

Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice

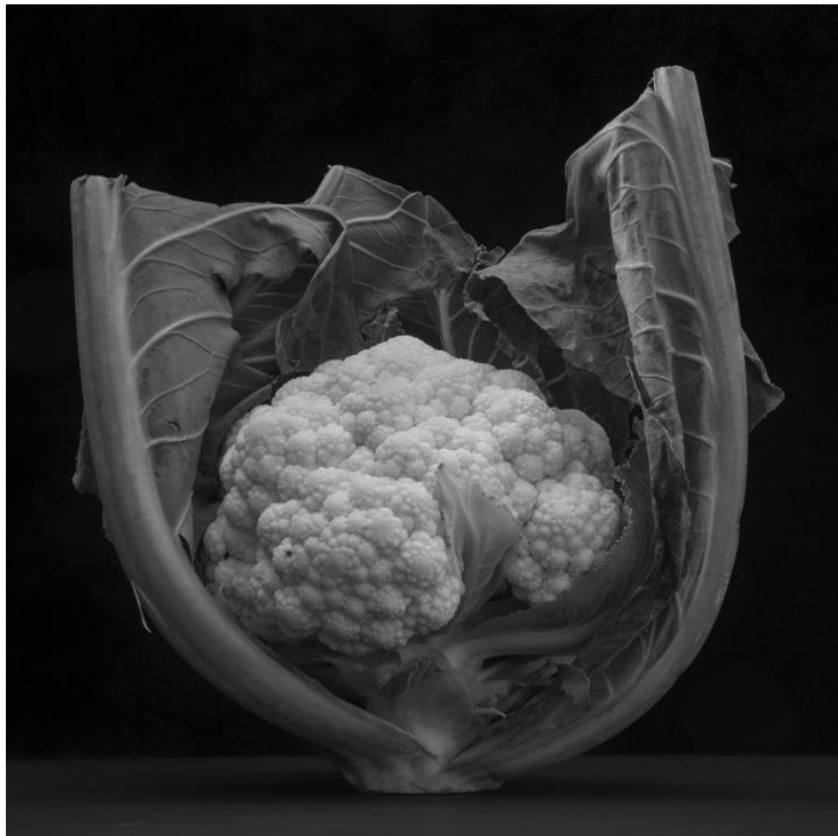
Assignment Five (Personal Project)

Mike Nott (Student Number 510717)

PHOTOGRAPHY 1: DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE Assignment Five (Personal Project)

Mike Nott (Student Number 510717)

20th September 2015



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1) INTRODUCTION:

This supports the submission of the fifth and final assignment for Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice. The requirements for this assignment are repeated below from the course material:

“This final assignment asks that you apply all you’ve learned in the course to build a collection of 10-12 final images on a theme of your choice.

When you’ve completed the collection, return to the brief that you set yourself at the start and consider how well your completed project matches up to your original intentions. Write a reflective account (around 500 words) to accompany your images. Here are a few ideas:

- *How did you choose your theme? Was it a good choice?*
- *What went well? What went badly?*
- *Did you stick to your original brief or did you find yourself departing from it? Why?*
- *What technical problems did you experience? How did you solve them?*
- *Are you pleased with your final collection? What could you have done differently?*

Send your work to your tutor together with extracts from your learning log or your blog URL. Your learning log work should reflect your experience of the personal project as a whole – good and bad. Don’t be afraid to include evidence of your mistakes – it’s all part of the learning process. You must include some prints in your assignment submission.”

During the submission of the previous ‘The Art of Photography’ module for Assignment Two (Elements of Design), I took a series of black-and-white images using food, especially fruit and vegetables, as my subject matter. This really tweaked my imagination at that time and I wanted to build on what I learnt then, coupled with my continued development for the exercises and assignments in this DPP module. The two ‘Colour into Tones’ exercises in particular furthered increased my interest in the flexibility and power available to the digital photographer, through post-processing, of bringing out the most from RAW files to create black-and-white images.

I supplemented this initial project idea with further reading and research of photography and photographers who have worked in this area. In particular, I came across an American photographer of the mid-20th century called Edward Weston, who had spent time photographing similar subjects in the 1920-30’s; his best-known of this series are perhaps are the ‘Pepper’ images. At first, these images appear to be quite simplistic, but the smooth lines, shadow and highlights and textures combine to make a pleasing effect.

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The following quote resonated when I came across it during my research:

“By isolating and somewhat enlarging the size of a [shell] and green pepper, or by slicing [shells] or vegetables in half, Weston allowed the forms of nature to reveal themselves as containing both significant pattern and splendid regularity.” Pitts¹, Terence (2013) Edward Weston, Taschen

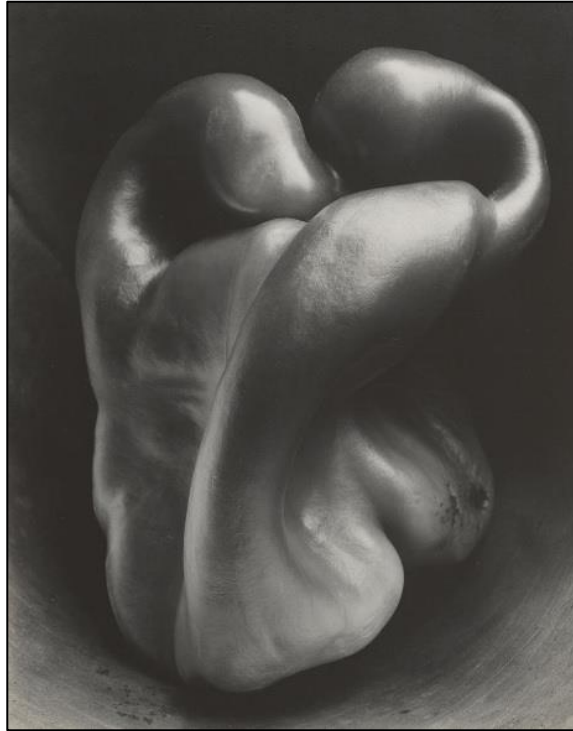


FIGURE 1 – PEPPER NO 30, EDWARD WESTON, 1930



FIGURE 2 – ONION HALVED, EDWARD WESTON, 1930

¹ Terence Pitts, former Director of The Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, Arizona.

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FIGURE 3 – CHARD, EDWARD WESTON, 1928



FIGURE 4 – CABBAGE LEAF, EDWARD WESTON, 1931

It was unfortunate that Pete, my tutor for my first three DPP assignments, resigned from the OCA just as I was submitting my Assignment Four work. I had previously discussed the subject of fruit or vegetables in the 'style of Edward Weston' with Pete for the subject matter for my personal project for this Assignment Five submission and he agreed that there was some merit in proceeding with the idea.

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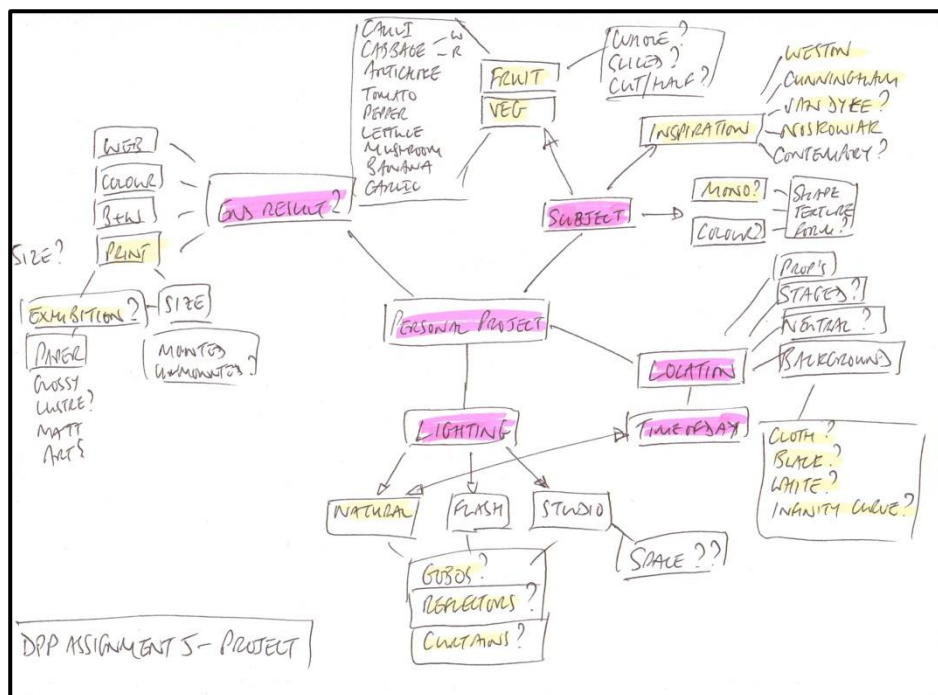


