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HUFFPOST CULTURE

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Made in Spain: Nature Morte Photo Works by Craigie Horsfield

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'Two Peonies. via Chiatamone, Naples. May 2010', 2013, Gesso, ink and wax on oak board 100 x 95 x 3.3 cm/ 39.4 x 37.4 x 1.3 inches

Craigie Horsfield (1949) has been at the forefront of socially engaged photography in the UK for many years. He has used new technologies to push the form to its limits: by reproducing images on a large scale (like Jeff Wall); or by weaving images into tapestries (like Chuck Close and Gerhard Richter currently to be seen at Gagolian). Now, he has worked with his long-time production team in Spain (Factum Arte) and its director, Adam Lowe, to print digital images onto oak panels covered in gesso. The images are printed up to five times on each panel to increase the sense of depth, before being covered by another five layers of wax (the first of which seals the image). These dark works recall the paintings of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) and other masters of the Spanish *bodegón* (still life).

It is impossible for an online reproduction to convey their seductive quality. They have a *luxe* surface that longs to be touched and seem more like sculptures than photographs. Viewing their profound visual depth is like looking through a window to an image beyond which recedes into the wood.

'Octopus and Fish. via Chiatamone, Naples. July 2009', 2013, Gesso, ink and wax on oak board, 100 x 100 x 3.3 cm/ 39.4 x 39.4 x

1.3 inches

Horsfield has long been interested in what he calls *'slowtime'*; an image might sit in his archive for twenty years before being printed, or adjusted into something else. His still lives have a long and strange gestation, and speak of the fragility of life. He has said that we share a *'material memory'* and his images of peonies, garlic, pomegranates, sea creatures and meat certainly entice the viewer to reflect on the occasions they have encountered such visceral objects. The wetness of the dying octopus' skin is almost too much to bear; it seems as if it has just been hauled from the depths of the sea and flung into a fishing boat, ready for consumption should it give up on life. Despite its struggle to live, we know that death will win out. And even though the octopus might become a meal which sustains the life of someone else, we also know that they, too, will ultimately become food for worms.

'Five Peonies. via Chiatamone, Naples. May 2010', 2013, Gesso, ink and wax on oak board, 100 x 92 x 3.3 cm/ 39.4 x 36.2 x 1.3 inches

Even the achingly beautiful peonies signal their own death. They are cut flowers which - despite being placed in a vase of fresh water - will soon fade and lose their rosy pink vibrancy. Most viewers, if they every had a rosy cheek and the fresh bloom of youth, will know that they too are past their best-by date. About 100 years ago, in 1914, the blooms of British and German youth, and a host of other nations, were ordered by older men to slaughter one another. In those days the children of the poor could be sent down



coal mines or to factories, as even today are children of the poor in many 'emerging' countries. The Victorians have a lot to answer for in terms of our fictive notions of childhood and innocence (and so much else) but perhaps they were right to see the moment before all naivety is lost as something to be cherished

'Two Pomegranates. via Chiatamone, Naples. November 2009', 2013, Gesso, ink and wax on oak board, 80 x 75 x 3.3 cm/ 31.5 x 29.5 1.3 inches

Horsfield has spent a lot of time photographing the post WWII Polish community that remains heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism. Christian painting has often used the pomegranate as a symbol of the church; a single fruit, containing many seeds. In Horsfield's delicate photo of *Two Pomegranates*, the toughness of their skin barely hints at the juicy red seeds inside. They await the revealing of themselves, they hint at it and, like Horsfield's photos themselves, they germinate desire.

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'7 Wooden Panels'
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