



ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Contemporary North

A Subgroup of the RPS Contemporary
Group

January & February 2021

Report of the RPS Contemporary North

Zoom meetings. Saturday 16 January 2021,
1:30-4:00 pm., and Saturday 20 February
2021, 1:30 – 4:00pm.

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

Text: **Gary Morgan**

Coordination and editing: **Patricia Ruddle**

Layout and design: **Wendy North**



Contemporary North went International at the January meeting with 28 members attending from the UK and beyond and, again, in February, with 26 members attending (four apologies), the international flavour was maintained.

In January, the meeting began with news and administrative points, the main ones being as follows.

We have been meeting bi-monthly via Zoom, but now we want to try a monthly format. It's possible to do so with online meetings, but moreover, we want to experiment with shorter meetings with fewer contributors. It is hoped that this will give us more time for each member's photographs with more discussion time to follow.

Our *Newsletters* follow the same cadence as the meetings but because the meetings are now more frequent, we considered whether they should be released monthly or bi-monthly. We decided to issue them bi-monthly.



It was reported, with sadness, that RPS President **Alan Hodgson** has retired due to ill health. The president elect, **Simon Hill**, has taken over. Those of us involved in the *Vision 2020* book project will know that Simon agreed to write the Foreword to the book before this transition. We are proud to have the new RPS President to participate in our project.

A short report was made about the *Vision 2020* project. The book is going well with **Christine Pinnington** designing the cover and layout. It was expected that a PDF proof would be available for the 20 February 2021 meeting.

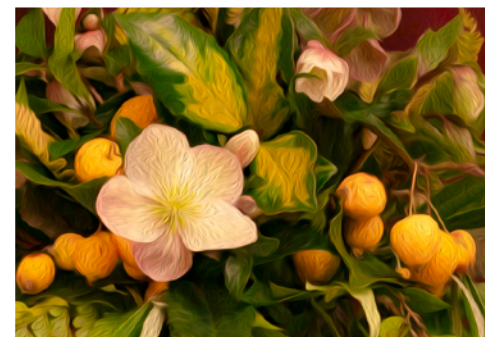
Indeed, in the **February meeting**, a PDF of the book was available, and completion is just awaiting the Foreword from **Simon Hill**. Currently the book is 120 pages long with 14 contributors. So far about 50 books have been ordered at £12 per copy. You are encouraged to contact **Morris Gregory** to order your own copies. We expect to get hard copies of the book around the end of March or start of April.

We were shown a quick preview of the book and it was nice to see so many

photographs we'd seen at previous group meetings, and to look forwards to having our own copies. It was remarked that the book demonstrates the variety of our group's contributors.

Morris has also asked for a deposit from each person who has ordered a book. His bank details will be provided. He reported that it would have been nice to distribute the copies of the book at our meetings. However, due to Covid, this is not possible and some other distribution method needs to be found, without incurring extra cost if possible.

Several people expressed the possibility of buying more copies after seeing their own. It was suggested that it may be necessary to go to a second printing.



North member **Jane Batty** cannot join us on Zoom, but asked to be remembered, wishing us a Happy New Year and included this photograph. She wrote that she used it for her Christmas card, working with

"the idea of presenting a painterly old master feel. The arrangement is made from plants, greenery and twigs given to me by friends. I lit it and gave it a modern tweak to produce my take and feel for this Christmas."

We welcomed several Contemporary Group members from the Netherlands and France, as well as Scotland and Wiltshire. Three members of the Benelux Chapter joined us, **Carol Olerud** (Organiser), **André Bergmans** (Secretary), and **Phil Dunbar** who lives in Paris and is the Webmaster of the Arts Society in Paris.

You can find more information in the following links.

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

<https://theartsociety.org/paris>

Closer to home (Scotland) we welcomed **Douglas May**, former Chair of the Conceptual and Contemporary Fellowship Panel.

Our North visitors today have agreed to contribute to future meetings.

Mick Yates from Wiltshire also joined us, and he introduced us to his photography later in the January meeting. We met him initially with the 9th blog, *Coronavirus UK – Photo Book*, in the CG series on COVID-19 and lockdown.

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2020/september/coronavirus-uk-a-photobook/>

We also noted that **Avijit Datta** has been co-opted as a Trustee on the RPS Council. As we all know Avijit so well, and how approachable he is, we should be encouraged to approach him with observations and suggestions. His RPS email address is: Avijit.Datta@rps.org.

Avijit also provided a link to *Meet the Team*, which provides background information on the Board of Trustees and the Council.

<https://rps.org/about/meet-the-team/>

On March 27th the RPS will hold an EGM in order to announce updates to the RPS bylaws. Attendance is encouraged. More information can be found at the following link.

<https://rps.org/about/governance-review-2020/egm-2021/>

The RPS EGM clashes with the Contemporary Group's AGM. (NB: the time of the CG AGM has been changed to 9:30 – 10:30 so that attendance at both is possible.) Avijit reported that he has already stood down from the Contemporary Group committee as Deputy Chair, and that a completely new committee needs to be elected at our AGM. All positions within the

Contemporary Group Committee are vacant; current members may apply for nominations.

Patricia may have details of nomination forms after this week's Contemporary Group committee meeting, 22 February. Avijit encourages us to take part in the election process and consider joining ourselves as new blood is necessary. Further information can be found by following this link.

<https://rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2021/march/egm2021/>

The next North meeting will be on March 20th. If you wish to show any images, please contact **Patricia**, in advance, so that she can arrange the agenda.

Outside the meeting Avijit mentioned that there is a new *Diversity and Inclusion* group in the RPS. This is a major new direction for the RPS. Further information can be found at the following link.

<https://rps.org/about/meet-the-team/critical-friends/>



We were very lucky to have RPS Associate **Prabir Mitra** attend the meeting. We met him through his 17th blog *The Fight Must Go On*, and invited him to our meeting.

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2020/december/the-fight-must-go-on/>

He was included in *The National Geographic* "A Year in Travel Photography: Best Images for 2020" for his picture of Holi.

Prabir describes his pictures as follows:

"Holi, the festival of colours, is celebrated in early spring all across India. The cities of Vrindaban, Nandagaon, Barsana and Mathura, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, represent the ancient Braj area which witnesses one of the most exuberant celebrations of Holi.

Though the religious roots of this festival can be traced back centuries, in the present day and age, it goes far beyond religion and brings people together from all over the globe. Getting soaked in coloured water when one is in the middle of a celebrating crowd is an inevitable yet incredible experience. People sing, dance and shout "Bura Na Mano Holi Hain!", meaning "Please do not mind, it is Holi!".

As a photographer it is a challenge to protect the photographic equipment from being covered with colour. I did a photo story on this extraordinary festival of colour and my story was published in the *National Geographic Traveller*, Sept 2020. <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel202010photo-story-celebrating-holi-festival-in-indias-braj-region>

You can find Prabir's web site here <http://www.prabirmitra.co.uk/>.