FIGURE 5 – ASSIGNMENT FIVE PLANNING MIND MAP

So, after the initial project conceptualisation (see Figure 5 for a mind map supporting this project), I developed the key themes for this project inasmuch that:

- the images had to be in black and white and not colour;
- the images needed to show detail, shape, form and texture, and this medium I considered the best to convey these particular aspects;
- I would attempt only to use natural/available light (I lacked the space to use studio lights and whilst off-camera flash remained viable, I wanted to use the light from the north-facing doors/windows). I would have to use reflectors (white foam-board), gobo's (black foam-board) and anything else that would help me control the light (including closing the curtains by varying degrees to restrict the amount of light).
- I would use a plain background of either black or white rather than fabric or other 'staged' still-life arrangements using bowls or other props.

At the outset, I also decided that the images would be intended for printing and wall display/exhibition rather than web-gallery, photo-book or similar; the minimum print size would be at least A3. As recognised in Wells, Liz (2009) *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (4th Edition), Routledge, she comments:

"Unlike other photographic movements of the time, formalism sought gallery exhibition. Indeed, work by these photographers [Weston et al] is now highly prized (and highly priced) and is included in all major photography archives as examples of one of the most significant photography movements of the 20th century."

I suspect my printed work won't be demanding quite the same commercial 'rate' as more esteemed photographers, but one needs to consider the relevance of printed work in the 'Internet' era and access of images through computers, smart phones, etc.

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Further research of Weston's contemporary American photographers, all original members of the well-known west-coast f/64 Group and what has become known as the 'American Formalism' style, in particular Imogen Cunningham, Willard Van Dyke and Sonja Noskowiak showed that most had explored the world of fruit, vegetables and flowers with the implied intention of showing shape, form and texture of natural subjects through relatively straight-forward compositions and arrangements; all had a common aspect that careful and sympathetic lighting brought out the best in the subject matter to convey the key image requirements. Whether these photographers thought in the same way, or expressed their approaches in this manner, is not known.

A selection of images are shown below (Figures 6 to 11), and whilst these include both vegetables and plants, it can be seen that there is a commonality in shape, form, and in some cases, shadow areas helping to create a more three-dimensional feeling.



FIGURE 6 – THREE VEGETABLES, IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM, 1946



FIGURE 7 – RUBBER PLANT, IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM, 1929

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FIGURE 8 – HALVED ARTICHOKE, SONJA NOSKOWIAK, 1930



FIGURE 9 – BASE OF CELERY STALK, SONJA NOSKOWIAK, 1933

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FIGURE 10 – HEAD OF CABBAGE, SONJA NOSKOWIAK, 1930



FIGURE 11 – CANNA LEAF, WILLARD VAN DYKE, 1933

I was keen to proceed with my initial project concept of just using raw 'food' rather than plants or flowers, which some of the researched photographers were perhaps best known for (Cunningham in particular), but whatever the subject matter, this project was going to be 'about the light' and the final presentation in the black and white print format.

My new tutor suggested that I should experiment with cutting up the vegetables to expand the scope of the subject somewhat, so I tried to factor in this aspect through the process of image taking to see what the outcome was. I also found some interesting images with this approach in subsequent researching – figure 12 shows a somewhat abstract view of a pepper cut across the corner.

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FIGURE 12 – PEPPER (INTERIOR) CHARLES HARBUTT, 1986

Again, at the recommendation of my tutor, I also looked at the work of Bill Brandt whose work I was largely unfamiliar with. Using the Internet (e.g. <http://billbrandtarchive.photoshelter.com/>) I was able to access many different images taken by Brandt during his lengthy career here in the UK. None of them really supported my primary requirements of this project, however I was more than intrigued by his portrait and nude work; there are some very interesting concepts and compositions, that should I participate in another model/studio session with the camera club, would provide some ideas to work with.

Ultimately, it was the work of Weston that was to form the basis and inspiration of my image taking for this personal project.

Intended Output/Presentation:

Given that I was aspiring to achieve something similar to the work of the f/64 Group photographers, my intended final result was always going to be in print, preferably with the intention for exhibition or display on a wall of at least A3 in size; careful image selection was key to ensure a 'consistency' or 'flow' throughout the selected images.

My selection of black and white images in printed form with the intended purpose of a wall-mounted exhibition comes with a number of considerations.

- Type of paper (glossy, lustre, matte, art);
- Type of mount (colour, size, core colour);
- Size of print relative to the mount and frame.

I had taken a number of images in support of this assignment; in fact I had taken many, but that wasn't necessarily down to poor pre-conceptualisation or planning, but more about altering the lighting, shadows and positioning of the subject matter throughout my photographic 'sessions'. The subjects had been placed on either a black or white background and during the subsequent image selection using prints it became apparent that mixing images of black or white backgrounds within the down-selection of images did cause a sense of imbalance within the collection as a whole. Through a number of iterations of image selection, I decided to proceed with a black background only approach for my final image processing, final image selection and printing.

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Capturing the images in RAW format at the time of taking was fundamental in being able to perform the black and white conversion of the image in post-processing and applying the necessary mappings of individual colours into tones. Using Adobe LightRoom for all my monochrome conversions, I found the ability to alter individual colour channels very empowering and I could often alter the look and feel of image considerably, sometimes for the worse, but always with the intention of achieving my desired, pre-visualised outcome.

For the purposes of assessment and handling, I elected to place the images onto a plain white background page and black text in an appropriate orientation. However, when displaying the images in a wall-mounted exhibition, then a mountboard would be cut to a suitable size for consistency in size and presentation. Figure 13 shows some options to be considered when cutting the mountboard (the displayed image area is shown in white).

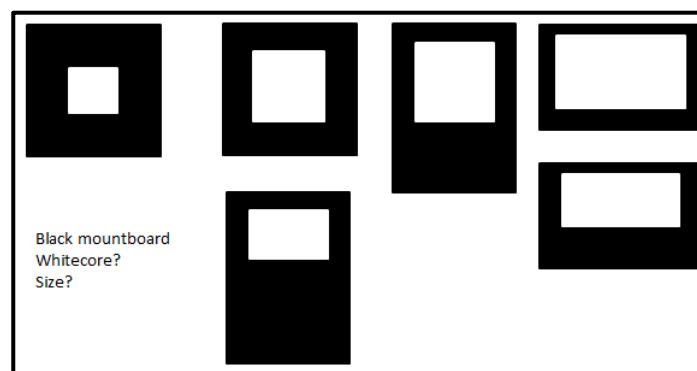


FIGURE 13 – OPTIONS FOR MOUNTS/PRINTS

A number of images were prepared for printing and possible inclusion in the final image selection for assessment. These are shown in the contact-sheet in Figure 14 below.

