



ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Contemporary North

A Subgroup of the RPS Contemporary
Group

April 2021

**Report of the RPS Contemporary North
Zoom Meeting.** Saturday 17th April 2021,
1.30-4.00 pm.

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

Text: **Michael Rooke**

Coordination and editing: **Patricia Ruddle**

Layout and design: **Wendy North**



Meeting on Zoom enabled the **Contemporary Group North** to be treated to documentary and conceptual presentations from members of the group from Yorkshire, Normandy and Herefordshire. With them, we travelled to West and South Yorkshire, the East End of London and Southern Belgium.

Due to Zoom, the geographic spread of our members continues to grow each month and we welcomed **Rachel Perry**, who joined the RPS and the Contemporary Group last week, and **Bunshri Chandaria**, an Associate, who found us on our RPS website. Both will give us talks at our next meetings.



Twenty-four members attended. (Apologies were received from **Gary Morgan, Graham Low, Sally Hedges Greenwood, Prabir Mitra, Mick Yates** and **Adrian James**).

The date of our meeting coincided with the funeral of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip and as a mark of respect we observed one minute's silence at 3 pm in his memory. The Society has enjoyed Royal Patronage since 1854 with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as patrons. The Society became Royal in 1894. As you know, the Duchess of Cambridge, a keen photographer, became the Society's patron after Queen Elizabeth (1952-2019).

Patricia Ruddle asked the group to consider the suggestion that as the Covid restrictions are eased, we might decide to meet one month in person (at Clements Hall) and one month on-line, using Zoom. Perhaps even a hybrid of Zoom and live meetings. A group within the RPS has been considering ways of reducing the carbon footprint of our activities and more extensive use of Zoom technology in the future may support that objective. More information in our May Newsletter.

Patricia also asked for feedback on whether the group should take a break in July and August this year, and reconvene with a live meeting in September if Clements Hall is available, followed by a Zoom one in October if the group wants to proceed this way. Please let her know.

Our member, **Alexandra Prescott** has been elected to the RPS Contemporary Group Committee and will no doubt contribute significantly to the Group and its wider RPS membership.

Don't forget that **Alexandra** has developed and now organises a FRPS Support Group for contemporary, documentary and applied distinctions. The next one is **May 10th at 5 pm (UK time)**. If you are interested in attending please email her:

aprescott_3@yahoo.co.uk

Avijit Datta mentioned the four new Contemporary COVID-19 blogs since our last CN meeting - concentrating on the epidemic of mental health deterioration accompanying the COVID-19 Pandemic

Blog 33 from Supriyo Das, Kolkata

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/april/the-new-normal-and-the-covid-19-fight-in-india-for-the-world/>

The New Normal and the COVID-19 Fight in India for the world

Blog 32 from Donna Bridgewater, Princes Trust Awardee. Speaking to the Contemporary Group on May 17th

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/april/getting-through-this-it-s-ok-not-to-feel-ok/>

Blog 31 from Abdulla Elmaz, The Maldives and Dubai

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/april/go-home-mental-stability-and-collaboration-in-a-pandemic/>

Blog 30 from Sakshi Parikh, Mumbai

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/march/chasing-pigeons-in-mumbai/>

Please make a special note of the **Donna Bridgewater** talk to the RPS Contemporary Group on May 17th. She is a Princes Trust Awardee and on this day of Prince Philip's funeral it would be fitting for members of our group (CGN) to express their interest in attending that Zoom event.

<https://rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2021/may/donna-bridgewater/>

Contemporary North Group Presentations

By accident, not design, two of the four presentations explored the effects of post-industrial changes in Western Europe on its landscape, its people, its communities and the associated concepts of the left-behind and levelling-up. Fascinating.

The next meeting was confirmed to be held on Saturday **May 15th, 130 - 4 pm (UK time).**

Peter Bartlett - *Shards of West Yorkshire Volumes 2 and 3*

Drawing on the idea of the archaeological technique of re-assembling shards of pottery to build a picture of the past, Peter had roamed the post-industrial landscape of West Yorkshire, its city centres, towns and communities.

