

Nicky Willcock at work

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Photographer Nicky Willcock talks to **Emily Paine** about her inspirations

Photographer Nicky Willcock's studio, located in Utopia Village, just off Primrose Hill's enviable Chalcott Road, looks like a typical open-plan office. "It's a perfect set-up for creative people and typical of Primrose Hill," Nicky explains. The office space is rented out to freelancers who have found, she says, that working from home swiftly drove them – like herself – insane. "I hate to use the word bohemian because it's just rattled off all the time, but it is very creative. There are often film crews around, usually just when you're trying to park your car." She rolls her eyes good-humouredly. So she likes it here, then? "To the extent that when my husband and I moved out to Hertfordshire I still travelled in for two hours a day to be in this studio and Primrose Hill – and then I couldn't stay away from Primrose Hill so I left him and came back!"

Career change

Nicky began her career in the more commercial world of advertising agencies. "At 21 I couldn't understand how to earn a living making art so I went into advertising, thinking that I would do my art in my free time [she laughs]. For the following eight years I got more and more frustrated because I wasn't doing that," she reveals. "Then a combination of things happened; I got married so I felt a lot more secure, and then my mum suddenly died and I thought life's too short, and it might be really scary, not to mention financially risky, but the fear of not being good enough that I had at 21, just didn't matter so much anymore. I went to St Martins and did a post-grad course and have been doing photography full-time for the past four years. Brave? Yes. Stupid? Possibly."

Considering she's currently got exhibitions on, or planned, in London, Madrid and Venice, as well as a permanent commission for the Gilbey House apartment block on Jamestown Road NW1, it doesn't seem to have been a stupid choice at all.

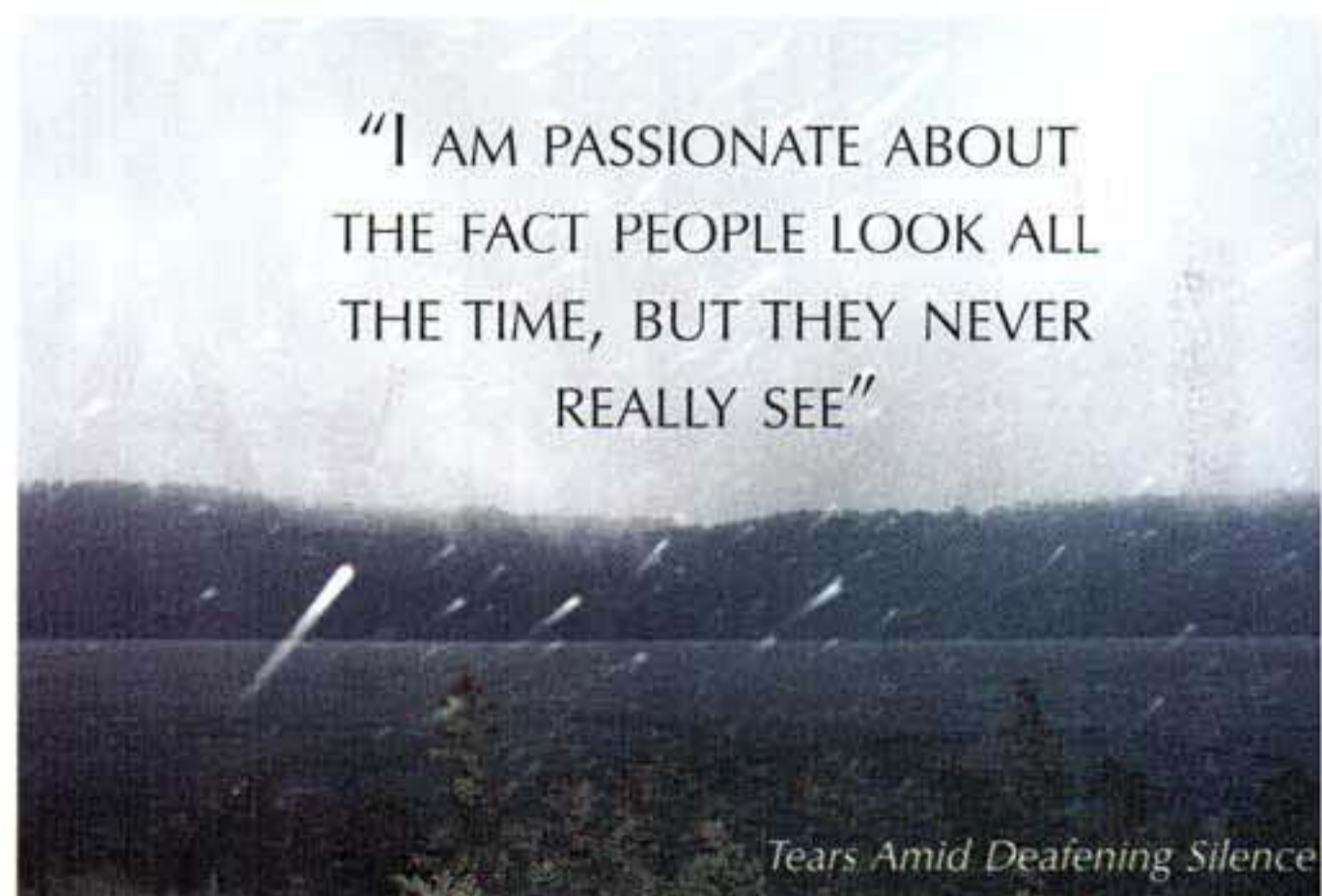
Nicky concedes that this is a good time and place to be a photographic artist; "The interesting thing Georgina [Coleman, of GC Fine Art Gallery, where Nicky is currently exhibiting] has picked up on is that economically as well as artistically, there's been a rising interest in contemporary mediums like photography in the last five years," she says. "People aren't really buying and selling high ticket paintings, people are investing in new talent. It's partly a consequence of our economy, but it's a really good thing artistically – people are looking for what's new and accessible and affordable, which in turn will allow that medium to grow."

Fine art

So what "pushes her buttons," as she puts it? "It's about creating something that feels beautiful, from the stuff that's all around you. For me, just seeing a perfect composition gives me a heart-racing moment. I feel a lot of the reason that I choose subject matter that people don't really think about – like industrial sites – is that I am quite passionate about the fact that most people look all the time, but they never really see," she enthuses. "Or is it that they see and they don't actually look? I like to capture what appears to be nothing and present it in a way that makes it beautiful, so people think yeah, I never really noticed that."

What does she think about the argument that photography is a mere technical procedure? She considers for a moment. "I think you have to differentiate between fine art and decorative arts. Fine art can or should be anything that provokes

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Tears Amid Deafening Silence



Tear

thought. Photography, used cerebrally, can fulfil this as much as any other medium."

She shows me her portfolio. Her work, largely of landscapes and architectural corners which, as she points out, a viewer wouldn't necessarily notice has been snapped in locations as local as the street where she lives, and as far-flung as Canada and New Zealand. It all shares the same searching, questioning quality and is unexpectedly charged, particularly considering the subject matter. Thought provoking indeed.

Nicky Willcock's exhibition is on until 4 April at GC Fine Art Gallery, 1 Colville Mews Lonsdale Road W11; www.gcfineart.com www.nickywillcock.co.uk

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