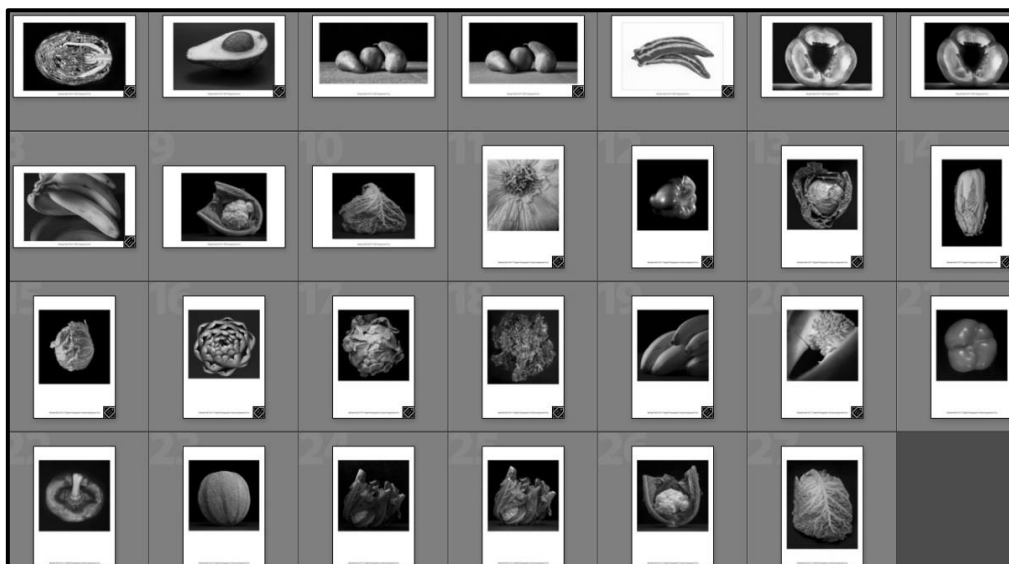


FIGURE 14 – DOWN-SELECT CONTACT SHEET²

² <https://nott249.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/dpp-ass-5-downselection.jpg>

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2) Images:

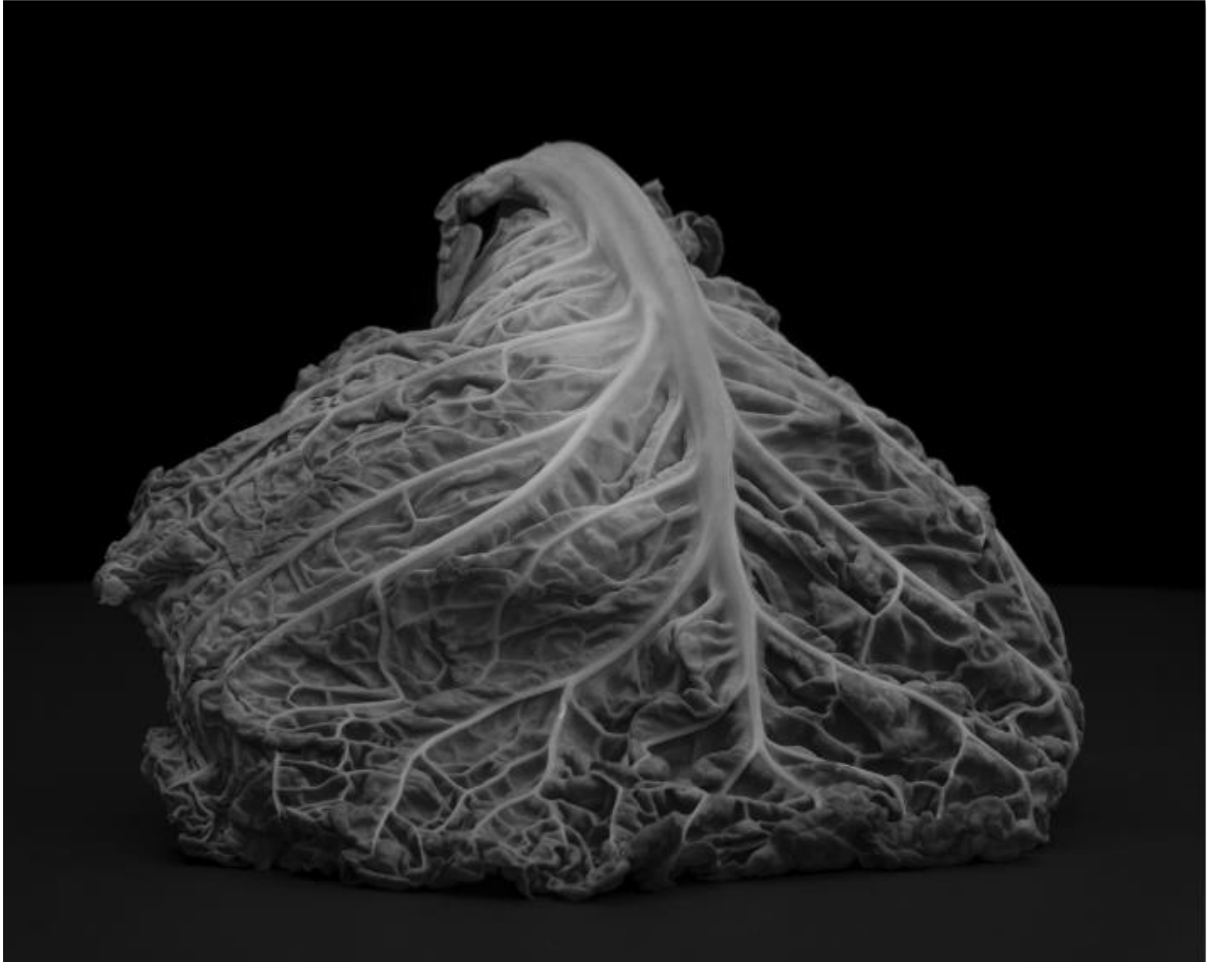


PLATE 1 – LETTUCE 1

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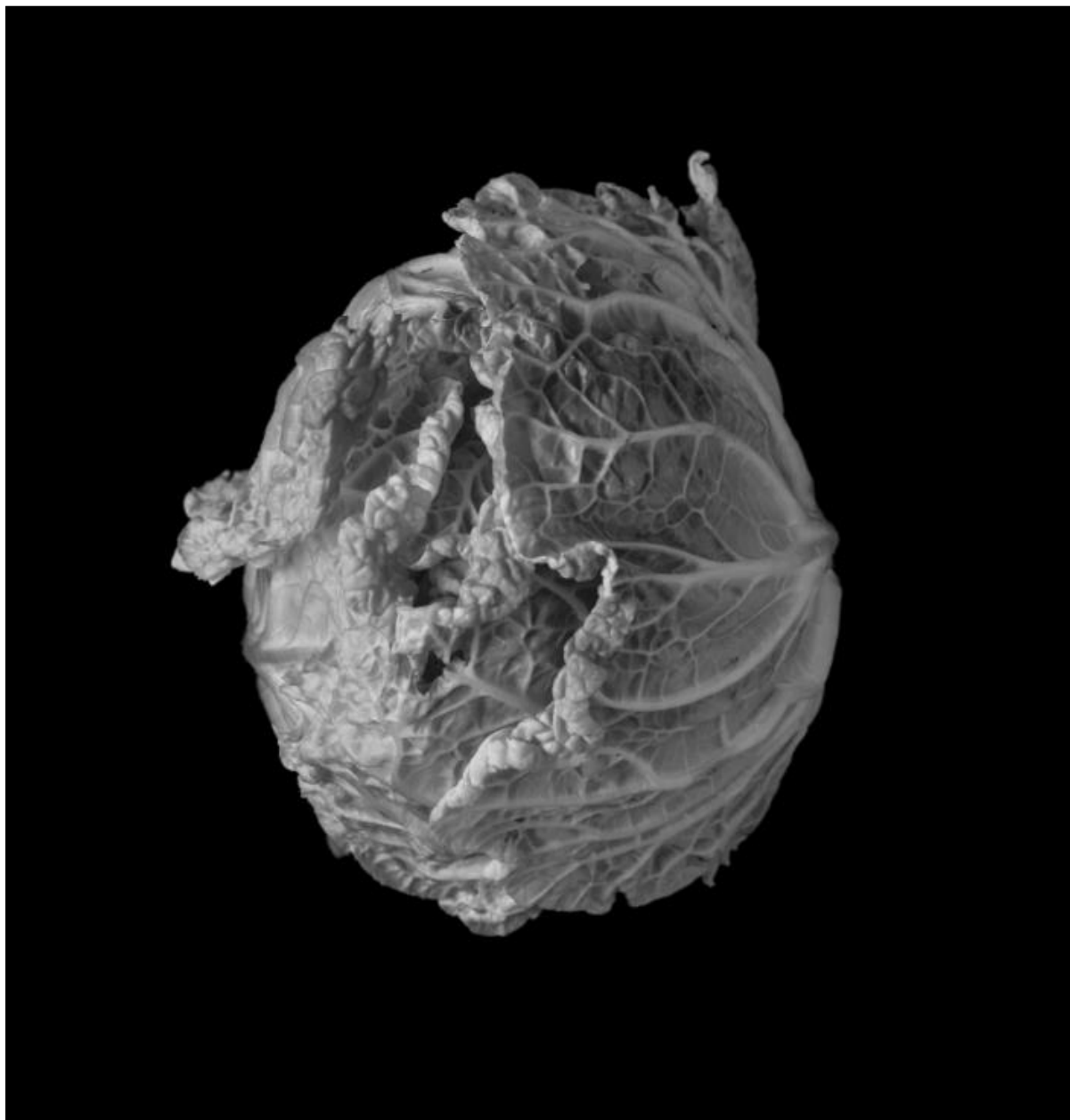


