

Gigapan Technology and Montage: A Case Study of 5 New Works

James Johnson-Perkins

Art and Design

CELE

The University of Nottingham

Ningbo, China

Introduction

I want to talk about the use of Gigapan Technology and how this, coupled with montage techniques, allows the creation of unusual and new contemporary works. First I will discuss Gigapan 'Epic' Machines, explaining what they are and how they are used and then I will discuss my initial experiments with them.

I will continue by exploring the history of montage and then I will be examining 5 Gigapan montage images that I have produced since 2010. These were created during artist residencies and lecturing posts, that I have worked on in Italy, Nepal, UK, Oman and USA. I will tell the story of how these works were made and deconstruct them in terms of their influences, their inherent concepts, some possible interpretations and the use of technology.

I will conclude by looking at associations and differences between these Gigapan images and at relationships they have to what I consider to be important and key montage works. I will also be reflecting on how Gigapan technology, digital manipulation and the Internet steer my work and the significance of these elements within my practice.

Gigapan Technology

It was in 2009 that I discovered this new tool called a Gigapan 'Epic'. This robotic machine allows a person to connect a camera and take hundreds of high quality images, which can be stitched together using computer software, to create enormous photographic images.

I came across this device when I was showing work at the Kube Gallery in Poole, UK. Here one of the technicians, Denis Roberts, spoke to me about a new robotic device he had acquired, that allowed him to take unbelievably big photos he called a 'Gigapan'. He gave me the website address (Gigapan, 2015) where I could buy this device. This site not only allowed one to buy the Gigapan equipment, but it also had hundreds of uploaded Gigapan images on it. After seeing these pictures, I was so impressed that I simply had to have my own Gigapan 'Epic' robot device.

The most impressive image on the 'Gigapan' site at the time in my opinion was the one of President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address taken on January 20th 2009 by David Bergman. (Bergman, D, 2015) I was amazed by this image and surprised as to how this technology could capture thousands of people at an event

in such fine detail. (Fig. 1a) With the Images on this website, one can zoom in (Fig. 1b) and out of them, akin to the effect of Google Earth software (Google Earth 2015).



Figure 1a, David Bergman, Obama's Inaugural Address, 2009



Figure 1b, David Bergman, Obama's Inaugural Address (Zoomed in), 2009

This also has similarities with the 'Power of Ten' film and book made in the 1970's by Ray Eames, (Eames, C. 1977). Allowing objects to be viewed at Micro and Macro level, getting ten times closer or further away. After buying a 'Gigapan Epic' robot I attached my regular Canon D10 Camera and this allowed me to take hundreds of fully zoomed photographic images of scenes. Using software on my computer, I stitched these together to create my own very high-resolution 'Gigapan' panoramic images. I immediately I began to think of how to apply this technology to my art practice.

I wanted to generate some interesting contrasts, so I began taking pictures of very small objects in front of very large and historically important buildings. Previously, my art practice had mainly focused on nostalgic and childhood themes, so to continue this theme my first two experiments involved placing toy soldiers in front of famous locations. When visiting Berlin and Rome, I created pictures using the Olympic Stadium and the Coliseum, respectively. In these images the extreme spatial disparity between the buildings and the toys, generated by the Gigapan effect creates an intense feeling of distance between the different elements. It also

produced a compelling narrative relating to adolescence, war and place. (Fig. 2) Initially, I was satisfied with the results, but I felt that I needed to work with more complex ideas to fully explore the possibilities of this new technology.

