THE RPS
ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Number 61 Autumn 2015

Contemporary Photography

View from the Chair

The RPS International Photobook Exhibition 2016, organised by our Group, has now been launched and all details can be found on www.rps.org/photobook. This is an Open and International Exhibition and we would encourage you to participate; some thoughtful and engaging books were shown last year at the first Exhibition. The first prize will be £1000. Bob Books, who are one of the sponsors, offer a 20% discount if you should choose to use their services to create your book.

The selectors will be:

David Campany, writer, curator, artist, tutor of photography at the University of Westminster. He has received the ICP Infinity Award, the Kraszna-Krausz Book Award, Deutscher Fotobuch Preis and the RPS award for writing in the field of criticism; **Lucy Kumara Moore**, Director of Claire de Rouen Books and selector for the First Book Award (for Lucy's thoughts on photobooks see www.hotshoeinternational.com/blog/interview/lucy-moore-of-claire-de-rouen); and **Dewi Lewis**, HonFRPS, internationally known photobook publisher. In 2012, the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation presented him with an award for Outstanding Contribution to Photography Publishing.

The Contemporary Group has two Facebook pages: www.facebook.com/groups/RPSContemporary and www.facebook.com/groups/RPSPhotobooks. These are well worth investigating if you have not already seen them. There are often discussions re the concept of contemporary photography and the opportunity for constructive criticism of your pictures from both your peers and well-known photographers on the RPSContemporary site and ideas on photobook design and creation on the RPS Photobooks site.

London Independent Photography (LIP) shares the same roots as the Contemporary Group and this year The Janet Hall Memorial lecture, organized by LIP, will be by Alixandra Fazzina whom I mentioned in the last Journal (No. 60). The lecture will take place on the 25 November 2015 at the London Metropolitan University, opposite the Whitechapel Gallery, nearest London tube station Aldgate East. Alixandra will talk about her book *A Million Shillings: Escape from Somalia* and her ongoing project *The Flowers of Afghanistan*.

There are now six Contemporary subgroups and if you want to meet any of your fellow members why not check out the website and see if they meet within reach.

Best wishes, Avril

Cover: *Holy icon held by grandmother Stovina*, from *Lonely Bulgaria*, © Boryana Katsarova

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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

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. For other formats, please contact the Editor. Large image files may be supplied on disc or by use of on-line large file transfer facilities. Unless requested, discs will not be returned.

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Contemporary Photography

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

Editorial

"[…] glorifying each one of these things, calling attention to something that most people might say doesn't need calling attention to." *

Last summer I watched a television programme on Pop Art in which the presenter, Alastair Sooke, interviewed US Pop artist Ed Ruscha. What grabbed my attention was the discussion on Ruscha's first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, published in 1963.

Ruscha documented his road trips between California and Oklahoma from the viewpoint of gas stations. In the interview he says that he had no agenda when he was taking these photographs. He went on to add that "the glory of America is somehow hinted at […] I don't intentionally want to insert my patriotism into anything, but sometimes it just happens." Sooke was obviously staggered by the word 'patriotism' and queried whether he was actually patriotic. Ruscha grinned and said that he doesn't remember ever using that word before. Sooke claimed it as an "Ed Ruscha Exclusive"!

After alleging what many may perceive as an unfashionable sentiment, Ruscha talked about the art process – making art is one thing, but it takes a viewer to interpret it, a thought he credited to Marcel Duchamp. Picking up on this, Sooke queried whether he had been influenced by Duchamp's readymades; also whether there was any religious sub-text, e.g., a correlation between the gas stations and the 14 Stations of the Cross. Ruscha agreed on both counts, especially seeing it as a collection of "readymades". However, he reiterated that he neither celebrates nor criticises his homeland in his work. (Although there was a hint of the political when he mentioned that "the white man's gas stations occupy land that once belonged to the Navajo and Apache Indians".)

Sooke referred to the book being about "America's mythic sense of itself" and called his work a satirical look at the values of a wealthy corporate America. I like to think that he was just taking pictures of gas stations, suggesting that often we produce work and then later come up with reasons for it.

What staggered me - his book was published in 1963 – 52 years ago! It had an initial run of 200 numbered copies to a third reprint of 3,000 in 1969, not editioned because Ruscha wanted to maintain its status as a "cheap, mass-produced item". The book is often considered to be the first modern artist's book.

