

ANDY SUMMERS

► CORK STREET, CENTRAL LONDON, MAY 2005

On an average day in London's Cork Street, the traditional centre for top-end contemporary art in the capital, a nondescript figure walks into the Beaux Arts gallery. It's a low key arrival: no chauffeur driven car outside; no personal assistant faffing about with clipboard and Blackberry; in fact, no indication at all that this is Andy Summers, legendary guitarist and musical driving force behind the premier rock band of the 1980's - The Police.⁽¹⁾

IT ISN'T SUMMERS in the guise of rock guitar hero. This is Andy Summers as artist and photographer, coming to give a last look over his inaugural exhibition of photographs at the prestigious Beaux Arts gallery. It's a first for the gallery as well. More used to showing artists of the stature of Elizabeth Frink, John Hoyland and Terry Frost, the gallery's young contemporary division does have a number of painters using photographic sources, but this is the first time photography *per se* has been the subject for a solo exhibition.

The series of images had been editioned at Summers' Los Angeles studio and shipped to London - including a large experimental print on canvas, stretched like a painting, and given pride of place on a back wall. It sold immediately after the Private View.⁽²⁾ The collection had been shot in disparate parts of the world with his trusted Leica - Summers is an inveterate traveller. Back then, the only compromise to digital had been in the printing process: '...there's something about the pattern of film grain' he noted, eschewing the DSLR revolution.

The Beaux Arts exhibition, entitled *City Like This* and selected from over 60 available works, was an evocative *homage* to the desolation and isolation that can exist at the epicentre of an over-crowded city, bustling with human life in all its varied forms. All the images are monochrome, which Summers prefers, acknowledging a reference to the *cinema noir* of his youth: 'I like the blackness and the darkness of these late-night times, and I don't think they would work in colour. I use it occasionally [I've just taken some photographs in Africa] but there's something special about black and white', he told a London newspaper critic.

In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, David Bailey commented: 'I could smell the wet dark streets, a feast of 21st Century redefined film *noir*. You feel they should have a sound track of a lonely saxophone playing. I hate comparisons, but in this case



► *Shadow Puddle, London February 2004*

'I hate comparisons, but in this case I feel it is a compliment to compare them to Brassai's Streets of Paris'. BRATLEY

I feel it is a compliment to compare them to Brassai's *Streets of Paris*'. The acclaimed photographer was not the only one to identify an individual quality in the pictures. Sarah Kent, leading UK art critic and photographer herself, noted: '...sometimes the damp streets are completely empty, in which case you are the one with no home to go to. The most beautiful image though, was taken in Denmark in the late afternoon. Silhouetted against the pale sun, a man walks toward a steaming train while fellow travellers cast long shadows down the platform. In fact, light is as much the subject of Summers' pictures as loneliness, and this is what makes them special...'⁽³⁾

The indices within the individual images appear to map a repeating pattern in Andy Summers' work - the lone figure; the street corner; the deserted avenue; night time - a well established *genre* reminiscent of Atget, Bill Brandt or Cartier-Bresson. But he is by no means derivative of these artists. 'I'm a big fan of Cartier-Bresson and think Robert Frank is probably the best photographer in

the world', he told one interviewer. Yet Summers has clearly established a voice and a language of his own, and it has been studiously refined over the many years he has been taking photographs with a serious intent.

Summers' preoccupation is not with *reportage*, nor does he fake events for maximum theatrical impact - he acknowledges that it has lately become common knowledge that Cartier-Bresson staged many of his candid night shots. No, the unique quality of Andy Summers' photographic work is illustrated by his uncanny and highly intuitive ability to detect that fleeting instant when a particular episode undergoes an unexpected metamorphosis - when the literal reading of a given image is suddenly subverted - by a glance, a gesture, a hanging of the head, a shadow... a smile. These unpredictable moments, seized and frozen from the streets and bars of cities around the world, expose exhilaration, loneliness and personal tragedy. Summers' unobtrusive lens captures the *zeitgeist* of metrolife - and the desperation and optimism ever present within the chaotic modern city.

Without doubt there is a resistance to the multi-discipline artist, especially in the UK. The individual that excels at one form of creativity is denied a serious audience for another. Often this is the result of an accurate critical assessment (Paul McCartney's paintings spring to mind) but Summers' own labours with the camera have produced a mature body of work that should transcend any such prejudice and bigotry.

