Ruinan Bai

THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF NANJING
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

The British School of Nanjing is a British curriculum international school.

The Art Department teachers are Royal College of Art graduates and industry professionals.

Student achievement at BSN is outstanding with student achieving ***Highest Mark in World for GCSE 3D Design and IGCSE Graphics*** and ***Highest Mark in China for Photography*** within the past 3 years.

Note: Any unlabelled images in this presentation are my own work.

About School



Photography Portfolio

Education Experience
The British School of Nanjing
2016-2025

Achievement
-GCSE photography Grade 8
-GCSE 3D design Grade 8
-Top IGCSE grades in English literature, First language Chinese, German, and GCSE music.
-Won three school talent competitions.



Personal Art Exhibition: *Six*

I independently organised a professional exhibition at a gallery in Nanjing on December 1, featuring a diverse range of photographic works.

02

A-Level Photography

-Coursework

Digital Collage

An investigation into double exposure centred around ”Nostalgia,” with inspiration from Daniella Zalcman’s *Signs of Your Identity*. These images explore ideas connected to memory, place and time.



Double Exposure Tests: Exploring Atmosphere and Expression



My initial tests were influenced by Martin Parr's *Autoportraits* and explored the double exposure process.



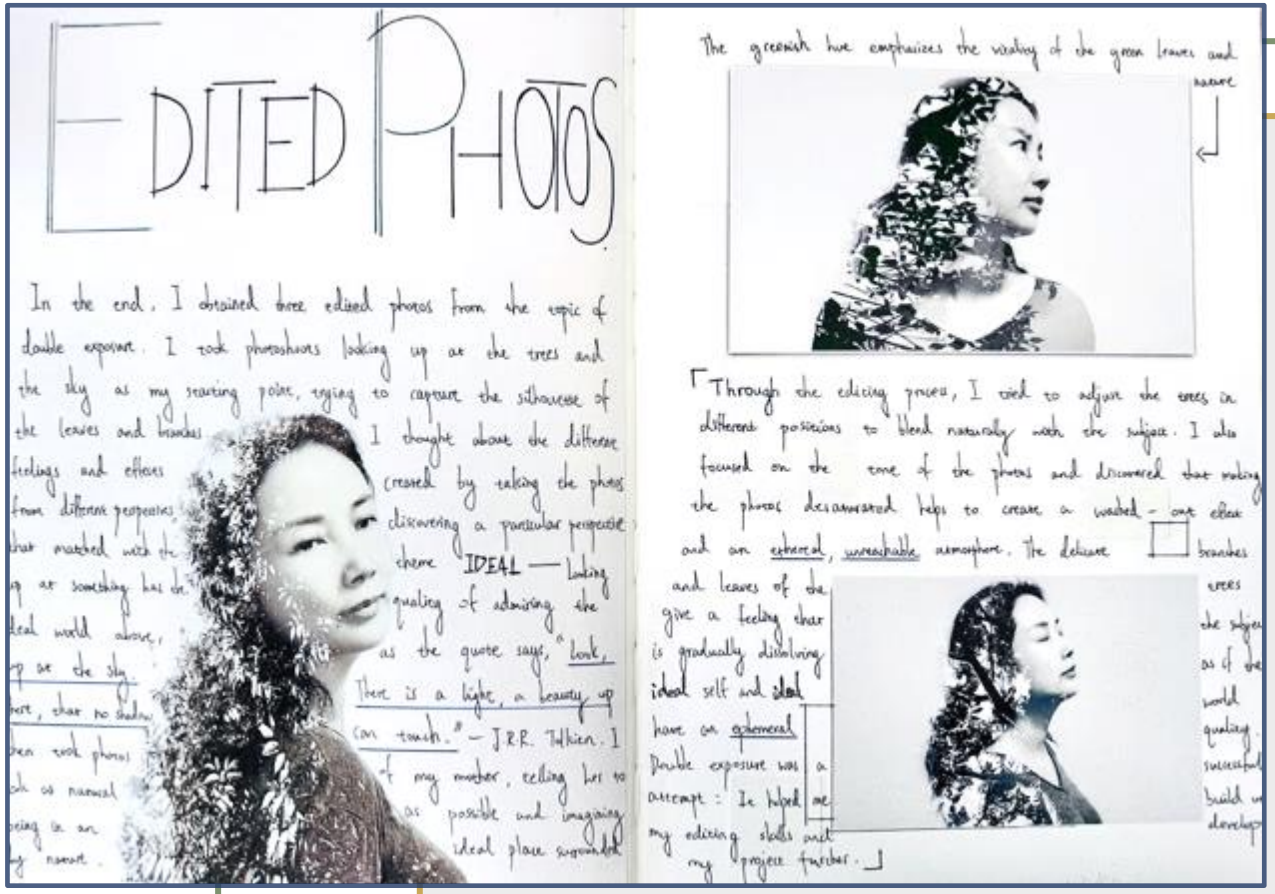
Martin Parr



Solve Sundsbo



Daniella Zalcman



EDITED PHOTOS

In the end, I obtained three edited photos from the topic of double exposure. I took photoshoots looking up at the trees and the sky as my starting point, trying to capture the silhouette of the leaves and branches. I thought about the different feelings and effects created by taking the photos from different perspectives, discovering a particular perspective that matched with the theme IDEAL — looking up at something has the quality of admiring the ideal world above, as the quote says, "look, up at the sky. There is a light, a beauty up there, that no shadow can touch." — J.R.R. Tolkien. I then took photos of my mother, telling her to look as natural as possible and imagining being in an ideal place surrounded by nature.

