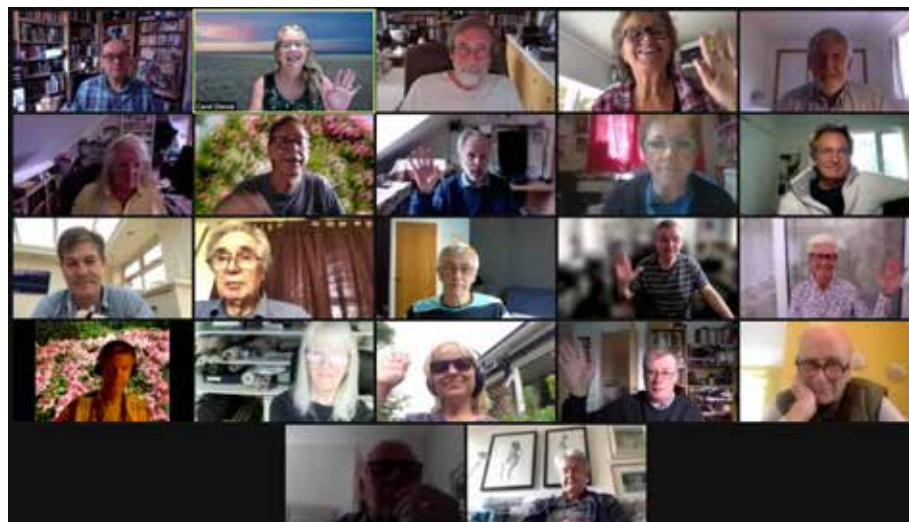


Contemporary North

A SUBGROUP OF THE
RPS CONTEMPORARY
GROUP



June 2021

Report of the RPS Contemporary North Zoom Meeting.

SATURDAY 19th June 2021, 1.30-4.00 PM (UK)

HOSTED BY **JIM SOUPER** AND CHAIRED BY **PATRICIA RUDDLE**

TEXT: **GARY MORGAN**

COORDINATION AND EDITING: **PATRICIA RUDDLE**

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: **CHRISTINE PINNINGTON**

Images and content of this publication are the copyright of the photographer unless stated otherwise.



The international flavour was maintained, but with a summer's twist to it as we discovered that people overseas were having better weather than those of us in the UK.

Twenty-two people joined us for the meeting, including a new member. Sadly, ten members sent their apologies.

Ginette Sear joined us for the first time from Bridgnorth, in Shropshire. Ginette has been using cameras since the age of 5 years. Her father was professional photographer and lecturer and taught her the basics at an early age. She's always taken photos but started to take things seriously in the last year. She is largely self-taught, mainly from books and on-line courses, and is looking to the RPS for help and guidance.

Three people joined, once again, from the **RPS Benelux Chapter**. Their Summer e-Journal, No. 23 was discussed, and readers are encouraged to have a look at it.

Mick Yates, who also presented some of his work at this meeting, is in the most recent edition. Also, **André Bergmans** and **Carol Olerud**, have articles.

https://issuu.com/royalphotographicsociety/docs/rps-benelux_chapter_ejournal_-_volume_23_-_summer_2

It's possible for members outside the Benelux Chapter to attend their Study Group meetings on Zoom. You can find more about their meetings on their RPS events page.

<https://rps.org/chapters/benelux/events/>

For example, they have an online study group that next meets on 13th July.

<https://rps.org/events/chapters/benelux/2021/2021-07-13-online-study-group/>

As part of the **Fotofestival Pelt**, the Chapter will have a members' print exhibition, *People at Work*. There will also be an

RPS weekend, 18-19 September, with a documentary workshop, talks and presentations.

<https://rps.org/events/chapters/benelux/2021/2021-09-18-pelt-photo-festival/>

Announcements

The report of the May meeting is now on ISSUU.

https://issuu.com/royalphotographicsociety/docs/contemporary_north_may_issuu

Many thanks to **Christine Pinnington** and **Wendy North**.

The RPS has widened the media for all three distinctions to include photobooks. You can find more information on the RPS web site.

