

## Contemporary Photography



An interesting attraction on the Promenade is the Royal Floral Hall, with its colourful collections of tropical plants and flowers.

# View from the Chair

A reminder, if you wish to attend *A Wider View* at Reading College please try not to delay reserving your place. Many have already booked, and the lecture hall at Reading is not as large as we have had in the past. So those who book late may be disappointed.

**Committee Positions**

Bob Gates will be standing down as Secretary at the forthcoming AGM on 16 November and we will urgently need a replacement. See the page 39 for the AGM time, location and details.

A treasurer is also needed to replace Brian Steptoe as soon as possible.

If we do not have anyone volunteer for the positions of Secretary and Treasurer the Contemporary Group could be in danger of being disbanded. These positions do not need to be for life; it would obviously help if you could give two to three years to a position, because it takes a little time to adjust to the job. Bob has been Secretary for five years and he now wishes to do other things. I have the details of what each job involves and can pass it on to anyone who may be interested. We do not have frequent meetings, perhaps twice a year plus the AGM, so it need not be a great burden.

We now have a dedicated Webmaster, Stewart Wall, whose first e-newsletter you will have seen. If anyone has an exhibition which you would like publicised please let Stewart know. Also, please tell him about any exhibitions you may have seen or books that you think others may be interested in.

There is a suggestion for a regional group in the Essex/Suffolk area. If anyone there feels that they would benefit from such a group, please contact me so that we can assess the interest.

I hope you all have a good summer, or at least as good as the weather permits.

Best wishes to you all,  
Avril

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If you wish to submit articles for the Journal, please send all copy and images on disc to:

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Cover: from *Shifting Sands* by Stephen Clarke, digital collage mounted on aluminium

Text should be in Microsoft Word and images are preferred in TIFF format, 300 dpi, file size guideline 10-20Mb. Images are also acceptable as high quality JPEGs, file size guideline 3-6 Mb. For other formats, please contact the Editor. Large image files may be supplied on disc or by use of online large file transfer facilities.

Unless requested, discs will not be returned.

DEADLINE for the Autumn 2013 edition is 30 September 2013.

# Contemporary Photography

View from the Chair	Avril Harris ARPS	2
Editorial	Patricia Ann Ruddle ARPS	4
Their Pictures of Me: Contemporary Portraiture	Alan Organ	5
Shifting Sands: photographs by Stephen Clarke	John K Walton	9
Embracing the Ordinary	Willem Melching	14
The State we're in	Nigel Tooby FRPS	20
Helen Brown	Robert Brown	26
A Researcher's Life, in conversation with Val Williams	Rod Fry ARPS	32
Serendipitous Encounters	Krystyna Szulecka ARPS	36
Group Events		39
Committee		39
Girls in the playground, Holland Park School, 1988	Marketa Luskacova	40

**Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that explores the photographer's personal view of contemporary society, environment, art or culture, usually through a themed body of work.**

# Editorial

*“There are parts of people’s lives falling out of the sky.”*

A two-mile wide tornado swept across Moore, Oklahoma, tossing debris four miles into the sky, damaging 12,000 homes on 20 May 2013. Most tragically 24 people were killed; I don’t know how many were injured.

I was on holiday in Tulsa, about a 1½ hour drive from Moore, and Shawnee as well, where another tornado demolished the lives of many the day before. During my time in Tulsa we were on tornado watch twice; fortunately for us the storms headed off to the east across the Oklahoma plains.

When watching the devastation on television, I observed that the first priority for many when coming back to their homes was to salvage sentimental belongings. And, most of all, their photographs. On several occasions I read that people were relieved to find their photos – “that was the most important thing to us.” They represented memories; they were priceless.

Photographs were sucked into the sky by the 200-mile per hour winds, and some were found as far away as 250 miles. Several Facebook pages were soon set up to recover pictures and personal documents. In the devastated areas people who wanted to help, set up “picture patrols” scouting through the debris.

Ironically, in May, the UK has seen the Enterprise and Regulatory Act given Royal Assent to a bill that defines Orphan Works, for example, photographs, as those items protected by copyright, but whose owners cannot be ‘found’ to gain permission to use. A similar situation exists in the US. Facebook and Flickr - internet photographers - beware. Actually, there is a Flickr group, the “Museum of Found Photographs” who acts as a repository for any images that have been found at car boot sales, vintage fairs, charity shops, etc.

Unarguably, the Facebook photo recovery teams in Oklahoma aren’t looking to exploit anyone or infringe upon anyone’s copyright. One of the Facebook organisers is quoted as saying, “I’m just trying to help. I couldn’t imagine losing my kids’ pictures.”

Indeed, there are those of us who are fascinated by the found photograph. As viewers, we can invent narratives behind the images; laugh at oddly surreal photos; snigger at badly taken pictures; or even treasure them as very collectable, vintage items. We have seen exhibitions in which the found or anonymous photograph is presented on the gallery wall as an art piece.

But this wasn’t the first thought that came to me when I was absorbed by the tornado news reports. What struck me was an overwhelming assumption by the people that photographs matter, that they are true records of their lives. They are memories.

I know that the value of photographic evidence can be problematic. Critical writing has tended to focus on what photographs are not, for example, objective and reliable; they can be manipulated; they can be staged. However, despite an academic criticism of photography’s capability to record the truth, there are those people, such as lawyers, historians or journalists, who continue to see photographs as showing real objects and events - and the people in Oklahoma whose lives have been wiped off the map by the May 2013 tornados.

