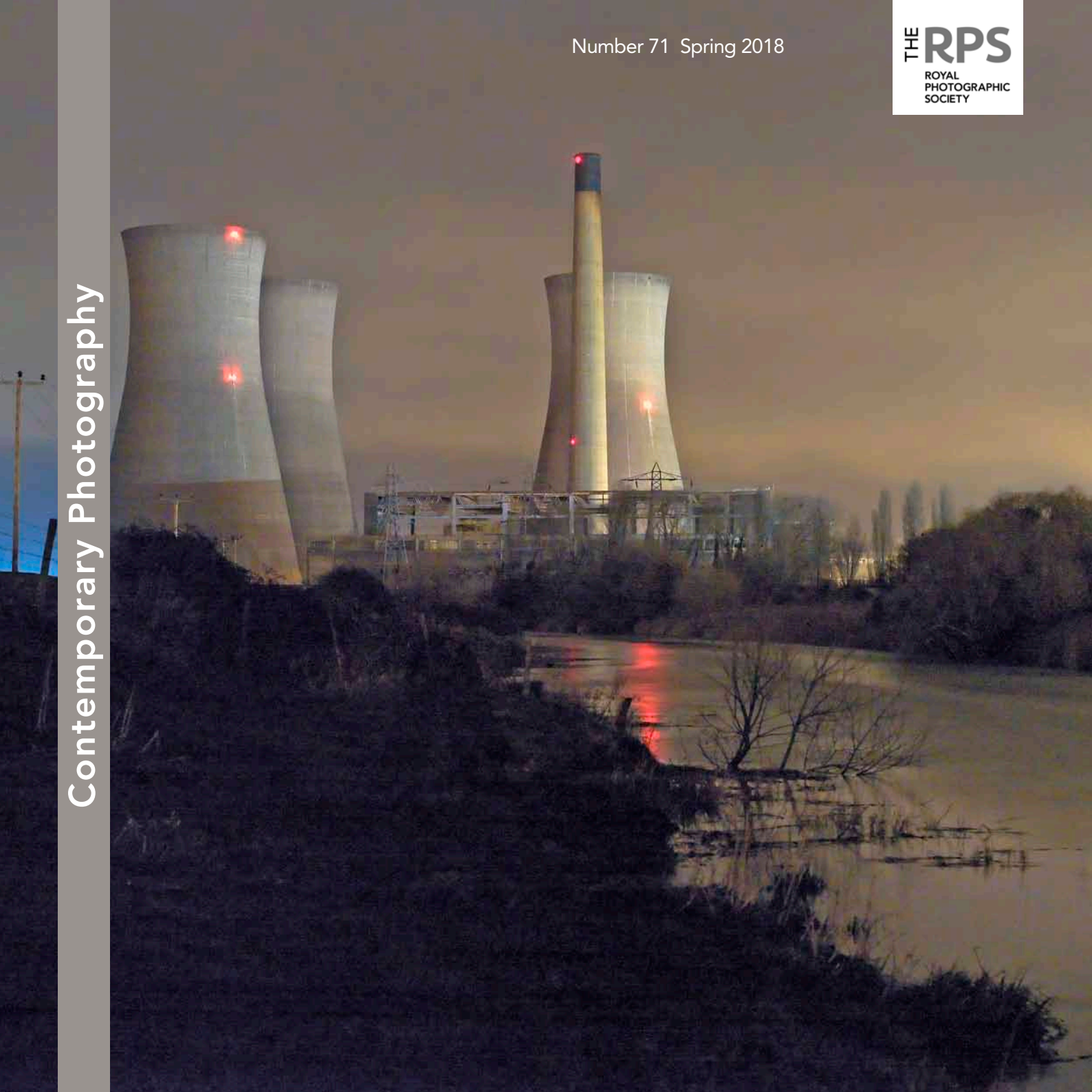


Number 71 Spring 2018

THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY

Contemporary Photography



Editorial

How would you describe a culture? How would you convey the full complexity that is the product of history, geography, human ideas and the rest of the natural world? The original *Civilisation* television series tried just that in the 1960s, and succeeded in describing Kenneth Clark's (and often our own) view of western art. John Berger might have presented *Civilisation*, but instead presented *Ways of Seeing* a few years later. And it is the approach he took then, and his shadow, that lie behind the new *Civilisations* series, despite the name. He declared that the relationship between the viewer and the viewed is more important than the intrinsic qualities of what is viewed. So Mary Beard asks why people represented the human form as they did in different times and places, and Simon Schama explains how landscape painting can be used to project authority, recall paradise lost and (to bring us back to photography with Ansel Adams) as an argument for conservation.

Looking at the work in this edition of *Contemporary Photography*, I am surprised how much communication there is between viewer and viewed. Carolyn Mendelsohn's portraits are beautifully crafted, but these girls talk to us as we look back. The monks of St Adelbert's Abbey pursue their ancient, calm and rhythmic life, apparently ignoring us, the viewers: but they invited Armando Jongejan to photograph them – they know we're watching! The occasionally disturbing portraits by Dima Komarov and Armen Parsadanov say one thing to me in leafy Cambridge, but I wonder how they are seen by the subjects. David George's landscapes hint at the idealised beauty of Constable, while not allowing us to forget the contemporary context from where they come. The experience of viewing Clifford Morris's quietly sad scenes would be different when seen now (at their second, long delayed exhibition) compared to when first shown in 2002. How do you respond to the work shown here?

-oOo-

We have made a small change to our layout in this edition. Instead of the *View from the Chair* at the beginning, we have a *View from*..... near the end. This lets us get a perspective from different parts of the group, both regional and from different activities. This time, Tom Owens gives us the *View from the East*. Tell me what you think about the change; suggestions for future *Views from*..... would be welcome.

Paul Ashley, Editor

Cover: © photo by David George, from the series *The Broken Pastoral*
Back cover: © photo by Armen Parsanadov from the exhibition *Post Soviet Visions*
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Contemporary
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Deadline for the Summer 2018 issue is 1 June 2018.

Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought and encourages interpretation; photographs 'about' rather than 'of'.

Monks' Life

Armando Jongejan FRPS

I first got acquainted with Abbot Gerard Mathijssen of St Adelbert's Abbey (Egmond-Binnen, the Netherlands) in 1995 when I worked on a series for the photo book *Villagers of Egmond*. I made a number of photos of brothers of the abbey during an open air service in Adelbertus Field, a beautiful, quiet place against the dune edge. I returned to the brothers in the abbey more than twenty-five times between 2002 and 2004. Everything was recorded with my analogue camera: prayer services, activities in and around the abbey, and the leisure time. It was peaceful, concentrated working. The end result was brought together in the 2004 photo book *A Quest (Een Zoektocht)*.

In 2016 Brother Gerard invited me back to record the changes within the walls of the abbey. He had written in his foreword to *A Quest*: "Nobody knows whether we are dealing with a final phase or with a new beginning." The incentive to create a new body of work about St Adelbert Abbey was simple and yet also unexpected - the fifteen hundred photo books from *A Quest* had sold out. Additionally, several new brothers had entered the abbey; as Br Gerard emailed me: "The abbey is doing well. Actually above expectations! The house is too small for the aspirants! Who would have thought that?"

On 26th June 2016 at 7 o'clock in the morning I started again with the new photo series on the Adelbertus Field. It was a beautiful day, the rising sun shone on the altar. It was still quiet. A limited number of visitors had come to this service. At the second shift at ten o'clock it was busy. Since then I have worked with my camera in and around the abbey about fifty times: in the greenhouse where Br Adelbert grows vegetables for meals, watching Br Beda painting beautiful icons, in the sacristy with Br Columba, and so on.

I sometimes heard during a visit that I had missed an "Armando moment"! My presence with the camera was becoming a matter of course for the brothers. There have been many beautiful and special moments, such as the festivities on the occasion of the abbot's 80th birthday. Normally only monks would be present, but I had become a familiar face in the abbey - as was also the case during the feast of the 60-year-old profession of Br Frans Melkert. The novices had prepared several gigs and it was clear to see that everyone was having a lot of fun. On this occasion the brothers were permitted to partake of a Westvleteren Twelve, Eight or Blond (an exclusive Belgium beer), a glass of wine, apple juice or homemade liqueur.

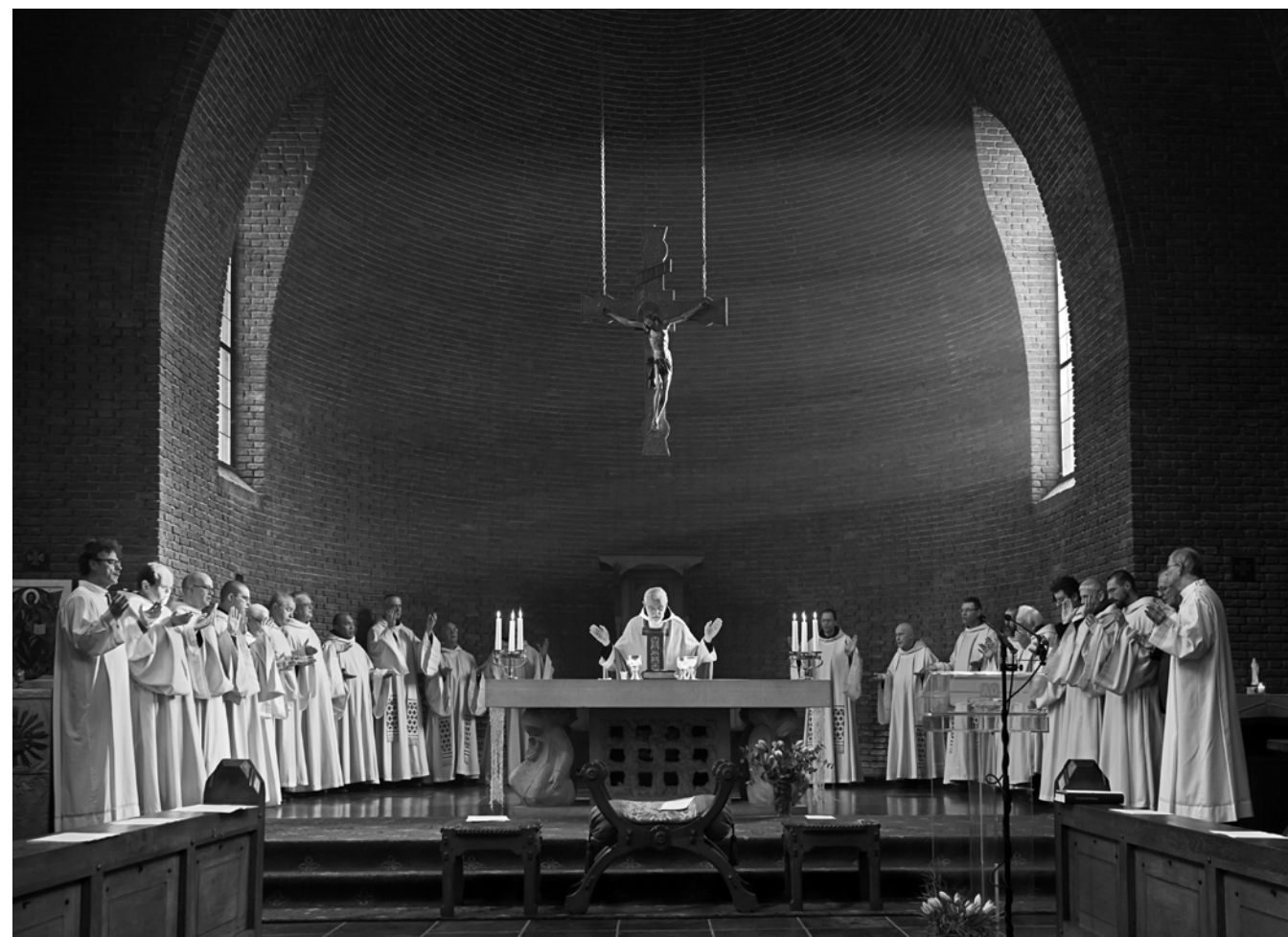
A lot has changed over the past twenty years. The smartphone has become commonplace in the abbey, and Br Gerard regularly puts photos of daily life on his Facebook page. There are new faces, with new brothers becoming novices or accepting their perpetual vows. The perpetual