PLATE 2 – CABBAGE 1

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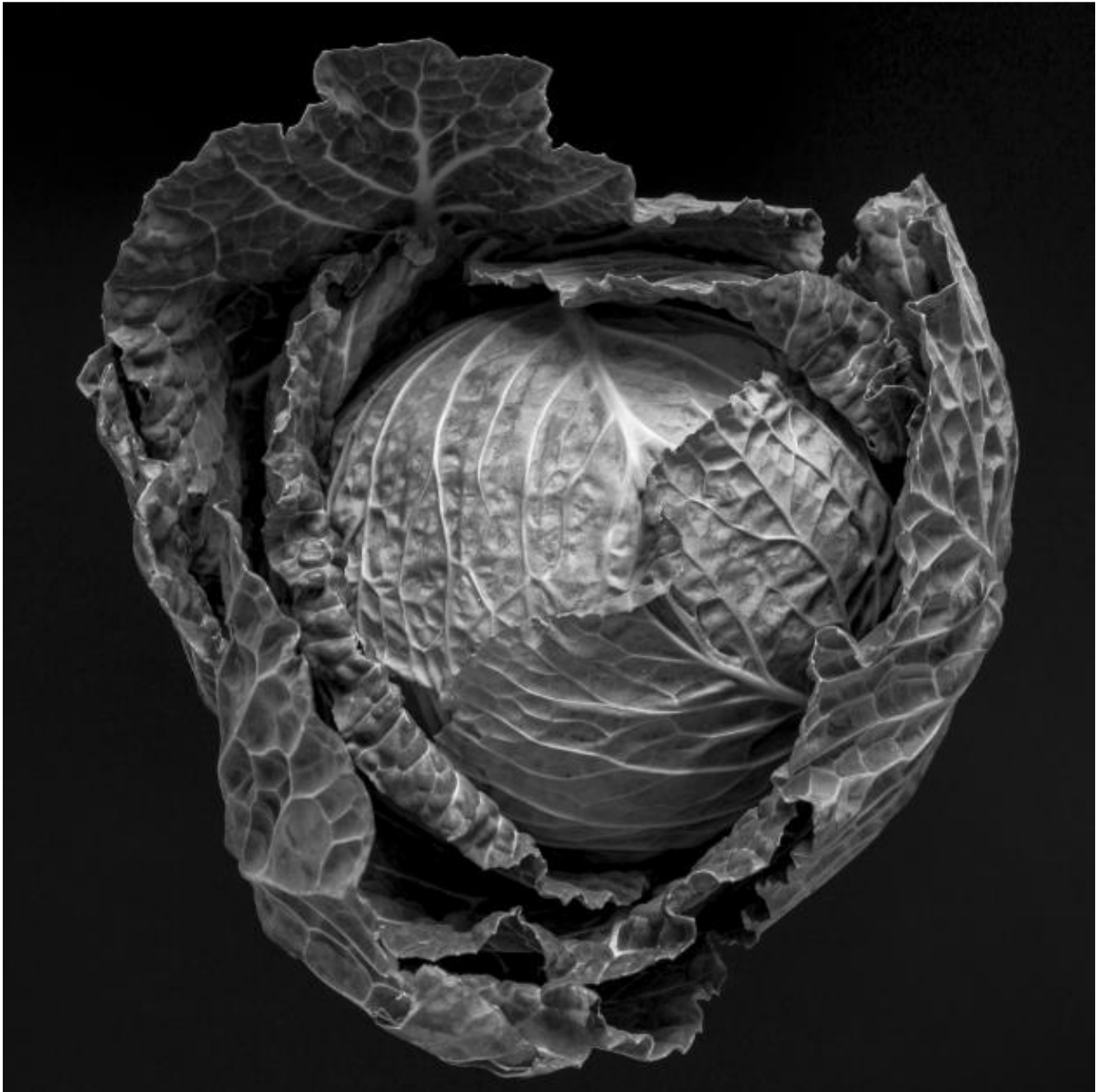


PLATE 3 – CABBAGE 2

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PLATE 4 – PEPPER 1

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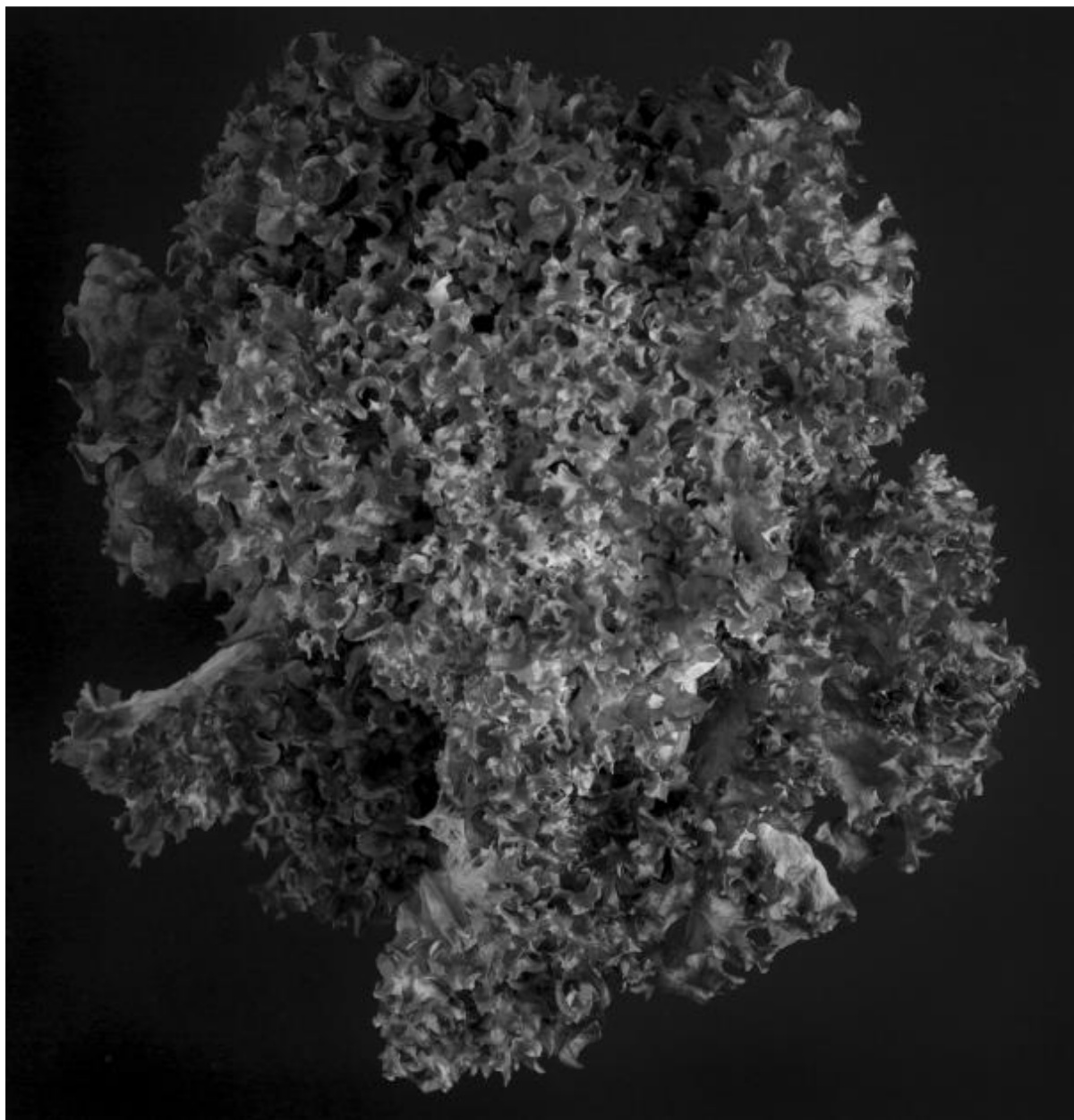