Born in Lancashire in 1942, he grew up in Bournemouth and there are rumours that Andy spent time on the seafront snapping holidaymakers as a school vacation job. But it was certainly a fascination with black and white cinema, especially the French New Wave, which served to inform his photographic development - coincidentally an influence that he shared with Jeanloup Sieff. This memory of cinema came to dictate his early efforts with a camera, that and surrealism, and there remains a quality of neo-surrealist 'other worldliness' in the majority of Summers after hours and street imagery to this day.

There is a certain irony in that Summers' serious attention to photography coincided with the formation and meteoric rise of The Police in the late 1970s, although he has no doubts about which is the dominant means of expression. Asked to choose between a guitar and a camera, he responds: 'Definitely... music is the superior art-form!' However, next day he is just as likely to champion the

► *Covent Garden, March 2004*

ANDY SUMMERS

camera and has himself noted that: 'my guitar and camera are fixed instruments, the only constants in a world of change'.

The opportunities afforded by the touring lifestyle facilitated Andy's first published work based on his photographic images: *Throb*.⁽⁴⁾ It's an insightful mixture of rock star antics and surreal visual puns, combined with some memorable and sophisticated pictures. It includes (perhaps the first appearance of) Andy's signature image. It is said that every photographer has *the* image by which they will be forever known and their status established. For my money, Andy Summers created his in this early work - it is a stark and dynamic depiction of a horse and its handler bathing in the sea. Taken as an opportunist shot in the Caribbean as the band recorded their fifth album, Andy recollects: 'This was taken about a year before I got into my Leica period. Shot in Montserrat when we were working on the *Synchronicity* album at Air studios [1982-83]. We were invited to a party somewhere on the island you could only get to by boat, and as we arrived I saw this guy taking a horse into the water by a chain around its neck. I saw the potential immediately. I had a camera bag with me and I jumped off the boat - actually, the water was a lot deeper than I expected which you can sort of see from the angle of the picture - and simply shot off the end of a roll of film'.

When the excesses of The Police tours got too much, Andy took solace in the taking of photographs and has even quipped that, as his personal life crashed and burned, he 'swapped his marriage for 40 rolls of film'. This episode at least had a happy ending when, post Police and intellectually stabilised, he remarried Kate in 1986 and remains *en-famille* to this day. The end of the band was the only time that his guitar went on the back burner and Summers devoted his creative energies to painting and photography, maintaining a studio on LA's Venice Beach: 'It was odd that my dialogue with the instrument [after The Police] stopped happening', he told the *Sunday Times Magazine* in a recent interview. But, perhaps more insightfully, he had noted in *Throb*: '...now I have fifty guitars and someone to tune them - I have a camera which gets me in and out of this wonderland [and which] I'm still trying to get in tune...'

There is a perception that musicians at the rock end of the spectrum are somehow DIY enthusiasts who just got lucky. Who somehow stretched those three chord sequences into memorable ditties and made a fortune out of it. Those familiar with Andy Summers' career know this is far from the case. In fact, he spent six years of classical guitar study at California State University, Northridge. And in the twenty odd years since The Police days, he has forged a celebrated career with various combos, playing his own diffusion of jazz/rock



'You have to be very subversive', he says about his 'undercover' nocturnal adventures

informed by an early interest in such as Charlie Mingus, Miles Davis and Charlie Christian. As well as introducing various elements of world music to his repertoire. It is easily forgotten, bearing in mind his boyish good looks and California-lite hair style that, at 65, his peer group includes fellow virtuosos Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton. Andy Summers was a veteran performer with bands like The Animals and Soft Machine long before teaming up with Sting and Copeland. His well known single-minded dedication to perfecting the craft of his art is a concept he also brings to his photographic work. Twenty-five years of serious image making has been facilitated by a day job that includes permanent world travel, and has

produced some memorable pictures. There are unexpected omissions. Whilst New York's Times Square is a popular location for Summers, his home town of Los Angeles features rarely in his urban street studies. He puts this down to the lack of a 'tight crowded scene' in car-bound LA. But where they do hang out on street corners, one suspects that even a rock star with a consummate skill for anonymity might find it difficult to go unnoticed in South Central LA. And yet Summers, somewhat bravely, lurks alone around deserted streets and busy late night sites from Zanzibar to Mexico, London's China Town to Toronto, Madrid to Copenhagen. 'You have to be very subversive', he says about his 'undercover' nocturnal adventures, 'When you're in action you feel a sort of adrenalin rush... you're trying to catch people all the time so the picture is real - but you don't want it to look that real'. And he likes the excitement that goes with the creative challenge: '...your mind and eye starts to click and you suddenly see everything.

