

concept

abstraction image conceptualisation notion thought
impression theory view conception idea hypothesis

THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY

**CONTEMPORARY
GROUP**

e-newsletter

Welcome to the November Issue of **the e-newsletter of the Contemporary Group.**

Thank you to all those who took the trouble to e-mail with positive comments about the October issue. A newsletter is only as good as its content and I would like to thank this month's contributors. I hope Contemporary Group members will continue to contribute profiles, news and reports in fact anything of interest in the contemporary world.



The RPS Biennial Exhibition
at the HIPFotofest 2015

With the Contemporary Group ethos being photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thoughts and encourages interpretation there was plenty to see at the recent Hull International Photography Festival. There were a total of 14 exhibitions around the city and 28 workshops and events. These included the 2015 RPS Members' Biennial Exhibition and a talk by Nigel Tooby FRPS.

It was good to see young photographers getting involved. The 'Emerging Photographers' Exhibition included work from Hull Young Photographers and students from Wyke College. The 'HIPclub Young Photographers' Exhibition showed work throughout the festival with club members guiding visitors around themselves. Hopefully we will see lots more contemporary photographers joining us in the future.

Christine Pinnington LRPS
Editor.

In this issue

From the Editor

South West Report

Jo Spence Archive

Profile - Suman Bhattacharyya

Interview - Brian Steptoe

Tom Owens in
Outdoor Photographer

What's On

Next Issue

RPS Contemporary South West Meeting

Rod Fry FRPS reports

A small but enthusiastic group of contemporary workers met on Sunday 4th October at Carnon Downs Parish Hall, Truro, Cornwall. After a lively debate the group enjoyed a day reviewing members' work.

Vivien showed an affectionate digital slide show she had put together of Martin's life. This was shown at his recent birthday celebrations. A

local shopkeeper asked Martin if he could scan her collection of old postcards of the village of Gweek. Martin gladly did this, and then combined them with the equivalent modern day pictures of the village. The result gave a fascinating insight into how the place had changed over the years. Changes in the occupation of buildings, the growth of trees and cars all had an impact on this rural community over the years. The boatyard originally handled commercial ship-ping had changed over the years into a marina mooring and boatyard for private pleasure craft.

John Evans Jones entertained the meeting with more photographs of his feet! He would make images looking down at his feet on various surfaces; one taken inside a changing room at M&S caused much amusement. He is developing the project by photographing his feet from a sitting position rather than standing.



His other equally intriguing project deals with photo frames. After examining the history and purpose of a frame he has start-ing scouring the charity and second hand shops for inter-esting, very often kitsch photo frames. The second part of the project is to make an image, which matches the frame. Every-body thoroughly enjoyed this project, which could be enjoyed on several levels, though it was felt it might be a panel too far for a Fellowship!

Ken Holland started to investigate the behaviour of gallery visitors some who linger longer at the exhibits than others. This work has been explored further by Ken and many more galleries and visitors haven been captured by his discreet and disarming style and delivered as subtle monochromatic images.

I showed my photographs of the Torbay Geo Park. A few years ago Torbay Council applied to UNESCO for Geopark status. This is granted by UNESCO to places with internationally impor-tant geology. The park is there to promote awareness and help people explore the local Geol-ogy. Sadly to many people the Geopark is just a rather curious children's adventure playground on Paignton Green. My photographs were divided into the way the Council have mishandled the project and the hidden geological gems that visitors do not see. These included fossil beds, sedimentary dykes known as Neptune's fingers, at Brixham Quarry; the Permian Breccia and Devonian mudstone unconformity, igneous intrusive rocks at Oyster Cove, plus the raised beach and gold deposits at Hope's Nose. It was felt that rather than combine both sets of images into one book, two would be better.



