

# LEARNING TO LOOK

## Brighton Photo Biennial in association with the Brighton & Sussex Medical School

Art and medicine have a long and rich history of shared dialogue, collaboration and exchange. Both are driving forces in our culture that advance knowledge and discovery. There is much common ground between the two subjects.

*Learning To Look* is a student selected elective for third year medical students at the Brighton & Sussex Medical School (BSMS) devised by photographer Tom Wichelow with Brighton Photo Biennial and BSMS that aims to develop students' visual awareness and critical thinking through photography based activities.

The course explores connections between the skills needed to practice medicine (particularly diagnosis) and those needed to produce and analyse photographs. It asks: How important is looking in diagnosis? Can students' observational skills be improved and enhanced through participation in photography workshops?

In 2005, Brighton Photo Biennial, in partnership with Professor Helen Smith, Chair of Primary Care at BSMS, supported by the Creativity Development Fund, appointed Brighton based photographer Tom Wichelow to devise and run a pilot course for first year medical students, with a view to establishing a Student Selected Component module for third year students from September 2006. Tom was already familiar with BSMS having previously been commissioned by Photoworks to document the medical school's first year. Tom taught students how to take and develop their own photographs, and facilitated extensive critical analysis of photographs. Together they discussed aesthetics, the subjective versus objective, and personal and social contexts, making constant reference to the role of creativity in medicine, and the relevance of understanding observation and perception.

This exhibition presents a selection of the students' photographs and logbooks, which provide an insight into their journey across the eight week course, an account of the value of the experience, and a clear demonstration of the benefit of working across disciplines. The subject matter of the photographs is varied, but each is a result of students taking a fresh look at their studies through the lens of a camera.

The exhibition also includes a specially commissioned film, directed by Rupert Noble that documents the students reflecting on the impact that the course has had on their medical studies.

Professor Helen Smith says:

*"We are very committed to developing a curriculum that will enable our students to study the arts and humanities in addition to core biomedical sciences and clinical medicine. We believe that these broader studies will contribute to their development as good doctors; doctors that have a deeper understanding of the meaning of illness, doctors that are able to communicate better with patients and family and doctors able to reflect on the impact of their work with sick people".*

**Brighton Photo Biennial** is the UK's leading festival of photography. Its education programme delivers artist led projects throughout the year that aim to encourage a wide and diverse range of people to enjoy, engage with and participate in the visual arts.

The project has been funded by the Creativity Development Fund (CDF) through InQbate (the Centre of Excellence in Teaching & Learning in Creativity). The CDF provides funding for the development and enhancement of innovative learning and teaching, and for research into the nature of the creative process in existing courses and activities.

Brighton Photo Biennial and the Brighton & Sussex Medical School would like to thank Tom Wichelow and all of the participating Medical and Photography students; Pauline Ridley, Catherine Redknapp, Gill Johnston, Peter Childs, Tom Hamilton and the InQbate team; Rupert Noble for the film; Anne Asher at CETLD; Judith Katz, Christopher Stewart, Colin Matthews and Dave Cooper at the University of Brighton; Claire Soper and Tim Hardy at the Gardner Arts Centre; Penny Jones, Education Consultant; LOUP Design; Spectrum Photographic; Chromatics and Big Art Ltd

### The Medical Students

Claire Bourner  
Laura De Neumann  
Patrick Harrington  
Ian Heath  
Funmiyebi Iniekio  
Sophie Knight  
Tapiwa Moffatt  
Elaine Murphy  
Victoria Nunn  
Darryl-Jo Satchell  
Laura Stansfield  
Sasha Wyatt  
Stephanie Harrison  
Charlotte Brooks  
Sarah-Jayne Burns  
Anna Evans  
Samuel Whitaker  
Danielle Franzmann  
Emma Ginn  
Hina Iftikhar  
Annika Jiskoot  
Lucy Minden  
Joanna Wade  
Myron Ciapryna  
Michael Harrison  
Vanisha Chauhan  
Anna Vuor  
Deepasree Bangaru-Raju  
Dhivyashree Bangaru-Raju  
Elise Maynard  
Jenny Clarke  
Sarah Coombes  
Becky Ellis  
Sameer Patel  
Susanna White  
Phoebe Hodges  
Claire Bowmer

# TOM WICHELOW

## LEARNING TO LOOK

### AN ARTIST IN A MEDICAL SCHOOL

*Learning to Look* has been a wonderful success. The other arts projects I have been involved in within the medical school have been productive and intriguing but I was left wondering...am I doing any good? Is there really a role for me as an artist in this situation? I can now genuinely say there is, and I have found it.

This Student Selected Component module (SSC), called Learning to Look (LTL) is offered to third year students, who at this stage in their studies are increasingly engaged in clinical practice. Lectures are replaced by ward rounds, campus life replaced by hospital. They are now expected to use and hone their embryonic medical skills. This SSC appears somewhere in the middle of this, and the students are suddenly placed in a very different world. A world not of hard decisions and medical fact, but of self-analysis and creative reflection. It is a tribute to these students that they have risen to the challenge of becoming part time art students and it is a tribute to the course that many of them gained so much. Their journals are (eventually!) full of revelations but begin with honest, genuine and healthy scepticism. They are confused by what I ask of them. Their medical training expects very different things to this and initially, most can see little useful link to what LTL requires of them.

The concept behind the course is difficult to sum up but it involves close scrutiny of oneself and of one's perceptions. Photography is used as a tool or a lever to prise the students apart from their perceptions and to enable them to view these perceptions from a small distance. The absolute importance of a doctor's perceptions is encapsulated in the process of taking a patient's history. This initial meeting and perceiving seems utterly central to the practice of medicine and is a starting point for the examining and owning of the students' perceptions. Over the eight weeks of the course they are encouraged to create a body of photographic work that represents their external world as trainee doctors. The concept of photographic (and scientific) objectivity (no such thing) is dealt with and the question is asked: does what we photograph in the external world reflect what is going on internally? Their work is gently scrutinised by me and more importantly by themselves, leading to greater involvement in the creative process and an enlightening challenge to their accepted way of thinking. Can being more perceptive really make you a better doctor?

Their scepticism slowly gives way to a realisation that in the taking of a patient's history, a good dose of their own perceptions can be obstructive, and that awareness of this is both revelatory and professionally valuable.

The students' journals are a wonderful example of how the worlds of science and art can come together and I hope that the students have gained as much as I have from taking part in the course. I would like to thank Professor Helen Smith for the enthusiasm she brings to running these courses; Juliette Buss from Brighton Photo Biennial for her support; Pauline Ridley for her cultivation of LTL, and finally, all the students for their keen, open-minded approach to a challenging project. Below are a few quotes lifted from some of their fantastic diaries:

*"I can honestly say, that this is a lot, lot harder than I thought it would be, but in a good way. Although at times frustrating, trying to think in a slightly different, non-medical way is hard, but I know it is probably doing me a lot of good."*

*"This new holistic way of teaching (medicine), I believe is vital for 'tomorrow's doctors. The more things/different ways in which we are taught the better. Medicine is not just scientific knowledge, it is knowledge of the world and its subjects - art, music, language...anything. The more the better."*

*"It has made me look, listen and think. Alerted all my senses to hopefully make me a better doctor..."*