AUTUMN iN PARiS

STEREOTYPiCALLY COMPRiSES:

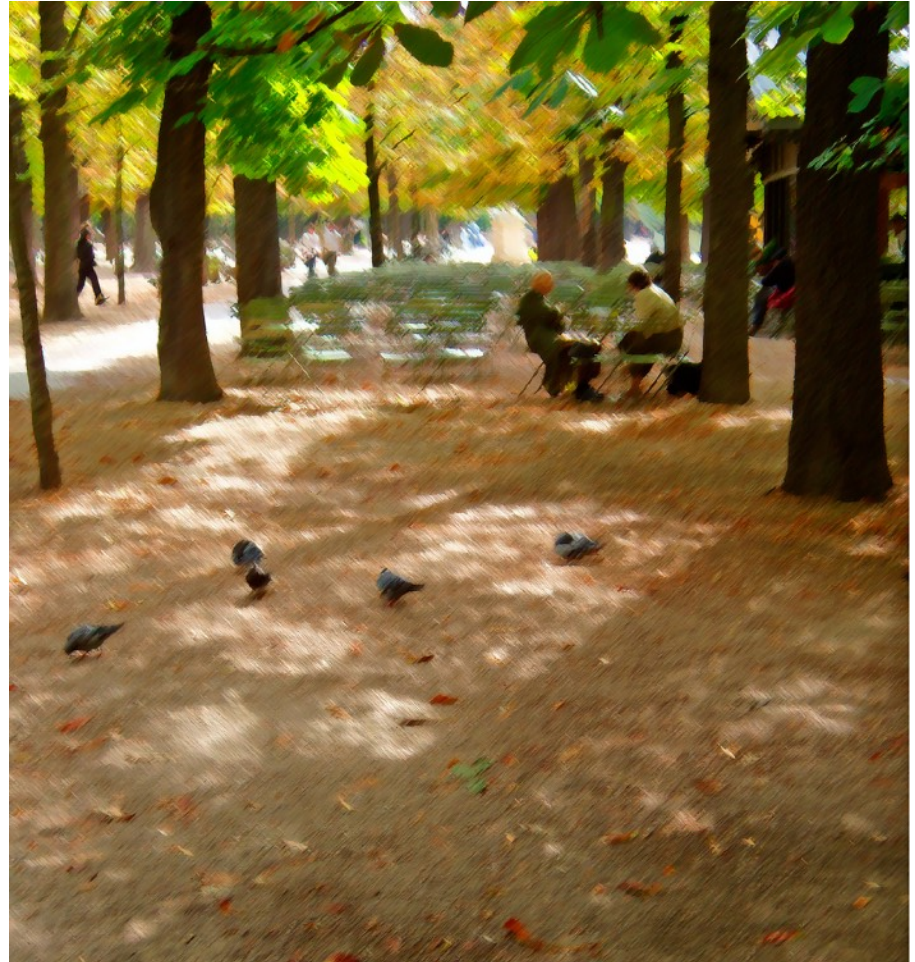
- **EiFFEL TOWER**
- **iMPRESSIONiST PAINTiNGS**
- **UNLiMiTED WiNE**
- **PARKS WiTH GRAVEL NOT GRASS**
- **STUDENTS RiOTiNG iN THE STREETS**
- **PEOPLE JUMPiNG iN THE RAiN**
- **LOVERS BY THE SEiNE**

PHOTOs: OLYMPUS CZ-50 (4.9 MB)

Graham Low wanted to show a short presentation of his only attempt at photojournalism during a trip to Paris, but when he checked French laws on street photography, he discovered that while it was legal to take the photos, it is strictly illegal to publish them without the explicit consent of the people in them. So, having them published in our *Newsletters*, it would be illegal.

He explained that he had captured almost everything that he considered stereotypical of the idea of Paris. No one seemed to object being photographed. But he hadn't asked permission.

Patricia told me about **Phil Dunbar** living in Paris, and so most likely to be knowledgeable about French law. Phil wrote to me saying that the law in France is that if a person is singled out and identifiable, then they have the right to privacy. Things have changed and are continually changing. However, if you take photos of people in the street, then there is no problem, as long as the images do not damage the person's integrity. In France the artistic right comes above the right to privacy. On private property the laws are different.





Graham Low

During the meeting Phil told us that reportage images, showing an isolated person, even if recognisable isn't criminal. He suggested that Graham was worrying unnecessarily. He went on to entertain us, telling us that private property laws are different. For example, a photo of the Eiffel Tower taken at night cannot be published as Pierre Bideau's lights are protected by copyright, although you can ask for permission. On the other hand, I've never heard of any case being brought and I have seen plenty of photos of the Eiffel Tower by night! While by day it's okay since Eiffel's copyright on the tower itself is expired. The same applies to any modern building. So it's not the faces that could be a problem for Graham, but the buildings!

Phil said that he went on the website of the French photographer, Valérie Jardin, who seems to survive, but seems to take a lot of silhouettes and close-ups of hands! She now lives in Minneapolis and has a podcast called *Hit the Streets*. She's also written, in English, a couple of good books on street photography: *Street Photography* and *Street Photography Assignments*. Her web site is.

<https://valeriejardinphotography.com/>

Phil also recommended the work of two other Parisian photographers. More can be found on the following links.

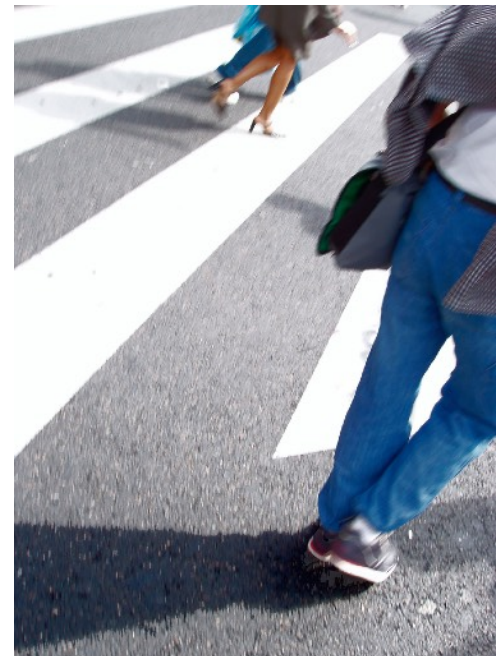
Bernard Jolival: Parisian photographer <http://www.bernardjolival.com/>

Pierre Montant: Photographer from Marseilles <http://pierreмонтant.fr/fr/accueil.html>

There are also a couple of interviews on *You Tube* in French, but maybe the photos and technique may be of interest:

https://youtu.be/LrZEEFixt_Q

https://youtu.be/8hlqP_rAAxo



Graham Low

Celine Alexander-Brown showed some images that will be in the *Vision 2020* book. She started with her statement of intention and explained how this has inspired the photographs she has been taking during lockdown.

