



Editorial

Photography happens when rays of light bounce off real-world matter into a camera. It would be a mistake, though, to place too much emphasis on the words ‘real’ and ‘matter’. Successful, memorable photography makes you stop and think: “this challenges me”; “what is the true story here?”; or “how does this make me feel?”. It goes beyond the here and now, the material, to (if you will excuse the pun) a bigger picture.

I first saw the work of Jan Staiger and Daniel Niedermäeier with no explanation, and wondered why it made me look twice. All their images (apart from the horse’s head!) are of mundane scenes, yet all of them say “something is not quite right here”. Even when you know the context, you spend time pondering the significance of those elements that distinguish these scenes from their ‘normal’ counterparts.

Nadja Ellinger has taken the *Little Red Riding Hood* fairy tale as the basis for her project. She has avoided the simple narrative, though. In a virtual exhibition of this work she allowed visitors to arrange the images according to their own perception of the meaning, reflecting how the familiar version of the story was ‘pinned down’ by Perrault from the disparate oral tradition.

Farshid Tighehsaz has a powerful message about oppression and social justice in Iran, which he could have expressed in a straight documentary series; he has chosen rather to show a society where alternative thinking is so suppressed that mistrust and fear are barriers to normal human interchange. His images show the difference between what the mask shows and what is underneath.

Sine Zheng and Meg Jackson are perhaps more obviously exploring abstract ideas, about human relations with the natural world and genetic engineering respectively. Zheng in particular questions the validity of our aspiration to bring nature into our urban life.

I am delighted that Evan Dawson, the Society’s new CEO, has contributed his *View from....* to this issue, and that he has chosen to draw parallels between contemporary music and contemporary photography. He writes of the importance of trust and dialogue between creator and audience in developing understanding of what both media are about. I hope you can see that the Contemporary Group is of the same opinion, as shown by this Journal, our e-journal *Concept*, our Facebook group, and the programme of online talks that we have recently started.

Paul Ashley, Editor

Contemporary Photography

Number 81 Autumn 2020

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

Cover: © photo by Meg Jackson, from her series *Subject 01*
Back cover: © *Fish*, photo by Sine Zheng
Journal fonts: general, Avenir Lt Std: author name, Letter Gothic Std

Simili Modo

Daniel Niedermeier & Jan A. Staiger

What happens if we don't act with foresight? - we make mistakes. Mistakes that are not accepted in an advanced society.

How do we enable ourselves to get access to a world that has so far only been pure imagination? We create playable worlds of make-believe.

They serve as laboratories. Interfaces between genuineness and modification. As isolated systems they meet their designated function of imitating given regularities.

Using them, we as humans can pursue our urge for extension of our habitat, the increase of our standard of living as well as the prolongation of our lifespan.

With this work, the evidentiary characteristic of the photographic medium can be questioned in a sense that the context of each image might differ from what can be expected at first appearance.

Therefore, neither the image itself, nor its significance are what they pretend to be. The photographic depiction serves as another duplicate that carries a vague notion of reality towards the spectator - a reference to our long acquired visual habit.

The spectrum of these imitations crosses many branches of society. In the manufacturing and security industry as well as in the context of education and entertainment, the course is set for transformation that we as a society will notice in the long run.

See: www.danielniedermeier.de and www.janstaiger.com



RealCare baby for simulating the experience of parenthood, University of Fribourg.



Military training area 'Schnöggersburg', Altmark. Gardelegen, Saxony-Anhalt.

Horse dummy, used to practice the intubation of horses, Veterinary Medical University Hanover.



Amusement park 'Tropical Islands' in former airship hangar, Krausnick, Brandenburg.



Filmset of ARTE / ZDF-production 'Bad Banks', Belval, Luxemburg.