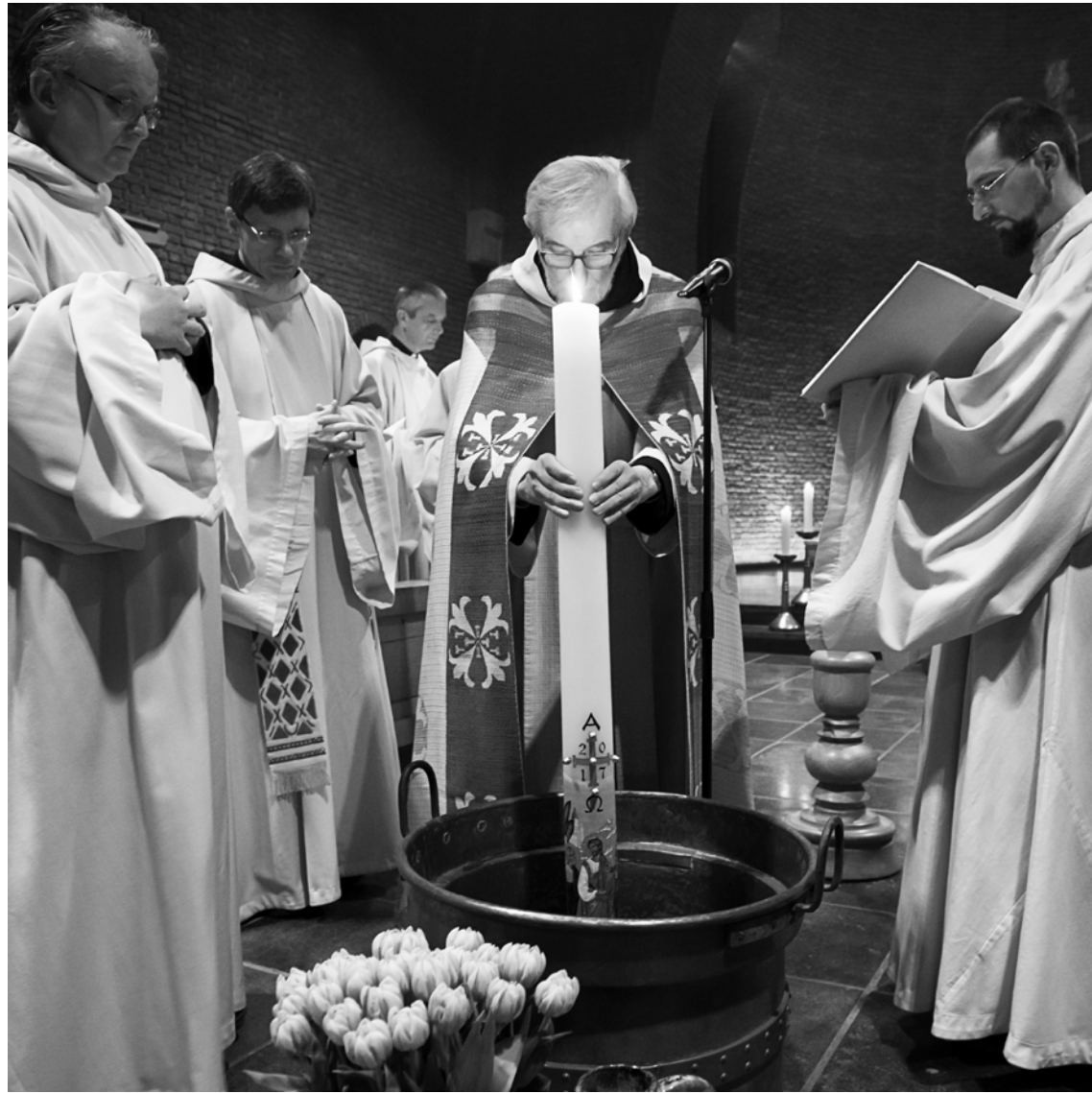
vows of Br Adelbert and Br Columba in the autumn of 2017 made it clear that the community of St Adelbert Abbey will continue with new faces - a development that was not expected back in 2004.

However, much has remained the same. Br Ole is still waiting six times a day in the Claustrum near the wall clock and the rope of the church bell. Originally from Norway, he is sometimes in his place twenty minutes before the ringing of the bell. He keeps an eye on the time and the clock is accurate to the minute. His bells bring the other brothers from the abbey to the church choir.

This second book contains a selection from two years of photography of the daily life of the monks of St Adelbert Abbey - a spiritual life focused on prayer and mutual service: monks' life.

Note. Armando's new photobook will be available from 2nd June 2018. For more information contact armandojongejan@hotmail.com.









Being Inbetween

Carolyn Mendelsohn

Being Inbetween is a continually evolving series of photographic portraits of girls aged between ten and twelve, exploring the complex transition between childhood and young adulthood. The work arises from my own memories of being this age and the desire to give voice and faces to the young women who inevitably must pass through these mysterious hinterlands on their journey towards adulthood.

Girls between ten and twelve are often marketed to as 'tweens' and seen as a group. They become invisible as individuals. At this age, girls are bombarded with advertising and marketing, and it is vital that this marketing doesn't come to define who they are, or who they are to become. I have heard some parents describing the age group as "ungainly", "awkward", "growing into their faces" and into the young women they are yet to become. They are at a vulnerable stage and often hidden within the cocoon of familial protection until they emerge as young women.

