



STEVE SMITH FRPS
SUPPORTING STATEMENT
More Than Old Cars and Cigars
 When Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, Cuba became a communist state overnight, which immediately impacted on the country's relationship with its neighbour the United States. Since the Cuban Missile crisis in the early 1960s, Cuba has been subjected to a trade embargo by the USA which, along with the loss of funding from the USSR in 1990, has left it struggling and isolated, with the few available resources concentrated on public health and education.

Now that Fidel Castro has resigned as President, are things about to change? I visited Cuba in 2006, and change is visible.

The town of Trinidad is a Unesco World Heritage site, and many properties are

Continued on p551 undergoing refurbishment on the back of this funding.

The same applies to the island's capital, Havana, which is littered with construction projects - many joint ventures with foreign companies.

Following a mass exodus after food shortages in the late 1980s, some two million Cubans now reside in the USA. Money and clothes are sent to families back in Cuba, and this has an impact on everyday lives.

The revenue that tourism generates is also having an influence, which will only increase in the coming years.

The purpose of these photographs is to capture the citizens and environment of Cuba as it is now: people living their lives, whether working, travelling, socialising or just having fun. There is more to Cuba than old American cars and cigars.

Facing page, below: Barber Shop, from Steve Smith's successful Fellowship panel.
Top: Steve Smith FRPS: Hanging plan.



COHESIVE & CONSISTENT

John Chamberlin FRPS, Visual Art Panel Chair, looks at recent successful Fellowships by Steve Smith and Dianne Owen, as well as discussing the standards required in order to gain a Visual Art Associateship or Fellowship

Visual art (pictorial) photography has held a central place in The Royal Photographic Society since its formation. Surveys of members' interests consistently show this to be the case, and the increasing number of submissions for Visual Art Associate and Fellowship Distinctions further reflects this.

A Visual Art Associate or Fellowship submission should consist of images which communicate a personal vision or style, conveying a sense of design, emotion, mood, or some meaning which encourages the viewer to look beyond the subject matter. There are no restrictions on subject, the choice of which is up to the applicant, but the submission must be much more than a record.

Assessment criteria

Submissions are assessed against six criteria: Quality of Communication, Degree of Originality, Cohesion, Artistic Sensitivity, Technical Skill, and Presentation. The Panel looks for a clear visual statement, which conveys a personal view. The photographer must be 'involved' with the subject matter. The submission should be cohesive, and of a consistent quality, in keeping with the level at which the author is working. Finally, the work should be well presented, although how this is done is up to the applicant. It is not obligatory for either printing or presentation to have been carried out by the photographer.

At Fellowship, the personal vision should be of the highest order. This is easier to observe than to put into words. The Panel is constantly surprised by the sheer variety of the work that is placed before it. While it of course receives traditional subjects such as landscapes, it also welcomes creative submissions that, on occasion, push the boundaries of the medium. Equally, some submissions employ older processes that have been revived in the digital age.

Narrow focus

Images submitted are viewed as a set. This has led in recent years to more narrowly focused Associate submissions. While a narrow focus is appropriate at Fellowship level, where we want photographers to show highly original approaches to their specialities, at Associate we do also encourage broader submissions, perhaps encompassing two or three themes. While it is important that images work together, applicants must also ensure that concern over this aspect of a submission does not override other criteria.

An Associate application should consist of 15 images which, in the case of prints, should be arranged in two or three rows to form a balanced whole. Submissions should be sequenced to produce a flow that is visually appealing. At Fellowship, 20 prints or slides are required. Applications on CD are accepted only at Associate level.

At both Associate and Fellowship levels, it is possible to submit work in book form. Details of the requirements are set out in the *Distinctions Handbook*, and also on the website. It is wise to check current regulations before submitting any portfolio, as amendments do occur from time to time.

Steve Smith FRPS and Dianne Owen FRPS

Though differing in subject matter, both successful Fellowship submissions presented here reflect the photographers' individual styles. Steve Smith's monochrome images are well seen, with each telling a story. The photographer is totally involved with his subject, and not only are the images successful individually, but the project hangs together as a coherent body of work. The quality of the printing is superb, and the project well presented.

