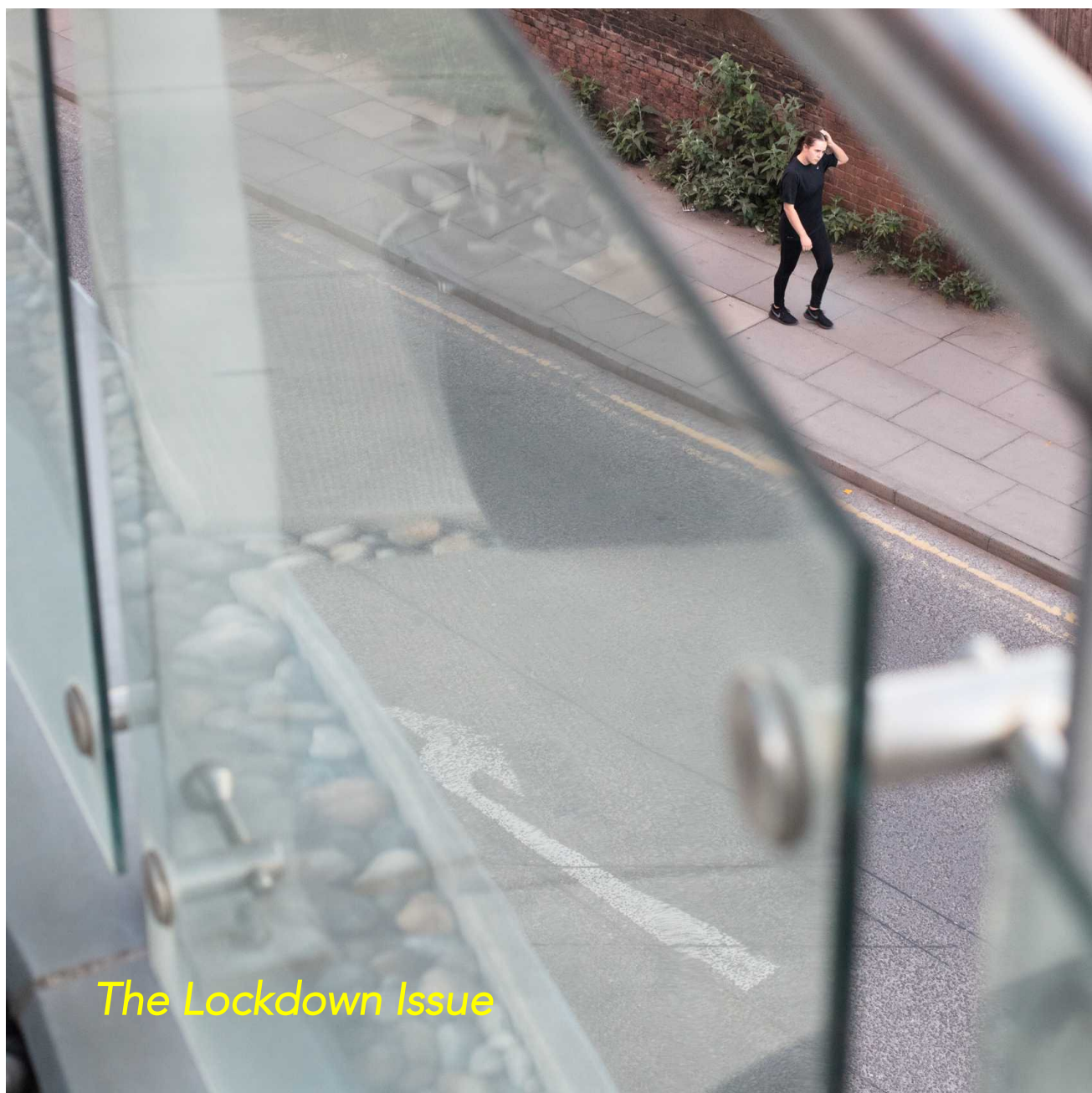


August 2020

The Newsletter of the Royal Photographic Society Contemporary Group



The Lockdown Issue



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The full length version of Concept August 2020 may also be found at:

[RPS Contemporary Group web page: Concept Archives
Issuu](#)

Front Cover Image: Romney Tansley ARPS



Editorial

This month we bring you, in an issue larger than usual, articles and features that all in some way reflect on this moment. They all address, directly or indirectly, the experience of lockdown in the wake of the world-wide pandemic. No aspect of life it seems has been unchanged by the Corona virus. And here we are able to bring you the work of a host of photographers who have risen to the challenge of depicting some of these changes.

