

New talent



In the second of our new series we turn the spotlight on **François Norris** whose dramatic abstract photography has come to our notice. He describes it as documenting the world around him – in macro. Elizabeth Roberts talks to him about his work

Profile: François Norris

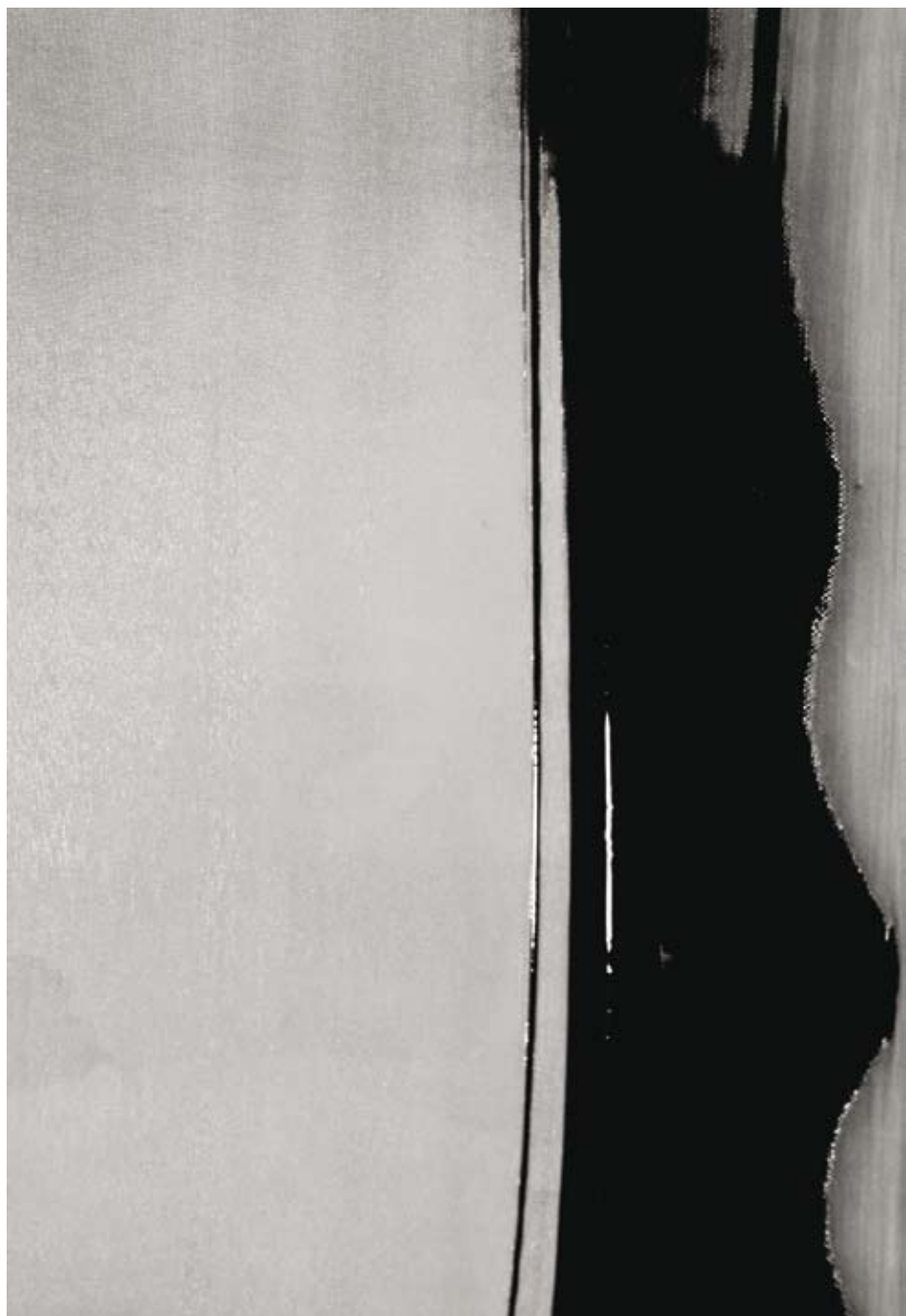
François Norris works through a variety of mediums, dividing his time between photography and teaching – including workshops for all ages in which he encourages exploration of the personal environment. He is also a Reiki Master

Elizabeth Roberts *When did you start taking photographs?*

François Norris When I was about 15. But I do remember having an old 120 Brownie when I was about nine or 10 – it was gorgeous. And I remember the excitement of capturing an image. And strangely, I took abstract photographs then. I obviously always had that leaning to look at things very closely.

