

THE RPS

ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Contemporary North

A Subgroup of the RPS Contemporary
Group

March 2021

**Report of the RPS Contemporary North
Zoom meetings.** Saturday 20th March 2021,
1:30-4:00 pm.

Hosted by **Jim Souper** and chaired by
Patricia Ruddle

Text: **Gary Morgan**

Coordination and editing: **Patricia Ruddle**

Layout and design: **Wendy North**



Contemporary North retained the international flavour in our March meeting with an increasing number of new members and with a more varied geographical spread both in the UK and Europe. We continued to meet on Zoom with 29 members attending, which included four new faces to the group. (Apologies from **Mary Crowther, Phil Dunbar, Sally Hedges Greenwood, Morris Gregory.**)

One of the new members was **Colin Howard**, who lives in an isolated part of Herefordshire. He reported that, due to his relative isolation, it's difficult for him to get face-to-face meetings and the Internet meetings are, therefore, a boon. A former Chair of the Travel Group, Colin now thinks that his interests have a more contemporary approach.



We were also pleased to welcome **Simon Hill** as the newest member of the Contemporary Group. He was prompted to join after he wrote the Foreword to our *2020 Vision* book, seeing us an interesting, diverse group of photographers.

Simon is the current **RPS President**. Patricia discovered a coincidence that previously linked Simon to the Contemporary Group years ago when he led **York Contemporary** around the city on an archaeological walk. At the time he worked at the York Archaeological Trust.

Simon has begun *A New Blogger on the Block* as RPS President. His most recent one will be of interest to all of us who remember: "...don't take my Kodachrome away."

<https://rps.org/news/bristol/2021/march/kodachrome/>

We also welcomed **Stan Colabella**, **Barbara Pollard**, both of whom were recommended by **Dave Burgess**, and said that they would like to continue to meet with us. Fortunately they live in Yorkshire and will be able to come to our meetings when we are back at Clements Hall.

Christine Pinnington, who spent many hours on the design and layout of the book, also attended the meeting and we expressed our gratitude at her excellent work. The book went to the printers on Thursday 18th March, so the delivery process to members will probably have already started by the time you read these notes. An extra copy will be placed in the RPS library.

There was some discussion about making the book available more widely. Currently this is not yet planned. However, we noted that the printers will keep the relevant files (for at least a short time) so that printing more copies is relatively simple.



Congratulations were expressed for **Adrian James** for achieving his LRPS.

Patricia also suggested that the Instagram feeds of **Peter Bartlett** (<https://www.instagram.com/peter.j.bartlett/>) and **Gary Morgan** (<https://www.instagram.com/drgarymorgan/>) were worth a look.

Jim Souper mentioned that some interesting on-line events were planned at the Wakefield Arthouse including a conversation with photographer **Carolyn Mendelsohn** on the 20th of April. More information can be found here:

<https://the-arthouse.org.uk/exhibitions-events/>

Additionally, there are three new Contemporary COVID-19 blogs since our last meeting:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/march/the-covid-pandemic-in-hong-kong/>

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/march/fighting-against-stigma-during-covid-19/>

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/march/protesting-human-rights-in-a-pandemic/>

You can get a complete list of the blogs by going to any one of them and scrolling down to the bottom.

Mike Rooke



Mike Rooke presented a PowerPoint presentation called *A Man's World* depicting a sheep market in Morocco. Mike explained that he was there as an observer and not to comment on their local customs and summarised the experience as follows:

Many contemporary photography projects can take months, or even years, to complete. But a very few are realised in a much shorter time frame. In November 2019, Mike found himself in a Berber sheep market south of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. He stepped into the arena with no knowledge of what to expect nor how long he had to capture the essence of the social gathering in front of him. Sheep and people. Noise and chaos. The farmers in the market paid little or no attention to him and he wandered freely amongst the action with a large DSLR and 70-200 lens.

It has been said that having a camera in your hands gives you a licence to see (**Joel Meyerowitz**). What Mike saw was the close and personal interactions between the farmers conducted with an unusual intensity of expression and body language, yet also with a calm self-assured manner, but far more extroverted than we, maybe, have become accustomed to in our own country. On top of that, the morning light and the colour of skin and clothing, added to the photographic interest that day.

