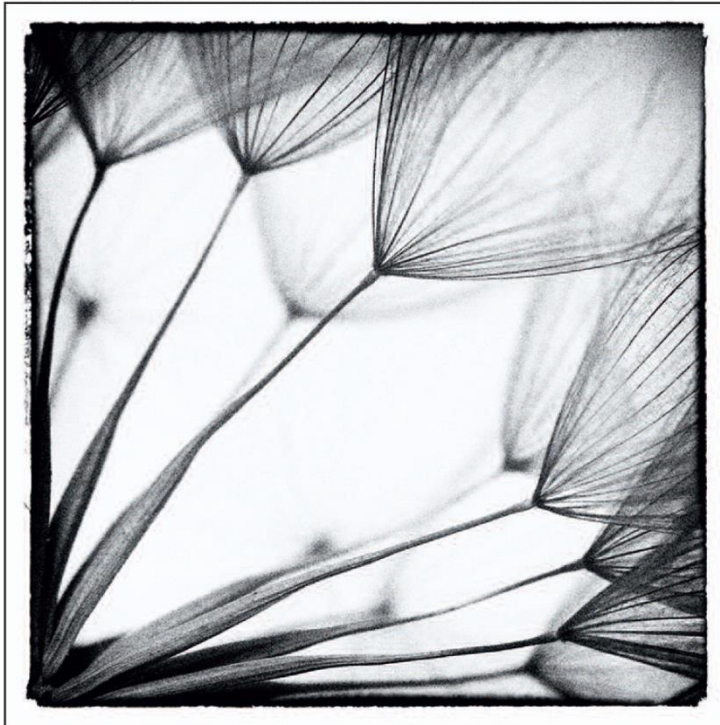
High Key Close-Up (Recent work from an ongoing project of minimal high-key IR flower shots)



Tulip



Snow Scene (Accepted in RPS International Print Exhibition 2010 and The London Salon 2009)



Dandelion close-up (Recent work from a panel of dandelion abstracts)

drawing, often landscapes, birds and animals, self-portraits (though that was probably later in self-absorbed adolescence) and flowers... and more flowers, so it's not really surprising that when the camera took over from the pencil, flowers continued as a passion. Sometimes it's the colour of flowers, often it's the delicate and evanescent nature of blooms, quite often it's the fragility of flowers as they wither and die but always there's a delicacy and simplicity to be found in flowers and their shapes which I can't resist as a photographer. At one point I spent about two years photographing, simplifying, becoming more obsessed with pale flowers and the sinuous shapes of their stems and this culminated in my FRPS panel in 2009. I was a little flowered-out after that but have recently found myself drawn back again, at the moment to explore in a more close-up way which finds mysterious and unexpected patterns and shapes – different from my previous approach but every bit as absorbing!

Although I don't see myself as a landscape photographer (all that getting up early, planning, getting cold and wet...) and have no interest in recording a scene, there are aspects of landscape which I find irresistible and snow is what really does it for me. Snow combined with the other irresistible aspect, trees, and I'm out there freezing to death and barely noticing. Snow has this wonderful magical transformative quality. It removes anything extraneous and allows me to capture my world of imagination in all its simplicity, strangeness and beauty. I have a personal favourite location not far from my home and every time it snows, I'm out there for as long as the light lasts and no-one comes trampling across to spoil the purity.

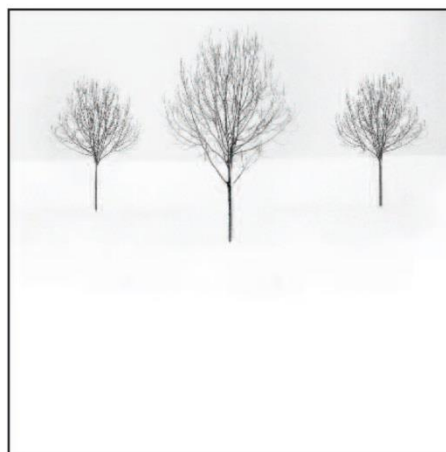
Most of my landscape shots end up as monochrome prints

and I do shoot with this in mind. I very rarely try a shot in both colour and mono as I usually have an idea from the outset about what I am aiming for. I also find myself going through mono phases and colour phases, seeing the world in rather different ways for periods of time. This is not something I consciously try to control; I just go with my impulse at the time of shooting.