*Broadcast 24 August 2015, BBC 4, *Soup Cans and Superstars*.
There is much information on the Internet about Ruscha and the book. Check out *TateShots*:
http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/tateshots-ed-ruschas-photography-books

Patricia Ann Ruddle, Editor

Lonely Bulgaria

Boryana Katsarova

This project is inspired by the sadness of – and my unwillingness to accept – the heavy social reality in my native country. It is my personal fight against the poverty, the loneliness and the depopulation of Bulgaria. Mainly, it is a project about the social situation in the urban areas in the country. It is a project about the people.

Situated in the eastern Balkans, Bulgaria has been undergoing a slow and painful transition to a market economy since the end of Communism on 10 November, 1989. (Founded in 681, it is one of the oldest states in Europe.) The country joined the European Union on 1 January, 2007.

Before 1989, Bulgaria was arguably a land of economic equality. Almost no private initiative was allowed, due to the policy-line of the Communist regime, but the vast majority of the population was employed in state-owned collective farms, factories, mines, etc., all dutifully tended under Socialism. Large government funds were allocated toward free health care and higher education, maternity and disability benefits and pensions. Traditionally, even the poorest Bulgarians, the ethnic Roma, held jobs, received social security payments, and enjoyed a decent standard of living, particularly in rural areas.

In the early '90s, two-thirds of the population was urban. During the last 20 years, most young people abandoned rural areas, leaving behind everything and everybody. They went to the few big cities, or even abroad, with the sole purpose and hope to integrate into the new global economy; to find work and a new life. At the moment, the population of this small Balkan country, my homeland, is still decreasing and growing older.

Today, decayed buildings and the elderly are the only remaining inhabitants of rural villages. They are the ghosts of the transition from socialism to democracy. In most cases these people are forgotten by everyone – relatives, friends, and even politics. Some believe that even God has forgotten them, but they continue to keep in their hearts the last thing that they have left – their hope.

In a nation once famous for its agriculture, the sense of abandonment is strongest in the countryside. Once, Bulgaria was a place of plenty, with walnut, apple and plum trees, all cultivated in the state-owned collective farms. These farms once exported vegetables and fruit to most of the Eastern bloc, but when the Soviet Union collapsed the market for Bulgaria's produce went with it. Today, the trees are uprooted and the agriculture has faded away.

In a country where there were no wars, epidemics, earthquakes or other disasters, Bulgaria's social reality is sad and unacceptable. Most of the elder citizens I have met during my painful wanderings shared their heartfelt feelings - they would prefer to die than to live in loneliness and poverty.

Between 1990 and before January 2007 when Bulgaria joined the EU, different governments ruled the country and failed in their fight against organised crime; they failed to put well-known criminals and corrupt high-ranking officials behind bars. This cost Bulgaria several hundred million euros in lost aid. According to the latest official news, it is the EU's poorest country. More than half of the Bulgarian population cannot be integrated into the living standard of the European Zone Countries.

In spite of it all, every Bulgarian lives with the belief that, with the support of the European Union, the Bulgarian government must determine to improve its social policies, and help the Bulgarians out of their poverty.

Ed. Note: See http://www.ingemorath.org/index.php/2011/01/boryana-katsarova-bulgaria/ for more information and statistics concerning Bulgaria's population and poverty. The website also contains many more *Lonely Bulgaria* images.

You can see Boryana talking about another project in collaboration with Dimiter Kenarov, *Ukraine: Crimea Under Siege* on YouTube http://pulitzercenter.org/education/meet-journalist-kenarov-katsarova-crimea-referendum-ukraine.

Boryana and Dimiter received grants from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting for this project.

Boryana is represented by the Paris-based Cosmos Photo Agency.

http://www.boryana-katsarova.com

Labour – Their Only Asset

Bharat Patel ARPS

In 2007, keen to show my photographic colleagues images from India, I ventured into a construction site near my ancestral home. The site's foreman was friendly and allowed me to take images of all the workers, both men and women. It was especially interesting to see and photograph the women as they rushed about in their colourful saris, carrying buckets of cement on their heads. They were a human conveyor belt, transporting cement mix from one part of the building to the other.

I went back to the site later with some prints. When I asked the foreman to give them to the workers, his immediate reply was "what's the point of giving it to them?" It occurred to me that he considered them of a lower social status and hence not worthy of those prints. Never had I come across such blatant disregard for others. This resulted in my finding out more about Indian labourers. Evident from the start, women were more exploited than men, doing mostly unskilled work. I was determined to capture their efforts and tell their stories though photographs.