When I was about eleven I recall spending a silly amount of hours in my room deciding whether to put on a pair of shorts because it was a hot day; that feeling of self-consciousness that suddenly descended from no-where. I remember thinking deeply about the world I lived in. These hopes and fears shaped the adult I was to become. At that age I had left young childhood behind and I was on the cusp of adolescence, where little comments and criticisms had a huge impact on my malleable brain. This is my starting point to the series – an exploration, a way of giving a voice to the girl I was and the girls who are; a way to explore the hidden complexity, duality and contradictions that mark this phase of life.

The majority of girls in this series were previously unknown to me, and come from diverse range of backgrounds. I invite them to come to the sitting in the outfit of their choice. It is important that they are comfortable and very much themselves during the process. After the photograph is taken, I interview them with the same set of questions, and record the answers. These are the *Inbetween* girls; amazing, fearless, fearful, brave, funny, and smart individuals, getting ready to take on the world.

See: www.carolyn-mendelsohn.format.com

Alice aged 10

I used to aspire to be a teacher, but now want to be a vet. I dislike it when people are mean to other people, because it is really hard to go through.



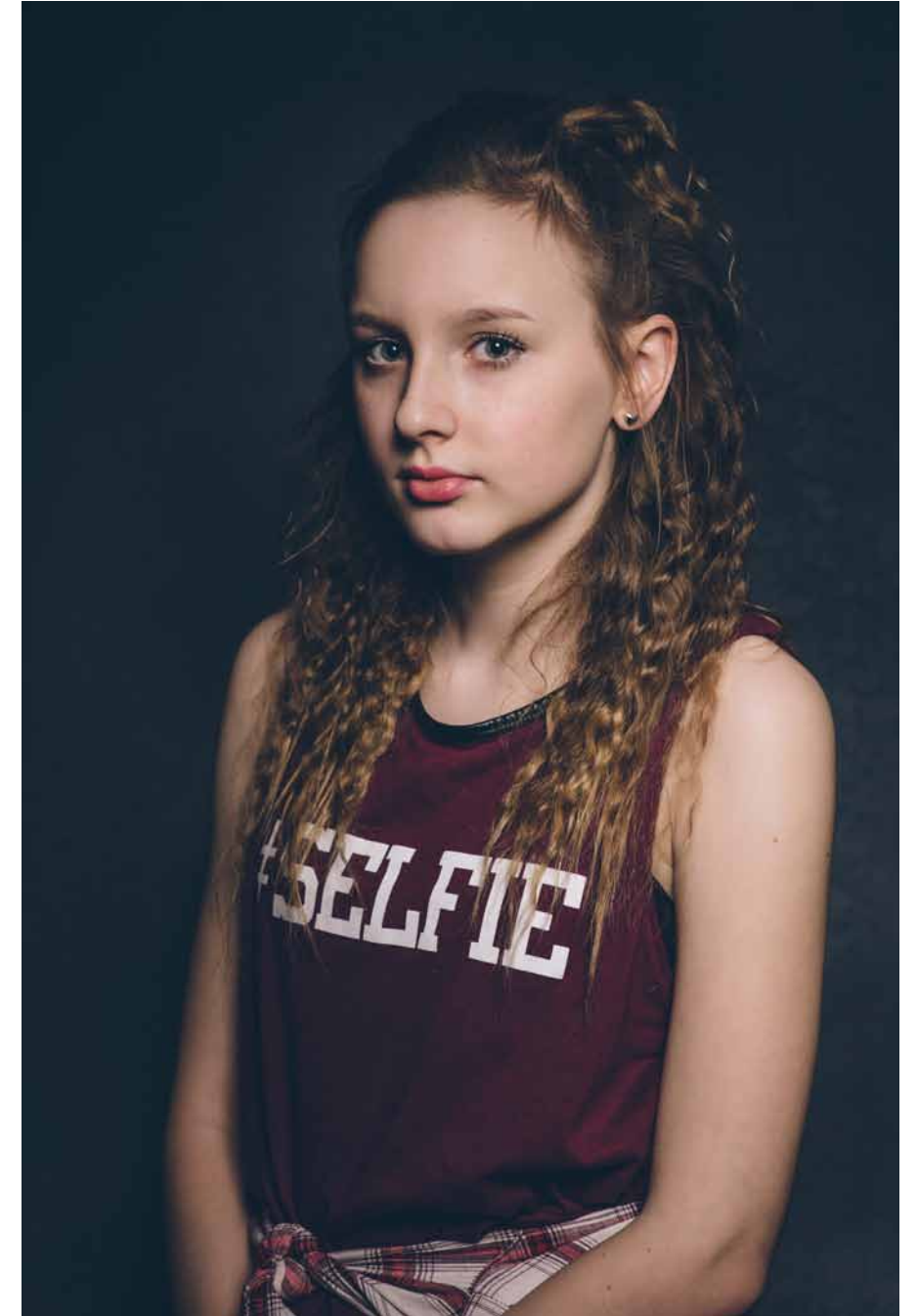
Aaisha aged 12

My ambition is to travel around the world and meet loads of new people from all different countries and cultures. I dream that no-one is homeless and everyone has a special place to go to.



Caitlin aged 12

I love my family and I hate it when people are mean to each other.



Heavens aged 10

*I love being adventurous,
creative and drawing. I
hate being bossed around.
I would really love to
be a doctor and I wish
nobody died in the world.*



Mabel aged 11

*I fear that one day we
will all be the same; that
people will get an idea
of how we should live
and how we should act,
and how we should look
like, and everyone will
be afraid to be different.*



Heather aged 11

My wish would be that I can fly up in the sky; I would see tall buildings, grass, trees and people playing. I hope for the future to be lovely and kind all the time.



Nishat aged 12

I love writing fairy stories and adventure stories; like going to magical islands where I spend all my time. I wish to be a social worker or work in a hospital because I love to help people.



Post-Soviet Visions

Anastasiia Fedorova

Every writer is sometimes tempted by the promises of the collective “we”. Collective identity has the power to make experiences more meaningful. It provides a feeling of belonging which we all subconsciously strive for. Everyone has several different identities which allow them to slip into a state of heightened collective awareness — be that related to gender, age, race, profession, location or background.

