

# Contemporary Photography

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# Contemporary Photography

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If you wish to submit articles for the Journal, please send all copy and images to: Paul Ashley (Editor),  
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Text should be in Microsoft Word. Images are preferred in TIFF format, although high quality JPEGs are also acceptable. Images should be at least 2500 pixels on the longest edge. For other formats or to discuss reproduction, please contact the Editor. Large image files may be supplied on disk or memory stick, or by use of on-line file transfer services, such as WeTransfer or Dropbox. Unless requested, disks and memory sticks will not be returned.

Deadline for the Autumn 2022 issue is 1 September 2022.

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

# Editorial

How does one express intangible ideas with photography – or with any visual medium, for that matter? Poetry and music are already one step removed even from the tangible; they have accepted ways of describing things one can see and touch, but also things that take shape only in the mind. Photography and painting can show the physical world directly but how do they express things that cannot be seen, such as memories, emotions, thought patterns and beliefs?

There is a fairly direct approach that shows the consequences of a concept: how it is revealed in the material world, and how it makes people behave. Or one could take a leaf from the books of poetry or music, and adopt symbols and motifs that others may understand. And there is an approach that asks the observer to infer meaning from a sequence or combination of images.

These are just my own notions; I am certainly not suggesting that any of the contributors to this issue have chosen any one such means of expression – they have their own personal inspiration. Each of them, however, has been faced with the question I asked above, and answered it in their own way. Greg Turner shows the outward expression of the inner psychosis of Ivan through a sequence of collaborative portraits – collaborative, because they are associated with Greg's recollections of abuse in his own childhood. Gui Christ's portraits are the reflection or expression of inward beliefs: his own as well as those of his subjects.

Much of Gareth McConnell's work uses flowers, flowers in liquid, saturated, luminous colours. The images here, from his latest exhibition, could, on their own, say almost anything, or nothing. Alongside words about his upbringing during the Troubles in Northern Ireland ("wreaths", "flower stalls", "flower power", "drugs"), they start to resonate with a different meaning. Billy Barraclough also uses his images as symbols, together with the poems of Lue Mac but able to stand on their own, talking about relationships between individuals within a community.

Gloria Oyarzabal's contribution is headed "Notes....", which I find is the best way to look at her diptychs reflecting on Thoreau's dichotomy of an unjust society and the natural world. It would be a mistake to read each diptych as a literal representation of that dichotomy; better to use them just as 'notes' to stimulate our own thoughts on the matter.

I might be making diptychs as photographic 'notes' myself in future.

Paul Ashley ARPS, Editor

**Cover Image:** *Murmurations* © Billy Barraclough

**Back Cover Image:** *Eden* © Greg Turner

Journal fonts: general, Avenir Lt Std: author name, Letter Gothic Std

# The Meaning of Flowers

*Gareth McConnell*

It could be said that, commencing with dead or plastic flowers, McConnell has worked through many hierarchies of floral representation . . .

... Flowers and flower colours: God's colours. Honour thy mother and father. Take pleasure in the deep petal beauty of the rose and the similarly wondrous, roseate floridity of the alcohol-dependent noses of the fathers – breathing like beasts, asleep on their sofas. Note: the sofas not necessarily compliant with The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations Act 1988 (amended 1989, and 1993) in respect of resistance to cigarette ignition. Flowers as identifier codes of sectarian loyalties. Mothers: make a nice flower arrangement for your home: white lily (republican), orange lily (loyalist), shamrock (Ireland), and opium poppy (addicts). Fine Liberty print shirts with dried blood and crusted mucous on them – intravenous drug use is also good for the home mood effect. Honour the haemorrhage colours – the pretty flower colours of illness and fatality. Note: the movement of blood from the vein up into a syringe during injection is what addicts call 'drawback' – the blood creates shapes within the drug liquid in the syringe that are known as 'flowers' and which may be conducive to certain kinds of contemplative pleasure

... McConnell's Frieze Week flowers – ecstasies of trippy-beauty – effervescence and fluorescence. Post-contagion-hedonism-colours. McConnell's Frieze posters/down in the dark – sugar-high intoxication colours, growing out of the fertile, warm dark dust of London's tube platforms. McConnell's specialist horticultural knowledge makes his flowers retinally absolute – pure, Class A, medicinal grade. Flash. Flash. Flash. Separation and disjunction. The retina's relationship of service to the brain becomes a little less servile – render unto brain seizure that which is brain seizure's . . .

