

*All the management of our lives depends on the senses, and since that of sight is the most comprehensive and the noblest of these, there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to augment its power are among the most useful that there can be.*

René Descartes

*I have discarded clarity as worthless. Working in darkness I have discovered lighting.*

André Breton

In our image obsessed culture— with its emphasis on sight, on lightness and brightness, on clarity, visibility, transparency etc.— an exhibition of photography about darkness and seeing might seem perverse. It might evoke something of the trauma of not seeing, a childhood fear of being stuck in the dark, or of claustrophobia or blindness or anxiety. And yet darkness is not only about not seeing, somehow it is also connected to the sense of not knowing, of not understanding, of being, quite literally, ‘in the dark’. And despite photography’s inherent dependence on light, this is where it can, in a very real sense, evoke ‘darkness’ and all its different associations.

For this exhibition, members of Photodebut present photographic work loosely connected to the theme of darkness. Each has interpreted the idea in their own way, teasing out different meanings, different associations that reflect the various backgrounds and approaches to photographic practise of the members of the group- from fashion, photo-documentary and editorial through to the use of photography in the context of fine art.

‘It went dark and I saw...’, the seemingly contradictory statement proposed to the group as a starting point has thrown up a typically diverse range of responses. Few of the photographers have chosen to work with actual darkness. Instead, on a vibrant and chaotic journey, we are lead through time zones and continents— from steely grey cityscapes in anonymous urban sprawl seen through the orangey blur of raindrops, to Rome and an afternoon storm on a sweltering day that covers the Colosseum in a thin layer of sand... a modern day Pompeii. A girl bathes herself at night in inky black water; a woman applies mascara, the torture-like instruments distorting her face; a young man sweaty and saucer-eyed leans into the camera— both very alive and spaced-out dead at the same time. A starry sky in Australia shines a vivid and unreal blue like a backdrop; pizza boxes in the window of a cafe are spot lit in perfect symmetry, evoking both a Prada display case and some kind of space age puppet theatre; children pose in makeshift ghost costumes while elsewhere demonstrators rally in Serbia... passionate, fierce, vital and raw. From the surrealy dressed rooms in a funeral parlour, to a suburban meadow with plastic fencing that glows the brightest orange against a smouldering leaden sky, the diversity of the work in this exhibition made me think again how the world is as interconnected as it is unconnected.

—Sophy Rickett