

# Contemporary Photography

Number 87 Spring 2022

THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY



# Editorial

I am writing this editorial 36 days after the invasion of Ukraine, an event still difficult to comprehend. We cannot ignore it – news video forces it on our attention – but unless you are directly affected in the country itself or in its near neighbours, it is not easily made real to us. I have not tried to respond by inviting contributors from the region of war. I am not up to the task of assembling a journal that makes sense of it beyond immediate photojournalism. There will be time enough for that. Nevertheless, I hope that the contributors to this issue stimulate thought about some aspects of current events.

There is some insecurity in the human psyche that leads it to see differences between us, to divide people into ‘us and them’, and to make generalisations about ‘them’ – sometimes positive, but often negative. It doesn’t take much for us to make distinctions: skin colour, religion, gender..... Such perceptions, and an imbalance of power, can lead to discrimination, abuse and oppression.

Last year refugees from the Middle East became political pawns on the Belarus-Poland border, wanted by neither country and forced into no-man’s-land. Michaela Nagyidaiova story of their plight draws – now – obvious parallels with the welcome offered to Ukrainian refugees in that country’s western neighbours. Enayat Asadi, by contrast, is working back where many of the Belarus-Poland refugees came from, the Afghanistan-Iran border. Even here though, they are unwelcome in a different country: sent back to where they came from or exploited by traffickers.

Gillian Allard is using photography to help refugees who have successfully made it to the UK to tell their stories of how they wish to overcome distinctions and ‘belong’ to their new communities in Ipswich. They tell their stories in words written directly on images of themselves.

John Ferguson and Patty Carroll address quite different kinds of differences and outcomes. John Ferguson sees the same aspiration as Allard of ‘belonging’ in a community, and in a place one calls home. The most noticeable feature of the African-Caribbean people he photographs is how fully they are embedded in their environment; the only visible distinction is that they are black – they have become ‘Black Suffolk’ people.

Patty Carroll brings our perceptions of differences right home to us all: literally so, making fun of assigned gender roles in the home. We need a bit of light relief at this time, even if it has a serious intent.

Paul Ashley ARPS, Editor

**Cover:** © photo entitled Zelly Lisanework, by John Ferguson

**Back cover:** © photo by Michaela Nagyidaiová.

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

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We welcome names for photographers to be included in the Journal. Please send suggestions or text and images to: Paul Ashley (Editor), paultheashley@gmail.com  
59 Gilbert Road, Cambridge CB4 3NZ

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 Summer 2022 issue is 1 June 2022.

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

# Anonymous Women: Domestic Demise

*Patty Carroll*

I construct narrative, still-life photographs that are imagined interior rooms engulfing the lone figure of a woman. Home is a metaphor for the internal life of women; their worries, desires and interior dialogue. The 'stage' sets are full size, using household furniture and objects that combine reality with fictional possibilities. As we have been confined to our homes during the pandemic, the overwhelming experience of being 'at home' has new meaning and importance for almost everyone. Home is not only a place for comfort and safety, but the central locus of work and play, and where psychodramas of life are experienced.

Even before the pandemic, I was creating imaginary, humorous worlds in the studio (on a full size 'stage' set) that critique and satirize claustrophobic expectations of women's domestic perfection; an unending but frustrating endeavor. Since the lockdown, however, my attention turned to more political and cultural messages than before. As we (the public) watched the world become more polarized through the window of our various devices and sources of information, it has perhaps energized our senses and caused us to consider our outer world with more focused attention.

My influences come from many sources; colorful movies from the 1950's and 60's, traditional still-life paintings, decorating magazines, a suburban upbringing, the game of Clue (Cluedo), nuns in habits, Victorian writing, etc. My intention with the work is to bring attention to the identity of unseen heroic women who silently run a home, family, and often careers. In this work, the figure symbolizes so many women, no matter from what culture or background, however, it has its roots in our traditions of consumer culture and the meaning of 'things'. My woman is both the creator and victim of her own possessions and obsessions. Her home has become a site of tragedy and danger, with scenes of hilarious and heartbreaking mishaps and horror. While humor is prevalent in these narrative images, the message behind them has darker implications in the role of women in all societies.