PLATE 5 – COS LETTUCE

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PLATE 6 – SLICED AVOCADO

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PLATE 7 – CAULIFLOWER

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PLATE 8 – ARTICHOKE

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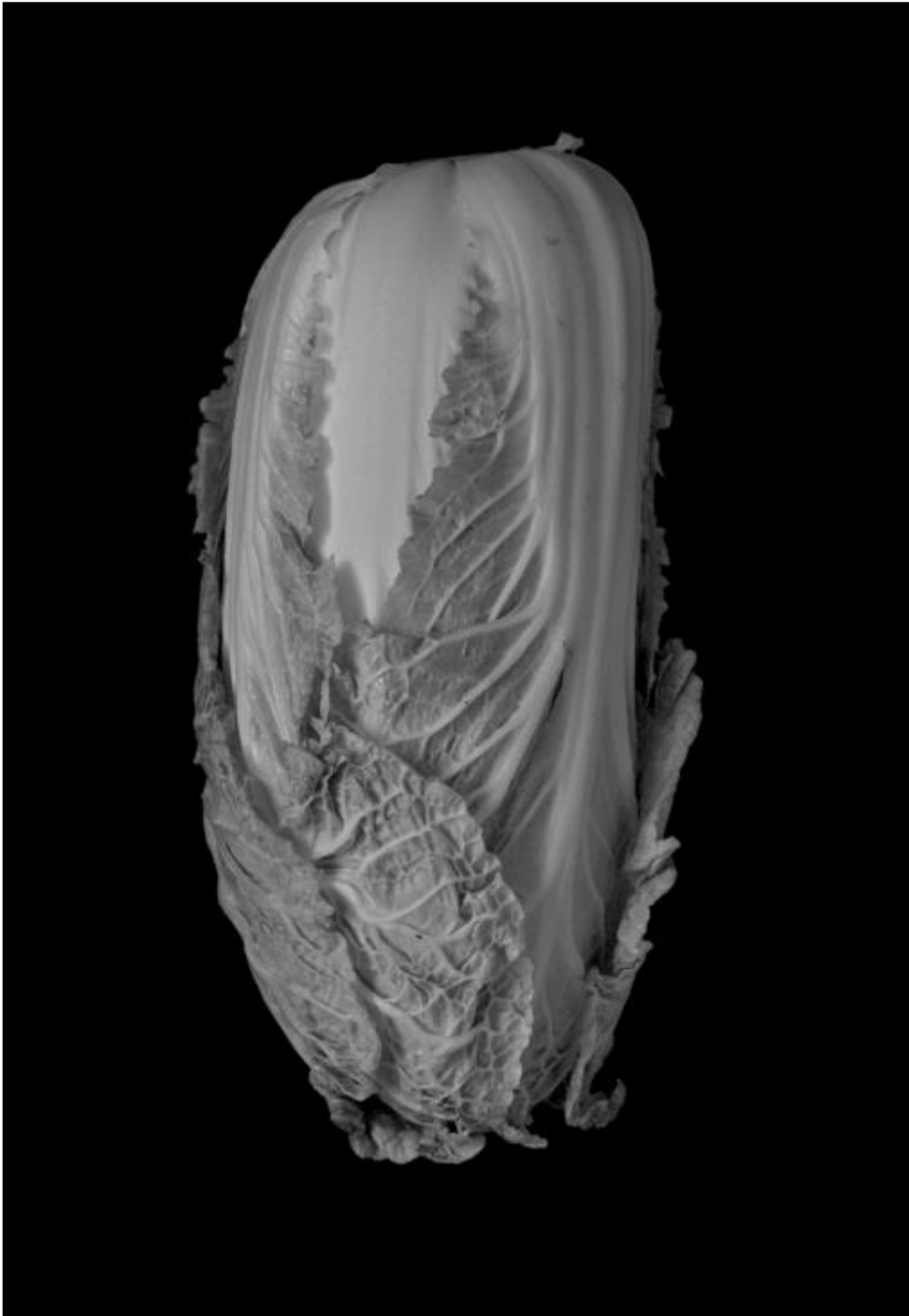


PLATE 9 – LETTUCE 2

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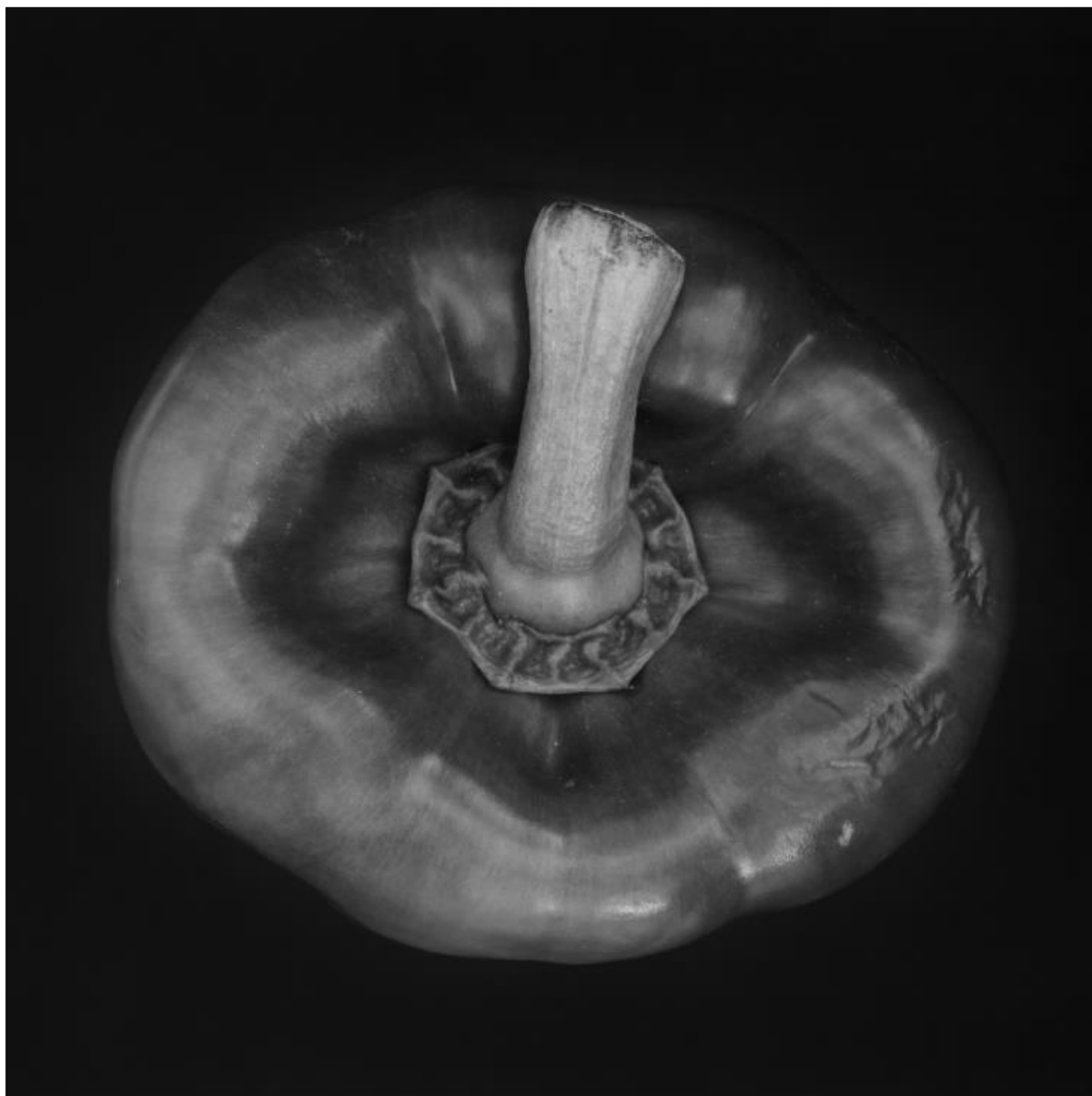