My Journey through 2020

In such unprecedented times, and in part, confined to home and garden, I found myself re-connecting with the beauty of the natural world, opening my heart and my eyes to what was around me.

Expressing my creativity and spirituality has been a valuable exercise for me. In a time of turmoil and great uncertainty, and the darkness of Covid-19, it has lifted my spirits and brought me solace and a sense of peace. It has been a source of hope, light, beauty and joy which has sustained me through these troubling times.

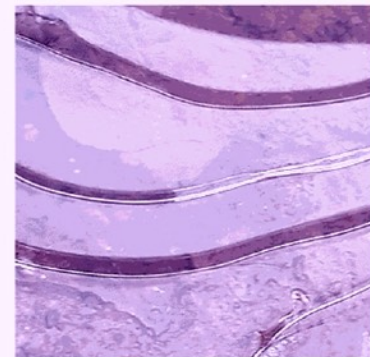
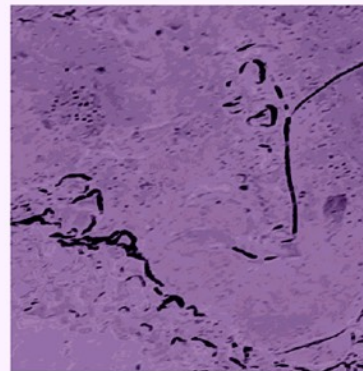
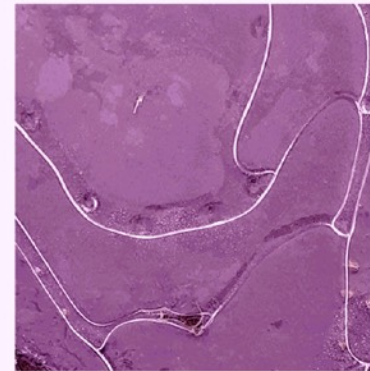
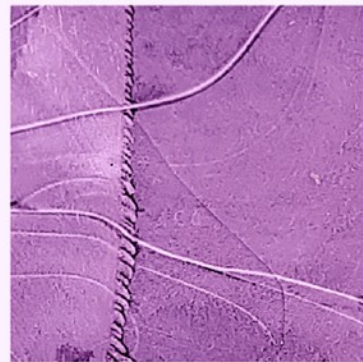
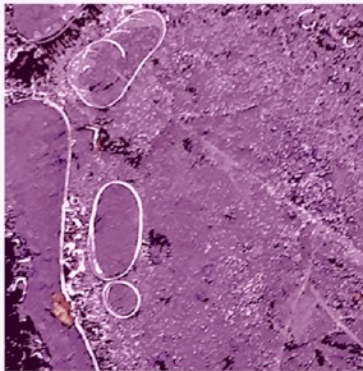
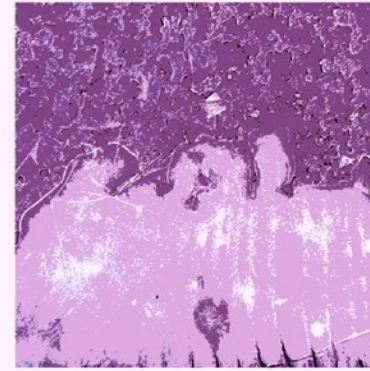
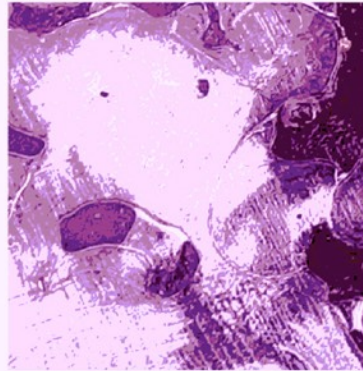
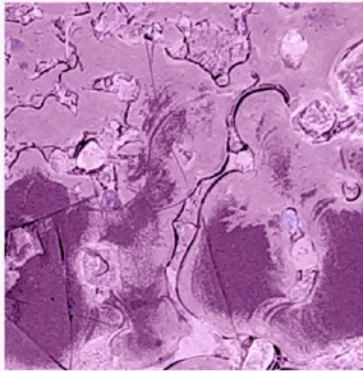
The photographs were of various flowers, leaves and ice, and reflected a new desire to experiment with Photoshop, different backgrounds and techniques. She explained how sometimes the creative result comes from experimenting, reading around and some Intentional Camera Movement (ICM).

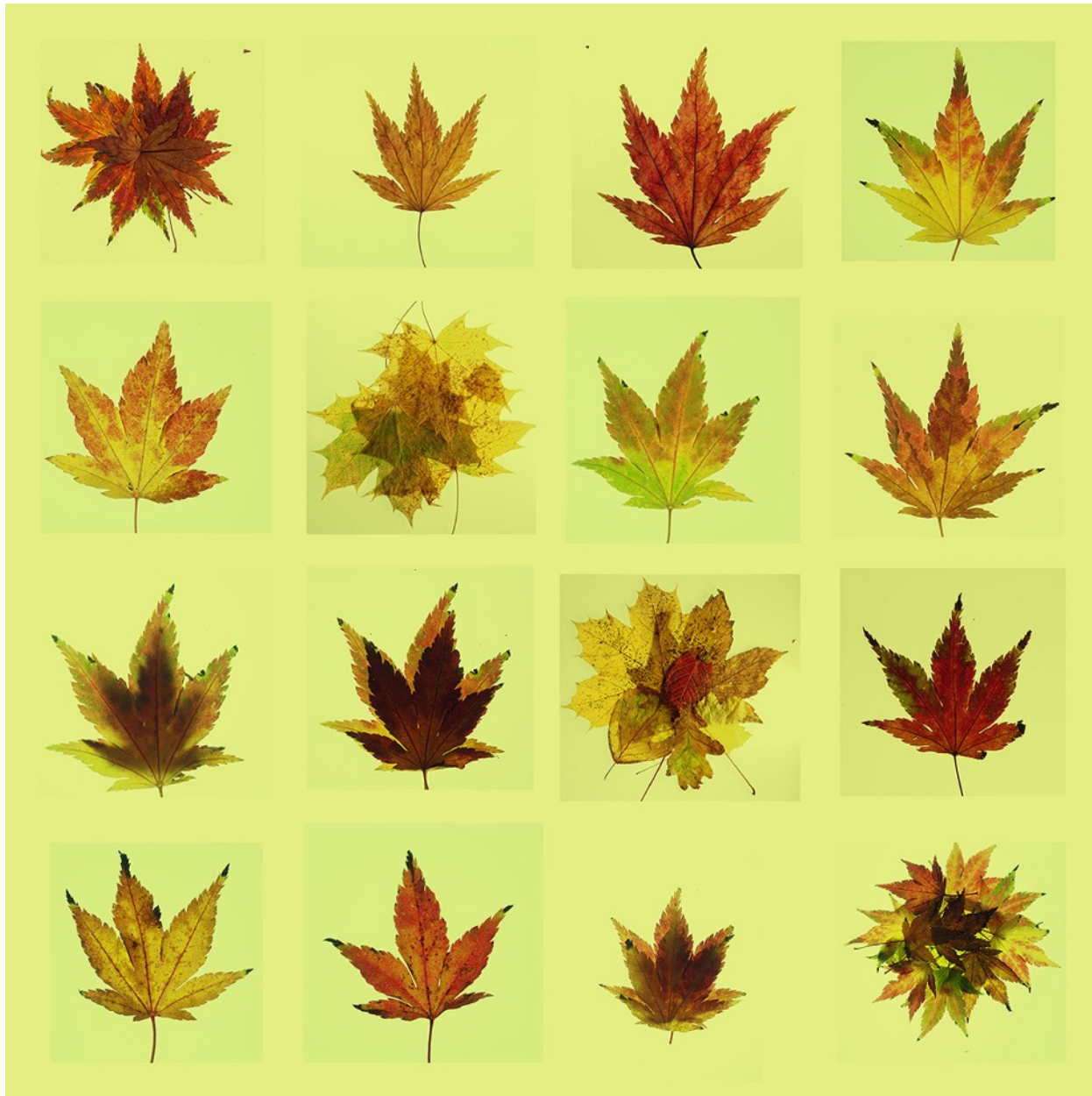
We then had a discussion on how contemporary photography is defined, making full use of Douglas May's presence and experience. Douglas thought that these pictures were a good example of contemporary photography, showing how a development of creativity had taken place due to lockdown. The project began with literal representations and proceeded to the abstract. He suggested that the concept, a project of process, can be considered a contemporary one.





