



Lateral thinking

Left: Will Curwen reports on the 'Lateral Thinking' workshop recently held in Manchester.
"The Golden Years" by team blue.

Right: "Deep" by team yellow.
Having just completed a gruelling City and Guilds teacher training course, I was very interested to see what the 'learning outcomes' of this evening's activities would be, and was gleefully surprised. Apart from being a very pleasant social occasion, this workshop was also a heck of a lot of fun - because those who attended had the rare opportunity to share their personal creativity with like-minded souls in a mercifully welcomed, non-commercial context.

Perhaps it's because there seems to be a bit more work around at the moment, but the mood of the evening was distinctly upbeat. We were asked beforehand to bring some paper, coloured crayons and - wait for it - a comfy cushion! The host and creative guru was none other than Michelle Demers, who for the evening re-defined her job description as The Association's resident photo-shaman; and the event was sponsored by Polaroid whose reps, Laurie Woodroof and Steve Moore, showed true spunk and joined in the fun.

In true hippy twilight fashion, we were invited to sit on our cushions and listen to what Michelle had in store for us. I have a personal fascination in the way we creative folk go about our daily work, the success of which, according to neuropsychology, is dependent on the complex interaction between the hemispheres of the brain and how much free rein we offer to the right hemisphere in particular. My own approach to taking photos is to prepare for everything and pray for the unexpected - putting oneself into that very beautiful state of 'hyper-reality' where the rational, logical and linear left brain intertwines with the right's intuitive, instinctive and emotional response to the world. It is this special

relationship which underlines and defines our existence as photographers, and I for one have always felt that being a photographer is not so much an occupation, as a privilege. I know no other profession which gives such an open, universal passport to what is happening in the world through the viewfinder of a camera.

We were then invited to draw our intuitive, 'unthinking' response to key emotive words, as quickly as possible, using our instinctive choice of colour from a selected palette, and using our non-dominant hand - which in my case is my right mitt. These exercises were designed to get the right brain abuzz - and what a buzz it was! After this communal frenzy of scribbling we then invited our left brain to caption each drawing as a way of analysis. It was quite surprising what came out alongside the laughter and bits of polite embarrassment. Lastly, we drew that much maligned word 'creativity'. I just grabbed all my felt-tips together in a bunch and made a lovely mess and, interestingly enough, so did three others. We dubbed ourselves 'the rainbow people' and felt quite special, having transcended all categories!

Drawing upon the work of psychologist Max Luscher, Michelle then explained that a personal preference for certain colours offers clues to the nature of our creativity and the environment most conducive to our particular creative output.

Then, divided into dominant colour groups, we were set the task of illustrating an advertising brief, based upon our talents, by photographing a seemingly out-of-place artifact (or 'oopart' to those who read *Fortean Times*!). Maybe I live too quiet a life, but this was real fun, and 'man-child' that I am, I did enjoy jumping up and down with the excitement of joining in to throw together an incredibly rough still-life using one light, one lens, loads of free Polaroid film, and anything else we

could lay our hands on!

An hour later, we tacked our results on the studio wall and were amazed at what came out in the gestalt of activity. Although some of the copy-lines were unrepeatable in civilised society, the results did bear some correlation between colour preference and creative sensibility.

Michelle, ebullient as always, was in her element on this happy evening, and her assessment of the results reflected much of what I have learnt about the creative process: that children are creative by nature and that the precariousness and compromises of adult life force us to treat creativity as yet another activity that has to fit in with everything else that puts bread on the table. These recessionary times have certainly sorted the wheat from the chaff, and I would like to believe it is our personal creativity, and ingenuity in its application, which shows who are the 'true' survivors.

Some past workshops have been little more than trade demos which, apart from the occasional fractious debate, have not really addressed the issue of how we make great pictures, how to recognise it when it happens, and what we have to do to make creativity a truly functional aspect of daily life; and interviews with our well-established peers tell us only about their talent. Lateral Thinking was the first to invite us to look inward for ideas and inspiration, and most were surprised at what they found!

Special thanks to Tom Pollock for the loan of his fab studio; to HA West, Bryan Bane, and Studio Workshop for the loan of their kit; and to Polaroid for their generous support and bonus free film!