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





Red red wine





Cooking the goose



Scrapbooking





Crise du couture





Mad mauve



Card play





Seeing red

# Rising From the Ashes of War

*Enayat Asadi*

This is an alternative history that can help us comprehend the lives and struggles of refugees. There are still limitless stories that have yet to be told or discovered.

This project is on the migration of a wave of Afghan refugees into Iran. They have been forced into trafficking by illegal traffickers due to the bitter and severe consequences of several years of violent conflict, insecurity and poverty.

Afghanistan has the most refugees after Syria all around the world. By 2015, more than 1.3 million people have requested defection from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and nearly 90,000 children, half of them Afghans, did this trip alone. For two years, I have been photographing the story of human trafficking in Iran's most strictly secured areas. One of the most deadly migrations in the world is happening on the eastern border of Iran, as thousands take a route through the mountains. They are exposed to plunder, kidnapping, rape and death – and one of the biggest dangers for immigrants is getting arrested by Iranian police, after which they would have to choose whether to go back to Afghanistan or be sent to Syria to war. To portray their lives, this crisis, and the conflicts that led to this migration (and how to go on living in their new communities) is the main goal of my project.

Despite all the hardships that the refugees lived with over the years, and the dangers they face to achieve a better place to live, and despite the unknown future that awaits them, there is one goal in their mind, and it is to survive, and hope is the only thing that I saw in them.

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



























# Black Suffolk

*John Ferguson*

John Ferguson's series of portraits is based on the theme of 'home', The images creatively explore the concept of home for a diversity of people from the African-Caribbean community who have made Suffolk their home, or who were born here.

John says: "This theme hopes to creatively express and explore people's experience and interpretation of what exactly is 'home'. Home can be a feeling, a physical space or a geographical place. Home can be a memory, metaphor or experience. The idea is to connect with the notion that we are, as a community, at home, both metaphorically and physically, our lives are inextricably attached to where we live, and Suffolk. I asked the people I was portraying the question: what does home mean to them? How do they express themselves and their spirit from their home?"

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





Affy



Carnell Cook





Brian Powlett



Gary Powell





Eldridge Marriott



Kanika Carr





Michelle Taylor



# Tapestry - Refugee Stories

*Gillian Allard*

Historically, Ipswich has been home to many diverse communities, including refugees. However, over the last 20 years, brutal conflicts and persecution have led to increased numbers of refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Europe becoming residents in the town. The effects of displacement and changes in language, culture and environment can be profound, but many embrace their new surroundings and wish to be accepted for their similarities, while keeping their traditions and the memory of home alive.

Using the theme of 'Belonging', a working group from this community has been working with me to reflect on their own experiences of what it means to 'belong'. Over the past three months, facilitated by Suffolk Refugee Support, these men, women and young people have generously shared their experiences and reflections, their culture and celebrations, and in some cases their actual belongings, in workshops and studio sessions. The resulting images highlight the importance of family, faith, friendship, culture and memory in fostering a sense of belonging, particularly for those who've been forced to leave their homes.

I've been overwhelmed by the generosity of the participants in this project in sharing their stories. It has been a rewarding and often humbling collaboration. I feel genuinely lucky to have worked with the refugees, who inspired my creativity more than they realise.

Rifaii's Poem is supporting the Lampedusa Cross at Ipswich Museum until 12th June. The full series will be on display at Weird and Wonderful Wood at Haughly Park on the weekend of the 15th May to raise funds locally for Suffolk Refugee Support.

[www.gillian-allard.com](http://www.gillian-allard.com)



Mina (Kurdistan)

My name is Mina. I am 2  
years and 2 months old.

I am the younger sister  
of two brothers.