ER *What were you initially interested in?*

FN The world around me – to be able to stop and look at that split second and really study it – every facet, every corner –



All pictures: Abstracts from the Silkscreen Printing project by François Norris

to re-visit it I suppose. To travel back in time.

ER *How did the your abstract work develop?*

FN A few years ago I took a picture of my niece in a swimming pool at night with the light behind her. The distortion of the shapes in the water made it quite abstract, and I realised I didn't have to be quite so literal, I could look at things in a different way. I've always been fascinated by refracted light and the way light can be distorted through heat and through glass and other mediums. I then had my first proper exhibition a few years ago in which most of the photographs were abstracts taken in my flat, and yet people

saw the photographs and thought I'd been to exotic locations because of the light. They said obviously that's Mediterranean light or Caribbean light and it was very funny. I was chuckling away inside to myself thinking, that's my bathroom, that's my kitchen, that's my sitting room. But it was very much about, for me, the discovery – I think that we discover rather than create.

ER *Do you consciously look for photographs or do you wait until they present themselves?*

FN It's both, I'd say. I often have my Lumix with me ready to snap – and then I get to saturation point and think, I've got to stop

taking photographs. I've got to actually enjoy my environment. My dad used to tell this story of how, when he was studying architecture, he and his fellow students went on a trip and they all took loads of photographs, but Dad only took 12. When they got back to college the next day, and had the de-brief, Dad was the only one who could really describe the architecture because he had relied on himself and just had the camera as a back-up. And I've lived by that – but I trip up sometimes and take a ridiculous number of images, like I did with this Silkscreen Printing project. But that was right at that moment – I had a finite time in which to take pictures.

ER *Can you describe how the Silkscreen Printing project came about?*

FN My brother-in-law, Alistair, is a fabric designer and he had made these enormous screen print frames to do some work, and he asked me to go along to help move the screens and such while he printed. I'd just bought my Canon 50D and a lovely EFS 60mm macro lens so I took them along. When I got there I found it was a big



industrial building with paint peeling on the walls, marks on the print bed, scratches on the floor – fantastic. When he started printing there were rich gloopy thick inks that were being pushed through the screen leaving incidental, accidental marks – it was