<https://rps.org/photobooks>

News

For those considering doing an RPS Distinction, **Richard Brayshaw**, Contemporary Group Deputy Chair, will be giving a talk entitled *A Path through Contemporary Distinctions* on 19th July. Booking details can be found at the link below.

<https://rps.org/events/groups/contemporary/2021/july/richard-brayshaw/>

Patricia mentioned that in an email, 27 May 2021 to all RPS members, President **Simon Hill** gave an update on what's happening leading up to the September AGM. She hoped that all of us would participate in voting for Trustees. The voting takes place 1 - 31 August, with the names of those standing to be pub-

lished before then. As you know, one of our North members is a Trustee and would like to continue his service.

Alexandra Prescott organises the Contemporary Group's Fellowship Distinction Peer Support Group for Contemporary, Applied and Documentary. Next meeting is Monday 20 July at 5 pm (UK time). This is a monthly Zoom meeting. This day marks the first anniversary of the Group. There will be a special speaker, and it's hoped that we'll join in with a drink to celebrate. We are all working for our RPS Fellowship Distinctions – just at different stages of the journey. This is an unofficial group who get together to support each other and offer thoughts on the journey we are all going through. Collectively there is a huge skill base that we can draw on and at the very least - some words from someone who is not so close to your work can make you think. Contact aprescott_3@yahoo.co.uk

After our May meeting **André Bergmans** showed us a fun photo based on the RPS Diversity and Inclusion strategy. He



suggested that perhaps our North Group could have a competition based on the Plan.

Blogs

Two more COVID-19 and Lockdown blogs have become available since our last meeting. With thanks to **Avijit Datta** and **Sean Goodhart**.

The 36th blog is by **Jayntha Shaw**, entitled *Pandemic Politics – Pursuit of Oxygen & Publicity*.

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/june/pandemic-politics-pursuit-of-oxygen-and-publicity/>

The 37th blog is by **Othello De'Souza-Hartley**, entitled *Blind, But I can See*.

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/june/blind-but-i-can-see/>

Douglas May

Douglas is the former Chair of the Conceptual and Contemporary Distinction panel.

He recently had an article, called *Apollo*, published in the RPS Contemporary Group journal, *Contemporary Photography*.

<https://rps.org/media/wukbdngk/083-spring-2021-journal-for-screen.pdf>

Douglas showed us a set of images he had recently made, *Sir James Gowans & The Pagoda*, that started in the present but dug deeply into his own past and that of Edinburgh.

One of the problems of lockdown is social distancing. He found too many people in popular walking places and so started exploring cemeteries. In one he found the grave of the architect Sir James Gowans, which reminded Douglas of his own attempt to save Gowans' house, Rockville, nicknamed The Pagoda, and its importance to Edinburgh's architectural heritage. Douglas with fellow students raised a somewhat chaotic and Quixotic campaign to save Rockville. Surprisingly, the developers were tolerant of their pluck. In a move that cannot be imagined in this age of risk assessments, a key was given to the students to allow unsupervised access in order to assess the house's possibilities.

After Gowans vacated the house in 1888, the house eventually fell into disuse and was bought in the 1960s by a developer with the intention of demolishing it to build flats. The council was happy with this, although Edinburgh's middle-class cared more about the heritage and tried to stop the demolition. The new owners offered to sell the house at its purchase price if the people trying to save it would take it over. If not, they would organise an architectural competition for the flats that eventually replaced it. Sufficient funding could not be found to save the house. The contents were sold off as "architectural salvage", Douglas acquiring a Minton tile with a daisy on it, which he still has. (In the Scots language gowan means daisy.) The campaign to save the house failed and it was eventually demolished and replaced with flats. However, the original gateway remains and can still be seen.

Douglas found his scrapbook of press cuttings about his efforts and showed us photographs of the book's pages. He included photos of articles, suggesting that the text can be lyrical and certainly help to get the point across.

Gowans left Rockville and moved into Castle Terrace, a block of flats with huge chimney and elaborate decoration, a "Gothic extravagance" that he built, and where he had his offices. One interesting feature of Gowans' work was that he incorporated many different types of stone from quarries across Scotland. These can be seen in the gatepost but also, and to greater affect, in a companion house, Lammerburn, that still exists, across the road. Here some of them glitter in the light when it's in the right direction.