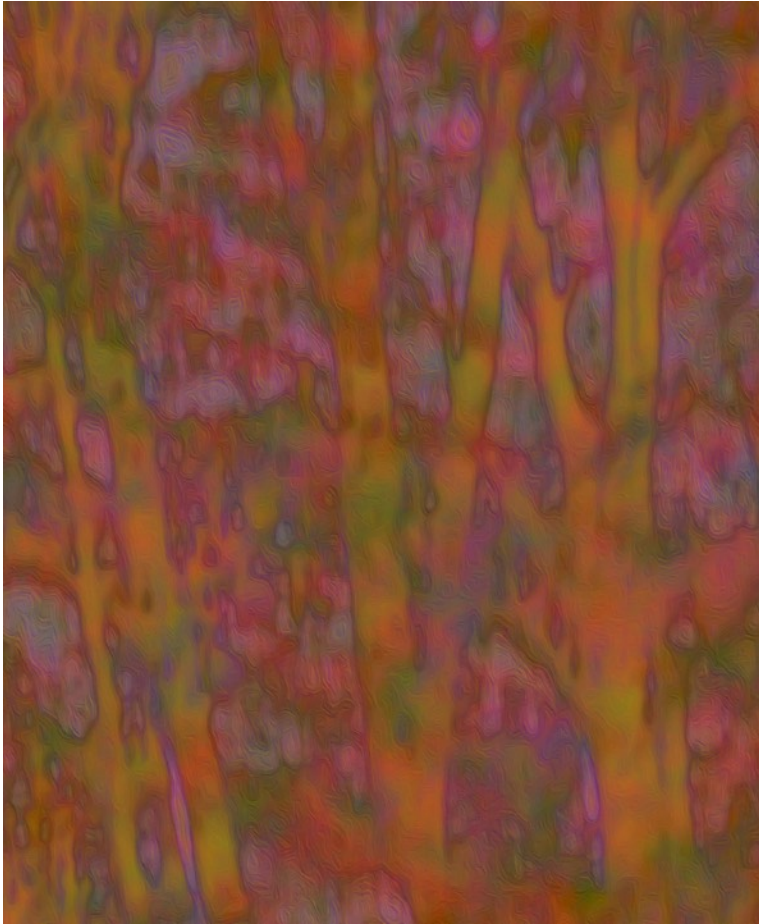
Celine Alexander-Brown







Celine Alexander-Brown



Celine Alexander-Brown

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Robert Harris



Robert Harris





We asked **Mick Yates** to introduce himself and give us a sample of the different projects that he has worked on. He described himself as “a documentary photographer with an MA in Photography, an ARPS, who has had a varied international career in business, big data and non-profits. He is currently a Visiting Professor at the University of Leeds in Interdisciplinary Ethics Applied. His full biography can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mickyates/>.

Mick showed us pages from a work he did in Cambodia, which appeared in *Contemporary Photography*, Number 76, Summer 2019. He followed with some gritty photographs of industrial towns in the 60s and 70s explaining how he started photography as a student, and how this affected his subjects in that period.

His main photographic theme is people and how they interact with their environment. He included subjects from as far afield as Russia, India, Kathmandu and China. His photographs easily cross many genres such as documentary, travel, contemporary and historical (“historical”, as Mick

explained, being “old contemporary”).

Mick gave us a link to a presentation that he prepared for our meeting today.

<https://www.yatesweb.com/rps-presentations/>

Mick told us that he tries to break up the space of the photograph, in a way that is reminiscent of **Daidō Moriyama**, by bisecting the photograph so that two distinct photographic segments arise. Another recommendation, and influence, is the Magnum photographer **Alex Webb**, again a photographer who builds multiple layers into his images.

<https://www.moriyamadaido.com/en/>

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/alex-webb/>

For more information about Mick, his projects, personal archives, blog and several books can be found at

<https://www.mickyatesphotography.com/>

Mick suggested that ethics aren’t fixed. We then had an interesting discussion about some factors of ethics in photography and how they get reinterpreted in different contexts, as time passes or how they are seen by different groups of people.



Mick Yates



Mick Yates

February Meeting 2021

The February meeting welcomed a Contemporary Group member from Poole, **Sally Hedges Greenwood**. Her blog, *Teaching by Example*, the 15th in the Contemporary Group series on Covid-19 and lockdown is recommended. Sally was able to unite female photographers throughout the world in her project and give them a voice to explain the problems (stages of trauma, acceptance, etc.) that lockdown caused them via the female only group on Facebook called *She Clicks*. This group was set up by Angela Nicholson and currently has more than 9000 members world wide.

