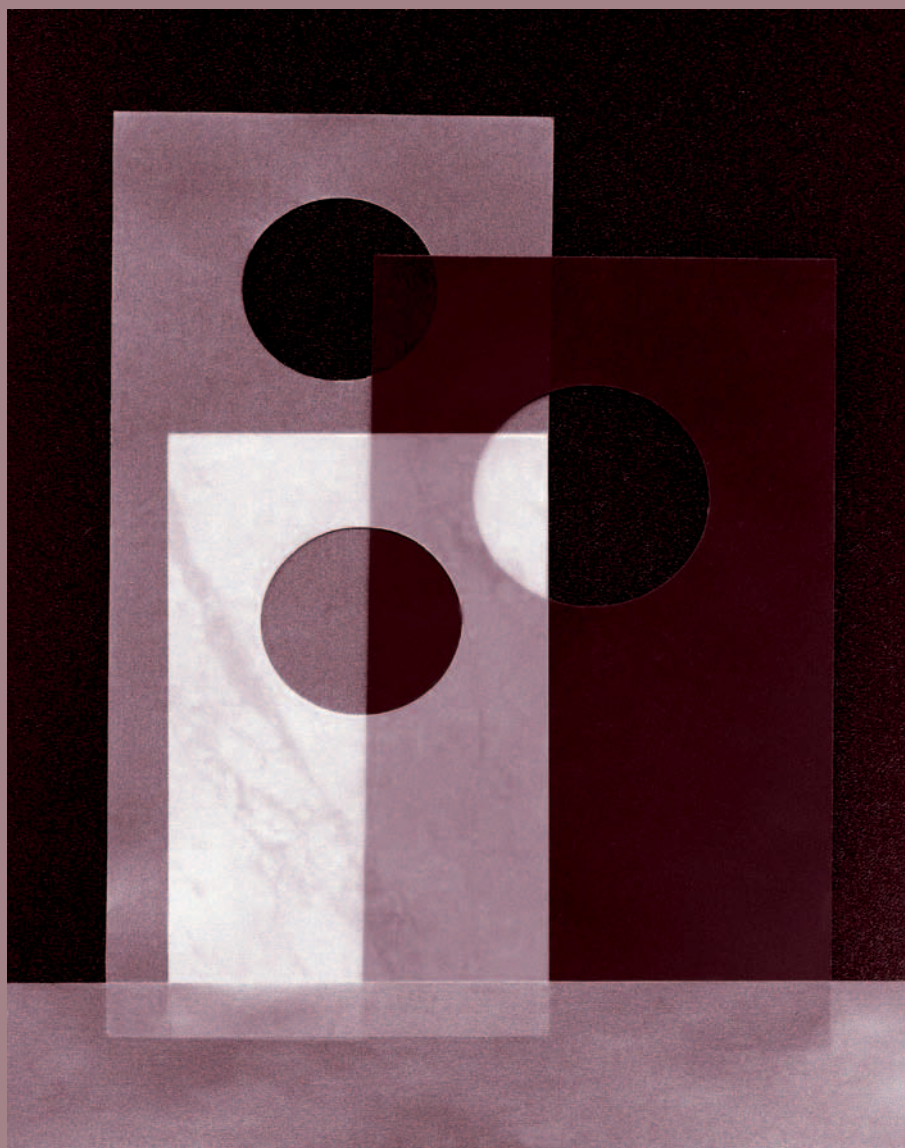


Contemporary Group Journal



View from the Chair

In July I wrote about the proposal for a Yorkshire/North East Group. Three months later I can safely say it was successfully launched by Nigel Tooby FRPS on 15 September. Nigel has thirty-eight members on his email list and twenty three attended the inaugural meeting, with apologies from those who were unable to attend.

The group is likely to undertake a wide variety of activities and these were discussed at the meeting in the context of members’ aspirations. As a start, five members of those present agreed to show their work at the next meeting, which will be on Saturday, 17 November in the Hampshire Room, Strensall Village Hall, Strensall, York YO32 5AW between 2 and 5 pm. The meetings will be open to all. Whether you are an RPS member or not, you will be made to feel very welcome. I wish the Group continuing success.

On 6 September I attended the talk given by Joel Meyerowitz at the Photographers’ Gallery; the hall was packed and I understand the tickets were sold very quickly. I heard Joel speak some years ago and can confirm that he has lost none of his fluency. His images of Ground Zero were particularly poignant to me as I had visited the site many years ago, and revisited last September when the Remembrance Park was opened. The photographs in New York that record the events of this dreadful time are not to be forgotten.

The second Group e-news was emailed in September. I have had no comments from anyone about it, so I do not know if it is welcome or not. Please don’t forget if you have anything of interest that you would like to pass on to other members, whether exhibitions that you have seen, or that are to be held by members, books you may have seen and liked or comments on how we run the Contemporary Group – I would be pleased to hear from you.

FORMAT photoforum. A monthly meeting, last Tuesdays, will be held for discussions about photography, led by photographer, journalist, author and teacher, Paul Hill, one of the founders of the Contemporary Group. www.derbyquad.co.uk and telephone 01332 290606 for more information.

There are still tickets available for **Contrasting Contemporary**, 10 - 11 November. I understand that both Jurys Inn and Premier Hotels are offering special deals for the autumn and they are both very close to the venue in Plymouth. Homer Sykes, Sian Bonnell Hon FRPS and Daniel Meadows Hon FRPS will be speaking on Saturday, and Sophy Rickett will speak on Sunday, We also hope to show a successful Contemporary Fellowship during the Sunday morning. Booking forms are available from the RPS website Contemporary Group in conjunction with the South West Region.

