

New Contemporaries

Sean Patrick Campbell

The effects of sitting with Sean Patrick Campbell's work aren't immediately noticeable. As you scroll through the mostly black and white images, taking in the often sparse compositions, you suddenly appreciate that you've been in quiet contemplation with these images for several minutes without even realising. It's not that the work is innocuous; far from it. It's more that there is an emotional subtlety running through his entire oeuvre that quietly keeps you with him on the journeys through his landscapes, both physical and metaphorical.

As a white able-bodied male, Campbell is acutely aware of the privileged position from which his work is made. But these images do not simply reflect a white western male's point of view. Their sensitivity and generosity helps create a safe space, allowing the viewer to become complicit in the very same journey of self-discovery that Campbell is himself on with his own photography. By posing the questions to himself about home and spirituality and mythology he is tacitly encouraging us to explore our own sense of self and place and home.

Photography can often be misused as a tool to push the views of a photographer and whatever agenda they are working to. And in the case of *SWOLLEN UTOPIA* Sean could have made just such a body of work. Coming from a disadvantaged town in the west of Scotland he could have easily mined the run-down areas of his post-industrial, now nuclear, homeland to create some poverty porn – thinly disguised as virtuous social documentary. Indeed, he has been criticised for not embracing that opportunity. But as he has commented:

I have no interest in saying this is what a poor town in the west of Scotland is like. What I want is for someone to look at those photos and ask those questions about the difference between our memories of our hometown and our experiences with them as we go back to them and how those help shape and mythologise you as an adult.

And that's what I mean when I say his work is generous.

Through his images, his texts and further discussion with the artist, it is clear that he has an enduring respect for the art of photography and the capacity it has to change the way people think and feel, himself included. As a result of this, his work is filled with a thoughtfulness and humility that sees him work, not as a master of his craft,

but more as a temporary custodian of a long-established legacy which will undoubtedly outlast him. Having worked long enough in the world of photography I know all too well that this is often not the case: arrogance being all too prevalent in some of the photographic circles I have found myself. To experience a photographer and photographic work that is humble and generous to its viewers has been a tonic to the oftentimes egotistical and selfish work that peppers the current photographic landscape. And I think that's where the strength of Campbell's work lies; in its ability to successfully walk that line between hyper-personal, but universal, and its ability to say so much both with so little and without shouting.

When I sat down to write this piece, I noted to myself what it was going to be about and, whilst initially for my eyes only, I feel it's a fitting way to end. My aim has been to explain how Sean's work is more about your own experience with the subject rather than just accepting his view. It's an opportunity to not only bear witness to his work and his experience but also to be as personally explorative of yourself and – really – what you need to do is just let his work happen to you and see where you end up.

Kat Gollock

You can find out more about Sean Patrick Campbell's work at [www.spcampbellart.cargo.site](http://www.spcampbellart.cargo.site)



Opposite top:  
From the series  
*Occlusional Landscapes*

Opposite below:  
From the series  
*SWOLLEN UTOPIA*

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Right:  
From the series  
*A Herald! in vibrant ends*

Opposite top:  
From the series  
*SWOLLEN UTOPIA*

Opposite below:  
From the series  
*A Herald! in vibrant ends*

