

CULTURE Upcoming | *ANALOG*

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In Upcoming we preview highlights from the global cultural calendar



Brian Dowling darkroom, Old Street *Photography by Richard Nicholson*

London gallery [Riflemaker](#) kicks off 2011 with its annual group show, entitled **ANALOG - trends in sound and picture**, featuring an eclectic quartet of photographer **Richard Nicholson**, sculptor Clare Mitten, rockabilly musicians Kitty, Daisy and Lewis and futurist light installation outfit Ziegelbaum + Coelho. The most poignant contributions are by Nicholson, who in the summer of 2007 decided to shoot images of professional darkrooms in and around London. At the time 204 were still in existence. When he completed the project three years later, only eight remained. The big companies that grew up servicing the fashion and music industries in the 1980s — including Ceta, Keishi Colour, Sky, Joe's Basement, Primary — have all gone.

What remained were the one-man bands, the 'master-printers', which still use film, whether printing in black and white or colour. Artisans like **Michael Spry**, whose high-contrast printing for [Anton Corbijn](#) gave U2 and Depeche Mode a visual language of their own. **Robin Bell** whose silver gelatin printing for major photographic exhibitions has included everyone from Bill Brandt to Ken Russell, Lee Miller to Terence Donovan. And **Brian Dowling** of BDI, a small commercial darkroom on Old Street in East London, who has over the past 32 years printed colour photographs for **Juergen Teller**, **Craig McDean** and **Nick Knight**. Knight created some of his most iconic and influential work from the late 80s and early 90s, including his [catalogues](#) for **Yohji Yamamoto**. The process would take days, with Dowling printing conventionally onto a baseboard, masking the various areas with sheets of photographic paper, and blending the colours with his hands. Knight is a great admirer of Dowling's practice, likening it to Haute Couture.

Initially the images of these craftsmen's dens all look the same, but staring into their worlds their uniqueness begins to surface. As Nicholson observes "The spaces I discovered were often haphazard and brimming with personal details: coffee cups, CD collections, family snaps, unpaid invoices, curious knick-knacks brought back by globe-trotting photographers. These human elements transformed what might have been a detached typology of modernist industrial design into something more intimate and nuanced."

Our world has been changed and enriched by the produce of these black cupboards, so how fitting that they too should have been caught on film and exposed to a wider audience.

Analog - trends in sound and picture at [Riflemaker](#). London opens on 11 January and runs until 31 March.

Text by Julian Balme

Julian Balme is a London-based art director, designer and writer who has had a number of photos printed in the darkrooms featured.



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