Finally Michael Woodhead showed his work on the architect Jose Plecnik. Born 23-01-1872 died 7-01-1957 He had a major impact on Ljubljana the capital city of Slovene. He is widely regarded as a pioneer of postmodern architecture extensively using concrete in his work, referencing simplified motifs from classical Greek and Roman buildings. Attention to detail and design are to be seen in all his work, whether it is in the large scale works such as the iconic triple bridge or a small shop kiosk or an extension to his own home.

The meeting closed by thanking Martin and Viv for organising the day, all agreed that whilst we were small in numbers it was truly a very memorable day of photography.

Next **Contemporary South West Meeting**

7th February - Dartington, Devon. For address details contact Rod Fry FRPS.

rod@rodry.eclipse.co.uk tel: 01803 844721

Jo Spence Memorial Archive

A Short Film on YouTube

Jo Spence was an innovative and iconic feminist photographer expressing identity politics through her photography. After being diagnosed with breast cancer she produced her noted work 'The Picture of Health' using her photography to document her treatment. She survived breast cancer but sadly died of leukaemia in 1992.

In a short film now on YouTube, Terry Dennett, former partner of Spence and curator of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive, talks about her life and work. He shows examples of her working albums, daybooks from her portrait studio; posters and magazines that she produced; and books and ephemera from her collection.

Jo's work will be sent to Ryerson University in Canada where it will become part of the university collection.

Jo Spence (1934-92)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOCcTT6uiak>.

Profile – Mr Suman Bhattacharyya ARPS

Suman is one of our overseas members and was recently featured in the RPS Journal. He recently gained his ARPS in the Contemporary and Conceptual category. Here we find out more about his photographic journey.



Rice and Smile Contest. 1st Prize for Suman Bhattacharyya.

Suman Bhattacharyya was born in West Bengal, India in 1973. He attended Calcutta University in the Faculty of Economics and after completing his education enrolled on a diploma course in photography with a Zenith camera borrowed from his friend in 1997 "just out of curiosity". There the darkroom and photographic experience he received "mesmerised his senses". Photography became part of his life for a long time. After completion of his diploma his career took over and although at this time photography took a back seat, it never left him.

As time passed he began again to take photography seriously. He started teaching in 2001 and continues today. He entered his first international competition recognised by FIAP in 2011. He has since entered numerous photo competitions and received several awards in national and international competitions. In 2013 Suman became the Secretary of Haraprasad Shastri Foto Club, who organise the FIAP & PSA recognised photographic circuit named the VIBGYOR CIRCUIT. At the same time in 2015, he achieved the AFIAP title from the Federation De L'Art Photographique. Recently he received 1st prize from the "RICE & SMILE" Contest (organised by Delta Photo Contest). He takes great pleasure shooting people-oriented documentary photos and loves the way nature creates and recreates its inhabitants. He has also been bitten by the experimental (creative editing) bug.

