

**Whitehot Magazine**  
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Aug 2008

A few minutes walk from Old Street Tube Station, in a westerly direction will bring you to Whitecross Street. This is a rather self-contained little Street with eccentric numbering. Madder 139 Gallery is next door to 'Carnivale' Restaurant/Shop. When you enter the gallery you enter a hidden world. Many of Chiappe's monochrome drawings of children are so small that you will need a magnifying glass (some are provided) to see them – and then you will struggle to see these micro-miniature faces. But they are there, and each has its own character. These are the instantaneous expressions captured from old photographic portraits randomly encountered, painstakingly copied and sometimes deliberately distorted. But why?

Is this just a feat of endurance to capture public attention or a gimmick to capture a market niche? I do not believe that his ultimate purpose and motivation arises from either, although he may have been influenced by both. He is deeply interested in the emotions of the innocent, as they attempt to understand the world that they find themselves in. It is a slow and deliberate investigation into the human condition. And we need such tortuous modes of presentation to make us see the human condition afresh. We are so accustomed to the human face that we find it difficult to perceive its hidden secrets. We need to go on this arduous journey to discover what lies beneath these innocent faces. We see the looks of patient conformity to the dictates of adult authority. We see the dark looks of children who have endured oppression and poverty. Chiappe takes this further and brings out the enigmatic, the ghostly, the transcendent, the sinister, the macabre. Glimpses of childish fancy also break out here and there reminding us of the forgotten world of childhood.

There is a gothic element to these portraits which is even more marked in the larger examples. Some of these dominate walls, and retain the blurring and aged quality of old photographs. In some, the details of the face are almost lost in a delicate mistiness - surely another way of making us consider the human face anew. One struggles to perceive the character and nature of the individual – but the battle is not in vain.

Other large works are dark in both senses of the word. An untitled picture of the façade of an old school is positively nightmarish. A little girl, dwarfed by the huge dark front door, stands solemnly facing us with a darkly enigmatic expression. The quality of the expression is achieved through intensive working over many weeks. It is this concentrated obsessive focus which eventually yields the transcendent quality. Chiappe does indeed make the surface take on a life of its own. At every stage he searches and senses the photograph for subtleties of light and shade on surfaces. Then he invests the paper surface with this information, building it up with layers and layers of fine marks. This has intensified over many workings and reworkings of the face to elicit the inner quality of the psyche. The surface is so alive that one can become transfixed by the stare which it gives forth. It communicates so many deep emotions and nuances of meaning and intention.

I would recommend viewing this exhibition.

<http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/2008-paul-chiappe-madder-139/1507>