PLATE 10 – PEPPER 2

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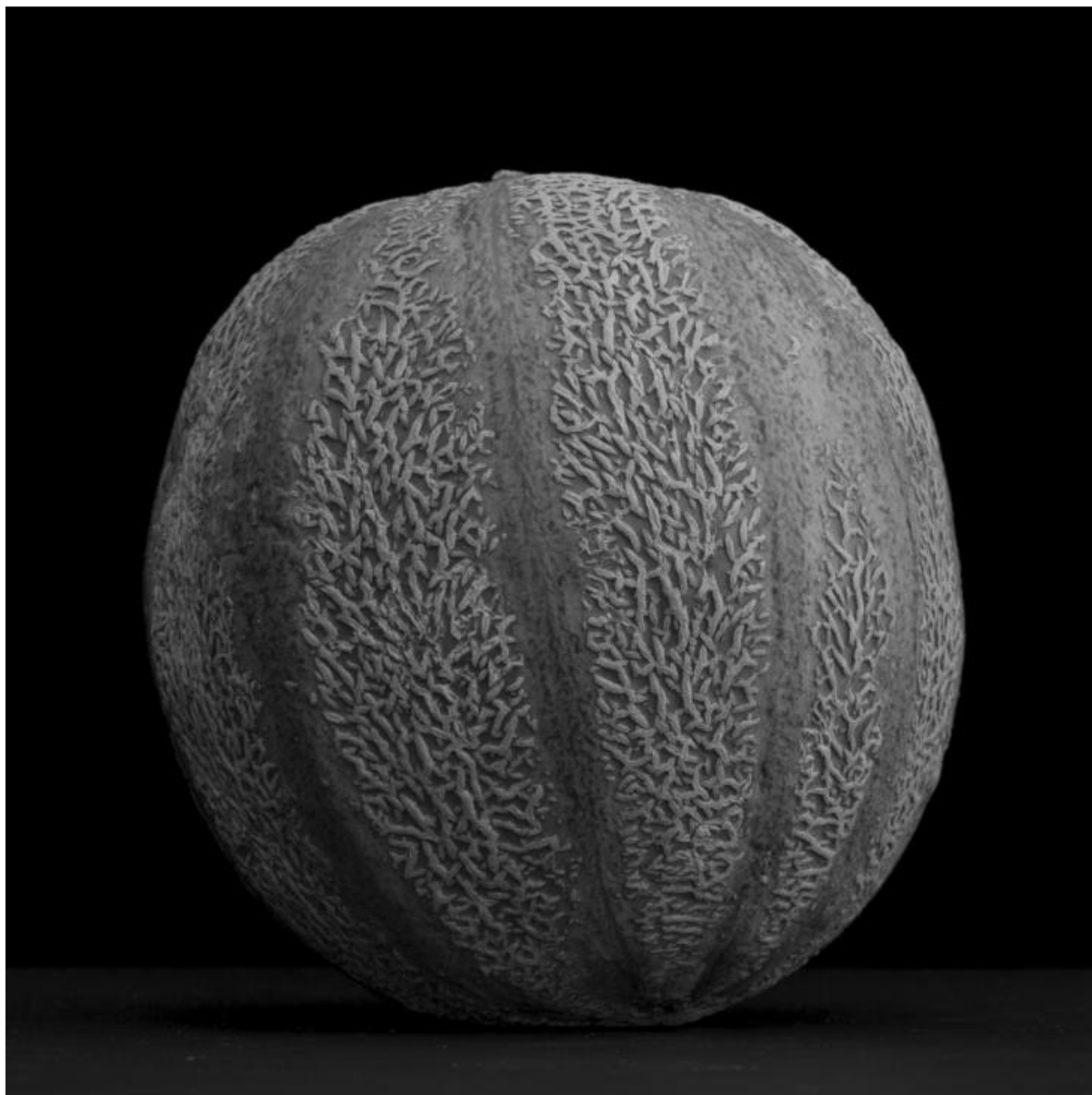


PLATE 11 – MELON

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3) Self-Assessment and Reflection:

This is my final assignment submission for Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice. I continue to present my assignments in this rather structured format, as no one has told me that it doesn't work or that it could/should be done differently.

In terms of the assessment criteria laid out within the coursework, there are four main areas to be considered:

a) **Demonstration of Technical and Visual Skills materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills**

The main DPP exercise subjects have been listed below and I have marked those areas in **blue** that I have applied in the development, execution and presentation of this personal project:

Workflow, **understanding histograms**, **image editing**, sensor linear capture, **highlight clipping**, noise, dynamic range, colour cast and white balance, **RAW files**, managing tone, managing colour, interpretive processing, **black and white**, **strength of interpretation**, **colours into tone**, **image correction**, improvement or interpretation?, **enhancement (dodging and burning)**, addition and alteration, **finishing** and **sharpening for print**.

I am a lot more confident and competent in using my camera and controlling lighting and pre-visualisation than I was when I started this DPP module; I also now embrace the opportunity to create, print out and mount my images. I still struggle with the concept of compositing in post-processing, or creating a new image composition from many different elements from other images, not only from an ethical perspective, but also from a lack of artistic or creative imagination on my part; I just can't visualise an artistic effect end-result that easily. I am hoping that that will develop over time; however, it may simply be something that I have no interest in. Time will tell I'm sure.

Working on this project over a number of months and having had at least four major 'still-life' sessions, typically lasting a day or more, has resulted in me taking many hundreds of images of different vegetable 'subjects', including cabbages, various types of lettuce, mushrooms, red, green and yellow peppers, artichokes, garlic, cauliflower, tomato (although technically a fruit if a pedant is reading this) etc. with varying compositions, changes in lighting, cutting and slicing etc. I even experimented with some fruit, bananas, apples, pears and melons. There has also been a lot of wasted food through degradation/aging and my plain heavy-handed handling. Some of the vegetables just didn't work as subjects, or certainly with the compositions that I had in mind, for example, tomatoes, mushrooms and red cabbage simply 'didn't do it for me'; to be honest, I even struggled to do much with the red and green peppers. I have no idea where Edward Weston got his peppers from, but I simply could find any with the sensuous shapes and forms that he managed to photograph in the numerous supermarkets and market stalls that I visited for my subject matter. One wonders whether this is this a by-product of the homogenised and clinical shopping experience we all now have to endure?

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Figures 15 – 18 show various set-ups when taking my images, including the use of artificial lighting and diffusers to help create even lighting on my 'subjects'.