And it really happens. You start to get into a flow...'. It is also interesting that even such a recognisable face, taken out of context, becomes almost invisible: '...you can go there with impunity. People don't seem to see you. Even if you go right in their face, their mind is elsewhere', he told arts journalist Michele Robecchi.⁽⁵⁾

Andy is always quick to acknowledge the inspiration and critical support he has enjoyed through his friendship with legendary photographer, Ralph Gibson.⁽⁶⁾ The two collaborated on a book of images of the guitar (text by Summers, photographs by Gibson) in 2004. *Impressions of the Guitar* revealed Summers as no mean writer either, and his musings on life as the aforementioned promenade snapper - enticing gawky tourists to be photographed - whilst daydreaming of Flying-V or Super 400 guitars, is highly entertaining. It also reveals Andy's complete knowledge of the history and technicalities of the instrument he has mastered. It is this attitude that is mirrored in the familiarity with his camera of choice, the Leica M.

► *Woman and Sea, Bali August 1985*

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

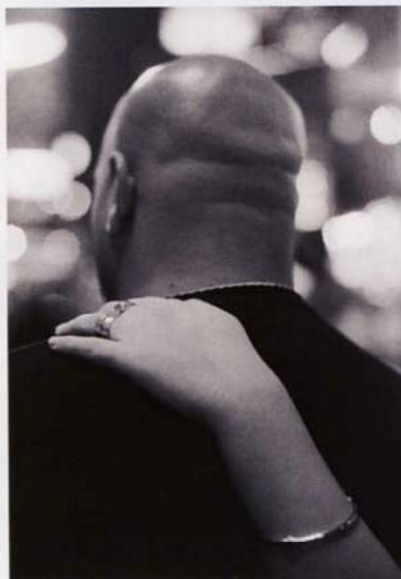
► SANTA MONICA, LOS ANGELES, 5TH MAY 2007

Andy Summers has arrived home for a few days of R&R before heading off to Canada to rev up for a series of sell-out concerts by the The Police⁽⁷⁾ - newly reformed to much rock press hysteria. Although lately he has given innumerable interviews on this very subject, Andy is still almost as bemused and surprised by the event as the whole of the music business. The impossible can happen - and it has!

I LAST VISITED HIM at his modernist home in Santa Monica following a spree in Paris, when we had trawled the art fair, FIAC, looking for Cy Twombly paintings (Summers is a serious and astute collector of contemporary art) and ditto Pere Lachaise cemetery, in search of Oscar Wilde and Frederic Chopin. Since then he has moved a few blocks down the road to a grand replica of an Arts & Crafts designed house: '...what do they call it? *Jacobethan?* - it's an exact copy of an English house after a design by Charles Voysey.⁽⁸⁾ I think there are quite a lot in and around London...', he says with a grin.

It seems a busy schedule, but the new tour is going to offer a lot of photographic opportunities...

I'm leaving tomorrow for Canada and I know I'm going to be travelling a lot so there are practicalities involved and also - how much you can carry? I have been using a Canon digital lately as opposed to the Leica - but it does bother me, because I know the joy I get from having the Leica with me and what I can do with it. Of course, the Canon is a great piece of equipment, but I don't feel that personal connection I do with the Leica. I'm actually thinking I might go out and buy a huge bag of film and take it along. Of course, one of the reasons I put it [the Leica] down was because of all the hassles with modern travel and airports. The last time I took the Leica extensively was on a trip though Asia, Vietnam and so on, the summer before last. But it was overwhelming - getting through airport security with rolls of film being examined. It is a nightmare, getting stuff X-rayed, and it is potentially harmful to the film. But it is a loaded issue - do you *really* want to take that chance with it all? I'm edging towards the Leica *and* the Canon gear! I'm pretty convinced now about shooting with digital, although I still don't think digital has *quite* got there yet - but its coming. You have to find your 'axe' as it were.



► Times Square September 2003

Summers'
unobtrusive lens
captures the zeitgeist
of metrolife

You often draw a parallel between the guitar and the camera?

Well, you've got this device in your hand and you are making something - *creating* - with it. It's very much that you have your finger on the button - or your finger on the string - and you have your brain working and you are thinking what you are doing. It's *your* body, *your* brain, *your* hand working together, so the experiences are not a million miles apart. To relate it to music - if it's a good set you go into the 'zone' and you know you are getting something special. It's the same with a photo-session.

