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18 JAN–18 FEB 2018**

**THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS'
GALLERY**



**POETRY
OF PLACE:
PAUL
HART'S
LANDSCAPES**

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POETRY OF PLACE: PAUL HART'S LANDSCAPES

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British photographer Paul Hart (b.1961) has spent over a decade exploring human relationships with the land through photographs devoid of people.

Poetry of Place is Hart's first solo exhibition at The Photographers' Gallery and brings together his three related series to date; each one documenting a precise geographical region photographed intensively over a number of years.

Truncated (2005-2008) is a deeply embedded study of an ageing pine forest plantation in Derbyshire, England. The tightly knitted images of the trees - themselves becoming almost anthropomorphic forms - show an environment (largely unaffected by the modern world) where nature has self-created shelter and protection from the elements.



Alien, 2007, from *Truncated* © Paul Hart



Sea Bank, 2016, from *Drained* © Paul Hart

Moving away from the enclosed atmosphere of the forest to the wide-open expanses of the Fens in the East Midlands and the Wash in East Anglia, the subsequent series *Farmed* (2009-2015) and *Drained* (2016-2017) present sparse, linear landscapes, which have, over time, been cultivated by people.

By focusing on the often-overlooked elements in familiar vistas, Hart's aesthetics carry a documentary sensibility that allows the landscapes to define themselves. Working exclusively with black and white analogue film and traditional darkroom printing techniques, Hart's works convey something of the soulful in landscapes rarely considered of aesthetic merit.

BIOGRAPHY

Paul Hart (b.1961) studied at Lincoln College of Art and graduated from Nottingham Trent University in 1988 with a BA (Hons) in Photography. He has concentrated on self-initiated projects for exhibition and publication for the past fifteen years. His work has been exhibited internationally at venues such as; The Royal Academy of Art (London), The Photographers' Gallery (London), the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (London) and at prestigious art fairs including; Photo-London, Paris Photo and The AIPAD Photography Show New York.

To widespread critical acclaim, Hart has published two monographs; TRUNCATED (Dewi Lewis publishing 2008) and FARMED (Dewi Lewis publishing 2016). Both publications are held in the V&A Museum National Art Library Collection. He has received a number of major awards including: The PX3 Prix de la Photographie 2016 (France), The Tokyo International Foto Awards 2016 (Japan), The Moscow International Foto Awards 2016 (Russia) and The International Photography Awards 2015 (USA). Photography critics Gerry Badger and Collier Brown have written essays about Hart's work.

Paul Hart is widely known as a leading traditional printmaker, making finely crafted silver gelatin prints. His work is regularly featured in the press by publications such as; *The Daily Telegraph*, *LensCulture*, *Black + White Photography Magazine* and *Photomonitor*. He regularly collaborates with Ilford-Photo, and his work is often seen in their international promotional campaigns.

RECENT EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Artificial Things*, The University of Cambridge (UK)
Photography on a Postcard, The PrintSpace, London (UK)
In My View, The Photographers' Gallery, London (UK)
- 2016 *When Frost Was Spectre-Grey*, The Photographers' Gallery, London (UK)
Paris-Photo, Grand Palais, Augusta Edwards Fine Art, Paris (France)
Prix de la Photographie, Espace Beaurepaire, Paris (France)
Moscow International I Foto Awards, Na Kashirke Gallery, Moscow (Russia)
Photo-London, Somerset House, London (UK)
IGPOTY, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, London (UK)
- 2015 AIPAD Photography Show, NYC (USA)

AWARDS

- 2016 Winner : First Prize Monograph FARMED Prix de la Photographie, France.
Winner : First Prize Fine Art Series FARMED Prix de la Photographie, France.
Winner : Third Prize Fine Art Series FARMED Tokyo International Foto Awards, Japan.
Winner : Third Place Fine Art FARMED Moscow Foto Awards, Russia.
- 2015 Honourable Mention FARMED International Photography Awards, USA.
- 2009 Winner : Second Prize Book Series TRUNCATED Prix de la Photographie, France.
- 2008 Winner : Second Prize Fine Art Series TRUNCATED Prix de la Photographie, France.

