

“it’s useless and tedious to represent what exists because nothing that exists satisfies me.. I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to what is positively trivial.” Baudelaire salon reviews (1859)

Is Baudelaire’s position defensible in the light of the case lens-based art forms to ‘represent what exists’ or, from a contemporary perspective so the ‘monsters of fantasy’ still allow artists to engage with ‘what exists’ creativity?

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PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE ARTS

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Illustrations List:

- *Figure 1. Alexey Titarenko. Vasileostrovskaya Metro Station (Variant Crowd 2), 1992. Gelatine silver print, printed by the artist, edition 15/15, 12 x 12 in (30.5 x 30.5 cm).*
- *Figure 2. Alexey Titarenko. Crowd 1, St. Petersburg, 1992. Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist, edition 1/5 AP, 17 x 17 in (43.2 x 43.2 cm).*
- *Figure 3. Alexey Titarenko. Corner La Esquina, New York, 2013. Gelatin silver print, printed by the artist, edition 1/5, 12 x 12 in (30.5 x 30.5 cm).*
- *Figure 4. Gregory Crewdon. Untitled, New York, 2007. Edition of 6. Digital Pigment Print. 58 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. 148.6 x 227.3 cm.*
- *Figure 5. Gregory Crewdon. Untitled (pregnant women/pool). 1999. laser direct c-print flush-mounted to aluminium, in artist's frame. 136 x 166.4 cm. (53.5 x 65.5 in.)*
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Charles Baudelaire is known for being one of the first people to express values on seeing the world in modernistic view, including in this; corruption, sordidness, and sensuality, which influenced the photographic world. He was not a fan of photography, deeply repelled by commercialism and the modernistic world, which included that relatively new creation, the camera. He believed that an anti-materialistic perspective was the way to look at things, as in his mind anything that came from a machine was not art, art had to come from the person/artist themselves, meaning this reduced the realistic aesthetic, making the perspectives of the camera irrelevant. (Baudelaire.C. 1856) Even though Baudelaire had a distinct repelling opinion on photography, many of the people he classed as his friends were either photographers or artists and poets who had a completely different view on photography to him.

Baudelaire had contradicted himself over the years, in 1846 he declared that he had a big admiration for a modern style dress and the beauty it beheld due to the way the artist had captured its essence in his painting, but he then went on to say he was repelled by modernistic views so this made no sense, so when his salon review in 1859 was published and he then went on to say *"it's useless and tedious to represent what exists because nothing that exists satisfies me.. I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to what is positively trivial."* (Baudelaire, salon review (1859), it became clear that Baudelaire himself was as confused on what

he thought about art and the ways it was made. Did he want it to be realistic or did he want it to be surreal? But even though this was the case, his interest in the contemporary art world and the creations that came before him but also in his life span became crucial and ended up having a pretty big impact on the photographic world due to all his critiques.

Baudelaire's position connected to lens-based art forms and '*representing what exists*', whilst still allowing the '*monsters of fantasy*' to be involved, is a rather interesting discussion when it comes to being able to express creative values. Limitations are one of photography's greatest advantages and a lot of photographers are getting away from these ideas and restrictions and using it to explore imagination. This is not always a bad thing and does not mean that the limitations of photography are being ignored because Contemporary photography nowadays has shifted from what it used to be, it had a move from aesthetic beauty of an image, whereas now it is more about the concept within the work and having primacy allowing the meanings behind it which lets the viewers emotions evolve. It also focuses more on the results than the process it took to get to that point,

In this essay, I will be exploring how contemporary art and the use of surrealism portrays '*monsters of fantasy*' in photography, and how artists are using it to produce and explain their works, by the side of this I will be using Charles

Baudelaire's opinions and critiques and a mixture of photographers work to look into this further and work out if Baudelaire's position when it comes to lens-based platforms can work with both what exists and the surrealism created.

After Baudelaire there have been so many contemporary/modernist movements like cubism, fauvism, and abstract expressionism, which were influenced by the words and work that he published, which led and pushed artists and photographers to explore more. When it comes to contemporary art it is difficult to define photography as it does not technically have a proper adhere as a label or a singular art movement, rather it can be thought as a creative way to create new paths

The sixties were when photography started to get a lot more appreciation, it had reached its peak. An artist called Alexey Titarenko found a way to express not only what was going on around him but also what he was experience in himself, through the art of photography. Titarenko came about 20 years later then Baudelaire but the way his photography had developed was something that Baudelaire would have never appreciated as art.



Figure 1

“I felt that my childhood dream of capturing on film, a state of the soul or a singular impression experienced in the street had come true—reality as I had felt and imagined it had been recreated” (Titarenko. A, 2015). This type of work has an almost poetic aura to it and manages to capture both ‘the monsters of fantasy’ whilst being able to represent what exists, with his inspirations from legendary musical conductors like Grigory Sokolov and Wilhelm Furtwanger who created their music to create almost an ocean of sound in each of their performances bring the music a feel of physical sense. This brought Titarenko lots of emotions and made him want to add virtuosity and a certain type of neatness that each photograph which might not have had been there in the original process of the photograph because he wanted to add something extra. He worked on his photographs in the darkroom added brush- strokes of a bleach solution onto each

image to add depth and different tones of greys which created a detachment of the crowd from the rest of the image.