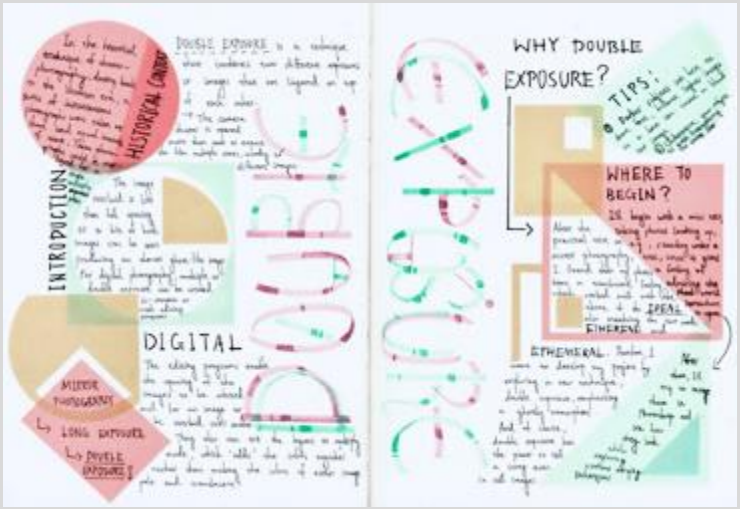
The greenish hue emphasizes the vitality of the green leaves and nature

Through the editing process, I tried to adjust the trees in different positions to blend naturally with the subject. I also focused on the tone of the photos and discovered that making the photos desaturated helps to create a washed-out effect and an ethereal, unreachable atmosphere. The delicate branches and leaves of the trees give a feeling that the subject is gradually dissolving as if the ideal self and ideal world have an ephemeral quality. Double exposure was a successful attempt: It helped me build up my editing skills and develop my project further.

Narrative Through Double Exposure

This series investigated the potential conversations created by overlayed images in a double exposure. I explored these conversations as both real and fictional narratives, and like that they are open to the viewer's interpretation.