He presented well over 100 images, all in colour, that have now been published in several books, capturing the essence of life there, with sensitivity and a fair degree of humour lurking below the surface of his work.

At the beginning of the project, he made a list of West Yorkshire communities that he wanted to visit and expected to complete it by the end of 2020. The five years prior to this time had seen the Brexit referendum and vote, largely supported by the communities depicted, and who fit neatly into what have been described as the “left behind areas”.

Many shots depict shop windows carefully and creatively crafted to attract attention by enterprising small business owners, often with spelling bloomers and often hand written. They tell a story of entrepreneurship, never understated, sometimes desperate, with people walking by seemingly oblivious of these efforts to rebuild the local economy.





Bingley



Brighthouse



Cleckheaton



Featherstone



Featherstone



Castleford

Castleford



Leeds



Hebden Bridge



Halifax



Morley

Peter has assembled these disparate images (shards, if you will) that together will form an extraordinary and valuable authentic history of this part of Yorkshire, during a time bookended by Brexit and the first lockdown.

For more information about Peter and his books his website is:

<https://www.peterbartlettimages.co.uk/>



Phil Dunbar - *La Ville Est Ma Solitude - The Town Is My Sadness (Loneliness)*

Phil lives in Paris and has photographed, in a startlingly graphic way, the town of Charleroi in southern Belgium that illustrates the post-industrial decline in that part of the country, dramatically and memorably.

The black and white treatment of the photographs captured the mood of this part of the town perfectly.

The opening shot is a panorama of the town, a steel town with its attendant cooling and water towers, and the vast remnants of the Bessemer plant which is the industrial process for the mass production of steel from pig iron.





At ground level though, the houses, streets and roads are visually and physically dominated by a huge water pipe, metres in diameter, which runs over and above the town. Phil captured the feel of this artefact superbly, with great compositions creating an atmosphere of an almost dehumanised existence.







One photograph in the shopping centre catches a shop window advertising Richesses Perdues (*Lost Treasures*) that nicely encapsulated the overriding impression of something broken and lost.

A particularly poignant photograph captures two young men on a park bench, but not speaking or acknowledging each other in any way.





The overriding and lasting impression of the set though, is of a town that has outlived its purpose in the run down rust belt of Northern Europe. Phil explained that the richest economic sector in Belgium is now the agricultural north, a transformation that is a complete reversal of the early industrial revolution.

Wendy North - *Plastic*

It all began with a recreational walk during the Covid-19 restrictions which resulted in over ten weeks of recovering from a broken ankle..



A nasty slip down a grassy bank for Wendy became the catalyst for a mini photographic project encapsulating the modern use of plastics at home, morphing into the creation of abstract images using multiple exposures. As would be expected, Wendy created a super set of sixteen images in a panel illustrating all that she saw whilst confined at home recuperating.

Her first camera phone shot though, was of her sitting up in the hospital bed pre-op, complete with oxygen mask with three doctors looking over her shoulder.



The initial impact of Wendy's injury and operation was that her world was very restricted and confined to a few key places around the house, which meant that her photography was also constrained, but as she gained in strength and her mobility increased her photography project widened and became more creative in its outlook.