You are taking in places like Seattle, Las Vegas, Dallas, New Orleans, Toronto, Montreal and New York. Plenty of opportunity for scouring those mean, midnight streets then?

It can be a risky business alright. You do take a chance. I try and make myself invisible and I often wear black. Of course, the Leica M is just great with its automatic function; it is small, black and just tucks under your arm out of sight. The Canon is no use for that - as I found in Morocco just a couple of weeks ago. As I said before, it's quite easy to disguise yourself, wear a hat or something - and again, you're out of context. I like to figure out where I am and where people go who are likely to be interesting. I'm looking forward to going down to Gastown [Vancouver] next week to take some pictures and more night scenes, for example.

It's been a busy 12 months. Taschen have brought out this magnificent book of your 'snaps' from those early days of touring.⁽⁹⁾ I recollect you were working on this in 2005 when the Beaux Arts show was on...

...well, you remember the situation. Originally, it was planned with Genesis Publishing in London. I was working with Brian's designers and then - suddenly and very sadly - Brian Royslance died. It so happens that Benedict Taschen lives around the corner here in LA, and as I had done so much work on the book (it was nearly finished) I went around to show him the 'maquette'. We did the deal in almost 20 minutes. They have certainly raised the whole project upscale...

[Summers had also worked on his biography up to 2006, when it was simultaneously published across Europe and America. A 'memoir', it was searingly honest about the personal pressures and disappointments that destroyed The Police. Summers was also revealed as a talented writer who, untypical for the rock business, was generous and thoughtful towards fellow musicians less fortunate than himself.]

...and immediately before that, the biography.⁽¹⁰⁾ How long did that take to write out?

This is with Piatkus in the UK and other publishers around the world. I had it with me for a couple of years, but I did a six month period of concentrated effort to finish it off. Of course, I wrote it just up until the grand USA show at Shea stadium in 1983, so there is 20 more years of personal material left unrecorded. I simply wanted to construct a book that read well and told a story...

BODY SUMMERS



► Parade Bali 1981

Those longing for a taste of rock superstardom might not realise it can be a very invasive and oppressive lifestyle - which your biography deals with in detail of course...

I'm a very introspective person really and like my mental space and privacy. In a few days I am going back into this incredible adventure with the guys - and a huge entourage of people, we are going to be doing 92 shows, playing to 80,000 people at a time after all! I am certainly thinking about how I am going to deal with it and keep heart, body and soul together. But I have got photography, so I do have something personal to retreat into for a

'To get respect in any aspect of the arts you have to earn it'

while. I'm sitting here looking at my camera bags this morning, making decisions on what I'm taking along.

