

'Relics' - Research Report

Rationale

Within my photo-book titled 'Relics', I encapsulate the theme of intertwinement between man and the natural landscape through an ecologically conscious agenda. I was drawn to this subject matter through my own relationship with nature; I feel that the natural environment provides an escape from the modern world, with all its noise, pollution and manufactured responsibilities. I can't help but see the world we live in today as a tragic separation from our natural roots, and through my photographic art, I wanted to express nature's almost eternal existence and how we are part of something so much bigger than the societal constructs we have imposed upon ourselves. The way humanity lives in the modern world leaves much of the population devoid of purpose or greater meaning to life. My aim was to emphasise nature's timeless existence and how preserving it should be humanity's greatest concern, as it gives all of us a purpose. I have captured this concept by showcasing derelict architecture and its interaction with nature as a force of reclamation throughout my imagery. The photographs depict the conjunction between flourishing plant-life and the artificial: cracked and decayed.

Primary Research

During the planning process of this project, I conducted research into a variety of photo-books and photographic works. One such photo-book that heavily influenced my own was "The Decisive Moment", by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Published in 1952, this book contains a collection of iconic images, rooted in street photography. This work aims to capture moments in time in which elements have aligned in order to create a powerful image. This way of working led the book to have been widely regarded as pioneering a new way of presenting narrative. It brought attention to new methods of producing a story and emphasises the unique narrative form of the image itself. I find that this way of working is highly effective as it gives each image a voice, which leads to a rich and characterful display. This has influenced my work greatly, due to Bresson's attention to presenting narrative through each image, and I ensured the implementation of this within my photo-book by showcasing the eternal struggle of nature through images of specific areas of landscape and human architecture.

Edward Burtynsky is a climate photojournalist whose work not only serves his nature conscious agenda but also provides room for artistic interpretation. He is known for his large-scale, aerial photographs that document the impact of human activity on the landscape. Through his thought-provoking imagery, Burtynsky explores the complex interplay between nature and civilisation. His images highlight the ways in which human intervention can influence and reshape the environment, a topic prevalent within my own practice. Similarly to my images throughout this project, Burtynsky also employs the use of a drone, leading viewers to contemplation regarding human progress and development in context to the enduring presence of nature. His work raises questions on the long-term implications of our actions on the planet.

Secondary Research – Rewilding

During my research into topics related to the subject matter of nature's reclamation, I came across the concept of 'rewilding'. This idea involves reintroducing natural ecosystems and species to their habitats. The process highlights nature's timeless existence and its relationship with human constructs. One example of rewilding is in the case of Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve in the Netherlands. Originally an industrial area, that was left undeveloped, nature reclaimed this space and formed a dynamic natural landscape of various flora.

Conservationists initiated the rewilding project by reintroducing wildlife such as horses, cattle and deer in order to recreate the natural grazing patterns of the environment's original inhabitants. A tragic, yet notable fact about this project was the starvation of the wildlife due to their lack of predators, which led to a shortage in food relative to the growing population.

Nature, being the powerful force it is, restored balance to this environment by managing its inhabitants, independent from external factors. This project displayed nature's adaptability and resilience and shows that it will persist in most circumstances.

Personal Development

Within the creation process of this photo-book, I learned a variety of new skills, including how to properly edit page layouts and the importance of naming pages/images. When considering options for page layout, I found that it was important to consider how the size and orientation can either enhance or diminish the aesthetic quality of each image as well as its meaning. For example, I decided to dedicate two pages each to most of my large-scale aerial photography, as these are high quality images and having them larger accentuates their detail and texture. Using the same logic, I ensured that my lower quality images were dedicated just one page each, used in conjunction with each other which aided in preserving the professional, high quality look I was aiming for.

Something else I learned was the importance of giving each page a name and how this can affect the interpretation of narrative by the reader. These names are all related to the overall subject matter and each hold pieces of context that add up to the overall meaning of the project.

Production Methods in Relation to my Subject Matter

The separation between my large-scale images and close up shots assisted in displaying the vast spectrum of nature's reclamation, from expansive efforts of restoration within vast landscapes to the intricacies of the materials reclaimed.

The decision to assign names to my pages created a contextual reference point for the reader. Each name's meaning offers different interpretations. A notable example of this is 'Evanescence', suggesting the idea of fading, highlights nature's timeless existence and the fact that it will outlast our creations and watch them fade into the background of the natural world.

‘Deliverance’ another prime example, is derivative of the Lord’s Prayer and presents the idea that nature and its restoration of artificial landscapes is a deliverance from evil; guidance away from an unsustainable lifestyle.

Final Evaluation

Overall, I am very pleased with the resulting photo-book. I have successfully conveyed a thought-provoking narrative through aesthetically pleasing imagery, and this will hopefully raise awareness of our unsustainable ways. One thing I would change in future is the removal of the extra pages at the front and back. This was an error on my part as the company I had used didn’t specify that there would already be blank pages included, and so I added them in order to preserve the professional look I was aiming for. An easily avoidable mistake that will surely not happen again.