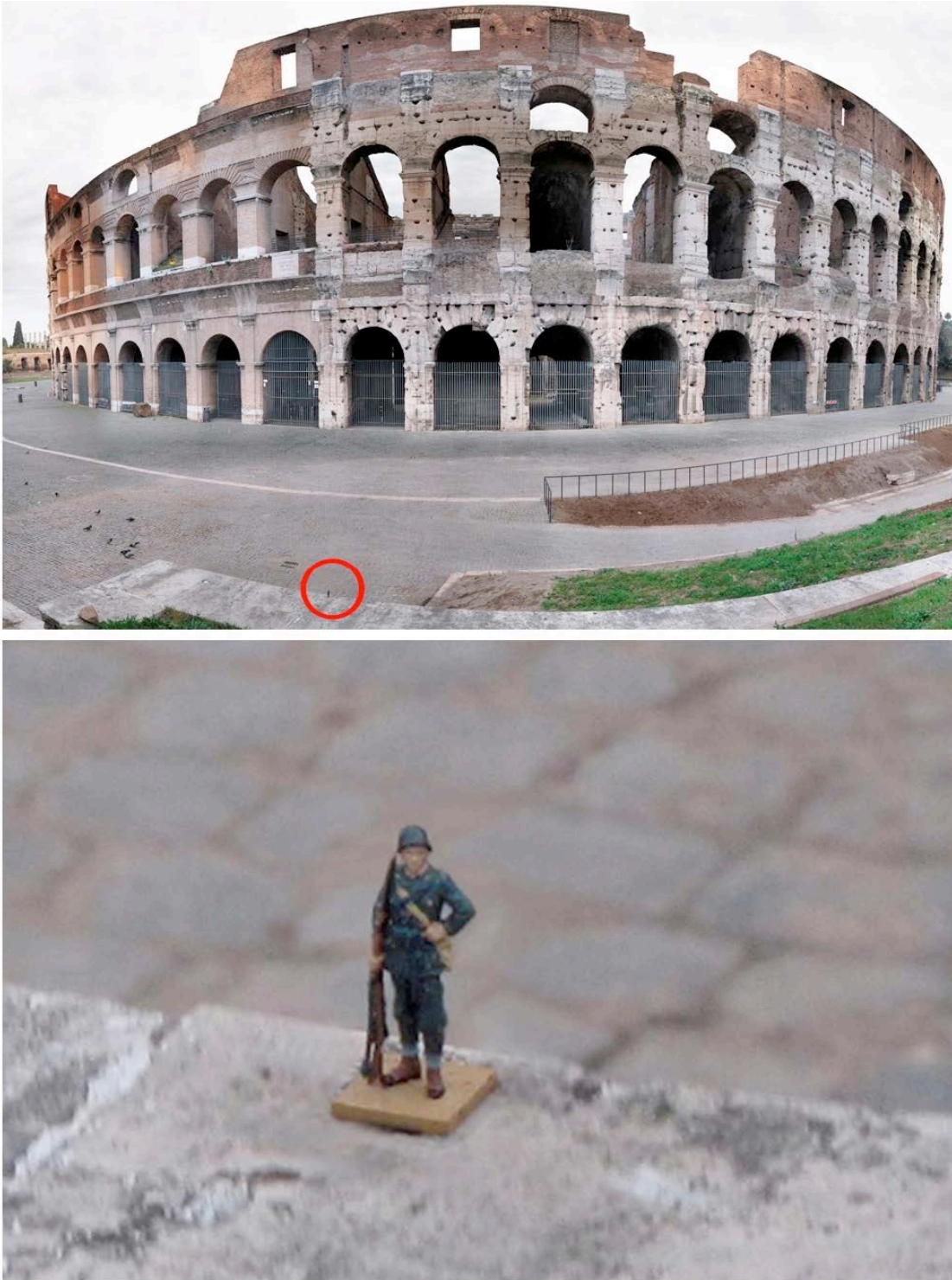


Figure 2. (This is one of my first experiments. The soldier is in the red circle in the first image. The second image is how it looks when we zoom in) Daddy, The Coliseum, Rome. 2009

Shortly afterwards, during an artist residency at the Emily Harvey Foundation, in Venice, Italy, in March 2010, I began considering the possibility of creating some very large photomontage works. I had taken a Gigapan image of the Grande Canal from the Rialto Bridge. While I was examining this picture, I realized the similarity with Canaletto images from the 18th Century and so I started to visually explore some of his works for inspiration. Whilst looking at the Canaletto images of Venice in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, I was struck by the grandiosity of these works and their panoramic quality. His enormous paintings often contained hundreds of people and depicted fascinating historic stories. (Fig. 3)



Figure 3. Canaletto, Return of the Bucintoro to the Molo on Ascension Day, 1729–32
Retrieved from Wikipedia website, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaletto#/media/File:Canaletto_-_Bucintaur%27s_return_to_the_pier_by_the_Palazzo_Ducale_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Following a line of thought, I reasoned that if I superimposed my own characters onto my Rialto Bridge image, I could create a comparable impression that I had seen in Canaletto's works. So I began to digitally overlay my own characters onto my Venetian scene. I realized, to create a comparable work, I would need to digitally collage hundreds of different characters to achieve my desired effect and this would take a very long time. This first image took me 2 years to complete.

Montage

When I started making these Gigapan works, I thought of them as large digital collages, but I wasn't quite sure what 'genre' or 'oeuvre' they fitted into. I did some further research into the origins of 'Photomontage' and discovered the work of Gustave Rejlander. Rejlander was a pioneer of combination photography, who completed his seminal work 'Two ways of Life' in 1857. This was influenced by Raphael's School of Athens (1509-1511). It consists of 32 combined negatives, each exploring different human archetypes e.g. 'the gamblers', 'the old hag' or 'the sage'. (Fig. 4) Although this work was completed over 150 years ago Rejlander was doing something very similar to me, dealing with the similar concerns by creating a contemporary translation of an older image, using new equipment of his time. Rejlander was using new photographic

processes that had been recently discovered and again today I am also using new technology: a robot, a digital camera, Photoshop and the World Wide Web.