PUBLICATIONS

- 2017 UPCOMING Monograph: DRAINED: Dewi Lewis Publishing, UK
- 2016 Monograph : FARMED : Dewi Lewis Publishing, UK
- 2014 Looking at Images : LensWork Publishing, USA
- 2008 Monograph : TRUNCATED : Dewi Lewis Publishing, UK
- 2006 Photo Projects : Argentum Publishing , UK



The roots of photographer Paul Hart's new book *Farmed* are firmly entrenched in rich, fertile soil. Intellectually, the first lines we read are part of a quote from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*—a seminal text which, for 150+ years, has grounded the still-unfinished process of drawing us back into a more conscious relationship with our environment. The first photograph we see is not by Hart but Dorothea Lange, the great chronicler of 1930s Depression-Era land mismanagement that aggravated the migrations surrounding the Dust Bowl. These important words and images put us in the frame of mind to consider humanity's relation to the land in contemporary times.

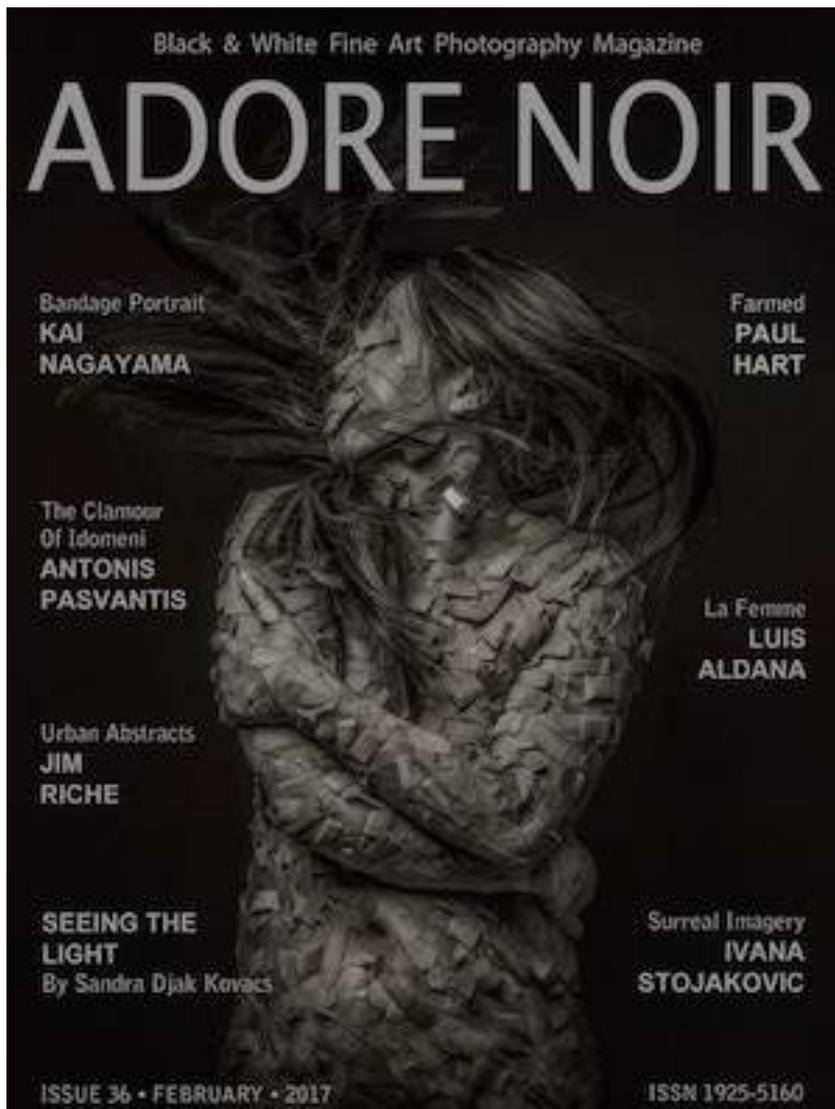
As Steven Brown so ably puts it in the introduction, "Hart's photographs raise important questions about possession, ownership, mobility, stewardship, history, memory, perspective—the list goes on. But none of these would matter much if the photographs were not, in their attention to the poetry of the place, earnest and moving." Indeed, it almost goes without saying that Hart's work displays admirable dark-room craftsmanship—but what makes this book stand out from other such analogue landscape series is how these pictures do not insist on remaining stuck in the past. Of course, any thoughtful gaze at deteriorating rural buildings and emptied agricultural tracts runs the risk of feeling nostalgic, romantic or even elegiac. But Hart manages to balance his lovingly attentive regard for the past with an ambiguous eye towards the present and future that confront us, if we care to look.

The most obvious example of this tension greets us in the middle of the book. We open to two facing photographs—*Fontaine Le Dun I* and *II*—which reveal a pair of wind turbines, whirring amidst great and overwhelming stillness. A ruinous encroachment of man on the environment, or new potentialities for the seemingly fallow land?