I have a few, but there is one collective “we” which turns up in my writing particularly often — the one which connects me with my peers in large cities across eastern Europe; the generation born between the mid-80s and 90s somewhere in the grand post-communist world. Maybe I relate to their cultural sensibility and vision, or perhaps the act of witnessing historical transition is a bonding experience. Maybe, like all young people, I’m under the illusion that everything which has happened to me has significance as part of a bigger picture.

Shared memory is a curious thing, because it truly comes to power in the smallest details. I was recently looking through a British friend’s family photo album and couldn’t take my eyes off the furniture, clothes, supermarket bags and kitchenware — all the alien bits of material culture which looked to me as if it had come straight from a film set.

All of the private domestic photos I’ve been exposed to come from the post-Soviet space. Due to the standardisation of products and the scarcity of consumer goods, most of my peers grew up in the same settings: flower carpets, crystal glassware gathering dust in cabinets, large, identical schools in vast estates.

Thinking that someone has exactly the same memories as you evokes both humility and panic. We (here it goes)

mostly come from families of engineers, scientists or workers, people whose life stories are akin to distant fairy tales from an empire which aspired to conquer space and turn rivers against themselves. And although we belong to a long line of historical amnesiacs, somehow in the contemporary global context it doesn’t feel right to just dismiss this background simply as a past left to rest. The presence of a collective “we” means there is still something we share. We may share language and memory — often not out of choice — but the main question which subconsciously haunts my generation is about something larger. Is there anything we share which lies in the future, not the past?

To start with, we look for the key in our surroundings, in the architecture of cities whose memories stretch back far further than our own. In the course of our lives, we walk miles through vast monumental spaces and imposing tower block estates, resting in the shadows of curved modernist buildings and megalomaniac monuments. The aesthetic of these locations has been widely commodified and exoticised, but they’re much more than a backdrop — they shape the way we think, feel, breathe and remember. The study of unique architectural settings is a central preoccupation for a new generation of eastern Europe photographers. The visual narrative they construct goes much further than just documentation. It’s not about capturing the existing space, but about contributing to the ever shifting character of the environment.

The dimension of space, however, is not the only theme which this new generation of image-makers explore in their work. Time is another preoccupation — and the future much more so than the past. Portraiture

serves as a vector into unfolding global history and the rise of new national identities. Born in 1997, Russian photographer Dima Komarov documents the youthful ecstasy and confusion of his peers and friends in St Petersburg, their restless searching and fooling around. Through his empathetic gaze, their values of freedom and inclusivity become apparent. Armen Parsadanov (born 1997) uses his *Nutshell* series to paint a portrait of Kiev’s contemporary creative scene, cutting through the myths and misconceptions of the city created by the media after the 2014 revolution.



A transition to global modernity is a challenge, not only economically and socially but also culturally. Even the language we use to discuss history is tainted by the heritage of imperialism. Former East, New East, Former West, Post-Soviet — none of these terms offer a liberation from the Cold War narrative. In recent years, the rise of the so-called post-Soviet aesthetic has turned a historical term into a trendy buzz word. In fashion, the height of its commodification was embodied in a red Vetements hoodie emblazoned with a hammer and sickle, as worn by Kim Kardashian. It isn’t unusual for capitalism to break history down into easily-marketable symbols, but what



this process often leaves behind is the people who had to live through real traumatic events.

Since 1989, eastern Europe has continuously played the role of the inner exotic other, familiar enough to be recognisable and strange enough to be amusing. The appeal of "poor but sexy" is perhaps one effect of this phantom division which continues to persevere. There is no East without West, and there is no periphery without a centre. But the new generation of eastern European image-makers works in a space increasingly free from the western gaze.

We still live in a world ruled by local stereotypes. It could be post-Soviet eastern Europe, the crisis-ridden Mediterranean south or American white trash — the tropes of locality are still very much present in contemporary image-making. Notwithstanding their limitations, these categories can become empowering with enough critical thinking. We might opt to stick with them out of choice. Today, the artistic movement across the post-Soviet space is defined by much more than just locality or a working through of historical trauma — it represents the emergence of a whole new language.