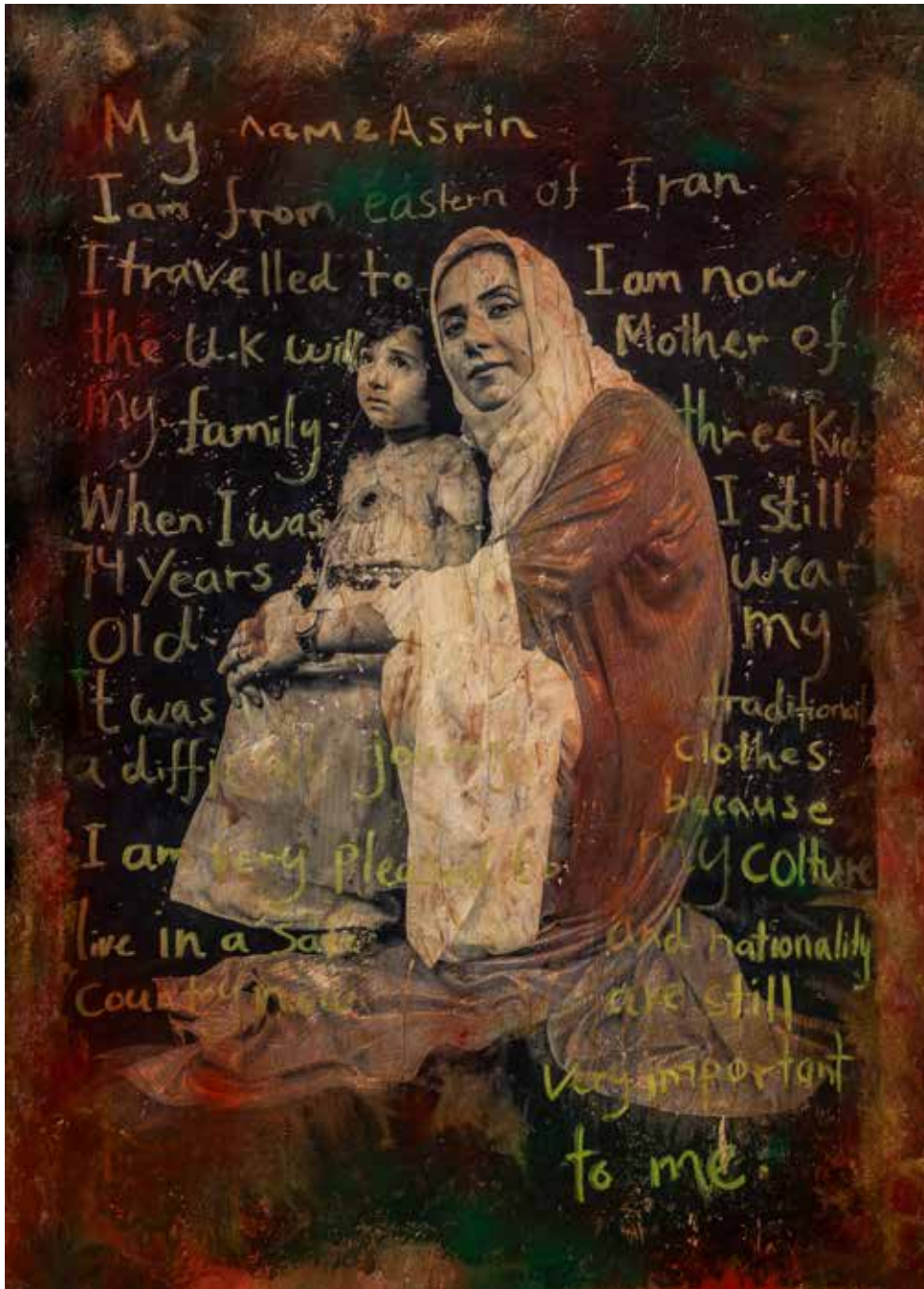
My parents and grandparents  
are all from Kurdistan

But I was born in Ipswich, UK.

