

PIECE BY PIECE

Transcending the boundaries of conventional photography by painstakingly constructing collages from thousands of frames, obsessive Scotsman

Adrian Brannan spends months creating each masterpiece.

WORDS: SERGIO BURNS
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ADRIAN BRANNAN ADMITS to stealing photographic kit from his father when he was younger. It could be that this early introduction to the trade gave Brannan his predilection and preference for using film – it’s certainly a feature of his work he feels passionate about. He also lists British artist David Hockney as a major influence, though stops short of describing himself as a disciple. Together, these formative influences may have had some part to play in the early, and almost accidental, development of the East Kilbride native’s trademark collage technique. “We were given an art school brief to photograph the Rennie Mackintosh building,” says Adrian, when asked to explain the origins of his unique style. “And because you can never see it properly (the streets are so narrow and it’s a wide building), most people would take a number of angles and stitch them together in Photoshop. ➔

About Adrian Brannan

Adrian graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 2000 and is now a freelance photographer/artist. Clients include Starbucks and Unity Media, and he has exhibited his work at the AOP Gallery and the Kelly Gallery, Glasgow. Visit www.adrianbrannan.com to see more of Adrian’s collages.



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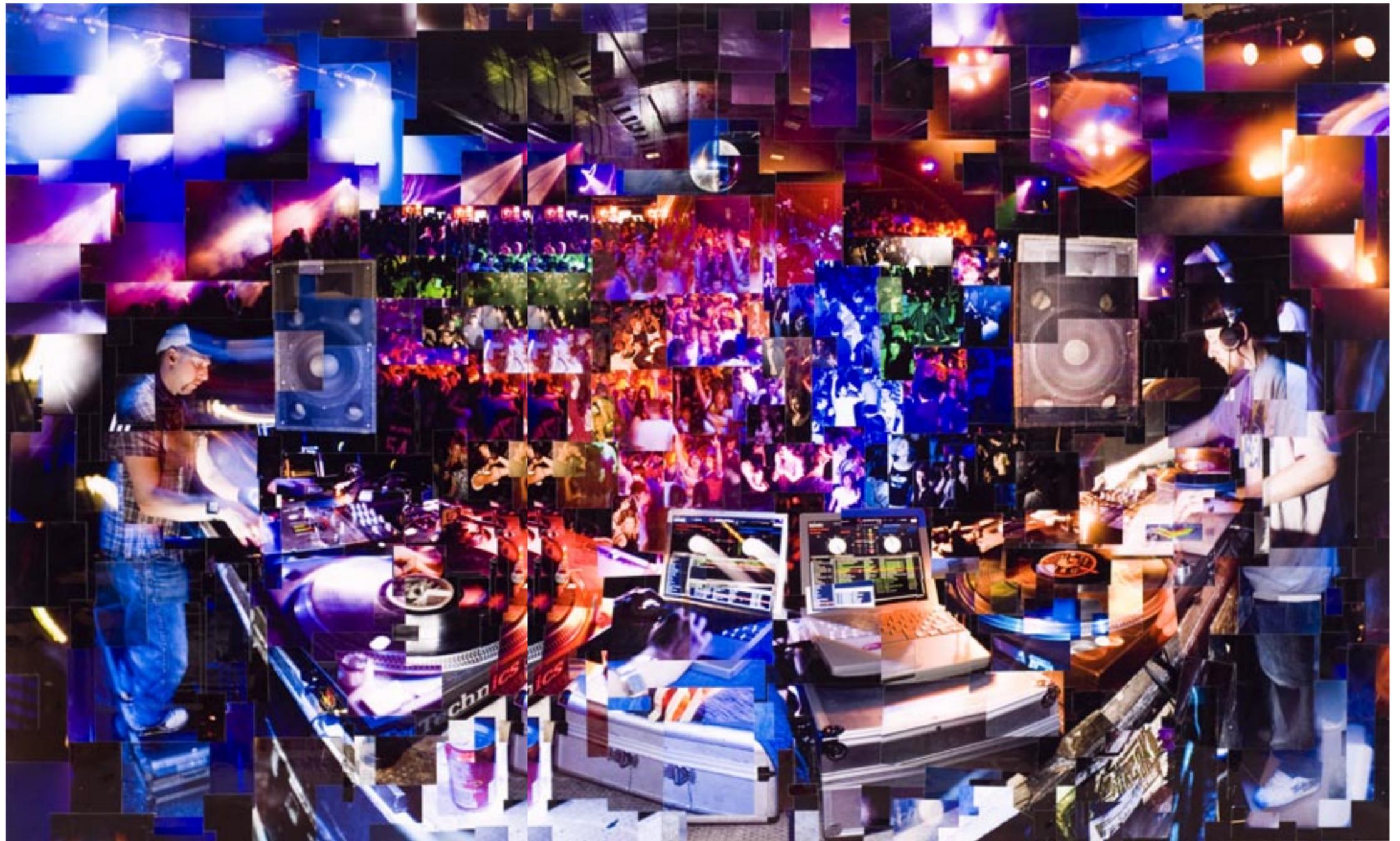
Instead, I stood in front of the Mackintosh building and just snapped away. I took hundreds of images and pieced them together into a large collage. It was a more honest way to see the building than sitting on the computer erasing every little imperfection."

