

Photography at the Museum

**Guidance and ideas for
photography at the RAF Museum
London**

KS4/5 Art and Photography

General guidance on photography at the RAF Museum London

We welcome photography across the whole of our Museum site, but please consider the following:

- Tripods cannot be used in the Museum
- Please be mindful of others around you (e.g. that you aren't blocking the view of other visitors)
- Do not photograph anyone without their consent
- Depending on the weather conditions and time of day, lighting can be low in some of our buildings (Hangars). There are tips on the next page for shooting in low light.

Locations within the Museum

The Museum is very large and spread across several Hangars so it is best to consider what type of photographs you want to take when planning your route. Below is brief description of each space.

Hangar 1 tells the story of the first 100 years of the RAF. It is a large modern building containing lots of different aircraft as well as uniforms and other objects. This space holds our 'First to the Future' exhibition which is great for installation photography.

Hangar 2 is our First World War Hangar. It is the oldest building on our site, containing aircraft and objects from the earliest era of flight. Lighting is low in this space, making this a good space for moody, historical-themed photographs.

Hangars 3,4,5 have an industrial feel to the architecture, and contain aircraft from 1918-1980, including lots of planes that fought in the Second World War. This is likely the best space to photograph a wide variety of aircraft. The outside of the building can also make for dynamic architectural photographs on a clear, sunny day.

Hangar 6 holds aircraft and objects from 1980 – present, making it the most modern Hangar. This Hangar has a mezzanine viewing platform, so is great getting 'face-to-face' with aircraft and taking dynamic shots from above.

Tips for low light photography

- **If you are using a camera that allows you to adjust settings manually (e.g. a DSLR camera) you can try the following...**
 - Use a wide aperture (low f-numbers) to let lots of light into your camera
 - Increase your ISO setting
 - Use slower shutter speeds (if you're capturing still subjects blurring shouldn't be a problem)
 - Adjust your white balance or try shooting in black and white if your photographs are looking off-colour.
- **If you are using a standard digital camera or phone camera try the following...**
 - Turn on your flash setting
 - If you are focusing on a smaller object you may be able to use the torch app on your phone to create interesting lighting
 - Use post-production editing (e.g. Photoshop) to improve the outcome of your photographs.
- **Tips and Tricks**
 - Don't make eye-level a default, move around, take photographs of the same subject from various angles and see what makes the most dynamic photograph
 - Use portrait aspect ratio as well as landscape
 - Once you've taken a photo of your chosen subject, take a moment to check that everything is where you want it to be in frame. Make any adjustments e.g. your position, angle and lighting
 - Exclude any irrelevant detail from the frame. If there are elements in the background that cannot be excluded, try adjusting your depth of field so they become blurred
 - Consider tone, colour and contrast – try squinting to blur your vision. This will help you to understand how the three elements balance in your shot.

The Seven Formal Elements of Photography

Understanding and focusing your attention on the seven formal elements of photography when planning your compositions will help you to capture more dynamic shots that engage the viewer.

Below is a breakdown of the key features and how to use them. On the pages that follow, there are also reminders to apply the key elements whilst taking photographs at the Museum.

Line is all about making a visual path that guides your viewer's eye through the image, creating 'leading lines'. Lines can be vertical, horizontal, curved or jagged. This element can give your photographs extra depth, especially when lines converge (join together) to create a vanishing point.

Shape is the outline of an object and **form** is the three-dimensional space it takes up. In photography, silhouettes are often used to focus the viewer's eye on shape, whereas form can be shown effectively using lighting to show depth, particularly if you also think about the tone of the image (see below).

Tone is the contrast between light and dark in an image. This is sometimes called the 'dynamic range'. Tone is most important in black and white photography where contrast can be used to guide the viewer's eye through the image.

Pattern is the repetition of shapes, lines, colours or textures. You can find out more about this element of photography and how to use it at the Museum on Page 5 (Pattern and Repetition).

Colour is the hue, saturation and brightness of the image. It can be used in several different ways in photography. For example, you could fill the whole image with bold colours or focus on one brightly coloured element, which contrasts with other duller or desaturated objects. You could also consider the mood and emotion that different colours represent, and use these to strengthen the theme of your portfolio.

Texture is the surface detail of an object or subject. Highlighting texture in your photographs can spark the senses of the viewer and help them to feel more of a connection to your work. Texture can be made visible on all kinds of surfaces. If you want texture to be the sole focus of your shot, you may need to experiment with different strengths and angles of lighting in order to make the texture appear more dramatic.

Space is the distance or depth between objects or subjects. Adding space in your composition can create a sense of scale and bring depth to your shot. It also allows the viewer to focus on the main feature(s) of your image.

Aircraft Photography



Aircraft in Hangar 6
(captured with wide-angle lens)

Career Link: Photographers who specialise in capturing aircraft could have a career in the RAF, or with aircraft engineers and manufacturers.

