



FLOWER POWER

Cathy Roberts' journey in photography began in her childhood with the acquisition of a Box Brownie. Now a Society Fellow, she describes the route which led her to the ethereal and spectacular flower imagery with which she gained her Visual Art Distinction

“Flowers, from their first buds to the full blooms of maturity, have provided artists through the ages with inspiration and with a beautiful link to the world of nature. They are essentially short lived, giving us a series of fleeting impressions. I feel their appeal lies to a considerable extent in this evanescence and it is,

this which I have tried to capture with my images through abstraction. Colour can in some ways be a distraction, so by deliberately limiting my palette, I hope to convey the emotional reaction more directly.”

- Cathy Roberts FRPS' Statement of Intent accompanying her successful Fellowship application

My route to the Fellowship has been essentially the same as the story of my development as a photographer, rather than a separate branch of that story. I suppose in a sense it all began with the Box Brownie, the much longed for present at the age of 11. In another sense meanwhile, it began when I studied the history of art at university.

I didn't really explore much photographically, or actually acquire a 'proper' camera, however, until I met my husband, who came into my life with, among other things, an SLR, which I took over and never gave back.

That was over 25 years ago, and I very soon found in photography the complete answer to my desire for artistic expression. I went through an intense period of seeing, with very little technical back up and many ideas in my mind's eye, which never emerged quite as I imagined them!

This period of trial and error, tremendous pleasure

Above: Cathy Roberts FRPS' hanging plan for her successful Fellowship submission.

when ideas came to fruition, and real bafflement and frustration when they didn't, led me to enrol on various City & Guilds modules to learn the basics. I enjoyed these, and learned so much from them that I took seven modules in all, ranging from Starting Photography to Constructed Images (in the early days of digital, using Photoshop 3), and achieved distinctions in all seven. At the time, success in five led by exemption to the RPS Licentiate, so I became, to my considerable satisfaction, an LRPS in June 1995.

My ideas have always tended to find expression in images that are at some remove from reality, whether simplified, abstract, or modified in some way, and as I explored various subjects at this time, I began to find I was developing an individual style, with my own ways of making photographic statements. Some of these worked, while others failed to communicate, but I always found that buzz of satisfaction when outcomes satisfied my 'inner eye'.

I did consider trying for the Associateship at about this time, but then life, as it tends to, got in the way. Serious illness, difficult times in the life of one of my children, pressure of work ... I went through about five years when, with each year I thought 'it can't get worse', and then it did. Photographic inspiration simply dried up – I toyed with the idea of documenting the down times, but that wasn't for me.

When I emerged from this time, it was into a marvellous world where digital had truly arrived. I'd been excited by it all along, but now, amazingly, cameras which had cost a small mortgage when I stopped were now affordable, so I flung myself back in and discovered that all the old excitement was still there.

The natural world, and attempts to distil some essence of what it meant for me, continued to excite and engage me. I found themes emerging in my work, which centred round flowers, colour, and an impressionistic approach. This gradually took the form of a series of prints exploring a range of palettes, from delicately abstract to powerfully colourful, and it was this series that I put together as my successful application for the ARPS in June 2007.

Until this point, I'd never in my wildest dreams thought I could aspire to Fellowship but, as my Associateship submission was so well received, I made what, with hindsight, was a mistake – I expanded my submission by five prints and took a stab at the Fellowship. Not a good idea! However, up to this point, I had simply followed my photographic instincts, and apart from attendance at several Distinctions workshops, sought no advice. Now however, as my Fellowship submission failed, I received really useful feedback from the Panel Chair, and also the chance to get support from an experienced Fellow.

Since the time when I had produced my prints for the Associateship, my photographic vision had been changing. I had been moving away from strong saturated colours and bold statements, toward a more subtle use of paler and more impressionistic colours, and an altogether lighter and more minimal approach. My earlier images now seemed overdone, and the feedback I received encouraged me to pursue the results my ideas were leading me toward.

By mid-2009, I had a set of 20 prints, which I felt explored and communicated this way of seeing, so I applied for the Fellowship again, in the Visual Art category. This time, to my great joy, my application was



recommended by the Board to Council for Fellowship. What I hadn't really anticipated was that I now had to wait five months for the second stage of approval, but finally, in November, I got the phone call I'd been hoping for, and the news that I was now a Fellow! What next? There's a strange feeling of liberation which goes with this level of achievement. I never

found my photography in the least onerous, but I feel at the moment, more than I ever have, that I am free to move where I want and explore photographically. Ideas are coming thick and fast. Some work, many don't, but the journey's great! And it still gives me a real thrill every time I remember that I've achieved the Fellowship. **Cathy Roberts FRPS**