In *Coping with Quarantine*, Brian Steptoe FRPS and Duncan Unsworth display work of a decidedly intimate nature, as in different ways their pictures meditate on their changing experience of the world, their worlds. Rod Fry also depicts life close to home, in pictures that reveal the positive community spirit of near neighbours in the early weeks of lockdown.

Taking a different tack altogether in *Lockdown Task*, John Evans-Jones focuses on an aspect of life that may escape the notice of most of us, the macro world of IKEA fitments. These he displays as objects of beauty, in his cool still-life pictures.

Adrian Hough LRPS takes yet another direction in his thought-provoking article, *Contemporary Landscape*, in which he considers the nature of the landscape photograph. Does it, he asks, serve the same purpose in contemporary photography as a scientific or conceptual model? Or is it something else altogether?

The photographs of Armando Jongejan FRPS in *One Foot in China*, are from his newly published book, *MADE IN CHINA*. They take us back before the pandemic and to a society which evokes feelings of both alarm and admiration in the West. His is a gentle portrayal of life on the streets, of a society largely at ease with itself, where as a result of rapid social change the traditional and the modern are constantly to be seen together in the frame. Through his lens we are able to imagine the dignity and beauty of the place and its people.

Finally thanks to Adrian Hough LRPS for his South West Report.

Romney Tansley ARPS
Editor



View from the Chair

Covid-19 - the Elephant in the Room

Well, we have passed four months since lockdown started in the UK and the cautious process of re-opening has started. There will be bumps along the way, as we see now in East Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Leicester, but I hope that you are as well as you can be, and that those of you who are of working age have managed to work from home and have been able to maintain your income stream.

As someone who is retired and in receipt of a good pension, I have been insulated from the fallout from Covid-19 but the arts of all sorts, including photography, are suffering immensely. Photographers, cinematographers and their crews, musicians, actors, directors, theatre staff and others face a very uncertain future and we still don't know when things will improve. I hope we can all support them as much as possible so that when we emerge from this global crisis we will have a viable arts industry that helps shape our culture. We will be much poorer without many of them.

One affected person I know is Thomas, a sound engineer, who should, as I write, be on tour with a major entertainer. He is a freelancer and has no work with no furlough. I met him on a project I started a few weeks ago. He is fortunate in that his grandfather taught him carpentry, skills he has been using to help re-configure a restaurant near here so that it can meet post lockdown rules. That was a week's work and he has been able to use his electronic engineering skills to do jobs elsewhere. This will be the future for him for some time I'm sure. It certainly makes me realise how precarious things are for many people.



Technology to the Rescue

Many of you are members of camera clubs and they, like ourselves, will be getting prepared for a new season and a new normal. Prospects for meeting live in the near future



seem remote, but technology in the form of Zoom, Webex and other services is coming to the rescue, not only for clubs but also for people and companies whose livelihood depends on being able to communicate on things photographic.

I suspect that we will see a lot more on-line seminars and exhibitions in the future. This is an unexpected positive from the pandemic. Organisations such as the RPS are realising that, while having meetings in a room are comfortable, our geographic spread means that attendance is limited to those with the income and time to travel. Zoom enables us to reach much greater and wider audiences. These meetings are here to stay.

The Contemporary Group On-line Discussions Series

I am very excited that we have started the ball rolling on a series of talks which we will try to deliver free or for minimal cost. I intend to try to present you, on a monthly basis, with interesting photographers in our field from as wide a group of artists as I can find. Some of you will have already signed up for our first session with renowned Magnum

Photographer Chris Steele-Perkins,

<https://rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2020/august/chris-steele-perkins/> If you haven't done so, please register and if you have questions please send them to me at contemporary@rps.org

Chris will speak to us on 24th August and then in September Paul Hill will be discussing his approach to photography and the upcoming issue of the third edition his seminal work, "Approaching Photography." I'm excited about this series, so watch out for announcements as we make them. I am in discussion with one young woman photographer based in Cairo whose work combines photography and other crafts to interact with nomadic communities. I have many other names on a list - enough to keep us going for some time.

