

Dryden Goodwin

"These images of strangers become emotionally charged for me; a refuge of thought, an area of intensity and unresolved intimacy"

DRYDEN GOODWIN uses a combination of film, video, photography and drawing to explore the elusive nature of portraiture. He selects unwitting strangers from a crowd – on a bus, for instance – films or photographs them, and then draws back into the resulting images using a variety of means, from etching to digital animation. He attempts to reveal the substance of a subject by connecting what one can see with what one can only imagine – the films and photographs show what the subjects look like, while the drawings suggest their interior world. By these means, Goodwin suggests that human nature cannot be captured in a fixed manner. While he maintains a respectful distance from his subjects, recording them with sympathy and objectivity, he nonetheless implicates the viewer in the tense and mysterious experience of looking long and hard at an unknowing and unknowable individual. INTERVIEW: Sarah Eison

Both Dryden and Goodwin are Old English words, one meaning "dry valley" and the other "good friend." What do you make of that?

My dad was evacuated during the war, and then afterwards was adopted by the Goodwin family, so there's always been an interesting relationship to Goodwin underpinning the family history. As for my first name, I have two brothers, Damien and Darius, so I've always been the third D, being the youngest. And, yes, "Dryden" refers to a location – I remember when I was about 10 forming a picture in my imagination of what this place might be like.

You use both drawing and lens-based media. Does one do for you what the other can't?

My work is often about the complexities of distance and degrees of connectedness between people, between myself and strangers. I'm interested in different ways of traversing this space in a physical but also psychological sense. With a camera you can use the zoom to make the person you've sighted appear closer. When making a drawing of someone from direct observation there is a real sense you are bringing them closer as you make the marks on the piece of paper in your hand. By creating these hybrids, I'm exploring what these combinations may reveal or obscure, or what is invented or imposed. There's also something about the different qualities of touch in these processes and the relationship between the eye and the hand. How in their combination the senses can get mixed up, suggesting, for instance, the ability to see with the hand or touch with the eye. A key idea at the centre of my new works is that there is something locked away in the photographs and I am trying to reanimate what appear as frozen moments. Drawing lets my imagination re-enter these photographic images.

Why do you photograph and draw so many strangers?

It's the ephemeral nature of these encounters that interests me. There's something about the transformation – the momentary and the apparently insignificant becoming layered and invested often with hours of time – that continually draws me in. Through my process, these images of strangers become emotionally charged for me, a kind of refuge of thought, an area of intensity and unresolved intimacy – in a pursuit to find meaning in them. I'm interested in a sense of transmitting and receiving, there's always this question between what's revealed and what's obscured, or what is invented or imposed.

Which is more humane: drawing or photography?

That's interesting, because combining drawing and photography together mixes up clear distinctions. On the face of it, when pointed in a certain direction the camera more objectively absorbs what it views, and with a drawing you become necessarily more selective. Drawing is more speculative and more subjective as well. The question also suggests something about the ethical aspect of making images of people who are not complicit in the act. Whether drawing becomes a form of imposition or suggests a kind of empathy. I find this aspect is never resolved, but it also seems to be an important tension. I want to create a kind of balance between showing enough of the actual person I've captured and the drawing acting as a partial veil or protection.

How do you feel when you take the etching tool to the surface of the photograph in Cradle (2008)?

There's a lot of tension in that action because you've got this very expensive print, and you're thinking this is handmade, and it's taken a long time to get to this point. At first

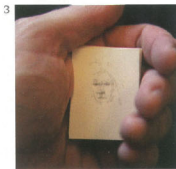
I feel very aware, it's almost performative, standing in front of this print, with this implement that is about to scarify the surface. The most significant stage is when this self-consciousness begins to break down, and my imagination becomes completely entwined with the strangers featured in the photographs as individuals. I'm completely drawn into the illusory world of the photograph and the person.

Do the faces you draw on dictate the kind of drawing you'll make?

