

MEETING STORM THORGERSON AT HIPGNOSIS (LONDON 1980)

by Rutherford

Between my first and second years as a photographic arts student in Toronto, I spent July 1980 in the UK, visiting London, the Scottish Highlands and the Orkney Islands. While in London, I telephoned [Hipgnosis](#) in the hope that (*What did I know? I was young and naïve; I figured, one can but ask...*) they might be interested in my work.



To my astonishment, I was invited to meet founder [Storm Thorgerson](#) (who, with Aubrey Powell, had pioneered *photoshopping* before the word) who was kind enough to agree to see this young photographer and to offer me a critique of the half-dozen black & white prints that (in the hope of arranging just such a meeting) I had brought with me from Canada. Passionate and intelligent in equal measure, as he looked through my work, he asked questions that required me to re-evaluate my work – to consider the decisions I had made (both those *in camera* and those I had made in interpreting the negative in the darkroom) in relation to my intention: *Did they work? And how did I know?* What I learned from his questions – and from the answers he elicited from me – made me a better photographer.

As he considered each photograph, I marvelled to find myself sitting in the basewomb from which had come many of the [album covers](#) for Genesis, Led Zeppelin, and (The) Pink Floyd (some of which are fine art in their own right) over which I had poured – while Storm Thorgerson offered cogent advice on ‘developing my voice’ in visual communication. (Imagine a music student having the chance to chat with Jimmy Page – or a photography student meeting Bill Brandt.)

Looking around me, I noticed a number of [Polaroid SX-70](#) photographs pinned to the workroom wall: all variations on the theme ‘*melting Peter Gabriel*’. Made using a technique I recognised, these images exploited the ‘minute of malleability’ during which one could physically manipulate the soft SX-70 emulsion before it set. On the release of *Peter Gabriel Three*, I realised that, at *Hipgnosis*, I had been looking at the proofs.



Peter Gabriel Melt Polaroids – Design & Photography by Hipgnosis: Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell

NOT MEETING PETER GABRIEL (LONDON 1980)

While we spoke, I overheard two men in the next room (a member of *Hipgnosis* staff and a visitor) discussing a number of images. At first in profile, then after changing position to face me, the visitor looked familiar... *Hipgnosis* addressed him as “Peter”. I looked again at the SX-70 proofs on the wall, then back at the visitor. Oh; *that* Peter...

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