What began as an honest necessity soon became an artistic passion, though he's quick to point out that it wasn't quite what he had in mind. "Making a living from collages didn't even occur to me at first. I'd always intended to go straight into pursuing car photography until the success of the collages took me on a welcome detour." In the seven years since his graduation, the 28-year-old Scot has honed and perfected his techniques, and constructing collages has become an increasingly lucrative way of making a living. But is there a deeper, more symbolic meaning to his photographic montage, a more cryptic or even allegorical reasoning in his work?

"I suppose it's an attempt to bridge the gap between photography and more traditional art forms like painting," he says, candidly. "I like to be able to manipulate a composition and present it without the often deceptive nature of digital post-production, and show much more over a longer timeline than can ever be possible with conventional photography. All sorts of techniques can be used in a single composition to convey the vibrancy of the subject, be it with varying exposures, film types or even physical effects such as flare or rain on the lens. The type of things that would ruin a conventional photograph can be the making of a collage."

If taking the actual photos seems like the easy part, putting the pieces together is a lengthy, laborious process that would challenge the patience of a saint. Going back to the same location over several months, if not years, and taking shots in different seasons, times of the day and weather conditions and using different lenses is only the start of the process. "For building the collages I use a guillotine and tons of industrial double-sided tape." Adrian emphasises 'tons' with a broad smile.

His admission that he often agonises over nearly every photograph, whether or not to use each shot, and how and at what angle it should be cut, are all indications of the exact, almost obsessive nature of his collage work. "I took around 1000 photographs for the



White van man

Adrian Brannan once worked in a gallery and has held down a job as a van delivery driver. He took on the work to subsidise himself while he pursued his photographic career, but does not have happy memories of these times. "I am better off now definitely, but a few years back just selling the pictures was not always enough to sustain me. I actually worked part-time in the Glasgow Room Art Gallery, and believe it or not I did delivery driving as well for a bit. That was hellish because it took up so much time and I didn't have enough time for my photography. It was a nightmare."