Gowans didn't always build grand buildings. One of his earlier works was Rosebank Cottages where he was trying to create healthy spaces for artisans to live. Good ventilation was designed into the houses as poor ventilation was regarded as a cause of illness. He also executed commissions for other wealthy patrons, such as the owner of Waverly Pen Company.





Douglas



Lammerburn

Gowans was also involved in the International Exhibition, in Edinburgh, 1887. An attempt was made to keep the exhibition buildings he designed, but the site needed to be maintained, by law, as open access. All that is left is the sundial that he designed with stones from eight quarries. Gowans was knighted as a result of his contribution to the Exhibition.

Although the campaign to save Gowans' house failed, those of his buildings that remain are now considered part of the architectural heritage of Edinburgh. One of the cottages, the Gingerbread House which was part of the original Gowans estate in West Lothian still exists. The photo of the gable end shows how he used different stones. The current owners love living in a Gowans house. Although the demolition of Rockville is regretted, it's encouraging that much of his unique and eccentric architectural vision remains and is enjoyed and lived in.



Castle Terrace



Castle Terrace



Waverley Pen House

Rose Cottages



Great Exh Sundial



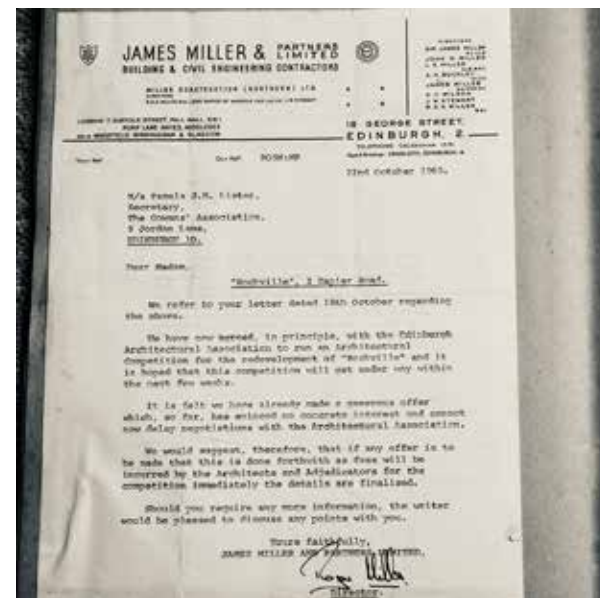
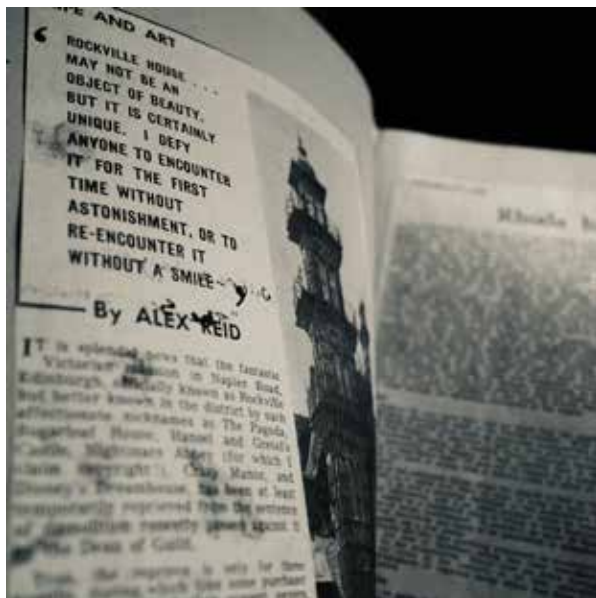
Gingerbread House Gowanbank