On-Line Exhibition

We are also launching a call to members to take part in an on-line exhibition, allowing you to share recent work in a number of categories - Open, Life in Lockdown and Climate Change. Look out for details as they become available.

And finally...

It has become important to thank medical staff and key workers for their sterling work during the pandemic and I re-iterate that with gusto. Many of you will be in that category, we do appreciate all that you do for us. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

On a more local note I'd like to thank all the volunteers in the Contemporary Group. Without you our meetings wouldn't go ahead, our superb Contemporary Photography magazine wouldn't be edited, laid out, printed and posted. The Concept team do a difficult job in trying to pull together this magazine for you, so many thanks to them. Please contribute articles. They'll be delighted to consider your work for publication.

Happy photography,

Alan Cameron LRPS



Southwest Contemporary Group

The Group was due to meet on 12th July at the usual venue in Dartington but due to the Covid-19 pandemic met instead via Zoom with eight members participating. Fortunately, Zoom upgraded our series of free pre-booked forty minute sessions by replacing the first session by one of indefinite length. After a few teething troubles and the convenor forgetting that he had to enable screen-sharing before anyone else could share their screen, the meeting settled down to be surprisingly effective.

The business section of the meeting addressed a brief report on the national Contemporary Group Annual meeting in March and a report on the progress in looking at recreating our presence on the RPS website. After this we moved on to looking at the images and thinking about ideas. Sadly, web-based communication does not lend itself to admiring the products of the darkroom which several of our members usually share and we very much missed this rich visual experience.

Adrian Hough began with a presentation about the comparison between the ways in which Geographers and Photographers think about Landscape and the parallels which exist between their categorisations. This led us on to an almost philosophical discussion on what constitutes a landscape and the nature and value of the human presence in any such image. Not everyone agreed with everything that was said but there was much food for thought and the presentation certainly stimulated friendly discussion which was the intention.

Graham Hodgson presented a series of images of Wuhan, which he had culled from Streetview, which interestingly only shows the inside of a museum with no views of any street.

When lockdown began, *Nigel West* found himself locked down in Adelaide, Australia and as we were meeting by Zoom could still have been there as far as everyone else could actually tell! He presented a series of monochrome images which showed open shops but deserted streets.

Vivian Howse had been in the process of producing a display of re-printed vintage photographs of her village when lockdown came and, realising the value of such images as a visual archive, set out to photograph as many people as possible on their doorsteps or in other socially distanced settings. There was a great willingness on the part of almost everyone to be photographed and in some cases the images were sent to distant relatives



enabling them to see an elderly parent. So popular was the project that Viv started receiving requests for visits. At the local boatyard, the residents had to be photographed



outside the yard as visitors were prohibited. Two variations on the theme were the celebrations of VE day (socially distanced, of course) and the clapping for the NHS.

Carol Ballenger spend her allotted daily session of exercise during the early days of lockdown in the local wood where she photographed the trees and recorded the birdsong, producing an AV display. We were also treated to a concert by her violin pupils, with each musician recorded separately and the mixed together by Carol.

Finally, *John Evans-Jones* showed two sets of images both of which were instantly recognisable as the product of his imagination by anyone familiar with his work. The first were images from three books which show similar but different images in multiples of four or eight images. One book covered People, one Art and the third book concerned itself with Things. Examples included sets of images of cross-roads from above, the washing hanging on a nearby line on successive days of the week and a set of trees photographed month by month. The second set were panels: 3 by 3; 5 by 5; and 7 by 7 of parts left over after building furniture from a well-known Swedish manufacturer. We were torn between the fascinating way in which the images had been produced and his photoshopped use of them in IKEA stores and our worries that everything in his house is in danger of imminent collapse.

We eventually ended after nearly two and a half hours. We will be setting dates for a 'proper' physical meeting in the autumn but with back-up arrangements for the use of Zoom if necessary.

Adrian Hough LRPS



Contemporary Landscapes

Here is a photograph of Prague. More precisely it's a photograph of a musician and a girl, both on a bridge in Prague with a backdrop of buildings. It is displayed in portrait format rather than landscape. In terms of genre or RPS distinctions it could fall into travel, documentary, contemporary or landscape depending on the other images associated with it as part of a portfolio, and any accompanying text.