FIGURE 15 – SETUP 1

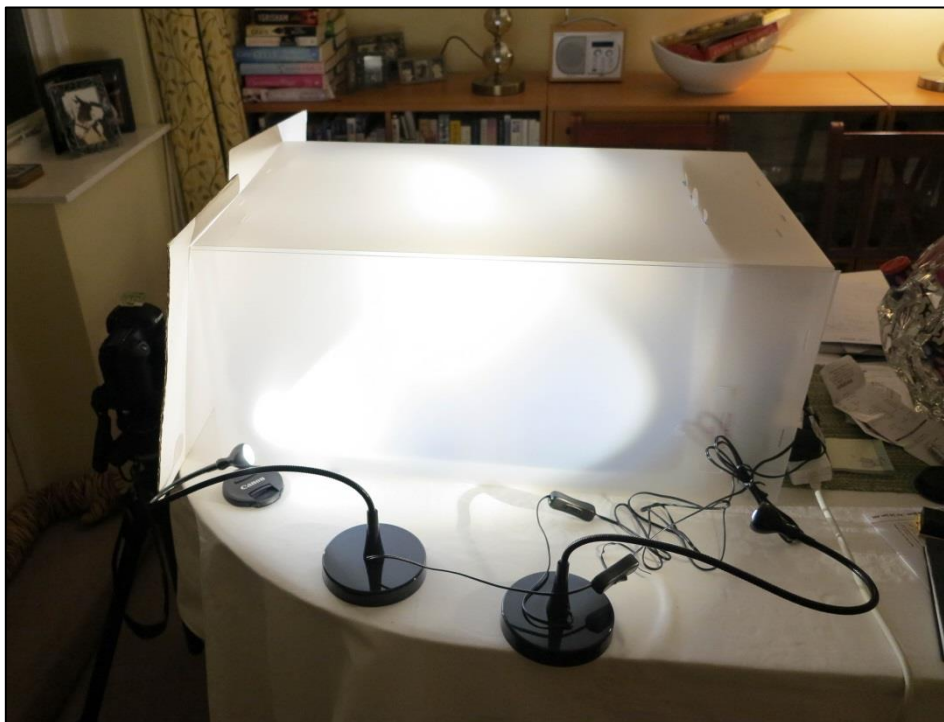


FIGURE 16 – SETUP 2

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FIGURE 17 – SETUP 3

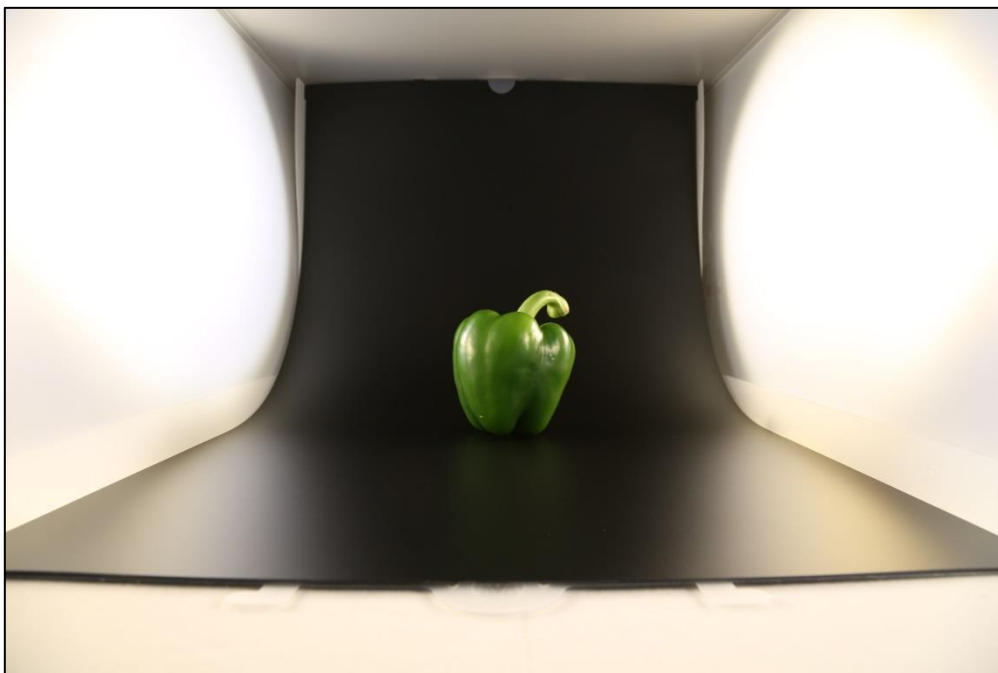


FIGURE 18 – SETUP 4

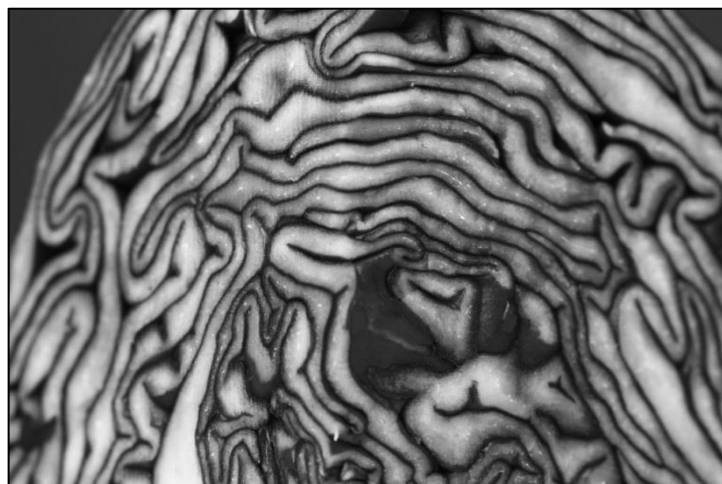
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The use of the available external window light did cause some issues, particularly when using the black foam-board or paper background; there was too much ambient light and the texture and apparent 'grey-ness' rather than the desired 'black-ness' of the background material was showing more often than not. I started to really narrow down the light on the subject through using cardboard 'gobo's' or by drawing the window curtains to focus the light onto the subject – with varying degrees of success. Coupled with small apertures, it also resulted in some long exposures (up to 30 seconds). Despite my original intentions, I also experimented using some Ikea LED lights (as seen in Figure 16 and resulted in images as shown in Plate 4 (Pepper)).

To be honest I haven't pushed the artistic boundaries on this project, but I am pleased with the overall result. Cutting the vegetables, photographing them in profile etc. resulted in a generally poor outcome on those subjects I really did think would be successful – such as the red cabbage shown below in Figures 19 and 20.



FIGURES 19 AND 20– SLICED RED CABBAGE

I also took a number of images where the 'subject' was placed on a white background for a 'high-key' effect (figure 21); whilst some were successful, when considered alongside those images with a black background, they just didn't 'sit' very well within the overall set that I

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envisaged for 'exhibition' display. I laid out the prints on the floor side-by-side, moved them around, added and took away and ultimately the white backgrounds were finally de-selected.



FIGURE 21– SLICED PEPPER ON WHITE BACKGROUND (REJECTED)

- b) **Quality of Outcome content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas**

Running alongside this learning activity, I continue to take photographs for my personal pleasure and development. Historically, landscape photography has been my first love, but recent forays into modelling/studio work and wildlife photography have increased my fascination of this subject in a number of different areas; there are so many things to try and so little time to do so.



FIGURE 22– THE SELECTION PROCESS

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I am pleased with the final selection for this personal project; the prints are all of a similar 'style', act as a coherent set, and have worked well in the printed format. I perhaps should have standardised on a crop/print size in post-processing, as the original intention was for display/exhibition, so one would have to imagine them all being hung on a wall and what the overall effect would be. One way of compensating for this would be to standardise the mount and frame size, but the mixing of square, portrait and landscape orientations would still be present. I am still unsure how I feel about that. Setting out the printed images on the floor and looking down on them showed that mixing orientations, rectangular or square crops didn't work that well – and I suspect trying to display these images in the same type of framing (i.e. finish, size, etc.)....so (yet another) lesson learned. It seems obvious, but until you actually try it, perhaps it isn't?

I was also in two minds on the print size, having read various entries on the OCA website about print sizes for assessment. My original intention was to at least print out on A3 sized paper and as can be seen in this assignment submission, the various size ratios used means that some of the images are a lot smaller than A3, especially those in a square crop format. I'm OK with that, as this was always my intention and I will be sending through the set of A3 images to my tutor for assessment.

The following figures (23 – 25) are representations of some framing/mounting options that could be chosen – the white line around the image represents the exposed (Arqadia³) mountboard 'whitcore' that I would select for final display.

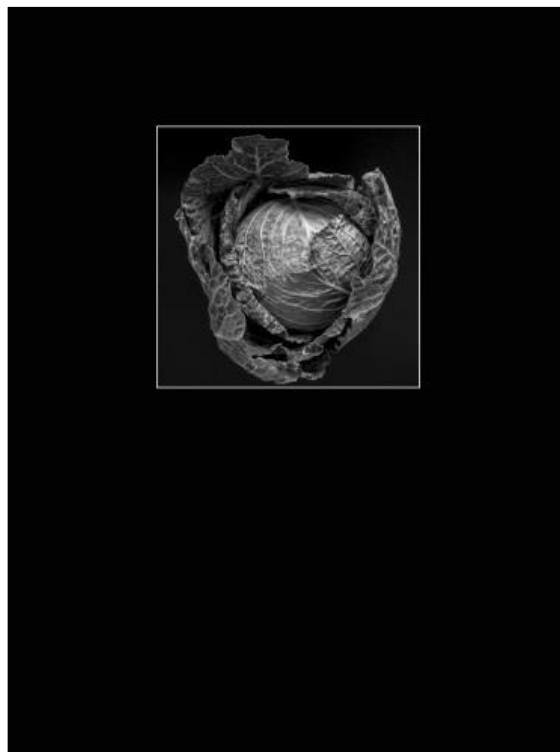


FIGURE 23 – PRESENTATION EXAMPLE 1

³ <http://www.arqadia.co.uk>

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FIGURE 24 – PRESENTATION EXAMPLE 2

