

JACK EAMES

PHOTOGRAPHY : PROSTITUTE PROJECT

Introduction

This was a project I completed as part of my Journalism degree - for which I was awarded a First for the course. Having lived in a red-light district for two years, I took this photo-essay as an opportunity to enter a world which had always interested me. I wanted to meet a prostitute and tell her life's story through my camera.

Finding a prostitute willing to talk and have her picture taken seemed at the time impossible, because I was both intimidated by the scene and my initial approaches were rejected.

After two weeks of walking through the main areas where several prostitutes were openly working, I eventually found a woman willing to be photographed. I remember feeling that I'd achieved something important - a first hand account of the world of prostitution.

This was a world I thought I had some understanding of. However, once I met Kate, I struggled to keep emotions separate from the purpose of the project - to investigate and act as a photojournalist. I'd failed at the first hurdle and the following pictures are an account of her life and my experience.

My reason for taking the pictures was to show the emotionally brutal and desperate environment, as well as the fact that she is not just a prostitute, but a human being.

It became an addiction trying to meet Kate and find out more about her life. I'm glad I never have to see her anymore as I was not strong enough to deal with her world - a world I know nothing about.



IMAGE TITLE: NOT AGAIN

The fact that Kate is wearing tights and footwear that will cover her during work not only has sexual connotations, but also a sense of protection can be gathered.

Kate's watch is turned around so we cannot see the time. This signifies that the watches face as well as the prostitutes face is not important to the customer. The clothing is all that matters.

Once I had met Kate I made sure I always went into the red light district in a car. This was primarily for my safety, but it also meant that she and I could drive off somewhere to talk and take pictures.

I was shocked by the amount of cars that would routinely drive around the housing blocks for hours. All single men in their cars, sometimes driving up slowly and then speeding off. I felt that the drivers must be getting some kind of sexual kick from this.

It was important for me to represent this horrible and crazy side of the scene. Cars can be seen as penis-extensions for men. In this case I felt that these cars were different coloured penises driving around, waiting to enter one of the prostitutes.

Kate's boots are positioned in a submissive position; and the bonnet and front of the car represent a penis entering her. The fact that the Ford car badge is clearly visible is integral to the impact of this picture. It is men that predominantly work on car production lines, so this additional male symbolism is also having sex with the prostitute.

The fact that Kate still has her boots and tights on shows the quickness of the sex between the two. No loving, no touching or caressing, just pure physical ness. The radiator grill of the car is a phallic symbol of the eye in the end of a penis, and shows the reputed belief that a car is an extension of a man's penis.



IMAGE TITLE: BUSINESS?

When I was trying to find a prostitute to photograph they would say to me "business?" It seemed such a strange thing to have said to me, and made me feel like I was part of the seedy world.

I wanted a different way of saying that Kate has a job just like everyone else, and she works to earn money to live just like we all have to.

This is her in front of a parking ticket display sign, again incorporating the theme of cars. The last 'e' in 'here' is half visible so signifies that a customer can come and pay this woman for sex 'here'. The other message is 'pay her', which is created by Kate's head blocking some of the letter out.

Kate is looking down at the floor, personifying the sadness and desperate feel to the photograph. The sunlight gives the only real light of the picture to the side of her face, showing her as human, and the dimly lit sign as manmade.

Whoever could read the sign, 'Pay Here', is not only presented with a cold phrase, but Kate's back would also greet them, emphasising the negative and emotionless qualities of what is depicted.

Once I'd found a prostitute willing to talk to me, I knew I had to pay her some money for her time. I'd worked out my ethics and thought that surely this money coming from me is better than her having to have sex with a stranger?

Once I'd finished taking the first photos of Kate, her mobile rang. She seemed pleased as she said, "I've got enough for a 20 bag". Previously she had just told me about her addiction to heroin.

This picture signifies the money going from me - to her - to her dealer - then back to her: as heroin. When driving to meet Kate I always wore gloves because it was cold. This connects the driving theme again.

This photograph was an attempt at a catharsis for myself. It was my money that blinded Kate to life. It was my money that could have killed her.

The rolled up note is a metaphor for the needle, but rather than pushing in to her arm, having it entering her eye, blinds her. Kate works for money to buy drugs. Until that cycle is broken, she will never see.

The fact that my hands block her mouth and nose suggests that the only sense available to her is her sight, and that is open and ready for the affect of the heroin which will block her vision.

The gloves signify the lack of any compassion in prostitution. There is no human touch. When was the last time Kate had a loving touch?

