

The past year should have been a great time for photo projects. Confined to home for long periods, we have never had a better opportunity to develop all those ideas we have mulled over for years. Or sort through all those images and pull them together into a project worthy of showing to the outside world. Of course, it doesn't work like that; for many, 'covid-time' has been filled by stress, new demands, new commitments and unexpected interruptions.

But, for those who could work on projects, how many of them would have looked at places close to home, or in the home – wherever we have been allowed to go? (I have been exploring the fen landscape just north of Cambridge.) What is it about these places that makes them distinctive, and means that our photos could be associated with nowhere else? Is it the terrain? The people there? The history?

Dafna Talmor picks apart some of these questions, deconstructing photographs of specific places, and reconstructing them as abstract landscapes, with a new individuality. The original locations were personally important to her; I wonder how much she recognises them in her new 'locations'.

Armando Jongejan has been exploring German bunkers in the battlefields of 1945. He could have treated the project as a simple documentary record of the remains. Instead, his images show us the organic processes that have occurred over 75 years. Trees and their roots have taken over, their massive, smooth-barked limbs embedded in the concrete structures, and overlying them like the limbs of dead bodies. Noel Bowler's newsroom interiors are also landscapes in their own way. They have a certain topography and surface texture that remind us of terrain and vegetation. Like Jongejan's work, they are empty, but we know how people fit into them.

Shahria Sharmin and Mykolas Juodele record the aftermath of conflict, or an interlude in it. Sharmin's extraordinary portraits could only be taken in Cox's Bazaar but refer back unequivocally to the refugees' homes in Myanmar. Juodele, as an outsider, records one more moment in the history of Nagorno Karabakh when one group has been forced out to let another return; it is a landscape that never changes – but the people do.

We have another few months of movement restricted to our own house, neighbourhood and country. These photographers challenge us to make the images from our particular 'place' more than just a documentary record.

Paul Ashley, Editor

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If you wish to submit articles for the Journal, please send all copy and images to: Paul Ashley (Editor), paultheashley@gmail.com
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Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought and encourages interpretation; photographs 'about' rather than 'of'.

Cover: From the series *Above The Fold, The Sun*. © photo by Noel Bowler.
Back cover: © photo by Shahria Sharmin, from the series *When Home Won't Let You Stay*
Journal fonts: general, Avenir Lt Std; author name, Letter Gothic Std

