

BTS PHOTOGRAPHIE

ANGLAIS – U. 2

Session 2006

Durée : 2 heures
Coefficient : 2

Matériel autorisé :

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Dès que le sujet vous est remis, assurez-vous qu'il est complet.
Le sujet comporte 4 pages, numérotées de 1/4 à 4/4.

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QUESTIONS

1. **Document A** : extract from “Interview : Brian Griffin” adapted from *Photography Monthly*, June 2005.

Answer the following questions in your own words.
(12 points : 3 points for each question)

- a) What difficulties did Brian Griffin have to face at the beginning of his career as a photographer ? (about 80 words)
- b) Explain what he means when he says : “I actually thrived on boring environments”. (Last line of the second column). (about 60 words)
- c) How was he influenced by other artistic mediums ? (about 70 words)
- d) How does he describe and justify his attitude to sitters ? (about 70 words)

2. **Document B** : text entitled « John Barker Crummock Water » (*Photography Monthly*, June 2005).

Translate from “This scene” down to “to frame the composition”.

(8 points)

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Document A

The story of how a working-class boy from the Black Country became one of the UK's most recognised and respected portrait photographers. By Ian Farrell

WHEN he was a young boy, growing up in Stourbridge in the West Midlands, Brian Griffin had no idea that he would grow up to be one of the most distinctive portrait photographers of the 20th century. Griffin always intended to follow in his Father's footsteps, working in manufacturing in one of the countries largest industrial areas. "The Black Country isn't very big, but it was literally covered in factories," he recalls. "It was dark, foggy and smoggy. The streets were gas-lit until I was well into my youth and the whole place still had a very Victorian feel to it. But it was an important place; probably the beginning of the industrial world." But one day, I gathered up all my prints, put them in an album and decided to apply to art school. Guilford, the London College of Printing and Central Polytechnic in London all turned me down without an interview, but Manchester Polytechnic offered me a place on their photography course. In hindsight I think they were desperate for people to take the course. Photography was considered a pretty sleazy career to have then and not one that many people wanted to get into. My parents were especially unimpressed. They saw it as me giving up on the engineering career that I'd been training for. But I distinctly remember saying to my Mother: 'Don't worry, Mum. I'm going to be the next David Bailey.'

After leaving college came a brief spell saving up some money by working in a steel works. Then came the inevitable move to London, where all budding photographers would compete for work. "I walked the streets forever," Griffin says. "I was so close to giving up, but the threat of failure and having to go back to my parents and admit I was wrong spurred me on. One day I saw an advert for an assistant in the *British Journal of Photography*. The position was working for Lester Bookbinder - a very influential still-life photographer of the time. He was very encouraging and when he looked at my portfolio said 'You have to be a photographer, not an assistant', which was amazing. He sent me off to see a guy called Roland Schenk, the art director of *Management Today*. And to my amazement he offered me a job."

But if Griffin thought that this was where things would get easier, he was mistaken. "It was so lousy," he admits. "I was back in the office again. Exactly where I was trying to escape from. And Roland was such a hard taskmaster: if my pictures weren't good enough first time he'd send me back to shoot them again. It was so embarrassing. Eventually I couldn't take it anymore and went freelance, still shooting stuff for *Management Today*, but gradually bringing in other clients as well.

"I think a moment of clarity came when I read Kafka's *The Trial*. I could see the business men I was photographing in the book and it all somehow connected with the film noir and expressionist cinema I was watching at the time. I began to see the businessmen in my portraits as 'actors', and the offices themselves as 'theatre sets'. Once I realised this everything started to work. I actually thrived on

boring environments. The more mediocre the office, the more I liked it. In those first couple of years I took perhaps three shots that were really good, including *Rush Hour London Bridge*, which has turned out to be one of the most iconic of my career. After that I began to think 'It's going to be alright', which was something that took me a very long time to convince myself of. I was working well, but that was all thanks to really hard work, and the work ethic that had been instilled into me by my parents all those years ago."

Griffin's style of portraiture continues to be theatrical, but his habit of manipulating his sitters so that they do exactly as he wants has attracted criticism over the years. "I started to feel jealous of other types of artists, particularly painters.

