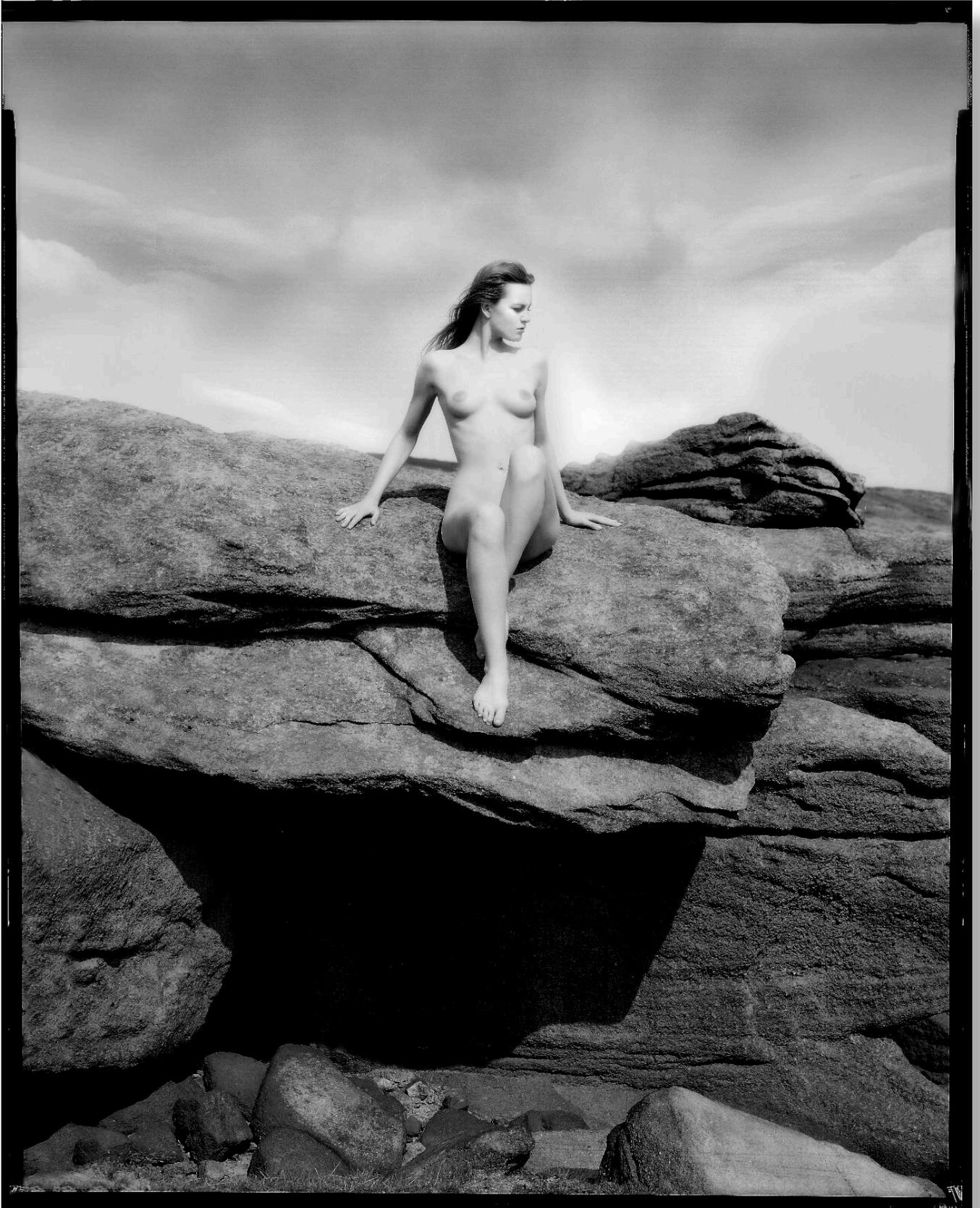


~ BodyScape ~



For Victoria H. and Perran Jeffery

Introduction

BodyScape is a personal portfolio of black and white photographs started a number of years ago during the time when I was a staff photographer for an audio video production company. The subject, a combination of landscapes and female nudes.

Through the 80s and the early 90s all of my commissioned work was entirely commercial. With little or no creative input required from myself, I found this situation very frustrating. I love pictures of all kinds and in particular photographic images. The media industry that I was working in always relied on a sensationalized presentation of any subject matter. In the area of human relationships and the natural world, the message seems to vacillate between completely irresponsible exploitation and the opposite extreme of rigid, ominous warnings.

The main reason I took a degree in photography and got into this business initially was because I, (unlike some of my colleagues), have always been more concerned with the artistic or aesthetic application of images principally in advertising, rather than the purely commercial one. Hence after a number of years stifled commercial photography, I started looking for a more challenging outlet of my craft.

My research led me to discover that the nude, principally the female nude, is without doubt regarded as one of the most challenging and respected of all subjects for the artist. Throughout history artists of every discipline have been working with the human form. Furthermore, the landscape also occupies this high standing with the artist and continues to provide inspiration. It was through my own love of the wilderness and my disapproval of how women are habitually portrayed by other photographers, that the concept for BodyScape was born.

The Landscape

It is very difficult to find truly natural landscapes in the UK, there is so very little of it left. Housing estates, supermarkets and industrial parks are shooting up everywhere; roads cutting through the countryside, rivers and open moor lands are being destroyed. Ancient forests are being cut down to make way for golf courses, our hillsides are radioactive, our beaches and seas are dying from our pollution. Need I go on? I'm openly concerned about this. I left London years ago for Lancashire to escape the big city to be a part of country side. It was only about 50% successful. We humans are always on the offensive, the planet doesn't stand much of a chance. Much of this project must document what there is left of the natural landscape, before its gone forever. All of my landscapes are as natural as is possible, no roads or onlookers, a world without walls or boundaries and no signs of any human intervention.