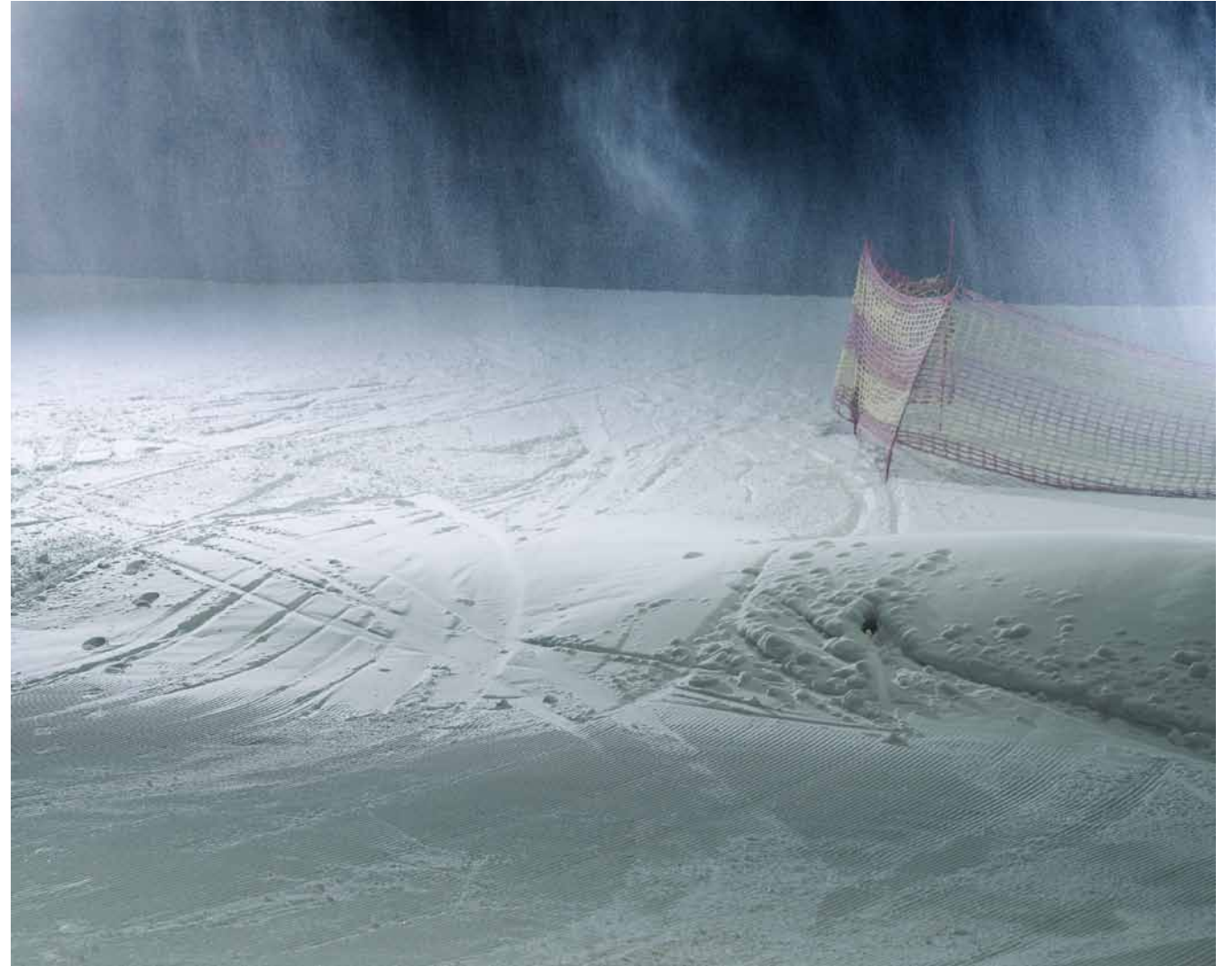


Artificial fog at the Harz national park. Schierke, Saxony-Anhalt.





TRON-lab used to simulate optical navigation for landing approaches on moon missions. German Aerospace Centre, Bremen.



Indoor-skiing centre AlpinCenter. Wittenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

From Labyrinth

Farshid Tighehsaz

This project is about the fears and the repercussions of the Islamic revolution in Iran, as well as the impact of eight years of war, in the frame of the possibility of potential future.