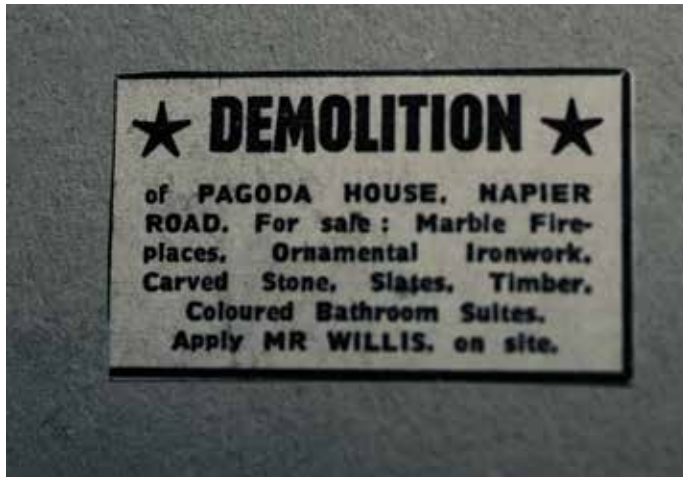
Gowan Signature Style



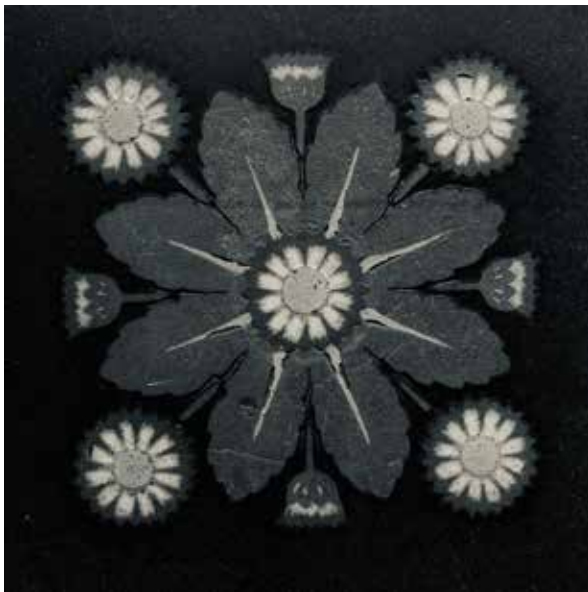
Current Gingerhouse







Minton tile



Douglas is thinking about what to do next with the photos. Some are in the Contemporary Group Postal Portfolio for comments. <https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2020/december/postal-portfolio/>.

He's also considering a book but is having trouble finding a printer that uses paper he's happy with. Douglas' comments led to a lengthy discussion about producing books. There seems to be quite an interest in this subject, and it was suggested that it be the theme of a face-to-face meeting. Also, Patricia suggested that she start a folder containing members' opinions and experience in making books.

Please send any information to Patricia, which will be available to all members.

Harry Silcock

Harry showed us some examples of his street photography during lockdown. The limitations of lockdown made him think about what people were saying about themselves, by what they displayed in their front gardens as these can be photographed and social distance still maintained.

Some images came from his archives. But his main hunting ground was around the area where he lives. It was clear that some front-of-house themes were manifest with very little analysis. For example, transport (trains, lorries, airplanes) was a common theme, as were animals and garden gnomes. A variety of materials were seen such as wood, plastic, concrete (more gnomes) and wicker.

Some gardens were very well looked after, but some unkempt and cluttered with various types of detritus. He speculated about the stories that these gardens tell about the occupants of the houses.





Mick Yates

Mick achieved an RPS Fellowship in April as a Contemporary digital submission.

He talked about his journey towards it. His Fellowship photography was also featured in his 2019 book *Unfinished Stories* which documents the story of the Khmer Rouge genocide and personal stories of friends who survived.

The work was inspired by a visit to Angkor Wat in 1994. In the distance he and his family heard noises, which turned out to be fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodian army; the former still being active some years after the genocide had ended in 1979.

The book shows images from the infamous killing fields, of which there are 20,000 across Cambodia. People suspected of not supporting the Khmer were taken to Tuol Sleng, an ex-school, documented and photographed and then tortured until they confessed before, finally, being executed. The camera was in effect their executioner. The photographs of victims are on display at Tuol Sleng today, giving a chilling reminder of how brutal the regime was. Around 2 million Cambodians were killed in the genocide, 25% of the population.

After starting to understand more of Cambodia and its recent past, Mick and his wife founded a program setting up schools in the northern Khmer Rouge Reconciliation areas, from 1999, in partnership with Save the Children and the Cambodian Ministry of Education. We saw some “before and after” images of one school which was, initially, little more than a roof and some desks but now is a large modern building educating 600 pupils.