Mike reported that the journey started from a tourist area in Marrakesh, but the group was transported, past the Atlas Mountains, to a sheep market in a village some distance away arriving at around 9:30AM, in the cold, but with a fantastic light. The local shepherds were already out in some numbers.





Mike Rooke

Many sheep were in evidence and neither people nor sheep minded being photographed. The scenes were changing so much that it was like a moving theatre. The local population were clearly well accustomed to each other and friendly with many smiling faces and interactions.

The low angle of the sun meant that people's faces were well lit showing the detail of their rugged and interesting facial features and the intensity of the relationships between them, often expressed with a dignity and calmness as they spoke to each other. Much of the clothing was traditional being made from wool and showing the ruggedness that shepherding requires, although some modern clothing was also in evidence.

Within a short period of time a lot of sheep trading action was captured, so Mike moved on to capture other types of interaction with deals seemingly sealed by slapping palms together. Again, the lighting was well-suited to the subjects. However, just as he was warming up the group was called back to the bus to go to see a goat herder.

After just 30 minutes, and grabbing only 50 shots in total, the opportunity to capture more of this authentic social event was snatched away because the photographic group he was with returned to the tour bus and headed south towards the stony desert on the edge of the Sahara.

Lyn Newton described how, when she did a similar photo tour, she also saw the "palm slapping" mode of sealing a deal, but that she'd also seen it at Appleby Horse Fair.

Mike finds that the following quotation from **Joel Meyerovitz** is motivating:

Once you have a camera in your hand - you have a licence to see.

Respond to events, your instincts. Trust it. Don't stop to think, or hesitate. Take that photo.



Mike Rooke



Mike Rooke



Mike Rooke

Harry Silcock is a street photographer who showed us a collection black and white images taken in India. He was born in that country and his father worked there for many years enabling Harry to travel around India and Pakistan, Burma (now Myanmar) and Nepal where he found excellent opportunities for street photography.

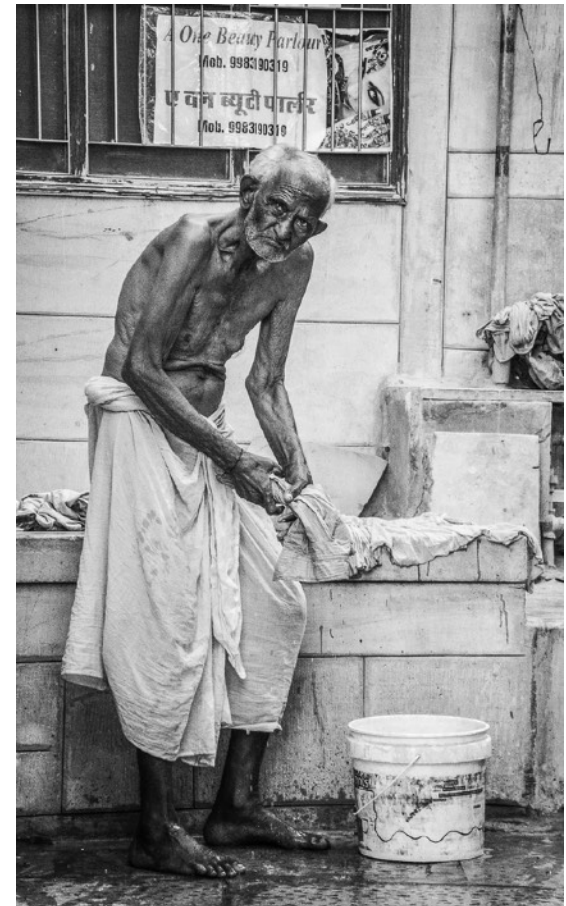
Despite all these countries being so intrinsically colourful, Harry shoots in black and white by preference, and often vignettes his photographs in order to lead the viewer more into the image. He often shoots with the camera and wide-angle lens resting on his chest (see also the article by Carol Olerud in this edition) and a remote release in his hand in order to capture more candid moments. Although this method hides moment of shutter release, Harry also asks permission and has never been refused, and is not happy "sniping" by using a long focal length lens.

Although he is a street photographer, Harry also likes to talk to his subjects and to get to know them at least a little. He says that this can often lead him into unexpected and interesting situations.