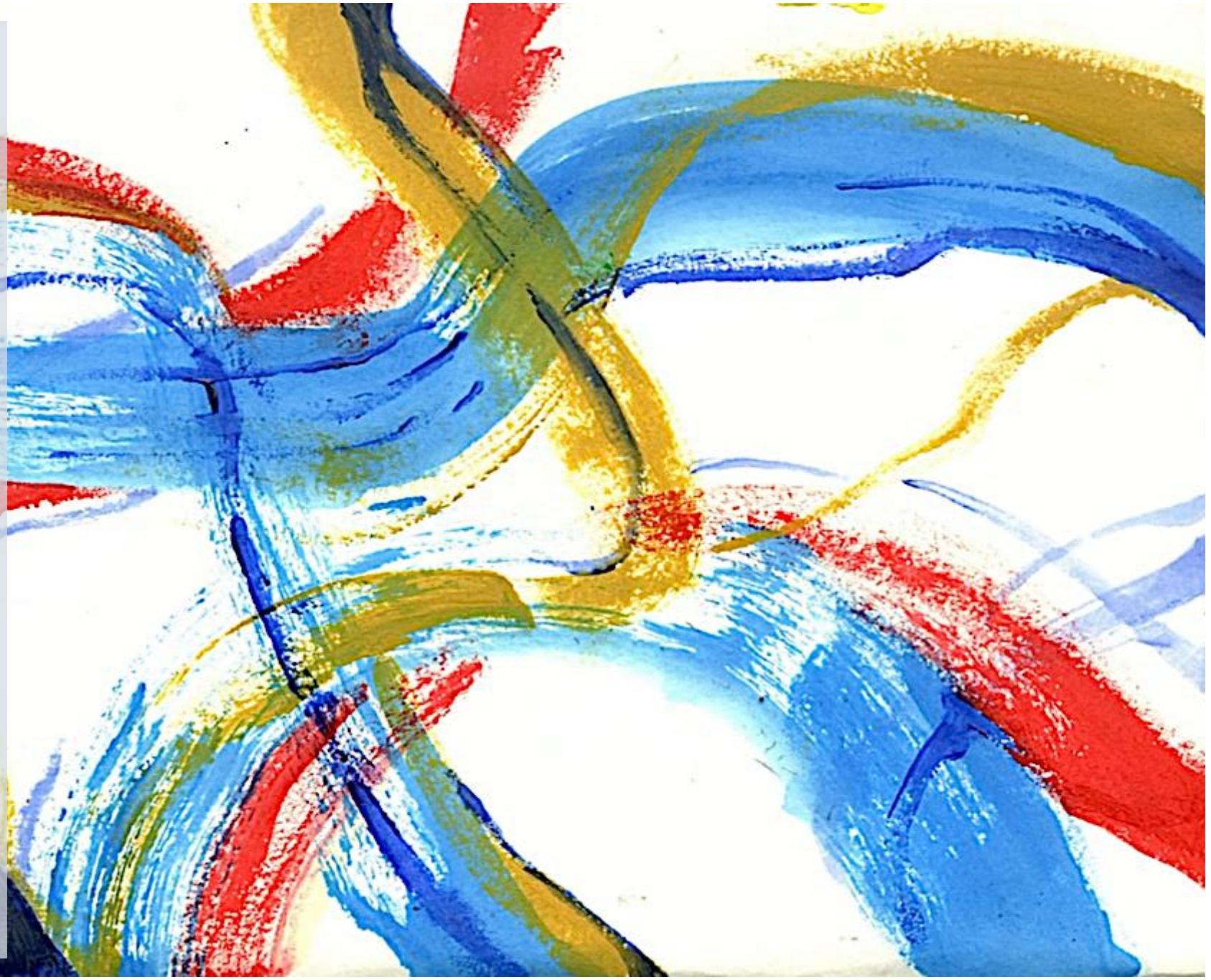
03

A-Level Photography

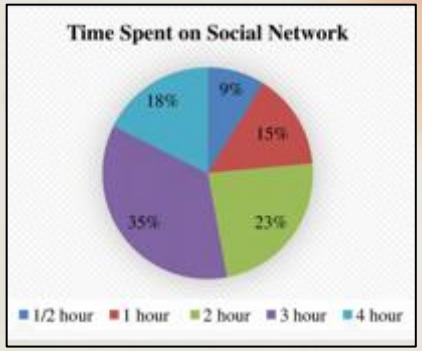
-Coursework

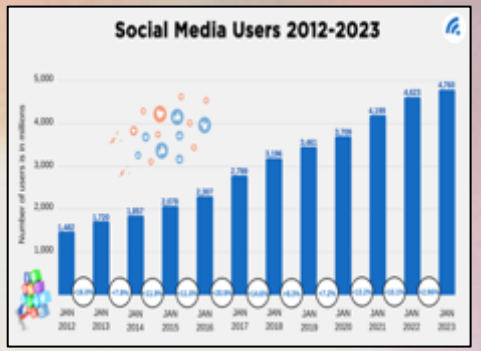
Utopian Fantasies

This project resulted in two photographic outcomes: a hybrid of traditional painting techniques and cyanotype printing, as well as digital photography and editing processes.



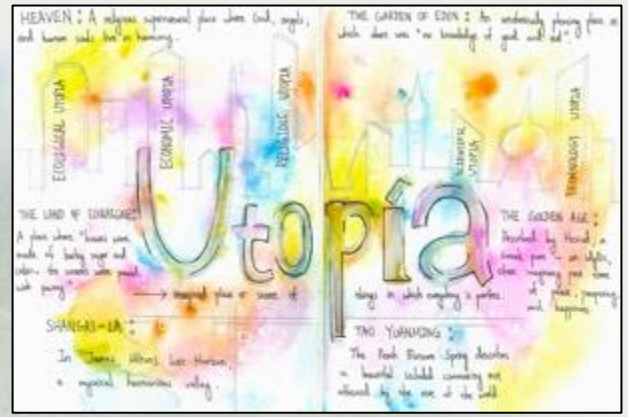














Interpretations of Utopia

My research led to three coexisting but distinct ideas relating to 'the ideal': Ziqian Liu's idealised yet unattainable world she wishes to live in; the idealised self as represented on social media; and the pursuit of an idealised spiritual state—Enlightenment or inner peace.



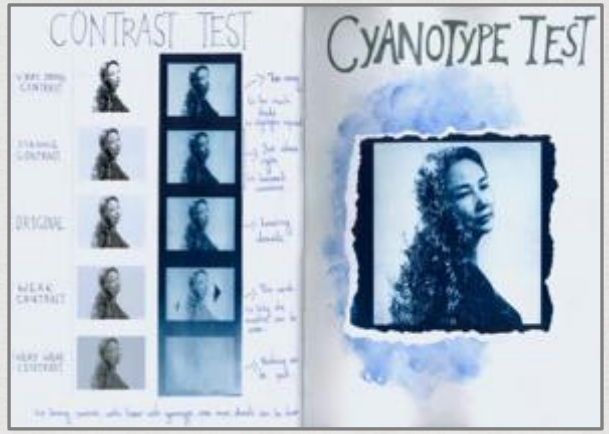
Traditional Painting & Alternative Photography

My utopia project began by exploring how gaze, viewpoint, and expression shape a photograph's atmosphere. I used low angles and peaceful expressions to convey an idealised state. I explored this further with alternative photographic techniques like cyanotype and incorporated painting elements to create a multi-layered image.















