

Colour at Ullswater

I took advantage of a recent calm misty autumn morning to pop down to The Lake (as locals to Ullswater like to call it – as if there were no others). Acting at speed I took photos of the mist rising, and then some with an agreeable fisherman in my foreground. (Note – always ask, it's rude not to.)



When I was ready to move on I went to where the lake does one of its dramatic doglegs and came across what I first thought was another fisherman in chest waders. However this turned out to be no fisherman, but Steve Messam creating one of his brilliant temporary – in this case very temporary – installations. Made from paper and card, these cubes formed part of a body of work for the papermakers James Cropper.

Steve explained he would later add the fifth and furthest cube to the curve by Photoshop, the lake being out of his depth at that point. I felt lucky to see this ephemeral work and meet Steve who seemed remarkably un-phased by my intrusion. I imagine he's used to photographers gate-crashing.

Steve's use of colour was great, the warm red of the cubes jumping out of the overall cool blueness, giving life and vibrancy to that morning scene. In addition to the colour contrast, red 'moves forward' in the picture frame, giving the photo a more interesting 3D effect, the less dominant colours retiring into the background. Photographers often use a figure in red to 'complete' their composition against a green mountain background. Red, as Steve says, is a chunk of the spectrum generally absent in the Lake District and looks particularly striking. It's worth remembering that we can't see colours in isolation, and they appear quite different when in juxtaposition with other colours. The red of Steve's cubes, the yellow of daffodils against a blue sky, it's good to look for simple images with one strong colour standing out against a weaker background.