He also noted that one of the best places for photographs is the market but that you have to be ready to seize the moment as a lot is going on and things can change quickly. He is also interested in contrasts and showed us an image of an elderly man washing himself on the street next to a sign advertising the A-One Beauty Parlour.

He's been on a few organised photographic holidays in the region but says that you need to be careful of what he called "temple burnout". He also goes on self-organised holidays which give much more freedom for spontaneity and serendipity.

Harry has a Flickr account here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/harrysilcock/>.





Harry Silcock



Harry Silcock



Harry Silcock



Harry Silcock



Harry Silcock



Harry Silcock

Nigel Tooby started the Contemporary North group many years ago when the original meetings were held in a pub in York. Nigel then welcomed members to his arts studio in Wakefield before moving to Cumbria. Nigel showed us a powerful presentation about homeless people.

Nigel now lives in the countryside, living the rural idyll, but suffers from poor Internet provision. So, his presentation was a short video, which **Jim Souper** hosted. The video explained that he is connected with a housing association (**The Gem Programme: Tomorrow's Housing Leaders**) which schools young people in how to be social housing advocates. Each year Nigel gives a talk to the new Gem Programme intake. However, with the Coronavirus restrictions, he prepared the video.

In 2014, the charity **Simon on the Streets** invited Nigel to produce an exhibition which Nigel called the **Eye Spy Exhibition** (<https://simononthestreets.co.uk/news/visiting-nigel-toobys-eye-spy-exhibition>). *Simon on the Streets* is a homeless person's charity, and the exhibition was based around photographs and objects that are of significance to homeless people.

There were no images of people. Nigel explained that it's too easy to become immune to such photographs. Instead, the images are taken as if seen through the eyes of a homeless person thereby placing the viewer in that position. The presentation covered street furniture, pallets, pieces of cardboard - the things that become the normal life-supporting items for homeless people but can appear inconsequential to us. Also shown was the practice of "squatting" meaning to hide one's belonging in order to return to them later. Sadly, it is quite common to find squatted items urinated upon or otherwise defiled by people who are violent towards the homeless.

Some themes ran through images and connected them. For example, when becoming homeless, many people take their photographs with them. Also, being homeless starts one on a downwards spiral that is often hard to get off and is often exacerbated poor literacy, lack of a consistent normal environment, and drug use which takes place in order to reduce the boredom of being on the streets.

With help, the homeless can sometimes get off the streets into a flat or similar safe space, but old habits die hard, and the sleeping bag is still put into a defensible position in case of attack.

Nigel had some suggestions for how to behave when we encounter a homeless person begging - give them food and drink or something that they can use, such as a sleeping bag. Not money.

The presentation ended with two possible scenarios. One was a young man called **Jamie** who used to be homeless but completed a *Gem Programme* course and is now a senior housing professional. The other was a fictitious depiction of a suicide and burial in a pauper's grave.

Nigel defined contemporary photography as being about something rather than of something.

His presentation was certainly about something, albeit a disturbing subject.

Some of the members had seen the original *Eye Spy Exhibition* and said that it was so powerful that they came out changed.

All of Nigel's images were made and not taken, that is, each one was constructed by him.