My influences have been many and varied, artists and photographers (though I don't like to differentiate between the two). I studied Art History at University back in the heady days when there seemed to be no worries about the future or the prospect of work or lack of it, and this allowed me to spend several years happily immersed in well-loved art and artists. The late medieval painters with their sinuous lines and strange world-view; the expressionists with their emotion; Blake and Palmer with their other-worldly mysticism; Turner with his sublime abstraction and light; Beardsley with his mastery of line and edge and many, many more. Undoubtedly, they all helped to shape how I see the visual world. In photography, Kertesz, Angus McBean and Michael Kenna come to mind immediately, many others follow.

Surrealism has attracted me on and off over the years with its suggestions of the subconscious and a world on the edge of the mind. I am also interested in the idea of narrative and suggestion and respond to images which ask questions and leave suggestions lingering in the viewer's mind. I often play with combinations of images in an attempt to create this feeling of unease. This style of image is very different from my usual much more impressionist take on subjects but is equally rooted in imagination. It is also a break from my usual way of working as this is the only type of subject where I work on one-off images rather than series.

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Three Trees (Accepted in RPS International Print Exhibition 2013)



Weak Winter Sun



Winter (The London Salon Medal 2013, accepted in RPS International Print Exhibition 2010 and Landscape Photographer of the Year Book and Exhibition 2012)



In Thought (Composite image shot with IR camera)



Alienation (Shot using Lensbaby. Another technique I use to get away from reality)

My current passion is for photographing dance – not in any way as a record of dancers or performances, although they have their own beauty, but it always seems to me to be strange to try to capture an art form as beautiful and essentially dynamic as dance in frozen static images. Rather, my dance photography is an attempt to explore the fleeting beauty of movement in dance. The camera seems to be the ideal medium for this exploration with its ability to use slow shutter speeds and blur movement. A great deal of my dance work is chance or serendipity and I love the fact that I can shoot a session with a dancer then download to explore what I have managed to catch in the speed of the moment and, by a fortunate combination of technique and luck, have captured something which I find beautiful and which effectively is unrepeatable. I'm quite an equipment junkie (cameras are beautiful objects) though I mainly use two DSLRs – one of them converted for infra-red capture - and spend every bit as long in post-processing as in taking. Like the addictive nature of the darkroom, the lightroom is just as absorbing for me. I use any and every technique (well, of the ones I know!) to get my end result and always print my own images as the final print is, to me, the culmination of the whole process. I experiment with all parts of the process and my main problem is with my butterfly brain which flits from one thing to another without managing to settle for long enough. This results in many 'experimental' shots, much wasted time on the computer and huge expense in paper and ink but I love every bit of it. I have no purist ethic about 'getting it right in camera', though I am



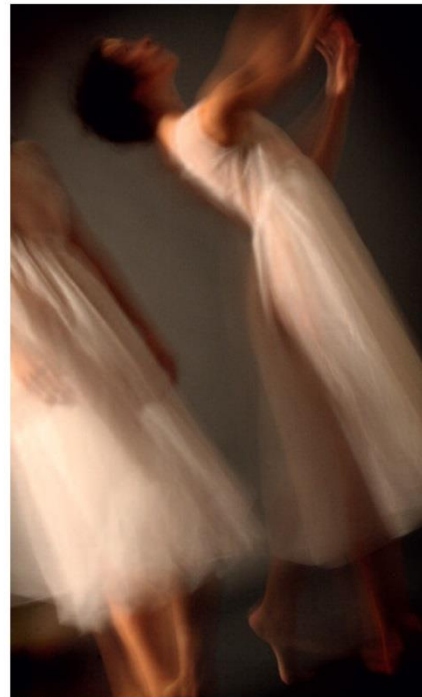
Harmony



Waiting in the Wings (IR shot; this gives the ghostly effect. Accepted in RPS International Print Exhibition 2012 and The London Salon 2012)



Grace (One of my first successful dance shots – taken when a visiting dance group performed at the college I worked at)



Waiting for the Performance



Dance Duality

full of admiration for those who can. Where is my photography taking me next? I have no idea, but it's one of the great joys of being an amateur in the true sense of the word that it doesn't actually matter. I feel as if I've been taking photos all my life but I still have the same thrill from the whole process now as I always have – if that ever went, I'd stop but I can't actually see that ever happening.

You can see more of Cathy's work on her website

www.cathyrobertsphotography.co.uk
and at www.themiragegroup.co.uk.



Pirouette (Taken in IR)



Curtsey (Taken in IR)