

***FIVE ESSAYS* by Leigh Preston FRPS**

The five essays are on “Northern Skylines” in the forgotten industrial landscapes of North and Central England; rural “Georgia” in the post-USSR era; “Eleventh Hour”, set in the memorial cemetery of the Ypres Salient; “The Coal Coast” up in the North-East of England; and “Scotland- Winter”, in which he explores the mountain country under snow.

It is a truism to say that photography is painting with light, which every picture in all these essays demonstrates with highly skilled techniques as well as intuitive art in monochrome and colour. Another truism is that photography is a time machine: great masters of the past recorded places, people and events without thought that these records were images of history, while others were and are quite conscious of Time being their subject. Leigh is such an explorer. If you are such a one, you will find much sombre delight in these essays.

Above all, however, Leigh is both a passionate observer of truth in its details and a seeker of the very personal. In these essays every place he visits is rich in personal meaning for him, be it reflections on his grandfather in the Great War cemetery or on his mother in rainbows. There is no sentimentality here, but fine sentiment and tight control.

Reading these pictures in this book, I am reminded of advice tendered by two great artists in another medium. Lawrence said: “Never trust the artist, trust the work,” because whatever the writer/ sculptor/ photographer might tell us of their intentions etcetera, the work speaks the truth for itself to anyone who can discern. Hemingway said he relied very heavily on his very own copper-bottomed, fool-proof crap detector, meaning that he tried very hard to be rigorously faithful to truth of feeling and ideas in his every choice of words, syntax, character, episode, description and tone

Leigh knows his subject. What he tells us in his words before each essay: he knows his landscapes rural and urban, his memories, himself. He did not know Georgia, he says, but he certainly knew this area of it before he was done. He did that by using another of his skills which so few snappers really use: he talked to the people he found there. He never made a portrait until he and the other had bonded; it shows.

Many skilled and beautiful photographs the world rightly admires and loves are no more than that: photographs. Beautiful but with nothing to say. If a photograph is to be art it must be more than an image, it must be a picture, which is not simply a wonderful construction.

All real art—poem, symphony, sculpture, whatever—must be the result of the artist apprehending some deep experience... and then selecting the elements to which he/she responded most... and then organising these elements in such a way that, when the final work is presented to an audience, that audience will re-experience the original for themselves in mind and heart. Do that and the work will have something to say, some statement worth making.

Get hold of a copy of *Five Essays* by Leigh Preston FRPS. Enter and embark on five voyages. Do not hurry your journeys. Take time to really look and see... feel... Let him *share* with you.

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