This quest has taken me over eight years and I will continue for some time. I now work with the NGO Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which has used many of these photographs in its awareness campaigns. It currently has over 1.5 million women members spread across India and countries around the world. It was formed in 1972 by Ela Bhatt, a great visionary and activist who wanted to 'organise' women workforces to better represent them. SEWA helps members negotiate salaries, demand heath and child care, facilitate bank accounts, get credit to trade, fight for vendors' rights and the right product prices, as well as numerous other demands that could bring about a social change.

To be poor, self-employed and female is to be vulnerable and exposed to exploitation. If there is no form of collective support then women are powerless on a path of lifetime hard labour and eternal struggle. Women feel powerless; every misfortune sets in motion a descent into even starker poverty. Only work, a steady source of income and some form of asset ownership can break that descent.

In India more than 90% of female workers are in the 'informal sector'. They do not have regular salaried employment with welfare benefits like workers in the organised sector. They are usually illiterate, making a living through their own labour or small businesses. These self-employed women are often engaged in uncertain seasonal trades that rise and fall with demand – recovering recyclable material from garbage sites, as agriculture labourers, construction workers, street vendors, garment makers, and numerous other home-based industries on which a low-cost global market is based. Though they form a large part of the economy their work is not recognised and hence remains invisible and voiceless. They are not incorporated in any nation development agendas.

There was always a thin line between showing poverty and showing hardship when taking these images. Unfortunately both go hand in hand. While there was no intention of showing poverty, it remains the basic underlying cause, which pushes these women to undertake what they do. My project is divided into three categories of work: manual labourers, street vendors and home-based workers. Only a common theme drives them - to feed their families.

Ed. Note: See Patel's Blurb book for more images and information. It is worth seeing the chapter *Tools Towards Second Freedom* with his images demonstrating the positive results that SEWA has achieved in its co-operatives. http://www.blurb.co.uk/b/2456872-labour-their-only-asset

There is an impressive interview with the remarkable Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, who wrote the Foreword to Patel's Blurb book:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjTYEOtjYvc
His website http://www.bharatpatelphotography.co.uk/