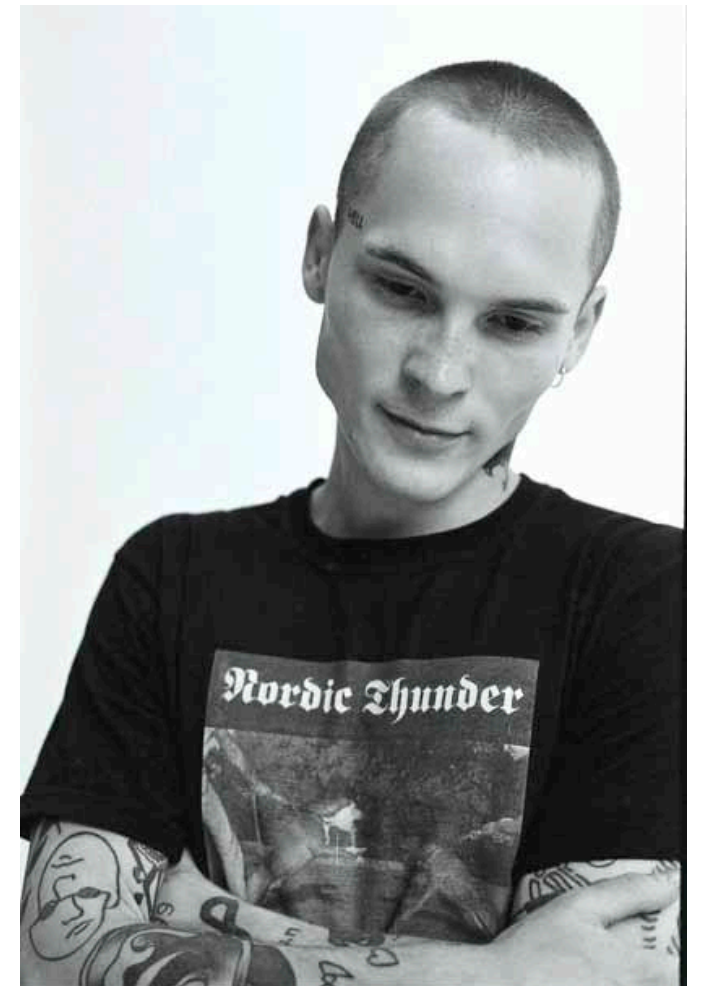




p 19-23 photos by Dima Komarov
p 24-25 photos by Armen Parsadanov

Footnote

Post-Soviet Visions was a recently ended group exhibition at Calvert 22, London (www.calvert22.org) curated by Ekow Eshun and Anastasiia Fedorova. It explored representations of lifestyle and landscape in eastern Europe through the work of photographers from Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The works of two, Dima Komarov and Armen Parsadanov, were selected by the Editor for inclusion here. Armen sadly died in February 2018 at the age of 35.



The Broken Pastoral

David George

The Broken Pastoral is the culmination of ten years work. At its heart it contains three interconnected strands of thought and intent. The first is tasked with transposing ideas and themes of western classical art (sublime, romantic, uncanny and melancholic) onto contemporary British landscape photography. The second strand documents these man-altered landscapes with a more romantic representation, a representation that is at odds with the dominant school of thought surrounding contemporary landscape photography. The third strand examines reflective nostalgia within contemporary photographic practice.

Ideas pertaining to man altered landscape have been in the intellectual stranglehold of the New Topographic movement since its inception in the early 1970's, a movement that has both feet firmly placed in the classical school of thought. *The New Topographics* were originally an intellectual response to pictorialism in American landscape photography. In the intervening years they are to be seen as the only possible intellectual response to the new landscapes engineered by changes in industry and population trends in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

Any aesthetic school is empirical, and therefore subjective, so the romantic school should have just as much traction in the theoretical and practical representation of contemporary landscape as the New Topographics. This small, but important argument was a major factor in the making of these landscape photographs.

One of the main differences between the two aesthetics is that the New Topographics anticipate the ideas contained within the work. They begin with the statement "this is..." (good, bad, indifferent etc.); the romantic aesthetic twists the precursor to "is this...?" This is a minor tweak, but it turns the informative into the inquisitive, thus giving the viewer more intellectual space when immersing themselves in the photographs.

To put my cards on the table, I am a big admirer of the work of the New Topographics, from their rigorous treatise to their high production values in print. They have done much of the groundwork that has given photography its present standing in the fine art world, but I believe there is room for variation and dissent in any artistic medium. This keeps art healthy and fresh: good art should question everything and believe nothing, even of itself.

These photographs, because of the intentional inclusion of elements of nostalgia and romanticism, fall within the jurisdiction of *The Broken Pastoral*, which is a distinctively modern, English cultural response to the accelerating industrialisation and technological advances that have impacted on the English landscape over the past century and a half.

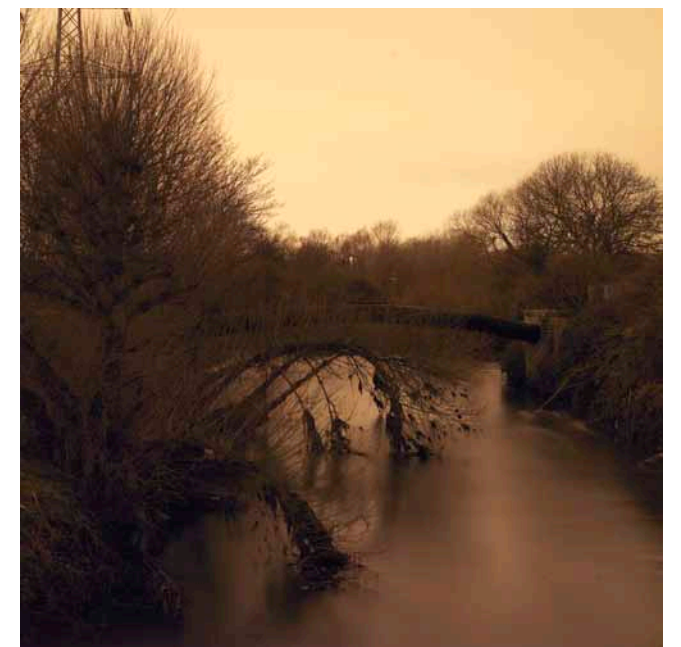
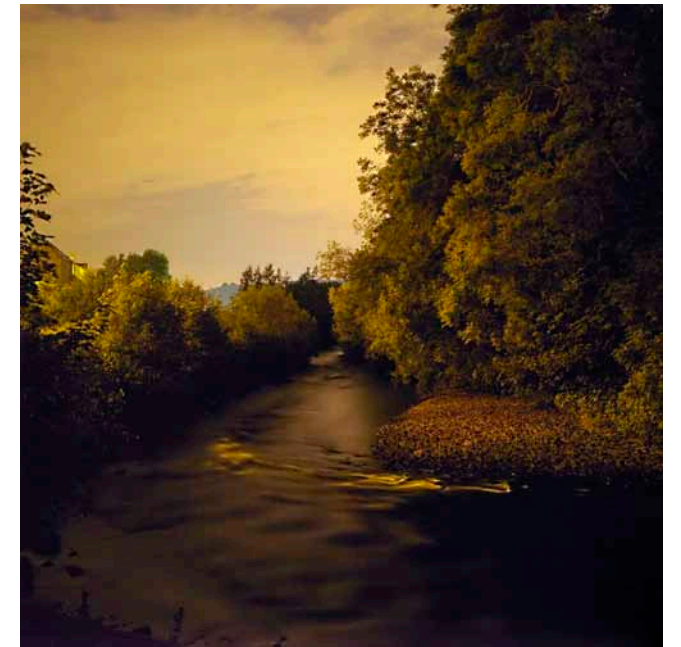
This idea has appeared frequently in art forms during the twentieth century (mainly in music), but can be applied to the visual arts with legitimacy and validity. *The Broken Pastoral* references a longing for a return to a bygone era, often associated with the countryside (or even a period of suburban plenty) while, at the same time, acknowledging the impossibility of making a return to this idyll.