Just like that, a book of black-and-white photographs shifts from sentimental to prescient. The carefully composed farmhouses, solitary trees on the horizon, criss-crossing telephone lines and bounded canals are not simply one man's reflections on the changing local landscape—instead, they are an important meditation on all of humanity's relationship to the environment. After all, little is left on this earth that is untouched by our influence. Even where we choose to "preserve" nature, it is within tighter and tighter bounds (think of the highways, power lines and furrows that cover the surface of our planet—"wilderness" barely hanging on in the in-between spaces). We can either mourn an idealized past or confront the realities of our surroundings and decide which is the best way forward.

In this respect, the book's final three images are memorable. Two of them, side-by-side, reveal perfectly parallel power lines vanishing into the misty horizons of the distance. Where will our control over the land lead? Impossible to say, but Hart's magnificent images help us look and trace the question as far as our vision can carry. On the last page, a tiny stream draws us toward the center of the frame before petering out of sight. Above, a neutral, uncaring sky. What comes next is really up to us.

—Alexander Strecker



'Farmed' - Interview by Chris Kovacs

"FARMED by Paul Hart is a series of pastoral views where the serene landscape transports the viewer to a quieter time.

The few abandoned buildings lead one to believe that the story may be ending for this stretch of land, however, on second glance, the proud trees, greenhouses and the building that is under repair tell a different story, one of continuation, a cycle that may leave some things behind but is always regenerating."

"Photographic processing and printing were introduced to me when I started my studies at Lincoln College of Art. I was immediately intrigued by darkroom practices: especially black and white printing, which is still important to me. However, I was also interested in the camera as a recorder of reality, and it was this alignment with truth and historical record, which seemed to me to be so valuable. But I soon realized, the more I photographed, that the moment you captured would never be the same again, even in landscape photography. This is the case, not just regarding the environmental conditions, but also the very substance of a place – nothing remains the same through time. So consequently, this photographic record that you made seemed to count for more, it grew in value.

For me, it was a powerful thing to be able to capture a moment in time on film. This element has stuck with me, and consequently, so has the analogue process. My interest is still with the 'physicality' of photography using film, and making my own prints.

As from the outset, it has always been important for me to stay hands on with the whole process, this is how I make the image I want to make. It takes a long time to develop and understand a working method, and for me that method is with film and the darkroom."

- Paul Hart

INTERVIEW

HOW THE LAND LIES

All images © Paul Hart

When **Paul Hart** set out to photograph the Fens his aim was not only to describe the physical place but to comment on man's effect on it. The work sits between documentary and landscape and slips seamlessly into fine art. Elizabeth Roberts reports.



SURTOTT LANE

When Paul Hart's book *Farmed* arrived in the office I unwrapped it with a certain sense of anticipation. His previous book, *Truncated*, also published by Dewi Lewis, had intrigued me with its uncompromising approach and its intense beauty. As I turned the pages of this new book I was both unprepared for and delighted by what I found, and felt it was time to discover more.

We meet for lunch in central London, a far cry from the landscape of Paul Hart's photographs. Bleak, desolate and unforgettably beautiful, they describe the reclaimed marshland of the Fens in East Anglia, now the site of intense agriculture. Unlike much traditional landscape photography they reveal the human side of the place – farm buildings, ploughed fields, isolated farmhouses, telegraph poles, wind turbines – all of which point to the effect of human habitation on what was once claimed by nature. 'Farming shapes the land,' Paul points out. 'As does the weather – and the people who live there. Nowadays, in that part of East Anglia, the farming doesn't seem to stop. Years ago, it slowed down in winter because there wasn't much to do except cut hedges and stuff like that, but now it just carries on throughout the year. Crops, and how they perform, are different, and machinery is much more sophisticated – it's the industrialisation of farming. I wanted to show something of this in *Farmed* but it's such a huge subject that I think it just touches on these things.'

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I ask him about his childhood and he recalls his upbringing in the country, running wild, hunting small prey with a gun ('I didn't kill much!'), unsupervised and free to explore, learning independence and the ways of the countryside. He smiles wryly as we comment that it was a childhood hardly repeatable today. But this background gave him the knowledge and understanding – and love – of the countryside and nature that is without sentiment.

