

Rankin and richard avedon comparison



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Richard Avedon and John Rankin Waddell (more commonly known as Rankin) have many similarities in their work and have also done many of the same things during their careers; this is not to say that there are no differences though. During this essay I am going to try to compare and contrast both the photographic work and the careers of two photographers.

To do this I have researched both photographers, I have researched their lives and careers and also their images. I have looked at similarities and differences in the photographers work, in style, composition, elements and equipment. For my research I have used a mixture of books and the internet (using websites, online interviews, biographies and news articles) which are all secondary sources of information.

A brief background of the chosen photographers

Avedon was born in New York City, America in 1923. In 1942 after a short time at University Avedon dropped out to join the U. S Merchant Marine to study photography, he left in 1944 and began working as a professional photographer in a department store. Within a year Avedon had been spotted by an art director and was working as a staff photographer for Harper's bazaar magazine. This was the start of a very busy and fulfilled photography career for Avedon which went on until his death in 2004 at the age of 81.

Rankin was born in 1966 in Paisley, Scotland but was brought up in Hertfordshire, England. After being expelled from school Rankin tried studying Accountancy for a short while, realising this is not what he wanted to do he went on to study photography at London College of Printing. In 1991

he left college to go on and form ' Dazed & Confused' magazine with his friend Jefferson Hack. This was the beginning of Rankin's career.

Fashion

Avedon always had an interest in Fashion and this was no surprise given that his Father owned a department store in Manhattan and he regularly had magazines such as Harpers Bazaar, Vogue and Vanity Fair delivered to their family home. Reading through magazines such as these gave Avedon the desire to try to recreate these images which were taken by photographers such as Steichen, Man Ray and Munkasci. Avedon started producing his own photos by the use of a Kodak Box Brownie camera and using his younger sister as a model.

' When Avedon became a professional fashion photographer, fashion models were not public celebrities, their work had no prestige, and their names were not generally known' (Avedon and Hollander: 2005 : p238)

This is a big difference between Avedon and Rankin. When shooting fashion it has always been common for Rankin to use famous models, this is not only due to choice but also due to a change in times. Fashion photography in the 1940s, when Avedon started out his photography career was different in many more ways than the fame or popularity of the models. Avedon created a name for himself within the industry by injecting life and colour into fashion photography that hadn't really been done before. His portraits contained smiles, laughter and action which completely went against the norm in photography for this period. This is something that obviously influenced

Rankin and can still be seen in his work today. Images by both are usually very minimalist and clean looking.

The first image is by Avedon and was used by Vogue for the front cover and the second is by Rankin.

Portraits

Avedon had always had an interest in portraiture and also a unique way of doing it. When taking portraits of people Avedon used to talk about uncomfortable subjects and asked them very probing questions. This caused reactions that gave Avedon a raw view of people that wasn't very often caught by others. His style was very detectable from the subject posing in front of a plain white background and looking directly into the camera. All the pictures were very minimalistic and almost clinical looking.

In 1985 he held an exhibition called ' American West'; the exhibition consisted of 125 photos that he had taken between 1979 and 1984, he had photographed drifters, miners, cowboys and many other from the western United States. Avedon was attracted to working people and teenagers growing up in the west. This went on to be published as a book and even though it was criticised at the time from people saying it was giving a bad impression of America it is still seen today as a hugely important hallmark of 20th Century portrait photography.

Most of Rankin's portraits are done with the same look of plain white background and the subject looking squarely into the camera. Rankin also has a way of bring something very personal to his portraits and has a skill of

really reflecting the models personality in the image but done in a different way to which Avedon did, usually by applying a quirky prop or pose.

Examples of their portraits are below; the first is by Avedon and the second by Rankin.

Documentary

Avedon's portraits from the ' American West' exhibition are of a documentary style, the pictures are documenting the west of the United States the years of 1979 and 1981. Avedon was interested in showing the real people of this area and time, he chose to photograph workers such as oil field workers and miners in their dirty work gear. He also photographed unemployed travellers and teenagers that were growing up here.

In 2008 Rankin, with Oxfam, did his own documentary photography exhibition entitled Cheka Kidogo. For this exhibition, travelling to the Democratic Republic of Congo in June 2008, Rankin took photos of people that were now living in refugee camps due to fleeing conflict in area. The exhibition was to show the reality and draw attention back to the forgotten conflict of the country. Rankin then donated all of the profits from his ' Rankin Live' exhibition to Oxfam.

Even though there aren't many visual similarities between the two sets of photos, there is a big likeness in the reason behind both and what the photographers wanted to show with them. The main reason for both exhibitions is to show the reality of living in a certain place and time and

then the life that this then creates for people. Both tried to capture and show the lives of their subjects through the people in their portraits.