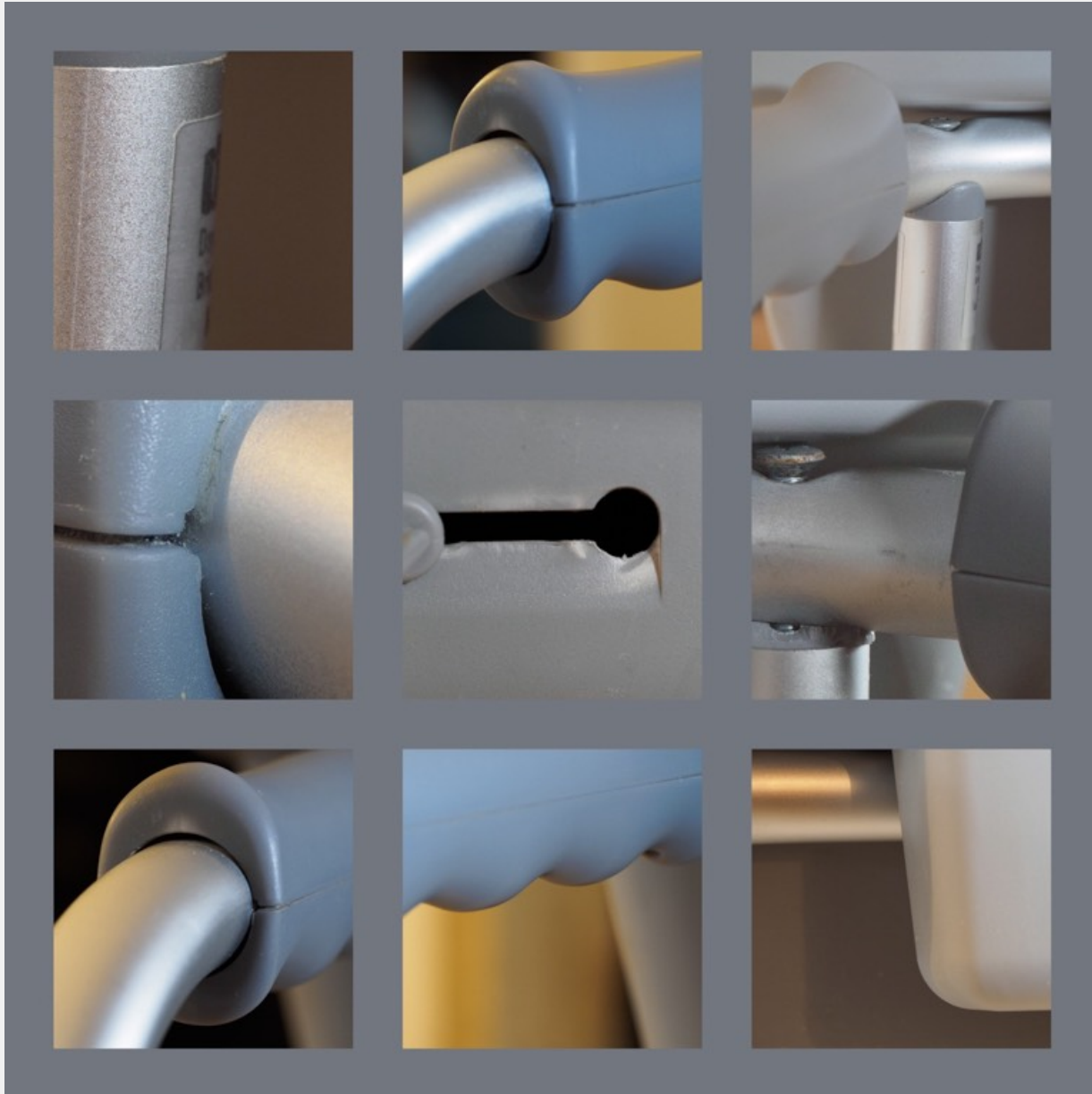




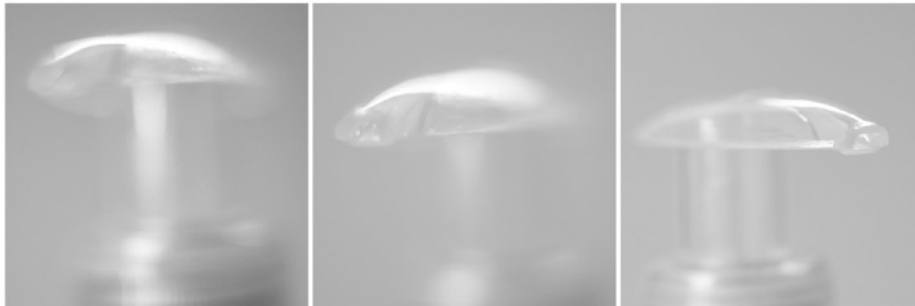
The first thing to catch her attention was the sheer volume of plastic containers that her food came in. Then the plastic in almost all items round the house – television controller, the heating thermostat, and even her zimmer-frame.