His depictions follow a more documentary route than those of the traditional landscape artist – but they depart from pure documentary at a fundamental point. ‘Although I take a documentary approach when I’m shooting, my interpretation in the darkroom is subjective – so it’s certainly not a simple recording of a place and time,’ he explains. ‘There is a lot of mundanity in these landscapes, and it’s a difficult line to tread – I didn’t want to produce a series of mundane pictures but I did want to show that mundanity.’ In terms of such photographic subject matter there are huge challenges to overcome but Paul has two key things that have helped him achieve his goal – his knowledge of the countryside and his ability as a printer.

Paul lives with his wife, Sarah, in an isolated location, some distance from the nearest town. ‘There are a few months of the year when it’s wonderful,’ he comments. ‘But the rest of the time it’s a sea of mud.’ There is a quiet, ironic humour here that reveals itself in the images too. The desolation that he perceives is not a dark view of nature but an evocation of the realities of country life. ‘Having grown up in the country means that I don’t have some kind of bucolic notion of it – rolling hills and sunsets – we’ve got to produce food and that’s what it’s being used for. Farmers naturally produce as much as possible – but the land can be exploited. There’s probably more food produced per acre every year than there ever has been. That’s why the landscape looks how it does,’ he explains. ‘That’s what this book is about.’

The hours Paul spends in the darkroom, meticulously printing, are the dividing line between his subject matter and the world of fine art. Beautiful as they are, viewed on screen or printed in the book, nothing can compare to the silver prints that Paul hands me across the table in a print box. The subtlety of the printing is paramount to understanding the images. ‘I think that this is a really important part of *Farmed*, the dichotomy between the subject matter that isn’t attractive in any conventional way, and the beauty of the silver print – these two things working together is what I find interesting.’

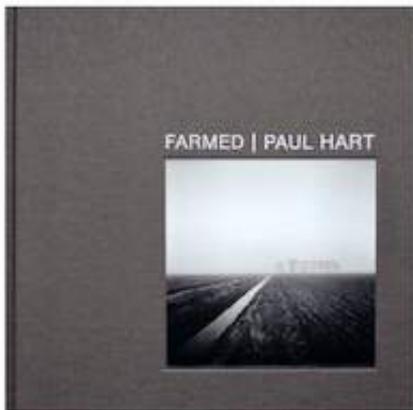
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As I go through the prints I begin to understand how Paul Hart has crossed the line between landscape photography and fine art. The work is exquisite and yet grounded. A long way from the conventional ‘good light’ of landscape photography, Paul chooses the worst weather conditions – mist, rain, cold – to capture his images. ‘Photography is so much about excluding things rather than including them,’ he says. ‘What’s important is what you choose to show within the frame – and the weather conditions help with this. In the Fens on a clear day, you can see for miles and sometimes that’s too much.’

In the same way, his compositions are carefully achieved. I comment that the book needs time spent with it, that it draws you in slowly. ‘Everything about *Farmed* is slow,’ he agrees. ‘How it’s photographed – using large and medium format and a tripod – and the work in the darkroom. So it stands to reason that the images seep into you slowly.’

But, once seeped in, these images stay with you, long after the book or the print have been left behind. They are images that speak of both nature and humankind, and their sometimes difficult relationship – and, at the same time, they celebrate this uncertain liaison.

Photomonitor:Listings / Reviews / Interviews / Essays / Portfolio
Auctions / Collections / **Books** / Talks**Farmed**

Paul Hart's second monograph consists of fifty-six black-and-white photographs of the farmed flatlands of the Fens. Crafted by traditional analogue means over six years, these exquisite pictures are more complex than the simple studies of light and land they may first appear to be. Hart's managed landscapes and reclaimed marshes quietly question our relationship with a human-altered topography. In this sense Hart is more a Robert Adams than an Ansel Adams, or – in British terms – more John Davies than Charlie Waite.

Any comparison with Peter Henry Emerson, that much earlier chronicler of the English East, is fleeting. Hart offers no bucolic idylls, no pastoral symphonies. Instead he gives us grey, exposed, cold, uninviting, corporate farmlands. And if the many trees which disappear into the many mists lend a slightly romantic, even pictorialist quality, this is more than countered by the precisely photographed, starkly modernist geometric lines. At times, Hart's pictures have an almost typological rigour, faintly echoing the deadpan industrial depictions of Bernd and Hilla Becher. Of course the British canon of countryside photography can be felt in the work, but only occasionally: Hart does not eulogise the land like, say, a Fay Godwin; nor does he have the overtly humanistic focus of a James Ravilious.