Best wishes to you all, Avril

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If you wish to submit articles for the Journal, please send all copy and images on disc to:

Patricia Ann Ruddle, 28 Malvern Avenue, York, YO26 5SG.
patriciaruddle@btinternet.com

Cover: *Umbra 5*, by Arnie Whittle ARPS

Text should be in Microsoft Word and images are preferred in TIFF format, 300 dpi, file size guideline 10-20Mb. Images are also acceptable as high quality JPEGs, file size guideline 3-6 Mb. Colour space in Adobe RGB is preferred rather than sRGB. For other formats, please contact the Editor. Large image files may be supplied on disc or by use of online large file transfer facilities.

Unless requested, discs will not be returned.

DEADLINE for the Winter 2012 edition is 31 December 2012.

Contemporary Group Journal

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Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that explores the photographer’s personal view of contemporary society, environment, art or culture, usually through a themed body of work.

Editorial

“It’s great that there is room for different opinions, otherwise it would be boring.”

The above quote is a remark made in an email from Dutch member, Pascal van Heesch. I had asked his opinion of our Journal to which he responded by telling me what he liked and didn’t like. But, as noted above, it’s all the better for having diverse articles. I think that this Journal issue includes such varied photography, which again is characteristic of the Contemporary Group. Whether diversity in approach or diversity in perspective, Group members make images that reflect their own world viewpoint and personal response to it.

I’m wondering - are you like Anna Fox who says that she keeps an open mind when starting a project? Perhaps like her, you are open to new ways of seeing by sometimes changing processes? Or perhaps working ideas out while “on the way”?

This year’s RPS Centenary Medal recipient, Joel Meyerowitz, gave a talk in London which coincided with the Award ceremony in September. Brian Steptoe attended the talk and told me that Meyerowitz’s ethos came across loud and clear - to keep advancing. Whenever he thought that his work was ‘plateauing’ he started working in a new way. Indeed, when hibernating in a studio in Tuscany because it was too hot outside, he began to make still life images of souvenir-type objects he bought for a few euros. Working in his tabletop theatre, he became fascinated with the seemingly endless juxtapositions that he could arrange, which in turn gave various interpretations to the different ways the objects were placed. ⁽¹⁾ This is an astonishing departure from the type of photography that we usually associate with Meyerowitz.

So, members, I’d be pleased if you sent me articles to show us the projects and ideas that you are working on, considering, or perhaps even stuck on. Then, our Journal will continue to benefit from the range of genres that Group members engage in, whether documentary or fine art, and to express and share our diverse purposes and concepts.

Best wishes, Patricia

1. Land, David “*Unsettled vision*”. Interview with Joel Meyerowitz HonFRPS. The Royal Photographic Society Journal, 152.7, (2012): 396-401.

What you see is what you get Five ‘realists’ from the Netherlands

Pascal van Heesch ARPS & Willem Melching

Dutch visual arts have a long-standing tradition of realism. The masters from the seventeenth century like Rembrandt and Vermeer are well-known examples. This tradition is very much alive in the contemporary visual arts and Dutch photography is no exception. Twentieth century masters such as Eddy Posthuma de Boer, Ed van der Elsken, Cas Oorthuys and Rieneke Dijkstra are deeply rooted in this tradition of realism and social engagement.

This tradition is also present in the work of the Dutch photographers represented here. Each represents a very personal interpretation of the realistic tradition, which varies from outright contemporary work to ‘classical’ social documentary.

Of course pure ‘realism’ is a naive illusion. Vermeer’s *Music Lesson* is more than a registration of reality; it is full of symbols, hidden clues and passion. The same goes for the photographers in this contribution from the Netherlands. Their work is only ‘realistic’ on the outside. They prefer to leave the interpretation of a deeper meaning to the individual viewer.

The five photographers have attended RPS Advisory Days in Brussels and the Netherlands, and have enjoyed the help, critique and feedback from experts like Sam Ang ARPS, Simon Roberts FRPS, Roy Robertson HonFRPS President and Ray Spence FRPS. At the moment Willem Melching is preparing an ARPS panel for the Contemporary Group. Cobi Neeft recently acquired an ARPS, and now hopes to benefit more from the RPS and its various activities. Ton Mijs submitted his series of jazz photography in 2010 which was awarded an ARPS distinction. Armando Jongejan FRPS and Pascal van Heesch ARPS are members of the Contemporary Group and its third Postal Portfolio.

All five agree that it is a great experience to explore and share the richness of the language of photography with an international community of enthusiastic photographers. Participating in the RPS is a great way to achieve this goal.

Ton Mijs ARPS - Americana

In the autumn of 2010, Ton Mijs travelled through rural New England, in Northeastern USA, in search of the 'ordinary' America. Ton was already well aware of the importance of the American flag in the culture of the 'promised land'. Nevertheless, he was struck by the fact that he saw the national flag literally everywhere. In the present series, Ton shows his amazement as well as his ambivalence towards this omnipresent patriotism. At the same time, the images are a tribute to American photographers like Stephen Shore and William Eggleston, the pioneers who were the first to picture the beauty of the banal and the commonplace in full colour. Ton has a Fellowship distinction from the Dutch Amateur Photographic Society. website www.tonmijs.nl/



