

LIGHTBOX ON OUR RADAR

See the Eerie Life-Size Portraits Created in a Camera Obscura

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To produce his larger-than-life portraits and still lifes, the British photographer used a vintage technique



Richard Learoyd, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Yosef, 2008.

For the latest Richard Learoyd's oversize monograph *Day for Night*, where the 150 images featured make for the most comprehensive collection of his

delicate indoor pictures, the British photographer brought back a non-digital method whose simplicity never fails to fascinate — the camera obscura. Literally a “dark room,” as translated from the Latin, Learoyd recreated a camera that is as large as a room. Interestingly, no negative is used; light simply reflects off the subjects — a live model, a lifeless hare, a bundle of gaunt roots — and after passing through a lens in the wall, strikes the color photographic paper in the adjoining room. The final product is a larger-than-life grainless print with a mesmerizing level of detail.

Often Learoyd hires recurrent models, as he has previously explained, whose facial features seem timeless and who are familiar with the lengthy sitting process, which sometimes requires hours, if not a whole day, for a single exposure.

There’s no better way to take in the visual grandeur of Learoyd’s images than in the quiet chambers of a gallery or museum, such as those of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where they will be on show from Oct. 24 until Feb. 14, 2016.

The light in Learoyd’s photographs is both familiar and magical, the objects he chooses to photograph are often of common use but rather overlooked. The pastel background and vignetted edges set a surreal mood that would seem to suggest an ephemeral fictional place if we weren’t also reminded that the photographs are in fact real and the subjects true.

As we gaze at Learoyd’s portraits, we are both strangers and accomplices, almost unable to look away. Resembling large paintings from the Dutch tradition, Learoyd’s images create a sense of peace, grace and a dreamlike suspension of time that lets us pause and inhale his sense of beauty. His aesthetic provides a glance into humans’ lives that we rarely have the chance to explore but intimately yearn to, in order to acknowledge the solitude of others as well as ourselves.

A book of Learoyd's photographs, co-published by Aperture and Pier 24 Photography, is available now.

Myles Little, who edited this photo essay, is a Senior Photo Editor at ***TIME***.

Lucia De Stefani is a writer and contributor at ***TIME LightBox***. Follow her on ***Twitter*** and ***Instagram***.

Slideshow:



Olya and Annie, 2011.



Andrew, 2012.



Hare 1, 2012.



Wanda's Flowers, 2005.



Rosie, 2006.



A More Insidious Root, 2008.



Agnes in Red Dress, 2008.



Small Mirror on Plinth, 2009.



Harmony in White, 2012.



A Murder of Magpies (Color), 2013.



Melanie, 2015.

All images: Richard Learoyd, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

<http://time.com/4040536/camera-obscura-portraits/>