No people at all appear in these silent, still landscapes weighed down by their intensive monoculture. These are among the most fertile lands in England, but you wouldn't think it by looking at Hart's photographs: for all the evident cultivation, they look bleak, even barren. But this doesn't mean the pictures are unappealing or lack poetry. Hart can (and does) make a corrugated barn look like a thing of great beauty, in harmony with the land and sky in shape and shade. Almost natural, even. But as Hart constantly and quietly reminds us – with an arrow-straight ditch here and a dead level bank there – almost nothing is natural in these drained, manufactured farmlands.

In these gently challenging pictures, it's as if the land is in quiet conflict with the roads and the tracks, the power lines and the telegraph poles, the trenches cut into it and the invisible machines which have ploughed it. Buildings are slowly swallowed by trees, derelict caravans are abandoned to the land, and pylons disappear into the fog. A quiet tussle between humans and nature is being fought. How long will our mastery over these flatscapes last before nature takes them back? The pictures pose such questions without declaring a victor, or even taking sides.

Classic, but neither modernist nor pictorial, Farmed evokes photographic history without over-relying on any of it. Sagely ambivalent, it looks simple and obvious, but is complicated and weighty. And it is – in its own quiet way – extraordinarily beautiful. Can we ask any more of art than that?

- Simon Bowcock

INSPIRATION

TALKING PICTURES

The naming of an image can alter our reading of it, as in the case of Paul Hart's *Warrior*. Here **Thomas Peck** takes an in-depth look at what happens when we are invited to anthropomorphise the content of a picture and invent new stories for it...

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B-W

Some landscapes are not landscapes at all. They are portraits disguised as landscapes. Instead of the wider view, the dramatic vista, they focus on the intimate, the personal detail. Paul Hart's evocative image of a tree in a forest exemplifies this approach.

What do we see? The image is in portrait format, the strong vertical of the main tree echoed by the multitude behind it. The ground from which the trees grow is diagonal, which seems to emphasise the uprightness of the trees. We see the bottom section of the main tree trunk, a conifer, clearly a mature tree, it stands in front of a phalanx of younger trees. The main tree seems to be broader

than those in the background – it is older. It is sharply in focus; the background trees are not. This creates a sense of depth in the image which underlines the predominance of the main tree. It leads, the others follow. Towards the upper third of the image the main tree sends out horizontal branches. They are thin. The power of the tree is rooted in its verticality. It stands, indomitable.

What do we feel? Tonally, the trunk and its cracked bark has been lightened, the smoother trees in the background have been darkened. This emphasises the cracked, scarred bark. Strongly upright, but cracked bark. The image exudes strength and fortitude. This tree is rugged. It has experienced more than the younger trees in the background. It is stronger, more powerful than they are.

The photographer defines the interpretation through his title, *Warrior*. We are being invited to view the image anthropomorphically. This tree may be old and scarred but it is also tenacious and courageous. The trees in the background now assume the role of an army, supporting the leader. The split bark connotes battle scars and armour. Clearly a leader.

Hart has created a simple image, extracted from the complexity of the forest. The treatment is subtle. It asks the viewer to interpret and leaves room for imagination. The title nudges the viewer towards the photographer's intention, but the viewer must still supply the interpretation. What a beautiful result – a portrait in a forest. Exquisite.

Paul Hart paulhartphotography.com

“This tree is rugged. It has experienced more than the younger trees in the background.

It is stronger, more powerful than they are.”



Warrior, 2007, from Truncated © Paul Hart

PRICE LIST

DRAINED (2016–2017)

Signed silver gelatin prints:

20 x 16" - edition of 12 - £750 + vat

20 x 24" - edition of 8 - £1,200 + vat

Digital large fiber formats:

40 x 40" - edition of 5 - £2,500 + vat (square format prints)

Framing available from £250 + vat

FARMED (2009–2015)

Signed silver gelatin prints:

20 x 16" - edition of 12 - £750 + vat

20 x 24" - edition of 8 - £1,200 + vat

Digital large fiber formats:

40 x 40" - edition of 5 - £2,500 + vat (square format prints)

50 x 25" - edition of 5 - £2,500 + vat (panoramic prints)

Framing available from £250 + vat

TRUNCATED (2005-2008)

Signed silver gelatin prints:

20 x 16" - edition of 12 - £750 + vat

20 x 24" - edition of 8 - £1,200 + vat

Digital large fiber formats:

40 x 40" / 50 x 40" - edition of 5 - £2,500 + vat

Framing available from £250 + vat

Please ask a member of staff to view prints from the artist's portfolio.

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