



Open  
College  
of the Arts

## Formative feedback

Student name	Thomas Pal	Student number	520377
Course/Unit	Context and Narrative	Assignment number	Two
Type of tutorial	Written		

### Overall Comments

#### *Photographing the Unseen*

Below I've offered you a number of observations about the work, the conceptual framing of it and the way you approach the writing. Your approach to the challenge of *Photographing The Unseen* is slightly untypical so you will need to very clearly signal to assessors why this work fits the brief - even though the brief is intentionally very broad in scope and possibility.

### Assignment 2 Assessment Potential

*I understand your aim is to go for the Photography/Creative Arts\* Degree and that you plan to submit your work for assessment at the end of this course. From the work you have shown in this assignment, providing you commit yourself to the course, I believe you have the potential to pass at assessment. In order to meet all the assessment criteria, there are certain areas you will need to focus on, which I will outline in my feedback.*

### Feedback on Assignment

#### *Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity*

Essentially, you seem to propose that beauty is unseen or un-seeable and that through use of your application of visual devices and through the act of photography a beauty that is hidden can be revealed. Of course this raises the issue of beauty being in the eye of the beholder and whether beauty as you present it can be universal and perceived by everyone.

Although this body of work contains some similar visual characteristics to the work from the first assignment I can appreciate from your maps and written notes that you were inspired by the brief of 'unseen'. If I recall, the first assignment also did touch on this when you experimented with what might be hidden or revealed of the same image file. In those your method created two sets of images showing different content and, therefore, two potential meanings. In this new work the impetus was to discover something that you call 'hidden beauty'. Again these new images share similar urban or city locations and you make good visual use of high contrast light and monochromatic strong geometric shapes to find and frame strangers that you observed in those spaces.

I'd like to have seen how you get these types of images to deliver the same furtive or mysterious quality through the use of colour. Removing the colour of course is an option available to all photographers, but when you go down this route it can add to the sense of visual history and harks back to the time when black and white was the dominant or the exclusive mode of photography.

You should reveal to the assessors not only your contact sheets, so also include notes that show your personal analysis and critical thinking around the concept of beauty that you are using to underpin the project. As well as exploring colour you might also experiment with picture aspect ratios. For instance how might the intrigue and tension become more condensed through changing from a 4:3 aspect ratio to a square format, or a very wide cinematic frame? As the course is concerned with narrative you might explore whether the images be shot and/or organized into sequential piece of work, or whether the images might suit being organized and designed into a small limited book or slide show.

I feel that your set of images could be made more visually coherent around your concept. The first four I think are the most engaging through their use of the figure appearing out of sheer darkness – especially images two to four. These imply the city without revealing particular settings and they get much closer to a sense of abstraction through the play of light and shade on surfaces and in space alone. You might position for instance images three and four side by side or one after the other and observe how your concept changes to one suggesting a male-female dialogue. You might reflect on what it is you sense that the darkness represents or evokes in the imagination of the viewer. As I said in my last feedback this type of city lighting is an often-used trope in particular forms of cinema such as Film Noir so get to know a little about these references because audiences will make those interconnections.

Technically all is fine, but I did think that the female figure in image four is left very detached, as the black is very black in this one. Some areas of the others in the set are interesting when the frames of the urban structures to isolate small elements such as the Millennium Wheel or the building corner in image 4.

Personally, I don't think that your captions add much at all. If your intention is to seek out some idea of beauty through framing and through the timing of the exposure then stick to this and build your understanding of it as an emerging personal language. The words confuse the simple strategy that you are working with. I would build on the images one to four and not stray too far from this language of abstraction, constraint and intrigue.

#### Coursework

##### *Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity*

You are doing well with the coursework. It is interesting that you weave your own life experiences into the analysis and into projects. The work on images and text is quite potent - it should be when we cover such tragic history, and in the drama of the images that you put together for this piece.

In project three you could push your positions to the two questions further and even bring in examples to reinforce or illustrate your argument.

## Research

*Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis*

Your engagement in research and how you start to incorporate this new understanding into your writing is central to degree level study. Your introductory text that contextualizes these images needs to become more focused on where you discovered the term beauty comes from, and you need to show a desire to get beyond a simple use of the word to building a deeper knowledge of its debates.

Your introduction starts off well and then you take the reader into the how you made the images. If your research reading or investigating the work of other photographers helps, then build this formally into your introductions. It is very normal that students new to studying when they run out of things to say about meaning and reading linked to theory, drift across into making of the work. Try to avoid this for now and concentrate on the progressive development of your skill in talking about the meaning or reading of the images.

A couple of references:

Ralph Gibson below would be a helpful reference for this current work. He's internationally known for his prolific publication of photo books. Very much at his height when I started out so a little dated now. He's not everyone's cup of tea, but the backbone of his work touches on abstraction, light and implied narrative, which I can see in your some of your photographs.

Rut Blees Luxemburg has an international reputation for her stunning photographs of city spaces. Her work is greatly informed by painting history and she articulates very well the context of her work. She shoots mainly at night of a large format camera so shoots less but contemplates the value of each exposure very carefully.

In some respects at this level it is not that you can say with certainty that you have revealed beauty, but that the making of the images allowed you to explore the possibility, and that you are trying to begin a personal deconstruction this everyday term.

## Learning Log

*Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis*

It is positive that you included on your blog the brainstorming that you undertook. This is well organized graphically, but maybe show what you thought about what you covered in the diagram. One of the branches is hidden beauty so explain to yourself on the diagram why this branch appealed to you above any other. Beauty as a term will need more investigation through research to start to unpack its complex vocabulary and the philosophical concepts of it as it applies to experience and the visual arts. Don't worry because at this stage in the course assessors will mainly be looking for you to demonstrate a curiosity and responsibility that takes you one step into deepening your knowledge of the concept of beauty, not knowing everything. I've given one reference (Benezra) that might start that journey.

## Suggested reading/viewing Context

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/chiaroscuro>

<http://www.ralphgibson.com/1971-2000-chiaroscuro.html>

Neal David Benezra, (2000), *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*, Hirschorn Museum & Sculpture

<https://www.bjp-online.com/2018/02/rut-blees-luxemburg-modern-project-liebeslied/>

Rut blees Luxemburg, (2000), *Visurbia*, Verlag Das Wunderhorn

Strengths	Areas for development
Solid technical control although I've yet to see any colour work so do try some out	An effort is needed to increasingly bring in theory and cultural context into the assignment work to give it context.
Good instinctive eye for composition and happy to try out different framings – you could try getting closer in some	With each approach that you take to assignments show that you have tried research and developed your knowledge of the field.
Good coursework responses but could be further extended	Reveal more about the internal thinking and analysis that takes the work from start to finish

Tutor name	Dr. Andy Langford
Date	25 <sup>th</sup> April 2020
Next assignment due	TBC