Some are very fine, some I dig deeper into the surface, but with all of them I'm trying to react, to allow each face to initiate a language of mark-making; the qualities of the line reacting to the qualities of what the person looks like and how I imagine the individual to be. I think the subtleties of the act of holding either an etching needle in Cradle, or a pencil in Shapeshifter (2008), are about touch. There's a sensual aspect to both the surface I'm drawing into – whether that's a sheet of paper, a photographic surface, or this membrane I use for the digital stylus – and to the image on the surface. That sense is quite acute. At certain points, you sense the warmth at the nape of the neck, the bones of the face. But the nature of the drawings is also influenced by the surface of the photographs. Those taken with a very fast shutter speed, for instance, have a lot of visual noise, so that the photographs' particular structure and the quality of each individual's face and head become fused.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

Probably a portrait drawing by Giacometti. There's something about the layering up, and the sense of trying to carve out a figure in space, that makes the drawings very sculptural.

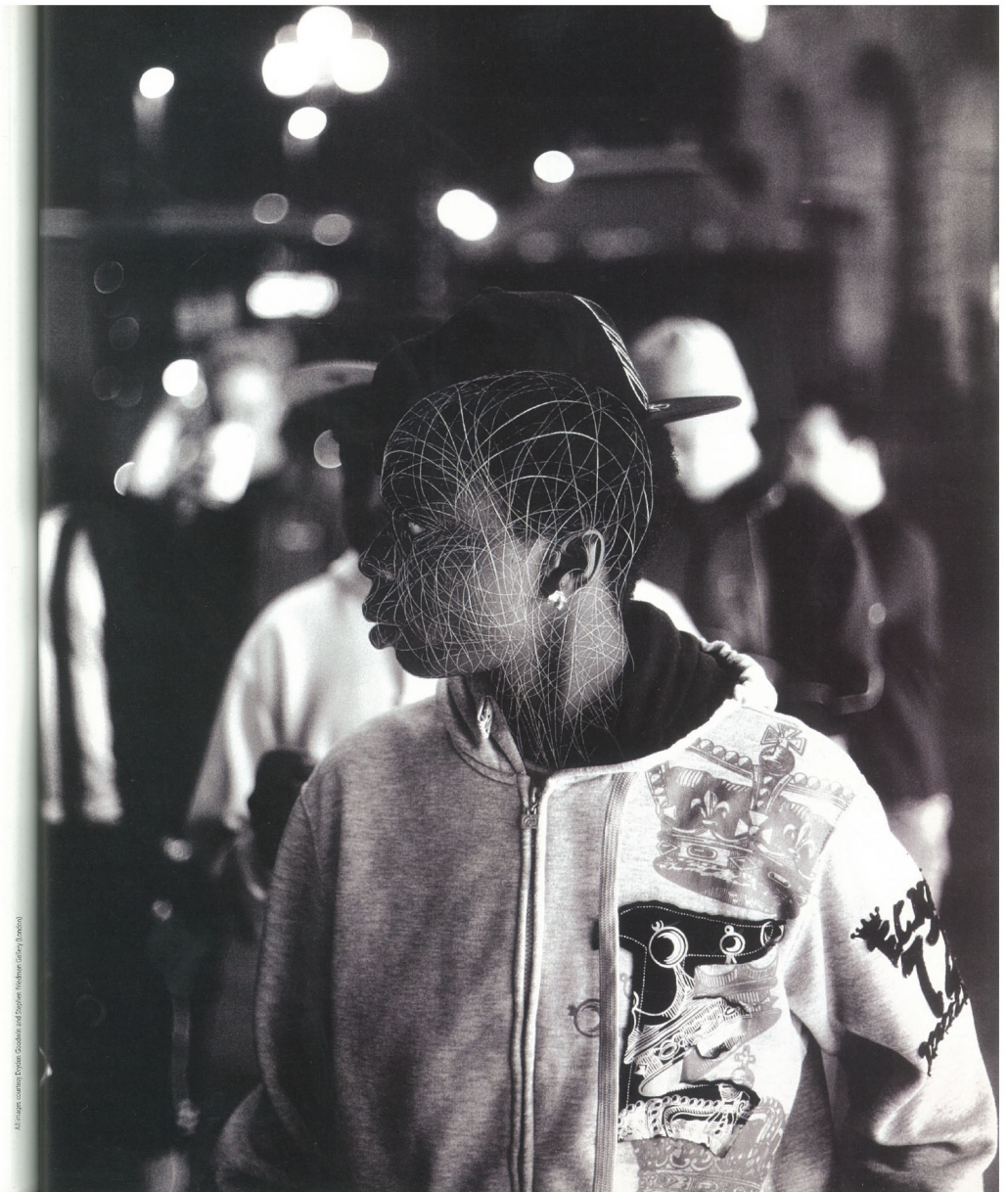


1 Mike (2006), red watercolour on paper, 57 x 38cm

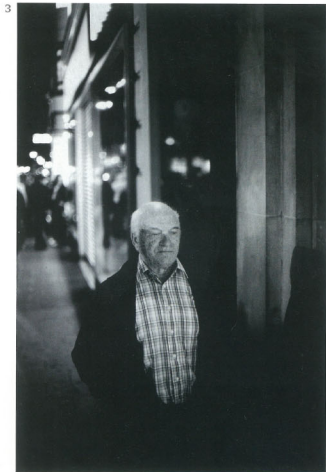
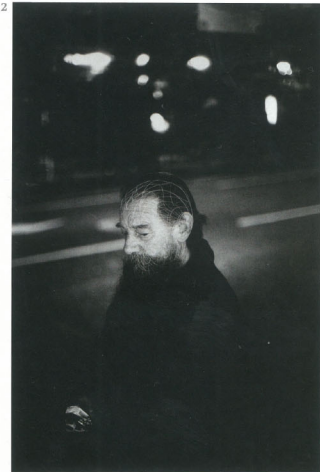
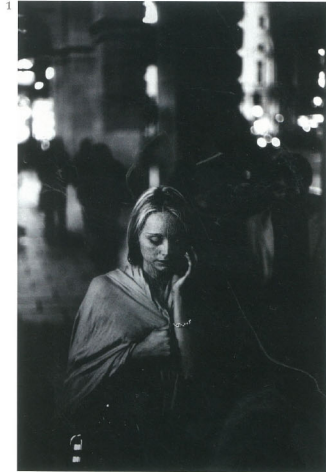
2 Caxl 7 (2008), detail, digital photograph with digital drawing, 244 x 45cm

3 A miniature pad on which Dryden Goodwin surreptitiously sketches fellow passengers as he travels London's public transport system. Opposite: Cradle 15 (2008), from Cradle (2008), a series of seven black & white scratched photographs, 160 x 111cm

