



Open
College
of the Arts

Formative feedback

Student name	Michael Franklin	Student number	517401
Course/Unit	Context and Narrative	Assignment number	5
Type of tutorial	Written / Audio-Visual		

Overall Comments

Well done on reaching the final assignment on *Context and Narrative*, Michael, and for getting another unit under your belt. This one obviously provides a different set of challenges to what you've already completed, and, as ever, you've grappled with everything in an honest and diligent manner.

The image you've produced is intriguing, hinting at all manner of things, and this is an assignment that rather bucks the trend you've become accustomed to over the last couple of years. As opposed to producing a coherent sequence of images, that you're required to submit just one means that you're being challenged in a very different way. I must admit that I've got reservations about this way of testing students, as it can often lead people to try and shove everything but the kitchen sink into their work. But, to be fair, it's also a test of restraint and communication, so an important one, whatever my misgivings.

Feedback on assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

- What's immediately apparent is that this photograph is very composed and that the viewer is being invited to closely read the various components that it consists of. While it's engaging and fairly striking stuff, an image that has clearly come as a consequence of some very deliberate choices, I do get the feeling that you're forcing quite a lot into the frame, Michael, and that the reader is being asked to do quite a lot. This is fine, and all part of the learning process, but my first impression - nb, without having read any of the accompanying text - is that the viewer is being faced with a very definite and slightly arduous 'decoding' job.
- Equally, it's hard to get away from the sense that you are trying very hard to conjure a poignant mood. The various signifiers that have been deployed here all, at least by my

reading, add up to something that treads a fine line between being moving and sentimental. The framed photographs, the clothes in the wardrobe, the age of the subject and the fact that he's alone... you're clearly nudging, perhaps even *shoving*, the viewer towards a certain reading. There's a lot going on here and, while this is clearly **very** personal work, and to be commended for it, I do wonder if the hand of the photographer behind the image needs to be a bit more... trusting of the viewer's ability to latch onto certain details. This is a likeable photograph, one that's *filled* with ideas and resonant with all kinds of personal meanings, but the initially calm surface is contrasted with a certain busyness that I can't help but feel it is slightly buckling under.

- But.... all of the above also sounds a little churlish and doesn't acknowledge that there's a lot else going on here. Much effort has clearly gone into the 'staging' and lighting of the work, and in many ways I think can be regarded as an image that has achieved plenty of what it set out to do. It's also a piece of work that has taken risks and clearly involved much experimentation. But I guess my central misgiving is that there's a 'loudness' to the image that goes against the sense of loss and sadness that is at its heart, and something that was more muted in its deployment of objects and props would likely have produced a more understated outcome. Equally, with so much going on, the figure at the centre of it all feels like a guest performer in his own movie, in spite of the fact that he is wearing a bandage on his head and occupies much of the frame.
- Overall, I think the work that you produced at the end of the last unit I supported you on did a more satisfying job of conveying similar ideas. Although you had the advantage of being able to include more images, your presence was much more understated than it is here. But this is understandable: although you say that this work is from your father's perspective, how can it really be about anything other than your own? With this in mind, the fact that you've taken such a personal and sensitive subject and made work from it is admirable. The final image is still very likeable and shows someone who is, in lots of ways, growing in confidence and getting better at realising his ideas. Ultimately, I think what we're looking at here is an issue of communication: how 'clear' do you need to be? How do you approach subject matter that is *deeply* personal and tied into your own grief? When is enough enough and it's time to step back? To what extent is it worth understating and letting an image's strength lie in its ambiguity and openness, not in trying to make every point in a clear and direct way?

Suggested reading/viewing

Context

- *Beyond Caring*, Paul Graham
- *Domestic Landscapes*, Bert Teunissen
- *So the story goes*, Katherine A Bussard

Pointers for the next assessment

- Make sure that your physical materials are carefully printed and curated and that your blog is easy to navigate and thoughtful edited.
- Be creative!!!! You've got a sense of how the assessment process works now, so don't be afraid to take risks with how you present your work.
- Best of luck!

Tutor name	Andrew Conroy
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Date	20/12/19
Next assignment due	n/a