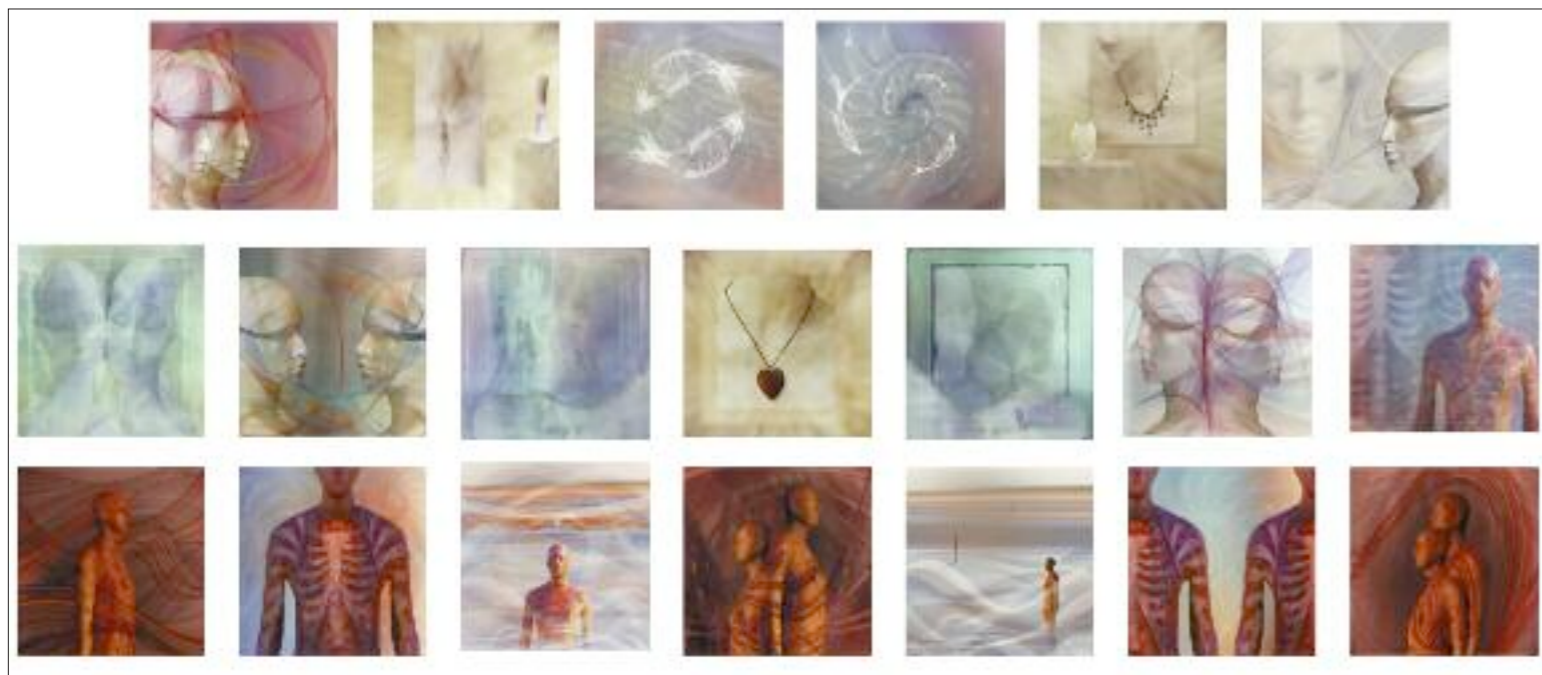
Dianne Owen's project reflects an entirely different approach to visual art. Again, it is clearly the work of a distinctive photographer with a creative mind. This project too is beautifully printed and presented, and has that important 'wow factor'. The Visual Art Panel felt privileged to see such exciting work, and my hearty congratulations go to both photographers.