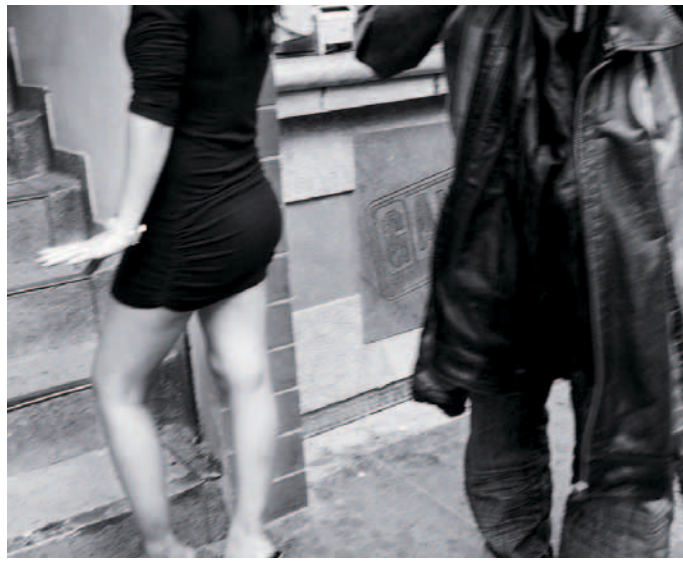
Willem Melching - Figments of Reality

Willem Melching characterises his work as 'nihilistic humanism'. As these pictures testify, people do their utmost to embellish our world, but the results are often depressing, if not devastating. By observing and isolating these aspects of reality he wants to emphasize the surrealism and alienation in the modern world. People are not visible in the pictures, but they are not absent either. They are about to enter the stage they have created. Although some pictures might be considered as 'brutal', it is not cynicism but compassion that is Willem's aim.

With this theme and approach, Willem has found a personal style in which to work. As a photographer he is indebted to giants like William Eggleston and Martin Parr.

Website www.wmelchin.home.xs4all.nl/





Pascal van Heesch ARPS - Down and Out in Medellín

The metropolis of Medellín, Colombia was known for years for the militias and drug cartels that resided there. It was the home of the infamous drug lord, Pablo Escobar. Without preconceived opinions and judgements, Pascal observed life and death in Medellín and its surrounding villages and towns.

Completeness and objectivity were not his aim. This shows the influence of Walker Evans and Robert Frank. Pascal's photos are about personal encounters with people in the street and they remap reality. Pascal wants to disclose the invisible: the role that money, drugs, power and faith play in a community such as Medellín. He is critical, inspired by love for and commitment to the 'ordinary people'. Pascal therefore sees the creation and distribution of these photos as a moral necessity. The Medellín series was awarded a Fellowship by the Dutch Amateur Photographic Society. The complete Medellín project is available as a print on demand book: <http://nl.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/1246696> Personal website: www.pascalvanheesch.com



Cobi Neeft ARPS - Krommeniedijk and its Inhabitants

Cobi Neeft has concentrated over a prolonged period on the inhabitants of Krommeniedijk. This is a community along a dike in the province of North-Holland, north of Amsterdam. She followed people in this community in their own residential spaces and observed their daily routines. Krommeniedijk is a small, old street, and Cobi captured its specific atmosphere, its characteristic feeling and the harmony of this typical Dutch countryside. In her work she is influenced by Martien Coppens and Ed van der Elsken.

Website www.fotocobi.nl



Armando Jongejan FRPS - A Fair in Istanbul

The fair Feshane Çocuk Eglence Parki is bordered by the west bank of the Golden Horn, Yavedut street and the Haliç bridge in the Eyüp district, Istanbul, Turkey. This used to be a fair for the whole family. But here it is Saturday five p.m., and outside the fun fair the traffic is rushing by, but inside it is completely deserted and quiet. No children are playing, no music can be heard, nothing moves. A complete and eerie silence. This inspired Armando to dedicate a series to this special environment. It's colourful, but there is no one there to enjoy this strange but very attractive setting. In his work Armando is inspired by photographers such as Ed van der Elsken and John Davies. Armando has a Fellowship distinction from the Dutch Amateur Photographic Society.

The complete series of the Istanbul fair is available at Blurb: www.blurb.com/books/1731147.
Portfolio: www.rps.org/region/Benelux/portfolio/3402-Armando-Jongejan%20FRPS/

Personal website: www.contrastfotografie.nl/

The Collector

Lesley Parkinson ARPS

This body of work is an exploration of the concepts of collecting, protecting and owning. Located in the domestic environment it examines our relationship with our possessions. By covering the objects in different ways, tissue bags, fabric or isolating them in a bell jar, they take on an importance and significance of their own; they become fragile, precious and mysterious. The work questions the motivation of collectors and the value placed on objects either for material or sentimental reasons. The objects create an archive of valued or valuable items remaining fixed, motionless in their own time and space, embalmed by paper, cloth or glass.

Exploring the subject of collecting has raised many questions - principally whom do we collect for and why? Are we collecting for our own private consumption; are we hoarding to prevent other people being able to share the pleasure of the objects; or do we think we are saving and protecting them from danger? Susan Pearce suggests that *"Collections are sets of objects, and, like all other sets of objects, they are an act of the imagination, part corporate and part individual, a metaphor intended to create meanings which help to make individual identity and each individual's view of the world."* ⁽¹⁾

Although the objects in the photographs are covered, it is still possible to gain a brief insight into what is hidden – the outline shows through the tissue paper, the folds of the fabric hint at a shape, the reflection on the polished wooden surface - we are given a tantalising glimpse. The bell jars isolate the objects, allowing us to view them but keeping them out of reach behind the glass. The images convey a sense of nostalgia entering

a world where time has stood still as in Miss Havisham's house in Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

In order to consolidate the work I have decided to suggest that the objects photographed belong to a Victorian gentleman collector who hoards the items for his own personal pleasure. The items are protected from harmful physical damage such as dust and light but also from the prying gaze of the public.