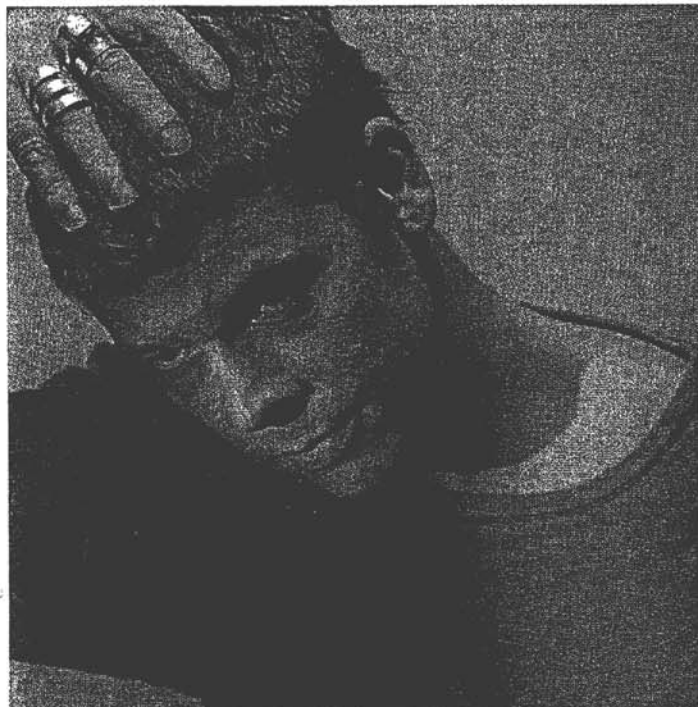
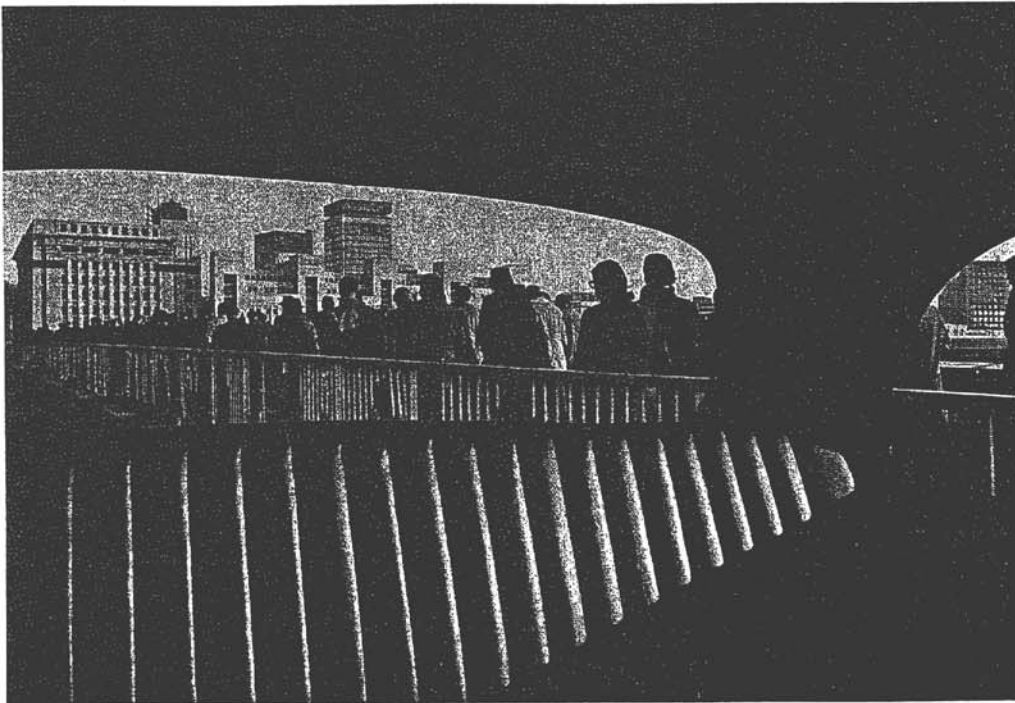
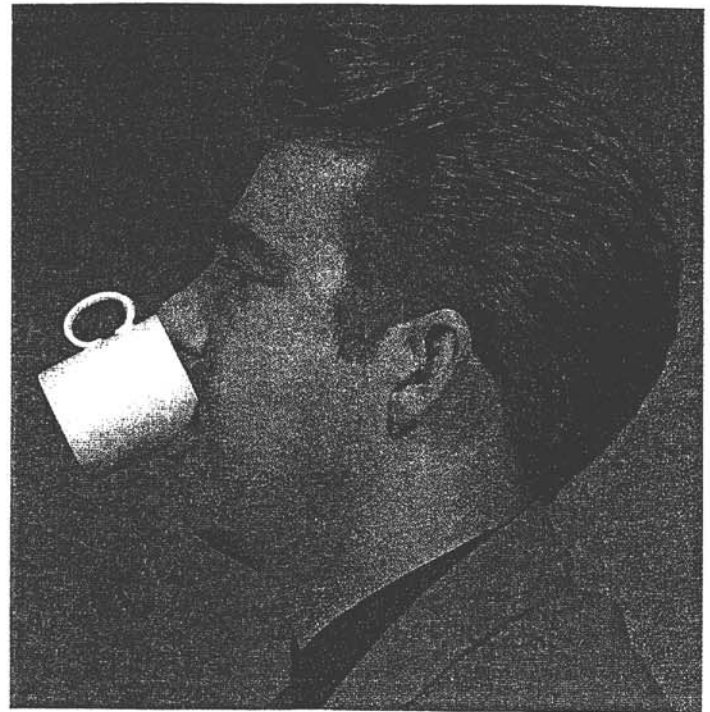
If someone wanted to depict someone's head as a block of wood then a surrealist would; if someone wanted to paint someone as a cube, then a cubist would; an exhibitionist would elongate a sitter's fingers if they wanted. And I started to think 'Why can't I do that?' And then I thought 'I will!'