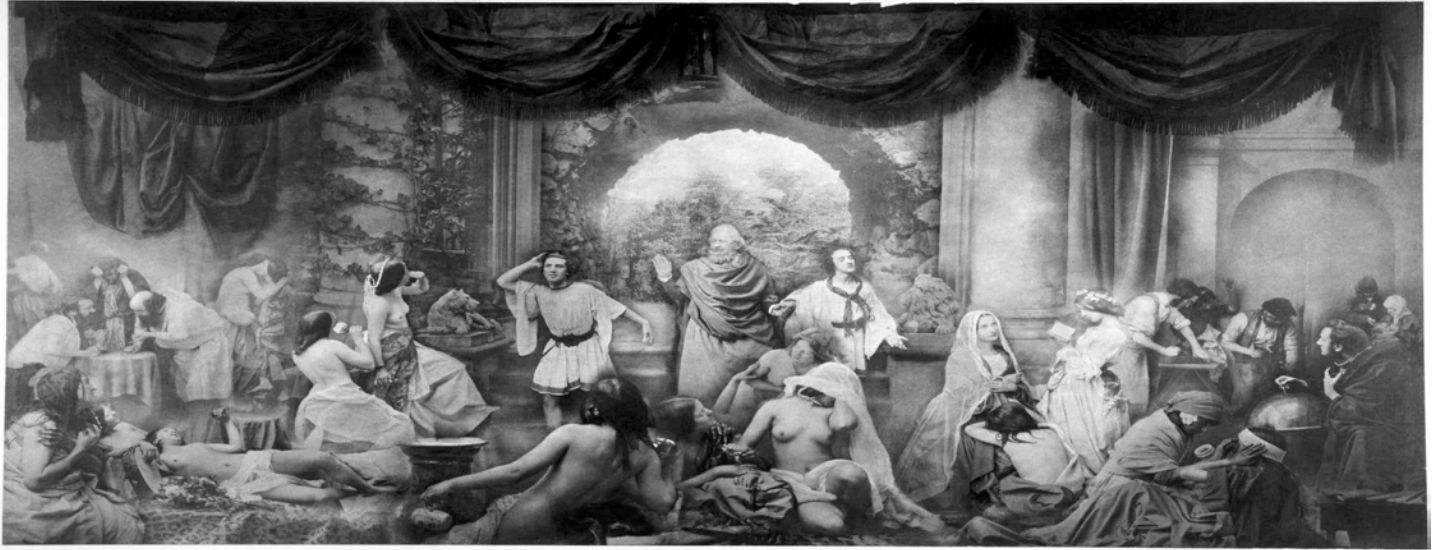


Figure 4, Gustave Rejlander, Two ways of life, 1857

Retrieved from Wikipedia website, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/31/Oscar-gustave-rejlander_two_ways_of_life.jpg/640px-Oscar-gustave-rejlander_two_ways_of_life.jpg

After looking at Rejlander, I traced the route 'Montage' has taken through the 20th century to the present day and I slowly began to realise that my Gigapan artworks are a historical and logical continuation of numerous montage works that I had always enjoyed looking at and had admired. For me key works in this genre are: Hannah Hoch's Dadaist images, Rodchenko's early revolutionary collages and constructivist posters from the 1920's, Man Ray's surreal photographic experiments from the 1930's and the Pop Art works of Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake from the 1960's. Two contemporary artists who also employ montage techniques and who I also respect are Andreas Gursky and Wang QuinSong.

When we look at Hannah Hock's 'Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer-Belly of the Weimar Republic, 1919-1920', the composition and layout differs greatly from the Rejlander work I have just described. It has a freer composition and she makes no attempt to visualise figurative perspective space, so the characters are spatially different sizes regardless of how near or far they are. The figures are gathered from many different sources and arranged in an amusing and playful manner. (Fig. 5)



Figure 5, Cut with the kitchen knife through the beer-belly of the Weimar Republic, 1919-1920 Retrieved from Wikipedia website, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_H%C3%B6ch#/media/File:Hoch-Cut_With_the_Kitchen_Knife.jpg



Figure 6, Alexander Rodchenko, Photomontage for Pro Eto, 1923
Retrieved from Employees one on to website,
<http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth219/rodchenko.jpg>

In Rodchenko's 'Photomontage for Pro Eto, 1923' the collaged elements create an imaginative, but more conventional pictorial space. There's a man on the top of the building reaching out into space whilst an aeroplane flies by. (Fig. 6) Later Rodchenko became fascinated with relationships between photography and typography, influenced heavily by the Russian Avant-garde.

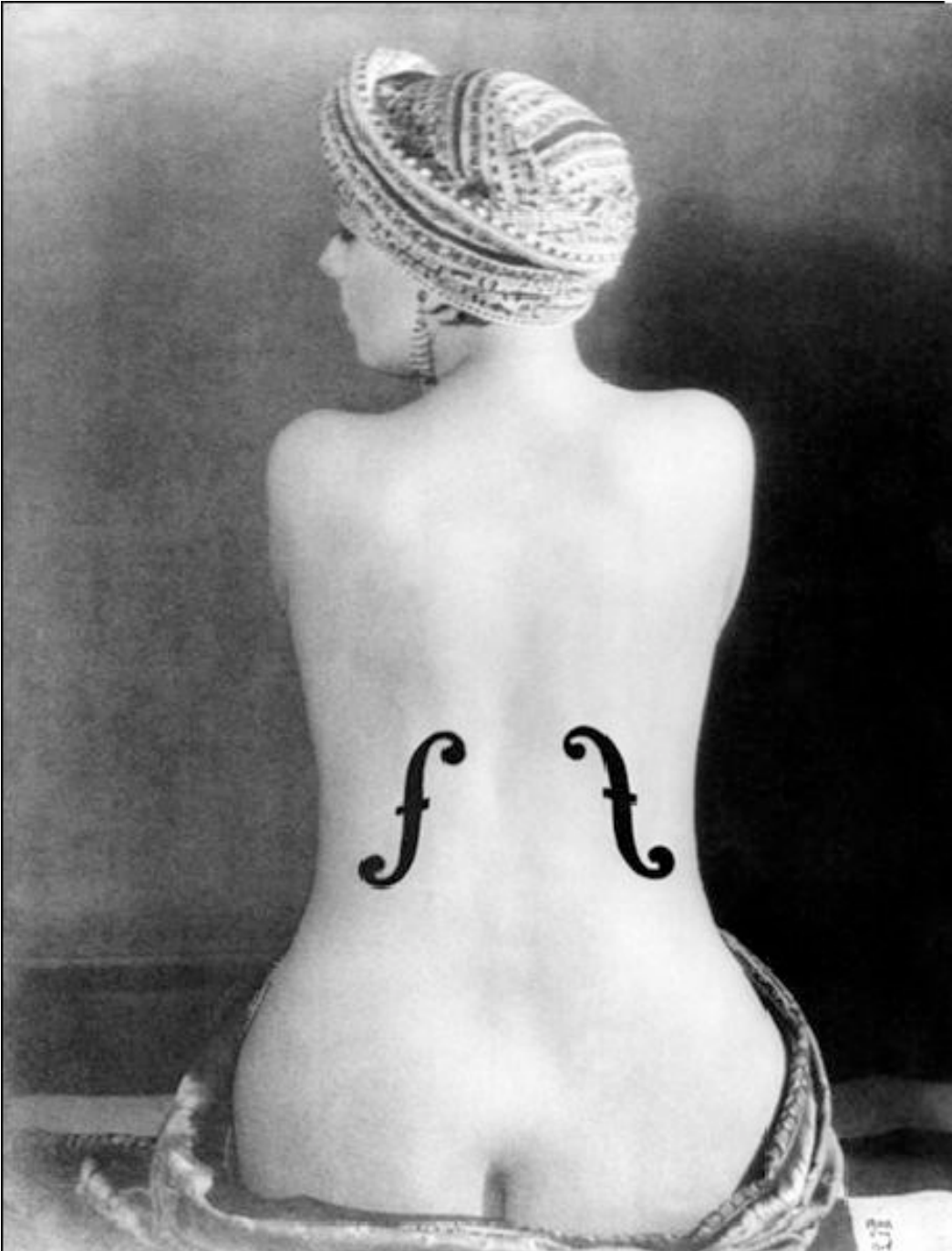


Figure 7, Man Ray, Ingres's Violin, 1924
Retrieved from Wikiart website, <http://www.wikiart.org/en/man-ray/ingre-s-violin-1924>