When photographing aircraft, think carefully about the angle you're shooting from. Hangars 1 and 6 are best for achieving interesting angles as they have balconies that allow you to get 'face-to-face' with aircraft.

For a more creative outcome, consider how an object can be viewed in different ways, for example, a bomber aircraft could be seen as victorious, dangerous or an engineering marvel.

Think about what you want to 'say' with your photograph and experiment with lighting, angles and scale to try and capture this. You could also consider which other objects are in your frame, and the context these give to the aircraft you're capturing.

7 Elements

Shape and form, Line, Space, Texture, Tone, Colour

Aircraft Photography (Detail)



Detail of window inside Chinook Helicopter
(Hangar 6)

Career Link: Photographers who specialise in capturing detailed shots of aircraft may be hired by aeronautics engineers and manufacturers. Skills in detail photography can also be useful in advertising or food photography.

You can create an interesting portfolio and show off more skills by capturing a variety of different shots of aircraft. Some of these could be close-up photographs.

When taking close-up shots, try to focus on a section of the aircraft that contains a lot of detail. Depending on how close-up you want to go, you may need to use a macro lens or setting on your camera.

Areas of detail you could try:

- Buttons, dials and switches in aircraft cockpits
- Mechanisms inside wings (these are visible where wings have been removed or folded, there are examples in Hangar 6)
- Rivets/joins that show how the aircraft was constructed
- Engines (There are several in Hangar 2).

Installation Photography



Installation shot of 'First to the Future' in Hangar 1

7 Elements

Pattern, Line, Space, Colour, Shape and Form, Texture

Installation and exhibition photography is used by museums, galleries and artists to capture objects or artwork within a particular environment.

It is important to focus on lines and angles when taking these kinds of photographs, as the aim is to immerse the viewer. The example to the left does this well as the eye focuses first on the aircraft model in the foreground, before being pulled back into the distance by the leading lines surrounding it.

You could choose to focus on a single object and capture the setting around it (as shown in the example photograph) or select a series of objects that tell a story or follow a theme.

Career Link: Museums and galleries hire in-house and freelance photographers to document their exhibitions and events to advertise and encourage new visitors.

Pattern and repetition



Installation shot of 'Wall of Hats' in Hangar 1

Repetition in photography means using repeating shapes or a repetitive pattern as part of the composition. This repetition can be the main subject of the photo or a tool to help make the photograph more dynamic and guide the viewer's eye through the image.

You can get one element of an image to stand out by using this to disrupt the repetition. For example, if you are capturing a selection of objects with similar shapes, but there is one unusually shaped object as part of your composition, this will break the pattern and draw the eye to that object.

7 Elements

Pattern, Line, Space, Colour, Shape and Form, Texture

Career Link: Mastering elements such as pattern and repetition can make all of your photography more dynamic and may help you gain a career in whichever area of photography you're most interested in.

Architecture Photography



Exterior of Hangar 1

7 Elements

Line, Space, Shape and Form, Tone

Career Link: Architecture photographers who focus on the exteriors of buildings can use their skills for Fine Art photography but are often hired to take photographs for architects.

There is a wide variety of architecture at the RAF Museum London, ranging from the early 1900s (Hangar 2) to modern (Hangars 1 and 6).

When working outside, consider the weather conditions and time of day before beginning your shoot. If in doubt, do a few test shots in your local area before setting out to make sure you bring the right equipment.

When photographing the Hangars and other buildings around the site, think about the scale, angle and lighting carefully. Depending on which angle you shoot from, or which part of the building you focus on, you can create very different effects. For example, if you want to make a building look large and imposing, consider getting as low to the ground as possible and angling your lens upwards.

Abstract/Macro Photography



Close-up shot of engine in Hangar 2

Experiment with extreme close-ups and macro photography. This can make familiar and recognisable objects look unusual, which can make photographs more interesting. This might work particularly well if you select a small area that contains a lot of texture or other detail.

Possible Subjects:

- Engines
- Uniform
- Detailed areas of aircraft (e.g. rivets, propellers)
- Reflective surfaces (e.g. glass, mirror).

7 Elements

Texture, Tone, Pattern, Shape and Form

Career Link: Macro photography is often used by commercial photographers who work in advertising as they use close-ups to show details of products. Abstract photography could lead to a career in Fine Art.

Nature Photography



Poppies outside RAF Museum London

There is a lot of green space at the RAF Museum site. If you want to explore themes such as war or environmentalism in your work, you could include some shots of nature in your portfolio.

How can nature photography work alongside aircraft photography?

- During May and June, lots of poppies bloom around the front main entrance to the site, which may work well with a First World War theme
- When plants begin to die away and trees lose their leaves in autumn/winter, capturing this could help to express themes about war and loss.
- 7 Elements

Colour, Texture, Space, Shape and Form, Pattern

Career Link: Photographers focused on nature may have careers in Fine Art, but may also be hired by conservation companies and charities who celebrate and/or protect wildlife.