Above The Fold

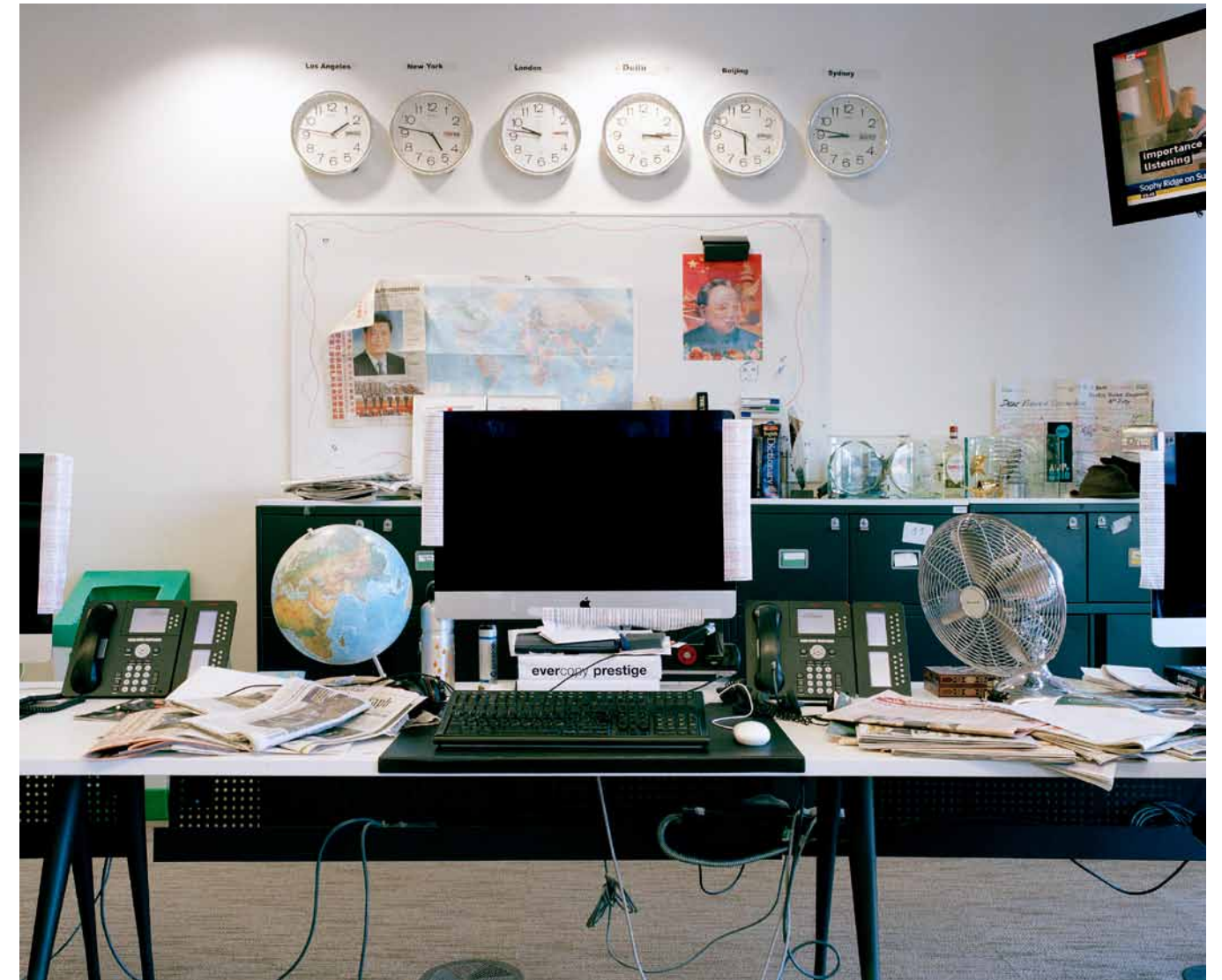
Noel Bowler

Above The Fold is the culmination of an ambitious long-term project (2012-2020) from Irish artist Noel Bowler. Using his signature medium format film camera to photograph newspaper newsrooms across Europe, the United States and Asia, his unique project shows us the physical space and the structural layers that have formed the foundation of our modern press.

Made over an eight-year-period and working together with a cross section of some of the largest newspapers (by paid circulation) from around the world, these photographs take the viewer on a journey through decades of human interaction that has helped to form the foundation of the free press as we know it today. The work of the newspaper and journalism movement has never been so relevant for so many throughout the globe. This timely work continues Bowler's ongoing consideration of the political forces that shape our world and the importance in sustaining the foundation of a free and trustworthy press.

Ever since the rapid increase in literacy rates during the 19th century, newspapers have been inextricably associated with the development of modern society through the production of political meta-narratives, the dissemination of information and the framing of debate. With declining readership in the 21st century, reduced advertising and persistent questions about 'truth' and relevance, the structures of print media are in a state of flux. Unlike the multifaceted and dispersed nature of online news media, the physical space of the newspaper office has been shaped by many years of evolution, adaptation and work practices that straddle both public-interest rationales and commercial objectives. This project reinforces the importance that people have played in the role of print news media and acts as a reminder of both the value and relevance of the journalist. These photographs offer us a glimpse into the places where the decisions and policies that affect so many are created. While these places may be separated by geography, culture and politics, they are all inherently linked by one fundamental attribute; the commitment to inform, educate and reinforce the importance of a free and honest press.