Microjet print on canvas, 79.8cm x 57.7cm



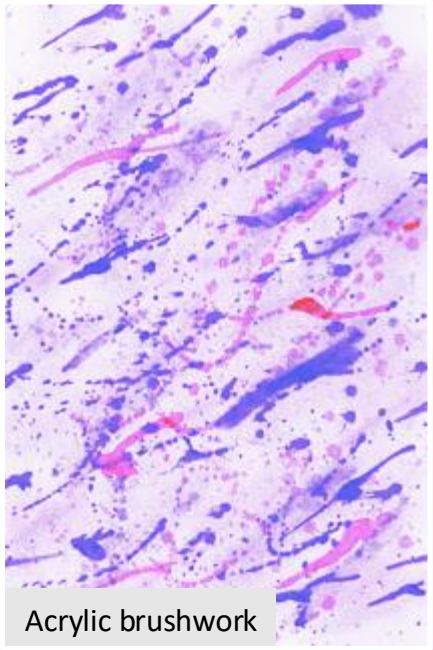
Digital Image



Cyanotype print

Outcome 1: Spiritual Utopia

The main challenge in this piece was combining and composing the brushstrokes and bringing a sense of balance and belonging to the image. To achieve this, digital techniques like vignettes and colour desaturation were used to create a cohesive result.



Acrylic brushwork



Digital mask



Combining layers

Outcome 2: Social Media

Considerable time was spent on this image to arrange the complex and varied brushwork across various media to maintain both diversity and coherence. The lighting and vignette are embedded subtly to enhance depth and direct focus while unifying the elements into a whole.













04

A-Level Photography

-Coursework

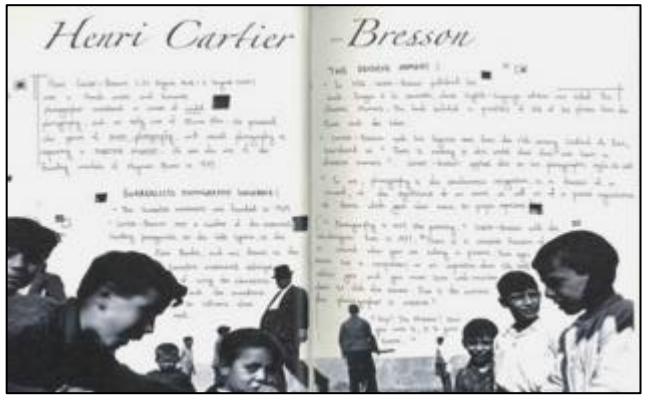
Documentary photography

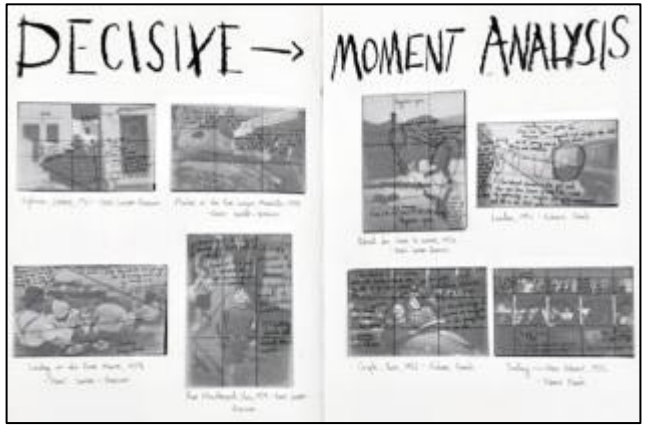
Inspired by works of historical pioneers, including Bresson, Evans, Frank and Elsken, I explored the role of subjectivity in black-and-white photography. I incorporated aspects of Chinese calligraphy to enhance visual storytelling and create a stronger cultural connection.



Experimenting with Black & White Photography

I investigated Ed van der Elsken's dodging and burning techniques, using strong contrast to accentuate the subject's presence. This transformed the body into bold shapes and forms, creating a strong sense of focus.






Ed van der Elsken

DODGING TEST









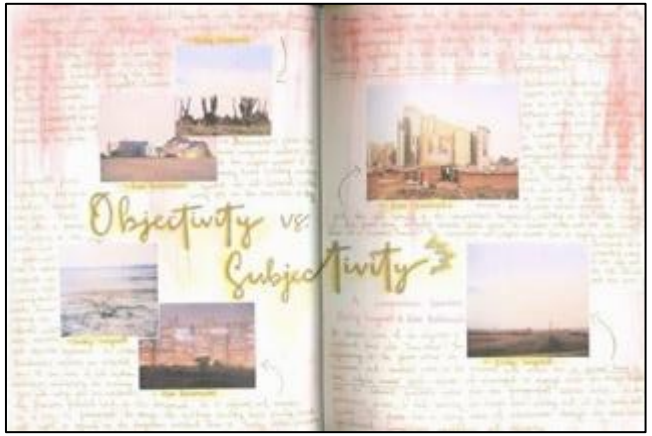
As the project developed, I studied the works of Walker Evans and Martin Parr, whose photography documents the lives of different communities. Inspired by their approach, I captured a series of images of the impoverished community within the modern, prosperous city of Nanjing, revealing the ethical dilemma surrounding housing demolition and their aspirational attitudes toward their lives.