There were two audiences for the Unfinished Stories project: the Cambodians who suffered and the Westerners who have little knowledge or understanding of what transpired. The genocide is not discussed much in Cambodia and is poorly understood in the West. Several of Mick’s Cambodian friends were interviewed in order to make public their stories of the genocide for the first time. For example, families were separated into different camps but would take great risks to travel to see each other. People from cities were forced to do hard labour in the countryside and died.

A quote from these traumatic stories was integrated with each photograph of the now often beautiful landscape. The Khmer language is used to respect the storyteller while also anchoring the geographic location of the suffering. English aids the Western audience.

The book, which was originally published in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is available in the UK.

<https://www.mickyatesphotography.com/Unfinished-Stories>

During the process of applying for the Fellowship, Zoom was used for 1-to-1 mentoring session with **Richard Brayshaw**, a process that Mick found very useful and praises highly.

Several of Mick’s Fellowship photos are shown below; however the complete panel can be seen at:

<https://www.mickyatesphotography.com/Features/Fellowship-Panel/>



នៅក្នុងសមរភូមិ គេបានដាក់ព្រួញកំពើងទាំងបីដាក់ ជាប់ទៅនឹងកាំភ្លើងធំ។
"The three had their ankles chained together to a machine gun for the battle"



ប្រសិនបើខ្មែរក្រហមបានឃើញបទគម្ភប័ណ្ណស្រុកមេឃីង ពួកយើងនឹងត្រូវយកទៅសម្លាប់ខោសទាំងអស់។
"If the Khmer Rouge could see the photos of our family we would have been killed by them"



ប្រធានភូមិសេកសប្បន្តរស់រាន់ក្នុងភូមិ ភាគីបានឱបគ្នា ក្នុងភូមិទាំងនេះនឹងប្រហែលត្រូវស្លាប់ទាំងអស់។
"The Village Chief was sorry for the young children; he said that they were all probably going to die"



បន្ទាប់មកគេបានដាក់ពួកយើងចេញឆ្ងាយពីជម្រកនៅ ទៅកាន់កន្លែងដែលគេឱ្យយើងជីកស្រះ
"Then they took us to an area quite a distance from the camp where the pond was to be dug"



ទាហានវ្យែរហ្វេស៊ីយ៉ាបានដាក់មីន មុនពេលគេចាកចេញទៅ។
 "Vietnam Rouge soldiers planted landmines when they left"



យើងបានស្នាក់នៅក្នុងស្ថានីយ៍បេតុងរយៈពេលមួយខែ ដើម្បីស្វែងរកអាហារក្នុងព្រៃ ដោយព្យាយាមជៀសវាងលាក់កម្រិតមីន។
 "We stayed a month at the gas station looking for food in the forest, trying not to step on landmines"

Mick also showed us some work which led to the final project submission, called *A Prayer from Hell*, which relies on negatives (i.e., the images are not positives printed from negatives, but are the literal images on the negatives) to give a haunting affect.



Originally this work was part of Mick's MA in Photography at Falmouth, which he took after seeing it advertised by the RPS.

We can share with you the complete presentation that Mick gave us on the day, thanks to Mick, it can be found here:
<https://www.yatesweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/RPS-Fellowship-Contemporary-North.pdf>

Richard Hall

The origins of the work that Richard presented came from a book by **Todd Hido** that he was given on his retirement. He felt that Hido's photography closed a gap between literature and film.

Richard had a poem written, *Vanishing*, by **Laura Turner**, and asked his two models to react to the poem before being photographed. He took five thousand images over a few weeks and then edited them down to make a story and a book. The book was self-published and used to obtain his Fellowship as a Contemporary book submission in April.