... McConnell's flowers. Coloured shadows. Slippage. De-registration. Screaming colour. Narcissistic, posturing, pop star tight-balls-trousers colours. Synaesthesia colours and intimate human perfumes. Vertiginous planes of colour as seen by the industrious bee on his or her daily commute to the flower workplace. The engorged take-me-to-bed-and-fuck-me flower colours of sex. An explosion of petals in a Northern Ireland flower stall, many people brought to violent orgasm . . .

... Paramilitaries are a kind of Northern Irish indigenous shaman, with magico-religious belief systems and powerful automatic weaponry. Paramilitaries practice as intermediaries between the human and the spirit worlds. They radically expand consciousness by issuing punishment shootings and beatings



for anti-social behaviour, including for children and teenagers, and by administering powerful drugs to their communities, including the Class A 'flower power' drugs LSD, DMT, psilocybin, and MDMA. In a profound paradox of spiritual learning, devotees may simultaneously buy drugs, and be shot for taking them. McConnell was a regular at Kelly's – a 'full spectrum of paramilitaries: UVF, UDA, IRA, INLA', and 'everyone completely wasted'. A united Ireland. The manager would occasionally receive funeral wreaths, sent by paramilitaries as a warning for hosting such devilry. Thus do the paramilitaries serve their communities; by dispensing drugs and spells, communicating with spirits, shooting adults and children, shooting each other, and helpfully escorting the dead to the afterlife

Excerpts from Neal Brown essay: 'Gareth McConnell: The Meaning of Flowers'  
See: [garethmcconnell.com](http://garethmcconnell.com)



*Dream Meadow XIV 2021*



*Dream Meadow XXI 2021*



*Dream Blossom XIV 2021*





*Dream Meadow XX 2021*





*Dream Blossom XXIV 2022*



*Dream Blossom XXIII 2022*



*Dream Meadow XIII 2021*

### **The Meaning of Flowers**

Milltown  
Omagh  
Sean Grahams  
Enniskillen

Weeping families in black – not psychedelia  
Flowers  
Flowers in and on hearse vehicles  
Linked arms  
Carrying coffins with flowers  
Crowds – holding flowers  
TV cameras – filming the flowers  
Police – standing beside the flowers  
Enemies can see the beauty of each other's flowers

*Flower wreaths – mums, dads, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, friends, colleagues, local tradespeople, neighbours*

# Murmurations

*Billy Barraclough, with poetry by Lue Mac*

A study of starling murmurations, the work reflects on crowding and connection between human and natural worlds, relationships with and within the environment, and the reassuring continuities of group behaviour in nature at a time when human gathering was suspended.







### **overwintering**

overwintering, we take the slow path  
down to the lake, our limbs unfurling  
white and frail as hasty shoots put out  
in prophecy of spring.

the time is spent.  
like this day collapsing without fanfare  
behind the treeline, we have passed  
the sluggish hours from nothing to nothing  
placing a stone here, overturning  
another there, scrutinising  
every nook until its secret side  
shone wearisome with use.

the beach is blue and seamed with roots.  
we come adrift, our steps as hesitant  
as dips in winter sea.

why are we here and not away?

the prints are spaced out like a frozen shoal  
arrested in its wake





## Symphony

when it is quiet enough  
when the ringing in the sea in your ear  
spreads its last wave and lapses  
into unbroken calm

when the old world of tics  
and nudges - always waking  
you from no sleep - pales  
behind you into a colour  
you cannot remember, a mere  
trick of the light

when it is ready to receive you.  
not the things you wrote down on scraps  
and stuffed into your pocket  
for safe keeping.

nor the notch on your desk, the wood's way  
of warning you: what is made legible  
(in spite of itself) will last.

it is not your father speaking, when there is nobody  
speaking. it is not the held breath  
of a voice.

when you are quiet enough  
the strings of the birches.  
the susurrations of moss.