See: www.noelbowler.com



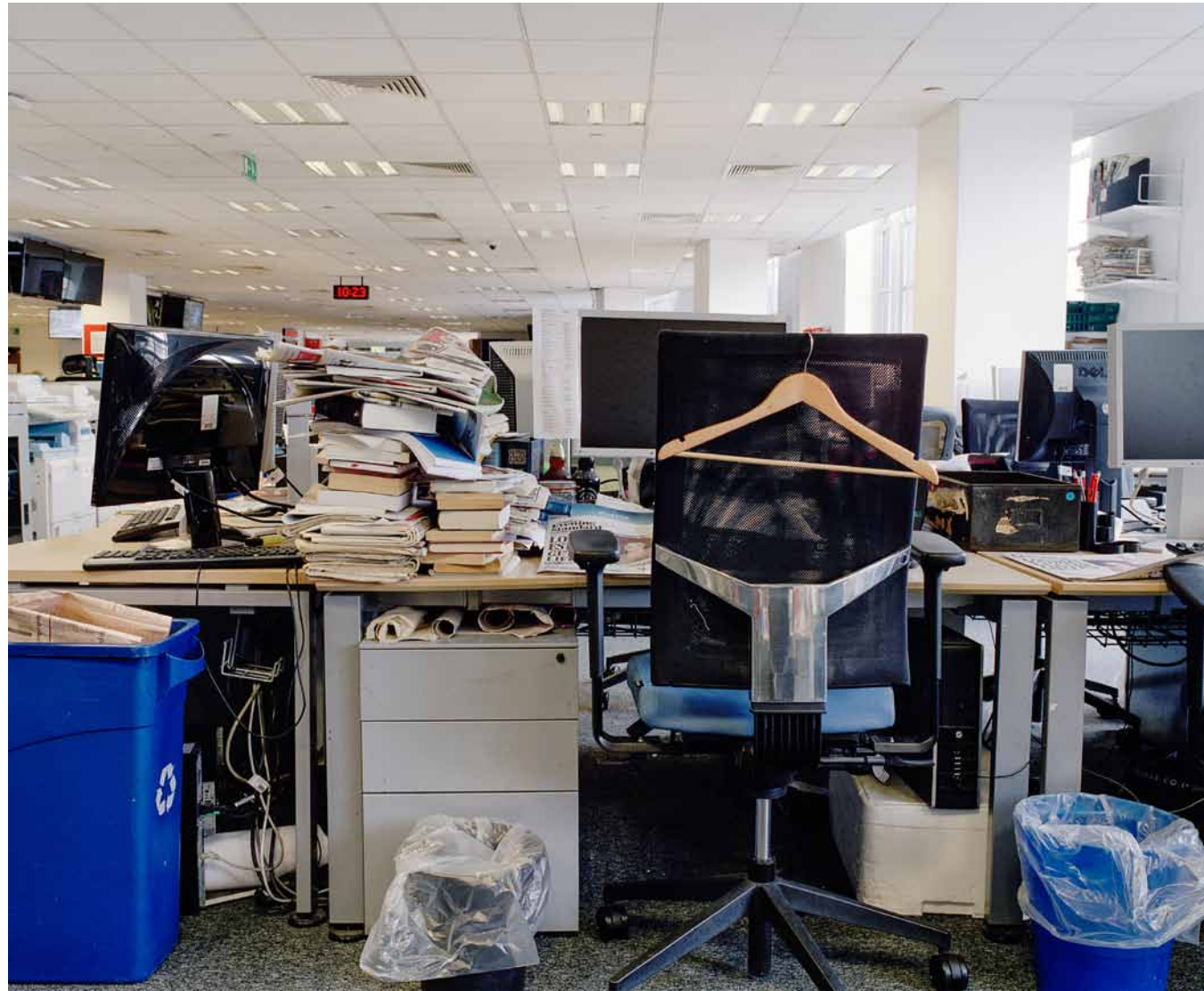
The Guardian



New York Times



Asahi Shimbun



Independent



Washington Post



Financial Times



Le Monde

The Battle of Hürtgen Forest

Armando Jongejan FRPS

The Westwall, referred to as the Siegfried Line by the Allies, was a German defensive line built just before and during World War II along the Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourg and French borders. The Westwall's length was more than 630 km (391 miles) from Kleve on the Dutch border to Well am Rhein on the Swiss border. The defensive line was a chain of more than 18,000 bunkers, tunnels and tank traps.

Twice before I visited the small village Simonskall in the German Eifel. I knew that there were heavy fights during World War II in this area and that there were still some bunkers left in the woods. Last September I decided to visit this village again to capture some photographs.

The line ran through the Hürtgen Forest (Hürtgenwald), an area in the German Eifel, 20 km (12 miles) southeast of Aachen. Here, fierce battles took place between September 1944 and February 1945, mainly between the American Allies and German soldiers. It was the longest battle on German ground during this war.

The battle in this wooded area, known as the Battle of Hürtgen Forest, claimed the lives of tens of thousands of American soldiers. There were many thousands of casualties and fatalities among the Germans also. Not just soldiers, but civilians as well. The Battle of Hürtgen Forest is less known than, for example, the Battle of Arnhem and the Ardennes Offensive, possibly because the impact of the battle was so great that it was described as an Allied defeat of the first magnitude.

Various remnants from World War II can still be seen in the Hürtgen Forest, such as bunkers 131, 132, 135 and 139/140, which are located on Der Buhler, a small mountain near the village of Simonskall. The bunkers are overgrown with tree roots and slowly but surely they merge into the forest.

