

Reflections on Tutor feedback: Assignment 4

This is the feedback on assignment 4 as received from my tutor, Robert Enoch. I have a little trouble relating to this as Robert does not share the same vision on this as I did. So, without attempting to sound like I did it right, I want to seek opinions of others as this could be a really crucial feedback for me, as to why he is the only one person who does not relate to this? Is it because he being a western male, is not aware of how women in our society are related or is it something that I have fundamentally done wrong, and it does not matter what society it is? It's definitely a feedback that has made me think and that is great in itself, as if even one person does not find it right, then definitely there is something I need to correct. Still, it's difficult for me to agree to some points that he has raised. The text in black are the tutor's comments followed by my response/points taken in blue italics under it.

I request you to once again share your opinions and viewpoints on this and without the fear of offending me, I seek your honest and critical opinion upon the points that the has made. Its more confusing for me as all of you, being westerners (some of you being males), did not indicate any such opinion or viewpoint. Now that the idea is planted in your head, do you see this assignment in a different light?

Overall Comments

You've done something interesting but not without flaws. This points you in an artistic direction which is potentially very important. You have found a symbolic object to tell a story. The Thai Ginger is a substitute for the victim of domestic abuse. In a way, this is bound to fail because the ginger is unrelated to the real object (a woman) and seems to humiliate the notional female by turning her into a vegetable! (If you were a man you would struggle to defend yourself here!) However, this could be artistically useful because it turns an emotive and difficult phenomenon into an abstraction which is – at least you hope – evocative of that violence.

I bet you will divide your audience with this one. But perhaps you should consider this a preliminary project for a more consistent and contextual photographic treatment for Assignment 5 (more on that below). Because this project may have opened your eyes (and understanding) to a means to deal with something hidden.

My choosing ginger was in no way meant to humiliate or degrade the status of a woman to that of being compared to a vegetable. Although in our country, a vegetable in most cases is more important or held in more importance than a woman. The idea here was not to choose an object that is being compared to a woman, but to choose an object that can express my theme without going into an obvious and run of the mill depiction of a violent crime that is the story of our nation.

A vegetable, if at all I would have compared to a woman, would be for all the right reasons, both being a life force, both crucial to development and nurturing of humanity, both delicate and fragile in appearance but hold immense power to sustain life. Therefore, I don't agree to the fact that it humiliates women in any way. Because we are already filled with ideas that sit in our minds from years of drilling by parents, peers and society, we tend to hang on to some juxtapositions so hard that we are closed to seeing things from any other way than this. What if I say that vegetables are life source and are an important part of us being alive and therefore it is an honour to be associated to one?

But to be honest, my idea of choosing the Thai ginger was because it is still life and after much searching for an appropriate object that complemented my theme in the way I want, this actually reached to me in a way like nothing else did.

Feedback on assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

You've set your images in the context of horrendous crimes against women - some of which I haven't even heard of like 'eve-teasing', which suggest a bizarre evolution - both in your narrative and your accompanying text. (Strange how, as I write this, the suggested words which appear on my iPad after "domestic" are *product* and *violence*. Such is its ubiquity.)

Eve-teasing, honour killings, revenge killings, female infanticide, acid attacks, rapes, molestation, sexual harassment are such a big part of our society that it is nothing new. Eve-teasing, another term for sexual

harassment on the streets, openly in public places and view, is such a huge part of our society that women/girls can't step out of their homes without some untoward incident happening. It makes every day living so difficult. I suggest you google "eve-teasing" and actually see how it happens and how it is something real and looming large as a menace in this part of the world. I am including some reference links to crimes that probably one must not have heard of in the Western world. Some of the crimes against women are so rare in the sense that even I was shocked to hear about them and yet so common in the rural areas that they are not even looked at upon as anything odd anymore. It is accepted by the society and the women alike and just taken as a part and parcel of everyday life. I want to do a whole project on this in my degree course perhaps so more of it there.

For me the series functions as a text with accompanying *suggestive* images rather than with *telling* images that explain or expose domestic violence. But what you have sought is interesting: a sculptural (3D) visual signifier of the effects of domestic violence. It is the scars, the traces, the missing limbs on the ginger that speak. Much of the success of that (original) project hangs on your ability to find the expressive drama in the ginger and unfortunately the whole series is ultimately always reducible to a vegetable and the common form of commercial vegetable photography.