After forty years from the start of the revolution, we became the generations thrown into a labyrinth of ideologies. Our identity is like a bubble that refers neither to historicity nor to the modern world. Any demand for social justice and identity is suppressed by the system. Institutions and departments do not accept any views other than the ruling one. All this destroys the space for growth and hope. Discrimination by the fundamentalist thinking towards the greatest part of Iranian society comprised mostly by youth belonging to the middle-class makes a hard dichotomy. These portraits of dichotomy are of the youth without a future, portraits of hopelessness, unemployment, and anxiety.

War, discrimination, poverty and abuses imposed by the government have changed our culture to the 'culture of fear'. Resilience has been destroyed in the face of misfortune.

In this climate of fear, 'the others' are always incognito. Anxiety fills the cafés, the streets, events and everywhere people get together. The others, their actions, whilst consistent with societal expectations, are corrupt, showing how fraudulent their society really is. Despite the fact that on the surface many of these characters act in certain ways, giving moralizing advice to everyone, they rarely show their true colours, preferring instead to present to the world the masks they wear. A hallucinatory reality that rushes into the surreal, a society as corrupt as it is cynical and silly. Their banality, with a characteristic national flavouring of metaphysics and high morality, and a peculiar conjunction of the sexual and the spiritual, encompasses triviality, vulgarity, and a lack of spirituality. The lack of trust makes us introverted and afraid of expressing ourselves in a clear language. Each day we become more and more alone. All this fear takes control of each individual's life and identity, in ways that are unique to every person.

The constant repetition of these negative emotions transforms our perception of life and our surrounding world. This heavy burden transmutes into a permanent status of apathy; in essence it is like being in limbo. Such limitation often leads to depression, violence and suicide.

In this situation the best cure for many seems to be the will to emigrate to a happier future. With lives spent in a vacuum, one feels homelessness deep inside. The same homelessness that belongs to the place we are born in as well as to where we wish to go.

See: www.farshidtighehsaz.com



In the alleys of tradition. In Iran streets belong to the ruling ideology. Tabriz, 4 November 2014.



Prayers for Eid al-Fitr near the border of Turkmenistan. 12 September 2016.



Celebrate the 38th anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Tabriz.