Paradoxically, my work oscillates between the dream world and bizarre images of the surrealists such as Man Ray and Magritte, and the utilitarian functional work of the early photographers such as Fox Talbot who used photography to record everyday items.

The images are hand printed fibre base silver gelatin prints, lightly toned, highlighting the traditional qualities of a fine print. I felt it was important that the photograph became a beautiful thing in its own right. The photographs are 6x4 inch in size requiring the viewer to actively engage and spend time with the image. The images become portraits of the items depicted. This work is very personal to me because the photographs were taken in my home of objects inherited from my parents.

I see this work as the beginning of a more in-depth analysis of the intriguing phenomena of possessing, collecting and hoarding, examining the value and meaning we attach to objects through a collective subconscious and how this relates to contemporary culture.

1. Pearce, Susan M. *On Collecting: an Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Routledge, 1995, p.27.



Shoshone Falls

Book review by Donald Stewart FRPS

Any new book by Thomas Joshua Cooper is an event to be welcomed, but when this volume also contains work by, and is referenced to, another great American photographer of an earlier generation both the pleasure and the impact are multiplied. The second photographer, Timothy H O'Sullivan, was one of the great photographers of the American Civil War and of the post-war expeditions to explore the economic and social potential of the American West. O'Sullivan was photographer to two major expeditions in the 1870s, and Shoshone Falls on the Snake River in southern Idaho, is the only location which he is known to have revisited. His photographs of the Falls and other western locations are now regarded as icons of the great Western Desert prior to the arrival of the flood of settlers.

Both photographers possess the ability to capture more than just the image seen through the ground glass. Where O'Sullivan was limited in the number of images he could produce as a result of the wet collodion process he used, Cooper limits himself to a single exposure of any particular scene. So with both it is question of waiting for exactly the 'right' moment to open the shutter. Cooper, with his eye for tone, texture, light and shadow constructs a view of the Falls which is different from yet in harmony with O'Sullivan's earlier work. Each oeuvre complements the other.

Although the water now flowing over the Falls and down the Snake River is but a trickle compared to earlier times, these locations still exercise a fascination and wonder which is enhanced when photographed by a master of Cooper's ability. Readers might wonder why waterfalls almost devoid of water continue to exert such a fascination. This may lie in the contrast between the two bodies of work. Where O'Sullivan's photographs show the power of a river in full flow, Cooper's show the results of that power to shape the landscape. In the 130 years separating the two bodies of work much has changed, particularly in the usage of water brought about by the massive expansion in both population and industry in the American West. O'Sullivan's pictures show a mighty river in full flow: Cooper's by contrast show the accumulated results of the river's water being piped off to aid 'civilisation'. Two quite different sets of photographs but each inspired by the circumstances the photographer found.

For me all the images are linked by one simple fact: great photographers make great photographs. Vision lies in the eye and mind of the photographer and not in what lies before the camera.

Cooper, Thomas Joshua & O'Sullivan, Timothy: *Shoshone Falls*. Radius Books, February 2012.



Timothy H O'Sullivan, *Shoshone Falls*, 1874.

©Thomas Joshua Cooper, *Bridal Falls, Shoshone Falls*, 2003-2004.
Photograph courtesy of Radius Books



©Thomas Joshua Cooper, *Broken Boulder, Pillar Falls Canyon, Jerome County*, 2003-2004.
Photograph courtesy of Radius Books



Hyperreal modernity

Del Barrett ARPS

The world of fashion appears to be one of glamour, sparkle and riches. The supermodels are glamorous, the clothes sparkle and there are riches to be made as a result of strong advertising campaigns – advertisements designed to make us believe that we can look like Natalie Portman or Michael Pitt simply by buying Dior perfume or Armani suits. Although at first glance these advertisements seem sophisticated and complex – strategically designed, carefully stage-managed and photographically perfect – when analysed more closely, the adverts take us from a rational world into an absurd one, and from reality into Baudrillard's notion of “hyperreal modernity” where “the medium has used its technical capacities to appear more true-to-life than the objects and/or subjects it purports to represent.”⁽¹⁾

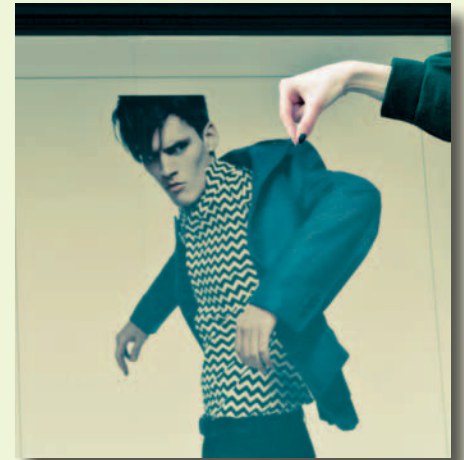
The project aims to highlight this “hyperreal modernity” through a series of images which were created by asking ordinary people to emulate or react to the eye-catching scenarios as found in shop windows and on the advertising hoardings. The resulting images highlight that the visual stimuli, attendant in the fashion industry, are larger than life, and bordering on the absurd.

The transient nature of this season's fashion is emphasised by the choice of editing the photographic images in the style of Polaroid snapshots. This underlines that they are 'of the moment', which ironically resonates with the fashion photography set-ups in the pre-digital days.

1. Detrix, François (2008) *Tabloid Terror: War, Culture and Geopolitics*. London and New York: Routledge.



Del Barret's panel of prints
was awarded an Associateship
in the Contemporary category
in Spring 2012





Sculpting Light

Arnie Whittle ARPS

Light is the most essential component of photography, and it allows the photographer to create images that have energy, vision and style. By harnessing its power, I have created a range of art prints that explore a new form of 'optical illusion'.