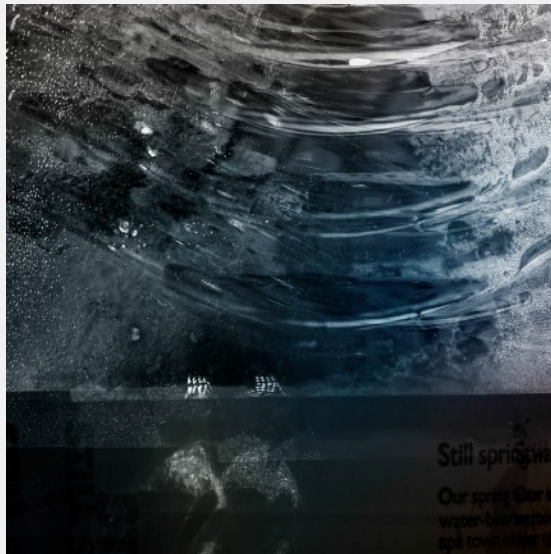
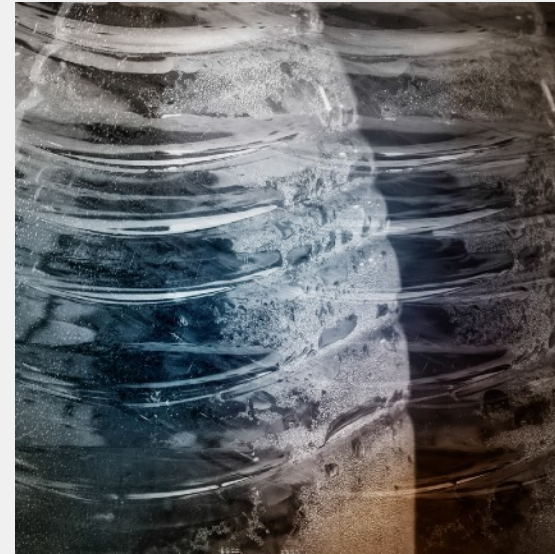
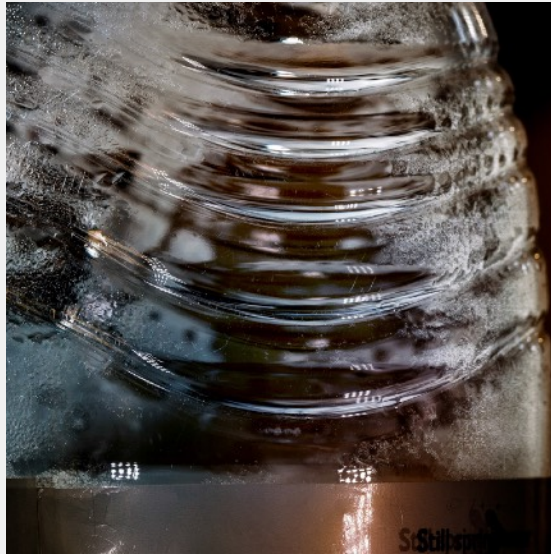






Then, as she recovered, more creative thinking began to happen as she began to explore the way the light played on the surface and through the material of plastic containers and also by adding in shallow depth of field, multiple exposures and colour inversions in post-processing.





Many thanks to Wendy for sharing that particular experience with us. None of us would wish an accident like that on ourselves, but it was an inspiring example of how photography can keep us feeling positive and motivate us out of difficult situations.