Work That Stage

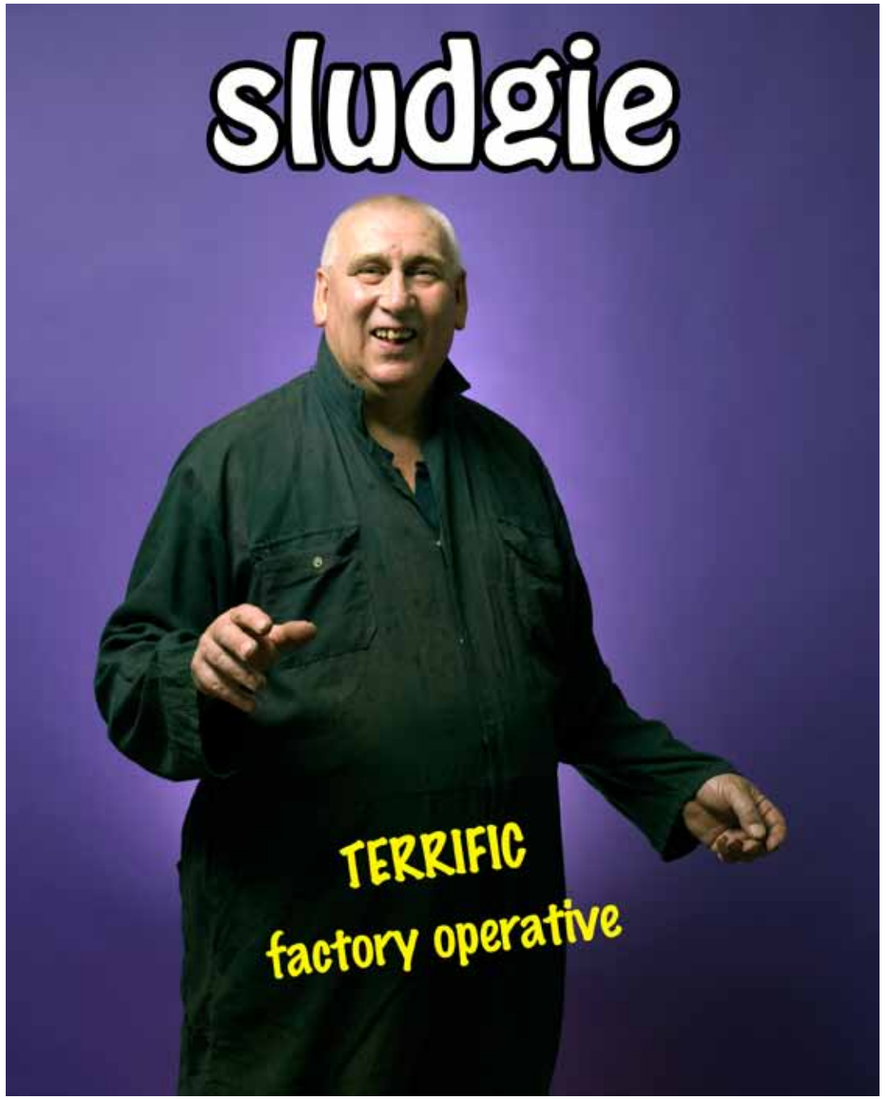
Chris Coekin

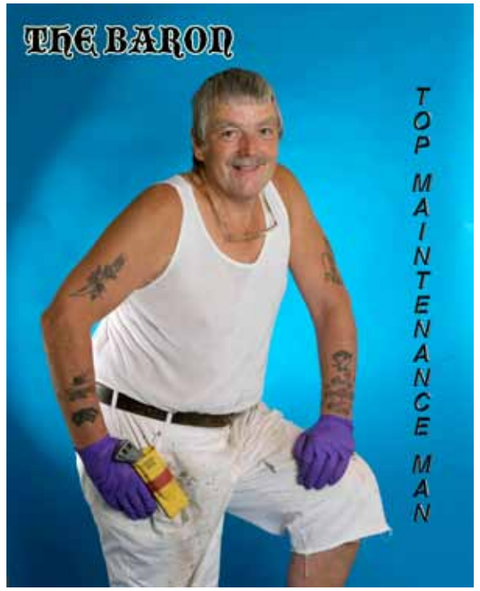
This project reflects upon the notion of work, struggle and artistic elitism. It continues and pursues an ongoing working methodology utilising text, image and collaborative processes. The images appropriate and emulate the aesthetics of self-publicity material often used by social-club artistes. These vibrant and textually descriptive ephemera follow a visual development that can be traced back to the traditions of Folk Art, the Victorian *Carte de Visite* through to Music Hall billing posters. The images were often produced by keen amateurs and social photographers. The backdrops are often garishly coloured and utilise basic studio lighting. It could be said that the photographs lack the creative and technical merits of conventional professional photographers. However, there is certain kitsch and humour embedded within them that Coekin finds fascinating. These images and their 19th-century relations were predominantly produced for a working-class audience, and generally lack critical appraisal by the art establishment. *Work That Stage* is inspired by Coekin's highly regarded previous books *Knock Three Times* and *The Altogether*.

Coekin replaces the artistes with manual workers but still retains the visual language of the studio set up and the engaging portraits. He then mimics the common descriptive language and typography as originally used by the artistes, juxtaposing them with the workers' professions. Furthermore, he refers to the subjects by their nicknames, a tradition that reflects upon endearment and vernacular language.

Many UK workers continue to face redundancy while TV shows such as *The X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent* dominate audience ratings. *Work That Stage* becomes a visual metaphor, questioning society's priorities and obligations both in terms as an understanding culture, and art appreciation. The workers on the stage, under the spotlight, heighten the drama attached to employment, while also acknowledging the need for escapism and entertainment.