My photographs take their inspiration from sculptor Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975). Her work uses the beauty of form and shadow on a sculpture's surface to create a sense of space and depth that draw the viewer in and through the form. The play of light on the surface adds contrast and drama, which is of prime

importance to her work. I have also been influenced by Francis Bruguiere (1879-1945) who created sculptural forms in two-dimensional photographs. His miniature abstract forms were used to create sculptural photographic landscapes. His former profession as a theatrical lighting technician gave him the knowledge to adapt lighting techniques on a miniature set. He explored new ways of using the camera and film to break the boundaries of conventional photography and create abstract prints.

My images have taken a 21st century approach to create a new form of alternative photography, by stripping image making of conventional rules and exploring photography with a new vision. I have used light and colour as tools, shadow and form as my paint, and the scanner bed as my canvas. By 'sculpting light' I have discovered that these images can be considered as a new form of modern visual art.

"Light gives full play to our tactile perception through the experiences of our eyes, and the vitality of forms is revealed by the interplay between space and volume."⁽¹⁾

1. *Barbara Hepworth and the Mediterranean Spirit*, Marmo, no.3, Dec. 1964, p.62. (www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hepworth-image-ii-t00958/text-catalogue-entry (accessed 14 August 2012).)

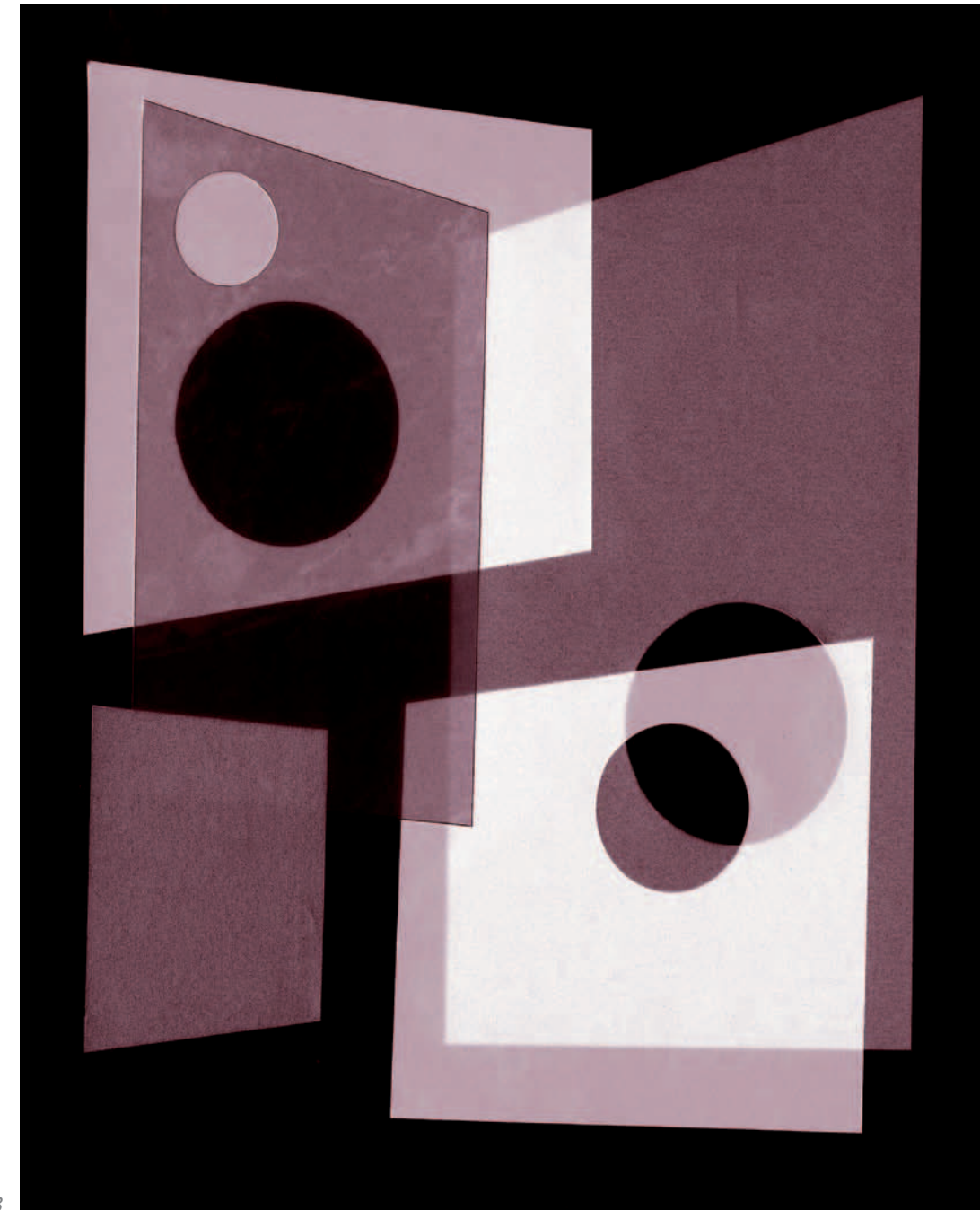


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Contemporary Photography Today

Brian Steptoe FRPS

The first question that was asked, and still is asked today, after the Contemporary Group of the RPS was formed in November 1989, was ‘What is contemporary photography?’ Why did we as early Group members have to struggle to give an answer that satisfied other RPS photographers? Why did we not just say that it was the equivalent of what contemporary art was in the art world - about breaking out of the boundaries of established photography, developing ideas, images and forms of presentation uninhibited from what existed before? About not acknowledging the status quo, on, for example, technique, composition and even technical quality. Rules or guidelines regarding composition and technical quality can maintain standards, but looked at another way, they are barriers to change. How would it be if the art community rules from the 19th century continued to be applied in the 20th and 21st centuries - no surrealism, no YBAs and no conceptual art.