Erotica

Both Avedon and Rankin have shot an Erotica collection. Even though Rankin's seems to be a lot more extensive, you can still see the similarities and influences from Avedon's work. In the pictures below you can see that the similarities are that of composition, colour, contrast and style. On the below image you can see that Rankin has also added his own style to the picture with the way he has lit the shot and the addition of the snake. Avedon's image is also very flat compared to Rankin's image.

The first is by Avedon, 1992, and the second by Rankin, 2007

A large amount of Rankin's recent work falls into the Erotica category. He has published a book that is predominantly of this nature featuring Tuuli Shipster, who was previously his muse but is now his wife. The book is a collection of erotic images of her that he has entitled 'A Photographic Love Letter'. Rankin has also published other books that contain more of his erotic images, probably his most famous one being called 'Cheeky', in 2002 he has released a book called 'Sofa Sexy' which is slightly more adventurous and daring than his other erotica work.

Colour

Due to the time a lot of Avedon's photos are black and white but even as time went on and colour photography became much more desirable and available, Avedon still shot much of his personal work in black and white.

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This doesn't mean that he never used colour though, quite the opposite, when shooting for fashion magazines during the 60s and 70s Avedon experimented a lot with colour photography.

Avedon's long relationship with fashion magazine 'Harpers Bazaar' allowed him to try out color as much as – or more than – any experimental photographer of the period. His palette derived from trendy colors of the time, including hot pink, which helped spread the colours through the clothing and cosmetics industry. (Marien : 2006: p354)

Rankin does occasionally produce black and white pictures but as a whole most of his work tends to be in quite vivid colour.

Both photographers produced a lot of portraits on white backgrounds.

Even though one uses mainly colour photography and the other black and white both generally produce very high contrast, high key pictures.

Rankin – 7 photographs that changed fashion

For a BBC documentary Rankin tried to recreate what he thought were the 7 photographs that changed fashion. The photos were originally taken by photographers that had influenced and inspired him such as, Herb Ritts, Cecil Beaton, Guy Bourdin, David Bailey, Erwin Blumenfeld, Helmut Newton and Richard Avedon.

During the program Rankin's goal is to expose the ways in which fashion photography uses fantasy and beauty to communicate something about reality. (http://www. bbc. co. uk/programmes/b00gq75c)

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For one of the seven photographs Rankin recreated Avedon's 1955 'Dovima With Elephants' for this he used model Erin O'Connor. He said he chose her for her tall frame and demeanour; this obviously matched that of model Dovima that Avedon had used for his image. Rankin produced the image in colour unlike Avedon's original that was black and white. Even though Rankin produced a very good image I don't think he managed to capture the atmosphere that Avedon did in his image.

During the BBC documentary Rankin said about Avedon, " Classic styling with energy and creative spirit. Daring, stylish and ambitious, his pictures reflected the optimism of 50s America and turned him into the first celebrity fashion photographer." (BBC : 2009 : The seven Photographs That Changed Fashion)

Avedon – 1955 Rankin – 2008

Books and Magazines

Both photographers have produced many books of their photography and many of Avedon's have been produced after his death:

Avedon:

'Nothing Personal'. Photographs by Richard Avedon and text by James Baldwin – 1964

'An Autobiography: The Photographs of Richard Avedon' – 1993

'Evidence: 1944-1994' – 1994

¿½ In the American West: Richard Avedon – Photographs 1979 – 1984 – 1996

¿½ The Sixties – 1999

¿½ Richard Avedon Portraits – 2002

¿½ Woman in the Mirror: 1945-2004 – 2005

¿½ Richard Avedon: Photographs 1946-2004 – 2007

¿½ Richard Avedon: The Kennedys: Portrait of a Family – 2007

¿½ Performance – 2008

¿½ Avedon Fashion 1944-2000 – 2009

Rankin

¿½ Snog – 2000

¿½ Celebration – 2000

¿½ Rankinworks – 2000

¿½ Rankin Male Nudes – 2001

¿½ Sofasexy – turning a cheap sofa into an object of desire – 2002

¿½ Breeding: a study of sexual ambiguity – 2004

¿½ Visually Hungry – 2007

¿½ Beautyfull – 2007

½ Tuulitastic – A Photographic Love Letter – 2007

½ Heidilicious – 2009

½ Alex Box – 2009

½ Cheeky – 2009

Both photographers were heavily involved in magazines during their careers and both predominantly about fashion, whether it be working for one or publishing their own. At the very beginning of his career Rankin, in 1991, with his friend Jefferson Hack started magazine ½Dazed and Confused½ this is still very popular and widely sold throughout the world. This was only the start for Rankin and he has gone on to produce magazines such as, ½RANK½, ½Another Magazine½ and ½Another Man½. Avedon was Art Director for ½Harper½s Bazaar½ at the beginning of his career and also worked for Vogue, Egoiste, The New Yorker and LIFE magazine.