Nigel Tooby



Nigel Tooby





Nigel Tooby



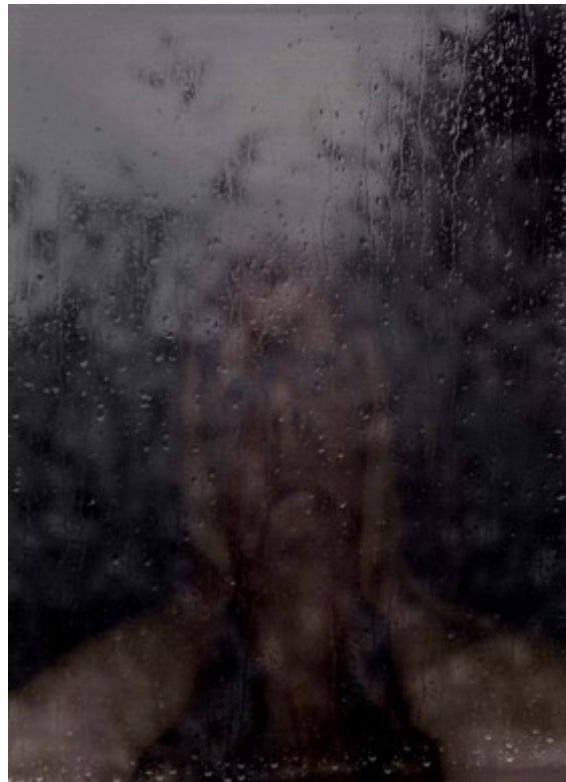
Nigel Tooby



Nigel Tooby



Avijit Datta drew parallels between the loneliness of the homeless and the loneliness of lockdown. This led to a discussion during which **Janet Cook's** ARPS panel was mentioned, which like Nigel's consisted of images that were constructed. Although not homeless, Janet experienced some of the feelings akin to homelessness. And, a connection can be made with some of the feelings that we have experienced in lockdown. **Patricia Ruddle** suggested that we re-visit her work which was an innovative conceptual installation, probably the first of its type in RPS Contemporary Distinctions. And, as such, there was no facility at HQ to show the installation as Janet wished. However, here is her Statement of Intent with a few images.



Janet Cook

Experiences during early life left me with a fundamental lack of self worth leading to deep insecurities, unhappiness and periods of depression.

I longed to "belong".

As the years passed, my professional success masked my constant feelings of emotional isolation.

Though still socially desperate to "fit in", the fear of rejection led me to distance myself from others.

I became a watcher, an observer, as if through windows both physical and emotional, never sure whether I was outside looking in, or inside looking out, certain only of my separateness.

Ultimately, overwhelmed by emotional guilt and failure, I withdrew further and suffered a complete breakdown.

During my years of physical and mental recovery, I began to recognise my need for a creative outlet, initially therapeutic and then, intellectual. I found that Photography was a possible answer as it allowed for the unpredictability of my state of health. I discovered a world which allowed me to observe safely, legitimately, secure behind the lens.

I was still separate, but of my own choosing.

I also began to write.

'Windows' and 'Isolation' still intrigue me as photographic subjects. Therefore, informed by my own experiences, I have made them the focus of much of my work.

I have researched the ideas of other artists, writers and photographers and I have begun to explore the relationship between my own emotional experiences, the words in my head, the images in my mind and those I have created.

I am developing the confidence and the ability to reflect on my past, consider my present and look towards a future with a growing acceptance of who I am.

Through this photographic submission I hope to communicate and express something of my personal journey of discovery. Experiences during early life left me with a fundamental lack of self worth leading to deep insecurities, unhappiness and periods of depression.



Janet Cook



Janet Cook

The feeling of not belonging, of not being entirely worthy, of being sometimes hostage to your own sensibilities. Those things speak to me very personally. Anthony Mignola. Man's loneliness is but his fear of life. Eugene O'Neill. When you please others in hopes of being accepted, you lose your self-worth in the process. Dave Pelzer. Self-worth comes from one thing - thinking that you are worthy. Wayne Dyer. I had friends at school, but I was never part of a gang and I dreamed of that sense of belonging to a group. You know, where people would call me "Em" and sit at the bar, "Em, are you drinking?" Emily Mortimer. We are lonely instead of bridled conviction rests upon loneliness, a rare and common, peculiar and to a few men, is the inevitable fact of existence. Thomas turns to stare at me. "You have turned aside and treacherous going. What to do?" Robert. My soul is a blotter how I try to blot there to hear my one. I was always myself for strength, but it comes from within. It is there all the time. Anna Freud 1895-1982. Def. Trompe l'œil - fool the eye, illusory, not what it seems. Loneliness is not an emptiness that must be filled. Loneliness is a symptom that we have not yet become comfortable with ourselves. A always tried but couldn't hide her desperate plea how to earn and how to learn approval.... Self esteem, beyond a dream there was never any, nor had been. Failing still beyond her will her spirit faded. Came the night no shaft of light illuminating presence of a god above whose love was waiting



and shout across the water, what are you after the summer. People build walls in the desert. The who of my life no the belief that far from being curious phenomenon to myself other solitary central and in of human existence as Wolfe. He out the window to put the guilty to work. Keat else is there Frank. Inside a hole and no more there's no one prayer... I'm always looking outside with and confidence



Janet Cook



Carol Olerud lives just south of Utrecht and is the joint organizer of the **RPS Benelux Chapter**. Every year she is one of a keen handful of members who go on a field trip, the last of which was in 2019 to Hamburg. She made a book of the trip and showed us some photographs from her collection.