Titarenkos work was mainly based around the reality that he lived in, his work showed the realness of what it was like to live in a communist regime which was going through an oppression which was effecting the citizens of St Petersburg, and that is why he introduced the long exposure times, to capture the movements and emotions of those people, he didn't use his photographs to



Figure 2

show an imaginary state of reality, as the subjects he focused on were very real issue, but he did use an imaginative and surreal way to represent his outer reality. Photography for decades has been a very important way to represent and reflect on the way society has been reshaped and reborn. Titarenkos take

on this style, made his work have an aura of fantasy and imagination, with all the blurred sections in it, showing that surrealism being allowed into photography is not always how people imagine it, as when people think about surrealism and people using their imagination, they think of a more unicorns and rainbows and happier situations. The way he created each photograph give the viewers a chance to interpret them themselves and create their own opinions on it.



Figure 3

Baudelaire did not want art to be something that focus on the outer reality and this is why he did not like photography, according to his opinions it truthfully showed how the world was and that was too realistic(*Baudelaire.C 'Correspondences' 1856*) and raw for him as he didn't want to see that and that was probably down to the fact that his life did not seem like an easy ride, he had

struggled with drugs, suicidal ideation and loneliness, so he wanted to focus more on the monsters of his own fantasies because the reality could never be the beauty that he wanted or needed. The inner beauty within each person was a lot more precious to him and he felt angry by the people who viewed photography as he felt they wanted to love for the truth and reality and that confused him.

Edgar Allen said, "If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear - but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented". Poe felt very strongly about photography compared Baudelaire, who was very influenced by the works of Poe and based a lot of his works and critiques around him. But when it came to photography Poe thought it was a great way to perfectly reproduce nature and the reality around us and did not have any restrictions like art did and well, Baudelaire did not.

Since then, Photography has managed to get to a stage where it leaves us questioning what parts of reality are true and what are the differences between our inner realities and our outer realities. (Bulh, A. 2012) Many surrealistic images have portions of both of these qualities and ultimately makes the creator much more than just a photographer because even though Baudelaire would

not say it, photographers become artist as they are not just 'imitations of nature' (Baudelaire, C). They become philosophers, observers and flaneurs because of their recreation of the world passing around us. The message our eternal worlds are telling us creates a dream like state. Gregory Crewdson, a well-established photographer takes this all into mind when he creates each of his images. He takes his images further than the inferior ordinary life and takes it into a superior surrealistic dream-like world.

Baudelaire was a poet and one of the most compelling ones, he excelled in complex and unpredicted expressions of sensibility which talked about modern themes. Subjects like complex emotions and financial constraints defined his life which helped him create some of the most well-known poetry. Thinking about this, you would have thought Baudelaire would be open to photography as a art as "*photography's closest cousin is poetry because of the way it sparks your imagination and leaves gaps for the viewer to fill in.*" (Soth, A)). Poetry is a lot like a dream, it is the way you feel and the essence that created because writing those down, becomes a way to release something that might not mean anything or might mean everything, so how is photography any different? Apart from the times it is real and a way to represent the world, it is just a visual way to express and release those feelings.

Commented [RH(1): Maybe add something about this artist

When thinking about the way contemporary photography has changed and how Baudelaire pops into this discussion, Crewdon is somebody who would have succeeded in changing his mind, as Baudelaire's whole world was influenced by imagination., his dreams were a realm for him, which he could escape too and avoid the reality of the world around him, his whole soul and body became engulfed within this realm, it became a second reality for him.



Figure 4

Crewdon defiantly encouraged the change in photography from the 1990s onwards, his complexity in the way he chose to experiment with concepts and expressions was something that art had not really seen before as his productions of these images because a big hassle in a way. He was recruiting actors, using cranes and highly planned settings. He inspired artists who were doing similar work to him to be freer and be able to explore those surreal approaches leaving the art world more enchanted than it ever had been. The importance of each

detail being planned precisely in these photographs, were to be able to bring a complete sense of clarity in to Crewdson's photos. "I completely invest in the idea of trying to make the image as beautiful, as mysterious, and as powerful as possible. The technology allows me to reproduce exactly what I envision" (*Gregory Crewdson Retrospective*).

Imagination is not something that is ultimately illusionary, it does include an



Figure 5

essence of reality, it does not get rid of the way the world around us is evolving, it does not replace reality, it merely adds a new value. It is a way to not have to have that willingness to accept that things are how they appear, it gives it a dimension that is more open and not as scary.

“if one desires to attain the world, it is imperative that one let the imagination dictate the course and incorporate one’s own soul into the construction”
(Baudelaire.C. *‘Les Fleurs du mal et œuvres choisies’*.p.97)

In conclusion, a contemporary outlook on the lens-based art form; photography, is a platform that can let the ‘monsters of fantasy’ be involved in photos because it still allows artists to engage in ‘what exists’ in a creative way as It is such a wide art movement and open to so many different opinions and takes. It makes realism still as real as it is and still as interesting, but it lets having those monsters and the concepts of imagination and surrealism a normal and important concept. Baudelaire set out to create a world where nature and the concept of imagination were overlapped, he may never have thought that photography was going to be something that would manage to be able to do that, or in fact wanted photography to be a artform that would allow this, but thanks to him, artists and photographers expanded on what he said and made it a reality to explore on what he originally set out to show.

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