

PDN PHOTO OF THE DAY

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Childhood Through a Veil of Old Film



"acid summer," 2010. © Robin Cracknell



There are more than a few layers of lost time in [Robin Cracknell's](#) series "Childhood," on view at [Sous Les Etoiles Gallery](#) in New York City until April 30. First, there is the fleeting youth of the boy in images, Cracknell's son Jake, who he photographed in found or restaged moments over the course of several years. Rather than smiling for portraits, Jake avoids the direct gaze of the camera – he looks away, or his eyes are obscured by his hands or by graphic elements in the image. Then there is the film itself – Cracknell shot the images with old, sometimes damaged cameras and salvaged 35mm cine film. The results are discolored, fragmented and lovely—scratchy, peeling pictures with violet, green and pink tones and bits of old film leaders and sprockets cutting into the frame.

Cracknell began his career in photography working in fashion, but he became disenchanted by the industry's emphasis on perfection. In a recent [blog post](#), he describes the thrill of seeing work by [Andres Serrano](#) and [Doug and Mike Starn](#) after working in fashion. "Looking at these pictures I felt that stirring in my gut I felt when I first held a camera or while printing in my father's den," where he learned photography as a teenager. "I stopped doing fashion photography that day and started aiming much higher, aiming inside myself, letting all the rules go and all the flaws and mistakes show." After giving up fashion, he spent a decade working with book publishers, producing covers in a looser, more impressionistic style for close to 300 books.

That attraction to messiness extends to the photographs of his son, which he sees as autobiographical. "Rather than documenting his life in the conventional way photographs do," Cracknell writes elsewhere, "I was actually restaging episodes and conjuring feelings from my own childhood. Parenthood does, in mysterious and sometimes unpleasant ways, take us back to our own childhoods....We are sutured into every snapshot we take and every picture, especially of our children, is, in some way, a self-portrait."

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