However, in the present context, I am using the photograph to make the point that because it contains a relationship between people, place and things, then whatever else it may be it is definitely a landscape photograph. It can be argued whether or not a landscape photograph needs to contain all these elements but that is a separate issue. The question which interests me, and why I used the image to open a presentation on the relationship between landscape in photography and landscape in geography, was to ask the question as to the purpose of a landscape in

Contemporary Photography. Given that such photography is supposed to be about things rather than of things or illustrating an idea or concept, does a landscape serve the same purpose in contemporary photography as a scientific or conceptual model in science or any other field?

The way models are assessed in other fields might raise the following four questions about the landscape photograph.

Does the photograph match the idea or data?

Is the photograph coherent rather than raising inconsistencies in itself or between itself and other images?

Does the photograph have sufficient breadth of expression or is it too restricted?

Is the photograph fertile in that it raises new questions rather than just making its own point?

I doubt if there is any consensus on any of the above but we certainly had a healthy discussion at Contemporary South-West. I'm in no sense trying to be dogmatic. All I want to do is to ask the questions and stimulate thought whether in agreement, disagreement or, hopefully, to develop and take the ideas further.

Adrian Hough LRPS



One Foot in China

As modern China continues its transformation into global superpower, the traditional and the modern jostle together in the lives of ordinary people - uneasily to many Western eyes. How does a photographer set about capturing this? This was the challenge facing freelance photographer *Armando Jongejan FRPS* on his recent trip to China.

MADE IN CHINA is the title of a new photobook by Armando Jongejan from the Netherlands. Having studied photography at the University of Applied Photography in Apeldoorn he now works as a freelance photographer in Egmond aan Zee. As a documentary photographer he seeks to make contact with people in their own environment, driven by curiosity about how they live, what they do. "In addition to photos, this also provides great conversations", he says.



Cheap consumer goods have been coming from China for many years. First there were household items and clothing. High-tech products, such as tablets, audio equipment, smartphones, cameras and lenses have been added more recently.

In several areas, the People's Republic of China, with about 1.4 billion inhabitants, is at the forefront of the world. The country has more than 25,000 km of high-speed rail, the second tallest residential tower in the world and many cities with millions of inhabitants. In a few decades it has been transformed from a developing country into a military, economic and political global player.

The transport infrastructure between the cities with the high-speed train lines is good and there are several metro lines within the cities. To achieve this, older districts regularly have to make way for new development. The result is many new high-rise buildings, residential towers of sometimes fifty floors or more.



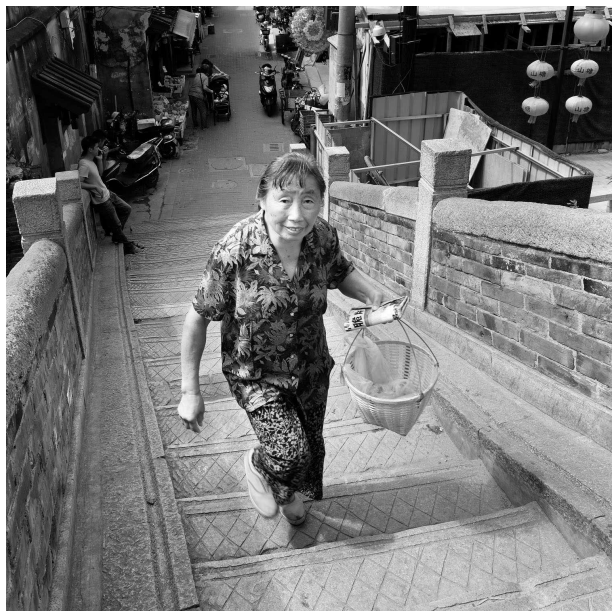
"My impression was that everyone works hard to earn a living - in factories, but also in workshops which sometimes double as bedrooms. Everywhere people seemed enterprising", he says. "I wanted to capture the transformation. People are important for me. I wanted to make contact, to be close and involved with my subjects."

"I went to China late last year. I went as a tourist", he says. But immediately he faced the challenge of how to adequately convey what he saw. "As a documentary photographer I make contact with people in their own environment, and my work is characterized by a thematic approach."