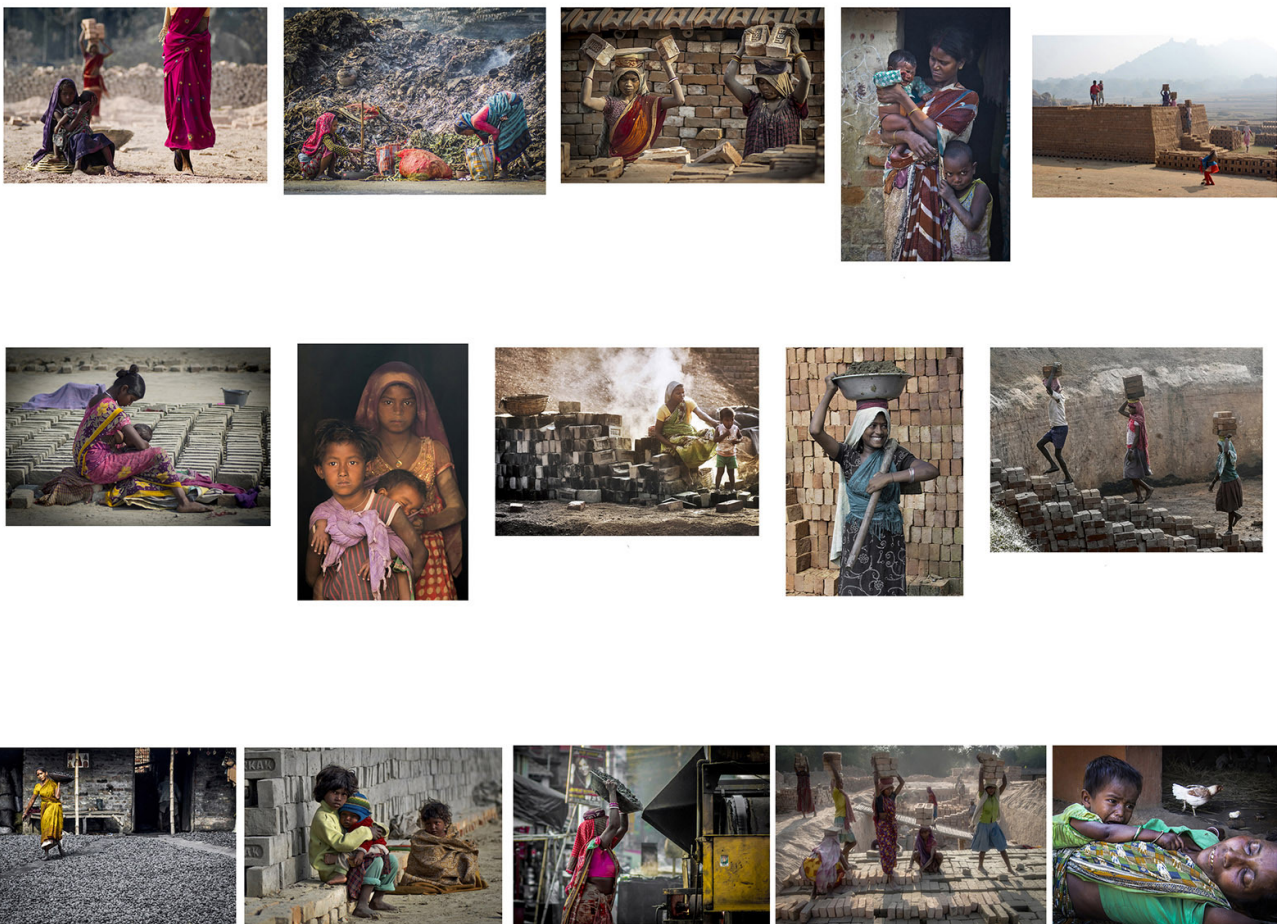
Since his borrowed Zenith he has moved from a Nikon FM10 to Nikon D70s then onto a Nikon 3100 and finally settled with a Nikon D750. His favourite lenses are a Tokina 11-16mm 2.8, Nikon 70-300mm 4.5-5.6, Nikon 24-120mm 2.8 and the very sharp Tamron 90mm 2.8.

Suman likes to shoot different genres of photography and he attributes his success to his friends, family and kinsmen who never get tired of posing for him. Although he has a busy schedule he travels whenever he has a chance to shoot urban areas of India's various cities and villages.

Suman's photography has been greatly influenced by the works of the Bengali art film directors of the 70's. To Suman the passive recording of life is the most interesting thing about being a photographer. Unlike Vivian Maier* he likes to submit his work for appraisal by competition judges, his most recent success being awarded the distinction of ARPS in the Contemporary and Conceptual category in September of this year. Suman's images focus on a social issue prevalent in India.

"The migrant women workers spread around India and their sub-human living standards with almost zero health care and other atrocities being faced by them needs the immediate attention of the world. My job is to portray the graphicness of the problem, which I have been doing for quite some time now and this ARPS distinction will embolden me to delve further into the other facets of the problem. The benefits of liberalisation in economical spheres is not helping the women very much".

The camera has shaped Suman's life and become an indispensable passion in which he can freely express himself.



