



Contemporary North

A SUBGROUP OF THE RPS CONTEMPORARY GROUP

January 2022

Report of the RPS Contemporary North Zoom Meeting.

SATURDAY 15TH January 2022, 1.30-4.00 PM (UK)

HOSTED BY **MORRIS GREGORY** AND CHAIRED BY **PATRICIA RUDDLE**

TEXT: **GARY MORGAN**

COORDINATION AND EDITING: **PATRICIA RUDDLE**

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: **ALEXANDRA PRESCOTT**



It was lovely seeing all the twenty-three smiling faces from the UK and the Netherlands. A super start to the new year.

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus problem this meeting is again on Zoom. We are planning to have alternate meetings on Zoom and face-to-face. Our next meeting is 19 February at Clements Hall, York.

New faces

Brian Crossland is the editor of the Yorkshire Region Newsletter and has joined in order to write an article about us. He also told us about his new project for 2022, which is photographing small villages. We hope that he'll be able to show us some photos at a future meeting. Perhaps this is something that members can do...

David Rutter is a recent Fellowship recipient with his *Abstract Simplicity* panel. We hope that he can show us his Fellowship panel in the 19th March meeting. In the meantime, here's a taster:

<https://rps.org/qualifications/frps/example-fellowship-panels/david-rutter-frps/>

Announcements

Alexandra Prescott has organised another Distinction FRPS Peer Support Group meeting on Zoom. Feb 23rd at 7 pm for Contemporary, Applied, Portraiture and Documentary Distinctions.

This is an unofficial group who get together to support each other and offer thoughts on the journey we are all going through.

Contact aprescott_3@yahoo.

Volunteers

This is a call to help with the production of the Contemporary North Newsletter- specifically taking Notes and preparing the Layout. With 24+ attendees on average – If you volunteer just once to do both jobs – at different times – that's one voluntary session a year! Please help to spread the load as it is hard on the same people who offer each time.

Three Talks from our newest Fellows about their 'F' journeys

21st February: Ken Holland FRPS -*When Hannah Left Home*.

21st March: Alexandra Prescott FRPS -*Universal Truths*

25th April: Carole Olerud FRPS -*18 Days -A Time of Great Sadness*

André Bergmans

Something different! Patricia saw this at a **Benelux** meeting and thought that it would be fun and informative for us to see it.

André is developing exercises for moving from a single-image approach to photography to an approach based upon body of work, and he is looking for help (feedback, comments) on what he has so constructed so far, which is explained below. He proposes this as an exercise for a photo club because he noticed that some camera clubs have a focus on single images rather than bodies of work. Also, he is trying to inspire people to look at the history of photography.

Exercises always start with a photograph: either a well-known image from a little-known photographer, or a little-known image from a well-known photographer. A member of the group chooses to find the background to the image and its photographer and then to make their own version trying to be faithful to the original, and then to experiment so that they gradually move away from the original to express their own concept. Useful lessons can be learned by, for example, paying attention to the depth of field, lighting, etc. and seeing if you can achieve the same effect.

He showed us images by a range of photographers such as **Tina Modotti**, **Casper Faasen** and **Karl Blossfeldt**, where lessons could be gleaned by considering the image carefully and then by trying to copy the style.

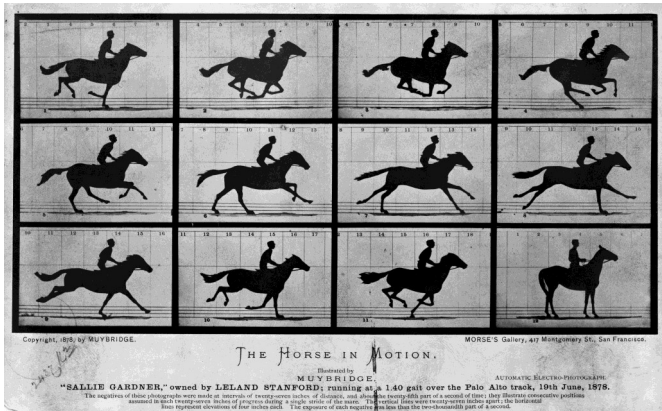
One of the objectives is to encourage camera clubs to know more of the history of photography