Some of you may remember when Patricia was the editor of *Contemporary Photography* and interviewed Sally about her book *With Photography - not just an autobiography* (Number 56, Summer 2014), which she is currently revising. <https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2020/december/teaching-by-example/>

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

<https://www.sheclicks.net/>

Alexandra Prescott presented a light-hearted set of images inspired by Stewart Wall's social documentary on-line course. Part of the course was an exercise to find an item in one's house, with which one had an emotional attachment, and then to photograph it, along with 4 other items, all in one hour. Such an exercise can form the basis of a project.

More information on the course can be found here

<https://artona.co.uk/2020/06/30/documentary-street-photography-visual-storytelling/>

Alexandra used a money box, labelled "My Shopping Funds", that her husband had given her some years ago as a joke based on her obsession with shoes. The box was broken the night before the course on a day when Covid death numbers were particularly high. The images taken for the exercise were an analogy for the current almost broken way of living – shopping / socialising appropriate clothes / accessories changed to comfort, as the first consideration, funded by loose change from a broken pot. The five images included a part of the shoe collection and the broken money box.

The exercise itself (finding the seed object, finding those related objects, shooting, cropping, etc.), which took place in an hour, instilled good work discipline and was quite instructive.

She explained that lockdown is an excellent opportunity to learn more, and she gave examples of where she learned more from including the Dutch masters and *memento mori*.





Alexandra Prescott

André Bergmans joined the meeting, from Heiloo, north Holland, and presented some photographs from a project he is doing with multiple sub-projects, connected with the liberation of the Netherlands in WWII, that took place exactly 75 years ago.

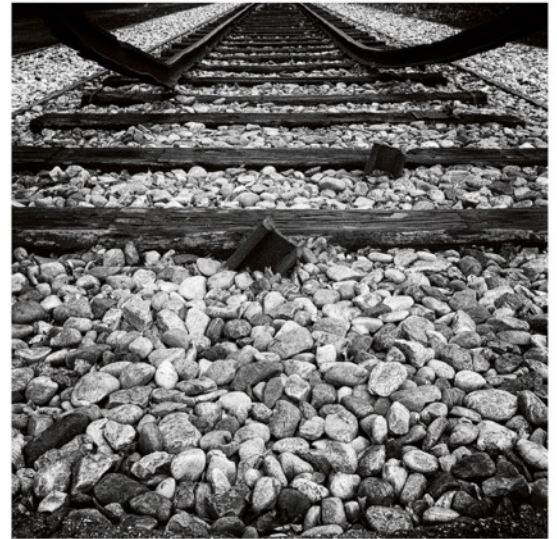
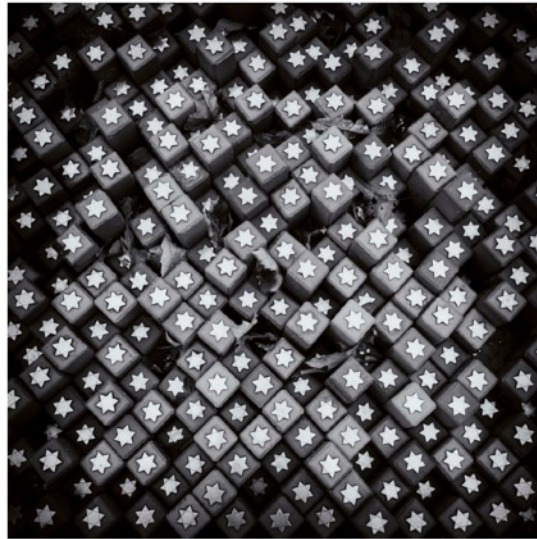
His photography is inspired by cultural heritage such as churches, prisons and concentration camps. The Netherlands was occupied for five years and was unable to remain neutral. The large (before the war) Jewish population was repressed. The Netherlands was liberated in two tranches in June 1944 and May 1945.

André did some work on concentration camps, of which there were five in the Netherlands, as well as the so-called Oranjehotel, which was a prison at that time, known as Scheveningen Prison.

André showed us a video of one of the concentration camps where he used grainy monochrome images of barbed wire and everyday objects to convey the mundane yet dark nature of the camp. The images of the crematorium, with human-scale doors into the furnace, were particularly chilling.

Before the opportunity to photograph at the Oranjehotel occurred, his *Cell 601* project, André photographed the Dutch concentration camps at Vught, Westerbork and Amersfoort, which are now museums. They were not extermination camps but labour or transit camps. Still, many people did not survive in these camps. The ultimate goal of his project is to create a more conceptual series on this part of our history. Concentration camp images will be combined with images that he took in the Jewish quarter in Amsterdam. In the meanwhile, some series already have been in national and regional exhibitions in the Netherlands.

We had a look at a triptych from the camp at Westerbork, which was a transit camp. A train of prisoners departed each week and they only went east. Very few people came back. The triptych illustrates the use of *Beeldrijm*, which can be translated as *Image Rhyme*. It refers to two words that look the same but are pronounced differently. Examples: watcher-thatcher, what-chat, treat-threat, Sean-bean. *Beeldrijm* can be described as two or more images that have aspects in common (i.e., lines, texture, composition). Some repetitive aspect of the images or aspects are complementary. So, *Beeldrijm* is a form of visual resemblance as well. In the photo club game or exercise that is called *Photo Chain*, one photographer starts the process by showing one image. The next in line will make another photo that 'rhymes' with the first image. The process continues until all participants have taken a photo based on the previous image. In triptychs or photos series, *Beeldrijm* can help to hold the body of work together. For example, the images in this triptych are units by their use of many of some object.



André Bergmans

Cell 601, the so-called Death Cell, is one of the remaining German WW II prisoner cells in the Oranjestad. Until recently, the cells were not accessible to the general public. Early one morning, André had the opportunity to record the story of this cell. In a scarily small space there are a limited number of objects, but the walls are full of inscriptions - silent witnesses of fear, longing, belief, humour, hope, love and patriotism. These inscriptions were written during the last night before the last journey through the green door of *The Little Gate*, into the lorries to the Waalsdorpervlakte (a specifically designated area in the dunes) to be executed.

André obtained permission to photograph in *Cell 601* but only for one hour. So he took as many photographs as he could in that time. André used a technique called *Dutch Angle*, where you tilt the camera to express the narrowness of the space. It involves setting the camera at an angle on its roll axis so that the shot is composed with vertical lines at an angle to the side of the frame, or so that the horizon line of the shot is not parallel with the bottom of the camera frame. In cinematography, the *Dutch Angle* is one of many cinematic techniques often used to portray psychological uneasiness or tension in the subject being filmed. It is strongly associated with the German Expressionism art form. (André noted that *Dutch Angle* is probably a wrong translation from the German. The words 'Deutsch' (German) and 'Dutch' are so similar in their respective pronunciations that they were mixed up.)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_angle

It's sobering that André had only one hour in the cell, and the people who passed through Cell 601 were in the last few hours of their lives. Parts of the prison are now used as office space.