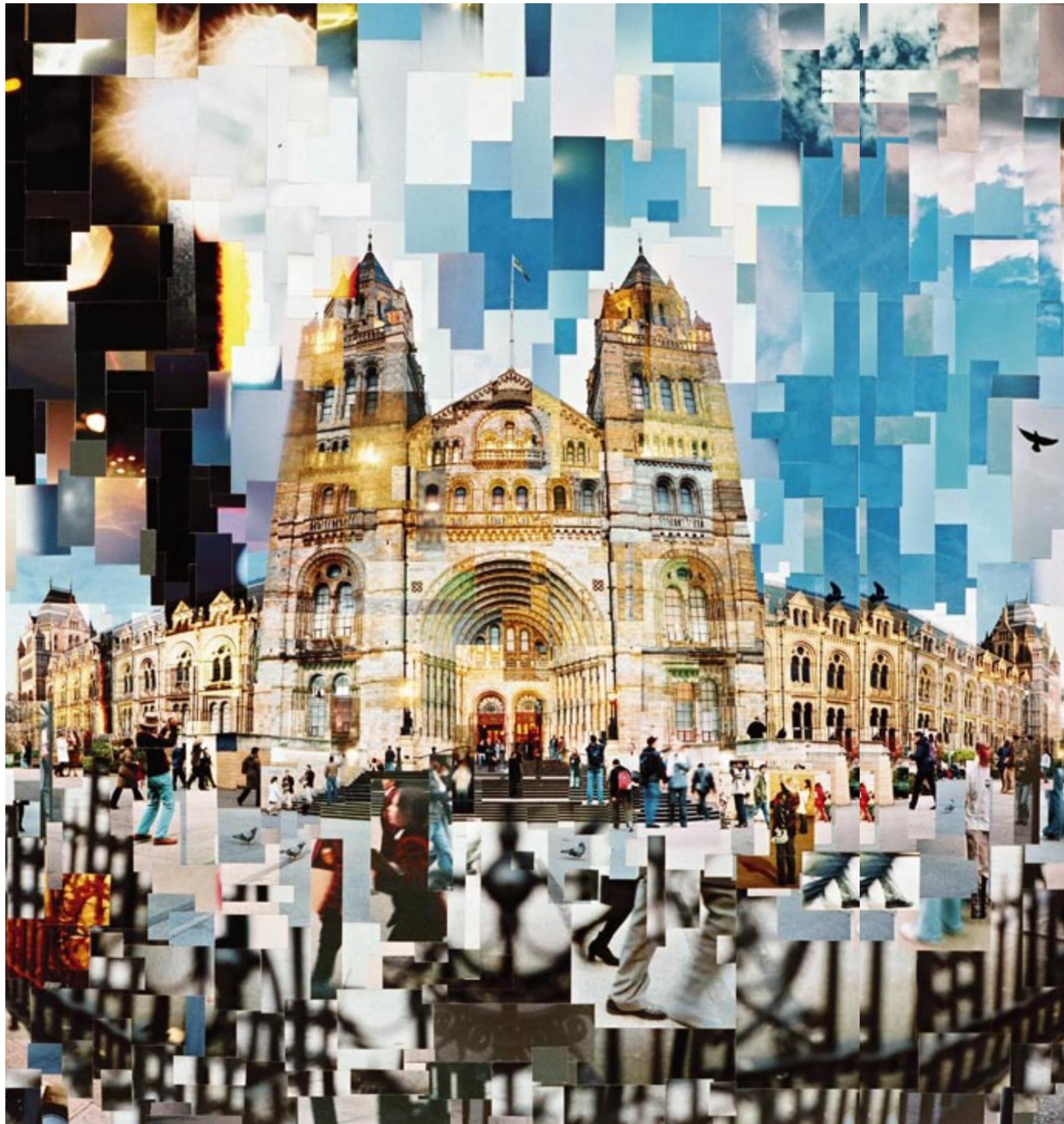
Girl in the collage

"Trace, my girlfriend, often helps out. Although she teaches art full-time she manages to do a lot of my odd jobs - PR and assisting on location. She's also in a lot of the non-Glasgow collages, patiently waiting or wandering around. She can be spotted in most of the London, Barcelona and Swiss collages, usually with varying hairstyles and clothed for every season!"

Above: 'Freakmoves', named after the club night at the Glasgow School of Art, took four or five visits and 1000 or so photos. Adrian used around half the photos taken, some no bigger than stamps.

Right: Many of Adrian's collages are of Glasgow landmarks such as the Mitchell Library, one of Europe's largest public reference libraries.





The other side of the coin

When not creating collages, Adrian can be found utilising the latest digital technology for various car magazines. "This was shot for a five-page feature on a tuner's demo car," says Adrian. "The brief is often quite open on car shoots. With this car I used the surrounding area of some 1960s high-rise flats

for a gritty urban look that I find complements purely functional cars like this, which see use as everything from track day action to the shopping run to being a full-on street weapon. This shot was taken with a Nikon D2X and 18-200mm lens, with two flashguns placed beside the car on stands."