Man Ray's photographs, I would argue are closer to Rejlander's work, in that he shares a similar fascination with photographic experimentation. In 'Ingres's Violin 1924' he cleverly adds musical elements to change the woman into a Violin, emphasising the similarities of the female shape. (Fig. 7) Richard Hamilton's work 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?', 1956, creates a truly postmodern figurative space, using elements taken from different historical pop sources such as: a romance novel, an old portrait and a can of Spam meat. (Fig. 8)



Figure 8, Richard Hamilton, 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' 1956 Retrieved from Wikipedia website, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Just_what_is_it_that_makes_today's_homes_so_different,_so_appealing_%3F#/media/File:Hamilton-appealing2.jpg

Peter Blake does something similar in his album cover design for the Beatles 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, 1967', where the people in the scene are assembled from many different chronological points. For example Bob Dylan, H.G. Wells and Albert Einstein. (Fig. 9)



Figure 9, Peter Blake, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Beatles Album Cover, 1967
Retrieved from Wikipedia website,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_images_on_the_cover_of_Sgt._Pepper's_Lonely_Hearts_Club_Band

These works show us how to create imaginative spaces using inventive montage techniques. The Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton works are also important in that they use elements from culturally or historically different regions, creating scenes with contrasting characters derived from diverse backgrounds. In 1998, whilst working in Kettles Yard Gallery, Cambridge, UK, as an intern, I saw my first Andreas Gursky image, Montparnasse, 1993. This is an enormous photograph of a high rise building in Paris. At the time, I was mesmerized by this work and I found its monumental quality quite astounding. Firstly, the size of the work was 187 × 427.8cm and I had never seen a photograph this large. (Incidentally this is a similar size to my works now) As well as the size, there are hundreds of windows and every one is in perfect detail and I wondered how it was possible to take a picture of such magnitude and clarity. (Fig. 10)



Figure 10, Andreas Gursky, Montparnasse, 1993

Retrieved from Media Art Net website, <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/montparnasse>

I have followed Gursky's work and I was interested to find out that after 1990 he began digitally manipulating images, to make them appear bigger or to include more elements. Often his pictures have hundreds of people or many activities happening at one time. (Fig. 11) These are sourced from different photographs that he has taken and montaged together to create mammoth documentary-style scenes. They often show everyday activities in expansive spaces such as supermarkets, docks and stock exchanges.

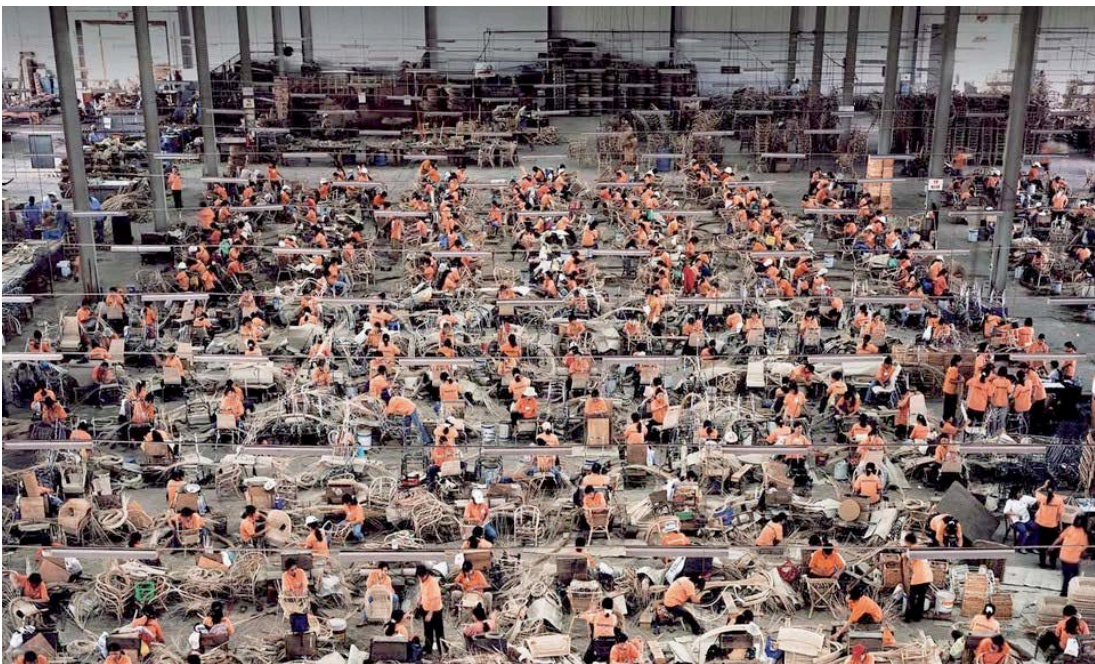


Figure 11, Cane factory, Nha Trang, Vietnam, Andreas Gursky

Retrieved from Media Art Net website, <http://www.architectural-review.com/reviews/andreas-gurskys-eye-for-detail/8626969.article>

Later in 2010, I discovered the Chinese artist Wang Qingsong. Qingsong's photographs also have a larger-than-life quality. However, unlike Gursky, he builds the actual scenes himself and his works often have a storyline or narrative message. In *Follow Me*, 2003 he constructs a huge four-meter wide by eight-meter long blackboard in his Beijing Film Studio, and scribbled many Chinese and English terms and slogans that

reference changes in Chinese history and culture. (Fig. 12) In Qinsong's works I am attracted to the fact that he deals with cultural questions and themes because I also share an interest in exploring cultural identity in my practice. I can also see that his work touches on similar themes to my own, such as religion, politics and dystopia. By analyzing the work of all of these artists I have come to understand many possibilities of photographic manipulation and I grew an interest in working with 'montage' and using new technology.