"And did I get some flak?! There was nothing like it around at the time, and I was perceived as manipulating my subjects in order to make them look stupid. But I wasn't. Photographing people is always going to involve manipulating them, but I try to remember that I am giving them something special: a picture that they will hopefully be remembered by for all time. If they deny me the chance to manipulate them, in the way that I do, they won't

Brian Griffin

get that from me. I know that sounds egotistical, but a lot of my portraits have become very classic images.

"These days I find I can judge a person within moments of meeting them. And there are loads of tricks I play during the shoot. I often pretend that I haven't got a clue what I am doing, so they contribute really strongly. Or if I can see someone is anxious about the time they have available, I deliberately stall them until the last minute to get them really worked up, then take all the photos really quickly while they are stressed."



Clockwise from top left:

TV Presenter
Jonathon Ross, 1990;
*Rush Hour London
Bridge*, 1974; Metal
spinner Kevin Bonell,
2003:

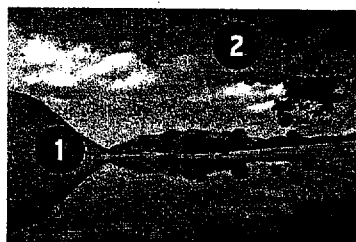
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Document B



JOHN BARKER CRUMMOCK WATER

■ **WILL CHEUNG:** [This scene has plenty of potential, but John hasn't made the most of it. The lighting is not that stunning; this is partly offset though by the fluffy clouds, which add interest, and the still waters give a decent reflection. For me, though, the composition doesn't work hard enough. The top right branches are more annoying than helpful in retaining my interest and John's picture would have been helped by walking a few metres to the left and shooting without trying to frame the scene with the tree. I think then he could have used more of the water foreground, that mountain on the left and the clouds. Finally, John should sort the horizon, which has a distinct left to right incline. **Judgement: John, your image isn't a disaster, but next time explore the view and don't think that you have to frame the composition.**]



1: Whoops! Check out that slanting horizon. An accurate horizon is essential when including water in the scene.

2: 'Framing' landscapes using archways or a convenient tree is a photo cliché. It can work, but here it proves a distraction.

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