www.chriscoekin.com
www.walkoutbooks.com




THE BARON
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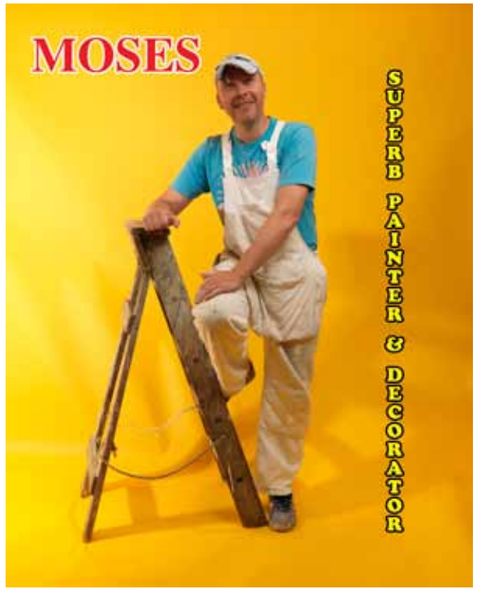
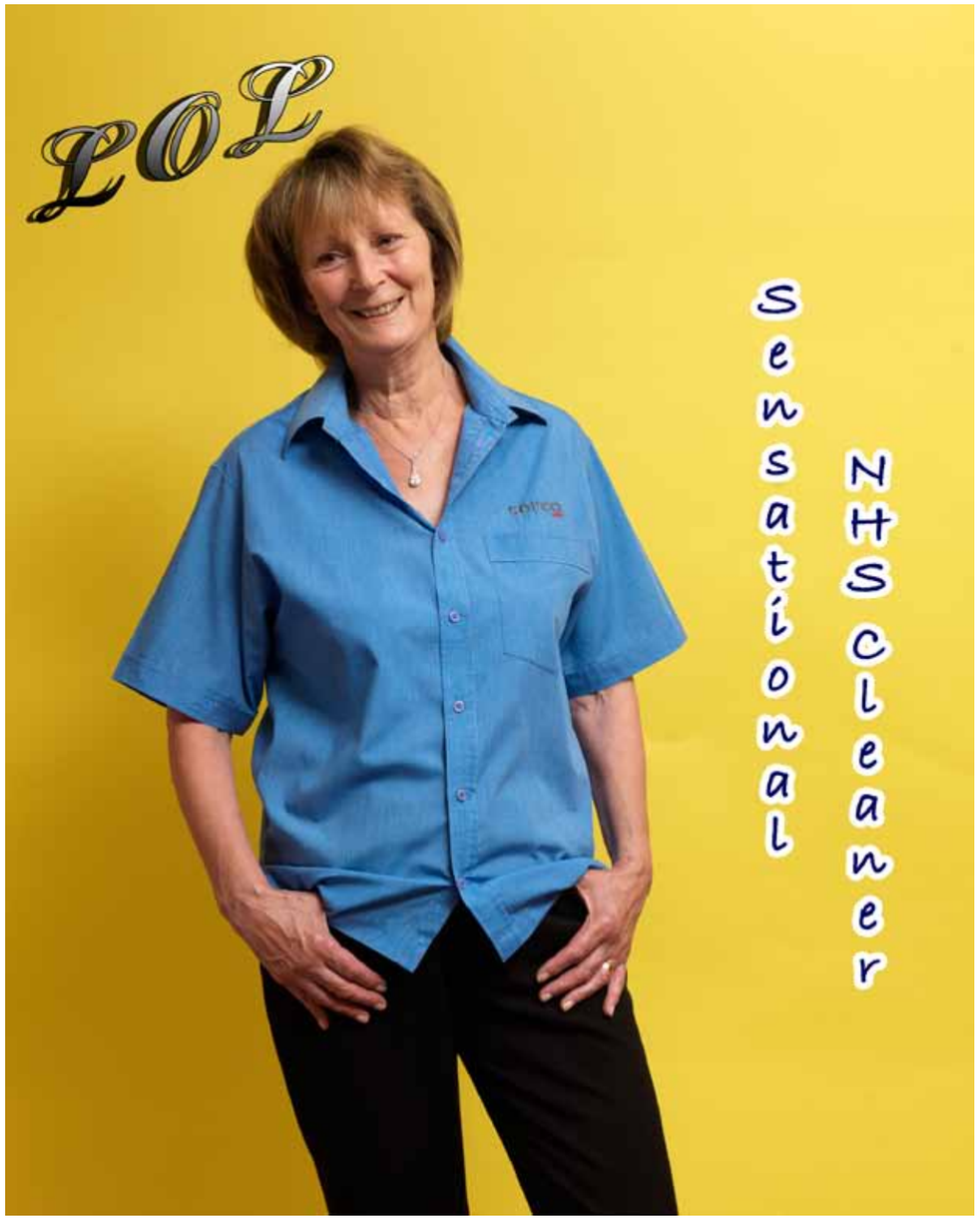

MOSES
SUPERB PAINTER & DECORATOR

LITTLE AL
Ace engineer

CRAMPY
Top quality mechanic


LOL
Sensational
NHS Cleaner

acollectionofirishmemories

Patrick Foster ARPS

I am Irish, from Tipperary, but have lived and worked in England for most of my life. So I use my photography to bring myself closer to the Ireland I love and miss. This is my way of 'not forgetting' my roots and especially how things used to be. My work suggests a rural idyll that today is unattainable. The encroachment of the modern world or new technology into the Ireland of my childhood is to me unthinkable; I therefore eliminate most forms of modernisation without destroying the honesty and intimacy of the scene. I suppose I am subconsciously encapsulating the heritage of an age.

This work is an on-going project documenting the Ireland I remember from my childhood. I do photograph other things and collections of memories as most photographers do, and I think of these collections, as a series of algorithms running concurrently within the operating system of my brain - all I need is the download key (inspiration/motivation) to start them running.