Figure 12, Wang QinSong, Follow Me, 2003

Retrieved from Wang Qinsong website,

http://www.wangqinsong.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=87&Itemid=15

Considering this research and re-visiting these 'montage' images, I also realised that my Gigapan works were not 'collage'. I began by calling my works 'Digital Collages', but as collage is strictly a non-digital and a manual form of montage, I have begun to refer them as 'photomontage' as they have a greater resemblance in pictorial style and execution to Rejlander work and other 'photomontage' artists after him. However it is true to say, in terms of content, my works bear more of a resemblance to Blake and Hamilton's collages. The noteworthy difference is that my images don't employ physical photographs and are comprised of pictures downloaded from the Internet. So given this important point, perhaps they form part of a new 'genre' or 'oeuvre', which I could perhaps call 'Virtual Digital Montages' or 'Digital Web Montages'.

5 Gigapan works

The Great Battle, (After Canaletto), 2010-12

The battlefield is symbolic of the field of life, where every creature lives on the death of another. A realization of the inevitable guilt of life may so sicken the heart, that like Hamlet, or like Arjuna, one may refuse to go on with it. On the other hand, like most of the rest of us, one may invent a false, finally unjustified image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world--not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning, because one represents the good. Such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself, but of the nature of both Man and the Cosmos. (Campbell, J, 1949)

Campbell sums up what I believe to be an important truism, that, in each of us there is a dark side, a 'sinner in us' if you like, that we ignore or suppress to the detriment of society. We like to create our own myth that we are essentially good. I also like the idea that Campbell evokes here, that 'the battlefield is symbolic of the field of life'. This is perhaps why we are so drawn to stories of power and hero myths, which Campbell talks so succinctly about in 'A hero with a thousand faces'. This remarkable book, which I was very taken with as a student, also inspired one of my favorite series of movies, George Lucas' Star Wars films. What I prized about the Star Wars trilogy is this epic intergalactic battlefield, where the forces of good and evil are playing

out. In Lucas' films, Luke Skywalker, is attracted to 'the dark side' and is faced with the dilemma that his main enemy the sinister, Darth Vader, is his father and he has to kill him, to save himself and the world.

Here also, Campbell suggests that the realization of human guilt can taint the heart, and characters such as Hamlet, or Arjuna, simply couldn't bare this feeling. When embarking on my work *The Great Battle*, I was fascinated by these notions of guilt and the countless archetypal stories (similar to Hamlet or the Mahabharata), which explored good and evil that I had known, and had played out on TV, in Comics or at the Movies. I wanted to portray these aspects of good and evil in a type of 'symbolic battlefield of life' and so I created an imaginary, epic combat zone from these stories that I have known. (Fig 13a)



Figure 13a, *The Great Battle*, (After Canaletto), 2010-12, (Dimensions 5m x 1.4m)

During my artist residency in Venice, which I mentioned before, I would look out from the Rialto Bridge everyday, as I lived nearby. I would often fantasize about great water battles from the past acted out on the Grand Canal and I would also imagine, in my minds eye different characters from these stories of my past, living in the rooms, in the buildings or walking on the docks on both sides of the canal. Therefore, when I started working on the image I had captured of Venice, I first digitally montaged the character of Luke Skywalker (that had I downloaded), on one side of the image and Darth Vader on the other. I then made a decision that I would continue to add good characters on the right side of the picture (Fig 13b) and bad characters on left. (Fig.13c)



Figure 13b, (Good), The Great Battle, (After Canaletto), 2010-12, (Dimensions 5m x 1.4m)



Figure 13c (Bad), The Great Battle, (After Canaletto), 2010-12, (Dimensions 5m x 1.4m)

I began trawling my memory and wrote a list of TV and film heroes and villains. I then thought about historic people that had had a huge appeal to me a young man. This included politicians, celebrities, pop stars, footballers, athletes and mythological creatures. I found images of these characters on the Internet and superimposed them onto either the friendly or the wicked side of my image. This wave of nostalgia created the psychological arena of the image.

What surprised me is just how many Good vs Evil stories a then 38-year-old man could remember and hold in his mind. These stories/mythologies manifested themselves in the image, for people to see. When talking about this image, two years after it was finished, I jokingly remarked to viewers that what they were seeing was what happens inside my brain. It's my very own nostalgic battle. It is like turning on an imaginary TV and viewing a section of all the dramas of my childhood at one time in one place, in Renaissance Italy!

One question often asked about this image is, "who wins?" When interpreting it in terms ethics and who will triumph, I personally think of this image as being redemptive. In that, nearly always concerning the characters in the image good overcomes evil. But of course this is a rather simplistic interpretation and this is not always true. For example, Vito Corleone sits in one of the windows of the left hand side. Vito in Ford Coppola's 'Godfather' films is a notorious and cruel Gangster who lives a very long life and is never defeated. Here is another interpretation on the work,

The key to understanding this piece of work is the fact that its impulses are mainly derived from intense religious faiths. When I look at this picture, founded on spirit of the current era, I see religious or rather fanatical elements combined with military passions, which have throughout the course of history ultimately won despotic power. (Holmes, D, 2015)

Unlike me, when Holmes regards The Great Battle, he feels that evil will overcome the good. I sense that Holmes is focusing in on the darker elements inherent in the work and he is concentrating on the fanatical and political elements on the criminal left side of the work, e.g. Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte etc....