"I shot images for 14 collages in Barcelona and only half were finished in the months after returning"

'Freakmoves' collage," he says. "And from that, I probably used half of them, some about the size of a postage stamp. This involved four or five visits to the Glasgow School of Art Union (the venue of the Freakmoves club night) over three months or so. The whole idea was to really capture the atmosphere of the place."

When it comes to discussing equipment, Adrian needs no invitation to rattle on happily about the more traditional gear he uses in the creation of his collage work. "I use a Nikon F5," he states, rather enthusiastically. "That was the last film camera used by journalists, the last true pro SLR. It was replaced by the F6, but that's more of a rich amateur's camera. My favourite lenses are the 50mm f/1.4 and a 135mm f/2.8, while I have a Fujimoto RA4 print processor and a Durst enlarger in my darkroom."

Left: Adrian captured the ornate Victorian architecture of London's Natural History Museum at different times of day and season to create a rather unique portrayal.

We've come to the conclusion that Adrian is a perfectionist, a description that he's quite happy to endorse. This attention to detail, however, is paying off and his collage work attracts attention from around the world. In addition to commissions from Starbucks, Scottish Enterprise and Princes Square, a shopping centre in Glasgow city centre, he's also enjoyed work in Switzerland and Spain. "Kenny Neil, a translator and entrepreneur living in Switzerland, was shown my work by a previous client. He loved Lucerne's KKL concert hall and felt it was his duty to bring us together."

The Kultur-und Kongresszentrum Luzern is the work of French architect Jean Nouvel, and is a colossal structure boasting a 1840-seat concert hall and gigantic, flat cantilever roof that reaches 115ft beyond the main entrance. It provided Adrian with his most difficult challenge to date. "It's probably the best picture I've ever created, too," he says. "I spent six pretty

Cutting edge

“I think the car photography keeps me from getting too introverted with the collage work”

intensive months on that, although it proved quite hard to actually complete. I wanted to get that one right, considering the time and effort I had put into it. The building is an absolute monster, the size of two football pitches, and it was quite daunting.”

He also talks fondly of a recent location shoot in Barcelona, which proved troublesome for very different reasons. “Too much to do in too little time,” he says. “Barcelona is a very big place, and even with a hire car, hunting out locations, spending hours at each one and then trying to find time to eat and sleep made things a bit tight. I shot images for 14 collages, and only half were finished in the months after returning.” An obsessive perfectionist, Adrian Brannan is also an amiable, friendly soul who appears to take most things in his stride. We had to shift locations during the interview but it did nothing to diminish his obvious desire to talk about the craft he so obviously loves.

Adrian has also succeeded in his original goal of finding his way into car photography – he now shoots for the likes of *Fast Ford* and *Classic Ford* magazines. For this kind of work, Adrian finds himself forced to flirt with the latest digital technology, hence for commercial magazine work he uses a Nikon D2X, while his favourite lens is an 18-200mm VR. “The vibration reduction is invaluable when working on car-to-car shoots and when you are pushed for time.”

With one foot in the past, courtesy of dad, though shrewd enough to be up-to-speed with modern technology, what does the future hold for Adrian Brannan? “I’d like to keep it sort of 50/50,” he says, after some consideration. “I think the car photography keeps my feet on the ground, keeps me disciplined, and keeps me from getting too introverted with the collage work. I think the future will definitely involve different locations – there’s still a lot more mileage in Glasgow but there’s much more I want to try in other places. London is definitely one place I want to properly get known, but finding somewhere I can sell my prints on a regular basis is tricky. London is my favourite city – I seem to find locations that I want to turn into a collages everywhere I go.” ■

Right: Antoni Gaudí’s Casa Batlló (known by locals as the House of Bones) as you’ve never seen it before. Barcelona was one of Adrian’s most memorable location shoots.