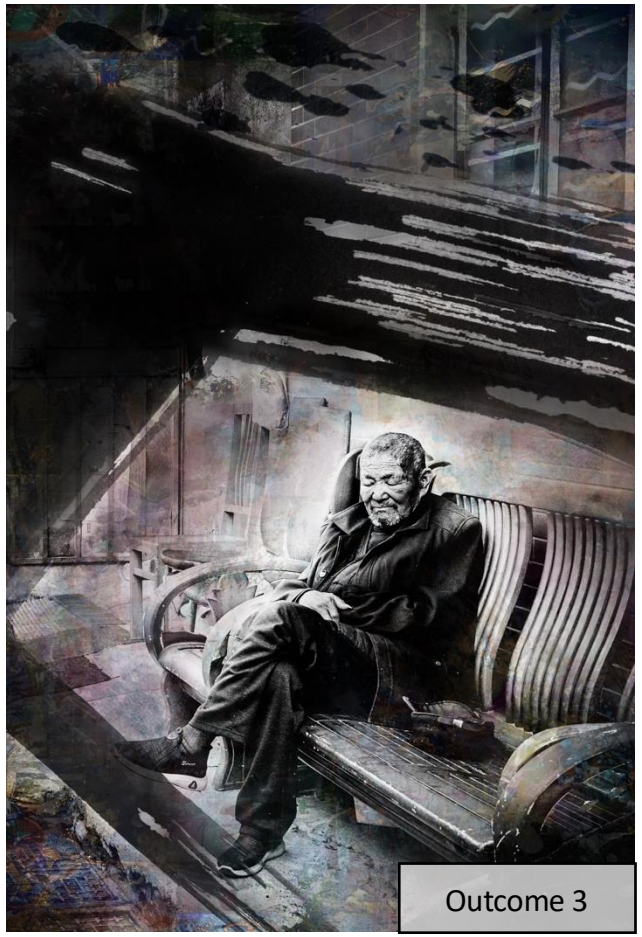


Walker Evans



Martin Parr





Outcome 3



Test Piece

Inherent Subjectivity in Photography

I discovered that a photograph is, ultimately, always a reflection of the photographer's personal perceptions, selections and intentions. To express this, I combined Chinese-inspired brushstrokes with my photographs, connecting them to preserving residential areas and the cultural heritage of the more conventional aspects of Chinese culture.



My Brushwork



Wang Dongling



Fan Ho









Final Piece Concepts

This piece reflects societal aspirations for an idealistic life and self-image in an impoverished area of China. I employed strong contrast and deliberate framing to highlight the juxtaposition between the barber and the poster on the wall, which symbolises harsh reality and idealism. Muted colours were added to enhance subjectivity and invite personal interpretation.