Tina Modotti's *Roses, Mexico*



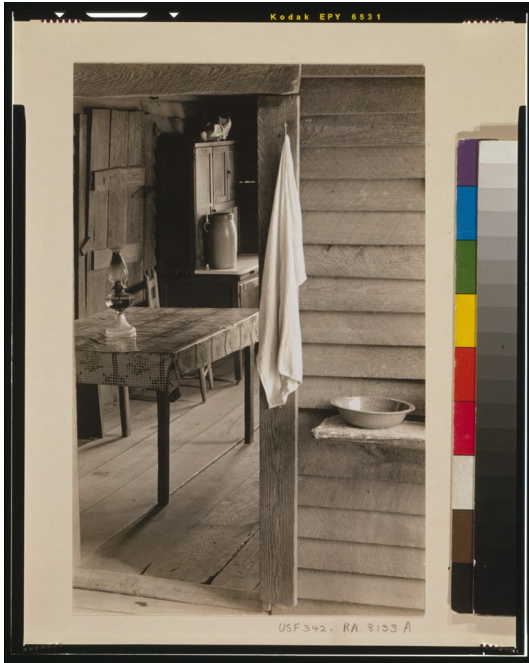
Andrés' version



Muybridge's *Horses in Motion*



Andrés' version

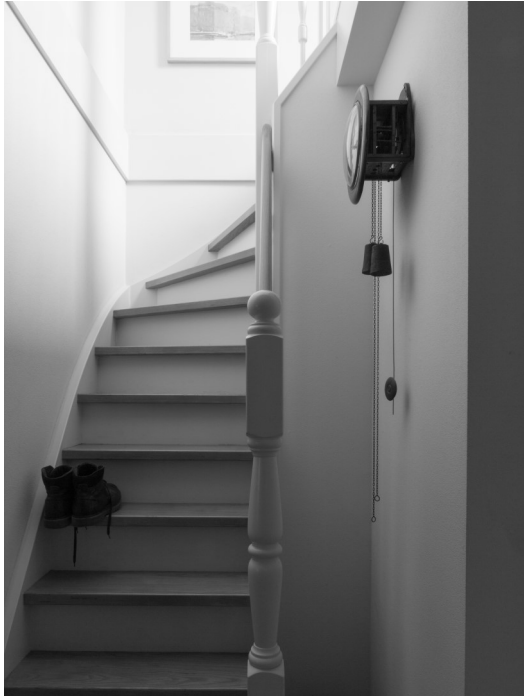


Walker Evan's *Bedroom Burroughs Family Cabin*

Supermarket advert



The original image does not need to be from a famous photographer. André showed an example, from a supermarket advertisement, of three identical cakes. André's version consisted of a photograph of three identical food items with attention being paid to the background and style of the original



André's versions



Another example was the bowl of a spoon by **Patrick Tosani**, which tries to make a mundane object very special. André's version was a pea on the tine of a fork. Discolouration was caused by metal plating eroding over time revealing the underlying metal adding to the details to be found by careful observation. :

<https://www.patricktosani.com/projects/photographies/1988/Cuilleres>



An interesting and very positive discussion followed in which **Richard Hall** recommended highly the following video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJafQpGADjg>

A quick poll was taken and several members want to try this and present their results at a future meeting. André also agreed to show his results from other camera clubs at a future meeting.

For more information about the **Benelux Chapter** (all RPS members welcome):

<https://rps.org/chapters/benelux/about/>

Bob Gates

Bob was Secretary of Contemporary Group for five years as well as serving as a Trustee on Council. He has done many things over the years for the RPS including being the Yorkshire Region Organiser for fourteen years.

After watching a You Tube video on urban exploration he was inspired to find an abandoned building and photograph it. The treat that he found was an abandoned sanatorium, *Beelitz Heilstätten*, about 30 miles from Berlin. Many such sites are private property and often in a dangerous state, and he found that the site he was interested in protected by fences, security guards and dogs. However, not being daunted he found out who owned the site and asked for permission to take the pictures, which to his surprise was granted provided that he entered the site at his own risk with no insurance.

Bob describes the building as follows.

