

the PHOTO- GRAPHER

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PAUL WENHAM-CLARKE FBIPP

When Lives Collide



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A hard-hitting and emotive photography project from Paul Wenham-Clarke FBIPP gives stark insight into the grief and suffering facing the friends and families of the hundreds killed and injured in road crashes every day in the UK.

A commercial and documentary photographer and a Professor of Photography at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB), Paul captured and exhibited the images to mark the 30th anniversary of RoadPeace, the national charity for road crash victims.

Paul addressed the tragic issue of road death and injury 20 years ago, when RoadPeace's first 'When Lives Collide' exhibition was launched at Gallery@OXO. In 2002, Paul worked with the charity and its members over two years to capture the harrowing images widely publicised by the media. The exhibition then went on to tour the UK and abroad to raise wider awareness.

Paul comments, "When I made the original 'When Lives Collide' exhibition back in 2003 I travelled the country photographing each person in their home. Initially I thought I would do the same with this new exhibition 'When Lives Collide 2023'. However, when I realised that from receiving the brief to hanging the work in the gallery would be a mere four months, I figured I needed a rethink."

Taking inspiration from the renowned American portrait photographer Platon, Paul toured the country using the same lighting set-up and backdrop. RoadPeace members across different cities would then come to sit and were asked to tell their stories as he took their portraits.

"As they spoke, I would take images of them as they went through a roller-coaster of emotion - sometimes crying, at other times smiling, as they remembered a beautiful moment with their lost loved one. I photographed lots of people in one day, and it was a difficult thing to do emotionally. Several times I was in tears, as I listened to the raw pain they were going through."



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“People often ask me why do I photograph such gruelling subjects. I think it’s because I have been a photographer all my life and worked through many genres of photography. I have been taking pictures since I was about 10 years old, so I have thousands of images of expected subjects. I went to art college and then assisted before I became a commercial and advertising photographer, so now after all that, I want to make images of things that really matter to me.”

Nick Simmons, CEO of RoadPeace, says, “When Lives Collide 2023 takes an artistic approach to explore the impact of road harm from the point of view of those directly impacted by it. Paul’s work so cleverly and creatively documents the lives of crash victims and acts as a call to work together to end road death and injury. We cannot allow this kind of preventable and avoidable suffering to go on.”

Paul aims for the viewer to consider an aspect of life they have overlooked, to think about it in a new way, and says working as a Professor of Photography enables him to take on big, long-term works supported by AUB that are not financially driven but about exploring issues of our modern society.

Paul’s signature style uses an advertising photography approach to social issue topics. However, he states, “it’s often brought criticism from other photographers. “There is not a photography rules book, just long established traditions. I think it is always best to learn the rules, then break them.”





“**T**he portrait of her dancing was made at a bus stop because when she was two years old, she and her mother and grandmother were hit by a bus and she lost her lower leg. Today, with the help of a prosthetic limb she is a 17-year old successful ballet dancer and is certainly someone to watch.”

The exhibition went live in London’s Oxo Gallery on January 4 and featured more than 30 road crash victims and bereaved families from across the UK.

“With this work, some of the images capture adults crying without any restraint; that’s not something we will often see in our lives. Using studio flash lighting and a high-end digital camera, these portraits are shocking and hard to view. Just for a few seconds we get to feel their pain and hopefully realise that the statistics on road deaths mean a lot more than just numbers. The image of Pollyanna Hope is the most uplifting of the images in the exhibition and was shot in a full-on advertising style. I had several assistants holding battery-powered lighting kits and we shot it on a London street.

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