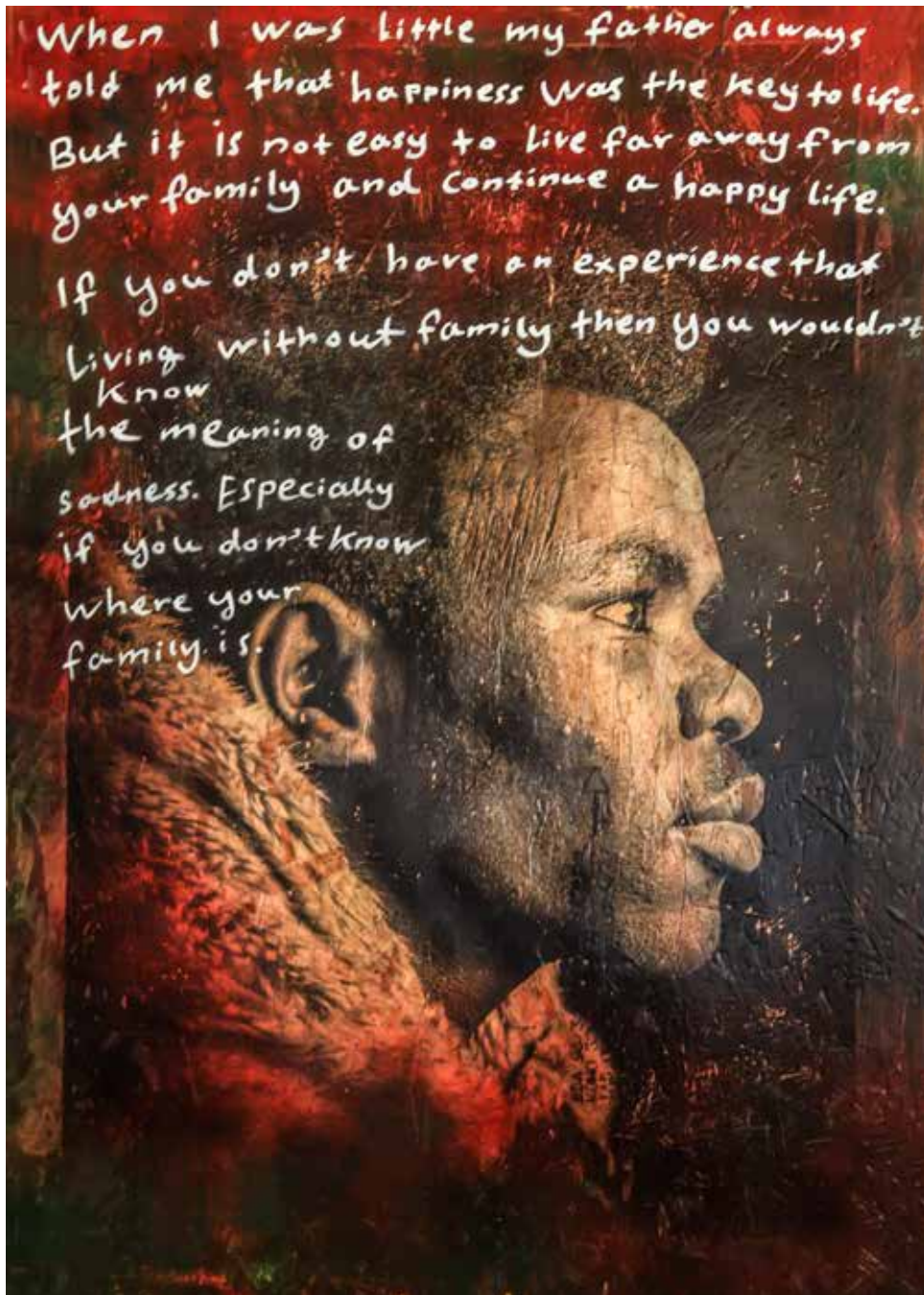
I am a 'Daddy's Girl'.







