

Mat Hughes. Photographic Artist



Still life-balance #2, 2020

This image, (one of six handmade photographs), was made in a 'still-life style' during the recent Melbourne lockdown.

The series explores the theme of isolation and life-balance and was made over a two-week period. The photographs attempt to describe my state of mind, the sense of endless mundane routine that shaped our house-bound lives and contrasts it with the often overlooked simple pleasures, like seeing the sheer beauty of sunlight falling on a vase of flowers.

But these are not simply static still-life vignettes, they come with a chase scene. This is a pictorialist demonstration in composition. The sunlight appears to visibly race across the wall infusing the scene with a warm glow and in that perfect fraction of a second everything is in absolute balance and all of our current worries are forgotten and we can once again breathe.

These photographs were made on film using a large format 4x5 camera. There was no obvious lens. Instead, two magnifying glasses were taped together and fixed to the camera body. The only aperture was a large gaping hole. Neutral density filters were the braking system that slowed light down.

Prints were made by hand using the 19th century, Van Dyke Brown printing process which does not require a light tight darkroom nor complex equipment.

A combination of traditional film photography and digital techniques allowed for a digital negative to be made from the exposed film. The digital negative was then contact printed for the final print.

In a digital age where granular sharpness is often the benchmark, these images present an older artisanal practice, one that celebrates authenticity. One where paper is coated by hand with a light sensitive emulsion, where prints are finished with varnish and bees wax and the finished work is presented as a tactile object behind a finely crafted picture frame.