Patricia

Quotations from (accessed 1 June 2013): <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/22/tech/social-media/tornado-lost-items-facebook> and <http://nation.time.com/2013/05/24/the-lost-mementos-of-moore-tornado-victims-search-for-family-photos/>

# Their Pictures of Me

## Contemporary Portraiture

*Alan Organ*

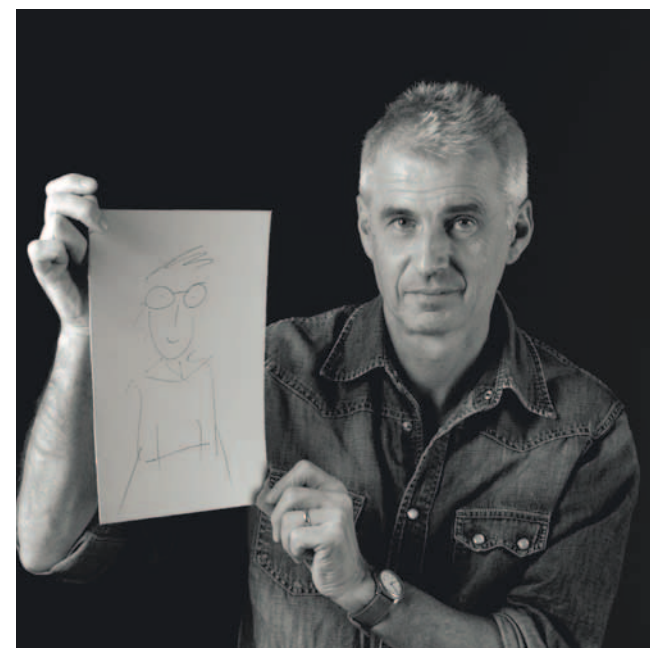
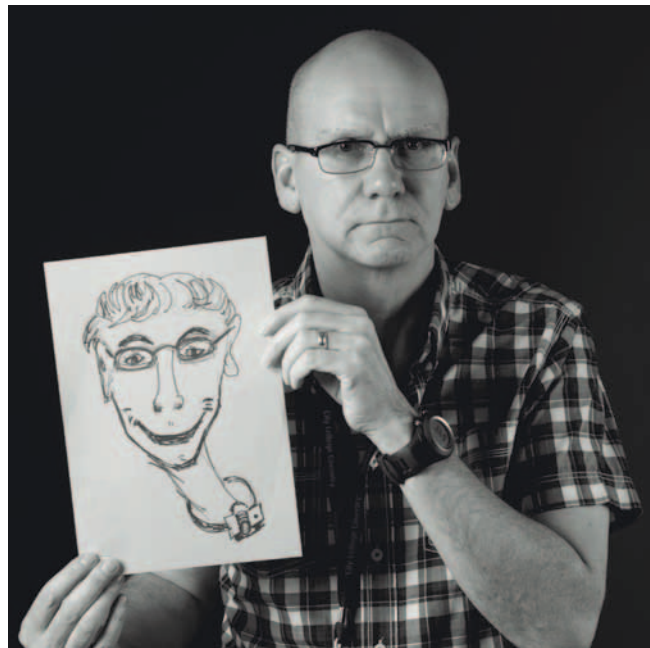
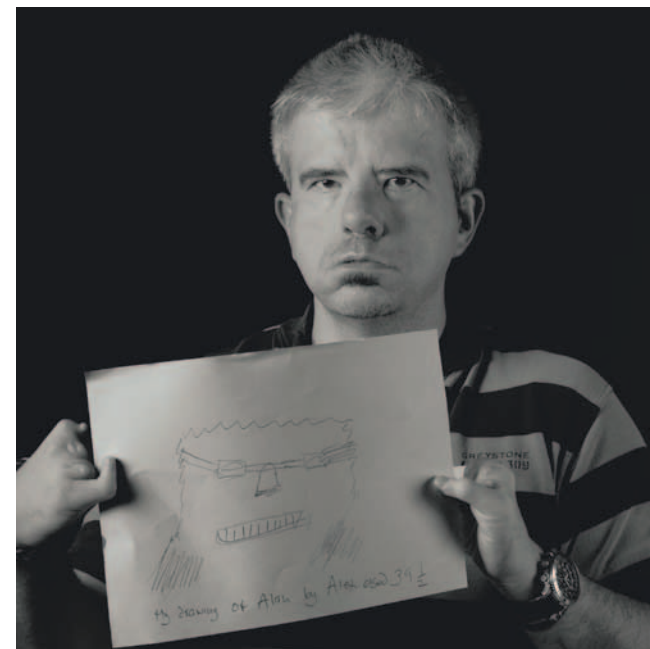
After the completion of a typically high-key commercial family shoot for a HNC project at City College Coventry, it was suggested that perhaps my next studio project could be a bit more contemporary - a set of images maybe with a little more of ‘me’ in it.

While trying to think of ideas for a project, I thought about the possibilities of studio work that in some way might quite literally have me in it, but I didn’t fancy taking self-portraits. I researched similar ideas by well-known photographers. Many have done actual self-portraits. There are even conceptual portrait photographers like Cindy Sherman who virtually make nothing but photographs of themselves. Sherman first became well-known with her late 1970s work *Untitled Film Stills* in which she poses dressed as movie actresses. She has been posing in her own photographs in different guises and settings ever since, though in a sense her images aren’t self-portraits, because although she is physically in them, she is always portraying someone else.