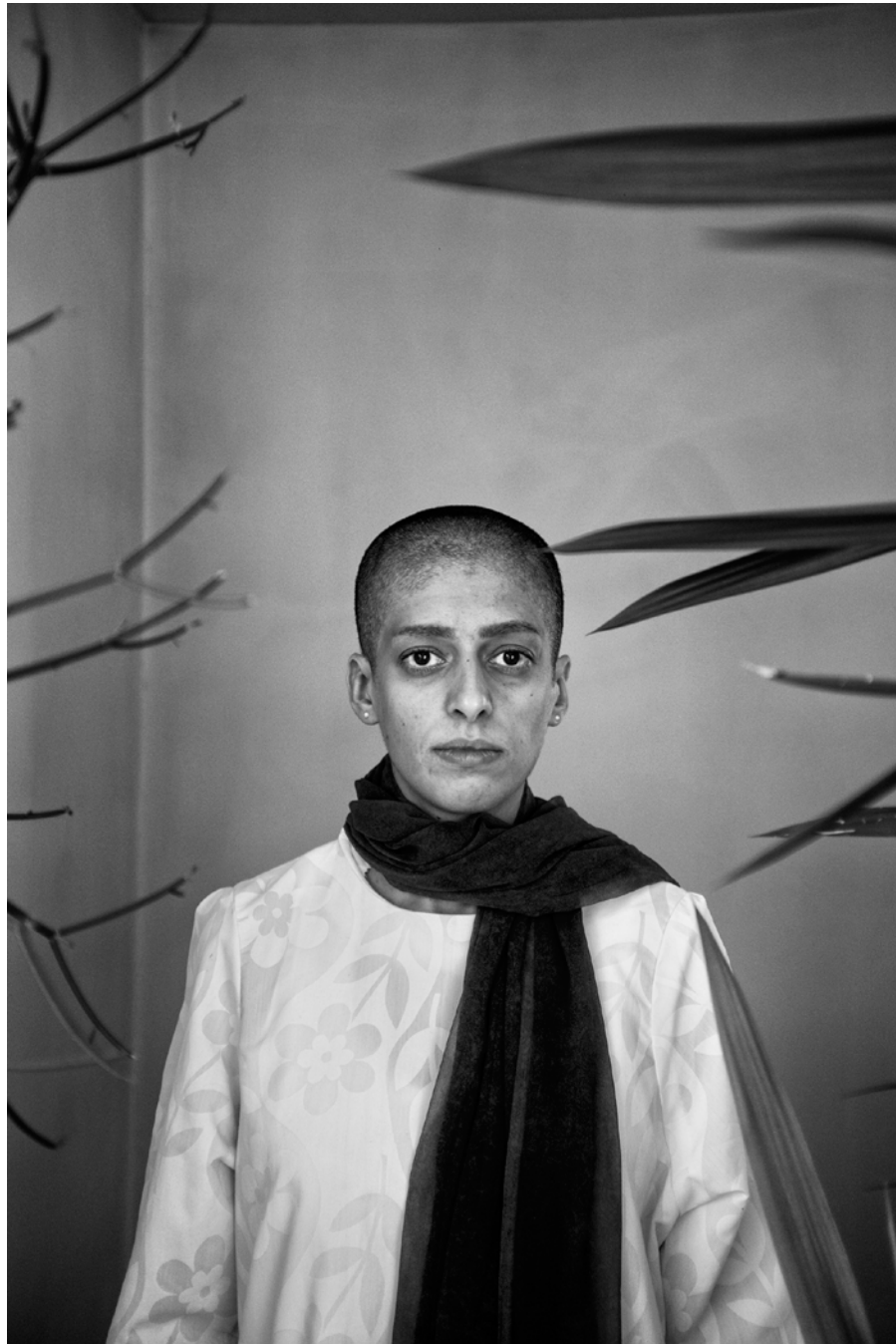


Love is difficult when you can't touch. Tabriz, 1 December 2014.



Concealing from the eyes. Tehran, 30 July 2015.

Soheila 30. She cut her hair because of her depression. In 1936, as part of his westernizing crusade, Reza Shah banned the veil. To enforce this decree, the police were ordered to physically remove the veil from any woman who wore it in public. After the revolution in 1979 the hijab has once again become a symbol, this time of the ideology and power of a regime over its people.



Fear of the naked body and gender issues hanging on the minds of these generations. Tabriz, 21 January 2015.

Path of Pins

Nadja Ellinger

Path of Pins is a visual re-telling of *Little Red Riding Hood*, revolving around adolescence and the awakening of the primordial and archaic feminine. As an oral tradition, the fairy tale is constantly changing and evading any attempt to fix it, and so the project is just a thread in the tapestry of stories about the girl who defeated the wolf.

In one of the earliest spoken versions of the fairy tale, which later inspired Charles Perrault to write his *Petit Chaperon Rouge*, the wolf asks the unnamed heroine: "Which path will you take?", to which she responds by choosing the path of pins, the careless and fleeting one – as opposed to the path of needles, the irreversible way of the wolf.

This decision of the pins reflects two interesting aspects: on a personal level, by refusing to follow the prescribed path, the heroine decides to stay a child and favours the state of innumerable possibilities. Exploring what lies beyond, she leads us deep into the forest.

On an abstract level, this metaphor of pins and needles relates to how fairy tales are being treated: like a butterfly collector, Perrault kills the living, ever-evolving oral tale, in order to present it to the reader in a pose he artificially forced upon it. Not only does he appropriate the story, but he coerces the heroine into the corset of his own ideologies. Compared to the early variants of the narrative, where the heroine tricks the wolf and escapes with artfulness, together with the help of washerwomen and the forces of nature, Perrault reduces her to a naive girl guilty of her own violation.

The fairy tale questions authorship: Every form of retelling or re-enactment embeds former versions of it, repeats it, alters it, so it will never be original – no authorship can be claimed over it. The fairy tale gives birth to itself.

I own the story – but just for a short time, in the fleeting moments while retelling it. Then I lose control. My voice melts into the chorus of everyone who told this story before. But what is a choir without its single voices?