Asrin & Mina (Kurdistan)  
 My name is Asrin, I am from Eastern Kurdistan, which is located in the country of Iran. I travelled to the UK with my family when I was 14 years old. It was a difficult journey. I am very pleased to live in a safe country now and I am the mother of 3 kids. I still wear my traditional clothes because my culture and nationality are still very important to me.



Rifaii's Poem (Syria)

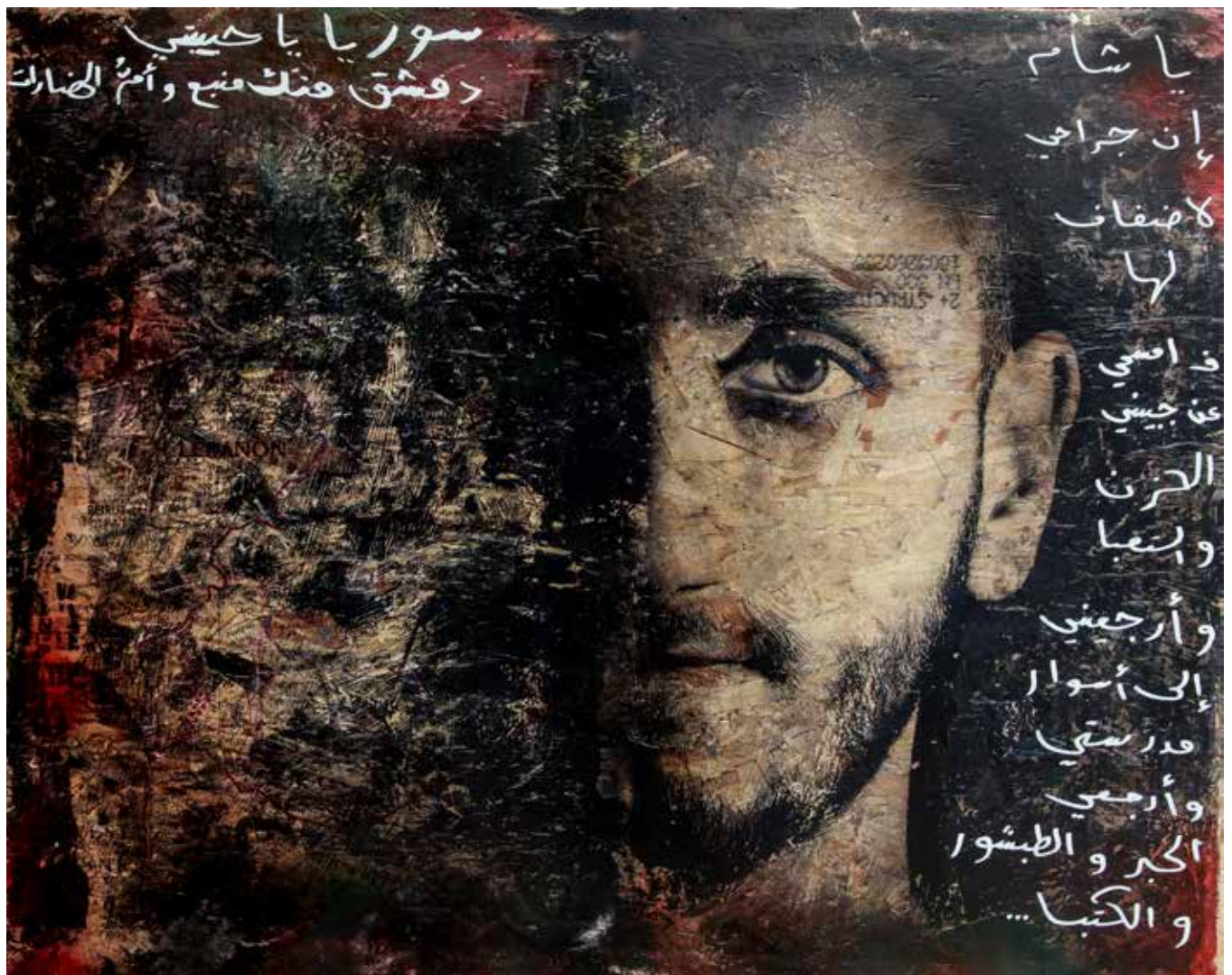
They say: When will we meet!?