## Waves

the day we saw the bay transform to glass  
in which a sun devoured itself to ash

we hadn't touched. i heard your breathing catch  
short and hold as each wave's ribbon fetched

light from the air, finding out the beach's length  
like a curtain drawn and drawn again, then set

to burn against the pane, which tapered off  
until the burning was the one light left:

the scourging of the surface. then my chest  
was fired and flowing with those lines that cast

no shade and passed away into the water's edge;  
the reaming sand; the cliff's convulsive surge



## Congregation

learning to long again, i place  
my palm to your edge: your fierce,

unyielding weirdness.  
and what comes back  
seems something short of mine:

the bed,  
the separating shore of skin.

not all that ends is death.

look: from my finger's furrow  
the hairs uplift  
like genuflecting reeds.



## Spring

and then the earth remembered  
how to join, the cut paths healing over,  
branches reached across to greet  
old friends they'd waved at sadly  
from the other side, the insects sketched  
their cords of consonance between the  
buds,  
birds bound the trailing ends  
of clouds, the staggered trunks forgot  
(as they always do) how to divide  
and in their rifts rose, newly founded,  
the confederacy of leaves



# M'kumba

*Gui Christ*

*M'kumba* is an ongoing project to document the Afro-religious stand against intolerance in Brazil. Its name is an ancient Kongo language word used to describe sorceresses and wisemen, but for centuries it has been pejoratively used to describe the African religiosities in the country.

For three hundred years, almost five million Yoruba, Bantu and Ewe peoples were brought to Brazil to work as slaves. Based on the medieval Christian theories that endorsed the use of African slave labour, these populations not only had their bodies kidnapped but their deities were associated with a devilish force that had to be combatted.

In this way, religions like Candomblé and Umbanda were forbidden in many parts of Brazil until 1970. Even after their legalisation and up to recent times, extremist Christian groups attacked temples and priests. In 2021 alone, over 600 religious attacks were reported in the country. Even now, despite the fact that 56% of the Brazilians are of African descent, less than 8% declare themselves as Afro-religious due to fear of being discriminated or attacked.

As a response to this violence, and as an Afro-religious priest in formation, I've started recording a younger generation proud of their religiosity, while in their moments of faith. My intention is to combat the prejudice and, through an intimate and enlightening perspective, show my understanding of these religions, and attempt to change the response to them in Brazil.

See: [www.guichrist.com](http://www.guichrist.com)





















# The Divided Self

*Greg Turner*

Ivan suffers from psychosis, a condition that causes him to hear a constant chattering of voices that gnaw at his psyche. He is unable to work, survives on benefits and lives at the very margins of society. I have been working with Ivan since the commencement of lockdown in March 2020 to create an extensive series of portraits that reflect his lived experience and tell his story.

My own psyche is scarred by the abuse I experienced at school. At some point during the creation of this work, I identified my own presence in the images; that of the small boy being tormented and abused at school. I began identifying specific memories from that time and used these vignettes to influence the direction and composition of the images.

The direct visual story is that of Ivan's experience of psychosis. In some cases, the subtleties of the composition, the title and the captions for each image are my own experiences from childhood. In others, they are Ivan's lived experiences and yet in others they are entirely fictional, the product of the unreliable narrator.

By superimposing these mixed narratives onto the visual story of Ivan's lived experience, I aim to show how despite the vast differences in situation and circumstance, our lives do overlap in many ways. In discovering this overlap, we find common connection through our shared humanity.