He travelled to eight cities in East and North-East China, including Shanghai and Beijing over a period of several weeks. He carried with him a small camera to take pictures of daily life - in fact two Fujifilm X-E3 bodies. "These are very light and even more important, they make you less threatening", he says. "I took a 10-24mm, 18-55mm and for some photos a 55-200mm, light lenses, but high quality. Generally though I'm a wide angle photographer."

Tradition and development go hand in hand in China. "In a park I saw thousands of plasticized A4 sheets with Chinese texts and a telephone number hanging on clotheslines or lying on bushes. Young people and old looked carefully at the texts. A young man I spoke to in English took out his smartphone and through his translation app he showed me that it was an important feature of life. These were all messages seeking marriage partners. There were tables around which older women sat on stools matching young people together." He adds that these are scenes which may be recognisable from the film *Mulan*. "China still exudes an atmosphere of tradition and peace", he says. "People are open and friendly, the officials more detached. But everyone is friendly and hospitable."





"Everywhere tradition and the modern go hand in hand", he says. "In one place I watched children having fun and driving around on large 'transformers', with a traditional temple in the background. Young women regularly wear traditional dress to stroll on the street. At weddings, one bridal couple may dress in Western style, while another dresses up in traditional dress."

"Over the months on my return I posted photos on Facebook and I got questions such as 'when will the photo book be published' or 'Can I order a book?'". Did he have a book in mind from the start? I ask.

"When I first posted my photos I had no idea that I would publish a book, but of course I started thinking. Slowly but surely the idea took shape in my head."

"I'm afraid that I see my 'photo world' in square format. It started when I was nine years old with my Agfa Click-II camera and later using the Rollei SL-66 and several Hasselblad bodies", he explains. He selected more than 400 photos, post-processed them all in black and white in square format. "I then printed them all on A4 and made my selection in three different stages. The final step was in a big room with 10 tables when I got my selection down to about 150 photos. There I decided which photos fitted, which ones made the combination or difference stronger." Then the sequence was important, he says. "What do I want to tell, how can I make the transformation clear? And how to depict the difference between ordinary people and officials, although I had no problems with officials."



"This is how I made the layout of my book", he says. "But this time there was to be no print run of 2,000 copies as with his previous book, Monnikenleven (Monks' life). "I ordered just 50", he says. The price is 35 Euro + 11 Euro shipping. There are nine books left as we go to press. If you'd like a signed copy, please contact armandojongejan@hotmail.com. Book: size 300x300x17mm 134 pages, 120 black and white photographs, printed in full color, hardcopy and almost 1.4 kg.

Romney Tansley ARPS







Life in the Time of Plague

On the 23rd of March a deep quiet descended on the world. A coronavirus originating in a wet market in Wuhan in China, travelled west and hit our shores like a silent tsunami.

The ensuing global pandemic put the country lockdown. Phrases such as self-isolation and social distancing entered our vocabulary. In order to save lives and protect the NHS, we stayed indoors and washed our hands thoroughly. We ventured out only for essential shopping, to visit the Doctors or for brief exercise once a day close to home.

Was it all bad? Traffic levels shrank to 1950s levels, contrails disappeared from the sky. We had time to think, observe the small things in life and appreciate our loved ones in the streets where we live. Communities came together. The daily routine became more tranquil. We had time to think. These photographs taken on my daily walks around the estate where I live, on trips to the shops and the occasional visit into Paignton, are a reminder of what has become the norm in the fight against this deadly disease.

During the lockdown we celebrated Easter and the 75th Anniversary of VE day quite differently from before. They somehow became more special, more reflective and more poignant.

These strangest of times have taught us the true value of the people who kept working during this pandemic. Especially those NHS staff who made the ultimate sacrifice in the battle against this deadly virus. They are the real heroes. Our thanks to them all.

Rod Fry ARPS





Life under lockdown has changed our sense of perspective, of what's important to us. Two photographers take very different approaches to capturing this new found sense of intimacy...

Camellia

A frost and slug damaged camellia flower from the garden where I spent many hours at the beginning of lockdown. The tortured beauty of the flower resonated with me as well as resembling the images of the virus cells circulating at the time.