Critical assessment of contemporary photography requires the (re)viewer to give attention to ideas and emotions as being at least as, if not more important than the purely visual aspects in the work. The subjective ‘like/don’t like’ has to be avoided. At least some attention to photographic theories underlying interpretation of imagery is a must.

So who are the role models to be? Well for starters, probably not Ansel Adams, maybe not Cartier-Bresson and not established landscape photographers. The main point is that whoever is seen in that role, the list is open-ended and non-restrictive; seeing all styles of work and forms of presentation as valid - not allowing ‘rules’ as restrictions. There are many occasions when an exception has been requested over assessment criteria

for contemporary work submissions for RPS distinctions, and why, because contemporary work almost by definition, is often work that does not meet ‘the rules’.

A review of successful RPS distinction submissions in the Contemporary category over the last ten years reveals that the work ranges along a line from fine art, fine art with a documentary aspect, documentary with a fine art leaning, to purely personal documentary work.

“There has always been an uncomfortable relationship between documentary photography and fine art photography. Even ‘fine art’ photographers who work primarily in the documentary genre often will not admit to the term. The elephant in the room in the fine art world is that tendentious work—work that has a motive beyond pure ‘artistic’ pleasure—is tainted and beneath work that is purely fine art.” ⁽¹⁾

Readers will probably be aware of my leanings towards the published photobook as a source for seeing ‘what’s happening’. This particularly applies where we take publications that are seen as among the best when reviewed by their peers. Guidelines from recent photobooks that push the boundaries are, for example:

- *Hackney Wick*, by Stephen Gill ⁽²⁾
- *A Shimmer of Possibility*, by Paul Graham ⁽³⁾
- *Illuminance*, by Rinko Kawauchi ⁽⁴⁾
- *The Pond*, by John Gossage, second edition ⁽⁵⁾

The photographic work of Paul Graham, in particular, his *Shimmer of Possibility*, has just been awarded the 2012 Hasselblad Award of £95,000. *Illuminance* by Rinko Kawauchi was in the short list of four for this year’s £20,000 Deutsche Börse prize. *Hackney Wick* by Stephen Gill and John Gossage’s *The Pond* figure among the most significant books published in the early

2000s, as identified by Martin Parr & Gerry Badger and in several other Photobook surveys.

Of course there are other less ‘boundary pushers’ than these, but the point is that they need inclusion in our definition. Contemporary photography is no more or less than the forms of photography practiced by contemporary art photographers working on their own personal projects. ‘Personal’ and ‘project’ are the important words. This is very different from ‘personal’ as frequently used by many amateur photographers just to mean ‘in my own favourite style’. Alec Soth sets out the difference in his blog:

“My art is different to the photographs I do for commissions. A huge part of my personal work is finding my subject. This involves daydreaming, wandering, editing and reshooting ... it takes forever. The process is introspective and I always work alone.” ... Alec Soth, Magnum

When a project is presented in book form, a favourite over just having an exhibition of the work, because it reaches a larger audience and is a source used by other

photographers learning from one another, there are many aspects involved as well as the images themselves.

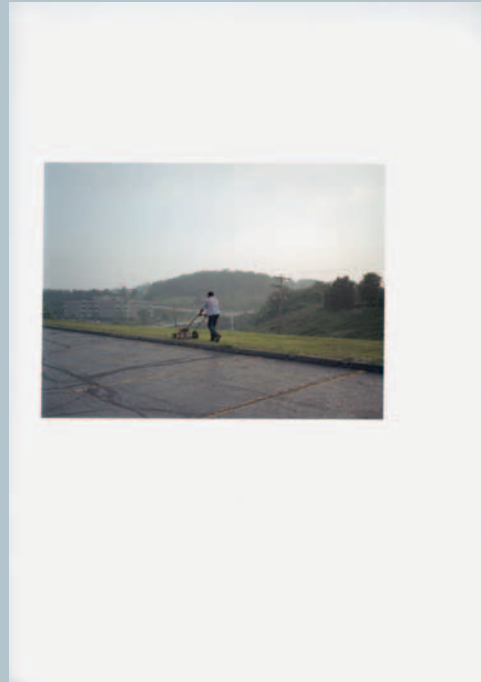
This is indicated, for example, in a Rinko Kawauchi interview: “How do you decide upon the composition of your books? How do you make your books flow so beautifully?”

“When I put together a book, I actually have a conversation with myself. To be more specific, I begin by printing simply everything I have recently taken and which interests me for whatever reason. And then I spread everything out on my floor at home and start by taking an image in my hand. I then choose the next image, as if I were playing an association game. I have moments where I say to myself ‘I don’t know why, but only this image can be next to this one’ or ‘this is a bit too well-coupled’. It’s almost like having some form of discovery.” ⁽⁶⁾

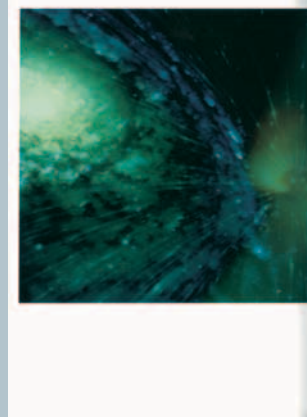
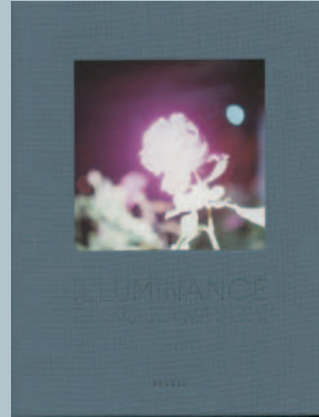
My recommendations for keeping up to date with contemporary photography would include seeking out photobooks published by Gerhard Steidl and by Michael Mack, and the new half-yearly *Photobook Review* published by Aperture ⁽⁷⁾.



