

DOMINIC ROUSE

Were it not for the pain to be found in the wider world, I might not have sought sanctuary in the confinement of my own, where I have discovered an endless supply of the raw materials needed to create my images," says Dominic Rouse of the phantasmagoric tableaux that comprise his current project, *Haunted by a Painter's Ghost*.

Drawing for inspiration upon the writings of poets, lyricists and philosophers, Rouse examines the themes of lost love and innocence, the imperatives of religion and ideology and the search for meaning within the constraints of social convention and human relationships. Rouse is particularly fascinated with images of children and childhood, describing them as "disturbing premonitions of ourselves."

"The transition from childish innocence into full and unsettling acquaintance with the world is a theme I enjoy exploring," acknowledges the Thailand-based photographer, who worked as a photojournalist before becoming a fine-art photographer. "The further we are distanced from our childhood, the larger it looms. The memories of a happy childhood can lighten the saddest of days, but an unhappy childhood can blight a life."

Rouse's bizarre images plunge the viewer into a dream-like labyrinth of the sacred and profane. In one of his most shocking and powerful images, *Ecce Homo*, Rouse confronts the horrors of totalitarianism. "The



background is a stairwell in Office S-21, the Khmer Rouge's principal torture and interrogation facility in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. The 'confessional' grille is actually a concrete window that illuminates that lethal stairway. The barbed wire was installed by camp guards to prevent further 'escapes' after the only man to avoid the grisly death guaranteed to all inmates did so by committing suicide, throwing himself from the second floor balcony on his way to interrogation. In its four years of existence, only seven prisoners managed to survive its horrors.

"The skull blended onto the figure was photographed in one of the killing fields where thousands of similar reminders of Pol Pot's genocidal reign are still to be found. The image is both a portrait of humanity and of our enduring lack of it."

In assembling his visually complex yet cohesive photographs, Rouse begins with a title and a clear idea of the

image he wants to make. "I think it would be difficult to make things up as I went along and achieve the seamlessness I am hoping for," he explains. "As an image takes shape, however, it begins to suggest other possibilities that I could not have imagined before assembly, and I often find myself in search of more elements than I had originally planned on using."

All the images begin as color transparencies, which are then drum-scanned. "I make small digital 'sketches,' using low-resolution files of the donor images to get an idea of how they will look when composited. I can spend several days working like this before I begin to compose using the high-resolution images. Once the full-size file is ready, it is written to black and white negative material, which is processed as any black and white negative would be. Toned gelatin silver prints are then made in a traditional wet-process darkroom."

Rouse acknowledges the importance of digital compositing in facilitating the creation of his images. "The photographer who attempted to integrate so many disparate elements into a single coherent image without taking advantage of the controls readily available in the digital realm would, in my opinion, be a little unstable," he says.

For Rouse, digital imaging is a bridge that helps merge the strictures of reality-based photography with the imaginative freedom of painting. "We photographers can put up a pretty

convincing argument that photography is more suited to surrealism than other media because its starting point must be a reality," he explains. "In any case, the marriage of photographic discipline with the painter's freedom now afforded by the digital domain provides the potential for great things. Despite producing good old-fashioned gelatin silver prints, which are better suited to retaining the subtleties in the shadow areas than digital alternatives, it has been suggested that my 'manipulisms' are not technically photographs, which does not offend me in the least." —Richard Pitnick

■ PRINT INFORMATION

Prints are thio-carbomide-toned gelatin silver printed by Mike Crawford at Lighthouse Darkroom, London, on Ilford warm-tone, semi-matte, double-weight paper. Editions of 16 on 20x16-inch paper (image size 18x14 inches). Editions of 8 on 24x20-inch paper (image size 22x18 inches). Editions of 4 on 50x40-inch paper (image size 22x18 inches). Price range: \$450 to \$3,500.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

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Prints can be purchased from www.dominicrouse.com