The use of Gigapan technology allows the creation of this giant impression. The image can be printed very large, 5 meters wide and 1 meter high, without losing any detail. This scale helps to create a majestic quality and permits the digital addition of hundreds if not thousands of elements into an image. This gives it a larger-than-life quality, which emphasizes the ethical themes and nostalgic power struggles expressed within.

The Assembly of the Gods, 2012-13

The psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today (in so far as we are unbelievers, or, if believers, in so far as our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life) must face alone, or, at best with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. This is our problem as modern, "enlightened" individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence." (Campbell, J, 1949)

Campbell proposes here, that in modern society many of us are faced with a spiritual void, lacking any effective guidance. Where religion has been questioned away, many of us turn to 'spiritual shopping', free to choose our belief systems. I personally hold an atheist standpoint, but I have always been fascinated by different faiths and religions and their rich stories and traditions. I wonder though, what can these faith stories teach us today and why do we still need them?

During another artist residency in Kathmandu, Nepal in February, 2012, I created a panoramic Image of Patan Square. (Sadly, in April 2015, two of the temples seen in my image, were destroyed by an earthquake) When making this image it was difficult to think of any other theme to use other than religion, as the place I was

staying is considered sacred by thousands of Buddhist devotees visiting every day. Another catalyst for this work was the image I had found, 'Assembly of the Gods' created by Bernardo Buontalenti, a 16th century stage designer and Architect. Previously, I was fascinated by this Buontalenti's sketch and I often imagined what it would be like to create an image like his, but using every image of a god that I could find. So, using my Patan Square picture, I constructed my own Assembly of Gods using religious or sacred imagery, which I could find in the vast vaults of the history of art. (Fig 14a)



Figure 14a, The Assembly of the Gods, 2012-13 (Dimensions 5m x 1m)

Initially, I found images of the world's most popular gods: Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Vishnu etc....Next I searched for material from Scandinavia, Africa, South America, Native America and Australia. Then I looked for pagan gods and characters that were somehow related to worship, for example popes, pop stars and sporting celebrities. Images of religious characters from Muslim and Jewish faiths have not been included out of respect for these faiths and also because these faiths don't usually create images from their religious stories.

When interpreting this image, similar to The Great Battle, After Canaletto, 2010-12, it is obvious, we can also look at the two polar forces, good and evil. These of course have played out in different monotheistic and polytheistic religions throughout time. Also in The Assembly of the Gods we have the option to see gods from the Roman and Greek pantheons together, alongside Egyptian, Syrian gods and countless other deities. This gives one an idea of just how many different religious characters have existed throughout humanity. It also allows us to compare and contrast the aesthetics features of different spiritual characters from diverse regions and times. (Fig 14b)



Figure 14b (Detail), The Assembly of the Gods, 2012-13

The Gigapan technology used in this image, again allows the creation of a huge background, here taken in Kathmandu. It also has an epic scale, similar to The Great Battle and the sight of hundreds of holy characters overlaid and seen in sharp detail, is again only made possible using this equipment.

The Astronomer (Portrait of Sir Patrick Moore), 2010-13

Sir Patrick Moore (4 March, 1923 – 9 December, 2012) was a famous British astronomer and personality, whom I used to watch on TV as a child. I was fascinated by anything relating to space and the late Sir Patrick Moore's program The Sky at Night on the BBC, was a favourite of mine. In 2010, I was living in the UK in Brighton, Sussex, near Selsey, a town where Moore lived. I decided to send him a letter asking him if I could make a portrait of him. He obliged my offer and I was fortunate enough to spend the day with him and take a Gigapan image in his study room. During my visit we talked about many things including cricket, the moon, Neil Armstrong and Albert Einstein.

When I started making this image (Fig 15). I wanted to infuse into it many things relating to Patrick's working life and so I found on the Internet many images relating to the cosmos and astronomy. Most of these space related objects were from the USA as this is what my Internet search engine provided me with. Later, during the making of this work, I was offered a job in Moscow at the British Higher School of Art and Design and in 2013 I moved to Russia. This gave me a rare chance to view, at the nearby Cosmonautics Memorial Museum, many rare artefacts and models from the former USSR. I visited this place many times and took hundreds of pictures of space memorabilia in the displays, which I later added to The Astronomer. I did this, as I wanted to make my image more universal. Here, I made a conscious decision to add these two constituents from the East and West, which would imbue elements of a kind of space race between the US and the Soviet Union. I also decided to join these two components using 'falling blocks' from the computer game Tetris. Tetris was invented in Russia by Alexey Pajitnov. It was released on June 6, 1984 and became one of the most popular games in the world. Surprisingly, many people still don't realise that Tetris is a Russian game!