Stephen Gill writes that when he first came across Hackney Wick in 2003 it “completely threw him”. The vast Sunday market in the old greyhound stadium, where most of the items looked like scrap, was closed down later that year as it offered a lot of counterfeit or stolen goods. He purchased a plastic film camera for 50p at this market which had no focus or exposure controls and used it to document the place and the people. *Hackney Wick* is an out-of-print volume which is currently priced at £200.



Paul Graham's *Shimmer of Possibility* was published as a set of 12 books, currently priced at £750 and subsequently as a student's single copy version. Each book contains a series of images which the author has referred to as equivalent to "visual haikus".



Rinko Kawauchi's *Illuminance* epitomises her light and airy style, with many overexposures which have been described by David Chandler as "expressing volatility and fragility" in her work. She was awarded an HonFRPS in September 2012.



John Gossage's *The Pond* describes a walk through a nondescript wooded area which includes a pond along its path. The example images here illustrate a point of close attention to two aligned sticks, which are shown in selected focus and later a pause during the walk to look upwards through the trees, appreciating the open sky above.

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1. Ruga, Glen. *The Razor's Edge: Between Documentary and Fine Art Photography*, New York Photo Festival, May 2012, Press Release, March 27, 2012
2. Gill, Stephen, *Hackney Wick*, London, Nobody Books, 2005.
3. Graham, Paul, *A Shimmer of Possibility* (12 volumes), Göttingen, SteidlMACK, 2007.
Graham, Paul, *A Shimmer of Possibility* (single volume), Göttingen, SteidlMACK, 2009.
4. Kawauchi, Rinko, *Illuminance*, Berlin, Kehrer Verlag, 2011.
5. Gossage, John, *The Pond*, second ed., New York, Aperture, 2010.
6. pingmag.jp/2006/08/11/10-questions-to-rinko-kawauchi-about-photography/ (accessed 16 Mar 2012)
7. The Photobook Review ISSN 2165-7645, www.aperture.org/pbr (accessed 5 Aug 2012)

A Very English Eye

In Conversation with Anna Fox

Rod Fry ARPS

What a pleasure it has been to interview Anna Fox! She has allowed us to not only gain insight into her photographic methods, but also to have her generous permission for the Contemporary Group Journal to show photographs from her *New Age* project, a work-in-progress on India.

Fox has followed the English tradition of being deeply rooted in certain areas of England which she can draw upon for inspiration for deeply personal work. I see her as an observer and chronicler of ordinary, everyday aspects of being English. She has the ability to hold a mirror up to her community, but what is perceived and what is revealed can be unsettling to the viewer. Though often critical and sharply observed as any Gerald Scarf cartoon, she still manages to convey affection in her work. There is also a sense of melancholy and absence in her images, a sense of yearning for what has gone before.

Fox is part of the new colour documentary photographers who emerged in the 1980s. She told me that at college she was taught by Martin Parr, Paul Graham and Karen Knorr who introduced her to the American New Colourists. She was also introduced to photographers such as Lee Friedlander and Bill Owens. However, she mentioned that “earlier I was influenced by my father who was a keen amateur – he had lots of photography books by Bresson, Atget and Brassai which were wonderful to look through all the time.”

I asked Fox whether her projects are image or project led. She replied that she takes photographs all the time. “When I first graduated I tended to work on projects that I always had the idea for. Now I work more freely than that, taking a lot of photographs and allowing themes

to emerge ... I actually enjoy the messing about phase of any body of work.” She added that she reads more, especially fiction and travel writing. Ideas can also emerge from listening to conversations, listening to the radio as well as looking at other people’s photography and paintings.

Author and Professor Val Williams, with an open, honest and accessible style, introduced Fox to a wider audience with *Anna Fox Photographs 1983-2007*, published by Photoworks in 2007. The book is a 25-year comprehensive survey of her work. It features several of Fox’s major projects from her earlier years, such as her first work, *Workstations* in which she observed London office culture in the mid-Thatcher years. Williams also includes Fox’s later, more personal bodies of work such as *Cockroach Diary* and *My Mother’s Cupboards*. And one of her recent projects, *Back to the Village*, is an ongoing series of portraits that captures the social life around her home village of Selbourne in Hampshire.

On changing her ways of working over the years, she revealed that “technically I change things all the time. This is because I always want to tread new ground and I want to be trying new ways of seeing – and each project demands a different way of looking. I don’t want to repeat the same style ...” Indeed, looking at her bodies of work over the years reveals different approaches; for example, in *Pictures of Linda Lunus*, a 1980s punk musician, Fox made both documentary portraits and a video that showed the photographer/subject relationship. Recently Fox has co-authored *Behind the Image: Research in Photography* with Natasha Caruana, which considers innovative ideas on how to develop projects. Fox told me that she is currently “writing a photo novel.”

However, we are fortunate to be introduced here to Fox’s *New Age* (working title only) – the first time seen outside of India. She told me that she started to photograph India in 1985 when a student, and was “immediately shocked by the way wealth and poverty rubbed up against each other so blatantly, and also by the clash of the modern with the traditional.” Today “aspiration” is the key to survival at all levels of society, and the world of commerce, as well as tradition, thrives on it.