The Society's standards

RPS staff and Panel members are here to help. While we would much prefer you to pass than fail, it is vital that The Society's standards are maintained, and this inevitably means that not all applications are successful. At Associate level, about 45% of print applications succeed, and the pass rate with projected images is much lower.

Fellowship is even harder to achieve, with about one in seven applications being successful. If all applicants were fully prepared and totally familiar with the process however, these rates would show a distinct improvement. It is important to do your homework. A carefully considered application is much more likely to succeed than one submitted in haste.

Restrictions on print size are to do with the ability to display them. Generally, A3 and A4 prints on suitable mounts are most appropriate, though with some



**DIANNE OWEN FRPS
SUPPORTING
STATEMENT
Gormley Men and The
Heads**

My Fellowship application was based on material I began at Associate level, when I was encouraged to develop my ideas, leading to the creation of images, on the themes of Gormley Men, and The Heads, which conveyed emotion and a strong sense of design.

The final images are printed on soft art paper, using a square format for images and mounts.

The journey was long and hard, and at times I almost threw in the towel, but with the encouragement of a mentor I persisted.

processes, a smaller size may be more suitable. However, quality is more important than size, with small prints often looking more effective on larger mounts.

Assessment sessions

The Panel meets three times a year, in the spring, summer and autumn, normally over two days, in order to give adequate time to evaluate each application fully. Typically, it views Associate applications on day one. This is done in open session, where applicants and others can see the adjudication taking place.

If you are contemplating a submission, you should take the opportunity to attend one of these sessions, enabling you to see the process at first hand, to view both successful and unsuccessful applications and, above all, hear the comments of Panel members.

Assessment dates are always published well in advance in the *Journal*. We receive regular feedback from attendees, who say how useful attendance has been for them. As most overseas members will not have the opportunity to attend a workshop or assessment session, The Society is looking to provide online and video support.

In the case of Fellowship, assessments are restricted to Panel members in a closed session, ensuring that full and frank discussion of the merits of applications can take place.

Supporting statement

While their work is being displayed, the applicant's statement is read out. It is important that the statement is a clear match with the images submitted.

The statement's purpose is to give the Panel an insight into the applicant's purpose and motivation in submitting the portfolio. We do not need to know what equipment was used, although sometimes brief information about an unusual technique can be of assistance to the Panel.

Panel members then view the work at close hand, before returning to their seats without discussing the merits of the submission. An initial vote is taken, with a green card shown for a pass and red for a fail.

If the vote is unanimous either way, the Chair

announces the decision immediately. Where a submission receives no support, Panel members are asked to indicate where the problems exist. This is intended to assist the applicant in any future submission.

In cases where the vote is split, a discussion to which all the members can contribute takes place. Following this, a second and final vote is taken. It is entirely possible that, having heard the views of others, members may change their minds.

Where there is a tied vote, the Chair makes the final decision. In the case of a failed application, Panel members make brief notes, which are collated and used in the written feedback to the applicant. They also act as an aide-mémoire to the Chair in any future correspondence.

No mention is made of the applicant's name, which is only known to the Chair. If, because of involvement at a workshop or through other contact with the individual, a Panel member recognises a body of work, the Chair is informed, although this does not usually prevent the member from having a vote. The Chair however will ask a Panel member to withdraw if they are related or closely connected to an applicant.

These procedures and practices have been developed over time, are intended to be fair to the applicant, and invoke best practice. The role of the Chair is to oversee proceedings, and to ensure that the assessment process is conducted in keeping with procedures laid down by The Society.

If it is felt the images are more suited to another Panel, the Chair has the authority to refer a submission, and the Chair is empowered to guide the Panel if it is felt that an incorrect decision is being reached.

Visual Art Distinction Panel members

All Visual Art Distinction Panel members hold Visual Art Fellowships. All are active photographers, and many are professional or semi-professional. They have been appointed for their expertise and breadth of appreciation for all areas of visual art photography, while several also work in other areas of photography.

The Chair will have served as an ordinary Panel member before taking on this role. All Panel members

give their time freely, and receive no financial reward.