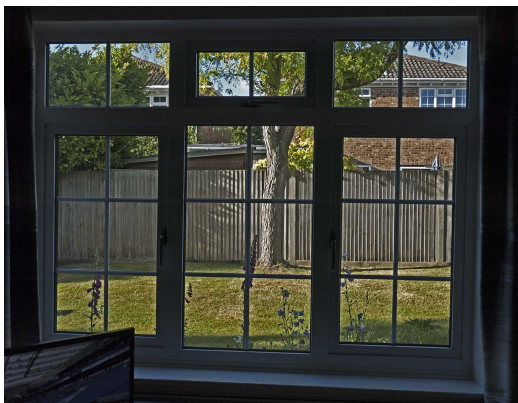
Duncan Unsworth



Home

In this project I have turned from seeing 'lockdown' as an unwanted constraint to seeing it as a way to explore the location of 'home' as a positive. All the images were taken in my house and garden, mainly during the unseasonably hot weather in late Spring 2020.

Brian Steptoe FRPS



Online Contemporary Exhibition

Call for Entries

With many exhibition venues closed during the Covid-19 pandemic the Contemporary Group would like to offer an online venue for your work. This call is open to all members of the Contemporary Group of the RPS. Our intention is that we use this opportunity to showcase current work and involve all members.

Full details are contained in my recent email. Be sure to read the full call for entries and the associated terms and conditions.

Dr David J. Grimshaw MA ARPS



Lockdown task: what to do with IKEA leftovers?

I hoard a box of old IKEA leftovers. When you've assembled an Ikea cupboard, bookshelf or TV table, there are always bits left over. There may be a spanner or Allen key or an oversupply of screws and washers. But usually that's not all. Into the box go bits of plastic or metal brackets or shelf supports or hinges that perhaps should be somewhere inside your new bit of furniture.

In lockdown I have had much time on my hands. I've read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. So what do I do now? I metamorphose my old IKEA leftovers into digital files which are easier to store and which will be remembered but in not quite their original form.

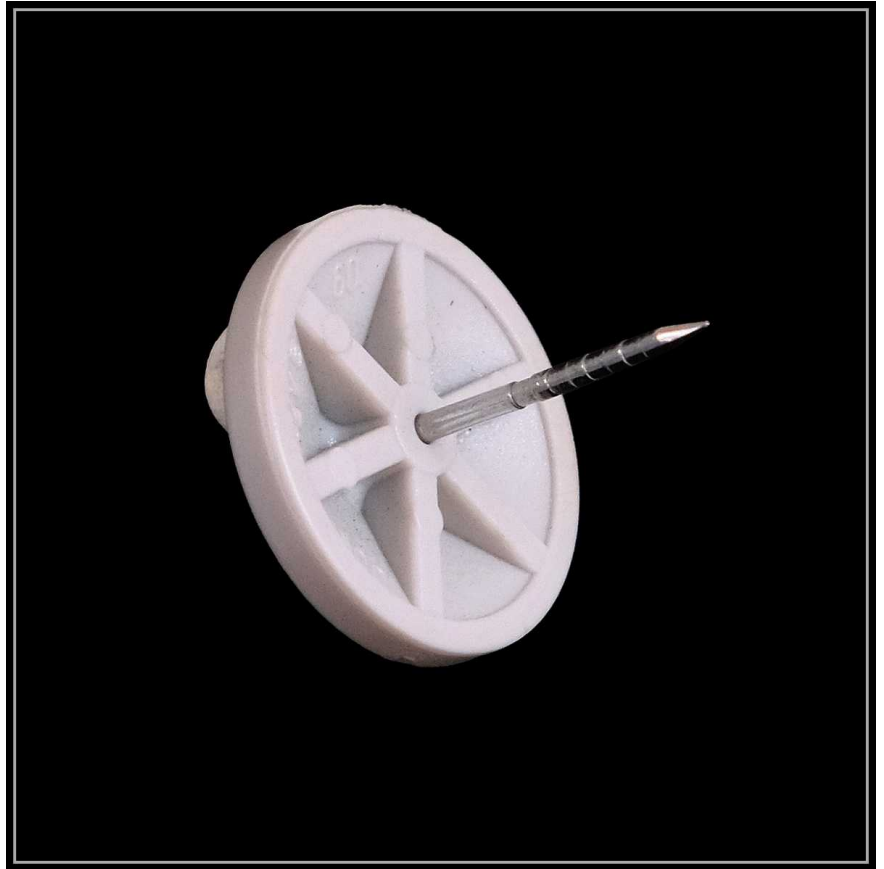
I selected 49 images with the intention of making a 7 by 7 grid, building it up from the obvious central silver washer to squares of three, five and then seven images per side. It's hard enough arranging a panel of fifteen or twenty images but the possible number of arrangements of 49 images amounts to many millions. Perhaps the number is a bit smaller by keeping the middle silver washer in a fixed position? I don't know, but then I didn't study maths in lockdown.

