



A Day in the Life... Fine Art Photographer

If you're dreaming of selling personal work to collectors then read on, as Jo Scott explains what life is like for the fine art photographer and how it can complement commercial output.

WORDS & IMAGES JO SCOTT

DO YOU HAVE to make a conscious decision to either be a commercial photographer or one who focuses on fine art? The answer to that is a firm no, because, for me at least, fine art photography is a mindset, rather than something that's separate to anything else I do. I pick up on the beauty in everything, noticing the small details that are often overlooked or ignored, and my images are very much an expression of what I see. As a natural light and location specialist, I create images with connection, beauty and clarity in every aspect of my work, whether that might be personal fine art, family portraits or corporate photography.

How I first got into fine art photography is a bit of a long story. About ten years ago, I went on a writing retreat to south-west France for a couple of days with the intention of doing photography rather than writing, simply to have some thinking and creative time away from my business and my young family. We stayed in a dilapidated ancient town house and I can't explain how inspired I was by the crumbling building. Bizarrely, I started writing as well as photographing how it made me feel, and I created a whole series of images that 'spoke' to me of the building. It was a total surprise and very enjoyable.

By coincidence, I had set up a meeting on my return with my mentor, Kevin Wilson, to explore how I might move towards a Fellowship at the BIPP. I had expected the discussion to be around portraiture, as I had my Associateship in that genre, but it quickly became clear that I wanted to immerse myself in creating fine art photography.

With this in mind, I set out to locate dilapidated buildings that I could photograph. When I found Victoria Baths



in Manchester, I knew this was the place and, after researching Victorian-era swimming pools, I ended up with a series of writings, drawings and images of this location, which made up my Fellowship submission in Fine Art to the BIPP.

It was a real turning point in my career. Not only had I achieved the highest accolade I could from that body, but at the same time I had discovered a passion for fine art photography that continues to inspire me and inform my commercial work as well. Everything I do is rooted in this genre. Clients will see the artistic influence, even in the most commercial of my photographs, and it's the creativity of thought that goes into my image-making that sets me apart from other

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commercial photographers.

It's now really important to me that I set time aside for personal projects. Deciding what the theme will actually be is fluid, in that I don't have a list of subjects, but go with what inspires me at the time. I try to take on one every year: my latest involved taking a 'photo a day' in lockdown from day one. It was highly spontaneous and was all about expressing my feelings through photography. The year before was 'Angels and Urchins' which explored feelings about my own childhood, and I've been working on one about artists for about six years! This is finally coming to fruition at the moment in the form of a book.

In terms of a typical day, I would say that it's hard for me to be specific because, as I've mentioned, fine art infuses everything I do. Some commercial clients commission me specifically because of my approach to photography and they give me creative freedom around what I produce. For example, it might be that I have a product range to photograph and, in these circumstances, I will develop a theme for the photography that's on brand for them. I might then go about creating further little sets for each product that sit with the theme but these will be individual to that particular item and will add something extra.

Creative Thoughts

If I'm progressing a personal fine art project, time on a typical day might be spent working on the creative thought process in advance of the shoot date. On the day itself, I might have to arrange for models to be in certain locations, sort out the clothes I want them to wear and then spend the allotted time creating images, at which point I'm in the visually creative zone. In terms of kit, I use the same for both personal and commercial projects: a Canon 5D MkIV and a 50mm prime or 70-200mm zoom, and sometimes an iPhone. The big difference is that personal projects take place over a period of time, when I can fit them in, whereas paid work is done to a specific timescale.

I see the fact that I'm a fine art photographer as part of my make-up and my fine art pieces, whether they are books or prints, support my values and my brand. So, I don't currently market or promote the projects in a conventional way. I did produce and sell books and prints of my Victoria Baths Fellowship



project, which went to homes as far away as Japan, and I'm just completing a book on my artists' project, with the one after that featuring my lockdown 'photo a day' set. The value of such things to me is intangible: they show potential clients who I am and what makes me tick. My prints are showcased on my website and promoted through social media as well

I haven't yet had an exhibition of my fine art, although it's something I often think about. The cost and time you need to expend can be prohibitive, unless there's a specific desired outcome. All the prints I sell are on archival fine art paper and I outsource them to a master printer who I trust to produce the highest of quality. Most are signed limited editions and can be purchased framed or unframed, and it's just another way of putting myself out there. **PP**

More information:
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MPB Used Kit List

If you're shooting fine art images then almost anything goes, but it's good to have some resolution under the bonnet. MPB's used kit expert Marc Read suggests three alternative kits.

Fujifilm X-T3 (Excellent, £839) + Fujifilm XF 90mm f/2 R LM WR (Excellent, £614)

Make the switch and keep yourself updated with the latest mirrorless technology. The Fujifilm X-T3 is user-friendly, lightweight and beautiful too. The image quality is also especially impressive, and comes with very good noise and dynamic range performance. Pick out details with the Fujifilm XF 90mm f/2: this lens is especially well suited to a variety of shooting applications, most notably portraiture.

Sony A7R II (Excellent, £1,069) + Sony FE 85mm f/1.4 GM (Like New, £1,199)

The Sony A7R II features the world's first back-illuminated full-frame 42.4MP Exmor R CMOS sensor, which delivers high resolution and high sensitivity. The camera also includes a five-axis image stabilisation system and can shoot and record 4K video in multiple formats, including Super 35mm and full-frame format, a world-first for digital cameras. Meanwhile, pairing a bright aperture with a short-telephoto focal length, the Sony FE 85mm f/1.4 GM lens is ideally suited for portraiture and other situations where focus control is paramount for the photographer.

Nikon D810 (Good, £859) + Sigma 24mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art (Like New, £514)

The Nikon D810 DSLR offers outstanding picture quality in a well-built camera. The impressive full-frame 36MP sensor allows you to capture every scene in complete clarity, and to print to a large scale, which could be a big selling point for fine art photographers looking to offer collectors the option of big prints. A great partner for this camera is the Sigma 24mm f/1.4 DG HSM, a wide and fast Nikon F-Mount prime that's a member of the highly regarded Sigma Art line. This high-quality lens is characterised by its advanced optical construction and robust physical design, and it's capable of doing full justice to the resolution that this pro-spec camera can provide.