

Sean Smith: stills in a moving world

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I do not know of a better working war photographer than [Sean Smith](#) of the Guardian. So I was delighted that he took time out to come to talk at Polis with students. Sean has been working in the UK and abroad for more than 20 years now and he is very much the modern man as well as the traditional stills photographer. In the last couple of years he made the switch to digital, he said, and he now produces stunning observational films for TV with a hand-held camcorder alongside his stills work. You can see one of his films for BBC Newsnight [here](#). What characterises both his video and stills work is a remarkable ability to capture events without imposing his own perspective upon them. People seem to open up in front of him and incidents take on an extra significance for his lens. They are visually compelling without appearing contrived.



Sean is very modest about his skills but he is passionate about photography and angry about what he records in places like Iraq. He has embraced new technology and his work is testament to photography's continued ability to tell stories in a human but gripping way. He hates having to photograph for writers and feels that the images should be used for their own sake and not just when accompanied by text or a commentary.

He is also worried that news organisations are increasingly less prepared to give photographers the time for assignments so that they can settle in to a place or a group of people to witness reality rather than a photo-opportunity.

[sean_hooded.jpg](#)

We now live in a world where anyone can pick up fantastic quality photographic equipment for a few hundred pounds. Websites like [Flickr](#) and YouTube mean that anyone get to be published as well. I think that's a good thing. But we don't want to lose the work of the committed and outstanding professionals like Sean either. In an ever-faster moving world, we need these people who can capture humanity in turmoil in a frame.

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