The Beelitz Heilstätten Workers' Tuberculosis Sanatoriums complex, built between 1898 and 1930 by the Berlin Regional Health Insurance Office, is one of the largest hospital sites surrounding Berlin. The complete ensemble of 60 buildings on a total area of 200 hectares is a listed historical monument.

It was divided into four sectors by a road crossed by a railway line. South of the railway were the two sectors for male and female non-infectious patients, north of it was for patients with tuberculosis and other infectious pulmonary diseases.

During the First World War it was used as a field hospital for German troops, and returned to its original purpose in 1920. On the outbreak of the Second World War it was once again used as a military hospital. Some of the buildings suffered severe damage during the war and the Russian Army took over the entire complex in 1945, not finally leaving until 1994. Famous patients include Adolf Hitler in 1916, and in 1990, the East German leader Erich Honecker.

The complex was sold to a private investor who renovated some buildings but later became insolvent. The site is now in private ownership and a neurological rehabilitation centre is in operation. Other plans include further medical uses including a centre for patients with Parkinson's disease. However, most of the sprawling complex has been abandoned



Bob entered through a gap in the fence armed with a printout email permission and was immediately taken with how overgrown the site had become.

Several buildings were entered, and many photos were taken inside various rooms. As windows were often boarded up there was little lighting; a tripod was often used along with occasional HDR used in some photos. Most images were taken with a wide-angle (18mm) lens.



There was a big mixture of rooms. Some were quite banal and looked like they could be functional such as consultation rooms, kitchens, sleeping quarters, etc. However, some were also very grand and looked like they were part of some English country house.



As you'd expect, there was some graffiti and much of it was mindless. However, some was quite artistic and very beautiful. Much of a decay (peeling paint, fungal growths, etc.) produced beautiful colours.

Despite the warnings that the site was patrolled, Bob only saw a couple of staff, and they were quite happy when he said he had permission to enter the buildings. The lack of people gave the place an eerie feeling, and he did wonder how long it would take for him to be discovered if he had an accident.



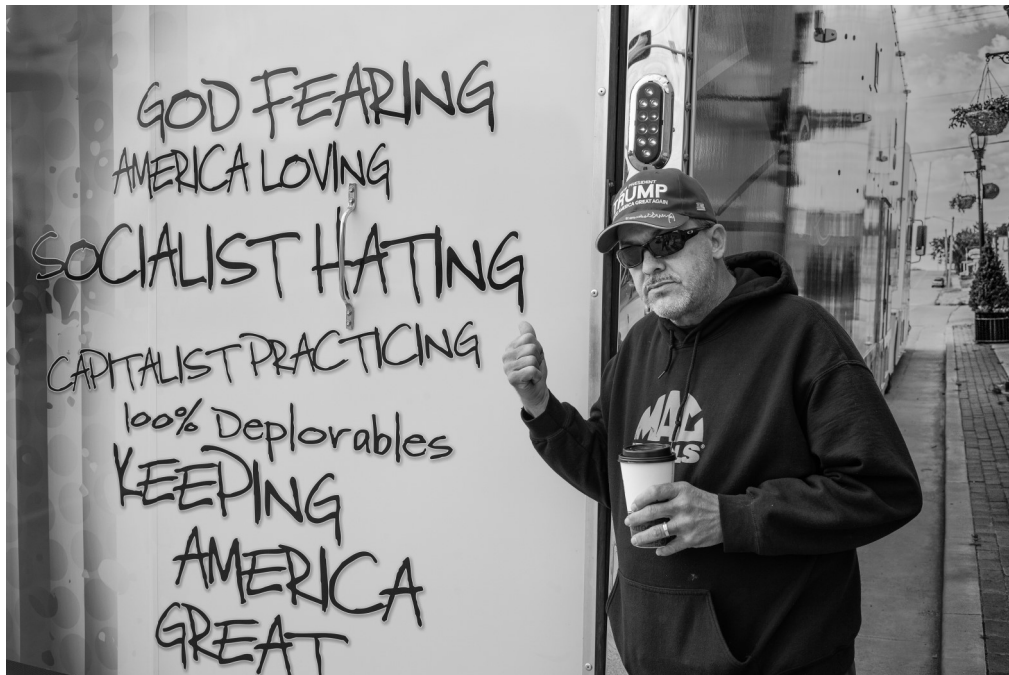
Mary Crowther mentioned that there are some hospitals in the Northeast of the UK that are in a similar state. However, access to them is very difficult. **Avijit Datta** added that the York psychiatric hospital has beautiful Wedgwood ceilings but that security is tight and access is not permitted