I find ruins of all kinds very photogenic. There are hundreds of relics like this around Ireland, and I try to preserve this forgotten aspect. These timeworn buildings are not well-documented; I seek to address this by photographing them and recording them for all time.

I am also safeguarding their anonymity by hiding their exact location except the county in which they reside and by doing so I feel I am shielding these little time capsules from modernisation. Often many of these abandoned or forgotten buildings are reclaimed by nature. Structures like these however, can serve as a record of times past; they may help us - or future generations - learn about our heritage. In nearly every instance, they are beautiful and haunting places to explore and photograph.

http://www.patrickfosterphotography.com

Bits and Pieces of Life We Carry Around

Elizabeth Hay Brown

I was interested to find out what the things we carry around tell us about us as individuals and the lives we lead. Are they like a portrait of the individual? To find out, I set up a small studio space in my local library and dared people to empty the contents of their pockets and bags in front of my camera.

Interestingly, parents who came in with their children were encouraged by them to empty their bags. Molly was one of these. Her mother dutifully emptied her bag. They walked away but were back five minutes later, and Molly emptied her pockets, pulling out handfuls of highly coloured elastic bands in animal shapes to the amazement of her mother. Other participants such as Helen turned up with a huge bag in which there was another bag - a wonderful blue one, containing her iPad, a book and two custard tarts. Paulina was going out for the night and so carried very little; while Guilia, (whose daughter said she was very strong), carried her daughter's as well as her own. Two friends - one who is very tidy threw his contents across the set while his wife who says she isn't tidy carefully placed her contents side by side. People arranged their own contents.

The objects tell you quite a lot about the individuals who carry them around. Look out for the old pound note, which is carefully folded. I am not sure what that means.

For more images of this different approach to making portraits see her website: www.elizabethhaybrownphotography.london

Molly

Paulina

Helen

Guilia

Ellie

Helga

Ivana

Linda

Judy

Michael

Julie

Mick

Café Royal Books

Craig Atkinson

In 2005 I decided to 'quit' painting. For 10 years I had painted colourless, large, awkward, expensive, difficult-to-transport abstracts. As much as I loved to paint, my entire practice was self-restricting. I returned to a very simple, inexpensive, easy-to-do-anywhere drawing practice.

Making several hundred drawings over 12 months I wanted to exhibit again but not using the gallery network I was used to. Books and zines fitted and solved the problems that painting had previously caused me; they were affordable, multiple, could be posted worldwide quickly, exhibited in galleries and read in homes. They were objects, more personal perhaps than a painting.

My practice gradually became photographic. The books became known through various channels: galleries, press, shops, internet etc. I began to receive many submissions from artists and photographers looking to have their work published and so eventually, I began to collaborate with these artists, making limited edition books and zines of their work.

Café Royal Books is 10 this year and in this time has become a lot more focussed and organised. It's become a business; something I had never considered. I now publish around 60 titles each year, generally focussing on British Documentary and work that somehow documents change, be it social, geographical, architectural for example. The books share the same format — I see each being a part of a long and ongoing series. Tate, V&A, MoMA, National Gallery of Canada and many other public, academic and private international institutions collect them.

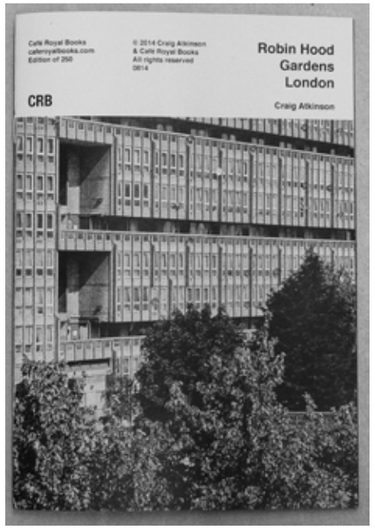
I'm hesitant to use the term 'book'. 'Zine' is no longer appropriate and 'artist's book' has also been used. Information pamphlet is perhaps best but selling information pamphlets is more difficult than selling photobooks!