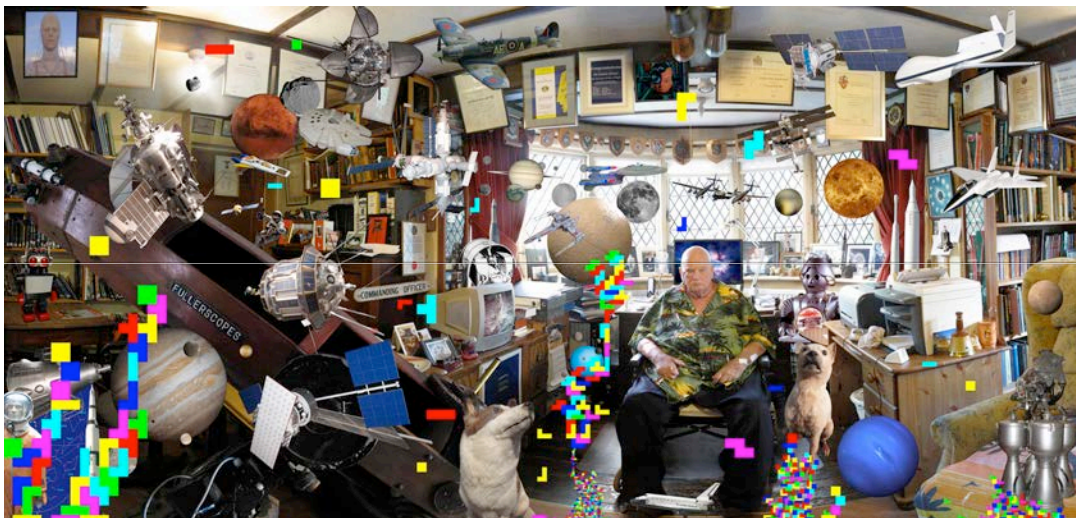


Figure 15, The Astronomer (Portrait of Sir Patrick Moore), 2010-13 (Dimensions 4.5m x 2m)

Ronan Kelly writes about the work,

There is something gravity defying about the piece, with various aircraft, planets and Tetris blocks hanging suspended in the room. The detail is so well mapped, that in places it's difficult to know which objects were actually in the room at the time of photographing, and which were superimposed on afterwards. (Kelly, R, 2015)

Using Adobe Photoshop, I used different lighting filters and added various effects to the work. Also there are various ways to blur the images and adjust the edges to make them look as if they were always in the image after they have been inserted. In *The Astronomer*, these tricks also add to, as Kelly puts it, the 'gravity defying' impact of the work.

Invader, 2012-13

Under America's watch hundreds of thousands of Middle Easterners have perished in continuing conflicts in Iraq, Algeria, Sudan and Israel/Palestine. US credibility in the region is in tatters. (Nicolas, P, 2010)

At the beginning of 2012 I was teaching in the Middle East in Oman, at the Scientific College of Design. I realized that if I was going to make an image there, it had to use the stunning Martian-like mountain landscape near my home. After taking an image, I decided I wanted to create something a little different. I thought about adding various characters, but somehow this image of the mountain, needed something else. I thought about adding images from all the computer games I had ever played. I also remembered the game *Bombjack* that was a favorite of mine from 1984. In this game the action takes place on different scenes of familiar places. The Acropolis in Greece, The Pyramids in Egypt and a New York style scene. (Fig. 16)



Figure 16, Bomb Jack Computer Game, 1984

Retrieved from Wikipedia website, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bomb_Jack

Whilst I was in the Middle East the 'Arab Spring' took place and there were many demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Rulers from these areas had been deposed, and there was a feeling in the region of great political change and upheaval. In 2011-12, I also had conversations with friends from Iraq about the recent war there, which I personally believed wasn't about creating stability in the area, as the US and UK government were suggesting, but was really about oil rights, gaining strategic power in the region and capitalist greed.

During this time, I read various history books on the Middle East including ‘A History of the Middle East’ by Nicholas Pelham, ‘Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph’ by T.E. Lawrence and ‘Orientalism’ by Edward W. Said. This led me to reflect on the negative effects of colonialism and American/UK policy and I wanted to somehow comment about the inequality of power in this new work. My intention in Invader was that the 1650 space invaders could be interpreted as huge undefeatable armies, symbolizing colonialism and the defending ship represents a small symbolic Middle Eastern region trying to defend itself against this vastly superior force. (Fig. 17)



Figure 17, Invader, 2012-13 (Dimensions 4.5m x 1m)

Here, the Gigapan technology allows over one and a half thousand space computer game elements to be overlaid on a very high-resolution scene. This technology also means we are able to see the miniature desert plants, stones and all the sharp details of the pixilated overlaid elements. (Fig 18)



Figure 18 (Detail), Invader, 2012-13 (Dimensions 4.5m x 1m)

Times Square Nude (After Hieronymus Bosch), 2012-14

I started working on this final work in the series, whilst I was an artist in residence with the Art Student League of New York, in August, 2012. It was obvious to me here that I should use Times Square as a location for this work, because its one of the most iconic spaces in New York and I also see this place in some ways as being symbolic of capitalist ideals and as being a kind of heart of America.

At this time, I was also investigating Hieronymus Bosch paintings and I wanted to imbue some of the bizarre and shadowy qualities of Bosch's work into this image. In many Bosch paintings there are people acting out strange deeds and are involved in immoral and devious behaviors. (Fig. 19) This, I thought could relate to aspects of life in Manhattan. Also at the time, someone at the residency house suggested that, if you can think of any act or activity, however bad or depraved, it would be happening somewhere in New York. This stuck in my mind and further implied an aptness to create a Bosch-like scene in Times Square and encapsulate and symbolize some of these darker features of American culture.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Last Judgement, 1482

Retrieved from Wikipedia website,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_%28Bosch_triptych%29#/media/File:Last_judgement_Bosch.jpg

Consequently, in this scene there are sexual deviants, American soldiers photographed in Iraq, notorious serial killers, religious fanatics, riot police, demonstrators of different descriptions, hipsters, superhero Impersonators, child drug addicts, animal abusers, Nazi sympathizers, anorexic and obese people, wounded children and dead bodies- photographed in war scenes, lifeless creatures and President Obama. These people are gathered in a hapless and ill-fated scene surrounded by a burning building, a crashed helicopter, a sprinting giraffe and scattering birds desperate to escape. (Fig 20)



Figure 20, Time Square Nude (After Hieronymus Bosch), 2012-14 (Dimensions 4.5m x 1.5m)

Some of the other influences for New York Nude are recent dystopian classics such as Francis Ford Copola's Apocalypse Now, The AMC production of The Walking Dead and the William Burroughs novel 'Cities of the Red Night' written in 1982. This image also tells a story of a dystopian world that has disintegrated into chaos and disorder and the work relates directly to many aspects in Bosch's work, where immorality rules. The difference with New York Nude however is all of the characters are not persons from stories or from Biblical enactments. They are not paintings and are photographically real. What's very worrying about the people in Time Square Nude is they symbolize themselves and are portraying aspects of a very real and frightening now.