The full Panel normally consists of 10-12 members, with five to seven sitting at any one time. Given the numbers appointed to the Panel, it is more than likely that, following a failed application, some members who did not see the original submission will assess any resubmission. With the approval of Council, a Panel member can serve for up to eight years without a break. Panel membership is usually reviewed every two years.

Fellowship Review Board

At Associate level, the Panel makes the recommendation of pass or fail and this has to be confirmed by Council; while at Fellowship, there is a two-stage process. If a majority of the Panel makes a recommendation in favour, the work is forwarded to the Fellowship Review Board for a final decision.

This Review Board consists of the Chairs of other Panels, together with voting members of the Distinction Advisory Board. Again, any recommendation to award a Fellowship goes before Council. In the case of an unusual submission, the Chair may also refer it to the Review Board for further consideration.

Feedback and support

Those who have approached Distinction Manager Andy Moore, or his assistant Ben Fox, will know

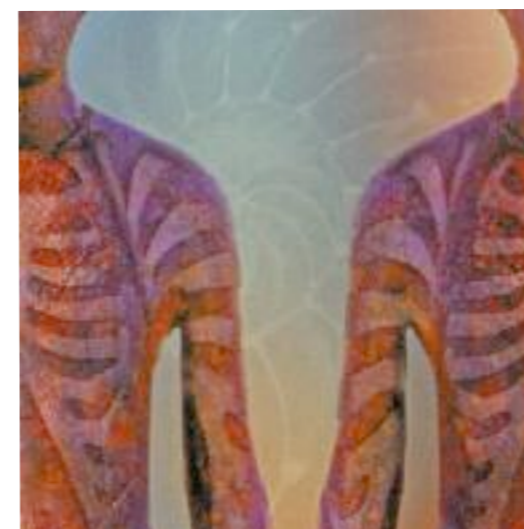
how helpful they are. However, they are extremely busy dealing with applications and queries, so please only approach them if you cannot obtain the information you need elsewhere.

While it is true that the level of feedback and support provided to failed candidates today would be unrecognisable to those who made submissions just a few years ago, The Society continues to seek to improve feedback to failed candidates and, as Chair, I am always happy to discuss the reasons for a failure and how improvements might be made. It is fully recognised that rejection can be upsetting, but if staff and Panel members are approached in a considered way, failed applicants will receive sympathy and support.

There are numerous workshops all over the country, which applicants and others can attend; adjudication at Associate level is open to applicants and observers; and an updated and user-friendly edition of the *Distinctions and Qualification Information Booklet* will shortly be available. Submissions are more likely to succeed where applicants have sought advice and carefully thought through the direction of their portfolio. It is inadvisable to set arbitrary dates for a submission; much better to submit when you and anyone advising you feel the application is ready.

Remember, a Distinction is something to aim for and achieve, but it is not a matter of life and death!

John Chamberlin FRPS, Visual Art Panel Chair



ASSOCIATE AND FELLOWSHIP
SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

- Read all current information available from The Society about making a submission. Contact the Distinction Manager at Bath for any clarification necessary

- Attend Distinction Workshops, where advice is given and successful panels displayed, ideally once as an observer and at least once with the proposed body of work

- In the case of Associateship, attend an assessment session at Bath and observe the process. Sessions where recent successful Fellowships are shown and discussed are also held in Bath

- Talk to others, particularly anyone who has gained a Distinction recently, and ask them for an honest opinion of your work. Be warned however, friends and family may find it difficult to be critical, and only Panel members will have a clear understanding of the standard required to achieve a pass

- If and when you have done all of the above, it may be possible to put you in touch with a Panel member who can give you more detailed support. However, Panel members lead busy lives, and it is important to have done your homework first

- Do not approach Panel members prior to an assessment with a view to gaining support, as this could invalidate your application

Facing page top: Dianne Owen FRPS: Hanging plan.
Above left: Armour.
Bottom left: Safety.
Both © Dianne Owen FRPS.