We talked about how some of the images only assume their real meaning when they are in context. For example, an image of bunk beds looked like a youth hostel, unless you knew that it was a concentration camp

Mick Yates described how André's work is very reminiscent of that by **Alan Cohen**, in his book *On European Ground*.

Avijit also mentioned the Tate Modern's retrospective on conflict from 2014, which can be found here:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/conflict-time-photography>

Richard Hall mentioned the book *Himmelstrasse* by **Brian Griffin**, which shows pictures of train lines leading to concentration camps. More information can be found in the following link

<https://brownseditions.com/product/himmelstrasse/>

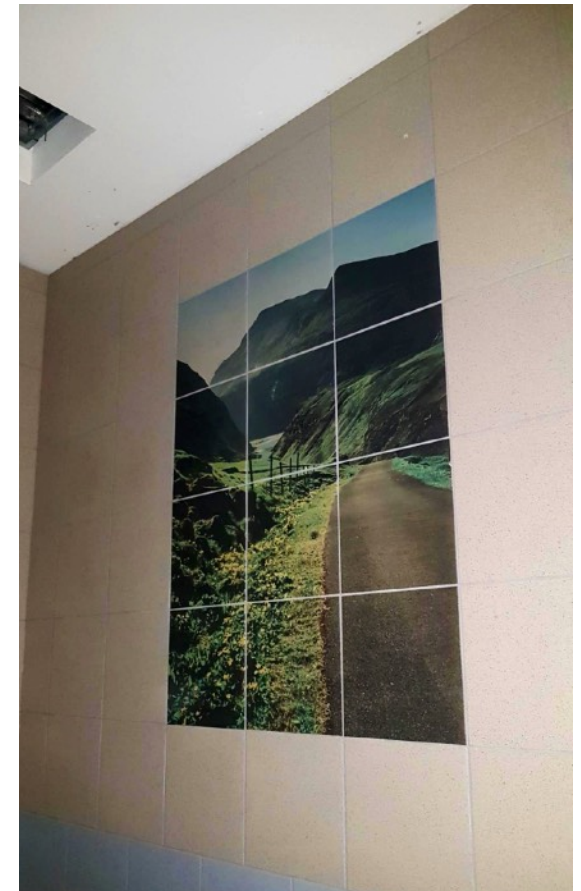


André Bergmans

Richard Hall showed us of his work *An Investigation into the Case for Art in the Police Custody Suite*, commissioned by the Nottinghamshire Police. He used to work for them, retired and then did a photography degree. Richard was contacted to work on a new custody suite that was being constructed.

Typical police cells are very barren and produce an unpleasant experience in the 13-16 hours typically spent in a cell. Prisoners are visited frequently, by the custodians, to mitigate the risk of self-harm, but the cell doors remain shut. No personal items are allowed, including books. No art works appear in any cells. The emphasis, for many years, has been upon reducing the chance of harm by removing methods rather than by making the cells nicer.

More modern mitigation methods include providing natural light and windows. Natural light can be provided, but not windows. Richard was contacted to produce pictures for the wall cells, in the form of tiles. He had two days to produce an image that could be engineered into the cell and would last up to 50 years. The image will be installed in five high dependency cells, overall size 90 cm x 120 cm, and opened in July. The tiles were made in Italy.



The police provided a set of subjects that must be avoided – such as religious buildings, cliffs, lakes, etc. So Richard went around Nottingham forest, and investigated his back catalogue in order to find some candidate images, one of which was chosen for the final image. The image was printed onto tiles and engineered into each cell's wall.

Richard then looked for research on the efficacy of images in police cells and found no such work. This idea had never been done before. Partially related work in hospitals was found and was the most relevant. These studies found that images that have a high fractal dimension are more soothing, as are pictures of savannah compared to woodland. He showed a picture of the image being installed in a cell.

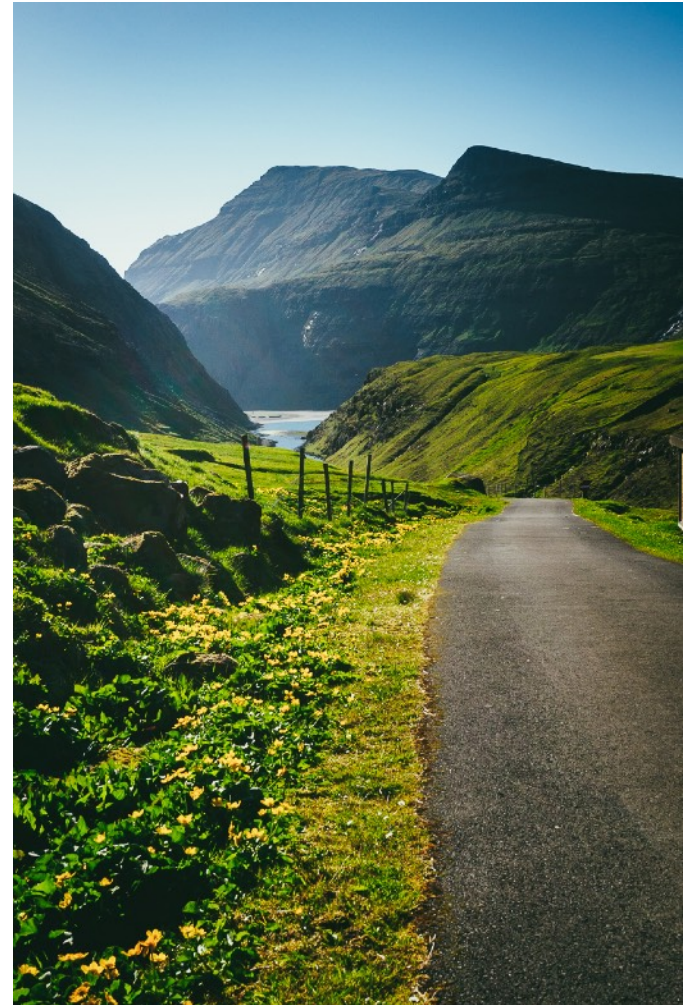
The idea of putting an image in each cell is going to be the subject of a study and paper. Due to the close way that people in cells are monitored, and not all cells containing a picture, a study will be conducted to assess the difference in behaviour between prisoners in cells with and without the picture.

Much discussion followed, for example, a picture can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on its context.

Douglas May mentioned the

project *Dandelion Room* by **Thomas Struth**, commissioned to provide images of nature for a new hospital in Switzerland.

http://www.thomasstruth32.com/smallsize/photographs/unconscious_places_2/index.html



Monty Trent showed us his project *Sanctuary* that had been incubating for some months, which conveys the camera pointing in two directions. He told us that when he was young,

“during school holidays our mums would chuck us out to play all day. I lived in north London surrounded by lots of land spared from post-war developers' hand. This was my own world, a playground full of wormholes into my imagination. It was mapped in my head and on grubby notepaper. Here I could fly and disappear with my gang into our cosy dens.”