A note on the book

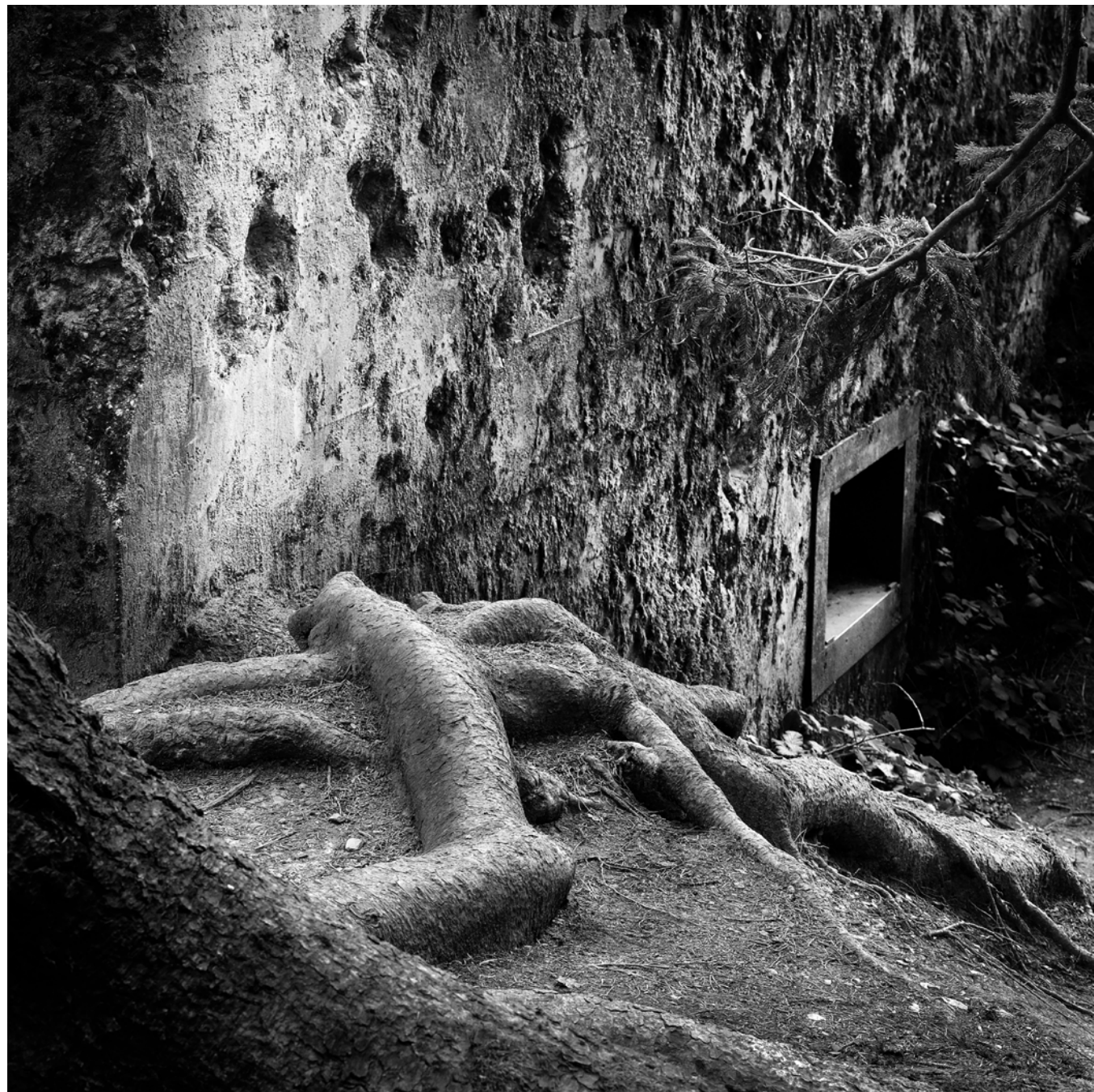
My new photobook of The Battle of Hürtgen Forest (like my other photobooks) is made just for my own interest: a photobook on the shelf is much better than a digital file in the computer. Although the book is created just for my own bookshelf, it is possible to order it.

Email: armandojongejan@hotmail.com.

Note. Armando Jongejan is editor of the e-journal of the Benelux Chapter of the RPS.



Bunker 139-140



Bunker 132



Bunker 132



Bunker 131



Bunker 135

Constructed Landscapes

Dafna Talmor

Constructed Landscapes is an ongoing project consisting of two sub-series that stemmed from photographs initially shot as mere keepsakes across different locations of personal significance. Produced by collaging medium format colour negatives, the resulting images are staged landscapes, a conflation combining the 'real' and the imaginary.

Through this work, specific places initially loaded with personal meaning and political connotations, are reconfigured into a space of greater universality. Blurring place, memory and time - defying specificity and referring to the transient - the work alludes to idealised and utopian spaces.

In *Constructed Landscapes*, condensing multiple time frames by collaging negatives to construct an image transfers the notion of the 'decisive moment' from the photographic act to the act of assembling and printing in the darkroom. In turn, fragments of varying source images collide and collude to create an illusory landscape; gaps and voids where negatives fail to meet or overlap mimic (and form new) elements of landscape, disrupting composition and distorting perspective.