Colin Howard

Colin is always oriented towards projects working in groups of pictures in order to communicate a message. Lockdown has given him an opportunity to re-evaluate his photography resulting in a book (he showed us the first draft) that documents some of his time in America. It's partly inspired by the recently re-published *Letter from America* by Alistair Cooke. Colin has made many trips to the US, and regards California as his second home. (Having produced many Blurb books he feels that this one may well be worthy of being published and is considering binding it himself.)

His fascination with the American West is captured in this artist statement from him.

Over a forty-year period I visited the USA numerous times, mostly for professional reasons and rarely as a tourist. Stays of many months had impressed upon me the 'can do' spirit of the American people, even when faced with national crises of identity and personal adversity. No set back appeared to dent the guiding beacons of American life: national pride, perseverance, and loyalty to a faith or sect.



The same principles were invariably apparent. If something hadn't worked out, they moved on! All credit was due for having tried and failed. There would always be further opportunities, no matter the depth of despair. Even those who had fallen by the wayside accepted that their plight was all part of the ups and downs of the American way of life. There was always an unshakable belief that their circumstances would get better.



After an absence of ten years, I set off on the evening of the Trump presidency through the American West to discover whether the Trump years had dented any of the vibrancy and vitality that had so marked my previous visits. Travelling by road through small towns, the emotions of the inhabitants were more readily discernible. There are many signs of industrial decline and abandonment to be seen, but surprisingly the guiding beacons of American life were still there just below the surface. Even the indigenous peoples who have every reason to feel marginalised appeared to have a sense of revival, strengthened by the core values of their heritage. Ultimately, it will be the next generation of youngsters that will determine the future of the nation. These show every sign of meeting the challenge.

But does the American Dream live on? Only time will tell.

While growing up my parents would frequently listen to the weekly *Letter from America* by Alistair Cooke, broadcast at the weekend on the BBC Home Service. Born in England in 1908, Cooke resided in New York from 1941 until his death in 2004. During those years he broadcast no fewer than 2,869 commentaries on daily life in North America. Rarely judgemental and frequently acerbic, he believed Britons would have more interest in daily life than in the intricate procedures of Congress and the sparring between politicians and the media. But were he with us today and armed with a camera, what would he have seen through his lens? And what narrative would his images convey back to us?

Alistair Cooke, *Letter from America*, 1946-2004, Penguin Modern Classics, Dublin, 2021.



Carol Olerud FRPS

Carol had prepared to show us her recent Fellowship panel but was unable to due to time limitations. However, we all agreed that we could include it here.

Statement of Intent : *18 Days – a time of great sadness*

Talking about death is still very much a taboo.

It's emotional and if you haven't been touched by the loss of someone close to you, it's quite possibly frightening.

My intention with this panel surrounding the 18 days my father fought for his life in the Intensive Care unit at the hospital, is to try and break open a conversation. To remove the fear and get the idea out there that death is a part of life, the great circle of life.

Watching someone very dear to you struggle to live, get all the medical assistance available to him and then realise he is losing the battle is extremely difficult.

I brought my camera in at every visit. We were limited to the amount of family members that were permitted to go in at a time, so we took it in turns. My sisters and I got very good at reading the instruments measuring his vital signs. There were many tubes with medicine and food being pushed into his body to help him.

It was awful. Having these photos helps me deal with my grief and puts some perspective on it. It is now many years ago, gradually I have accepted that he is no longer with us. It has taken me some time to get this far, that I can share this body of work. I really feel it is important, especially in the times we have been in. Many families could not visit their loved ones and could not say their farewells. I can't imagine how hard that was!

Maybe I can help others by sharing my own pain and sadness and get that conversation going. Death is peaceful in the end. A part of life. The end of life.

www.carololerud.com





