

DAVID MITCHELL: Bio

Mitchell's photography career started in the early eighties in London, Florence and Milan. In 1991 he moved to Hong Kong where he found instant success shooting for prestigious fashion labels including Christian Dior and Laura Biagiotti. He worked almost exclusively in black & white, creating a unique signature style with conscious echoes of Jacques-Henri Lartigue.

His international reputation growing quickly, Mitchell was engaged to shoot editorial for the very top international fashion magazines: Vogue and Elle. He was also a pioneer in Asia as the first successful foreign photographer on the dynamic Thai fashion scene, shooting extensively for top publications. His work became recognized by the advertising industry and he continued to expand into the commercial world and built up a considerable roster of clients such as Singapore Airlines, Mercedes-Benz, Sony, Hong Kong Bank, Ericsson. As imitators clamored to emulate his classic styling in stills, he segued to explore the moving image in both personal and commercial work through film. He welcomed the opportunity to direct projects for the National Kidney Foundation in Singapore which dealt with severe disability and terminal illness in children. He was also invited to be the Director of Photography to shoot the Royal Thai Anti Drugs campaigns as his interest in working in the fashion industry due to its superficiality dwindled. In the mid nineties beginning to diversify into the fine art arena, he received requests from private collectors interested in his fine art works at which point he began to shoot in color more frequently and he continues in this vein today continuing to develop a body of work considered highly collectable. This work has now been made available to a wider audience after exhibitions in Shanghai and Singapore. Having sold out many of the older collections of early work his more contemporary print work is now available in strictly limited editions. The artist divides his time between his homes in Bangkok and Singapore, energized by the dynamism and color of the region.

LYLE REXER-

The Dog Must Howl: On the Art of David Mitchell

What is it we see when we open our eyes on the world? What can art show us of that? With a profound immediacy, the work of David Mitchell has revived these questions posed by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty once wrote of painting, "...it offers to vision its inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real." The philosopher had little interest in photography, given its traditionally static, not to say iconic relationship to material reality. Merleau-Ponty's great theme was the imaginative construction of reality through the artist's perception, a profound hunger to make what is outside inside – and vice versa. This hunger impels the work of David Mitchell, a photographer unique among his contemporaries.

Usually the attempt by photographers to pursue a path outward from the inside leads either to surrealism or to a kind of coat-tail pulling formalism, where visual analogy is meant to stand in for psychic and spiritual connection. This is in contrast to other more political forms of abstraction in photography, from early Suprematism and the New Vision of the Bauhaus, whose point was to promote an idea of order beyond the visible, to contemporary content-free imagery that seeks to foreclose any interpretation at all: what you see is what you get.

David Mitchell uses the techniques of photography, combined with digital tools, to make an image of his inner experience, to build toward specificity rather than to court ambiguity. That inner experience is one of unsurpassed intensity and visual richness, a space where his physical body and its events intersect the world and its impressions. An earlier time, Merleau-Ponty's for instance, would have called the response visionary, before that word was trivialized. In the starkest terms, it involves Mitchell's attempt to find a visual "language" for depicting supremely altered states of perception and consciousness induced by left temporal lobe epilepsy, which first appeared a decade ago. He does not make metaphors, as conventional photographers unavoidably do. He strives for an impossible transparency.

Clinical literature is accumulating about LTLE, presenting stories of individuals with the condition experiencing episodes of unquenchable creativity, in fields that often have no prior relevance to their symptomless lives. That is not quite true in Mitchell's case. He had been a successful fashion and editorial photographer, so the camera as a device and his professional milieu implanted a repertoire of responses (choices about framing, point of view, depth of field, color, and graphic form, as well as *mise-en-scène* and narrative arrangement). Thus, along with the "what" of his art there was already a nascent sense of "how." Yet nothing prepared him for the "what," the overwhelming tide of sensations and memories that LTLE triggers. As he describes it, the experience is like opening a box he never knew existed, and finding inside it everything, but transformed beyond recognition: sight, sound, smell, color, space, memory, corporeality itself. He stands outside himself, aware of his body immersed in the tide of intense colors, auras, sounds, forms. Suddenly, in a rush, the fullness of being is opened and "the inward tapestry of vision" revealed. It is bliss, but crushing.

With these episodes came the sudden drive to give form to an expression, to do what the dreamer inside the grip of a dream cannot do, which is to seize and transmit some aspect of it. "The dog howls at the moon," says Mitchell. "The dog has no choice. I have no choice but to try to snatch what I can." Which is not to say that the process of translation, or call it assimilation, is easy or simple. Merleau-Ponty's writing on Cezanne has unveiled the shifting intricacy of an artist's attempts to capture the visible. Yet with Mitchell's work there is a sense that the search for appropriate means was and is inevitable because the pull of the subject is so strong. The search continues, impelled by vision, what he calls his lucid dreaming.

The first and most important step for Mitchell was to jettison black and white photography in favor of color. His antiquarian comfort, the comfort of formalism and control, could not withstand the tide of sensation. It would have been like singing in silence. Colors can blend and match or clamor discordantly, only to form new accords. Color binds us to the surrounding world, an actual ligament. Color reminds us that the experience of our being is more than an image or an idea; it is a totality, lived through our bodies, indivisible. Working with color, the artist works with the world, with the light that emanates from it. Black and white could reenter his thinking – as it has recently in engrossing large-scale works – only after color had changed his vision by revealing light's dual character, transformative and transparent. At the same time, Mitchell needed a foundation for the work, a visual starting point, like the initial mark on a canvas, and he found it in fabric he would collect then assemble into graphic constructions. In early works, he preserved visual references to this collage foundation, whose materials were discarded after photographing. The impulse may have been to ground the images by providing a sign to the viewer that the photographs were exactly that and that they were about something, that is, something distinctly out there.