Suman's successful
ARPS Panel

**Vivian Maier was an American street photographer who worked as a nanny and care-giver. In her leisure she began to venture into the art of photography and after her death over 100,000 negatives were uncovered. Never seen during her lifetime, these became one of the most fascinating windows into American life in the second half of the twentieth century.*

www.vivianmaier.com

Exploring Photobooks

An interview with Brian Steptoe FRPS



CP: For many of us your name is synonymous with photobooks. When did you produce your first book and what was the inspiration behind it?

BS: My first serious publications were inspired by a photographic project on the Carters Steam Fair and this led to seven illustrated books on the vintage fairground and carousels, most with print runs over 1500. These included extensive text on history and restoration, self-published and marketed under the imprint Jumper Books from 1994 to 2010. Turning to 'photobooks', Olympic Blue, published by Blurb in 2008, was probably my first.

CP: How did you gain your experience in this field?

BS: My personal photography changed soon after the formation of the Contemporary Group in 1989, becoming based on projects rather than single images. This type of work fits naturally with the photobook. Buying books such as The Americans by Robert Frank, American Photographs by Walker Evans, the road books by Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld set standards for content and design. Attending a Magnum photobook workshop in 2013 and importantly, the two Photobook weekends at Bristol in 2014 and 2015 opened the door to leading personalities in the field. The regular blogs by Jorge Colberg, who teaches on photobooks, are also very useful.

CP: How would you advise readers to gain knowledge and experience of the world of photobooks?

BS: Involvement in as many of the ways mentioned above and going to photobook exhibitions and festivals whenever feasible. Keeping on-line and real life contact with organisations, activities and magazine reports on the topic. Aiming to apply learnt experience to your own production of photobooks.

CP: How many of your own photobooks have you created to date and do you have a personal favourite?

BS: Aside from the commercial Jumper Books, there have been about twenty. Each one could be seen as a favourite for different reasons: photobooks on the Orient Express, on the creation of the Olympic Park, a joint one on Britishness, Gray's Pick-Your-Own farm family and others.

CP: Do you collect photobooks of other authors?

BS: I have a collection of about 250, most being publications from the last four years. I add to these regularly, my favourite source being Claire de Rouen's bookshop, who have just started selling on-line.

CP: Who do you consider to be the current leaders in this field at present?

BS: Leading publishers in the UK are Mack and Dewi Lewis, but there are a host of small publishers and self-publishers. For authors, I would have to say Martin Parr, Alec Soth, Stephen Gill and Paul Graham, but there are many others who get short-listed at Rencontres d'Arles and Paris-Photo, the two leading exhibition venues.

CP: When looking at a print, the image usually has to speak for itself. How important do you feel the inclusion of text is in a photobook?

BS: The most important thing about a photobook is the subject or theme; to establish a reason for it being a book. Whether to include text or not is for the author to decide; does it add to the 'value' of it being a book. Text which has a more oblique link to the photographic content is often most interesting.

CP: Do you feel that presenting photographs with accompanying text lends itself to contemporary photography in particular?

BS: I don't think there is any direct connection here. A catalogue of a major photographic exhibition in a national gallery would be expected to contain text as well as reproductions of work; a travel guide similarly.

CP: There are many good publishing houses available to us now, making a professional looking book accessible to photographers. Do you think that there is still a place for handmade books?

BS: Certainly. Many artists, who may or may not describe themselves as photographers, see the book form as their own way to create work.

CP: With the popularity of tablets and e-books do you see a decline in the traditional form of a book?

BS: This is often raised as a question. But it is emphatically not what is happening. More and more real photobooks are being published every year. It is now reported that there is a decline in e-readers and a resurgence of physical books.

CP: If you could pick 3 key points for producing a good photobook what would they be?

- BS:
- Having a topic with 'purpose and value' rather than a repeat of what has been done many times before.
 - A well edited and sequenced set of photography which supports the topic.
 - A physically well created resulting book that is a pleasure to hold and read.

