



Contemporary North

A SUBGROUP OF THE RPS CONTEMPORARY GROUP

November 2021

Report of the RPS Contemporary North Zoom Meeting.

SATURDAY 19TH NOVEMBER 2021, 1.30-4.00 PM (UK)

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

TEXT: **MIKE ROOKE**

COORDINATION AND EDITING: **PATRICIA RUDDLE**

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: **ALEXANDRA PRESCOTT**



'It was so nice to see our friends on Zoom who live too far away to come to our York meetings. Twenty-one members joined us for the meeting. Sadly we missed the seven who sent apologies.'

The next Contemporary North meeting will be a live one (there will be mince pies) at Clements Hall in York on 18 December starting at 13:30. We look forward to seeing everyone in person again. However, not forgetting our lovely North members around the country and beyond, we're back on Zoom in the New Year on 15 January 2022.

New face

David Collyer, a Contemporary Group member from South Wales who is well-known for his photography on the coronavirus as well as portraiture.

Announcements

Patricia Ruddle mentioned the email from the new RPS Director of Development, **Tracy Marshall-Grant**, with the request to complete a questionnaire. Due date 15 December.

Alexandra Prescott has organised another Distinction FRPS Peer Support Group meeting on Zoom. December 9th at 7 pm for Contemporary, Applied, Portraiture and Documentary Distinctions.

This is an unofficial group who get together to support each other and offer thoughts on the journey we are all going through. Maybe you have an idea about a distinction, or just want to see what other members are doing. 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.

(P.S. we have been encouraged to come with mince pies and mulled wine to celebrate the season!)

Avijit Datta told us that there will be a special talk to celebrate the 80th birthday of **Paul Hill** MBE on 18 January 2022 at 700pm – 830pm (UK time). Avijit will interview **Paul Hill**, **Brian Steptoe** and **Douglas May** about the origins and the future of the Contemporary Group. The format will also include audience participation – so get your questions ready! A link to join will soon be available on the Contemporary Group webpage. Please make a note in your diary and tell all of your friends.

Avijit Datta: *Painted with My Hair*

Avijit told us about an interesting 59-minute BBC Four *Arena* program describing how Donny Johnson, a painter (not a photographer), a United States lifer who survived long-term solitary confinement

through a remarkable pen-pal friendship and the making of beautiful paintings from M&Ms, jelly beans for texture, making brushes from his own hair. It's a remarkable story.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0011691>

David Collyer- *All in a Day's Work, Shooting Covid-19: A Very Contemporary Project.*

Once asked, what is the secret to grabbing outstanding travel/documentary photographs, a well-known photographer answered simply, "Be in f8 and be there".

David works as an Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) in a hospital in Abergavenny, South Wales, and so had wonderfully privileged access to the front line health services coping with the Covid-19 pandemic as it struck the Welsh valleys in early 2020. Shooting entirely on film; (a mix of Tri-X and HP5+, using an Olympus XA3 camera), the drama of the action in the ICUs was captured with extraordinary skill and sensitivity.

His work has been featured by *The Guardian* and has been produced as a book titled *All in a Day's Work* - now in its 3rd edition. The book is about people, doing a job. Coping with the challenge of it all. David says that he "wanted to show the human faces behind the idealised and eulogised image of doctors, nurses, allied healthcare professionals and auxiliary staff". The name of the book is a direct reference to that feeling, and very successfully succeeds in achieving what David set out to do.

The photograph that sits on the front cover of the book (right) was taken at 8am as an anaesthetist prepares for work and the girl assisting him crouches in the background, still shattered from the previous day. A dramatic, telling shot that sets the scene for what follows inside the book. The pages of 35 photographs show what it actually felt like on the wards for the medical staff and their support teams.

They came across as a tight knit family, getting on with it, despite extraordinarily long hours and uncertainty. Teamwork.