Therefore I work with my friends, my family, my own body. Like children, we create our fantasy world together that enables us to talk about the ineffable. It is a dreamlike state, where logic does not apply anymore, and time works differently. The preconscious mind draws connections, develops a narrative I wasn't aware of, and finds analogies between this universe and reality, stitching these worlds together.

The tale develops, slowly, growing with each iteration, like a living creature.

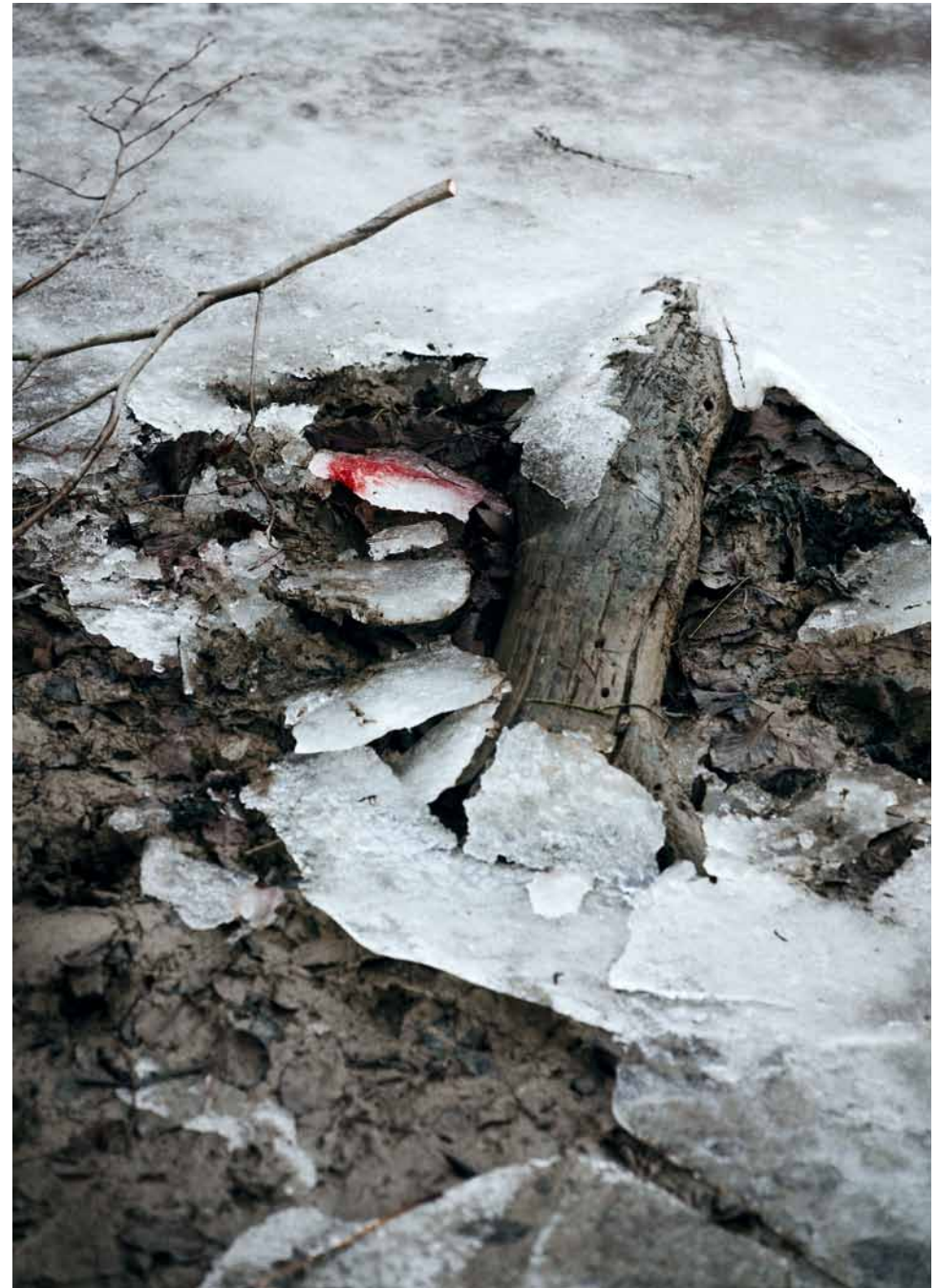