Her Indian work so far has been in three stages. She explained that she began by photographing some of the traditional, although not always ancient, rituals and events. For example, she told me about the Baul Singers who reject money and travel about as paupers. The second stage is to photograph some of the “emerging evidence of commercialism in modern life” such as the development of tourism and new types of leisure activities. She continued, “As well I am quite keen to photograph different people’s working lives, looking at personal accounts from different levels of society about what it is to live in India today.”

Fox readily admitted that this is a massive project, but reiterated that this is how she “works on bodies of work that do not necessarily have a clear beginning – by this I mean that I am working many things out on the way, leaving it open for me to discover new things about a society and its people. It’s vital – if I start with a particular project it’s like starting with a closed mind, so I keep it open in order that I can learn more en route – essentially what I want to look at in the broadest possible sense is the extraordinary clashes in Indian society today.”

Anna Fox has given us the opportunity here to understand how she works. I find her a quintessentially English photographer who has turned her *Very English*

Eye on India, clearly demonstrating that she is no casual observer of both the old and new subcontinent. I am very grateful to Fox for her generosity and co-operation in helping me write this article. We are privileged that she has shared her *New Age* project with us, revealing yet another facet to this major contemporary photographer.

For more information, see www.annafox.co.uk.

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Diamond advertisement, 2009

Photographs on pages 31 to 38 and back cover - Work in progress from the series *New Age*. © Anna Fox, courtesy Tasveer Arts, Bangalore and James Hyman Photography, London.



*Pulikali
panther,
Kerala, Nov
2011*



*Pulikali tiger
#3, part of
the Onam
festival,
Kerala, Nov
2011*





Film school campus, Mumbai, July 2010



Woman with baby carrying washing across golf club green, Gujerat, June 2010



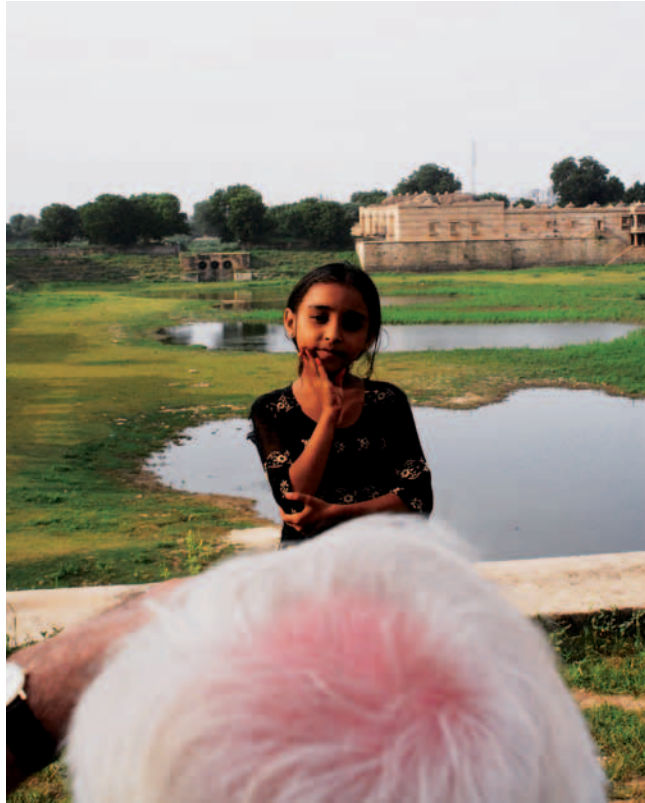
Lunch break, New Emerald Club building site, Mumbai, July 2010



Cafe del Mar car park, Goa, Oct 2011



The Barupia of West Bengal #10, May 2012



Girl photographed by tourist, Gujerat, 2008



Classroom, private photography school, New Delhi, 2008

GROUP EVENTS

November 3	Contemporary North West meeting. Days Inn, Charnock Richard services M6 between J27 and 28. A day with Colin Thomas. Attendees please bring their portfolios. Contact Ian Maxwell mail@ihmaxwell.com tel 01524 770278
November 10-11	Weekend event at Plymouth University. Joint meeting with the SW Region. Speakers include Daniel Meadows HonFRPS, Sian Bonnell HonFRPS, Homer Sykes and Sophy Rickett. Pre-weekend walking tour 2pm Friday November 9. Contact Avril Harris ARPS, avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk, tel 020 8360 7996
November 17	Yorkshire and North East meeting. This new group will meet bi-monthly and the next meeting will be in the Hampshire Room, Strensall Village Hall, Strensall, York YO32 5AW. Presentations of a body of their work for discussion, by Malcolm Davis, David Collier, Nigel Tooby, Robert Rivron and Peter Bartlett. Contact Nigel Tooby FRPS, nigel@mogulimage.co.uk, tel: 01924 274100 (daytime) 07817 416286 (mobile)
January 21	Contemporary North West meeting. Details tba. Contact Ian Maxwell mail@ihmaxwell.com tel 01524 770278
February 10	Contemporary South West meeting , venue and time tba. Contact Rod Fry, email rod@fry.eclipse.co.uk tel 01803.844721 (after 7pm)
March 22-24, 2013	Weekend for members of Postal Portfolios One and Two to look at and discuss ongoing work. Missenden Abbey, Great Missenden, Bucks. Contact Anne Crabbe, info@annecrabbe.co.uk

STOP PRESS

Nigel Tooby FRPS will be presenting his recent Fellowship and the steps that led up to it, at our Plymouth weekend on Sunday 11th November.

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Commencement of the demolition of squatter houses, Ahmedabad, 2011, work in progress from the series New Age. © Anna Fox, courtesy Tasveer Arts, Bangalore and James Hyman Photography, London.