I say: After a  
year and a war...

They say: When does the war end!?

I say: When we meet











# The Poland-Belarus Border

*Michaela Nagyidaiová & Anna Jacková*

We head to the forest where three Kurdish boys are waiting for us. There may also be police, the army, or smugglers. One thing is for sure, no one is safe. Time is of the essence. A humanitarian crisis is occurring on the Polish-Belarusian border, testing the moral boundaries of its people.

An old country house close to the Polish-Belarusian border now serves as a base and warehouse for volunteers and activists providing aid in the forests. Five people, Agata, Kassia, Marek, Zuzana, and Wiktoria sit in the house in November 2021. They have decided to travel from different places and countries to the Podlasie region of Poland, where a humanitarian crisis has been unfolding since August. Every evening, the group evaluates how the day went and how they felt. Sitting at the table, Wiktoria interrupts the conversation: "Can you hear that? That's the army." Armoured vehicles roar outside the window. They agree that the first intervention was successful, the second was not. When an intervention is a success it means that one group of volunteers or activists managed to locate migrants in the forests and give them at least a hot soup, tea, water, or dry clothes. The volunteers can't do much more because they could face charges of smuggling. The police arrived during their second intervention, which is why it turned out to be an unfortunate mesh of events. Most likely, the migrants that were found there were taken back to the Belarusian side of the border by the police or border patrol.

Intimidation of activists and volunteers helping people in the forests has been occurring here for months. The more visible you are, the clearer target you become for the armed forces, which have been using aggressive methods when interacting with migrants, as well as the right-wing radicals based in Podlasie.

Poland has been breaking international humanitarian laws since the beginning of the crisis. Persons who cross the border without paperwork and apply for asylum are entitled to have their application assessed. According to a new regulation, persons who have crossed the Polish border illegally are to be delivered back to the border; there are no exceptions for people declaring they want to ask for protection under international law. Volunteers regularly receive reports from migrants detained by Polish border guards,



who were exported back to Belarus without having any assessment. The pushbacks are normally illegal, but the Polish government has found a way to circumvent the law, as explained in a report published by Grupa Granica:

"Belarusian soldiers often use threat and force when moving people across the border back to Poland. Whole families, primarily from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, are wandering through freezing forests and undergoing dozens of pushbacks. The Polish soldiers often divide them when sending them back to the Belarusian side. The landscape of the more than 400-kilometer border is densely forested and swampy."

Text by Anna Jacková, translated by Michaela Nagyidaiová.  
Photos by Michaela Nagyidaiová.

See:

[www.michaelanagyidaiova.com](http://www.michaelanagyidaiova.com)

Editor's note: text written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.











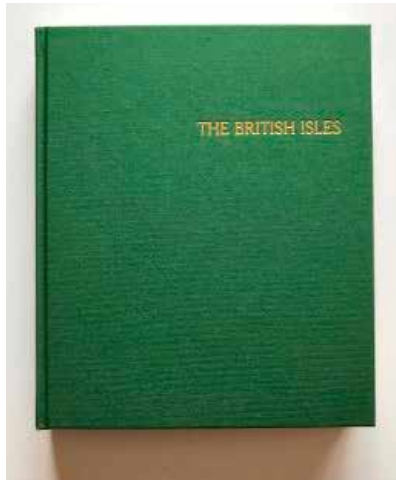






# THE BRITISH ISLES, by Jamie Hawkesworth

*Book Review by Brian Steptoe FRPS*



26x22cm,  
292 pages,  
198 images

A wide range of  
images, many  
being portraits  
showing people at  
work and at leisure.



