

MALCOLM PASLEY

VISIONS IN PLATINUM

There has been a lot of talk lately in London about how the art of fine black and white printing is suffering a slow death by neglect from manufacturers far more interested in the amateur mass market for colour, and of how the schools are losing sight of craftsmanship for the sake of turning out yet more fashion photographer wannabes.

It is true that photographers working here in monochrome have seldom basked in the high visibility their American cousins have always been used to. No local equivalents spring to mind when you think of such giants of grey tone as Ansel Adams or Edward Weston, but they had the benefit of luminous Western skies and the native talent for self promotion. The English are far more reticent, and that comes from their weather and culture. Malcolm Pasley is a photographer who learned from both traditions, came to his artistic awakening in the United States and recently returned to Britain to make it a reality.

"I have a great deal of respect for printing as a creative process," he said to me in a recent discussion about his passion for platinum printing and photography of the nude. "The process as a whole, of starting out with the equivalent of a blank canvas and then the idea evolving by intuition is what made me excited by photography in the first place, when I began. With what I am doing now, I still begin with just the vaguest idea and then the photograph emerges almost by happy accident."

Pasley went through a long period of pursuing another route through photography, in the eighties, when he

set aside what drew him to the medium in the first place. "I was a fashion photographer throughout the decade, and had developed a reputation for advertising beauty photography, 'clean beauty', and that was not unpleasant but it wasn't highly satisfying," he relates. He followed his American actress wife to Los Angeles when she was offered work there, and did quite well amongst the California palms and golden smog filtered sun, but he was even further away from his creative roots.

Pasley had always admired Irving Penn and his massive platinum prints of flawed and tawdry objects in extreme close up, of brittly perfect pre-supermodel supermodels, and of female nudes for whom the term 'Rubens Blonde' would be gross understatement. Happily for him, one of the essential ingredients for platinum printing, ferric oxalate, was only made in Los Angeles and he was already located near the source.

The decision was almost made for him. Pasley began down the slow and costly road of learning to print in platinum. "I watched my life go down the sink," he says wryly. Then, on a short return visit to London he showed the results to Hamiltons Gallery in Mayfair. They wanted more, and he had none. So, Pasley returned to the tinsel city, worked feverishly on new images, packed and came home. He has never looked back since. ☺