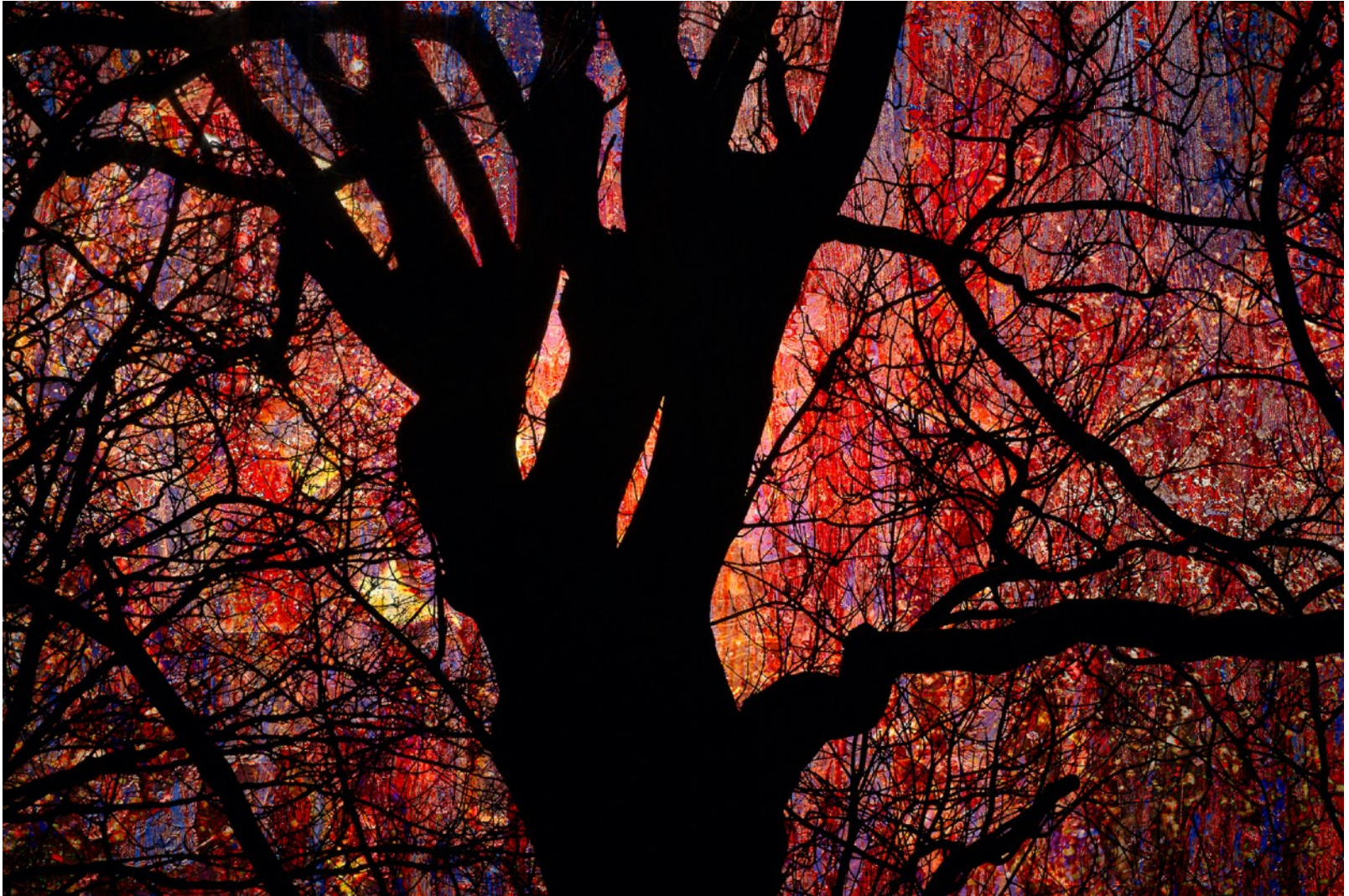
He found a new sanctuary sixty-five years later in Adel Woods (a place that also inspired Henry Moore), in Leeds, which is part of the Meanwood Valley, a protected urban green corridor slicing into the centre of the city. It is a nature reserve of woodland, heathland, meadows, bog, beck and pond. Now he spends his exercise rations here when his wife chucks him out of the house. He finds asylum in the dark woods, exploring paths and discovering new secrets.

The images were accompanied by miniature poems (which Monty read for us,) that set the emotional scene for each image, and revealed the frustration of sharing the outside with strangers in time of separation and isolation, as well as the joys and hopes for the future. He told us that at night, during the darkness of the pandemic, he scribbles lines expressing his thoughts, fears and hopes. Then he makes the photographs as a visual metaphor for them as he searches “for the light”.

Monty was concerned about whether or not the images were contemporary in nature. Douglas May opined that he was initially sceptical. However, for Douglas, the climax was the satisfying final image where Monty was shown hoping to dance with his grandchildren. Celine Alexander-Brown welcomed the idea because she is trying to produce a book of poems and photos. She now has the inspiration to carry on with her project.

Avijit said that the idea of words before images has a solid basis due to 3000 years of Chinese iconography, where poems are regarded as imageless pictures.