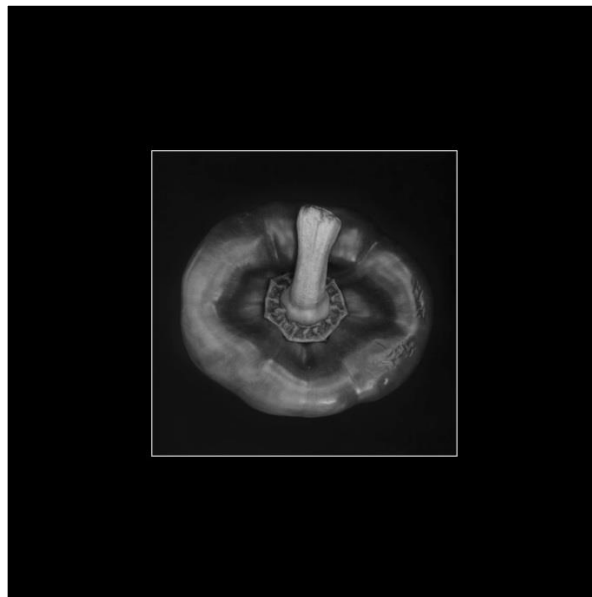


FIGURE 25 – PRESENTATION EXAMPLE 3

As mentioned previously, I am applying the new technical knowledge and skills in all of my work now. I continue to be self-critical, perhaps overly so, and I also recognise that I continue to struggle with the 'art' side of photography. Research into the work of other photographers is slowly improving my awareness and increasing my sense of 'the art of the possible', but I am also realistic in knowing where my limits currently are. One wonders whether as you get older whether your thoughts become more limited or blinkered. What would a child with access to all the great things that digital photography can now offer – with the equipment, post-processing applications etc. what would they be able to achieve when they don't have any such limitations within their own minds? Great things I suspect.

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I spend quite a lot of time on my blog entries for the supporting exercises and my musings on related subjects. I have continued to use a free-version of Wordpress in support of this DPP module, which as time passes does increasingly frustrate me in the manner in which the blog content is displayed. Again, this could be down to my lack of knowledge of the Wordpress application and this will be an area that I will need to spend some time on as I progress, either with this OCA study programme or through the future use of my own personal photo website.

c) **Demonstration of Creativity imagination, experimentation, invention, development of personal voice**

In my opinion, I still have yet to develop a personal style of my own. These initial learning modules are structured in such a way that I'm having difficulty in seeing how this could be achieved at the moment, but perhaps that's my blinkered way of thinking again. I have said previously that I have struggled with the artistic side of photography and lack any real creativity – and continue to hope that this will develop over time – and time, or more a case of lack of time, continues to be an issue for me in terms of balancing a busy job, family and domestic commitments with the time to study in support of this OCA learning experience.

Whilst I have clearly taken inspiration from the likes of Edward Weston, I found this apposite sentiment during my research reading:

"Ideas do not exist - nothing is absolutely new" Fox and Caruana (2012) Behind the Image: Research in Photography, AVA

I had expressed some concern to my current tutor that I was not using Photoshop manipulation or compositing as much I felt I should be doing for this assignment; I have become more proficient in both Lightroom and Photoshop, but yet I find using Lightroom much more intuitive in terms of major post-processing workflow activities. I also selectively use Nik Silver Efex Pro 2 for more aggressive black and white manipulations (start with the pre-set options and modify as required).

d) **Context reflection, research, critical thinking (learning log)**

A lot of time and effort has been expended on this assignment project. I have been back to my book shelves and have been re-reading course study books, researching relevant images and photographers on the Internet (I have found 'The Center for Creative Photography' website to be extremely useful for the American photographers), planning and practical experimentation have all contributed to the final outcome.

This final assignment is the conclusion of the Digital Photographic Practice module; what have I learnt? I have further increased my knowledge of noteworthy photographers, both historic and contemporary, and this is helping me to better understand the artistic side of photography. I am relishing the opportunity to print out images, not only to contribute towards the OCA projects and assignments, but also for local and regional competitions for my camera club. Entering digital projected image competitions has become more of an issue for me as the brightness of the projected images seems to differ and I have absolutely no control over it (although I have started creating alternate images with different brightness levels now provided I know which projector is going to be used).

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My have expressed my own self-analysis and critical thoughts throughout this assignment write-up, but I continue to have the belief that I lack the artistic flair that I believe is required to be ultimately successful in pursuit of the BA Photography degree.

I have deliberately not included my observations and comments from the supporting the 'Creative Interpretation' project exercises associated with this section of the course. My write ups for these exercises can be seen using the following links:

Exercise 24 (Sharpening for Print)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/05/15/dpp-exercise-24-sharpening-for-print/
A Web Gallery	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/dpp-project-a-web-gallery/

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ANNEX A - SUPPORTING MATERIAL

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General Course Assessment Criteria

Repeated verbatim from the OCA course study material:

“Here are the assessment criteria for this course. These are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you are going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assessment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words – do a self-assessment, and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings of each assignment you’ve completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

Assessment Criteria Points:

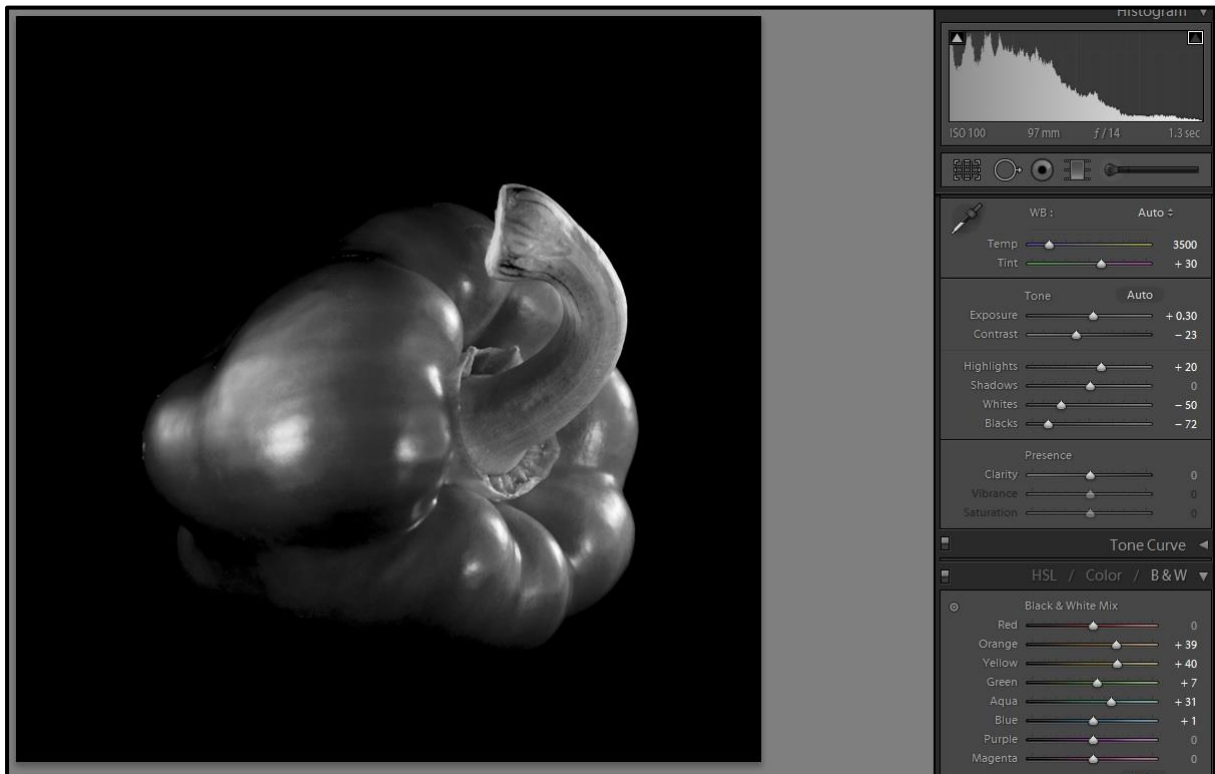
- Demonstration of Technical and Visual Skills material, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills;
- Quality of Outcome content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas;
- Demonstration of Creativity imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice;
- Context reflection, research, critical thinking (learning log).”

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Selection of Supporting Images (from LightRoom)



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End of Assignment