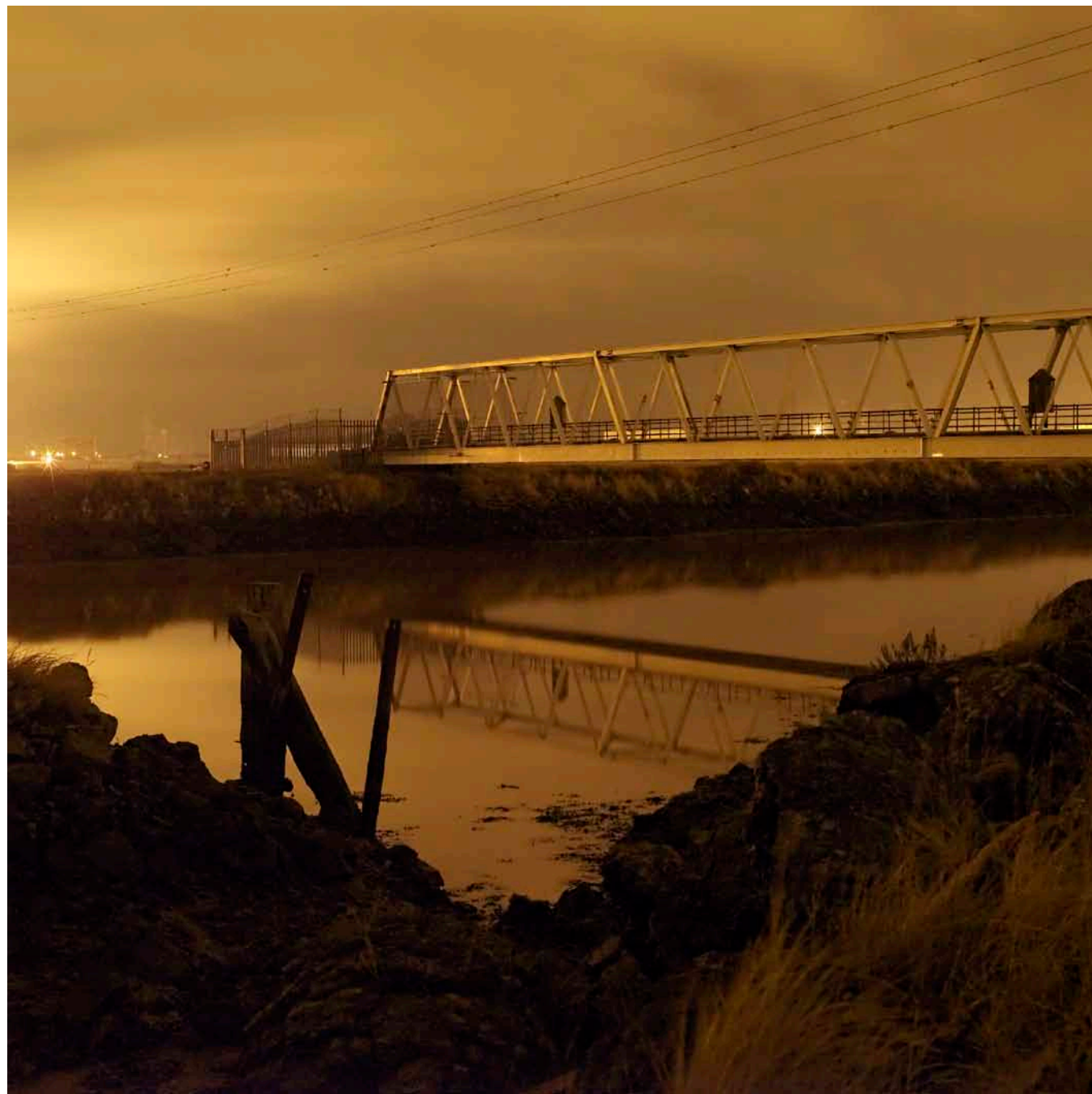
The impossibility occurs because that world has been disrupted and disfigured beyond repair by the advance of modernity, its homeostasis now reliant on the intervention of mankind. The acknowledgement of this impossibility is dependent on the idea of reflective rather than restorative nostalgia in the work. (Restorative nostalgia is a fixation on a point in history that is somehow better than the present world we inhabit; reflective nostalgia is to be enamoured by the historical distance between that point in time and the present.)

There is also the argument that a return to a pastoral idyll is doubly impossible because the collective memory of these bucolic landscapes is, in part, a construct of an outdated, diminishing, class system that would prefer the world to return to a place where it was once a dominant force.

The Broken Pastoral is ultimately not a lament for something lost but a celebration of what has been created. These new landscapes have their own charm and nuances replacing the old pastoral vistas. They have been created by man's intervention in the environment for eons, with new interventions and the creation of a new era in 'English Landscape'. Paradoxically, these dystopian beauty spots vacillate between the utilitarian and the sublime, creating a cognitive dissonance within the work and the viewer. Ultimately, no matter what an artist shows or writes about their practice, success is dependent on the interaction between the work and its audience.

See: www.davidgeorge.eu









Only the Tide of Time - Revisited

Clifford Morris FRPS

In 2002 Clifford Morris had an exhibition of his photographs of canals entitled *Only the tide of time*, which showed how they had changed from commercial carrying to leisure pursuits over time. Clifford used a monochrome medium enabling him to look directly at the canals, and produced rather melancholy images that illustrate what the passage of time had done to them.

Reflecting the fortunes of the subject of his photography, the exhibition has been washed by its own tide of time. After 2002, the work was held in archival

conditions at Walsall History Centre, which is now scheduled to close. Clifford has therefore donated his work to the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port. The museum has put a selection of prints on show again until 15 July 2018 . It has therefore been called *Only the tide of time - revisited*.

Let us hope that, just as the tide turns, the photographs will still be seen in another 16 years time – at another venue, and perhaps with another new title.