See: www.nadjaellinger.de



Demeter



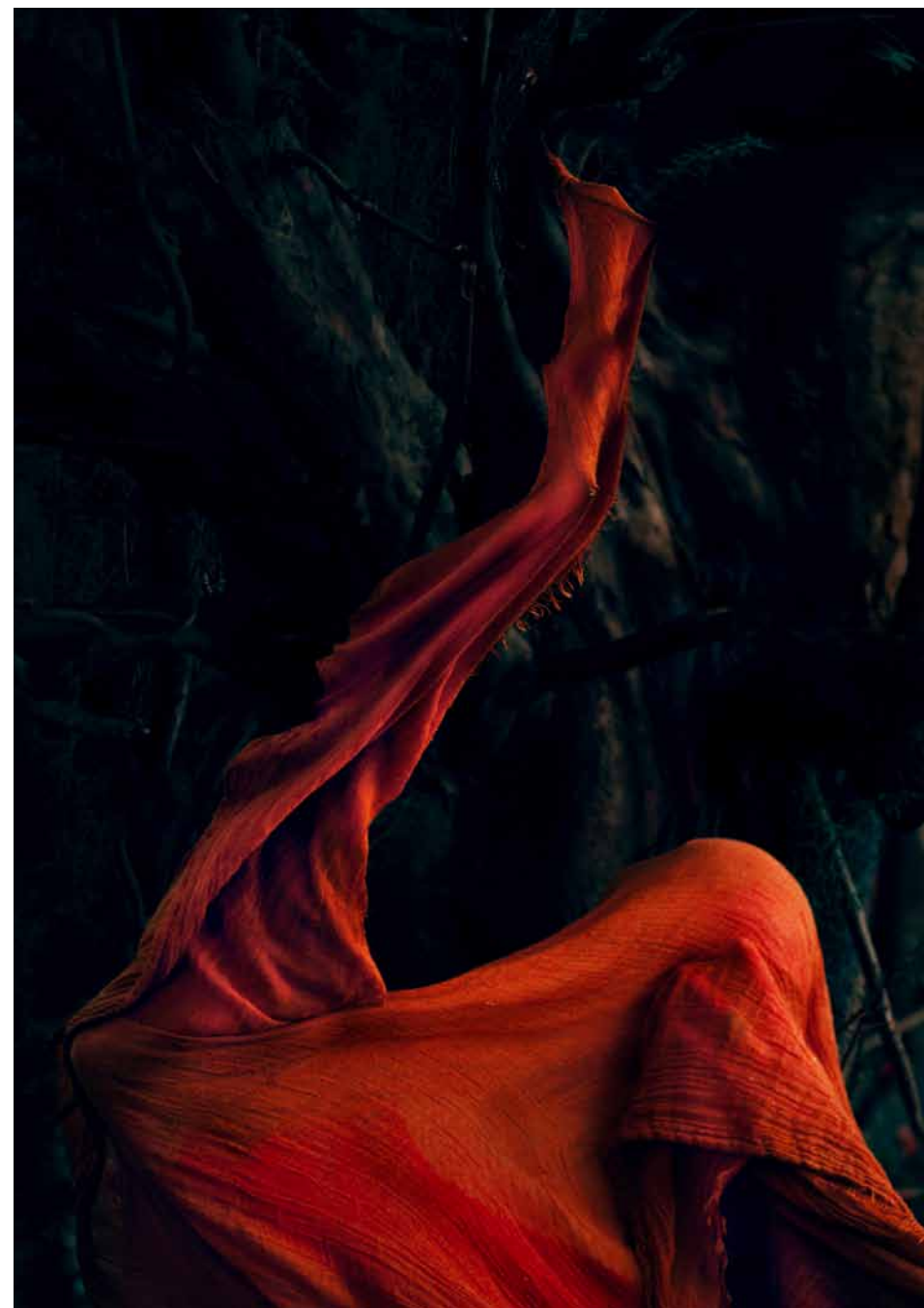
Creeper



Untitled (ice)



Bud



Henkersmädel
(assistant
executioner)



In my own hands



Waschweib
(washerwoman)

Subject 01

Meg Jackson

Exploring the limits of future scientific possibilities, the series explores a genetically engineered world in which life itself is re-modified, reconstructed and reborn. The laboratory becomes the birthing pool for these new ultra-humanoid personas: test-tube enhanced perfection.