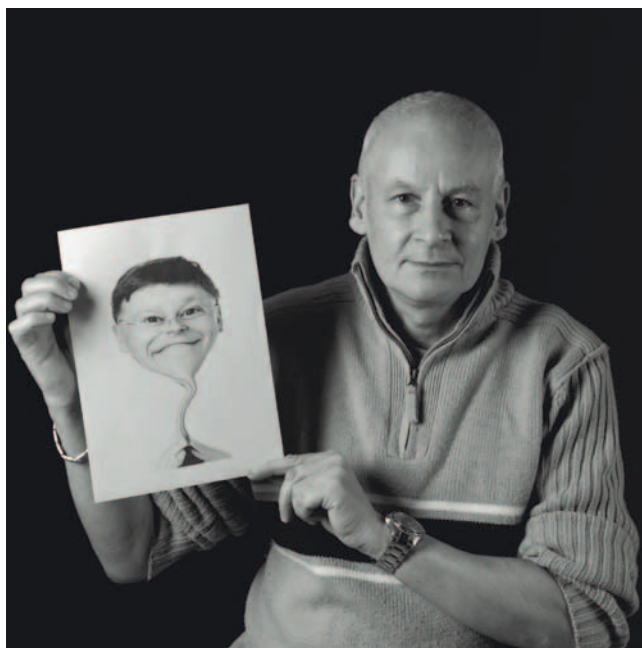
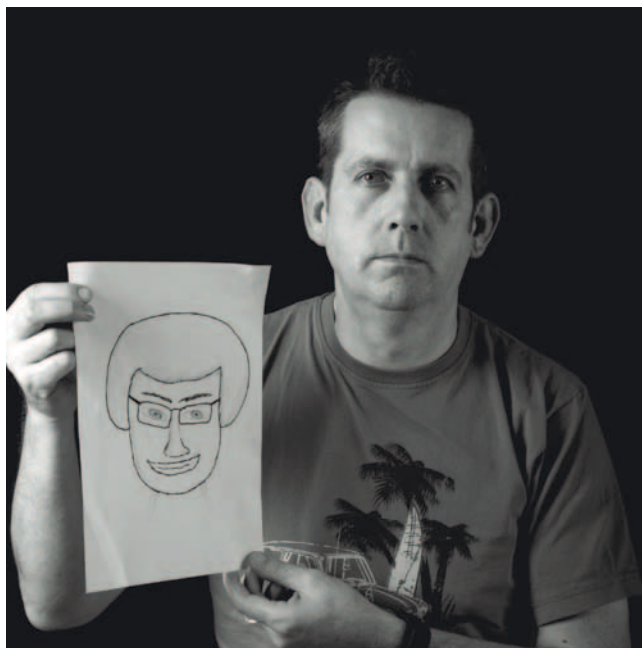
Further research and idea-searching led me to the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) website, where I discovered a Martine Franck photograph of Henri Cartier-Bresson, photographed from behind, looking into a mirror and drawing his own portrait. He is in the picture three times, or four times if he’d set the shot up and taken it himself. Ansel Adams is quoted as saying that there are at least two people in his photographs, himself and the viewer. Research led me to a lightbulb moment - ‘ping’ - I had an idea for my project.

I asked twelve photography class colleagues to draw pictures of me and bring them to the studio; they did not disappoint. I photographed their individual portrait photographs in a low-key setting, holding ‘their pictures of me’. It was a simple plan, but I think original. I can’t find anything similar by anyone else. It also fits my idea of my being in each image, without it being a self -portrait. The question is – “do the pictures actually say more about me than an actual self-portrait would”?









# Shifting Sands: photographs by Stephen Clarke

*John K Walton*

I first encountered Stephen Clarke's work five years ago, when I wrote an accompanying text for his *Caravans of Contentment* exhibition. I enjoyed his celebration of the caravan holidays of his childhood in the 1960s and 1970s; a widely shared but deeply unfashionable experience, a cheap, informal, accessible, sociable kind of holiday, easy to mock, but testimony to the strength and capacity for unassuming enjoyment of so many families and local communities at this time. His exhibition at Colwyn Bay, on the North Wales coast, a portrayal of changing perceptions and experiences of the nearby resort of Rhyl between the 1960s and the turn of the millennium, offers a sharper, more obviously critical, more unforgiving angle of vision on what has gone wrong across parts of the British holiday coastline during those years. His approach communicates a sense of loss and desolation, through the juxtaposition of 'before' and 'after'.

'Before' is focused on the 1960s, and sometimes earlier, because the presentation through colour postcards includes images from the 1950s, signposted most obviously by the vehicles visible in street scenes, a reminder that postcards sometimes had quite a long shelf life in the shops. The cards are adapted to display textual insertions from the Ward Lock guidebooks of the time, providing demographic detailed information and eulogistic descriptions of the locality for the literate and self-improving holidaymaker; and certain images are carried over from one illustration to the next, to provide linkages and an impression of random continuity. They also contain images from the address and message side of the card, superimposed on the picture. 'After' takes the

form of a separate series of black and white photographs, taken from the early 1980s onwards, presented in isolated clusters running below the unbroken run of much larger postcard representations. They show facades and frontages of buildings, alongside occasional beach scenes and isolated advertising figures of promotional fantasy, but with the colour and most of the life leached out. The contrasts are arresting and disturbing.

The postcard pictures are lush, soft and alluring in their bright colours. They depict scenes from the traditional family holiday which reached its apogee and the climax of its democratic popularity in the post-Second World War generation, adapting nineteenth-century motifs for the new working-class markets of holidays with pay, in the final flush of the long heyday of Victorian and post-Victorian industrial certainties. There are beach donkeys and an oyster bar, bandstands and cafés, the Pier and Gaiety Theatre, Botanical Gardens, Floral Hall (displaying Victorian decorative opulence), and a miniature steam railway, together with a bowling green and tennis courts, and a paddling pool enjoyed by children with shorts and skirts hitched up above the rippling water, all carryovers from that earlier era. Efforts to embrace post-war modernity slip into the pictures too, most obviously an early monorail, a land train, a shopping centre, and young women wearing bikinis. There are good luck motifs (a Scottie dog, a black cat, a horseshoe), as befitted the seaside's liminal associations with chance and fortune telling; and ladies in Welsh costume haunt the postcards, to conjure up the special spirit of this locality.