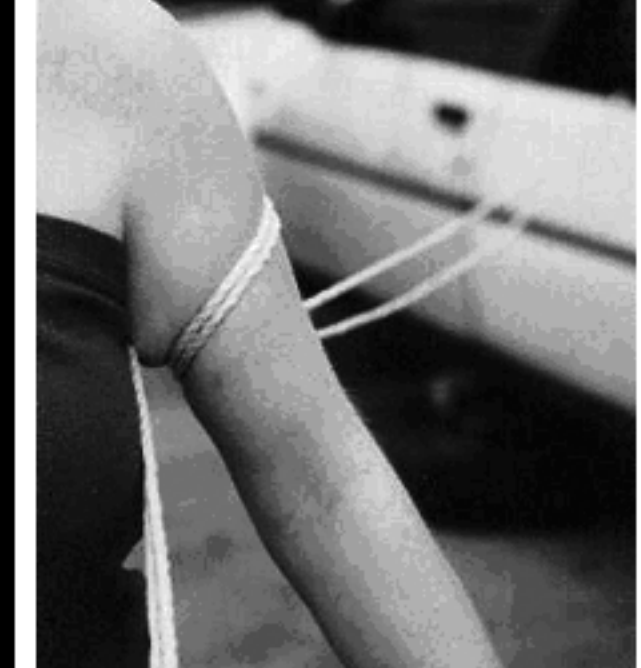


IMAGE TITLE: CUTTING THE CORD

Kate has been a prostitute for six years and openly talked about her drug habit. The rope in this picture is the first point of visual location.

It is a deliberate exaggeration of strapping your arm before putting the needle in.

It also connotes the fact that she can only exist through her attachment to the car, again signifying the penises that drive around looking for sex.

Cars are manmade, so this is another representation of how Kate's survival is dependent on the various needs of men.

The title to this piece is significant. Cutting the cord is associated with a newborn baby and the cutting of the umbilical cord. This picture represents anything but the pleasure of new life.

This shot is particularly powerful because of composition and content. I framed the shot so that there were lines coming towards the centre of the photograph from each corner.

Starting at the bottom left, the lines of the passenger door panelling encourage your eye to move to the centre frame. Top left is Kate's head. The fact that she is turning away is unusual in photographs. We are more accustomed to subjects looking at the lens.

The top right hand corner of the frame shows the heating system of the car. This represents again the manmade environment as well as a sense of control. The bottom right hand corner is the most potent section of the picture. It could be assumed that the hand is moving towards the woman's groin, or is it moving away?

The visual language belonging to the customer - his car and hand - are black. This substantiates that he is the cold and gruesome component of the picture. The black 'Y' shape between her legs represents the unknown. Accompanied by the askew composition, which with the glove going under, rather than over the skirt lends itself to a truly nasty picture.

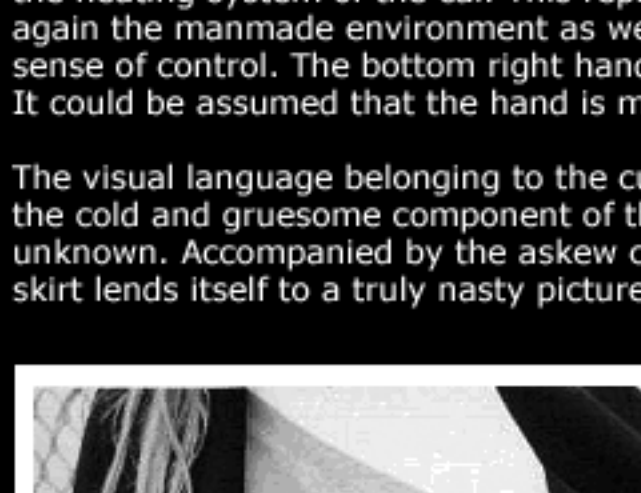


IMAGE TITLE: CUTTING THE CORD

The first time we took pictures a screwdriver fell out of Kate's coat pocket. I asked her if she would use it and she said, "Definitely. I've been raped once. Never again".

I felt sick and utterly ashamed of myself for being part of the male gender responsible for the attack. Not only responsible for the attack, but part of the system that keeps girls like Kate walking the street.

This photograph represents the tools of her trade. Rather than getting Kate to hold up a screwdriver to the camera, this picture shows the harrowing and danger element of her work.

The wire fence behind her is broken and kinked; exaggerating the unbalanced and gruesome world she earns her money from.



IMAGE TITLE - I'VE BEEN RAPED ONCE - NEVER AGAIN

The contrast of the hammer handle gives separation from the blackness of her coat, symbolising her with a powerful penis of her own to fight back.

To put Kate's face in full view throughout these pictures would have detracted from the impact of the essay. It is also representative of how the customer is more interested in what they are wearing than what they look like. Some of the girls I met had bruises, legions, scars and black eyes, but still they were selling sex.

I said in my introduction that this project was to show that Kate is not just a prostitute and her only existence is selling sex - she also lives day to day.

At some time in our lives we've all sat at a lake and fed the ducks. This shows her relaxed and in her normal clothes doing normal things.

Her trainer is clearly at the cross section of the 'rule of thirds' photographic formula. You could almost draw the 'rule of thirds' grid on this picture and her trainer would be at the point of where the lines cross.