See: [gregoryjohnturner.com](http://gregoryjohnturner.com)



### **Metatron**

*June 8th 1982: The teacher explains to the class that they are to treat me like I was a ghost and ignore me. This feeling of being invisible is upsetting but also strangely empowering.*





**Balthasar**

*December 18th 1981: I write notes on my bedroom wall to remind me. Don't go to school when you wake up in the morning; remember how bad it felt the day before.*





### **Corinthians**

*April 26th 1984: My violent outbursts mean I have to see a psychologist. She asks me to draw a picture of a house, a tree and a person but I draw a priest instead.*



### **Absalom**

*December 17th 1984: A paroxysm of anger takes hold of me. Eyes bulge like squids. I black out for a moment and then feel knuckles connecting with bone. The boy crumples beneath me whimpering.*



### Trinity

*June 7th 1982: Mother hands me the candle and I carefully light it, placing it under the statue of the Virgin Mary. She drops a coin in the box and we say a Hail Mary together.*





**Saul/Paul**

*September 6th 1984: I am making a new start and resolve to work hard and study. My focus is fixed, my determination steely.*



### **Golgotha**

*January 26th 1983: It is the feeling of isolation that will last well beyond this experience. I cannot know this yet, but many years from now it will be the weight of that solitude pressing down like a stone on my chest that I will remember most vividly.*