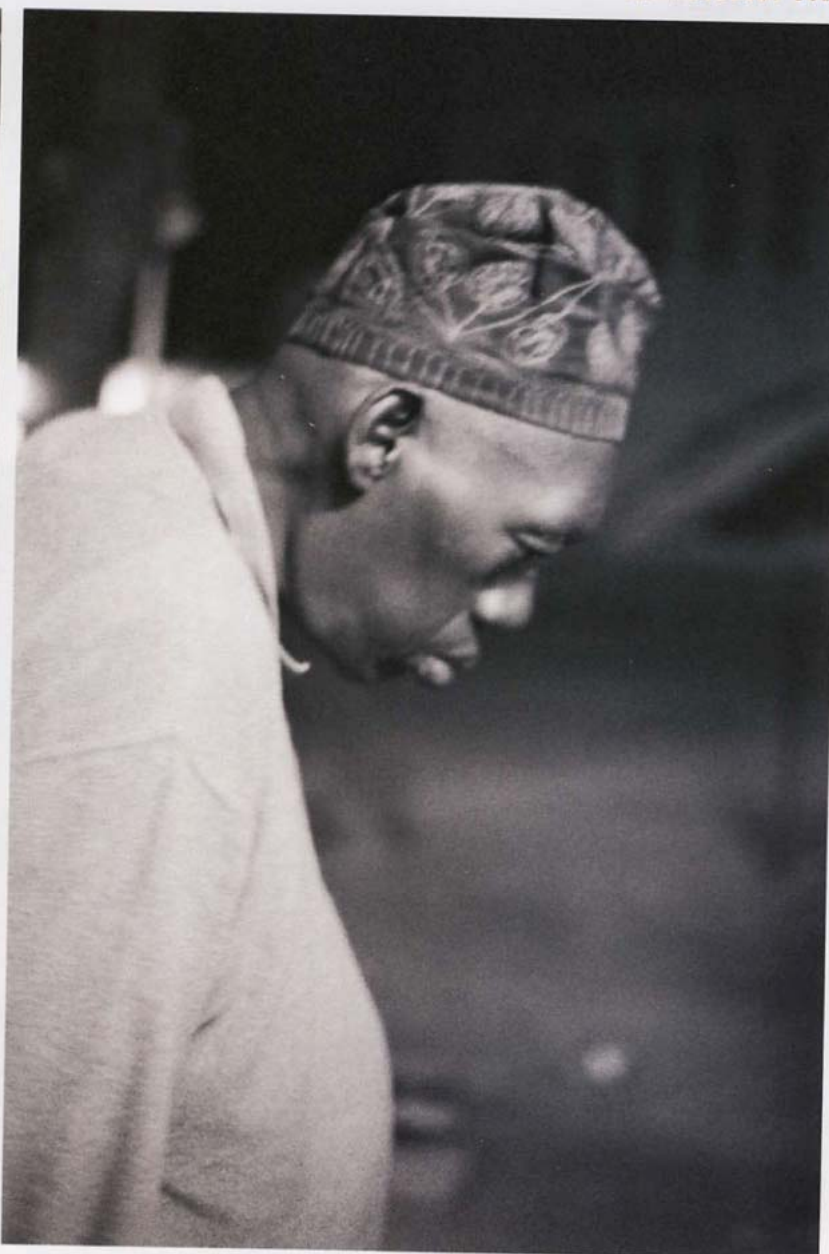
There is no doubt, whatsoever, that you have transcended any notion of the 'rock star who takes a few photos on the side'...

I've been taking pictures seriously since the 1980s, so I do have a body of work established. England is the worse place for getting mauled but my last solo show there - at the Beaux Arts - got very decent reviews. I was pleased about that, especially as in the UK it can be very tough. I put a lot of heartfelt effort into the images and to the level of quality - just as I do in my music - it's not a hobby on the side. I'm proud to put my name to it. To get respect in any aspect of the arts you have to earn it...

Well, it hasn't taken long then...?
Not really. Just a lifetime...!

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THE TWILIGHT ZONE



► *Stonetown Man, Zanzibar August 2004*

NOTES

[1] The Police hit the mainstream in the early 1980s, playing a style of reggae/punk rock music. Whilst the hit lyrics were the result of Sting's particular genius, the signature sound of the trio was due to the consummate skill of guitar veteran Summers. The band's *Synchronicity* album from 1983 was number one in the UK and USA, and went Platinum eight times in the USA. The band broke up in the mid-1980s. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* ranked The Police at 70 on their list of the *100 Greatest Artists of All Time*

[2] *Turning Man, Times Square*. September 2004
Digital photograph onto canvas.

[3] *Time Out* review of *City Like This*, 27.04.05

[4] *Thrab* published by Sidgwick & Jackson 1983

[5] *Contemporary* magazine. May 2005

[6] Ralph Gibson (born Los Angeles, 1939) took up photography while serving in the U.S. Navy (1956-60), studied at the San Francisco Art Institute (1960-62), and later worked as an assistant to Dorothea Lange and Robert Frank.

Along with many other accolades, he was made an *Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government (1986). Gibson currently divides his time between the USA and France.

[7] The Police announced dates for their first tour in 23 years (beginning in Vancouver, Canada, on May 28) at a press conference and mini-rehearsal at Whisky A Go Go in Los Angeles - just a day after performing their classic hit, *Roxanne*, at the 2007 Grammy Awards.

[8] Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941) English architect and furniture designer, influenced by the work of William Morris, the Arts & Crafts Movement and the Art

Nouveau Movement, he was concerned with form and function rather than ornamental complexities.

[9] *I'll Be Watching You: Inside The Police, 1980-83*
A Taschen Book of Photography. Somewhere between photojournalism and an illustrated diary, it follows The Police around the globe between 1980 and 1983. The collector's edition is limited to 1500 copies, each numbered and signed by the artist; contains over 600 photographs personally selected from Summers' archive of over 25,000 negatives. Most photos are previously unpublished, and many of them have never even been printed prior to this project.

[10] *One Train Later* by Andy Summers. Piatkus Books.
A well written, highly detailed and witty account of a journey towards fame and the many stops en route, each one as enlightening as the next.