We could all start to look round our house, camera in hand, without waiting to break a leg.

I'm delighted to see that Wendy seems to have fully recovered.



Colin Howard - *Barking Mad*

Colin now lives in Hereford but was born and bred in the East End of London. He came up with the idea of photographing the environment surrounding the railway stations that formed a backdrop to his early life. He called it a journey of discovery along London's Hammersmith and City Underground Line.

Colin has been taking photographs in black and white for 35 years. He says that the way he edited and selected his shots had changed radically as the project unfolded and his final curation is very different to how he first saw the project.

He started at Hammersmith and worked his way east to Barking. Not surprisingly, most of the 100 or so photographs capture people showing the diversity of the population within the environment of the city.



The project began as straight documentary record but ended up being a very personal journey, with a very telling final image.

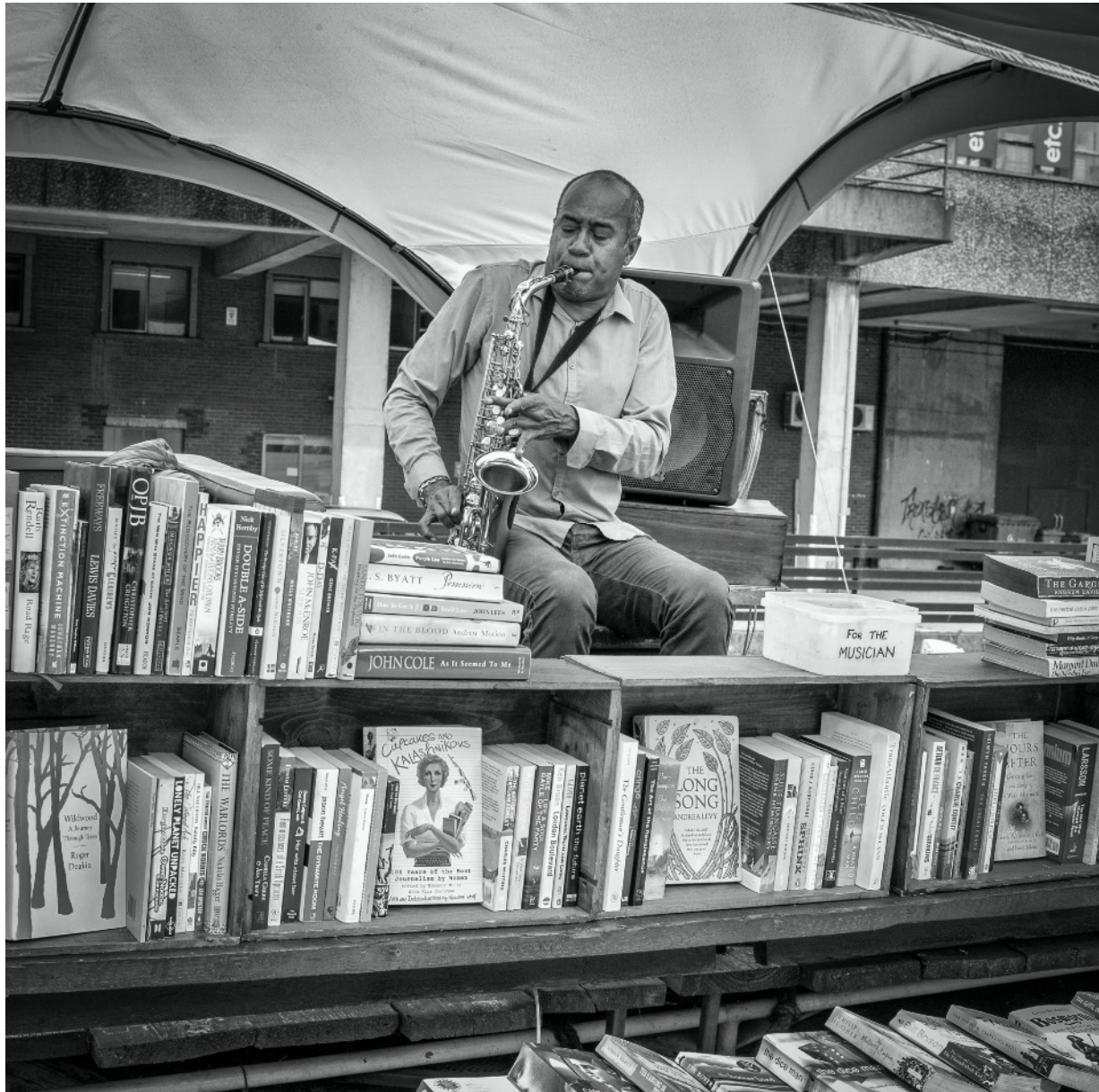
The first shot is a great one of a person emerging from Hammersmith Station under the flashy hoarding advertising the Broadway Shopping Centre. (So very different to the painted shop signs of West Yorkshire that we had seen earlier in the afternoon.)

