

John Riddy

John Riddy studied painting at London's Chelsea School of Art and began taking photographs to document other painter's canvases and sculptures. Space is Riddy's subject, and for him the task is to resolve the complexities he finds in the built environment and in landscapes. He first came to critical attention in the early 1990s with his functional black-and-white pictures of unpopulated architectural spaces.

An iconic work from this period is "New York 1994", which depicts a monumental hall in Grand Central Terminal – made strangely memorable due to the presence of a chandelier. Such work encouraged inevitable comparisons with the 'straight photography' of Eugene Atget, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and Walker Evans, who all to some extent made the cultural vestige their subject. In fact, Riddy's work of that time bears closer resemblance to that of the poetic photographer of buildings and interiors, Edwin Smith.

In 2000 Riddy found new challenges in the work of literary adaptation or interpretation. His key book and touring exhibition "Praeterita" takes its name from the autobiography of the Victorian art critic John Ruskin. The project, which comprises twenty-eight photographs, involved travelling to some of the landscapes, cityscapes and interiors encountered by Ruskin. Each picture refers to a passage from the book in which Ruskin movingly recaptures memories from his life. The sequencing of images in Riddy's work demonstrates his conceptual sophistication. The "Praeterita" pictures are characterized by the detached – Riddy once called it "Reticent"- approach of earlier work. Number 21 in the series, titled "The Feasts of the Vandals", is a view of a deserted English beach at that time of day when shadows lengthen. The eye is led to the middle of the horizon where the row of beach huts and the shoreline converge. Before our eyes, countless sets of footprints are preserved by the sand, stretching to infinity. Somehow one can't imagine Riddy intruding into the scene to leave his own trace for the record. The stillnesses, absent presences and contradictions of place continue to be his theme. Since 2004, with the exhibitions "Recent Places" and "Skies", Riddy has been taking colour pictures. Again, this encompasses landscapes and cityscapes. Buildings, some photographed at night, are represented as deserted and as if there was something artificial about their appearance of permanence.

While Riddy has benefited from the recent revival of interest in 'styleless' photography, he lacks (and has no use for) the self-reflexive irony of much of it. By contrast, it could be said that his work aspires to something Utopian: a

purity or innocence that is outside art and outside time. In an interview of 1996 Riddy confessed to a romantic sensibility, “if ‘romantic’ means believing you can transform reality through representing it”. David Ryan sums up Riddy’s achievement as “allowing a free play correspondences and connections to occur” between either side of the viewfinder.

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