The original postcards were sent, every year, to the same family members in St Helens, on Merseyside, a particularly unlovely, hard-working, Victorian manufacturing town of coal mines, glassworks and breweries whose working class had come late to these seaside delights, by dint of a combination of hard work, industrial paternalism and the advent of the Welfare State. Clarke's father mass-produced the messages, setting up a kind of assembly-line at a café table, variations on a cheerful theme of good times and good wishes, with minimal content. They share the treasured banality associated with working through the year to exchange one routine for another, less taxing one, away from the strenuous workplace, returning to the same resort, doing the same things, as the weather varies and the children grow older year by year. The car and the caravan, as symbols of mobility and leisure, were new but quickly assimilated alongside the other little luxuries and shared enjoyments of working-class life.

Clarke's black and white photographs contrast starkly with this sense of comfort and security. They were taken in the summer, but the sunlight is harsh, the shadows sharply defined. Buildings are bleak, desolate and deserted, even where their ostensible purpose is gregarious pleasure and comfort. The old pleasure palaces, such as the Floral Hall, are visibly on their last legs, while once-alluring decoration is tawdry and fly-blown. The rectangular windows of chalets and shelters gaze blindly back at the camera, offering nothing. People are few and far between, even on the beach, and play is tentative and desultory.

This suggested contrast reflects widespread perceptions of the decline of the British seaside, along with the industries, which supplied its reliable contingents of annual holidaymakers since the 1970s, as old ways

of life fragmented and the lure of cheap flights to the Mediterranean prevailed. We know that this was not a universal story; that resorts are still capable of some regeneration. A historian – this historian – might argue that Clarke's postcards edge over into the disastrous 1980s, that the vantage points and perhaps the timing of the photographs provide a selective set of images. On the other hand, his images commemorate the lost world of 1960s Rhyl, and mourn the decline of so much of provincial holiday Britain.

*Shifting Sands* by Stephen Clarke showed at Oriel Colwyn, Colwyn Bay. 22 December 2012 – 15 March 2013. <http://orielcolwyn.org/shifting-sands/>

#### Further Reading:

1. Patrick Browne and John K. Walton (eds.), *Coastal Regeneration in English Resorts – 2010*, Lincoln: Coastal Communities Alliance, 2010.
2. Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, London: Reaktion, 2006.
3. John K Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
4. P. Williams, *The English Seaside*, Swindon: English Heritage, 2013.

(Ed. note – John K Walton is the IKERBASQUE Research Professor, Instituto Valentín de Foronda, University of the Basque Country UPV/ EHU, Vitoria – Gasteiz, Spain)

Postcard images are digital collages, originals mounted on aluminium. Black & white images are vintage gelatin prints.









# Embracing the ordinary

Willem Melching BMK\*

The title of Michael Foley's book *Embracing the Ordinary* struck me as an apt description of what I am trying to do with my photography. It might sound a bit exaggerated, but I attempt to show how we try to embellish the world, and how these attempts usually fail. Actions, well meant, often turn into their opposite. This unfortunate failure to brighten our world is the common theme in my pictures. Some think that my pictures are humorous, but that is at first glance. I think that they are rather sad, but despite that, it is encouraging that people - against all odds - try to brighten the world. And, despite everything, people are optimists. I think that is a comforting thought.

I was more or less content with my pictures, but after seeing several series by photographers such as Martin Parr and the Dutch photographer Paul Bogaers, I decided to arrange my pictures in pairs. Everything then fell into place. I had a sense of 'homecoming'. Combining pictures in pairs forces me to think harder about what I am trying to say. It is hoped that the images are enhanced, and viewers are more aware about what they actually see.

Combinations can mean harder work but I find that realising them can facilitate the making of sequences. The process gives me the freedom to combine pictures from different locations and different times, which I think loosens a more precise concept of producing sequences. I can combine a cactus in Tel Aviv with a shower on the beaches of Dieppe; or red and white chairs in Berlin with chairs in a Belgian road-side café. However, I am not always looking for any combinations when making pictures. I take photographs freely and combine them afterwards. The combinations come more naturally now that I work within a certain theme and style.

\* Bondsmeester Klasse (BMK) is the highest achievement that can be attained in the Dutch Fotobond.













# The State we're in

Nigel Tooby FRPS

They say there's a book in everyone and I'm no different. But the problem is that I'm not that good at writing and even if I were, I'm not so sure that my messages would suit text. Images carry so much more information and can make a point more powerfully.

I care passionately about society and what I see as its faults; the things that ought rightly to be improved. It's my worldview, of course, but then doesn't everyone have one of those?

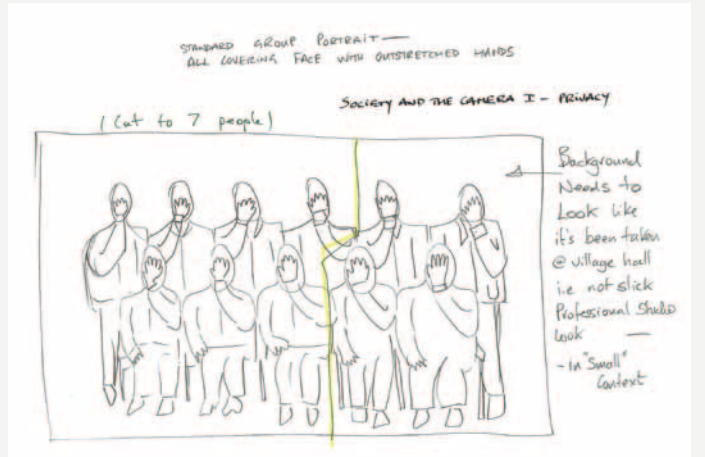
My Fellowship book *The Price of Money* was all about toxic business culture. It also touched on an issue that I wanted to explore in more detail. The image *Ballot Box* related to the political process and in particular the way powerful minorities can subvert it. That led me to examine a wider remit for my next project: another book, with the working title *The State we're in*. From that I think you can see where it's headed. It will centre on the state of Britain today, although some of the issues may apply internationally.