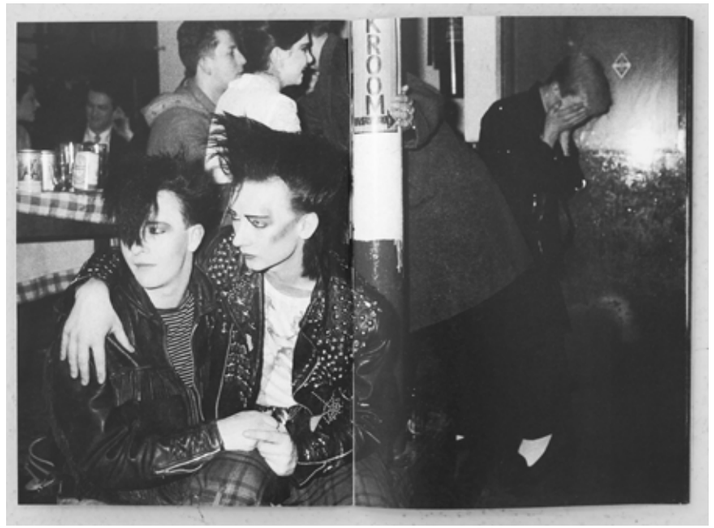
My work is generally an exploration of brutalist structures and the city, sometimes combined; a mix of human fluidity and concrete rigidity. I enjoy the freedom of being a tourist and try to maintain a level of tourism in my photographs. My abstract past plays a part in the way I see images too, as shapes, forms, line, tone, mass, composition.

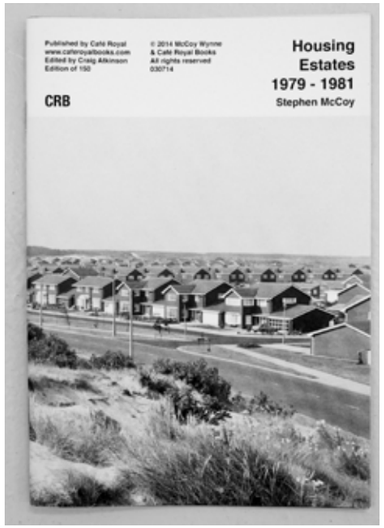
I collaborate with photographers, publishing work from their archive. The work has been made for a variety of reasons, some unseen, unpublished and commissioned. The books I make strip the work of their original context. I try to make the books neutral, democratic, straight forward. They are affordable to make and to buy. They've become fairly collectible; each book is published as an edition of around 200, which contradicts my desire for the books to be seen by many. However, many galleries, libraries and museums collect the books, so they become publicly available.

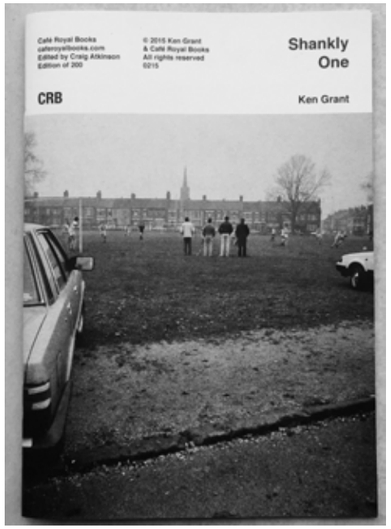
Recently I've published a boxed set of *Eight Stories* by Daniel Meadows. Each book accompanies one of Daniel's movies which offer a window into his archive held at the Library of Birmingham. The set includes a DVD of the movies. I'm working on a series of books with Martin Parr, the first of which was published in June. This autumn I'll be publishing a set of books by Document Scotland on the occasion of their exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

www.caferoyalbooks.com
www.craigatkinson.co.uk









Bone Fire

Dr Casey Orr

This series consists of photographs of unlit bonfires and their teenage guardians taken over a five-year period around West Yorkshire, highlighting both tradition and community as well as linking us to the land and the elements around us.

The annual November 5th Bonfire – later to be rebranded by James I as Guy Fawkes' Night – was in earlier times known as the Bone Fire, a symbolic burning of the summer's animal carcasses to ward off, and warn of, the oncoming frost; part of the seasonal ritual marking of time, before clock-time, when the world's turn was measured by sun and moon, tides and shifts in the weather.

Bone Fires were celebrations, feasts, staking claim to our survival through another cycle and heralding our gathering-together in the face of colder weather. In this fire, people saw off summer and clenched a fist at winter; set a big blaze to measure the distance between harvest's gathering and spring's seed-sowing.

The *Bone Fire* photographs celebrate a modern-day echo of those times, a transient world these kids create for themselves, fun they create without leadership and instruction;

the photographs elevating those self-built chaotic structures into sculptures, sculptures that live, burn and die in that one annual breathless week.

The culture and tradition of Guy Fawkes' Night is dying out, being replaced by huge, ordered, adult-led corporate and municipal imitations; the *Bone Fire* series preserves the inspiring social phenomenon of the tradition.