Monty has an interesting website: www.montytreant.com



1. Shock

*Two days before my 75th birthday
my luck ran out
a quiet life
smashed*



2. Confused

something woke me

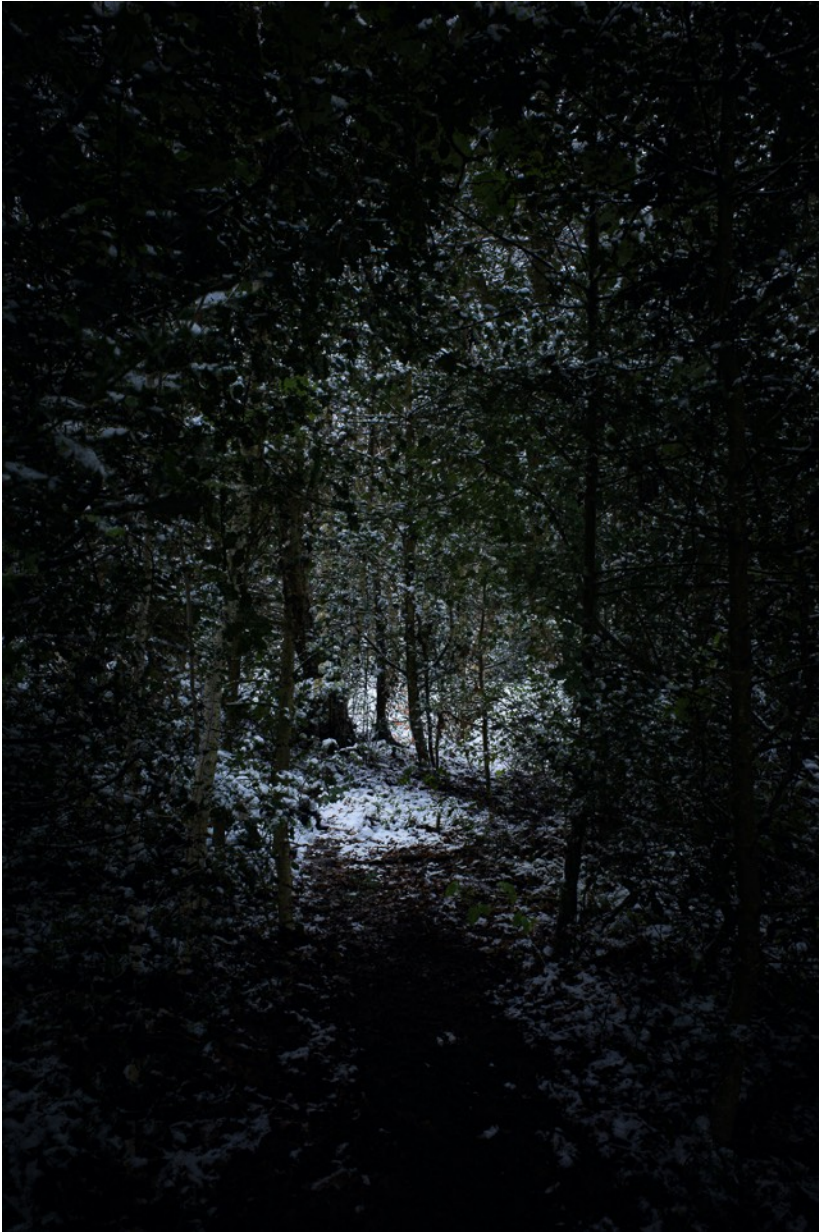
from my dream

where am I?

when am I?

night or day?

is it safe now?



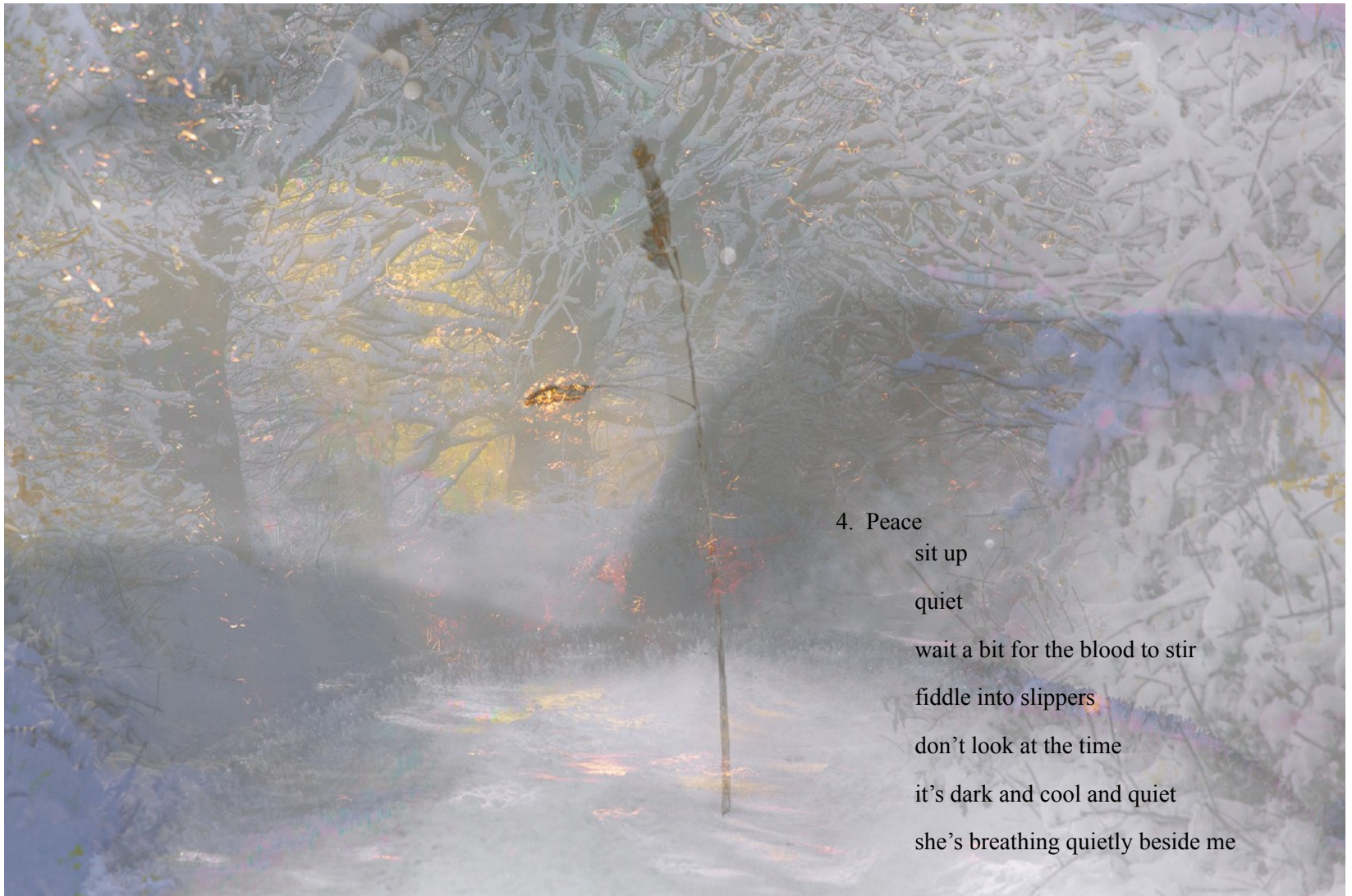
3. Wormhole

but I can worm my way away,

safe

unseen

a harbour in the storm



4. Peace

sit up

quiet

wait a bit for the blood to stir

fiddle into slippers

don't look at the time

it's dark and cool and quiet

she's breathing quietly beside me



5. All this may pass
*one day I may dance again with my
grandchildren*

We hope that the Contemporary Group membership has enjoyed our new format of two short monthly meetings rolled into one long Newsletter. Or, as one North member said, it's an *Illustrated Magazine!* Our hope is that we have captured the essence of our meetings, by showing contributors' photography along with some of member comments and links to additional information that may be of interest to you. Let's see if during this time of lockdown restrictions whether this new format works for all of us.

Reminder again of the upcoming Contemporary Group AGM on 27 March, 930 – 1030. It's important to have the opinions and feedback of all Contemporary Group members around the world.

<https://rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2021/march/agm2021/>