Wang Dongling, Harmonious Opposition



Yossi Kotler, Splitting Apart





Outcome 4

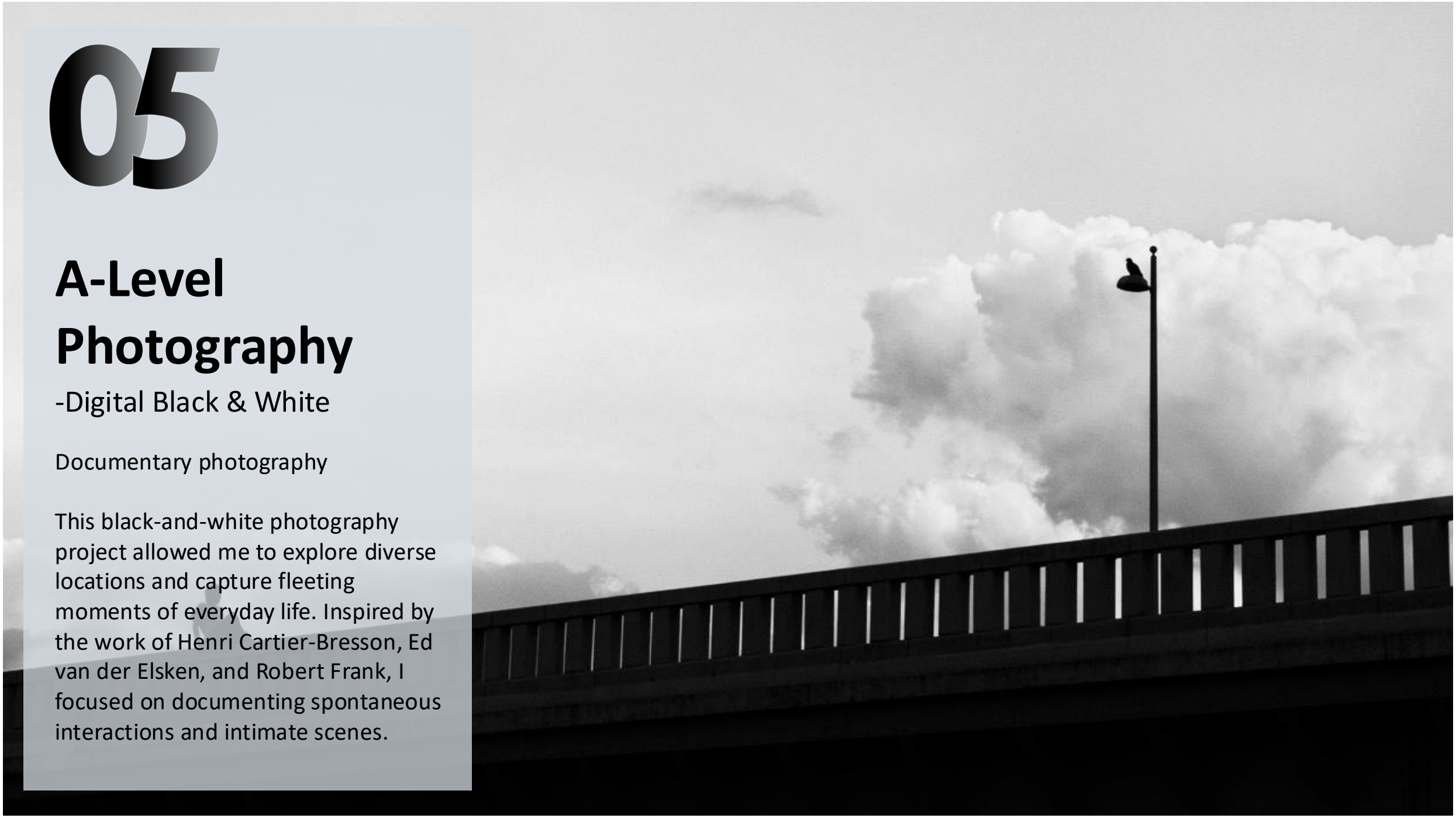
05

A-Level Photography

-Digital Black & White

Documentary photography

This black-and-white photography project allowed me to explore diverse locations and capture fleeting moments of everyday life. Inspired by the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Ed van der Elsken, and Robert Frank, I focused on documenting spontaneous interactions and intimate scenes.



Street Photography

I utilised contrasting elements in these two photos to create a visual juxtaposition, drawing inspiration from Robert Frank's work to form a visual narrative.



