



Winning the RPS Environmental Awareness Bursary sparked an odyssey into an alluring wilderness for photographers **HANNA-KATRINA JEDROSZ** and **CARL BIGMORE**

GLASNOST AND



CARL BIGMORE
A documentary photographer, Bigmore won The Graduate Photographers Award 2017 in association with Magnum Photos. carlbigmore.co.uk





JAMES BRABAZON

HANNA-KATRINA JEDROSZ
A documentary photographer and photojournalist, Jedrosz is part of the photography collective M55 Reports. hannakatrina.co.uk

THE GREEN BELT




Conceived in 2002, the European Green Belt is the spine of a 12,500km ecological network along the route of the former Iron Curtain. Spanning 24 countries, it is a haven for nature and rare wildlife, with 3,272 protected areas and 40 national parks. It proved irresistible for the winners of the RPS Environmental Awareness Bursary 2016 – Hanna-Katrina Jedrosz, 29, and Carl Bigmore, 34.

Both MA graduates in photojournalism and documentary photography from the London College of Communication, Jedrosz and Bigmore spent six weeks travelling the Russian borders of the Baltic and Fennoscandian regions of the belt – encompassing Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – as part of their documentary project investigating the impact of human activity on the European Green Belt.

Here they reflect on nature's tenacity, spectres of the Cold War and the power of collaboration.



HANNA-KATRINA JEDROSZ

 I'm fascinated by the interplay of history, landscape and human experience. For my first major project for my MA at the London College of Communication, *I Feel Every Stone of the Road*, I retraced prisoner of war camps across Poland and Germany where the Nazis held my Polish grandmother, who was a freedom fighter.

For *Half the House*, I explored how sites in Athens have been reappropriated as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 European migration and refugee crisis. The inspiration for this project came from a podcast that mentioned the European Green Belt. I became interested in investigating the spectre of the Iron Curtain and how it affected those living along the route.

After explaining my ideas to Carl we decided to work together. We won the bursary a week after the Brexit vote, so it felt very timely.

As we travelled we became aware of the reality of Russia, rather than the one-dimensional representation portrayed by the western media. The countries along the Green Belt seem quite neighbourly and it plays a vital role in maintaining the peace.

We spoke to an artist in Riga about living through Soviet occupation. She got emotional telling me that although the Latvians weren't necessarily fighting on the streets, there was a resistance, and a profound sense of living a dual life. Walking through the remnants of abandoned Soviet military towns was a reminder of the interplay

between everyday life, politics and the role nature has played in healing the scars left by the Cold War.

With Carl I felt a meeting of minds. Although we bring our own perspective, it's reassuring to know that we share a commonality in how we view the world.

We shoot using medium-format cameras – square and 6x7 respectively – so getting the films processed, scanned and costed has been time intensive. Coupled with the fact we effectively have three bodies of work, editing the project for display has proved challenging. However, I feel we've selected images that will draw viewers into the narrative, which hopefully raises awareness of the powerful symbol of hope I believe the European Green Belt to be.

CARL BIGMORE

★ My interest in photography stems from my granddad, who worked at Kodak. I've always been drawn to the documentary genre but I want my pictures to create their own world. I'm interested in the space between fact and fiction in photography.

Hanna and I met at my graduation show in 2014. Her ideas for this project spoke to my interest in the relationship between people and place. After being shortlisted for the RPS Environmental Bursary in 2015 it was great to have the Society's support on this project.

The inhabitants of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are extremely proud to be

European, but the shadow of the Soviet era looms large. The people are welcoming but difficult to bring out of their shell, due to scars inflicted on the nation's psyche by the Cold War.

I find the European Green Belt a paradoxical space. The route was carved out during a dark period of history but today these environments are positive because they have enabled wildlife to flourish and allowed those living along the belt to form a close connection to nature.

When we visited Oulanka National Park in Finland we were shown a type of lichen that only grows in areas with

high air quality. These small indications of how nature is thriving along the belt highlighted how man's interventions in other areas of the natural world are ultimately damaging.

Throughout the editing process, working with Hanna, I've learned to be more objective about my work and now I can see subtle qualities in pictures that I might previously have missed.

As well as exhibiting the project throughout the Green Belt we're keen to turn it into a book. Given its geographical scale we hope to explore other regions of the belt, so this project is only the first chapter of something larger.