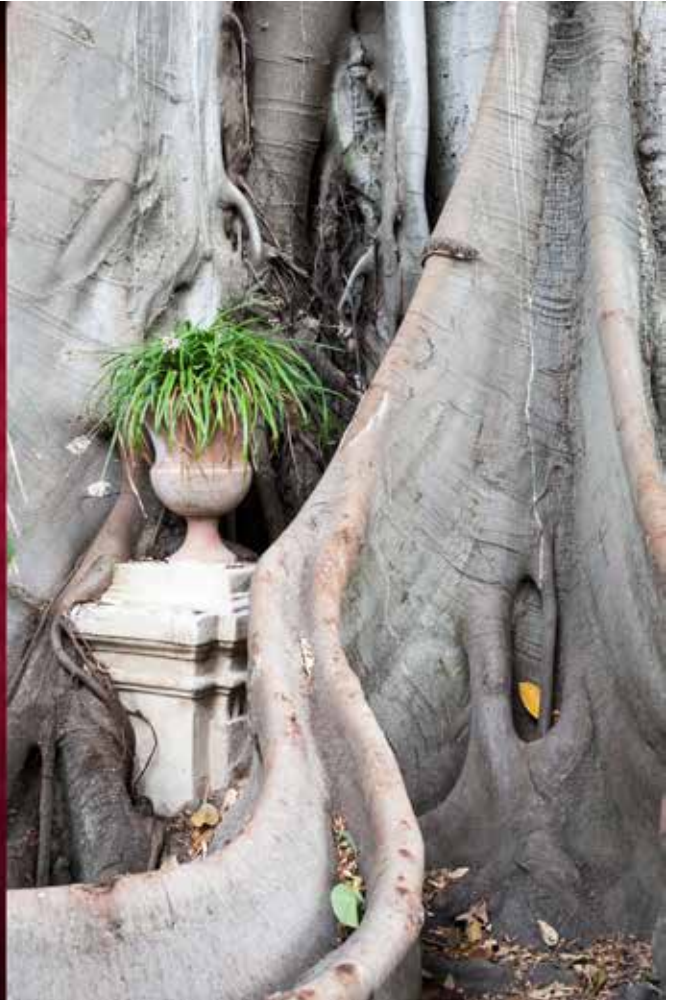
# Notes for a (Re)imagined #Walden

*Gloria Oyarzabal*

In 1845 Henry D. Thoreau leaves the family home in Concord (Massachusetts, USA) and settles in the cabin he builds next to Walden Pond to “live life intensely from beginning to end”. This displacement is enough to take him out of the social routine in which he suffers from lack of freedom, being the beginning of an experiment that lasts two years, two months and two days in true autarchy. It advocates self-discipline - body and mind - to be a philosophical and mystical adventure, fleeing from conformity, moving between Epicureanism and stoicism. Walden, said Thoreau, “is a book written for that majority of men and women who are dissatisfied with their lives and with the times in which they live, but who could improve them. And also for those who seem to be rich, but who in reality have accumulated useless things and do not know very well what to do with them”; it is an advocacy of free and wild life, as well as a fierce criticism of society and its impositions (have they changed since then?); it is a radical and direct questioning of the institution of work as indoctrination and of the market as the only god, as well as a lucid defence of the simplification of life and of the path that leads us to pursue its essence and its daily pleasures; it is a reflection on the need to preserve both nature and the planet as well as the core of our own individual and irreducible existence; it is a stimulating exploration of intimacy in its most concrete form: living conditions. During our months of confinement, it was evident that not everyone dwells in the same way. Is it enough to be alive to live? The feeling of having renewed his existence in contact with the natural element led him to a real ecological commitment. Surprisingly, the Thoreau after Walden is more radical and demands an armed struggle against the American state that justifies slavery. The conclusions drawn during his stay at Walden Pond will become a real social guilt inviting to violence and civil disobedience.

See: [gloriaoyarzabal.com](http://gloriaoyarzabal.com)



























# A Pound Of Pictures, Alec Soth

*Book Review by Brian Steptoe FRPS*



25x30.5cm

76 pages

66 images

A project which began by photographs taken on the route of Abraham Lincoln's funeral train, but then expanded as Alec wandered with his camera.

It was inspired by seeing someone advertising the sale of bundles of photographs by pound weight.



# View from the Chair

*Alexandra Prescott*

Joining the RPS introduced me to a new set of peers and friends. Then along came Covid and social interactions almost ceased - but technology finds a way. Just as the fax machine established itself in 1988 during the postal strike, Zoom and video conferencing established a sound foothold for all. Zoom has meant that I can attend regional and special interest group meetings without the time and carbon footprint of extensive travel.

In June I attended the monthly meeting of the Portfolio Box Group; we laughed and discussed images. One image in particular – of a young woman in a long evening dress, holding a pair of shoes and walking down a street with lights and shadows. An older man with evening clothes but no jacket was walking behind her - and then there was the invisible photographer. We were asked to think about what was happening – was she being stalked, had there been a row or was it all a coincidence? Is the truth, in the absence of an explanation, what we choose to see?

Take Arthur Stieglitz's *The Steerage*, 1907, as an example. *The Steerage* is considered Stieglitz's signature work; it was proclaimed by the artist and illustrated in histories of the medium as his first 'modernist' photograph. The perception is that the image is of immigrants refused entry to the USA. When Stieglitz took the photograph, he was on board the Kaiser Wilhelm II, probably in the harbour. In the image he is facing east and it is more likely that the image is of immigrants returning to Europe on the expiry of their two-year visas. The man in the Jewish prayer shawl is a woman wearing a striped blanket. *The Steerage* has been chosen by the Jewish Museum to represent the immigrant experience. Stieglitz did not take the image to highlight an issue, he took it to fulfil his own ambitions to create fine art photography. Towards the end of his life he stated that *The Steerage* was his greatest triumph.

The image we discussed on Zoom was taken on a mobile phone by the mother. The daughter and her father were walking home in Europe on a warm night after a graduation party. I believe this because the facts that have been given to me leave no room for doubt. But what if there are no facts, what then is the truth of an image?



# GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

The Contemporary Group continues to hold meetings online and, when possible, in person. Keep an eye on the RPS website (when up and running), Concept and the group Facebook page for details of future talks.

## Regional meetings

Contemporary East. Meetings are held online on the first Thursday or Friday of each month in the afternoons. Contact Tom Owens for more information.

Contemporary North. Meetings are held monthly live at Clements Hall, York, and online, on Saturdays. Contact Patricia Ruddle for more information or see the RPS website.

Contemporary South West. Contact Adrian Hough for details of regional meetings.

Contemporary Northwest. Contact Alan Cameron for details of regional meetings.

Contemporary Central. Meetings are held jointly with the Documentary Group on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm, online. Contact Steff Hutchinson for more information.

## COMMITTEE

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