

## RETURN TO FAIRYLAND

All pictures  
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For his latest conceptual fine art collection, **Paul Gadd** imagined a vivid dreamworld of barely-glimpsed mythical creatures and enigmatic childhood memories. He talks to Scott Teagle about his gallery, artistic printing techniques and growing old.



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**P**aul Gadd and his Mamiya RZ67 are inseparable. Bought soon after graduating in 1997, he still swears by it even now, over 20 years later. 'All the work you can see on my website was made using that Mamiya RZ67, but I strongly believe that a camera is just a camera and it's the user that matters and the eye they use to shoot with.'

He began his photography career as a sculpture student; he found his creations were too large to take home and adopted photography as a means to record his art. After coming a close second in a Young Catwalk Photographer of the Year

competition, he was approached by fashion photographer Chris Moore and ended up working with him for four years. 'At the beginning it was just loading film, sitting on a box with all the photographers' crotches in my face. Then digital came in and changed everything. In the end it became more of an office job.'

Reluctantly, Gadd decided to go it alone and find his own way in the world of commercial fashion photography. While successfully freelancing in London, he was given the opportunity to work in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. 'I was shooting fashion and portraits and was told the fashion

industry in Malaysia was doing great, which wasn't true – it was terrible. However, the work I found got me into magazines like *Marie Claire* and *Harper's Bazaar* and in those days it was a big deal for me to get published. It became a big thing and I was getting plenty of work, but none of it felt inspirational and I really stopped enjoying it. So I called it a day and went back to film – and then I had no work.'

He didn't completely quit, but his enthusiasm for film and especially returning >

Above **The Cycle**  
Right **Fin**







to a darkroom was overwhelming. It was during this time he made a very fortuitous connection: 'I was still working for one or two magazines and one of the people I was taking a portrait of was an architect in Malaysia. We became friends and next door to her was an abandoned house, owned by her sister. As she was so interested in photography I said, "Why don't we do something with that house?" So the next day we got contractors in and pulled out all the internal walls, demolished the first floor and made a huge darkroom and gallery called

The Print Room. We taught a lot – we taught people who would never otherwise get the chance to practice photography. To be in an exhibition is very, very difficult – you either pay a lot of money or you have to get someone behind you. So the idea was to help photographers that would never get the chance to print their own work and exhibit it. We'd spend months on a specific subject, continuously printing for weeks until we were ready to have an exhibition. I think we've had 15 exhibitions so far, plus a few solo shows too.'

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Alongside running The Print Room, he began a long-desired photographic journey into self-discovery, and acknowledgment. The images accompanying this article are from his impressive *Inhabitants of Fairyland* collection, a series inspired by a childhood encounter with one of these mythical creatures. 'One day a dandelion seed floated in front of me and settled, hovering in front of my face; I looked into it and saw a figure with wings! This series is about recreating a

Above *Inevitabilis*  
Right *Inhabitants of fairyland*







◀ landscape or a dreamscape; so I imagined my studio as a creative space, a fairyland. The recreations of these landscapes with creatures that have died in my garden are a reflection of my aging. It's also like an escapism I guess – when talking about my age and this period in my life and where my work has been before – I'm trying to express the connections of these things in my creative landscape. Looking at the *Inhabitants* series it's definitely about my childhood and growing up.

Paul started this series in 2016 and the work unfolds and evolves with every new

print. 'The *Inevitabilis* image is all about getting old – I had ruptured my achilles tendon and had to shoot this in a wheelchair. This was the first of what was to become the *Inhabitants* series. The "inhabitants" of *Inhabitants of Fairyland* are purely from my garden and all stored in my freezer. So *Inhabitants* is focused on my immediate surroundings – I'm still waiting for more stuff to fall from the sky.'

For *Still-Born* Paul kept the monitor lizard in his freezer for three to four years before finally finding the correct composition for it.

'I'd had it for a long time and actually shot it a few times but was never happy with the result. I had collected all the fruit from my garden and when I took the lizard out of my freezer, Malaysia being very hot, the ice on the lizard would instantly turn pure white. But this would only last for 10 seconds, so I had to place the lizard as quickly as possible and shoot, shoot, shoot before the white ice thawed away.'

Above **Still-born**  
Right **Phallus**







The title *Inhabitants of Fairyland* prompts the viewer to question how these creatures of fairyland lived and died to become the emancipated corpses in Paul's images. And there's a feeling that they are desperately asking, 'Why?' or 'How did this happen?' Questions that many people who have suffered an age-related frailty can readily empathise with.

When asked about the delicate colouring, Paul replies: 'I use watercolour dyes – a very famous Malaysian artist-photographer, Ismail Hashim, introduced me to this technique. He took a couple of workshops at The Print Room and so I started painting on prints and, at first, thought, "I hate this." But I had to eat my words as I now really enjoy it and a lot of

people seem to buy the hand-tinted images.'

Printing is Paul Gadd's deepest passion and he has experimented intensively on his negatives and the chemicals he uses to process and print. 'I use many different techniques, including scratching my negatives. I usually shoot three or four exposures of the same shot – multiples of one shot so I can be more freely creative with my negatives. I also use tonnes of paper, reels and reels of the stuff, and am always trying out different papers and coatings for the prints. I have tried so many combinations of toning types I always end up spending hours in the darkroom trying out different chemicals; beeswax, for instance, has amazing properties.'

Currently in lockdown in Seoul, South Korea, Paul has had to leave his darkroom in The Print Room behind and is missing it greatly. 'There are darkrooms that you can rent but we had a really good darkroom in Malaysia. I have my own preference for enlargers and what not, and I find it weird using other people's equipment. I love the darkroom – it's very therapeutic. I can go in there in an afternoon

Above **Collector of the Heart**  
Right **Civet in Fairyland**

*'One day a dandelion seed floated in front of me and settled, hovering in front of my face; I looked into it and saw a figure with wings.'*



and not leave until the following morning – I've happily printed all through the night.' He is now desperately hunting for studio space and room to build his new darkroom.

Through The Print Room he has published one book to date, *Five Minutes*, a collection of portraits of the people of Malaysia. 'This was me introducing myself and The Print Room to the people of Malaysia.' When asked whether there would be further publications, he responded, 'I've been working on another project, *Market*, for years. The first group exhibition we held at the Print Room was about one specific market in Malaysia – Pudu Market. I've always thought this was one of our better exhibitions and since then

I have photographed markets from all around Malaysia, Japan and Korea, and was thinking they could make a suitable collection for a book.'

Though his career has taken him halfway around the globe, Paul has always held a quiet desire to return to Great Britain. 'I was hoping to move back to the UK – I always thought about doing a 360. I've done a lot in Asia. I have regulars who will buy my work but haven't sold any in the UK and would like to move back to England some day. The ideal scenario would be to find a gallery to represent my work. I'm always thinking about the UK – I love London and I really miss London'. Paul has achieved such a high level of competence and expression in his

photography and printing there is a growing interest in his future exhibitions, he says: 'I'm quite pleased about it, it's taken a really long time though. After going from commercial photography back into the arts, where I originally started – I'm in a happy place now. Though it would be nice if I could sell a little more'.

**You will be able to see Paul Gadd's work when it will be exhibited in London next year at The Other Art Fair presented by Saatchi Art, [www.saatchiart.com/paulgadd](http://www.saatchiart.com/paulgadd). *Five Minutes* is exclusively available from his website, price \$40.**

[paulgadd.com](http://paulgadd.com)