Most of my image ideas come from the news media. The way I prefer to work is to draw the images, committing them to paper as my aide-memoir. Despite my atrocious drawing abilities I can then come back at a later date safe in the knowledge that the idea is logged – otherwise I'd surely forget it altogether.

Here's one I jotted down earlier, and you can see by the resulting image that I've stripped it down because it was too ambitious.

Several things prompted this one. A man came up to me in the street and claimed that he had a right to privacy and could I please destroy the image I'd just taken of him. I had to explain kindly that he didn't enjoy a right of privacy in a public place. Then there was a newspaper image where someone on the edge of the picture was shielding his face with his hand. It occurred to me that this whole privacy thing had got out of hand. So to emphasise this (and also to lampoon it) I imagined an image where everyone agreed to have their picture taken – a formal group serves the purpose – but then they would all shield their faces from the camera, which juxtaposes the formality and acceptance of the occasion with their entrenched assumption of privacy at all times.





Of course it's not always easy to come up with ideas in the first place. I was struck by a newspaper article describing a very sad, fatal accident (a drowning I seem to recall) where only one person was involved; not like a group thing where there were several potential casualties – it was only ever one person. The emergency services sent two ambulances, a paramedic fast response car and two (yes, TWO) air ambulances. I realise that it's nice to know that everything that could be done was done, but what struck me about this was the monumental waste, at a time when people are suffering needlessly because of the health service postcode lottery and the NHS are howling about lack of funds. I mean, just what use were TWO air ambulances at heaven knows how many thousands of pounds per incident attended or TWO ambulances for ONE person? I'm still trying to create an image for that one but it's difficult. I may never succeed.

The next one is a little different. I read an article which was bemoaning the fact that children are suffering from a lack of male role models and male interaction, which is apparently damaging their normal development – particularly in single mother families. This is due to men increasingly avoiding all contact with children for fear of being labelled paedophiles. Apparently, primary schools across the country are bereft of male teachers, and this because of the hysteria attached to the whole subject. Society's view of the problem is out of all proportion to its actual size and that is ultimately leading to far more damaged children, although damaged in more subtle ways.



I currently have about thirteen images sketched and half that number shot. The first two were inspired by press phone tapping activities and manipulation of the political system - the way *The Sun* switched allegiance from Major to Blair in 1997 and then back again in 2010, both times arguably swinging the tide of public opinion and thus the election result.





The first new image that I made for *The State we're in* was actually a triptych called *UK Democracy*. It appears to me that whichever way people vote at the general election, very little of any substance actually changes. There are tweaks but never any substantial movement on things that really matter. Think Europe, immigration, roads, schools, housing, law & order, government waste and red tape - all substantially untouched through the years. The 1980s TV sitcom *Yes Minister* was famously close to the truth insofar as unelected civil servants probably have a vested interest in the status quo and can effectively 'dead-hand' any efforts to move too far away from it.

To capture this, I thought of paint. When children mix paint to create new colours and add in too many new ones, the whole lot always ends up as a muddy brown mess. I took the three colours of the three main political parties and mixed them. The predictable result was brown. So, starting off with the first part of the triptych, *Your Choice at the Ballot Box*, we have the three colours, but then the muddy hand of the unelected civil servants begins to smear and mix the colours together. The second part, *The Hand of the Unelected*, leads to the three identical brown hands in part three, *Your Actual Choice at the Ballot Box*. Many people have said to me "It doesn't matter who you vote for, nothing will ever change; they are all just the same." In a sense it seems that they are mostly right, which is ultimately a bad omen for democracy. If enough people come to realise that they can never bring about any meaningful change through the ballot box, then exactly what other options does that leave them?



The Olympic legacy issue really tickled me in a sad sort of way, all that talk by politicians about promoting sport strongly on the back of the Olympics while the grand sale of school sports fields continues. Priceless.



So far the book is work-in-progress. I hope that it will have a more general appeal than the toxic business culture illustrated in my Fellowship book *The Price of Money*. It will certainly have more explanatory text and maybe some press cuttings. I'm not sure yet - the design is still gestating in my creative bottom drawer along with the need for another 27 images.....

An exhibition based on the book *the price of money* will be shown at the Ropewalk Gallery, Barton-on-Humber. Date to be announced. [www.the-ropewalk.co.uk](http://www.the-ropewalk.co.uk)



# Helen Brown

*Robert Brown*

Helen Brown was an experimenter and innovator in producing photographic images. She was an active member, sometimes chair, of the Hertfordshire Foto Forum and enthusiastically exhibited at local venues in Hertfordshire. Illustrated here you will find a selection of Helen's work taken over the years. All of the images shown here have previously been publicly exhibited.

A largely self-taught photographer she loved to research and resurrect many older techniques and then to experiment. A particular interest was in the techniques of toning. There was hardly any genre that Helen did not manage to cover successfully, and her main pleasure was the doing of it, enjoying the act of using the camera, printing, thinking about the paper she would use to best express what was wanted from the image.

Her work was primarily for her own pleasure and for the pleasure of a group of friends. She did not publish commercially but did create individual hand-crafted books that combined her photography with another interest, that of book binding. This interest extended to the restoration of period photograph albums to bring them back to life. She also created unique, beautifully bound, folders and boxes to display her photographic images, ideas that were well-thought out and highly imaginative.

Helen did not generally work in colour but a late interest was in botanical studies and the hand colouring of extremely soft mono images of native plants. Her knowledge of the subject, the arrangement of the plants and their grace, along with many hours of patient work all contributed to the elegance of the image. Helen died in 2011 but her exquisite work continues to be treasured.