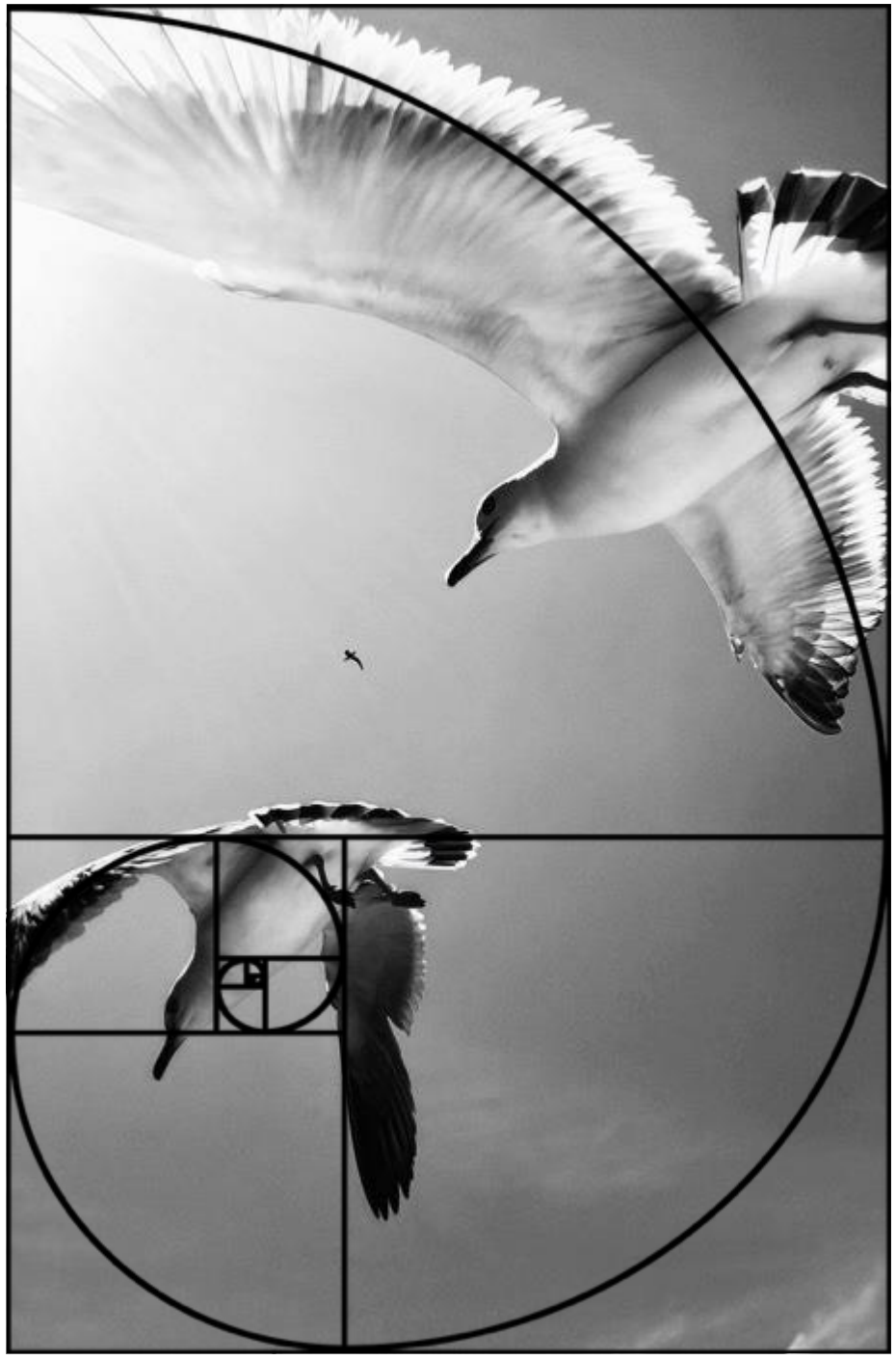


Digital dodging and burning techniques are applied to emulate the effects typically achieved with film.



Robert Frank

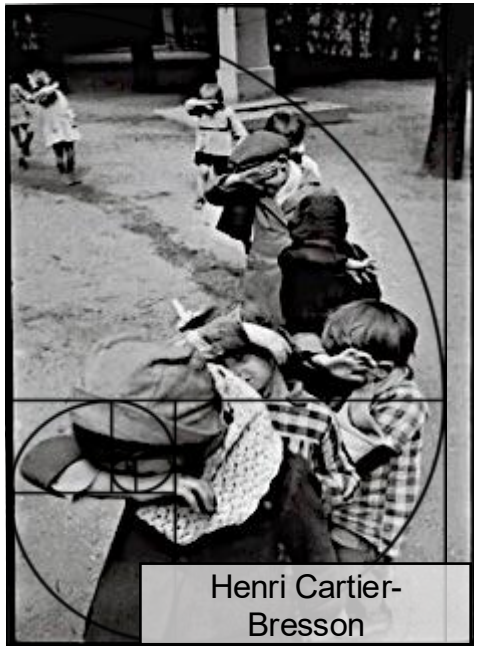




These pieces are inspired by Henri Cartier-Bresson's use of the golden ratio and Ed van der Elsken's bold dodging technique.



