

Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio

Work In Progress

My initial attempts at emulating the early travelling portrait photographers with my Free Portrait Studio were farcical. I started out making images along the south coast of England setting up my equipment outdoors where I would be highly visible but not present an obstacle. I would then ask passers by to take time out from what they were doing and have their portrait taken.

Putting aside sceptical policemen, bewildered street wardens, comedic drunks and talkative pensioners, my main enemy was the wind. On more than one occasion I ended up either chasing or wrestling my 9ft x 9ft collapsible background. I now hold my Free Portrait Studio events indoors.

Itinerant photographers were an accepted part of English street life in the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries. Part of the Victorian floating world of peddlers, tinkers and travelling entertainer's, their sitters were frequently photographed in temporary, makeshift studios that were set up in a variety of places.

Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio is a non-commercial mobile studio that follows in the footsteps of early itinerant photographers. Visiting a variety of venues throughout the country Jason Wilde's Free Portrait Studio invites visitors and passers by to temporarily discontinue their daily routines to take part in a short informal photography process, with each participant able to receive a free A4 B&W inkjet print.

Staged against a neutral grey background these documentary portraits eschew the overtly conceptual motifs of much contemporary portraiture in favour of the descriptive powers of the medium. This growing body of powerful imagery is a valuable documentary project that aims to reflect the complex nature of contemporary English society.