



Final Analysis

Roger Hicks considers...

'Mother and daughter at Sloane Square', 2017, by Luke Agbaimoni



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Our appreciation of any picture is a blend of the personal and the universal. Imagine five portraits: a lover, a friend, an acquaintance, someone long forgotten, and a stranger. We see different things in each, but still share a common humanity.

Then think of the settings, the contexts. These too carry their freight and can be more or less specific, more or less universal. The London Underground, the Moscow or Paris metro, the New York subway, the U-Bahn in Berlin: all are different, but anyone who has experienced any of them can see the specific and the universal. We are all people; they are all underground mass transit systems.

Shared experience is the basis of humanist reportage, and this is the very heart of Luke Agbaimoni's pictures on www.tubemapper.com. People and

settings interact wonderfully, often creating the strange impression that we are remembering something we have never seen, or perhaps something we would have seen had we been paying attention. Mass transit is a strange blend of togetherness (we really are all in it together) and isolation (but we rarely talk to one another). Elegance and cleanliness are interspersed with dilapidation and filth. Past and future mingle promiscuously.

Specific and universal

In this picture, I love the mother and child (specific, but also universal), the rich blue of the tiles (specific), and the blur of the train (all but universal, except in those rare stations where the train doors line up with holes in a barrier). I don't really recall Sloane Square station: it is nearly 40 years since I lived on King's Road. But even if it

has all changed, it is still the same.

You don't get pictures like this by accident. At least, not often. You need to experiment with shutter speed and aperture to create the appropriate blur and depth of field. You need to be able to concentrate and exclude the unnecessary; you need to practise. You need to know when to wait and when to grab the shot.

If I owned the right sort of hotel/pub/restaurant in London, I'd buy original prints from this series to hang on the walls, and if I could get Luke's permission I'd sell them too, as prints and postcards. Crass commerce? If you like, but also a compliment. As I get older, I like cities less and less. But this series makes me want to go back to London. Indeed I am half tempted to have one of them on the wall in my house in rural France, to remind me of a life I used to live.

AP

Roger Hicks has been writing about photography since 1981 and has published more than three dozen books on the subject, many in partnership with his wife Frances Schultz (visit his new website at www.rogerandfrances.eu). Every week in this column Roger deconstructs a classic or contemporary photograph. Next week he considers an image by Hamish Gill.