

SOCIETY MEETING REPORT

“THE TUBE MAPPER PROJECT – CAPTURING MOMENTS ON THE LONDON UNDERGROUND”

Presented by Luke Agbaimoni

A talk to the Society given on Tuesday 12 July 2022 at Keen Houe

Luke is an author and photographer based in London who looks at the Underground from an artistic, photographic, commuter's point of view, rather than historic.

The idea for this project started whilst Luke was working as a Web and Email Designer near ExCeL Centre and would go for a stroll during his lunch-hour. At the time (about 10 years ago) the DLR was running a photographic competition, which Luke subsequently won. His ultimate aim of The Tube Mapper Project (which is also the name of his book) is to have taken at least one photograph at every station on the Underground, Overground, Docklands, and Crossrail.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNDERGROUND

“When it rains the ground becomes a mirror reflecting the world above, instantly transforming the landscape before us. The puddles on the ground act like temporary vortexes, giving us a brief glimpse to a unique visual dimension that is just for us. I believe this is especially true at night in London. The neon colours of the city are distorted on the surface beneath our feet, creating new and sometimes surreal optical interpretations of very familiar locations. My reflection collection embraces the 'upside down'. Dwelling deep in undiscovered world. Searching in water, puddles and reflective surfaces, for a different perspective of the city of London.”

Stations pictured included Stamford Brook, South Kensington (in the slushy snow), Westminster, Wimbledon and Nine Elms.

The number of puddles on platforms indicates how uneven the surfaces are, but he often gets wet knees! Luke appreciates and highlights the architectural aspects of stations – such as the lights lined up with the roundel at Westminster. He often photographs at night, not just for the reflections, but because it hides the dirt.

UNDERGROUND SYMMETRY

“Humans are naturally drawn to symmetry. We are puzzle solvers. Our brains make sense of the world around us by seeking out similarities, and by searching for patterns in the labyrinth of the information that we receive. When we look at a symmetrical image, it is like a visual problem has been solved in front of our eyes. The overall effect is that we find the photo soothing and pleasing to view. The picture feels complete”. Pictures included:

1. St. Paul's showing the Central Line's “sharks teeth” barriers between cars (which prevent passenger access/egress during an emergency) and the red and white tiling patterns on the entrance to the platforms.
2. Clapham Common's narrow platform.
3. Goodge Street with the patterns of tiles around the platform exits;
4. Tooting Bec with its multiple roundels and a chandelier.
5. 1972 stock with its symmetrical interior.
6. Near Canning Town with the Underground beneath the DLR.
7. Stratford Central Line where train doors open on both sides – other stations where this happens are Arnos Grove, Canary Wharf DLR, Morden and Barking.

It takes a lot of patience waiting for trains to line up perfectly for the shot and Luke has to use a very fast shutter speed to achieve the “frozen” image. He also sometimes only has very few minutes to capture a shot whilst a train is at a station. Luke also likes to include people in his pictures to give a sense of scale.

LINE OF LIGHT

“The train is approaching at last. The distant howling grows closer and unnatural winds begin to rush down the platform. Signs of arrival are upon us. And then you see it. Lines of light appear on the track. Painted by invisible hands. Closely followed by a pair of bright eyes, eager and excited to arrive at the station”.

Obviously, Luke never uses flash on these types of shot, nor stands anywhere that the public is not permitted or safe.

WAITING FOR TRAINS

The hunt for drama and technicality lead to building the 'waiting for trains' collection. I love capturing the moment of the anticipation of the arrival of a train. The results I think are very pleasing. Dramatic colours and light and possible even in the middle of the day.

Luke likes the technical issues around photography and, by his own admission, has a very steady hand through practice – as tripods are not permitted on platforms, etc. He likes to illustrate the curve of platforms, the poses of commuters and what they are doing whilst waiting, including at Baker Street H&C platforms where passengers tend to line up with the light wells.

At Brockley station (on the main line between London Bridge and Brighton) Luke was introduced to the Station Cat who is called Saffy who greets all passengers and lives in one of the shops there.

SPIRALLING UNDERGROUND

“If you can choose not to use lifts or escalators when entering a tube station, you may be rewarded with a spiral staircase. These can vary drastically in height, with TfL claiming some to be as tall as “15 Storeys”.

Illustrating the colours such as yellow at Borough, green at Goodge Street, and red/orange at Gloucester Road. There is also a “hidden” spiral staircase at Embankment.

TUNNEL VISION

“Wandering through the endless passageways and tunnels is like exploring a vast museum celebrating the old and new. You’ll encounter modern designs alongside antique features originating from the 1860s, it has the oldest sections of underground railway in the world”.

Tiles are very hard and thus difficult to cut so the angled work in black and white at Goodge Street forms one of Luke’s favourite images.

Luke has found that he rests his camera on the handrail of the Travolators at Bank, he can get interesting, travelling, shots.

Colliers Wood with its uplighters and architectural features give a very strong image, whilst Hatton Cross has striking orange mosaic tiling around doorways dating from its building in 1975.

London Bridge and its Star Wars-ish spaceship tunnels; and he plans to ask someone to dress up as a Storm Trooper to get a shot. Luke was surprised when Canary Wharf was used instead of here for the filming of Rouge One.

The Greathead Shield and its plaque at Bank station with a man in trench coat and trilby who just happened to be walking through.

ELIZABETH LINE / CROSSRAIL

As the newest line in London, it also has the most modern designs. Shots included:

1. A certain Bear from Darkest Peru at his namesake station (the bear belongs to Luke’s son) during one of the trial run days.
1. The giant, googly, eyes on the ceiling at that station.
2. Tottenham Court Road with the powerful image of the red and white dots on the vast passageway wall, and the totem poles.
3. The multi-coloured walkway at Canary Wharf at the Adam Plaza Bridge leading to Crossrail Place.
4. Symmetrical stonework at the Liverpool Street Station end escalators, and again at the Moorgate Station end.
5. The Star Trek logo reminiscent architecture above the escalators at Whitechapel.
6. Comparing Crossrail and main line trains at Abbey Wood station.

After a short Q and A session, the meeting thanked Luke in the usual manner.

Amanda Griffiths