Obviously I can't be sure that I have created the most pleasing or meaningful grid but I've had a good try. Then I wondered if IKEA would steal my idea. Might they incorporate the images in what we see as icons of the IKEA brand? Their logo, their floor plan, their meat balls and hot dogs or the traveller exit, to remind us of what we've let ourselves in for. Probably not!

John Evans-Jones ARPS







Help make the Contemporary Group thrive

The success of a Special Interest Group depends on engagement with and the involvement of its members, so I am seeking volunteers who can spare a few hours a month to create and run regional and chapter sub-groups.

The Contemporary Group works best when we have active regional organisations to connect members in a locale, who can meet virtually or face-to-face to discuss their photography. At present we need volunteers to help support local members in most UK and Ireland Regions and in our Chapters.

At present several local groups exist as shown below and some cross regional boundaries, e.g. Contemporary North has members from outside its principle base in Yorkshire region.

Region	Local group	Organiser	Email	Members
East Anglia	East Anglia Contemporary Group (EACG)	Tom Owens ARPS	contemporaryea@rps.org	19
North West	Contemporary North West	Alan Cameron LRPS	contemporary@rps.org	16
South West		Adrian Hough LRPS	contemporarysw@rps.org	22
Yorkshire	Contemporary North	Patricia Ruddle APRS	patriciaruddle@btinternet.com	28
North*		Patricia Ruddle APRS	patriciaruddle@btinternet.com	10

*For now Patricia Ruddle ARPS is happy to act as contact in North Region, but we would prefer to have someone actually based in the region as a volunteer.

At the moment we lack organisers for the Regions, Chapters and Countries detailed below. Chapters or Countries with only 1 member are not included.

Where numbers are very low - fewer than 6 - it's probably unnecessary to have an organiser but I'll be content to link you up if everyone in the group has opted to receive emails.





What do we ask local organisers to do?

We ask our organisers to contact the members in their region or chapter and have meetings with them to discuss group members' photography. Currently meetings happen at regular intervals several times a year, and they can be either virtual or face-to-face. Frequency and format is up to you and your regional members, meetings can be as long or as short as you wish and your face to face meetings can be outings.

Ideally each meeting should be followed by a report which you share with your members that is then published in Concept. Total time commitment to organise each meeting and report on it would take a few hours.

Organisers are automatically added to our committee and so can influence the Group's direction by raising ideas and concerns of their own or their members. Committee meetings are on-line generally every three months and occasionally face-to-face for UK members. If every region and chapter organiser were to join, then meetings would last no more than two hours. At the moment we aim to get through business in an hour.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact me at contemporary@rps.org.

Meanwhile, if you see a group that is open and you'd like to join then contact the local organiser. I'm sure you'll have a warm welcome.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from some of you.

Alan Cameron LRPS

Chair





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Next issue: due for publication mid-October 2020

Articles and features:

Please send to Romney Tansley by 1st October romney@tansley.co.uk

Text in Word format Images in jpg format max 2Mb (no watermarks please)

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For RPS Contemporary Group

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/>

For past issues of Concept

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/e-news-archive/>

For the Archive of Contemporary Photography

<https://rps.org/groups/contemporary/journal-archive/>

RPS Contemporary Face Book group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RPSContemporary/?ref=share>

Contemporary NW Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3636828756391116>

RPS Contemporary Instagram page

<https://www.instagram.com/rpscontemporary/>

Contemporary North Meeting Report 20th July 2020

https://issuu.com/royalphotographicsociety/docs/rps-contemp-north_july20

The next North meeting will be on Zoom on 19 September 2020

Issuu

https://issuu.com/home/published/concept_august_2020