Text by Paul Ashley





All Quiet on the Home Front, by Colin Pantall

Book Review by Brian Steptoe FRPS



250mmx200mm
86 pages, 12 smaller
width insert pages
with short texts,
48 colour photos.
Published by ICVL,
Bristol, 2017



Capturing the all too short number of years with his daughter as a young child until the beginning of her independence as a teenager, this heart-warming story is experienced from her father Colin's viewpoint. An individual story but also a universal one, with life-changing feelings of daughter Isabel's father on becoming a father, expressed through her adventures in the home, his and her nearby country rambles and on holidays. This is further brought to life by later hearing his daughter's reflections on individual photos in the book, in video conversation with her father. Visit http://youtu.be/e3c_Rw5K8v4.



View from the East

Tom Owens ARPS, Contemporary Group East Anglia Co-ordinator

I don't know how it happened, but I became the East Anglia co-ordinator for this group several years ago. That in some ways was a hurdle for me: I like my solitude and I think this comes into play with some of the bodies of work that I make. I cannot roam in and amongst a cassette of photographers, other than if I am making work professionally and other photographers are present. No, for my own arts practice I tend to begin with the end in mind, and that often is a temporal vision. This accords with early school reports: "lives in a world of his own...". Looking back on those days I can see that it was the creative side of my brain working and nothing to do with daydreaming! I was just waiting for a Contemporary Group.

Our group meets to discuss and support image making for exhibitions. The meetings are infrequent but we meet when we need to, normally in Ipswich or Felixstowe, and that is to do something, or confirm something. Face to face always works best.

We began with a group exhibition (*Contradictions*) in 2016 and are now gearing up for two exhibitions this spring (*FrEAST*) and early summer (*MEUS*). Two years ago, a new biennial international photo festival began in Ipswich, PHOTOEAST. We tried to get billing, but we had no pedigree, so we exhibited at the same time but in a different location. This year we are billed as a fringe event – progress indeed - so we will exhibit in Ipswich Town Hall during May. PHOTOEAST 2018 begins on the 24 May. We will exhibit again in July, so that we can feed on the hunger generated by the festival.

Then we shall rest and begin creating new work for two years hence. I'd dearly like to get younger people into this group without it becoming a club. Some 48% of the membership in East Anglia is over 65. Experience counts but youthful vigour is what will energise us into being truly contemporary.

I am always open to opinions as to how we can bridge the age gap so please mail me at contemporaryea@rps.org. I'd love to hear from you.

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

7 April - 4 May	<i>An Elizabethan Progress</i> , exhibition to accompany the photobook. The Heritage Gallery, Greenwich University. Queen Anne's Court, Old Royal Naval College, London SE10 9LS. Curated by Brian Steptoe
12 May	Contemporary Group one-day conference. <i>A Day with Bill Jackson and Chloe Dewe Mathews</i> . Regent's University London, Room T106, Inner Circle, Regents Park, London NW1 4NS. 10 am to 4 pm. see www.rps.org/events/2018/may/12/a-day-with-bill-jackson-and-chloe-dewe-mathews to book a place.
19 May	Contemporary North East meeting at Central Buildings 2, 13 Bullring, 3rd Floor, Suite 4, Wakefield WF1 1HB 1.30-5pm. Contact Patricia Ruddle ARPS, patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel 01904 783850
4-28 July	<i>MEUS</i> , exhibition at the Frame Workshop and Gallery, St Nicholas Street, Ipswich, IP1 1TJ by members of the East Anglian Contemporary Group: Keith Locke, Callum Beany, Peter Ellis LRPS, Kevin Marrable and Tom Owens ARPS.
7 July	Contemporary North West meeting at Samlesbury War Memorial Hall, Cuerdale Lane, Preston, PR5 0UY. 1-4pm. Theme for meeting is 'Three images that inspire you and your responses to them.' Contact Alan Cameron, alan.cameron@me.com tel 01253 829114, mob 07825 271344
8 July	Contemporary South West Meeting at Carnon Downs Hall, Carnon Downs, nr. Truro. Cornwall. Starting at 10.30, finishing time 16.00. Contact Rod Fry rod@rod Fry.eclipse.co.uk tel 01803 844721
14 July	Contemporary North East Meeting at exciting new venue in York!. Contact Patricia Ruddle ARPS patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel 01904 783850
19 Sept	Conceptual & Contemporary Photography Distinction Assessments. 10:30 - 16:30, Fenton House, 122 Wells Road, Bath, BA2 3AH. Applicants and observers may attend the Associateship assessments.
Dates not fixed	Contemporary East Anglia meetings. These will be in the Ipswich and Felixstowe areas when arranged. The project underway is the The Ipswich Waterfront Development. Contact Peter Ellis wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com .

Chair - Avril Harris ARPS avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk Deputy chair - Peter Ellis LRPS wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com Secretary - Kate Wentworth LRPS kate.wentworth@btinternet.com Treasurer - Greg Holba LRPS greg@holba.net Postal portfolio - Duncan Unsworth duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com Event organiser - Avril Harris ARPS avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk	Journal editor Paul Ashley LRPS, 59 Gilbert Road, Cambridge CB4 3NZ paultheashley@gmail.com Journal Editorial committee - Paul Ashley, editor Anne Crabbe Brian Steptoe, design Webmaster, Sean Goodhart LRPS seangoodhart@hotmail.com e-Newsletter (Concept) editor, Lyn Newton, lynconcept@btinternet.com	Committee members - Brian Steptoe FRPS bsteptoe@compuserve.com Rod Fry ARPS rod@rod Fry.eclipse.co.uk Patricia Ruddle ARPS patriciaruddle@btinternet.com Anne Crabbe FRPS info@annecrabbe.co.uk Tom Owens ARPS tom@tjowens.com Paul Ashley LRPS paultheashley@gmail.com Alan Cameron LRPS (co-opted) alan.cameron@me.com Tessa Mills FRPR (co-opted) tessamills@hotmail.co.uk
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