This is the first step of visual location. The photo-essay began with Kate taking her trainers off and putting her work boots on. This encourages the viewer to reflect upon an image they have already seen.

The wooden platform gets much exposure in this picture. This solidifies the natural feel to the environment and activity from Kate.

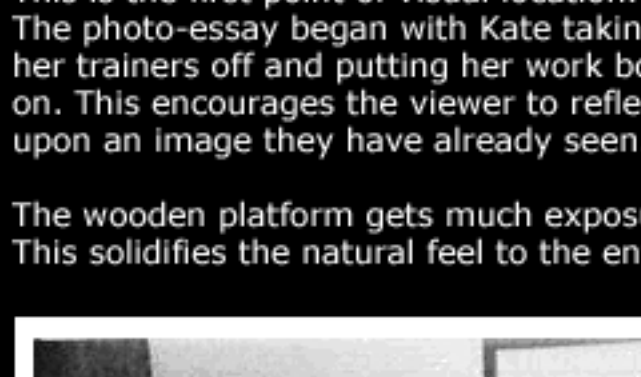


IMAGE TITLE - SHADOW CATCHERS



IMAGE TITLE - SHADOW CATCHERS



IMAGE TITLE - SHADOW CATCHERS



IMAGE TITLE - SHADOW CATCHERS



IMAGE TITLE - MONEY SHOT

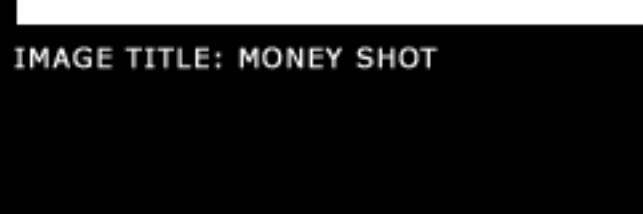


IMAGE TITLE - MONEY SHOT

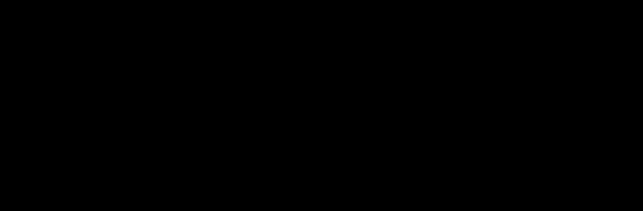


IMAGE TITLE - MONEY SHOT

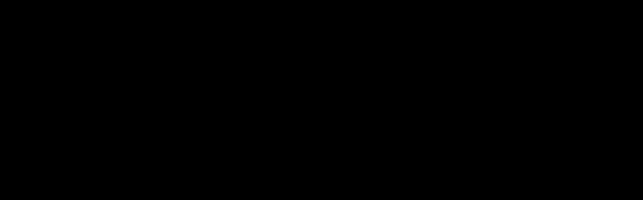


IMAGE TITLE - MONEY SHOT

With regards to content I wanted to show another aspect of Kate's life. She talked to me about her interest in photography - especially black and white.

This picture is a deliberate parallel to the previous example of naturalism. There are birds on the lake in both photos. As they eat the bread the swans appear oblivious to the suitcase with cuttings in each panel.

They are producing high contrast shadows on the water, which compliments the main theme for this picture - the shadow on the wall cast by Kate is almost a mirror image of the ones produced by the swans. This brings the swans and Kate towards a feeling of relaxed unity.

I have titled this 'shadow catchers' because as well as it being a photographic term which represents her interest in images, it also establishes that there are several shadows to be 'caught' or viewed here.

I've titled this picture 'Money shot'. It is the final picture of ten photographs showing Kate's life as a prostitute and my interpretations of the time I spent in the red light district.

There is a deliberate irony here, because the 'money shot' is a term that can be applied to the man ejaculating over a women's face in a pornographic film.

Having spent time with Kate and meeting other prostitutes I began to understand how the world of prostitution is anything but sexual. It is a desperate world of a complete imbalance of power and utter cruelty and viciousness.

The only escape for girls like Kate is a destructive momentary hit - heroin. This is where my money went and I still question my motives for carrying out this project. At the time I felt so shocked by what I'd seen first hand, I didn't think I'd feel the same again. It was an experience that will remain with me and one that I will be better prepared for next time.

This is the only time in the essay you see Kate's face, it skeletal in appearance. She is pulling the chord with her teeth. The rope also represents a form of noose-like strangulation. The movement in the picture is intensified by the fact that everything else is sharp focus.

The top left hand corner has the door and pipe still in frame. The pipe represents the needle going into her arm. It is the only support structure available to Kate.



IMAGE TITLE: DRIVE THROUGH



IMAGE TITLE: BLIND LEADING THE BLIND



UNTITLED



IMAGE TITLE - WE'VE ALL BEEN HERE