



Stephen Gill

**Stephen Gill** (b. 1971) became interested in photography in his early childhood, thanks to his father and interest in insects and initial obsession with collecting bits of pond life to inspect under his microscope.

Gill has emerged as a major force in British photography; his photographic work has been exhibited and held in collections at many international galleries and museums including London's *National Portrait Gallery*, *Tate*, *The Victoria and Albert Museum*, *The Photographers' Gallery*, *Victoria Miro Gallery*, *Palais des Beaux Arts*, *Leighton House Museum*, *Haus Der Kunst*, *Gun Gallery*, *The Sprengel Museum* and has had solo shows in festivals including *Recontres d'Arles*, *The Toronto photography festival* and *PHotoEspaña*. A major solo exhibition of Stephen's various London series was presented at *Foam Museum* in 2013.

Gill has gained special recognition for his numerous original and beautiful self published photo books such as *Invisible*, *Hackney Wick*, *Warming Down*, *A Series of Disappointments*, *Archaeology in Reverse*, *Hackney Flowers*, *Buried*, *Off Ground*, *Coming up for Air*, *B-Sides*, *Trinidad 44 Photographs*, *A Book of Birds*, *Outside In*, *Coexistence* and later this year will see the publication of *Best Before End* and *Talking to Ants*.

### Interview

#### What was the first photobook you bought?

It was a nature study book of pond life, though it was not 100% photographic as it was dotted with illustrations and text.

#### What influences your own taste in photobooks?

It just works, though as I grow older my taste changes perhaps as my distrust in aspects of photography also grows.

#### What is it that influences you most when you are developing new work for a photobook?

I have never made new work with a book or book making process in mind at all. Only thinking of the work.

#### Much of your work seems to embody a type of documentary performance that is integral to the resulting image – be it the interventions of flowers, or use of pond water to explore images through a microscope. How does the vessel of 'photobook' extend this amalgamation of 2D photograph and 3D form?

I enjoy process but keep the two aspects of my practice very separate. The work is everything to me and a book sometimes follows and encapsulates the series. The book making process is an exciting time to assemble images whilst tuning into the same frame of mind when you made the actual work.

#### Do your subjects dictate the form they take, or does the form influence the subject? What takes precedence? Do you know what takes precedence?

In my recent work I try where ever possible to encourage the subjects themselves to breath and lead the way and inform the shape of the series, so I never know exactly where its going to land really.

#### Do you feel that your work is becoming increasingly performative?

Some of my recent series are more of a reaction to the times we live in rather than an attempted subjective description. I would not undermine photography's great descriptive strengths though, but in recent years have felt often straight descriptive photography can be restrictive to convey all thoughts and ideas. I think often when making work you get to the edge of possibilities and parameters and it's like hitting a glass wall and I enjoy searching for ways of getting to other side to help and further articulation.

#### Are your photobooks containers for something, or documentation of your process, or aesthetic vehicles – or a combination of all of these things? I guess I'm asking – how do you see your photobooks as part of your practice?

I see my books of series in different ways; sometimes as a halt to an obsessive immersion that sometimes lasts for years, other times perhaps the book is a byproduct of a productive and/or destructive process - maybe also the encapsulation of ideas and feelings that are on pause until viewed to resume.

#### You have made 18 photobooks of your own. What do you wish you'd known when starting out making them that you now know? Is there anything you would change if you could? This could be practical or aesthetic...

I don't know really - when I started nobody in 2005 I think I had already learnt many things by looking at books for many years prior that I wanted to avoid rather than do.

#### What do you think of the rise in self-publishing? How has this changed the medium?

I am a bit out of touch really but I think, sadly, the book content seems to be getting left behind and have felt this for a few years. Perhaps we should forget about making books and make work and allow the books to make themselves. Many books made now seem dangerously to be with an audience in mind and playing to appetites and trends, becoming and moving like a swarm. Photography could be seen as looking a great deal at itself in recent years to the point where it's getting close to imploding.