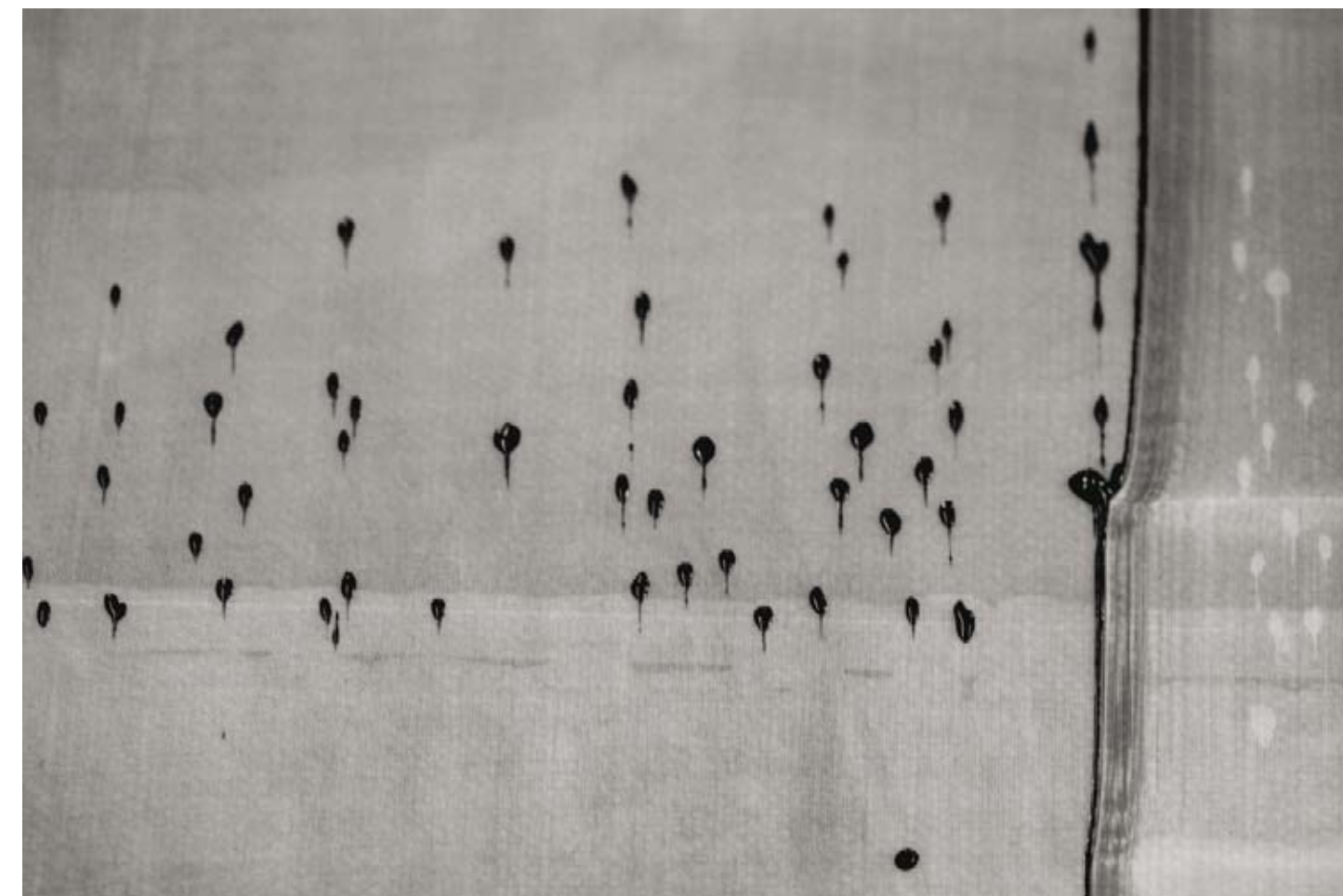
like the inks were escaping out the side, all squashed up. I had my camera on my shoulder while we worked and I kept flinging it round and taking pictures and then flinging it back to help move the screens. I was documenting what was going on but I was also documenting it in a microscopic way. I took about 750 photographs.

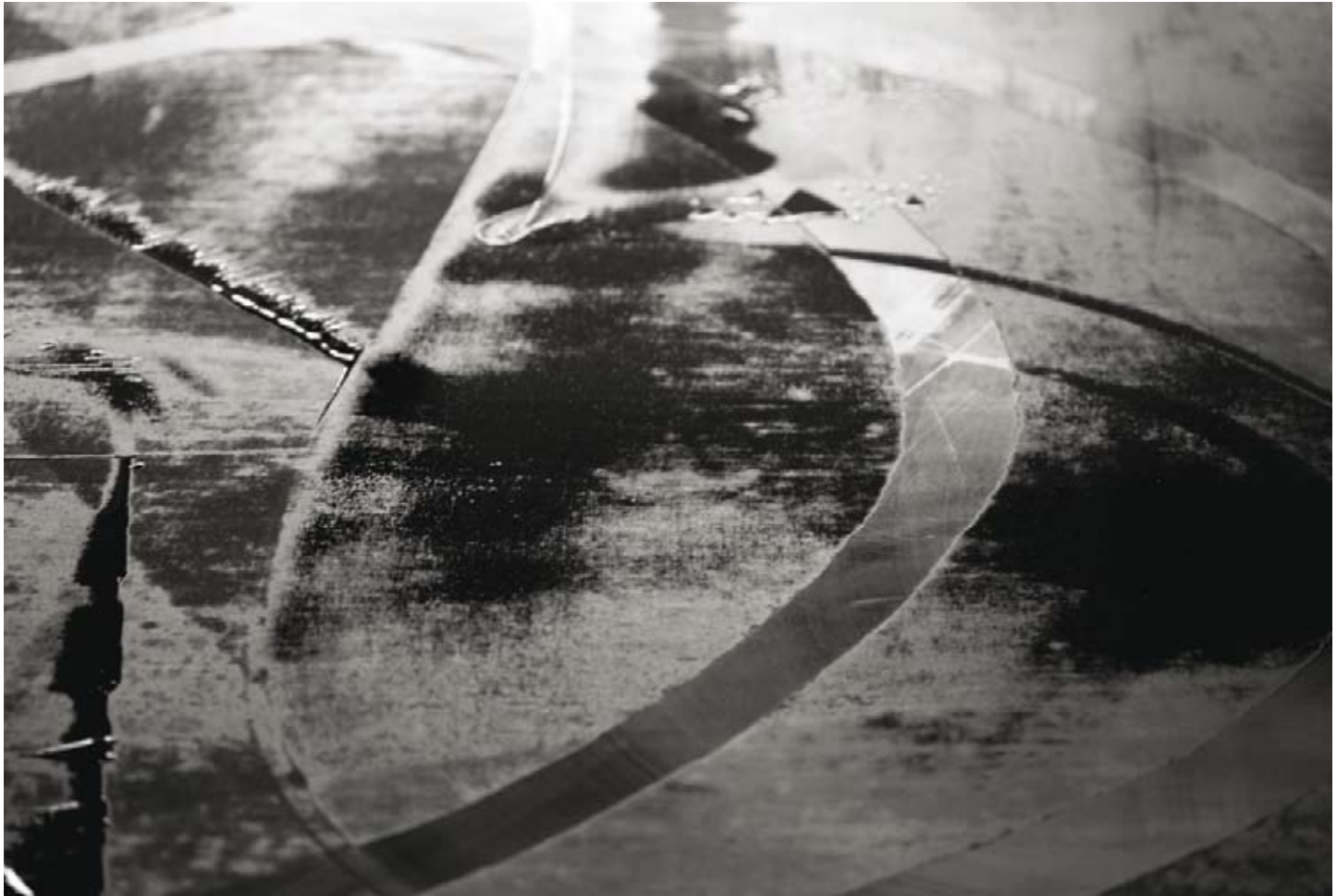
ER *You work in colour and black & white – how do you decide which to go with when you are processing your abstracts?*