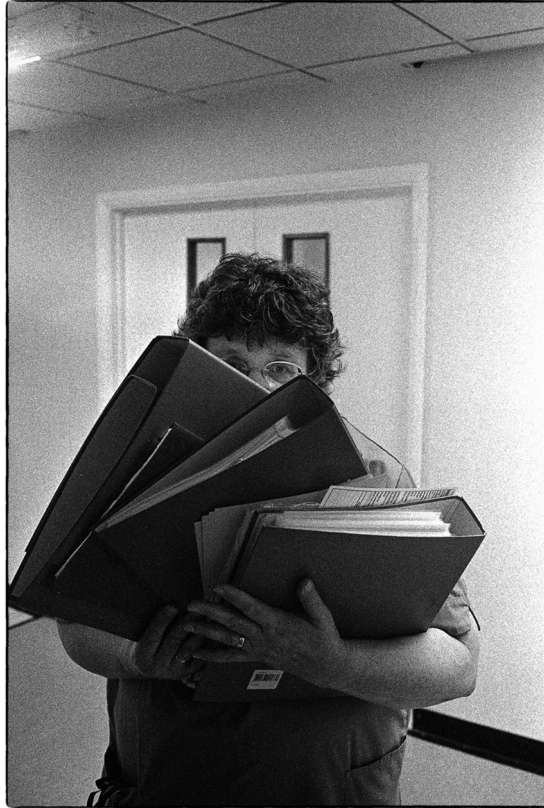
It was interesting too, to learn that some support staff had been policemen, served with the Territorial regiments in Iraq, or were ex-medics from the military.



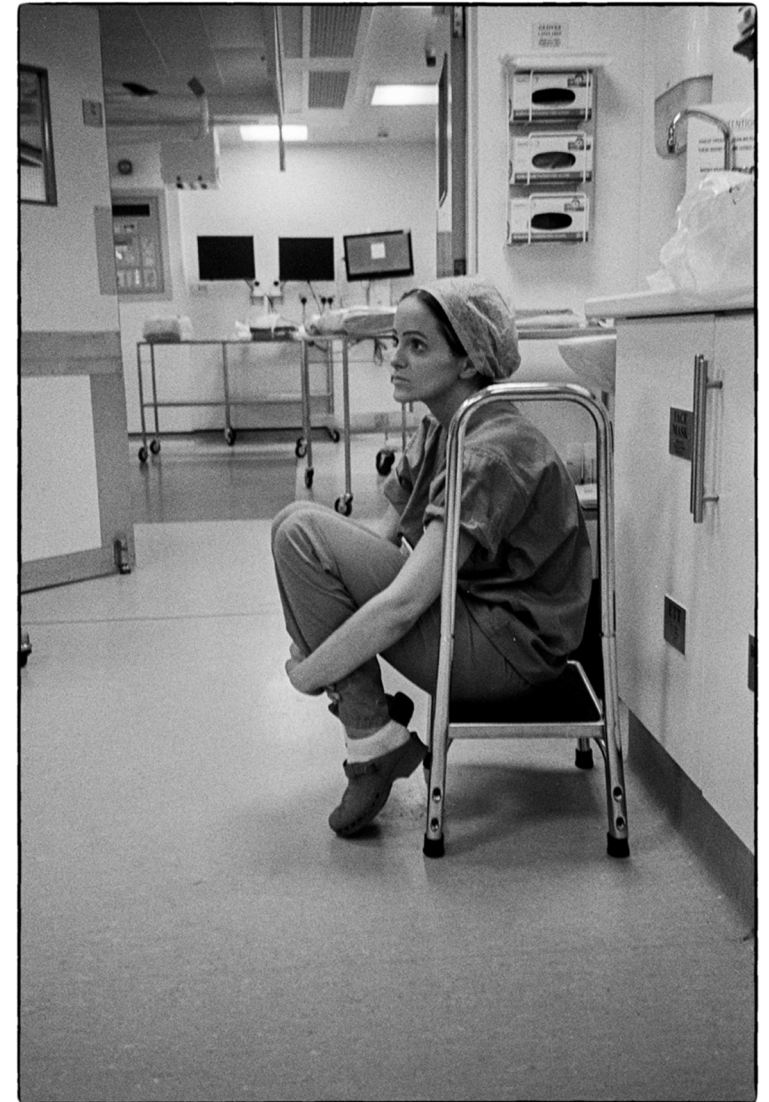
The staff were doing the jobs that they have been trained to do, but the strain was often etched on their faces, showing apprehension as they don their PPE, not knowing what to expect next. Some had to adapt or modify their kit for comfort or convenience, struggling to get it on in some cases. Superb documentary photography.