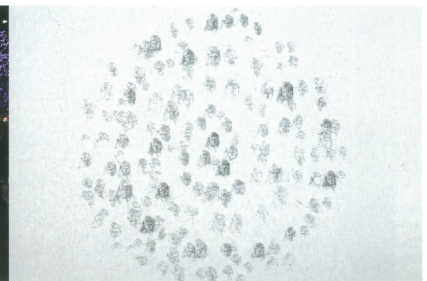
CV Born: 1971, Bournemouth, UK. Studied: Slade School of Fine Art, London. Lives and works: London. Represented: Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Artist's website: www.drydengoodwin.com



All images courtesy: Pieren Goodwin and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London



Images from *Cradle* (2008), a series of seven black & white scratched photographs, each 160 x 111cm:
1 Cradle 11 2 Cradle 9 3 Cradle 14 4 Cradle 10



Images from *Casting* (2008), a series of 5 diptychs, each 66 x 100cm, photograph and pencil on paper: 1 Casting - Regent Street 2 Casting - Intimissimi 3 Casting - Nike

Dryden Goodwin says: "In the series of diptychs *Casting* (2008), I'm making intense drawings of people I've picked out from photographs I've taken at night of busy street scenes. When I start to draw, there are challenges because the heads in the photographs are very, very small. While I suppose I could enlarge them further, I don't, because I'm conscious of not wanting to lose this impulse to get closer. The strangers become very present in my imagination when I'm drawing them. I use a magnifying visor, so there's a

transformation of my physical visual apparatus, and even a sense of my physical self changing. I feel like my body almost dissolves behind my eyes. The act of drawing with my hand and propelling pencil is at first quite clumsy, with lots of broken leads, but then you are suddenly transformed by wearing the magnifying visor because your movements, your motor neurone system becomes more finely tuned, and the eye-hand coordination becomes strangely miniaturised and more discerning."

All images courtesy Dryden Goodwin and Professor Elizabeth Gallery, London