Utilising classic photographic genres including landscape, sculpture and portraiture combined with the cinematic tropes of science fiction, the work situates the artist as central in the role as maker and designer. Stitching together retrieved fragments from hard drives, reboots, and fading brain cells the project questions contemporary ideas around human existence and the possibilities of re-fashioned identities.

Providing a prediction on a mesmerising future. A Brave New World awaits.







Wild Dwelling

Sine Zheng

With the development of urbanisation, people gradually get lost in the dazzling steel forest. Surrounded human-made objects create an obscured appearance in which people are easily losing sight of the boundary between reality and illusion. We feel at ease in modern life with sufficient resources, and even try to build a fake vision of nature in our city life, making an illusion in which we perceive a simulative environmental image. My project is devoted to exploring the frame of the environment we desire through the blurred boundary between environment and human. The perspective that I want to share with the viewer is a concern for the ecosystem and valuing every moment and place we are surrounded by.

See: www.sinezheng.com

Watering





Bathtub



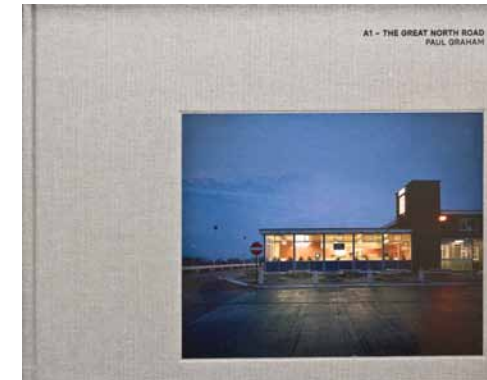
Window

A1-The Great North Road, by Paul Graham

Book review by Brian Steptoe FRPS



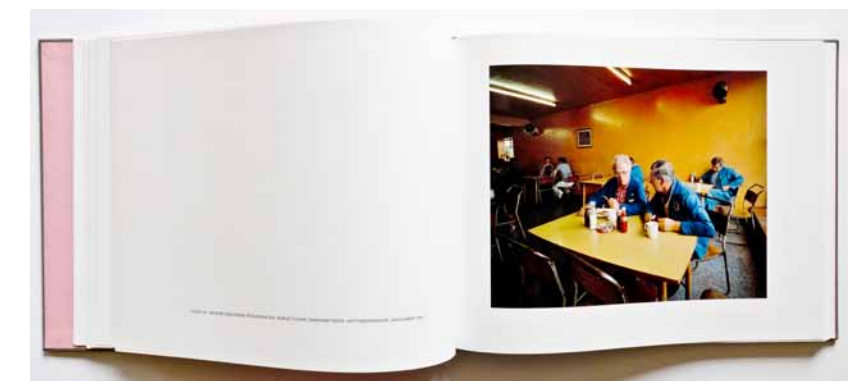
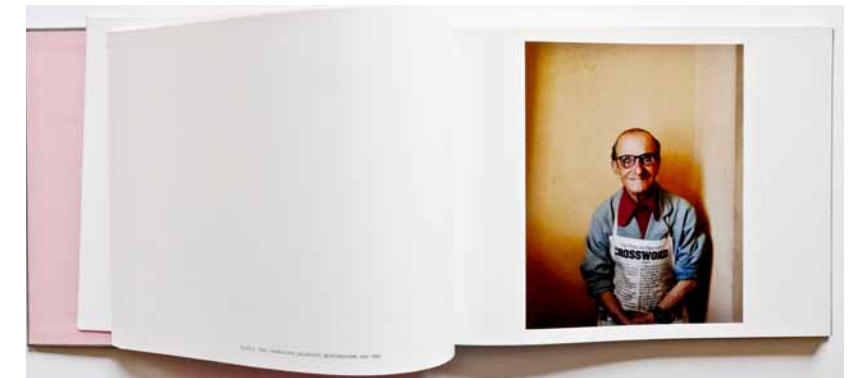
Hanger



New edition of the original 1983 publication, published by MACK in 2020. The book is sequenced, based on the A1 road from London to Edinburgh, with images of people whose work links them to this road and more scenic images. There is a sense of melancholy in the work which can be related to the decline in usage of this route as faster motorways took over.