Just north of there, Colin has taken a shot of Shepherd's Bush market that looks extraordinarily old-fashioned, as do the people.



Having whetted our appetite, Colin takes us on a long journey through a London that he knows intimately, with some superb photography of real London life. There is even one of a seller of second hand books playing a saxophone behind his stall.





Humour creeps in as well, occasionally, but the overriding impression of this stretch of London is one of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives in the shadows of one of the great cities of the world, photographed with skill and empathy.







The last shot in the set is one of an unknown chap lifting a glass of beer up to the camera on the very same spot in Barking where Colin's grandfather was killed during the Blitz. You couldn't have made that one up.





Imprints

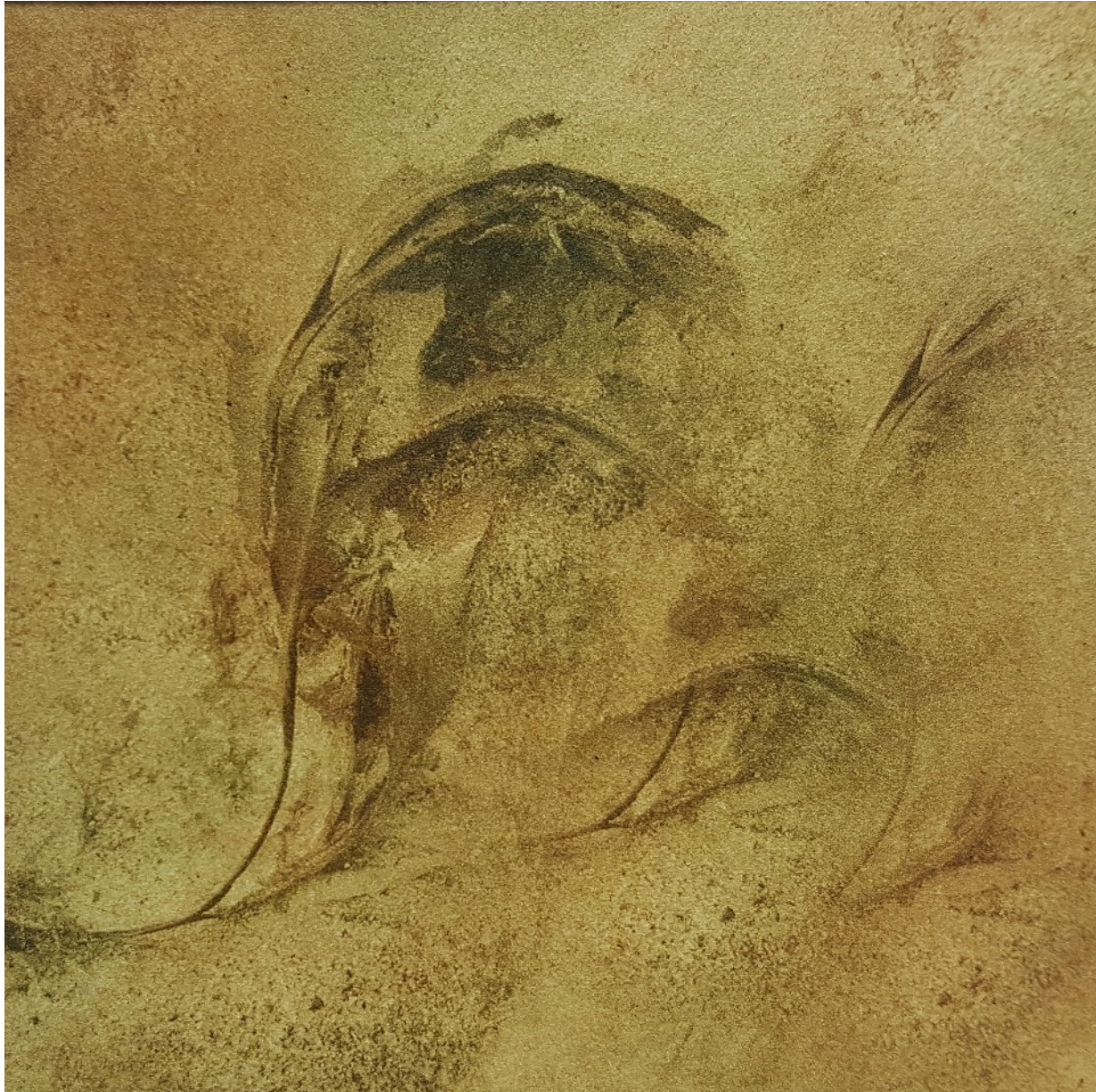
Inspired by... gallery
The Moors National Park Centre
Danby, North Yorkshire

