



## Images of Hereford | Christopher Preece Documenting Change!

Architecture Week is an annual event now in its 10th year. The week aims to celebrate architecture and the built environment through a series of lectures, exhibitions and events. It is co-ordinated by the Arts Council of England, the RIBA and a host of other influential arts and regeneration organisations.

For the second year running Hereford features as part of the national event along side works focussing on London, Birmingham and other urban areas. Last year it was in the form of [www.imagesofbuildings.com](http://www.imagesofbuildings.com) in which the photographer placed modernist icons found in Herefordshire side by side with those known nationally. This was a powerful move, re-imagining Hereford not as a rural idyl but as an urban centre with a richness of thought.

This year's exhibition continues this thought but focuses on Hereford in the extreme. This series of photographs represents Hereford as a gritty, urban environment. It focusses on infrastructure, signage, monumentality, branding and urban malaise. The images are both brutal and inspiring, they challenge the picturesque notions that are continually drip fed to residents and tourists alike.

The timing of the exhibition is also profound; it captures the city at a point where its history is being submerged by a new influx of global brands, regulations and infrastructure at which the historic city seems powerless to take a view on. Yet out of this, Hereford emerges triumphant for the first time. It becomes a place of complexity, where the banal postcard shot framing the river, the old bridge and the cathedral gets mowed down

under the rush of a city teeming with a richness of forces that do not yet have voice.

The compositions are harsh, disorientating the viewer continually, challenging them to reconsider what is of value and what needs to be lost. The images have been deliberately saturated, which gives dominance to the contemporary and challenges the historic fabric to beef up and jostle for space. It has the effect of making beautiful what is often considered controversial; the roads, the graffiti, the brand.

I hope many find these images shocking, jarring, obscene...because for the first time they capture Hereford having to face the global onslaught from which it and its administration wants to run and hide. A globalism that sees China emerging as the largest market force, which sees over administration wants to run and hide. A globalism that sees China emerging as the largest market force, which sees over 30,000 MacDonaldis in 119 countries all eating the same junk food, while elsewhere five million children a year die of hunger, a world of SARS, birdflu and AIDS pandemics, Mars landings, Guantanamo Bay, and not to forget strawberry fields..

But perhaps the most shocking thought is that someone has valued Hereford enough to make it art.

I hope this exhibition serves as a catalyst for many because before Hereford can re-generate it needs to start by reviewing, re-thinking and re-imagining itself. Christopher Preece is due to exhibit in the Water.shed as part of the mandate to Promote, Stimulate & Entertain.