

Tony Ray-Jones

Tony Ray-Jones, an outstanding British photographer who inspired many young photographers to see and experience something called personal expression and commercial success. He always claimed - "Don't take boring pictures" and it was his one and only rule throughout his too short career. He died at the young age. Ray-Jones didn't make pictures, he made projects and his archive is categorised by those projects; sporting events, London markets, rock and roll concerts, and so forth.

In my opinion the primary aim of this book is to provide a new opportunity to examine the history and life of a photographer, as well as his thoughts and opinions about photography. He defined a new way of looking at his own society - with irony, humour, nostalgia and compassion. Tony's point of view exerted an enormous influence on the development of British documentary art photography from the 1970s through the present. People who knew Tony for his 'personal' work were sometimes unaware of how much time he spent working on commercial assignments during his years in England. The book of Ray-Jones states and proves that he was pushing himself hard to achieve goals and to reach enormous applause for creating a history of British post-war life.

It seems that most of his photographs are documentary, almost anthropological by nature and make keen observations on contemporary British society. Tony Ray-Jones also stated that his aim as a photographer was to capture the specific aura, the nostalgic potential and current humour in ordinary situations.

If we search through his book, we realise that Tony did not always give his pictures titles. Even if he did, they usually consisted of the place, and sometimes the event, where pictures were made. It seems that Ray-Jones was printing his black and white images small, in a dark register of tonally very dense prints. He was highly concerned with the quality of his prints and the layout of his work, as he wanted to convey the full power of the images.

His approach to the photography influenced a new generation of independent photographers emerging in 1970s Britain. Many people nowadays recall Tony as an influential British post-war photographer, best remembered for his light hearted, quirky black and white images of the English social landscape.

In some way we may call his photographs minimalistic in term of lack of the titles and the story behind every image. There are people involved on most of the pictures which can state that he tried to show the sadness and the humour in a gentle madness that prevails in people. In the interview with BBC news he also stated that "Photography can be a mirror and reflect life as it is", but he also thinks that perhaps it is possible to walk, like Alice, through a Looking-Glass, and find another kind of world with the camera.

Tony was a great pre-visionist. He knew the components he needed to make a picture that would satisfy him even if he had no firm idea how those components would come together in the final composition. His notebooks were full of plans, lists and ideas for pictures in certain locations, with desirable characters and elements described in advance. He had a knack of choosing scenes where the ordinary suddenly became bizarre - almost surreal. His genius was in recognising likely scenes and capturing the moment when the 'right' juxtapositions took place.