Maybe my images are not in your face with clichéd images of gory violence or after effects of a violent scene, but that was never my intention to begin with. I did want to consciously move away from depicting anything directly, rather my emphasis was to tell a story of a violent crime in a way that it actually happens – in an abstract manner – the beatings and the violence is usually always carried on within the four walls of a home. The woman actually bears the abuse, tries to hide her scars, her pain and agony and ultimately succumbs to it rather than fight it, which is rare, as societal pressure is significant in my country. A divorced woman or a woman who has left her husband is looked down upon as "characterless", which is also a significant term used in India. There is a lot of work out there that is brutal and portrays a more documentary style of approach in handling this subject but I really didn't want to go there. I wanted to create an abstract series of work, that tells a moving story without the accompanying gore with it necessarily. In that sense, I do agree that they might not be perceived as telling images. Somehow my mind keeps going to Laura Lewinsky's work on apple shavings and cherry seeds – and that is ok to signify various aspects of life? Isn't that work also reducing human lives to that of a discarded apple or garbage?

But there are moments when something happens here which is what you must notice and build on. It is informed by a connection between the text and the images but it turns the object into an expressive form. These are photos 2 and 5.

5 is the best because there is really no way of visualizing the psychological impact of domestic abuse in any other way than with analogy or symbol. The frayed tendons of the ginger look like the result of a violent tear. There's nothing surgical or careful about it. These messy fibres are what is left of the marriage. It is not a dead thing, it isn't over, it is still connected to the living organism.

2 has the frightening, creepy form of the head of an insect. But is this the internalized monster or the fear itself?

1 is problematic because you are turning the woman herself, head, arms etc into a vegetable. It is a kind of playful treatment which undermines the dreadful seriousness of the subject. As does the final image of the lowered head of 'death'.

But there is a place for that reaching form you call 'cries of mercy' as well as the scars of 'the physical wounds'. But is there really a reason to convey a human form?

Again, in no way do I think that any of my images ridicule the female in any manner or is trying to make light of a subject that is dead serious and so real in nature. The lowered head of "death" actually is one of my most favourite image – it is so simple and yet so profound in my opinion and reflects an end so violent in such a peaceful manner. Yet reading this, I feel that I have drastically gone wrong in my thinking.

It's important to convey a human form as domestic violence is only a human thing. Animals and plants do not resort to violence or abuse.

So, **did you find the best, most suitable object to impart your narrative of scars?** As I said, the vegetable has humiliating connotations. Yes, it is organic, but it doesn't *think*, so we call a stupid person a 'vegetable'. Or someone who likes to 'veg out' in front of the TV a 'couch potato'. It was a flawed choice in my view. But it has shown a useful potential. Simply by seeking these scars in an object you have sought to show (invisible) emotional, psychology and social scars. You could perhaps have sought these scars in a domestic setting: dents in the wall, broken crockery, bent hinges, torn clothing, blood stains and scuff marks. Whatever the

traces you could find, they would at least have the consistency of context which a food doesn't have. (Perhaps your research into Edward Weston for Exercise 4:11 effectively hamstrung your ability to make the correct subject to object relationship).

You could probably find women in a refuge or at the police station with real physical scars. Perhaps you could create portraits of the women juxtaposed with portraits of the faces of police, health professionals and social workers employed to help. (Presuming that exists in India). I wonder what that juxtaposition will reveal about the social attitude to domestic violence?

This is the approach that I wanted to move away from – because it is so clichéd and overdone. Though maybe I haven't been able to make a correct subject choice, still I would not have liked to treat this subject in the usual expected manner.

Coursework

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity

Your coursework is invigorating, playful and creative. Don't think that these have to be 'successful' or conclusive. They are more like sketches, ideas, possibilities which advance your understanding of photography as a creative art like steps on a ladder and become the 'talent' which will inform your work as you progress.

Noted

Learning Log

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis Summarize how you have applied what you've learned from the course to your assignment photographs. Also note down what you've learned from other photographers in executing the assignment.

Excellent reflection on your process and search for an object that "speaks to you" with the charge of a symbol. This is the key development in this work.

Pointers for the next assignment

I hope you will pursue this project to fulfilment. You've made an important leap but you've got to centre your search in the correct context however difficult that may be.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interesting and potentially powerful use of symbol to imply a hidden subject.• Excellent technical and visual skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Linking context with subject.