The Model

The models are also as natural as possible, no body decorations or ornaments, no tanning lines, no visible signs of the modern world. The emphasis is on natural and not fake beauty. I'm not trying to make them look like natives who live in the woods, they are very much part of our society, they are just seen here totally out of the context of their normal surroundings; very natural but also somewhat surreal.

Some critics have occasionally questioned the necessity and or the tastefulness of the nudity that is intrinsic to it. When, however they see the images created in BodyScape, it becomes graphically clear that those images are things of beauty, very much the product of an artistic effort from myself and the models and are not something that would ever be found to discredit women in any way. Indeed, one of the many reasons for my undertaking of this project is that I want to directly challenge the commercial images of women we see every day in newspapers and magazines and now the Internet. These publications show women as little more than a commodity to be bought and sold, used up and then thrown away. BodyScape attempts to puts women on a far, far higher plain. Many women have told me that they find reassurance of feminine strength and freedom in my photography. Many of the models I have worked with have voiced their discovery that modeling nude in a beautiful and natural landscape was more about making a personal affirmation of self-esteem, than becoming a sexual object for male fantasies.

Objectives

It has never been the intention to produce a sexy photograph in BodyScape. There are no skimpy or see-through bits of clothing to obscure the body; no pouting glamour girls. I think most fine art photographers who shoot nudes; myself included, are so concerned that their work should not be confused with pornography, that they go to great lengths to keep out any type of sexual overtones. I did that for a while, but found the limitations were too strict to maintain any artistic integrity. But it would be hypocritical to present the beautiful women I shoot in a completely non-sexual image, simply to pacify those who are fearful of a stimulated libido. Neither by saying or doing this am I being a prude; it's just that there is such an enormous amount of published material where woman are little more than chattel, and comparatively little material that attempts to show women for their beauty. I am trying to redress the balance. BodyScape is not trying to show an Eve in Eden. The landscapes are often hostile, remote and bleak, the models sometimes challenge the viewer or is very secondary in the frame, but both she and her environment are always seen in the most flattering light and stance possible.

Methods

In order to be able to achieve all this, a number of the women appearing in the photographs are not professional models. I have special friends who are not professional models working with me on the project with great results. Some of the professionals involved have now also become good friends and it is such a great honor for me to work with these wonderful people. All have enjoyed the freedom of the project and the silence of the wilderness where they can express themselves without the intrusion of the modern world. We have set ourselves very high aesthetic standards for BodyScape. A deciding factor to a model's inclusion to BodyScape is what they can bring to the project in addition to their faces and their bodies. By this I mean that it's not enough for a woman to do just as she's instructed in front of my camera. This project is very much a joint effort between the model and myself. This project has evolved from its inception through a close working relationship, in which the model's creativity and input is just as important as mine. A thinking model who has a clear understanding of the objectives behind the project, and an affinity with the environment is a vital ingredient to the success of BodyScape.

If you understand the more technical side of photography, the film format I have chosen is 10 x 8. The camera is a SINAR and the stock a combination of Kodak Tri X 400 and Ilford FP4 plus 125. I only use two prime lenses, a 165mm f8 Schneider Super Angulon and a 360mm f6.8 Schneider Symmar. The exposure technique is the zonal system, which includes the processing of the film. Because of the disciplines needed when using a large format view camera, when on location, the process is less like a normal photographic shoot, where a photographer and model may shoot hundreds of pictures and then later choose only one or two from the whole session; and more like a painter, who arrives at a location and will work for hours on the same image. The camera itself is very big and heavy and takes about twenty minutes to set up. Every image is very carefully considered. The exposure technique I have adopted is very demanding, and when necessary, I will wait at the same location, sometimes for hours, until I am completely happy with the natural lighting before I take the one exposure of the set up. On a normal BodyScape assignment I will usually shoot five frames, sometimes less and sometimes none at all.

Obstacles

Just finding the appropriate locations has taken year's and I'm always on the look out for more. As this project is none commercial and so far nonprofit making, the lack of finance and the problems of trying to get anybody to work on a differed payment basis is frustrating. I'm funding the entire project myself – and it's not easy! Camera, film, processing and printing; electronic scanning and manipulation, people's time and expenses, are all very expensive. As I mentioned before, some of the models are not professionals. However, many of them are the very finest in the business and would normally earn very large fees, but everybody that I've worked with so far has been more than happy just to be connected with the project because of its artistic nature. As time goes by more and more people want to get involved – they too want to encapsulate beauty, or help me to. The most contradictory attitudes I have experienced so far are from some model agencies. The euphemisms and excuses that these people sometimes come up with are extraordinary, normally along the lines of; We don't have any girls that do that sort of work . This is simply not the case. All the model agencies in the UK have models that have, or would be very happy to, take off their clothes for the camera, provided that the shots were not going to compromise them. A very understandable attitude however. There are so many photographers who waste agencies time, or who shoot poor quality material. I can not blame an agent for being reticent. Again, fortunately, once the images and the quality standard of BodyScape become clear to both model and agent, these problems tend to dissipate. Agents and models who truly understand the project and the ideals are extremely helpful, if not essential.

Conclusion

This project has taken up an increasing amount of my time over the years and a fair proportion of what little money I have. I have given them both up willingly. The important thing for me is to make the images.

No matter what obstructions I have come across, be it time, money, attitude or misinterpretation; I will continue to enhance and document with my photography, the landscape wherever I can find it untainted, (it is there, you just have to look.) The female form has its own stunning beauty, and my attempt to put combine it into the landscape in a comprehensive and complementary format that I call BodyScape.