



Lottie



Bones



Peggy



Prospero



Flo

How sad is that doggie in the window

Photographing dogs left in cars was no easy task. **Zoe Williams** hears why

Is there anything on Earth lonelier than a lonely dog? Sure they're cute, but have you ever seen a more affecting despair, a better distillation of the condition of solitude? This is the photographer Martin Usborne's earliest memory: "Being left in the car, and this feeling that no one would ever come back... the impossible loneliness of this silent space." Funnily enough, I left my boyfriend outside Lidl once and he said roughly the same thing. That was quite annoying. It comes so much better from another species, in a moment of art.

Mute: the Silence of Dogs in Cars has been no simple project. Usborne spent many days wandering around supermarket car parks, barking ("I was looking for dogs but I couldn't see any. I thought they must be all lying down"). Then he realised that people actually didn't leave their dogs in cars that often. There was nothing for it but to find particular dogs, and then put them in cars. Many more hours were spent matching the expression of the dog to the type and colour of the car. Much ham was wasted. The huskies would only react if Sinead

O'Connor was playing. Studio lights beamed into night-dimmed cars, to give that particular quality of bleakness and invisibility.

Giving the dogs back must have taken a fresh emotional toll, especially that white staffie. But what exceptional results: who knew we had so much to learn from a puzzled collie in a Sierra? What's in the dark space of that whippet's imagination? (Mainly chicken, probably. Chicken and cats.) Oh Lottie, so much sadness, just in your eyebrows!

Who knew we had so much to learn from a puzzled collie in a Sierra?

i For more images go to www.martinusborne.com/



PAWS FOR CONCERN

Despite only featuring canine subjects, the project Mute was inspired by the photographer's own childhood memory of being left in a car by his parents. He recalls being terrified that they would never return, likening the situation to a dog waiting for its owner. In this series, four-legged models stare longingly out of car windows, illustrating the human — and animal — fear of being abandoned. The show is at theprintspace gallery, London E2, until November 9. Visit: www.martinusborne.com.

Photographs by Martin Usborne

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Pointer Prospero



Hondenlevens

Je komt toch wel terug?

Bang, boos, berustend – fotograaf Martin Usborne zag allerlei emoties bij honden die eenzaam in Londense auto's wachtten.