In dialogue with the history of photography, *Constructed Landscapes* references Pictorialist processes of combination printing as well as Modernist experiments with the materiality of film. Whilst distinctly holding historical references, the work engages with contemporary discourse on manipulation and the analogue/digital divide. Beyond photographs, the project has expanded to include site-specific vinyl wallpapers, spatial interventions, photograms, preparatory studies.

See: www.dafnaltalmor.co.uk

Note: *Constructed Landscapes*, published by Fw:Books in October 2020, and designed by Hans Gremmen, includes two essays by Olga Smith and Shoair Mavlian, a poem by Cherry Smyth and an interview with Gemma Padley.



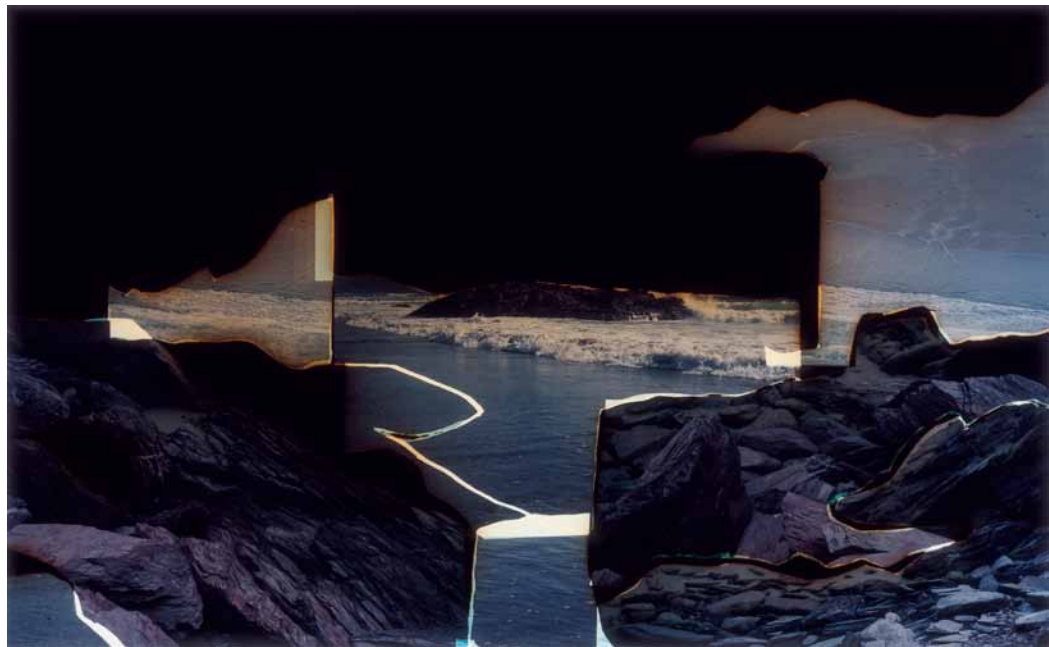
Untitled (0811-1), 2012