Similar to the other images, the Gigapan technology allows the capability to create a giant (New York) landscape, infused with countless characters. This differs from a Bosch image, because Bosch's paintings are very small in comparison. What's incredible about Bosch's paintings is the detail in these very small painted characters. One wonders, if Bosch were alive today would he use a computer and would he work with similar themes as myself?

Conclusion

In the 5 works, there are various threads that run through them. Ethical ideas about good and evil are evident in Times Square Nude, The Great Battle, Invader and The Assembly of the Gods. In The Astronomer this is less apparent, however the cosmos related material from both sides of the Cold War, Iron Curtain, USA and Russia, does suggest a conflict of sorts.

The otherworldly quality, which is created using Gigapan technology, makes the works into giant digital mural- like images. As I have indicated before, this gives them an epic quality, similar to Renaissance friezes, we can also make comparisons with the work of Paolo Uccello (Fig. 14) and they are also reminiscent of the huge socialist murals like that of the artist Diego Rivera (Fig.15). What distinguishes the Gigapan work from these kinds of paintings, as I have also stated previously, is all the images originate from real photographs and this creates a different kind of reading.



Figure 14, Paolo Uccello, The Hunt in the Forest, 1470

Retrieved from Wikipedia website,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunt_in_the_Forest#/media/File:Hunt_in_the_forest_by_paolo_uccello.jpg



Figure 15, Diego Rivera, Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda, 1946-7
Retrieved from Wikiart website, <http://www.wikiart.org/en/diego-rivera/dream-of-a-sunday-afternoon-in-alameda-park-1948>

The Internet and access to digital imagery, permits a different type of construction that was unimaginable before. This reflects and compounds the postmodern nature of these Gigapan works, as they use imagery from many different regions, cultures, religions and histories. As I alluded to before, this has similarities to the multi-thematic content of Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton's montage works. Pictorially in *The Great Battle*, *The Assembly of the Gods* and *Times Square Nude* there are also similarities with Blake and Hamilton's works in that they use conventional perspectival rules. However, this is not so in *The Astronomer*, where the composition has an ad-hoc quality relating to the size and placement of objects, similar to Hannah Hocks work I mentioned earlier. *Invader* is quite different from the other works, as the composition is appropriated from an 80's computer game, previously described. My work also has commonalities with Gustave Rejlander and Man Ray, in that it deals with photographic experimentation and cutting edge technology of its day.

My practice also shares connections with Gursky and QinSong, in that I have been influenced by how they technically construct images and my work also has a similar otherworldly quality to theirs; however, my pictures differ as they are assembled, by 'montaging' many virtual sources onto a (Gigapan) photographic background. As such, I feel that I am delving into a new digital practice, made possible by this new technology. Because of this original and unique way of working, I also believe my images capture a *Zeitgeist* and they offer viewers unique and new visions of our current world.

The Internet allows us to view information from across the globe and provides us with a richer (but sometimes darker) understanding of society that was inconceivable before. I consider that by imbuing huge quantities of this diverse and once virtual material into giant super-sharp images, and by exploring socially significant themes, my work reflects important aspects of contemporary culture in a new way and is considerably stretching the boundaries of what images can be and can portray.

Technical Notes:

All of the imagery that I found on different websites was added to the base image at the same resolution, which it was found. In these Gigapan works, I only used images, which could be sourced, that were 'very large' (at least: 1000x1000 pixels) using the search engine. (Note: If you use: Google, Yahoo, Bing, Baidu or most other search engines, it is possible to choose the relative size of the images that you search for) If you printed at 300 dpi (dots per inch), a 1000 x 1000 pixel image it would be 8.5cm x 8.5 cm. This is slightly less than 2 megapixels. 2 megapixels is 1600x1200 pixels.

The total size of each Gigapan image is approximately 200 Mega pixels.

References:

Gigapan 2015, Gigapan Website. Available From: <<http://www.gigapan.com>> [1 October 2015]

Google Earth 2015, Google Earth Website, Retrieved October 1, 2015
Available from: <<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>> [1 October 2015]

Eames, C, 1977. The Powers of Ten. IBM Press, New York

Bergman, D 2015. Gigapan Website, Available from: <<http://gigapan.com/gigapans/17217>> [25 September 25, 2015]

Tchmyreva, I, 2011, Exhibition Catalogue, Assembling Reality, Two Ways of Life, by Oscar Gustave Rejlander. Garage Centre of Contemporary Culture, Moscow

Campbell, J, 1949, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Pantheon Books, New York.

Holmes, D 2015, James Johnson-Perkins, Artist Website. Available from: <<http://www.johnson-perkins.co.uk/essays.html>> [5 October 2015].

Kelly, R 2015, James Johnson-Perkins, Artist Website. Available from: <<http://www.johnson-perkins.co.uk/essays.html>> [5 October 2015].

Nicolas, P 2010 (Foreword), Mansfield, P, 2010, A History of the Middle East, Penguin Books, London

Star Wars (Trilogy), Dir. George Lucas, 1977-83, 20th Century Fox