Benham Gallery
Seattle, Washington
www.benhamgallery.com

Schneider Gallery
Chicago, Illinois
schneidergallerychicago.com



ANGELINE - 2002



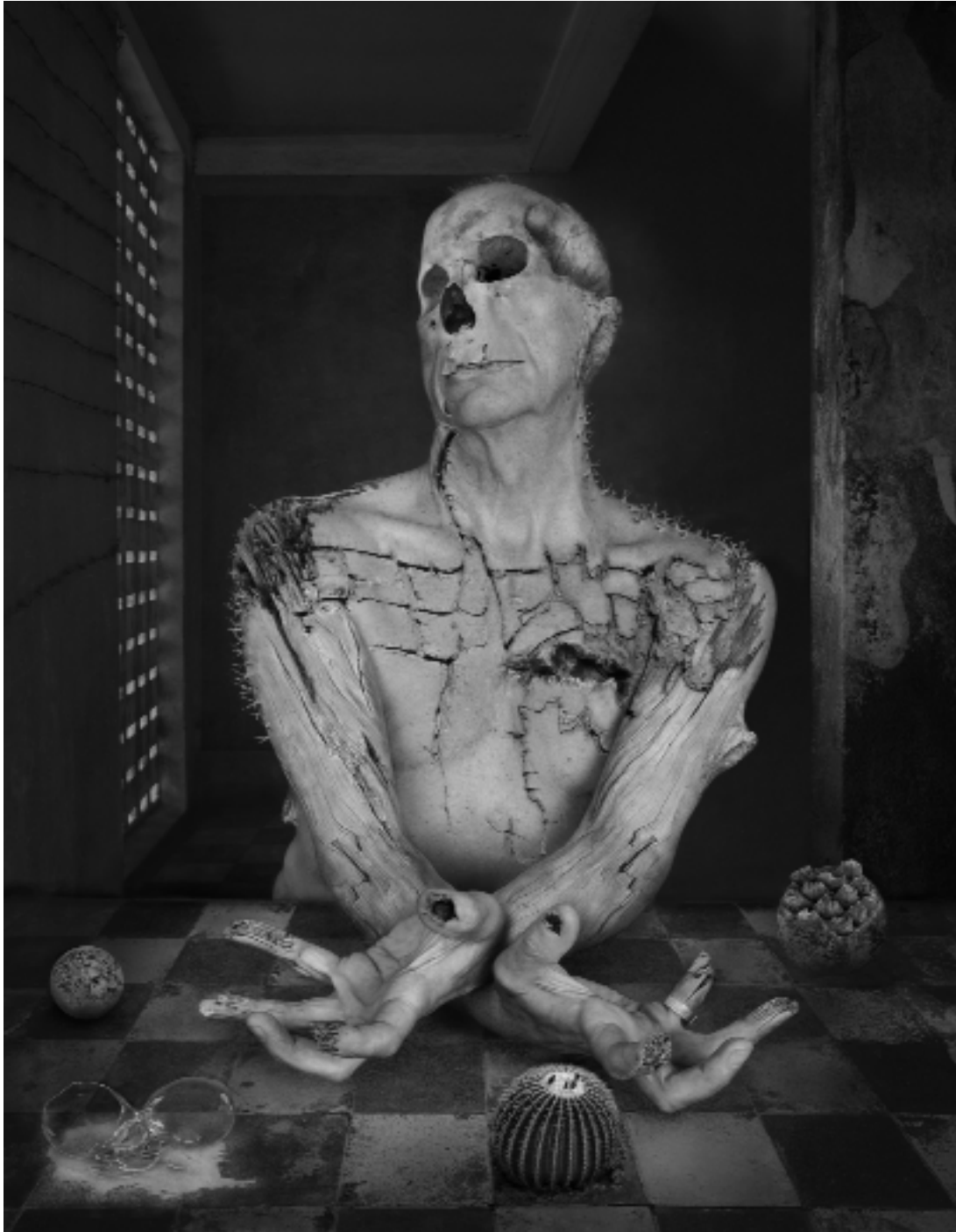
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