Untitled (1212-2), 2013



Untitled (0812-1), 2012



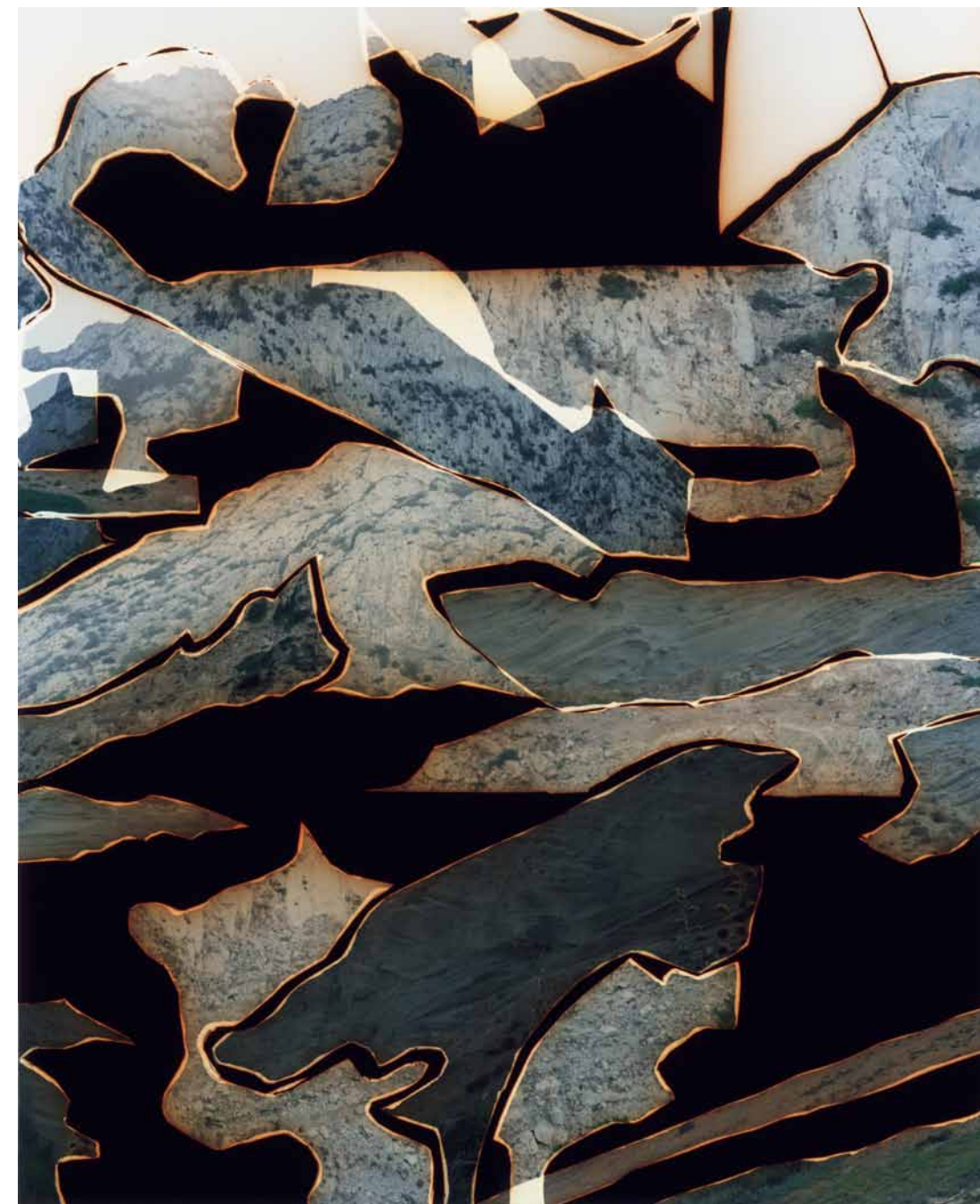
Untitled (CO-1616161616-1), 2017



Untitled (GI-191919191919-1), 2019



Untitled (LO -TH -
181818181818-1), 2019



Untitled (GI
-19191919191919-
1), 2019

Fragile Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh

Mykolas Juodele

The stunning mountainous landscape was dotted with burned out houses in a land that only nine days later would be called Azerbaijan. Locals forced to leave their homes at short notice loaded their belongings onto trucks, ripped off rooftops of their houses, chopped down trees and set ablaze whatever else that could not be taken. The insides of slaughtered cattle were piled up in front of the doors of some houses as if to give the nastiest possible welcome to the new residents.