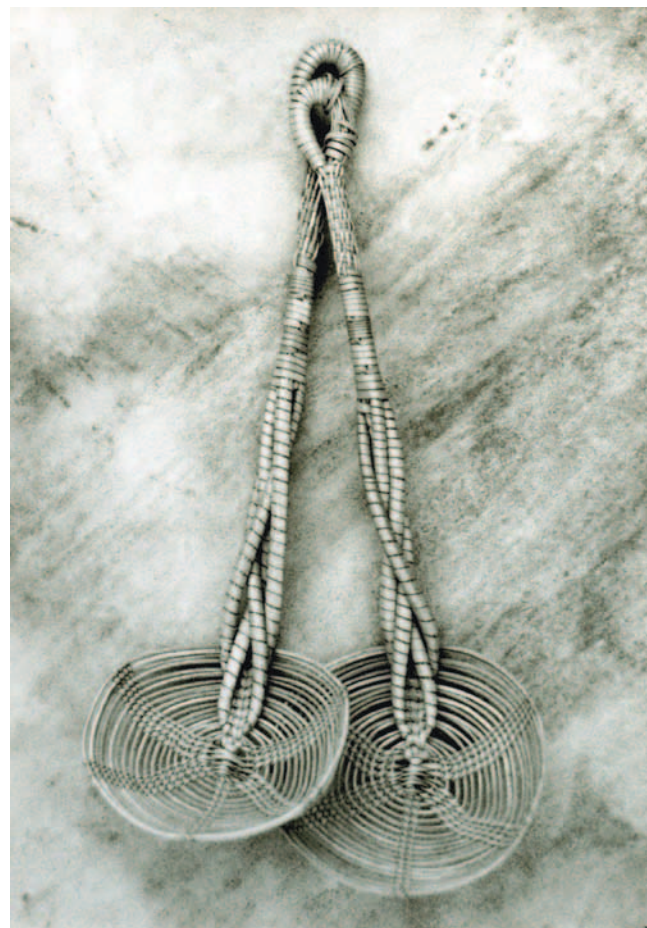
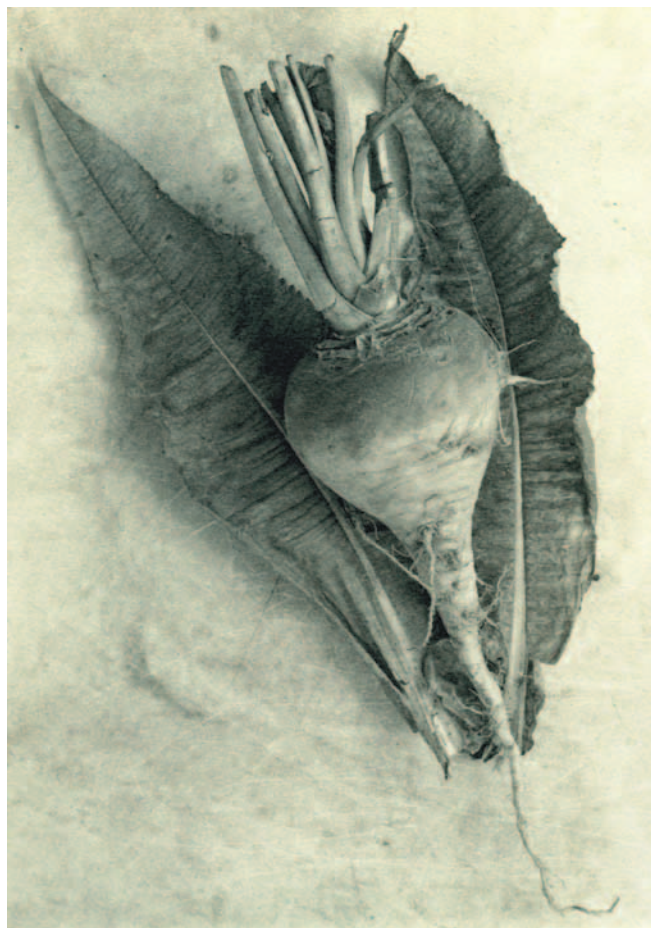
(Ed. note: Helen Brown's work will be exhibited with other Contemporary Group members. See the Events page for information.)













# A Researcher's Life

*Rod Fry ARPS in conversation with Val Williams*

The importance of Val Williams to British Photography can never be under-estimated. This first became apparent to me when I came across her book, *Martin Parr* <sup>(1)</sup>, and later with *Anna Fox: Photographs 1983-2007* <sup>(2)</sup>. I was impressed with Williams' clear and concise style of writing, which greatly added to the work of these photographers by giving us a greater understanding of their work.

Her collaboration with Susan Bright in the groundbreaking *How We Are Photographing Britain* <sup>(3)</sup> exhibition at Tate Britain (2007) confirmed what a major impact Val Williams has had on the visual landscape of our country, helping photography to become a widely-accepted art form.

Val Williams is Professor of History and Culture of Photography at the University of the Arts, and Director of its Photography and Archive Research Centre (PARC), located at the London College of Communication, (LCC). She was awarded the RPS Dudley Johnson Medal for curation in 2005. Williams has just completed the mammoth task of archiving her work to the new Library of Birmingham.

**RF. What made you decide that you wanted to become a photographic academic researcher?**

**VW.** This began when I worked with British photographers at Impressions Gallery, York, in the 1970s. I believed that there was a rich history of photography in Britain and that many major figures were being overlooked. I worked with the photographs of Angus McBean, Herbert Ponting, John Havinden and Peter Rose Pulham at Impressions;

and later, when I became an independent curator with the archives of British women's photographs, which was a hugely under-researched area. This was when I really learned how to research - following leads, talking to archivists and curators, getting to know the archives of many different kinds of institutions such as the Fawcett Library and the Museum of Labour History.