Editing and Experimentation



Simple photographs of aircraft taken at the Museum can be made artistic by editing. This can be done either digitally or by hand.

Editing: You may need to make subtle changes to your photographs, such as changing the colour balance or removing unwanted elements from the background of your photo. Digital editing is usually the best option for making these changes.

Experimentation: You could experiment by cutting up elements of your photographs before re-assembling them into new forms so that they become abstract like the examples here. This can result in surreal and artistic outcomes.

You can find more detail and inspiration on the next page.

Artist Inspiration: Fiona Banner

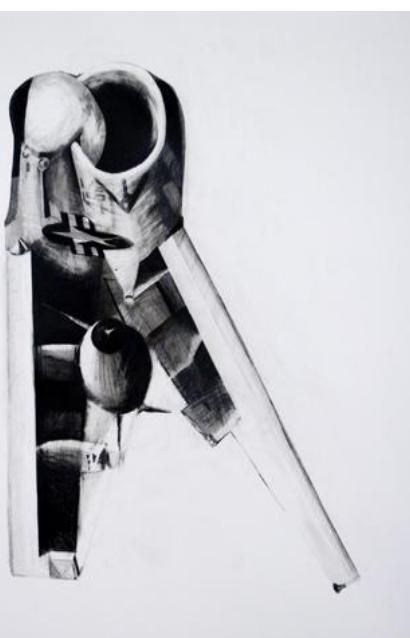
Fiona Banner is a contemporary artist who has worked with the subject of aircraft for many years. She often explores the relationship between aircraft and language. We have some of Banner's work on display in our Art Gallery, which you can find upstairs in Hangar 3/4/5.



Fiona Banner
The Bastard Word Studies, 2006-7
Graphite on paper

While this aeroplane alphabet is made up of drawings, rather than photographs, it could still make excellent inspiration for photography.

To create these drawings, Banner has visually dissected lots of different aircraft and re-assembled to create new forms. While the alphabet is very familiar, the aircraft parts it is constructed from are made unusual and intriguing. You could create a similar effect by editing and manipulating your own photographs.



Fiona Banner
The Bastard Word Studies 2006-7
(Detail Letter R)
Graphite on paper

You could experiment and cut up (either digitally using software such as Adobe Photoshop or by hand) and re-assemble the different aircraft parts into new forms. A good way to get started would be to cut up the different parts (e.g. engines, wings, fuselage) and focus in on each one individually. Think about the new forms these shapes could become.

We would love to see the photographs you've taken at the Museum. Share with us on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook @RAFMuseum

How is photography used within the RAF?

Photographers in the Royal Air Force create stills and videos to support the armed forces during times of peace and conflict. RAF Photographers use their skills in lots of different ways. All of the images on these pages were entries into the RAF Photographic Competition 2022. Details can be found here: bit.ly/4200wAW

Reconnaissance

Since the earliest years of flight, planes have been used for photo reconnaissance. Reconnaissance is the observation of the enemy or area of land. Today, this is mostly carried out by drones or satellites, but historically, this was done by hand – literally! In the First World War RAF photographers and pilots would have to dangle their arm out of their aircraft while aiming a heavy camera over enemy territory! You can see some of this equipment in Hangar 2.



From RAF Cranwell Portfolio

Ceremonial

Ceremonial photography is common in the RAF as personnel are often involved in state events such as parades, memorial events (e.g. Remembrance Day) and Royal occasions. Ceremonial photography is also used in the RAF to document events such as award ceremonies in which medals are given.

Equipment

Equipment photography in the RAF involves capturing the most up-to-date technology that the RAF uses, including aircraft. Equipment photography may require the photographer to go along on missions to be able to capture the technology in action.



'Striker' by Corporal Lee Matthews, from JADTEU at RAF Brize Norton

Sports

There are nearly 50 different sports organisations within the RAF, so there are regular matches, games and events. Often, different RAF Squadrons will compete against each other. Photographers capture these events to celebrate success.



'Triumph and Pain' by Air Specialist 1 Iain Curlett, from RAF Benson.

Portraits

Portrait photography is used in the RAF for a number of reasons. It can be used to show the public which roles people hold, to celebrate achievements and to tell stories. It can also be used artistically, as shown in this portrait.



Air Specialist 1 Emily Muir, from RAF Valley

Technical/Engineering

Technical or engineering photography may be used alongside equipment photography to demonstrate the technology used by the RAF during a particular time period. It can also be used artistically, as shown here. This photograph is an example of macro photography, but also uses pattern and repetition.



'Graduated Filter' by Air Specialist 1 James Skerrett, from RAF Waddington

Operations

Operations photography aims to document and capture important moments during operations and missions. To take these photographs, Photographers travel with aircrew and capture their various roles in times of both peace and war.



Air Specialist 1 Hamilton Palmer, from RAF Odiham