Carol is a street photographer who lets the camera hang around her neck and shoots from the stomach so that people are unaware of her intent. The group's accommodation was in the centre of Hamburg so that they were within easy walking distance to many of its more interesting places.

Carol's equipment is a Canon 5D mark iv with 16-35mm lens - which is hardly inconspicuous for street photography! The 5D has a 35mm sensor meaning that a 16-35mm lens has quite a wide field of view, which she put to good use.

As you'd expect from a major hub such as Hamburg, the subjects were varied and often quite lively and interesting. Carol visited several areas including the Reeperbahn (famous for its seedy night life), Neuer Wall (for up-market shopping), the subway and the harbour. The atmosphere was very relaxed with many people enjoying themselves walking around, having a quiet drink taking a selfie with friends.

Dogs also featured in several images and, due to her wide-angle lens, the owners could also be included when they probably didn't expect to be.

As is common in many European cities, there are now many electric scooters in use. These are fast, very quiet and often have two people on board. Carol said that she tried one herself but fell off it.

The Reeperbahn is really a night-time area. During the day, when her photographs were taken, it is a less interesting and somewhat unkempt. She was surprised to see that there were access barriers labelled “no entry to women”. This is different to Amsterdam where anyone can get into the red-light area and it has become a tourist attraction.

One of the techniques that Carol uses is to shoot into the sun with the camera’s file format set to raw, and then use Lightroom to fix any exposure problems. This technique allows her to respond quickly to interesting activity and to be able to fix any exposure issues later.

Neuer Wall is the luxury shopping street selling Rolex watches for thousands of Euros as well as other luxury labels such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Bvlgari. There were even security guards on the street preventing photographs of shoppers and shops. However, by standing on a street corner and watching (**Joel Meyerowitz** also uses the same technique), she was able to take some useful photographs.

Neuer Wall can be contrasted with Hamburg’s own homeless population as shown by Carol capturing an image of a wedding party posing for their photographs next someone to someone begging on the streets. .

When you’re tired, after a day’s shooting, the U-Bahn is always handy for getting around, and has its own attractions for the wandering lens, such people going home (also tired, and falling asleep), architectural ceramics, etc.

Carol made a book from the photographs, just for herself. In an age where most photographs never get further than one’s disk drive, a book results in a more immediate and lasting memory of a place.

You can see more of Carol’s work on her Flickr feed

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/carololerud/>



Carol Olerud



Carol Olerud



Carol Olerud



Carol Olerud



Carol Olerud



Carol Olerud

In the dying minutes of the meeting, **Richard Hall** gave a very quick presentation called *Postcards from Home*. He mentioned that this work was inspired by criticism of his book of photographs, taken of people in his village during lockdown, which enabled him to achieve his ARPS. The book is the third blog in the series on COVID-19 and lockdown, *A Photo Project in 80 Days*.

Richard explained that, in an effort to update the photographs, and which formed part of his University course final year end project, **Jim Goldberg's** work (<https://jimgoldberg.com/>) was inspirational, and Richard was lucky enough to chat to Jim in order to refine his vision.

Jim's suggestions allowed Richard to go back to some of the original subjects in his village and to take more photographs and to get the subjects' stories. Again, these were taken during lockdown, so many of the images are taken through some separating medium such as distance or glass. Everyone's front door was also photographed to make a mosaic for a double page spread.





Richard Hall



Richard Hall



Richard Hall

Each of our Contemporary North meetings has shown that we are a diverse group of photographers with wide-ranging projects. This exemplifies the nature of the Contemporary Group genre – that there is no genre. It encompasses all types of photography, whether personal exploration of self or life on the street. In our March meeting it was interesting to note that there was a connection among the different contributions. It was all about people, whether people on the street, people with and without homes, and a reflection on what it means to be human.

"Happy Spring from Contemporary North"

Next meeting 17 April 2021, 1:00 - 4:00 pm. (Uk time)