Since 2010 and especially in the most recent images, that anchor has been cut loose. The foundational constructions are no longer apparent as such, with fewer and fewer anecdotal references (mesh, torn fabric edges, tape). Memory and loss, the classic themes of photography, no longer haunt the pictures. They have become more abstract, richer in information and visual texture and, I believe, truer to their intentions. Critical attempts to affiliate the work with constructivism, concrete art and minimalism, all ideologically based movements long since extinct, make little sense. Mitchell might be practicing a species of process art, except that he appears to have no interest in process for its own sake or in chance, except insofar as these might lead him closer to his elusive goal. The outcome cannot be known in advance, but that doesn't mean unpredictability is the point. Mitchell uses both in-camera strategies, including double exposures, extreme close ups, gels and filters, and, post facto, digital programs. He clearly does not care about photographic purity or issues of ontology and virtuality. He makes images to approach ever more faithfully the texture of his experiences. "I have to surrender to the process so I can work quickly," he says. "Otherwise I feel I am dragging a dead weight." His techniques are not rocket science, but they illustrate a fundamental

axiom of creativity, that everything is explored on a need-to-know basis. Like Cezanne, who constantly lamented his lack of ability as a painter, if Mitchell needs it, he figures out how to do it, and figuring it out leads him to new and better ways of rendering. Like Cezanne, who constantly lamented his lack of ability as a painter, if Mitchell needs it, he figures out how to do it, and figuring it out leads him to new and better ways of rendering which can only approach the goal and, thus, prompt yet another beginning, another series. As the work becomes less nostalgic, it becomes more poignant.

It recalls the character of the land surveyor in Kafka's *The Castle*, who gains a blasted grandeur as his goal recedes. Not that Mitchell is a martyr. He has stated that if he were given the chance to be cured of his epilepsy, as debilitating as it often is, he would not take it. Having howled at the moon, he cannot give it up but must pursue the moon in its insurmountable distance because it is the most beautiful object in the sky.

Lyle Rexer

Brooklyn, New York

Lyle Rexer is a critic, curator, and lecturer. He was educated at the University of Michigan, Columbia University (from which he holds B.A. and M.A. degrees), and Merton College, Oxford University, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar. He is the author of several books, including *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography* (2009), for which he received a grant from the Arts Writers Grant Program of the Andy Warhol Foundation, and *Photography's Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave in Old Processes* (2002), which showcased contemporary photographers working with 19th century photographic techniques. He has published many catalogue essays and hundreds of articles in a variety of publications, including *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *Harper's*, *Aperture*, *Modern Painters*, *Parkett*, and *Tate*, Etc. As a curator, he has organized exhibitions in the United States and internationally, including "The Edge of Vision: Abstraction in Contemporary Photography." Lyle Rexer teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and is a columnist for *Photograph* magazine.

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BORN 1964, Brighton, England

EXHIBITIONS

2011 Conversations in Post Minimalist Abstraction – Jim Kempner Fine Art, NY

2011 RMA Institute, Bangkok, Thailand

Solo Exhibition Concretism/Abstracts 2011

2011 Sande Webster Gallery 2010 Group Retrospective

2011 Chemtura Corporation 2011 NYDC Highland Park NY, NY

2011 Perkin's Center for the Arts, NJ, *Photography 30, Group exhibition*

2010 RVS Gallery, Southampton, NY

2010 Sande Webster Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

*Divergence: Five photographers' views on the changing
medium of photography in the 21st century*

2010 First Light Gallery, Brighton, UK

2010 The Viewing Room, *Janusian*, NY, NY

2010 Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY

2009 Surface Library Gallery, *Textures*, East Hampton, NY

2009 NEOCON, Chicago

2009 The Natural History Museum Vienna

2008 Bloom Bangkok

2004 The American Club Singapore

2003 Bund 18 Shanghai

2003 Gendela Gallery, The Esplanade Singapore

1989 Pizzo, Calabria Italy

CLIENTS/COLLECTORS

Chemtura Corporation

Universal Studios/Relativity's Rogue Pictures: Limitless

Open 4 Business Production, LLC (Royal Pains/USA Network)

LAB Film and Content (White Collar Promo Trailer/USA Network)

CBS Productions. Inc. (Blue Bloods/CBS)Epson

20th Century Fox: Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps

Epson

De Beers Diamonds

Vogue Magazine

Elle Magazine

Christian Dior

Laura Biagiotti

Kei Ito

Bund 18 Shanghai

Singapore Airlines

Citibank

Ericsson

Sony Bank of Indonesia

DBS Bank

Banyan Tree Hotels: Bangkok, Phuket, Maldives

Oriental Hotel

Shangri-La Hotel

Metropolitan

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Royal Thai Anti Drugs campaign

Film Director: NKF, Singapore

Film Director: Central Department Store

Film Director: Homeland Securities, Singapore

Film Director: Kei Ito designer; short film project

Filer Director: Bund 18 young fashion designers, Shanghai

Managing Director: Yo-Yo Film Productions Pte Ltd

Managing Director: David Mitchell Photography

Film Director: Two Oceans Productions, Singapore

Managing Director: Addspin Pte Ltd, Singapore

Managing Director: Suekai.com Pte Ltd