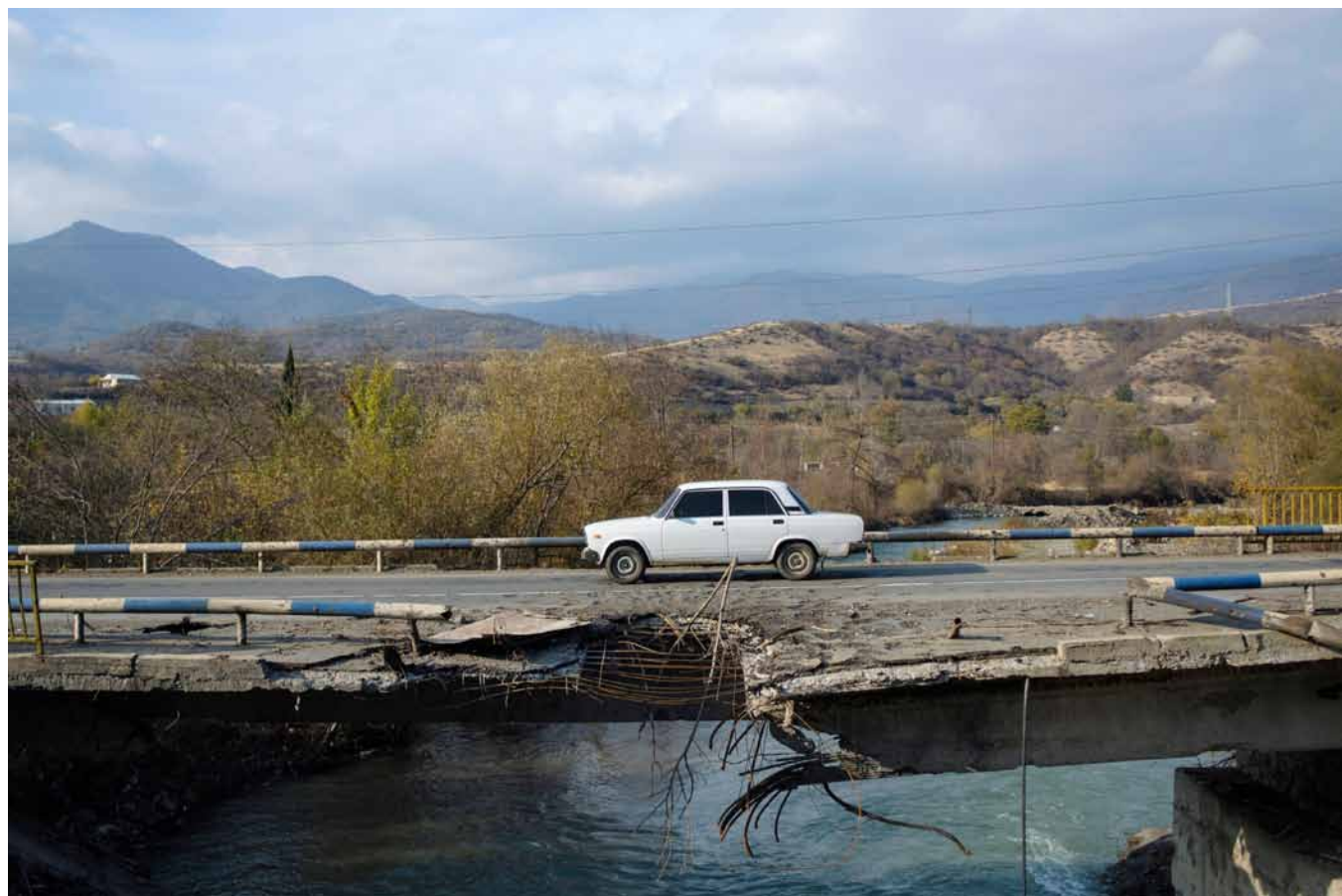
A week after the ceasefire agreement had been signed, the city of Stepanakert remained largely abandoned. Solitary figures roamed misty streets still full of broken glass. There was no Internet, water or electricity. What was abundant in post-war Stepanakert, however, were fear and rumours. Many were reluctant to come back, worried that the Azeris would shell the city from their positions in Shusha, a city located on a hilltop overlooking Stepanakert just five kilometres away. Some told stories of dogs shot by Azeri snipers to intimidate the returning population. Others spoke of a guerrilla resistance force ready to keep fighting.

The disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has sparked three major wars in the last three decades, killing and wounding tens of thousands of people, pitting one new generation of recruits against another. A month after the war, as Armenia and Azerbaijan exchange bodies and calculate their losses, reconciliation seems more impossible than ever.

See: www.juodele.com



Russian peacekeepers near Dadivank monastery.



An old Lada crosses a damaged bridge in Nagorno Karabakh



Abandoned house in Karvajar district

Sandbags - a sign of recent fighting - are seen in front of an Egyptian restaurant in Stepanakert



Burial ceremony at Yerablur's military memorial cemetery in Yerevan



Father greets his son upon arrival in Stepanakert



Displaced people reunite with their loved ones as they return to Stepanakert after the war

When Home Won't Let You Stay

Shahria Sharmin

It was surely a startling discovery for the Rohingya when they found me in the middle of the Kutupalong camp. Shelters for those left homeless by states. Rohingya, who had become quite familiar with the presence of cameras in their lives by then, found me different, almost weird. A woman, carrying a very large wooden box camera, nervous, not so sure why she was even there and looking completely lost — not a familiar sight at all.

It didn't take them long to realise that I was an outsider to their world. Slowly but surely, I became a spectacle. Not that I ever claimed to be a part of their existence but at least I was not pretending. I started telling my stories — I started telling their stories. I had never experienced genocide. Nobody in my family was ever killed, tortured or raped. Eventually I myself became the 'contrast' in the story. The deep sense of satisfaction I had for being part of the host nation, came crashing down when their stories hit me. My work with Rohingya youth began in May 2019.



Yasmin who waited for her husband for four years saw him just for a glimpse. The day he returned from Malaysia, he was executed by Myanmar military with their two sons. That same day, this 23-year old was raped that gave her a child in the refugee camp. A child whose loving face reminds not of her husband but of terror. There was no trace of hope, only despair and a great deal of anger against the whole world. A world that did nothing to save them from ethnic cleansing, which eventually became a full-blown genocide in 2017.