**RF. Who were your early influences that inspired you to take this particular career path?**

**VW.** There weren't many influences at that time in photography, but I used Helmut Gernsheim's *The History of Photography* <sup>(4)</sup> to give me clues about who to look for and where to look. I was interested in the ways that photography is very clear direct evidence of historical events, but there wasn't any one person or institution I would pick out. In the 1980s I went on a study visit to the Center for Creative Photography and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Arizona where I learned a great deal.

I was very impressed by David Mellor and Ian Jeffrey's exhibition *The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950* in the mid-1970s, and by the work that Gail Buckland did with Cecil Beaton on the book *The Magic Image: The Genius of Photography* <sup>(5)</sup>, also, Nancy Hall Duncan's work on fashion photography. I was very interested in how exhibitions are presented as a public spectacle. When I began to travel abroad in the late 1980s, I was particularly interested in the way that Dutch, Swiss and French curators presented work,

and of course was very impressed by US exhibition design. I was also very interested in photo festivals - Fotofeis in Scotland was a really good event, bringing European photographers/artists like Joachim Schmid to the UK. I worked with the Netherlands Fotomuseum in the early 1990s, and admired its open and innovative approach to exhibition making. When I worked in Sweden in the late 1990s, I was impressed by the Nordic belief in culture, and that it was funded so well and so intelligently by the State, while we in the UK were spending so much time chasing grants and sponsors.

**RF. Some photographic books are so heavy going you need to sit with a dictionary to understand them and often end up knowing less about the photographer after wading through the text! Was it a conscious decision to adopt the style of writing you use?**

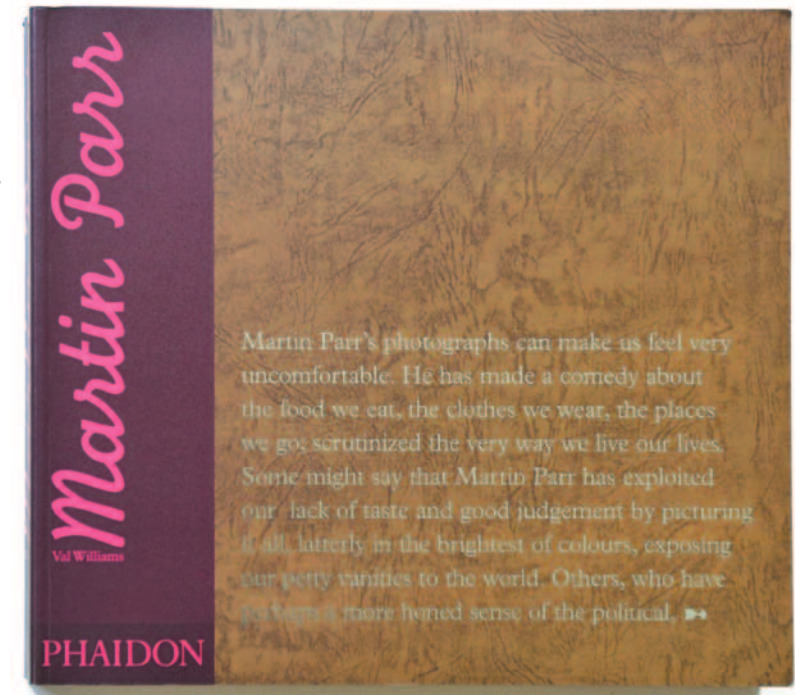
**VW.** I studied English and American literature at university, and that introduced me to a range of literary writing styles. I also liked and read much journalistic writing and later did quite a lot of journalism myself, and this taught me about clarity and never to patronise the audience. I've also worked with some really good text editors, who made sure that

I didn't ramble or say things in a convoluted way. I have always been committed to writing that is clear and understandable, but which still expresses arguments and is based on extensive research. Even for the journalism I did, including the series of obituaries I wrote in the 1990s for *The Independent*, I did extensive background research.

**RF. I really admired the How we are photographing Britain exhibition at Tate Britain. Were you aware that yours was the first major photographic exhibition to be held at Tate Britain, and did that put extra pressure on you?**

**VW.** Yes, we were aware of that, and of course there were some pressures because there are so many knowledgeable people in the UK who are passionate about photography. Most colleagues and institutions within photography were incredibly supportive, especially the V&A and National Media Museum. The exhibition

was curated in a very short time for a show of its size, so it was hard work to get it finished in time. But other than this, I don't think we felt that we had to try to encompass everything happening in photography since its early years. We very much thought of it as our show, which we had



*Martin Parr*, Phaidon Press, London, 2002



been entrusted to do. Susan and I worked well together and it was an amazing experience for both of us.

We were consulted on everything by Tate, and we had a very good exhibition designer (Oliver Salway) who made enormous efforts to do everything in the way that we wanted, and also devised the presentation and lighting that we were very happy with.

**RF. If a curator of a major museum asked for your help on selecting twentieth-century UK photographic work to collect, whose work would you recommend and why?**

**VW.** There are so many interesting and skilled photographers working now, it would be very difficult to name anyone in particular. I enjoyed working with Stuart Griffiths on his *Closer* project, and there are some photographers working around ideas of memory and the domestic interior whose work I find very intriguing. There is very good work being made in the Nordic countries and Eastern Europe which I'm always keen to explore.

**RF. I have really enjoyed the themed exhibitions, *How we are photographing Britain; Street and Studio; Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera*. Do you think these engage more with the visitor rather than the retrospective exhibitions of one photographer's work?**

**VW.** I think it depends entirely on how the exhibition is conceived. I saw a Robert Frank retrospective in Switzerland in the 1990s, which was one of the best photo shows I've ever seen. I've seen group/themed shows that don't work at all. It all depends on the intelligence of the curator and the skills of the people in the wider exhibition team, as well as the willingness on the part of the photographers to work with the exhibition team and listen to their arguments.