We all know that people show incredible resilience to events when they have to. The camaraderie displayed by the staff in that small hospital shines through in David's photography. And humour too. A lot of humour. The mannequin that was used to train staff in various procedures affectionately called Carl, and being caught spread-eagled flat out on a bed being attended to by two nurses.

A nurse (below left) slumped in a cardboard box saying "I'm so tired I could sleep in here".



One standout photograph that appeared on the front page of *The Guardian*, and chosen as the *Photo of the Year*, (right) captured a young nurse, Sarah, sat hugging her knees, looking away with a 1000-yard stare, tired and resigned

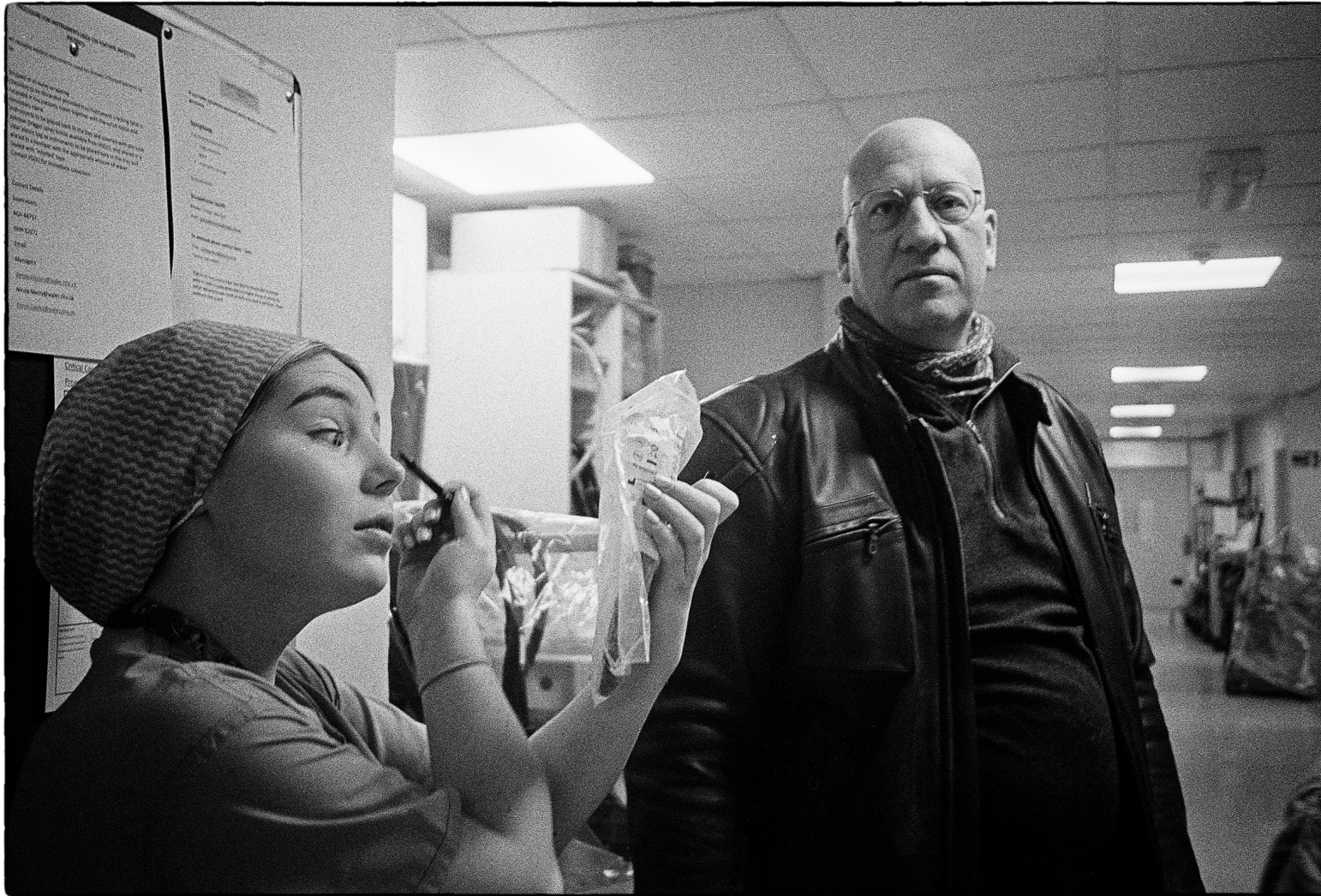