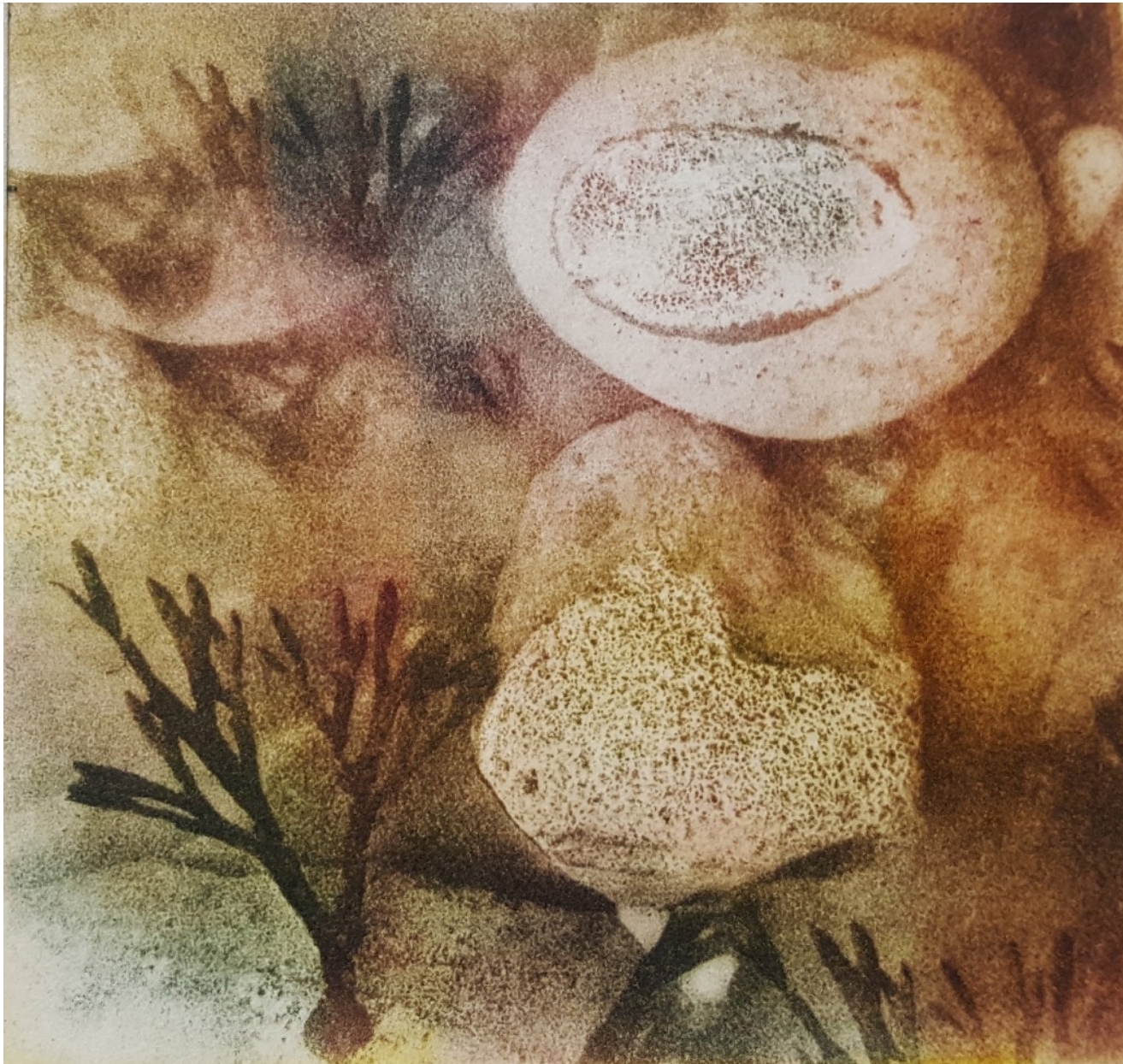
8 May to 7 June 2021

yorkprintmakers.org.uk

There was no time for **Patricia Ruddle** to show a few images that will appear in an upcoming exhibition. She asked whether it would be okay to present them here.

The images are part of an ongoing project that explores the combination of printing and photography with solar plate etching, a process that appeals to her love of both processes. With a fascination for the diversity of seaweed dotted along the shore, this work has been influenced by organic shapes and places visited, especially the stunning coastline of North Yorkshire.











STOP PRESS!

While we have been preparing our article, or as some call it, our *Illustrated Magazine*, we received brilliant, exciting news. Two members have achieved a Fellowship in the Contemporary Group with book submissions.



Bunshri Chandaria

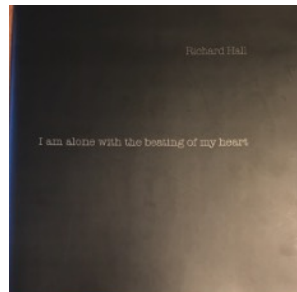
Silent Voice

"My mother-in-law's

Alzheimer's diagnosis alarmed and saddened me. She couldn't communicate in a manner people were accustomed to. People stopped calling. They didn't know how to react, how to relate to her. As a consequence she felt isolated. She went quiet.

I felt a deep need to *give her a voice*."

Richard Hall



I am alone with the beating of my heart

"The book was a collaborative

effort. I am fortunate to work with several theatre companies which means I have a relationship with writers, producers and actors. I sought to work with some of these people during lockdown to further our creative processes by asking a scriptwriter and poet to make a piece of verse that a couple of models might react to for me to make a narrative picture story to illustrate their reaction to the poetry. I added in landscapes and house interiors to illustrate the narrative. The work was made in connection with my photography degree."

Mick Yates



Unfinished Stories

"Unfinished Stories tells the personal accounts of Cambodian friends who have never spoken out before about their life during the Khmer Rouge Genocide. It combines a photograph which illustrates the strange phenomenology of the now often beautiful landscape with a quotation from their traumatic experience".

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