*How We Are Photographing Britain*, Tate Publishing, 2007

**RF. In 1946 Dr H Baines, then president of the RPS, said at the opening of the first post-war photographic exhibition, “In one respect photography in this country has lagged seriously behind that in continental countries and the USA where it is recognised as a subject for tuition at university level. This is bound to have an adverse effect on its application and practice.” Is this statement a good jumping off point for a history of British post-war contemporary photography to be written?**

**VW.** I think it is being written continuously, in the form of shows as well as in texts. Grayson Perry's selection from

the Arts Council Collection, which was shown at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, a few years ago, gave a whole new story, and I have noticed that there are quite a few smaller shows coming up which look at British photography in

the 1970s. I think that individual projects succeed much better than overarching 'histories'. Martin Harrison's book *Appearances: Fashion Photography since 1945*<sup>(6)</sup> is an example of this and it remains one of my favourite books about photography. Also, PhD study is developing rapidly in photography. Noni Stacey at LCC is researching *Camerawork* and other groups from the 1970s. Brigitte Lardinois, also at LCC, is excavating the work of the *Signals Festival of Women's Photography* from the 1980s. These in-depth explorations will probably form the basis of the way we think about photo history. But there won't be one overarching view as there perhaps was in the 1970s.

**RF. In conclusion, I asked her how our Contemporary Photography Group, a special interest group within the RPS, can appeal to a wider and younger audience?**

**VW.** That's a big question. Perhaps via web and social media. Most interactions are done through Facebook and Twitter, so perhaps a bigger presence there would help. Perhaps also some portfolio viewing sessions with high profile reviewers, held across the UK. This is what photographers seem to need most of all.

Many thanks to Val Williams. We are extremely fortunate and very grateful that she took time out of her hectic schedule to share her thoughts and give us an insight into her work.

### Publications

1. Val Williams, *Martin Parr*, Phaidon Press, 2002.
2. Val Williams, *Anna Fox: Photographs 1983-2007*, Photoworks, 2007.
3. Val Williams, *How We Are Photographing Britain*, Tate Publishing, 2007.
4. Helmut Gernsheim, *The History of Photography*, Oxford University Press, 1955.
5. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image: The Genius of Photography*, Pavilion Books, 1989.
6. Martin Harrison, *Appearances: Fashion Photography since 1945*, Jonathan Cape, 1991.



# Serendipitous Encounters

*Krystyna Szulecka ARPS*

This series of photographs was taken when I was periodically looking after my ageing father. From being a self-reliant, capable and generous person who was very close to me, he became dependent on the care of others, withdrawn and distant. I experienced his loneliness and isolation even when surrounded by those who were once close to him.

In turn, I witnessed this isolation and loneliness everywhere I went - on park benches when lovers had a misunderstanding; in car parks when family members went their different ways after a social event. Again, I saw this during parties when people passed each other without engaging; in shopping centres and markets where purchases were not shared experiences but isolated activities.

These photographs were taken in various locations throughout Europe during a year.







## GROUP EVENTS

- 9 September Richard Sadler FRPS, former Group chair, will talk on his journey with photography. Dynevor Centre for Art, Design and Media, Swansea. SA1 3EU. Contact Susanne Durie, sdurie1@yahoo.co.uk
- 14 September Contemporary North East meeting, Strensall Village Hall at 2 pm. Members to bring photographs expressing views of the NHS on its 65th anniversary for possible book and/or exhibition. Contact Nigel Tooby, nigel@mogulimage.co.uk or tel 01924 274100.
- 16 September Contemporary North West meeting. Days Inn, Charnock Richard Services, M6 between J27 and 28. Contact Ian Maxwell mail@ihmaxwell.com or tel 01524 770278
- 21 September *Past, Present and Future*, Current trends in contemporary photography. Main speakers David Bruce FRPS, Olivio Argenti FRPS, Ray Spence FRPS. Neues Museum Biel, Switzerland. Contact Richard Tucker, tucker42@bluewin.ch
- 26 September to 6 October Annual Exhibition Herts Foto Forum, St Albans Museum, Hatfield Road, St Albans AL1 3RR. Telephone 01727 819340. A retrospective of Helen Brown will be shown, along with CG members Avril R. Harris ARPS, Robert Farrer ARPS, Leonard Salem FRPS, George Stergios LRPS, Kate Wentworth LRPS, Mike Wilkinson LRPS, Duncan Unsworth and Gus Wylie.
- 12-13 October Contemporary Group weekend event. 'A Wider View', Reading College. Kings Road, Reading. Details and booking form available on RPS website. [www.rps.org/group/Contemporary](http://www.rps.org/group/Contemporary). Speakers are Dana Popa, Daniel Meadows HonFRPS, Jem Southam HonFRPS, Marketa Luskacova, Natasha Caruana and Francis Hodgson. Two-hour slot available for attendees to display work. Photographic book sales table by Claire de Rouen Books. Price £70 group members, £85 all others, £25 deposit to book a place. Contact [avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk)
- 20 October Contemporary South West meeting at The Carnon Inn, Carnon Downs, nr Truro, Cornwall. Starting at 10.30am. Contact Rod Fry [rod@rodry.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:rod@rodry.eclipse.co.uk) or 01803 844721 for details.
- 16 November Group AGM and attendee showing of prints. 2pm, The Cave, Linear House, Peyton Place, Greenwich, London SE10 8RS (5 mins from Greenwich main line and DLR station). Contact [avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk)
- Advance information A photobook exhibition is being organised, which will be open to all members of the RPS, with a closing date of 1 September 2014. More details available by Autumn 2013.

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© Marketa Luskacova, *Girls in the playground, Holland Park School, 1988*. Marketa is one of our six speakers at *A Wider View*, 12-13 October 2013 in Reading College.