



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

Scott, Grant ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2882-1380> (2016) Portrait Photography Made Simple, or Not! United Nations of Photography.

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/4516>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

Portrait Photography Made Simple, or Not!

I have long believed that the most important quality that a portrait photographer requires is an interest in people. A desire to talk but most importantly to listen. To feel confident enough in technical ability to not allow it to dominate the creative process. In short to demonstrate empathy, to document a person as they truly are, not just how they look.

Of course there are many reasons why a portrait is created and therefore many approaches to the portrait are implemented by photographers. From the highly controlled and manipulated to the captured moment of the unaware, all are valid but are all successful in communicating with the viewer?

The recent portrait of Donald Trump by Nadav Kander for the cover of *Time* magazine made me stop and think. This article <http://forward.com/culture/356537/why-times-trump-cover-is-a-subversive-work-of-political-art/> discussing the image's construction, reference points and subliminal message made me question myself further.

Kander's work can be seen in prestigious galleries, magazines and advertising campaigns but it is in the world of advertising photography that his long career was formed and I believe remains based aesthetically. His portrait work demonstrates a precise controlled approach to image making and his relationship with his subjects/sitters. The result is a final portrait image that exists as an amalgamation of elements

forged in pre-production consideration, just as Annie Liebovitz's highly stylized portraits for *Vanity Fair* magazine and many advertising clients are. Both photographers straddle the worlds of art and commerce but utilize the pre and post production tools available to them — stylists, set builders, hair and make up artists, art directors, post-production artists, lighting technicians, photo assistants, prop teams, etc, etc—to fulfil their intended outcome. Just as an advertising client commissions them to fulfil a brand based brief, in their editorial and personal work they continue their aesthetic and 'in practice' working methods.

With this understanding, let's return to that picture of Trump. There is no doubt that it is a powerful and beautifully constructed image, which with the addition of the iconic *Time* logo becomes something both subversive and knowing. But is it the result of a 'meeting' of minds at the point of image capture or of a pre-conceived intention, and political belief? Did Trump fall into the photographer's and the magazine's highly sophisticated visual trap? I think so.

This is portraiture as construction. The Kander/Trump/*Time* image now joins the pantheon of socially, culturally and politically subversive mainstream magazine covers of the past that include Carl Fischer's crucified Muhammed Ali for *Esquire* magazine and Annie Liebovitz's, naked, pregnant Demi Moore for *Vanity Fair* amongst many others.

There is no pretence in these portraits. Their construction is clear to see and their purpose similarly obvious. They are advertising images selling a message and a belief. In that they are highly successful but what do they tell us of the person? What insight do they give us into the sitters psyche?

As an art director I enthusiastically embraced the concept of the constructed image but as a photographer I feel uncomfortable with excessive pre-determined control in my image making.

Portraits affect us when we experience an intimacy with the subject, an intimacy that is created through the photographer's ability to engage with the person they are photographing. This engagement is then communicated to us through the finished chosen image. Simple to write, not so to achieve.

Most portrait photographers I speak with and have worked with—and myself—emphasise the importance of conversation in their process. More time is spent talking than actually photographing and that to me makes sense. The creation of a portrait should be a mutually respectful transition of ideas, thoughts and experience. I have said for many years that a successful portrait is proof of a successful conversation but of course it is no guarantee of success.

Understanding light and the geometry of composition are the building blocks onto which such a conversation constructs the completed image. An ideal situation which takes time and effort to master. As I have mentioned in previous articles this has led me to reject the concepts of making or taking a portrait and in turn has led me to describe my process as 'finding an image'.

The created portrait takes no such risks and when creating a cover for *Time* magazine this makes complete sense but I am sure that I am not the only person who would like to hear a recording of the conversation that took place between Kander and Trump during 'that' shoot.