

PYLOT

BRIAN GRIFFIN

By: Henry Gorse

April 9, 2016



An icon of British portrait photography, Brian Griffin has photographed some of the most influential personalities of the last forty years from Margaret Thatcher to Iggy Pop, Damien Hirst to Vivienne Westwood. With an exclusive new shoot in PYLOT's fourth issue, Henry Gorse interviewed 'The Griff' to see what makes him tick.

Watching Brian shoot on film for PYLOT was an eye opening experience. From my own work and from photographers I have assisted, analogue tends to be a straightforward, fast-paced process on set. Working in what at times was complete chaos, and sound tracked by manic krautrock, Brian showed us an insight on how it used to be done, with a strong technical discipline and a sharp eye for precision.

The process of shooting was slowed down to every minute detail, with flash heads going off left, right and centre, and controlled as if Brian were painting a picture. Brian's vision for the shoot was all in his head, and it came to life as he walked round the room adjusting the lights and bopping to Neu!

Combining this technical discipline with a playful, creative aesthetic is what makes Brian unique to a lot of other photographers. His work has an unpredictability which comes naturally from the character he is.

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HG: Aup Brian, how's it going lad?

BG: I've been involved a lot with my show in New York, it's a most enjoyable experience and has required a lot of effort. Photography-wise I have a personal project called the "Disciples" and I'm in the midst of shooting and getting that together. Then it's my talks around the country which culminate during Photo London when I will chair a talk called "Question Time". You can book to attend it here:- <http://rps.org/events/2016/may/17/photography-question-time>

What were your influences growing up, starting your career?

Growing up surrounded by factories and the atmosphere and light within them, mostly aided by smoke and fumes!



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The light in your pictures is such an important aspect of your work, the light in your Star Wars photographs is extremely memorable for example. Is this freestyle nature something you have always embraced?

I know it's a cliché but light is so important in photography so I have intensely studied it all my career. I find looking at paintings a wonderful inspiration and through this research I developed my own style. Applying artificial light to your photographs indoors or out, gives your work such a lift and can aid it to become quite unique.

Using props and objects within your work seems to be a reoccurring practise. What do they help you to achieve?

They help to bring in a bit more of me, and at times make a boring subject interesting.



The industry today has become very professional and formulated, back in the day what was the difference if there was one?

It has always been a struggle to maintain a career in photography. Even in the early seventies when I began it was immensely difficult to get your first worthwhile job, especially if you wanted to be creative.

What do you think of the current photography talent compared to your generation?

I love the fact that more photographs are being taken and with digitalisation it's so much easier but there sometimes seems to be less good photographs around... Maybe pain and hard work are the driving forces behind good photographs!

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I feel the younger generation appreciate analogue as we have grown up around the idea of perfection in the digital age, analogue lets us react against that, allowing imperfection and an unpredictability. What is the perception of this in your generation? Was digital a welcome upgrade at the time or an uneasy cross over?

Most of the top professional photographers went over to digital straightaway because of the fear of being out of touch, plus clients could see its advantages. One could view the day's shoot instead of looking at crunched up Polaroids in the after shoot hotel bar and thinking, "I'm sure frame seven was far better". We, photographers of my generation, just didn't feel emotional about film because we had grown up with it as the material that collected the image. In fact, when I started, film was quite difficult to handle and you really had to know what you were doing, especially if you were shooting transparency, which was the most common type of film. We never shot colour negatives. However, some photographers felt uneasy about digital, not trusting it to produce the image quality and feel that film could give them. These were photographers that worked more on the "Art" side of photography.



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What are your favourite qualities of analogue?

Reflecting back, now we have both film and digital, I can see why film is beautiful. Like a music lover listening to CD or vinyl there is a difference. It's an emotional difference, you can't really rationalise it but you just like how it renders your image, it just feels right. It's organic, real, and truthful.



I remember having a chat with you about Avedon and Man Ray, for you were they the ones to keep up with?

I'm an obsessive, I live for my photography 24/7. I have found the hardest-working, obsessive photographers to end up being the greats with Avedon and Man Ray being prime examples.

Can you share one of your most bizarre experiences while you were taking pictures?

Blood running down my face as I was taking a portrait for an editorial assignment. I'd just crashed my car outside the subject's house. My sitter who will remain nameless didn't even comment.



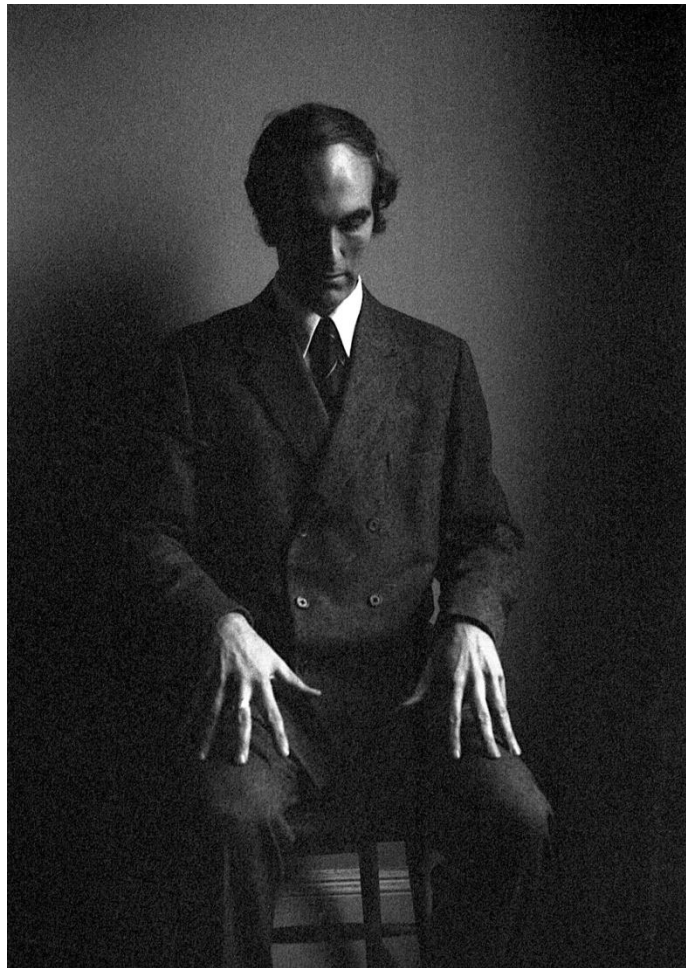
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What is it about fashion photography that interests you?

A chance to be creative photographically in an age that seems to mostly deny that possibility.

You recently exhibited in New York, can you tell us a bit about that?

It was curated so well and is at the Steven Kasher Gallery on West 26th Street. Such a wonderful gallery and spacious, which meant it could show easily around 70 of my images. Generally, on show are my images from the 70's and 80's and all shot on film. Read more about the gallery here: <http://www.stevenkasher.com/>



You have shot a lot of musicians and memorable album covers in the past, was the music something you had to connect with to achieve great pictures?

Apart from Iggy, I generally was not into the music of the artists that I photographed. I was a krautrock fan!

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Did you enjoy working with PYLOT?

Loved it, and I wish the magazine my very best.

What can we expect from The Griff in the future?

More and more photographs I'm afraid.