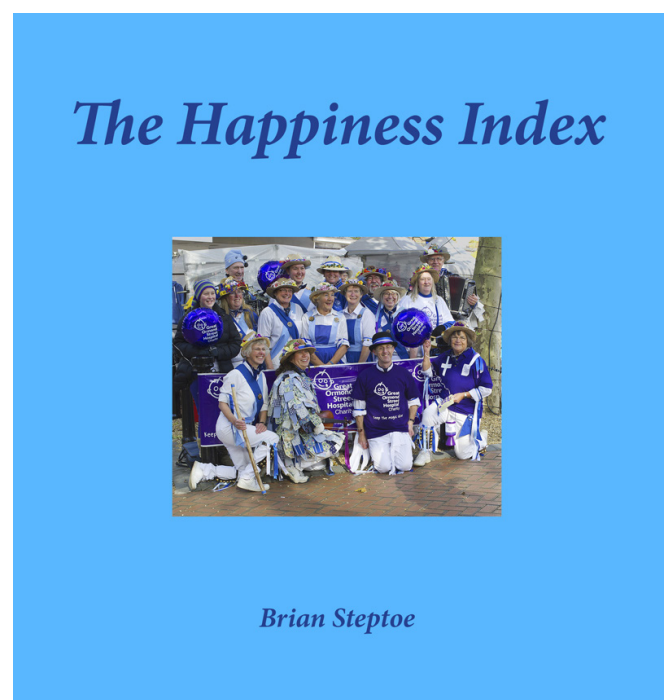
CP: Do you have a current or future project underway?

BS: I always have a project in mind, usually one that will take many months to evolve.

CP: Thank you Brian

Brian Steptoe was interviewed
by Christine Pinnington

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RPSPhotobooks>



Front Cover of Brian Steptoe's Photobook 'The Happiness Index'

Tom Owens ARPS, Chair of the East Anglia Contemporary Group, was recently featured in Outdoor Photography magazine. His exhibition 'Edgelands' is currently showing at the Museum of East Anglia. The magazine described his project as questioning the notion of beauty in the countryside – his images demonstrating his ability to seek out visual harmony. The exhibition runs until the 3rd March 2016.

www.eastanglianlife.org.uk

There will be meetings of the East Anglia Contemporary Group in the Ipswich and Cambridge areas when arranged. The project underway is the Ipswich Waterfront Development. Contact Tom Owens ARPS tom@tjowens.com

What's on in 2016

January 16th - Contemporary North East Meeting.

The Royal Oak, York. Contact Patricia A Ruddle ARPS.
patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel: 01904 783850

25th January - Contemporary North West Meeting

Days Inn, Charnock Richard Services on the M6 (between junctions 27 and 28) starting at 7.30pm. Contact Ian Maxwell.
mail@ihmaxwell.com tel: 01524 770278

7th February - Contemporary South West Meeting

Dartington, Devon. For address details contact Rod Fry FRPS.
rod@rodry.eclipse.co.uk tel: 01803 844721

20th April - Conceptual and Contemporary Distinction Assessments for ARPS and FRPS.

Fenton House, Bath. Applicants and observers may attend the Associateship assessments.

ARPS enquiries arps@rps.org

FRPS enquiries frps@rps.org

As we are fast approaching Christmas the next issue of Concept will appear in January. A short bulletin will be issued in December if there are any urgent communications. Deadline for contributions for inclusion in the January issue is 20th January 2016.

News, reports, reviews, publicity, profiles, images, in fact anything of interest in the contemporary world. If you have any contributions you would like to have included, please email to:

photopinni@btinternet.com

Christine Pinnington LRPS

Editor, **concept**

the e-newsletter of the RPS Contemporary Group

Note: The copyright of photographs and text in this issue belongs to the author of the article of which they form part unless otherwise indicated.

In the meantime Merry Xmas and Happy New Year!