Ed. Note: Dr Orr is a Senior Lecturer in Photography at Leeds Metropolian University. Her new project *The Library Animal* will be at Art Space, Leeds City Library, December 2015.
http://www.caseyorr.com

The Epilogue

Liai Abril

Book Review by Brian Steptoe

25.5x18.5cm, 160 pages, 84 photographs, 5 inserts and 5 foldouts. Published by Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2014.

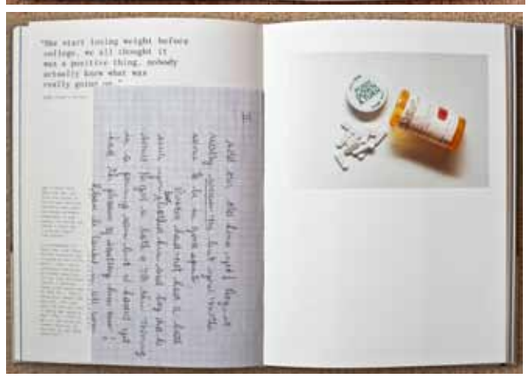
Cammy Robinson was born in May 1979 and only lived to the age of 26. She died of heart failure brought on by years of anorexia and bulimia which she was unable to escape from, even with extensive help from her family, friends and medical treatments.

This book was created and then published in 2014, several years after Cammy died. Her parents in Chattanooga, Tenessee, allowed and encouraged the author Liai Abril to produce this story of Cammy's life, which combines Abril's photos, plus family photos, video stills, documents, letters and extensive texts to convey the agonies and sadnesses suffered.

The photobook makes extensive use of a range of design and layout methods in support of the storyline. It is also a good example of the incorporation of images selected to convey the story and the emotions involved; images chosen for purpose rather than for technical qualities. The book was designed in collaboration with Ramon Pez.

Liai Abril is a Spanish photographer. She has been working on a long-term project about eating disorders, of which this book on the topic is her most recent. It received wide acclaim on publication in 2014 and was short-listed at Paris Photo that year. She gave a talk on this work at the Bristol Photobook Festival in 2015.

see http://www.laiaabril.com



Group Events

until 31 July 2016 — **Invitation for entries to the RPS International Photobook Exhibition 2016. This is OPEN TO ALL, MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS OF THE RPS. Contact Rod Fry ARPS rod@rodfry.eclipse.co.uk or see www.rps.org/photobook**

21 July to 31 March 16	*Edgelands*. exhibition by Tom Owens ARPS. At the Museum of East Anglian Life. Iliffe Way, Stowmarket IP14 1DL tel 01449 612229
14 November	Contemporary North East meeting in York at the Royal Oak pub 2-5pm. http://www.royaloakyork.co.uk/ Please bring any work, whether completed or work-in-progress to discuss. Digital projection will be available. Contact Patricia A Ruddle ARPS, patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel. 01904 783850
22 November	Contemporary Scotland meeting. Edinburgh Photographic Society, 68 Great King Street. 1-5pm. Informal discussion, support and advice covering work completed or in progress by the members. Please bring any work prints or books. Contact David Fells LRPS david.fells@btinternet.com tel 07563 756137.
25 November	London Independent Photography Janet Hall memorial lecture. 19.00-20.30, Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Central House, London Metropolitan University. 59-63 Whitechapel High St, London. Alixandra Fazzina, *Visualising Migration*. The late Janet Hall was a leading member of the Contemporary Group and organised many of the early talks and workshops. Tickets £12 in advance on-line, £15 at door.
30 November & 25 January 2016	Contemporary North West meeting at 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
7 February 2016	Contemporary South West. Meeting at Dartington, Devon. For address details contact Rod Fry rod@rodfry.eclipse.co.uk tel. 01803 844721
16 January 2016	Contemporary North East meeting. Exciting new venue to be announced! Contact Patricia A Ruddle ARPS, patriciaruddle@btinternet.com tel. 01904 783850
20 April 2016	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
Dates not fixed	Contemporary East Anglia meetings. These will be in the Ipswich and Cambridge areas when arranged. The project underway is the The Ipswich Waterfront Development. Contact Tom Owens ARPS, tom@tjowens.com.

Chair - Avril Harris ARPS
avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk

Deputy chair - Rod Fry ARPS
rod@rodfry.eclipse.co.uk

Secretary - Peter Ellis LRPS
wordsnpicsltd@gmail.com

Treasurer - Greg Holba LRPS
greg@holba.net

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Marcus Henry, Meteorological Station, St Helena © Jon Tonks. Courtesy Impressions Gallery.
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