723,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh from brutal violence back home in August 2017. Together with influxes from the 1970's through the 1980s and 1990s, this recent wave almost completely uprooted them from Myanmar. There are about 1.1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh now. Cox's Bazaar became one of the largest refugee concentrations in the world almost overnight. While they say they are indigenous of Rakhine, the Myanmar government claims that Rohingyas are Bangladeshi immigrants. Once elected to the Myanmar parliament, Rohingyas are no longer even considered citizens.



Myanmar was an open cage where they feared persecution, torture and death. Today they have lost their identity and are called 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals'. Nationals, not citizens, not even refugees, nor are they Rohingyas. That was the price they paid for a safer, but closed cage in Bangladesh.

A child who has seen the most terrible of human atrocities, a woman in search of the non-existent heaven, a family in search of a place called happiness, a man who looks across the border in search of his father's graveyard...I photographed it all.



I photographed a community that is always running from fire. They run into Bangladesh, take a break, traffic themselves to Thailand, rest in another hell, go to Malaysia, which never meets their dreams, take another break, go to Indonesia, feeling Australia is better - probably the heaven and the promised land. Along the way their boats capsize and thousands die. Many thousand miles away, there is Myanmar, a most unwelcoming home in human history.

A young mother stands on the seashore, barefoot, lost, looking at the sky, asking God "Why is there no place called home?".... I photographed that too. Helpless in my existence, my camera captured life as they knew it to be- an escape, an unbearable journey, a never ending path to a future unknown.

See: www.shahriasharmin.com



The Ameriguns, by Gabriele Galimberti

Book Review by Brian Steptoe FRPS



A study of the way in which the Second Amendment to the US Constitution is interpreted today. "Freedom is my passion and I think that guns are necessary to defend it" ... quote by a Texas resident. There are ten times as many gun shops in the US as McDonalds restaurants.

Book by Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2020. 27x22 cm, 136 pages, with extensive text, 33 page spread and numerous smaller images.



View from the South West

Adrian Hough LRPS

One of the current pertinent questions for the contemporary photographer is how to explore Covid-19 as the subject of photography. Not photography of Covid but photography about Covid – and that got me thinking, not about Covid but rather about the subject matter for contemporary photography.

Photographers often speak about the subject of their photographs and the subject of other people’s photographs. However, the stuff that we photograph is, according to grammar, not actually a subject at all. If I perform an action on something then I am the subject and the thing is an object. So when I photograph something, it is really the object of my photography and not the subject. That’s why the lens furthest away from the eye in an optical instrument is termed the objective lens.

The fact that we talk about the objects of our photography as if they were the subject is interesting. I don’t know whether it’s an accident and corruption of language or whether it’s more profound in origin. However, wherever it comes from, it says something interesting about photographers and photography. It seems to imply that the photographer and what they photograph become part of each other so that they are one. Rather than taking a photograph of something, when I take a photograph, that which was formerly a thing becomes an extension of my own self.

And this claim takes us back to where we began, with contemporary photography not being photographs of things but photographs about things, so that in the process we explore them and discover something about them. A photograph of something can be taken at a distance without any prior understanding or immediate interaction. However, a photograph about something requires a relationship and mutuality. It requires engagement and relationship.

Great photography for photography’s sake, as distinct from cutting edge technical photography which serves a different purpose, is always photography which is about rather than of. It is photography which evokes and informs, and we learn more about its subject as we enter into the image, explore its hidden depths and discover what it might be telling us. We enter into a relationship in which what could have been an object turns the tables on us and reveals to us something of the true nature of ourselves.

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

Social distancing is likely to be part of our lives for some time to come, so the Contemporary Group is developing a programme of online events. The Society also offers a wider range of events and courses than we can list here. Creativity is also helping some of our regional groups with distanced meetings.

See the RPS website for more details of these meetings and to book your place. Keep an eye on the RPS website, *Concept* and the group Facebook page for details of future talks.

Group online meetings

In conversation with Sarah M Lee, 15 February 2021, 19.00-20.00.

Lies, Damned Lies and Photography, a talk by Maria Falconer FRPS, 15 March 2021, 19.00-20.00.

Regional online meetings

Contemporary East. Meetings are held roughly monthly in the afternoons. Contact Tom Owens for more information.

Contemporary North. Meetings will be held on 16 January, 20 February and 17 April, probably in the afternoons, Contact Patricia Ruddle for more information.

Contemporary Southwest. The next meeting will be by Zoom at 14.00 on 21 March 2021. Contact Adrian Hough for more information

Contemporary Northwest. Joint meetings with the Documentary Group will be held on 13 February and 13 March 2021 from 13.00-16.00. Contact Alan Cameron for more information.

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. Contact Steff Hutchinson for more information.

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