Paul Graham, who now lives in New York, writes in this new edition: "As I traveled up and down the road, the question of when and where to photograph was left open to chance, to random encounter, consciously wanting to avoid it being like an American Road trip."

23 x 30 cm, 96 pages,
42 colour images,.



A View from the CEO

Evan Dawson

I was honoured to join the RPS as its new CEO at the end of July. Since then, I've been getting to know it through its volunteers, staff and partners. The breadth of work is staggering; and it's inspiring to see how everyone rose to the challenges of lockdown - reaching thousands of photographers throughout the world, helping them stay active, creative and connected, despite being restricted. My own professional background is in music, although I have been an active photographer for a long time too. Dr Ashley invited me to write a view on contemporary photography, so I'm going to try and approach this through the "lens" of music...



Percussionist Adriano Adewale, photo by Evan Dawson

Contemporary music has a mixed reputation. Many regard it as confusing, pretentious or alienating, with no predictable structure, and it can seem unschooled or unrefined – the product of random chance, perhaps. It can seem like the preserve of the educated or the young – certainly not for the common woman or man. But if you speak with its creators, contemporary music is often a yearning to create something of its time, breaking with convention to avoid cliché or comparison. As we grow familiar with established approaches, it takes greater efforts to surprise or shock us, so we experience new emotions or deeper levels of understanding. Music is about communicating things that cannot be said in words, which can only happen if there is trust between audiences and creators. Trust is often built through dialogue, explaining intentions behind a work; and to demonstrate that its creator has mastery over the rules, which they are then "entitled" to break. They might use instruments in untraditional or destructive ways, or embrace the incredible new technologies that are emerging. Much can now be achieved at home, which previously required an expensive studio – but true meaning is only ever achieved where music is shared, and emotional connections made between humans.

In the above, I hope 'photography' can be substituted for 'music', and that it will hold true for you. As I learn about the incredible work of the RPS and its members, I'm searching for meaning and purpose in photography practice. I'm starting to glimpse it, but I'm aware that it will take time. I hope this article gives an insight into how I'm approaching this personal challenge, and may even give you pause to re-consider contemporary music too!

See www.evandawson.com

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

Social distancing is likely to be part of our lives for some time to come, so the Contemporary Group is developing a programme of online events. The Society also offers a wider range of events and courses than we can list here. Creativity is also helping some of our regional groups with distanced meetings.

Group online meetings

"Little Poland: a community in Devon", 26 October, 18.00 to 19.00. A talk by Ken Holland ARPS.

See www.rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2020/october/ken-holland for more details and to book your place.

"Collaboration in visual storytelling", 23 November, 19.00 to 20.00. A talk by Rehab Edalil.

See www.rps.org/events/contemporary/2020/november/rehab-edalil

"In conversation with Giles Duley HonFRPS"

See www.rps.org/events/contemporary/2020/december/giles-duley

Future talks will be given by Carolyn Mendelsohn (18 January), Sarah M Lee and Maria Falconer. Keep an eye on the RPS website, *Concept* and the Group facebook page for details.

Regional meetings

Contemporary East. Virtual meetings are held roughly monthly. Contact Tom Owens (contemporaryea@rps.org) for more information.

Contemporary North. 21 November, online meeting. Contact Patricia Ruddle (patriciaruddle@btinternet.com) for more information.

Contemporary South West. 15 November, online meeting. Contact Adrian Hough (contemporarysw@rps.org) for more information.

Contemporary Northwest. Contact Alan Cameron (contemporary@rps.org) for details.

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