Ed van der Elsken



Henri Cartier-Bresson



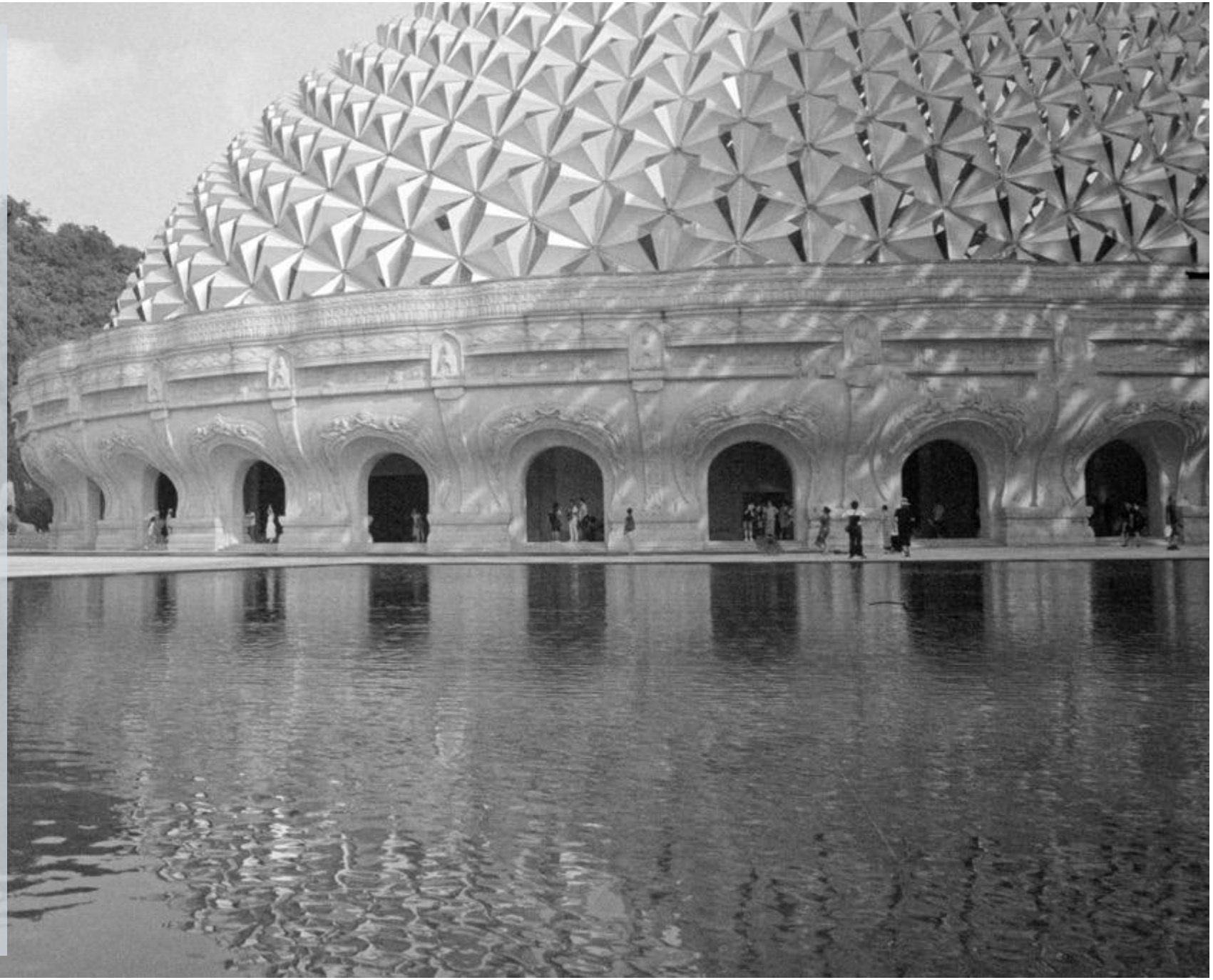


06

A-Level Photography

-Film Photography

To deepen my understanding of photography fundamentals, I undertook a film photography project and printed the final images by hand in the darkroom. I shot with 35mm film on an SLR camera and medium format in a pinhole camera. In the darkroom, I experimented with filters, dodging, and burning techniques.



Prints developed on Multigrade photographic paper, 7.5cm x 26cm







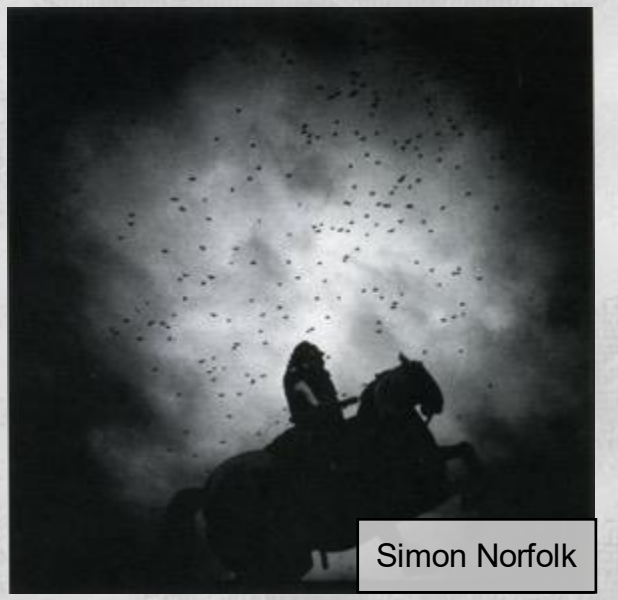




Darkroom Process

By exploring film cameras, I gained a solid foundation in understanding aperture, shutter speed, and shooting distance while experimenting with darkroom techniques like dodging, burning, and multigrade filters inspired by Ed van der Elsken. It was a challenging yet soothing learning process that became more engaging as I gained proficiency.

Inspired by Simon Norfolk's burning-in technique for visual impact and Henri Cartier-Bresson's *The Cyclist* to capture the fleeting moment of a street scene.



Simon Norfolk



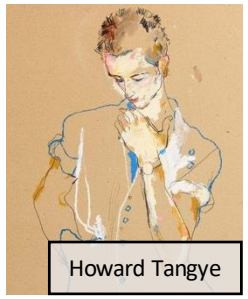
Henri Cartier-Bresson



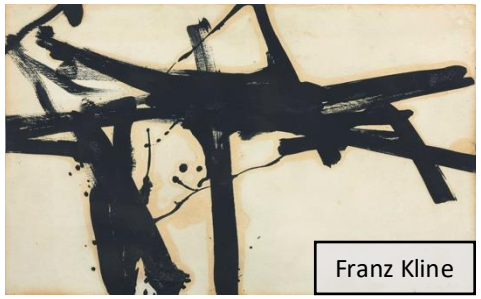
Print developed on Multigrade photographic paper, 7.5cm x 26cm







Howard Tangye



Franz Kline





Additional Artworks