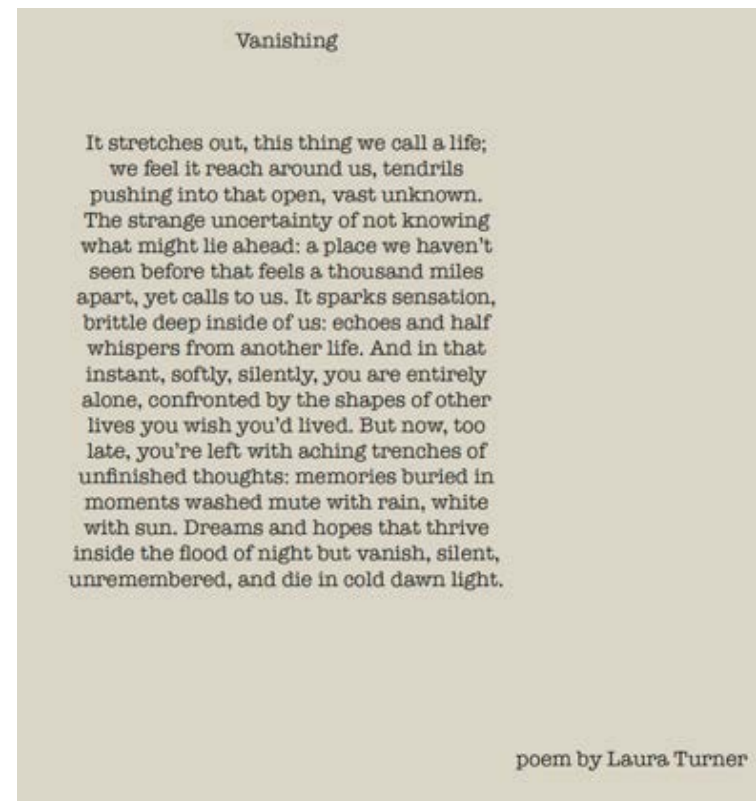
Richard presented his book, *I am alone with the beating of my heart*, in a two-minute video, which he has given us in this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyF69SQ3Tas>

He took the photos in bad weather (darkness, fog, rain) and often through car windows. Some exposures were quite long (2 seconds, hand-held) but modern cameras can produce good results even with these constraints. He also used gobos, made from cutting holes in fibreboard, to place interesting patterns of light and shade across the models and used ingenious sequencing of house interior shots and shots including the models to imply location.

Buildings were lit to suggest that something might have happened or was about to happen and the interior model shots were based upon the poem.

The two models were an actress and a student of photography. Each brought their own experiences and their reactions to the poem as they had different backgrounds.

In the assessment for his Fellowship Richard had many positive comments. **Richard Brayshaw** gave help at the conception of the project.



The poem that inspired the book was at the end of the book. This caused a lively discussion about whether the book could be understood before the end was reached, and whether the poem should be at the start to lead the viewer as the book was read. Should photographs have words at all? Do viewers need to be lead? Does the meaning of a photograph, or what the photographer wants to say, change as times goes on? Does the photographer's viewpoint matter or is it what the viewer takes away?









Graham Low



Graham has been in the garden in the last few months following the transitions in his apple tree of buds to rotting apples and using these as a metaphor for COVID-19. The buds on his trees turned into flowers, the petals of which died leaving small apple buds behind, which eventually turned into apples which dropped and rotted. The weather conditions that the flowers endured were shown including sun, rain and ice, and their eventual decay.

This was another home-grown project, due to Covid restrictions, demonstrating again that you don't need to travel far for photographic inspiration.







Graham Low

**This was the last meeting until 18th September on Zoom.
On the 16th October we'll be at Clements Hall.
The dates for the rest of 2021 are:
20th November Zoom
18th December Clements Hall**

Contemporary North wishes everyone a happy, safe and fulfilling Summer.

STOP PRESS!

Patricia added that after the meeting finished, she learned that **Avijit Datta** was awarded a dual RPS Distinction, ASIS FRPS – the third Fellowship in this North Newsletter! She asked him what it meant and learned that the ASIS is an “Accredited Senior Imaging Scientist” qualification. She further learned that his work used: “the results of light photography, positron emission tomography, cine magnetic resonance imaging and c-fos proto-oncogene staining of brain cells.”

It's noteworthy to mention that our RPS Royal Charter maintains that photography is the art or science of recording light on any medium which can produce an image. And, considering that his work is “about life” it fits the ethos of our Contemporary Group.

Many congratulations **Avijit Datta ASIS FRPS**