FN I think they offer themselves to me. It's almost like they tell me which ones are right to be black & white. And there are some that just have to be colour.

ER *So it's instinctive?*

FN Yes, definitely. I have an absolute love of black & white, because that's how I started. I took photographs of Brighton Station and of the Sussex coastline which lends itself so much to black & white. It was an important time for me – I had a Canon Sureshot camera. But to answer your question – I look at an image and it's like I can change the filter ▶





◀ on my eyes and I can see in black & white.

ER And what about when you're taking the pictures? Are you aware of seeing them in b&w or colour?

FN Yes, I love b&w because it is so emotive. There's something about it that allows you into an almost mystical world of emotion. Something that makes you see in a different way.

ER Can you say why that is – is it to do with form, composition? Or is it to do with narrative?

FN I would say both. I do use images as metaphors. And as narrative.

ER So for you, abstracts are not just about form and light? They have this other dimension as well?

FN Yes, I fall in love with my images because they seem to represent where I am. I suppose it helps me to see where I am.

ER This relates back to what you said earlier, in that when you started taking photographs it was about describing to yourself a moment in time of the world around you. So it's a way of making

sense of the world in these tiny images rather than the bigger picture. Condensing it down.

FN Yes

ER What proportion of the 750 images you shot of the Silkscreen Printing project do you really like?

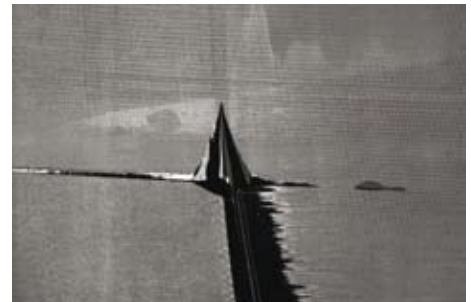
FN Quite a high proportion, actually. It has stopped me taking pictures for a while – 750 images is a lot.

ER What would you like to do with them?

FN I'm slightly overwhelmed by them. I don't want to print them all but I'm toying with the idea of doing an installation – say in a warehouse where I could project them. But I will print some of them.

ER Do you have any particular photographic ambitions?

FN I would love to go in to space and photograph the earth. The clouds and the land masses – I know I could spend a few years just orbiting and clicking and discovering something different every day. I'd probably abstract the earth – use a long lens and go in close.



Taking Abstracts: **A Free B&W Reader Workshop**

If you would like to join *Black & White Photography* on a free reader workshop entitled **Taking Abstracts**, run by François, email Mark Bentley at markbe@thegmgroup.com or call Mark on 01273 477374. Participants will need to own their own macro lens. The workshop will take place in the south of England in February.