Why I take Photographs

I have no profound reasons for being a photographer apart from that it answers a very deep need in me for self-expression and it, and writing, are the only means I have for answering that need. I know I am old fashioned as I still use slide film and my subject matter is mainly landscapes but perhaps, as a Chemistry Undergraduate, I can explain my liking for film by the fact that chemistry is still central to the whole process of taking a picture.  Also, and more importantly I think, is I like the fact that the final image will not be exactly as the one I see at the moment that I trip the shutter and that to make the final photograph work I have to try and ‘see’ the world as the film sees it and to exploit that it doesn’t ‘see’ quite like me, in that it becomes rather like a fascinating game that I love to play.

 As for my love of landscapes I think that has many parts, but most importantly, I feel, is that I develop a deep, and surprisingly for a very rational atheist, almost pagan attachment to particular places. I have always done this even as a very small child and I want, through my photography, to show the essence of the places that I love and the depth of my own feeling for them. So, to this end I will go back time and time again to the same places until I get somewhere near showing what I feel about them. One example of this is the Photograph of Cardinham Water which is a part of my portfolio. This was a place that I discovered when we, as a family, first moved to Cornwall. My children used to play within the stream and I would make up stories for them just as my Mother had done for me but then the setting was the streams that flowed through the Surrey hills of my childhood. So, Cardinham Water came to represent many things for me; childhood, a certain mysterious and hidden quality that many Cornish places had, and the sense that given time nature will reclaim everything as part of this landscape had once been quarried but it now impossible to tell which had once been dug over by working men and which was natural as it had all returned to being entirely sylvan. Trying to convey all this in a 35mm rectangular piece of plastic took me many, many attempts and in the one that I include in my portfolio I feel that I have finally done my subject justice as it was taken in the last week of my Father’s life there is, at least for me, a sadness and poignancy within it that adds a depth to the final image.

The other aspect of why landscape photography is important to me is something that I hinted at earlier. That is, it gives me a chance, temporarily at least, to escape from my own rational worldview and re-enter the world before that particular Pandora’s Box was opened. Now, as in the myth, I cannot return everything back into the Box, and to be quite honest I don’t regret having opened it in the first place but the gifts that were brought from its opening also came with a sense of loss because the world was a more intensely, exciting place when I believed that God was in his Heaven, the Dead sometimes walked and that great monsters lurked within the depths of Scottish Lochs. So, I try to imagine the places that I love now as they would have appeared to me when I was a child and then I use my choice of lens, viewpoint and exposure to recreate that world again.