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Photography  
My best shot

Photographer Stephen Gill's best shot

Interview by **Andrew Pulver**

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'Where intention meets chance' ... Stephen Gill's shot of a Hackney street PR

For quite a few years I've been making photographic work in the London borough of Hackney, where I live. Recently, I've been trying to photograph not just what the place looks like, but also trying to include as much as I can of what it feels like. I started collecting little bits of stuff from actual places, and then putting them inside the camera. Bits of plant life, seeds, or glass: I drop them in just before loading the film. I've even used insects. These objects then sit on the film emulsion when I'm taking the picture. It's a way of encompassing the actual essence of a place in an image, the visual noise and chaos. I did think about photographing these tiny objects directly, but I didn't have a macro lens.

The background picture is just a random street in Hackney. I used to take descriptive, detached pictures of the area, but then I thought: why not go one step further? This way, I have slightly less control and have to grapple with the point where intention meets chance. I buried prints in the ground, leaving them for a while and then digging them up. It is exciting, knowing you are working half-blind; you have no idea what the pictures will look like.

This series is in the same vein; until you process the film, you have no idea where the objects will fall. The green blobs down the left-hand side are a tiny bit of silica gel I found in the gutter; the cloudy things on the top left are tiny bits of glass, probably from a car headlight. I developed it completely straight, with no computer enhancement. Each frame is from exactly what's sitting on the negative.

I started making these photographs a couple of years ago, and I've done hundreds now. Hackney is a place that attracts obsessives. It's something to do with its contradictions: you can be in a beautiful spot with canals and meadows, and then the flipside is chaos and dirt. That's what I'm trying to grapple with. [Photography](#) is good at turning things inside out, and this is the opposite: bringing the outside in. As much as I love photography, part of me is rebelling against it.