# View from the Editor of Concept

*Suzi Darsa*

I'm sure many of you will agree, being a photographer can be a lonely pursuit at times. Whilst I developed my photographic skills and knowledge over the years in formal and informal settings, my passion for photography, like many photographers, remains deeply personal. We invest so much of ourselves in the images we create, in part through making key decisions over how each image is constructed. We choose the subject, the viewpoint, the frame, the plane of focus and the moment of exposure. Whilst it's impossible for those who view our images to fully share our personal experience of taking them, it's our desire to communicate what we've seen and experienced that transforms our solitary existence, into a collective one. As photographers we facilitate dialogue, community, empowerment, empathy and change. It is with this in mind that I am pleased to take on the mantle of editorship of the *Concept* newsletter.

I am fortunate to have worked within the corporate side of the photography industry and to have been surrounded by inspirational imagery, a privilege I will always be grateful for. I am now a frustrated photographer, dedicated to building a photography business that provides room for creativity and shared joy.

When I recently joined the RPS, I sought a creative community where I could escape the solitude I was experiencing as a photographer and find solace with like-minded individuals who are driven to create imagery for personal or commercial purposes, or both. By becoming a member of the Contemporary SIG, I wished to broaden my horizons and deepen my understanding and appreciation of contemporary photography. My experience of being a member of the RPS has been overwhelmingly positive, inspired by members' talks, its varied programme and from reading the RPS Journal. I applaud all those who work so hard to create and maintain this supportive community.

*Concept* is a key resource which brings together the Contemporary SIG community, where we can take a break from our sometimes, solitary existence and engage with like-minded members who want to share their work, their progress and provide encouragement for others.

To ensure *Concept* reflects the vibrant community it serves, editorial contributions from members are key to guaranteeing it remains a valued publication. With the help of Christine Pennington who leads on *Concept's* design, and Sean Goodhart as webmaster ensuring it's accessible on-line, we aim to bring you a publication you look forward to receiving and one which keeps you connected with your community. For those members considering submitting work or articles, please do get in touch to discuss how we can work together to continue creating a dialogue we can all benefit from.

# GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

The Contemporary Group AGM was held as an online meeting 2 April 2022. Alexandra Prescott was elected as the new chair of the group. Alan Cameron was elected as Treasurer. David Grimshaw has left the committee. Other committee positions and members remain unchanged.

Next Group meeting 16 May 2022, 7pm, by zoom. In conversation with John Ferguson.

Keep an eye on the RPS website, Concept and the group Facebook page for details of future talks, both online and, when possible, in person.

## 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	Alexandra Prescott FRPS	Chair	aprescott 3@yahoo.co.uk
	Tim Hancock ARPS	Secretary	hancock.tim@sky.com
	Alan Cameron ARPS	Treasurer and North West group organiser	alan.cameron@me.com
	Keith Launchbury	Membership co-ordinator	contemporarymembership@rps.org
	Duncan Unsworth	Postal portfolio	duncan.unsworth100@gmail.com
	Paul Ashley ARPS	Journal editor	paultheashley@gmail.com
	Sean Goodhart ARPS	Webmaster	contemporaryweb@rps.org
	Brian Steptoe FRPS	Journal design	bsteptoe@compuserve.com
	Suzi Darsa	Concept editor	concepteditor@rps.org
	Patricia Ruddle ARPS	North group organiser	patriciaruddle@btinternet.com
	Tom Owens ARPS	Eastern group organiser	contemporaryea@rps.org
	Steff Hutchinson ARPS	Central group organiser	info@steffhutchinson.co.uk
	Adrian Hough ARPS	South West group organiser	contemporarysw@rps.org
	Tessa Mills FRPS	Distinctions Panel Chair	tessamills@hotmail.co.uk