foto's Martin Usborne



Husky's Bear en Kessie



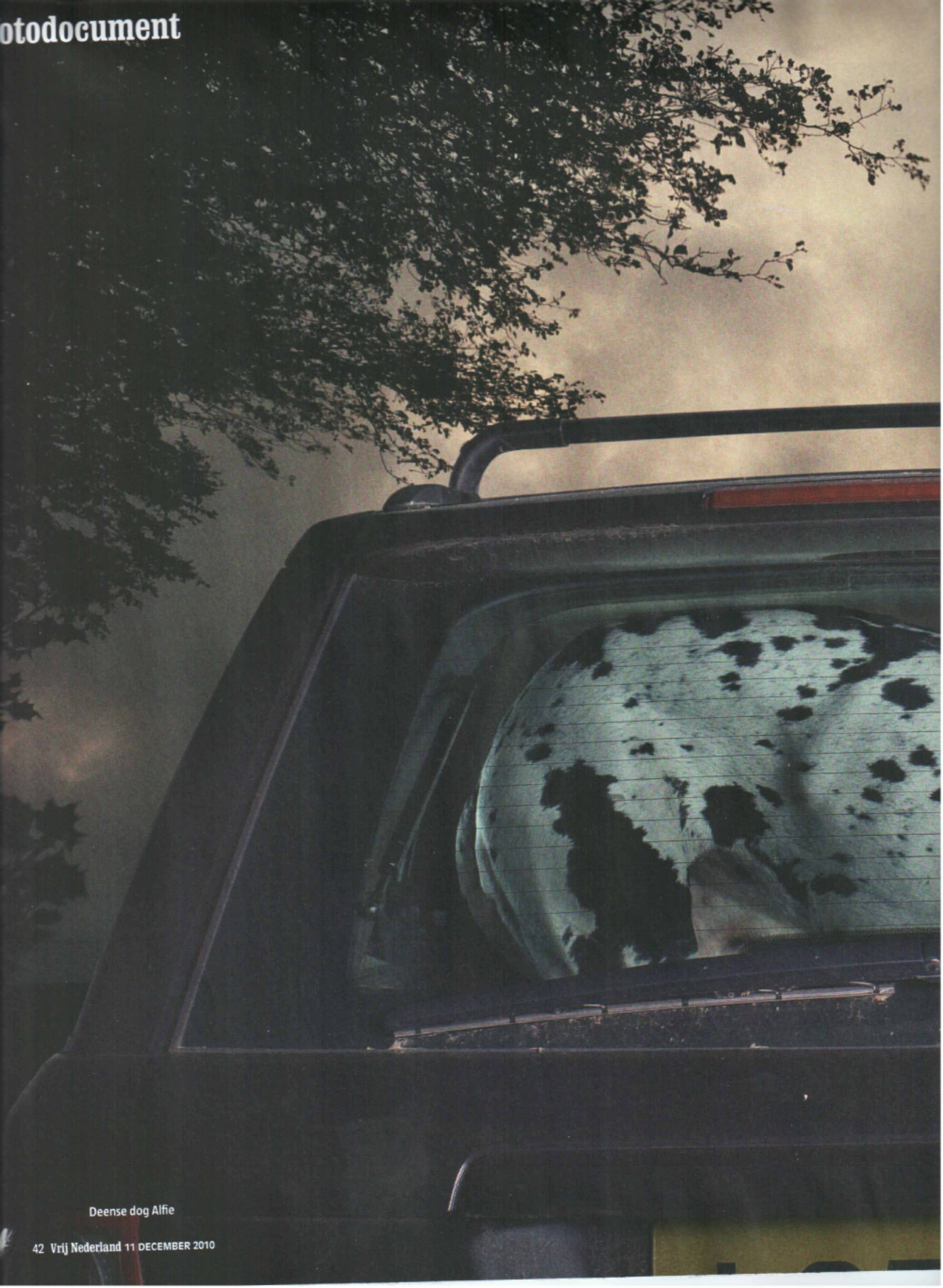
Peggy



Prince



Staffordshireterriër Bones



Deense dog Alfie



MARTIN USBORNE

www.martinusborne.com

A Dog's Life

Childhood memory reflected in a canine stare

Martin Usborne had a good childhood on the whole, but he has one unhappy memory that persists. Left alone in a car one day, the feeling of helpless abandonment stayed locked within him.

"I don't know when or where or for how long, possibly at the age of four, perhaps outside Tesco's, probably for 15 minutes only," he recalls. "The details don't matter. The point is that I wondered if anyone would come back. It seems trivial now, but in a child's mind it is possible to be alone forever. Around the same age I began to feel a deep affinity with animals - in particular their plight at the hands of humans. I remember watching TV and seeing footage of a dog being put in a plastic bag and being kicked. What appalled me most was that the dog could not speak back. Its muteness terrified me."

Now a well-established professional photographer, he was reminded of these feelings by the recurring sight of dogs locked inside their owners' vehicles, unable to speak out, and decided to make a project out of it. The result, *Mute*, on show at The Print Space in London until 09 November (www.theprintspace.co.uk), is unsurprisingly dark, but it's not without humorous touches. "I do think of them as portraits, even though they are of dogs, because the images are focused on their faces and they do seem to be expressing various emotions," says Usborne. "Some of them look expectant, others resigned, others agitated. Yes, you could say I was anthropomorphising, but then I think that all portraits are about the photographer as well as the person in the photograph. They're never a simple reflection of the subject's feelings."

Initially Usborne hoped to shoot a documentary-style project, but quickly realised it was impractical, so instead he enlisted the help of willing dog owners. He says he usually had to take at least a couple of hundred images on each shoot to capture just one soulful moment, which meant each session took at least three hours, shot on his Canon EOS 5D Mk II.

"The camera is the perfect tool for capturing a sense of silence and longing," he says. "The shutter freezes the subject forever and two layers of glass are placed between the viewer and the viewed: the glass of the lens, the glass of the picture frame and, in this instance, the glass of the car window further isolates the animal. The dog is truly trapped."

He found the images worked best if he shot the dogs at night, as it cut down on unwanted reflections, so he took along quite a collection of equipment to each shoot, including a bank of portable lights, batteries and even a smoke machine. "I found myself in some crazy situations," he laughs. "On one shoot I was with this lady with five huskies outside a council estate at 11 o'clock at night. The only thing that would make them quiet was Sinead O'Connor's *Nothing Compares 2 U* - they loved that song - so we had to drive my car up alongside and play it at top volume." *BJP*



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