The celebration of a nurse's 40th birthday (below), her face full of normal joy being kindly looked upon by a colleague.







David's 18th blog in the Contemporary Group series on Covid-19 and lockdown:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/january/all-in-a-days-work/>

David and his son Ned's 29th blog in the Contemporary Group series on Covid-19 and lockdown:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/contemporary/2021/march/protesting-human-rights-in-a-pandemic/>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/david_collyer_photographer/

Website: <https://davidcollyer.wordpress.com/>

Wendy North presented to us a collection of works, some unfinished, but influenced by a quote by Guy Tal.

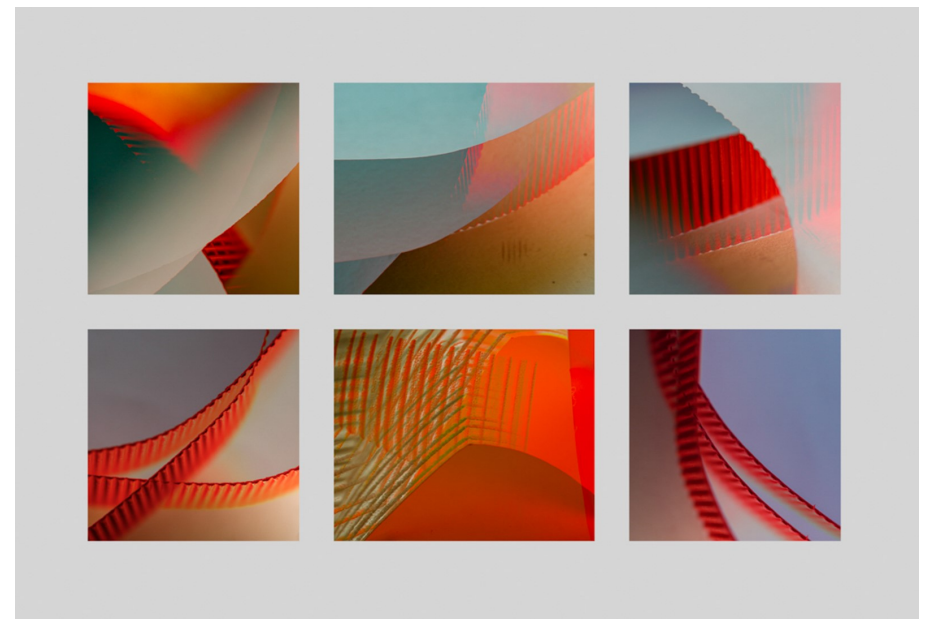
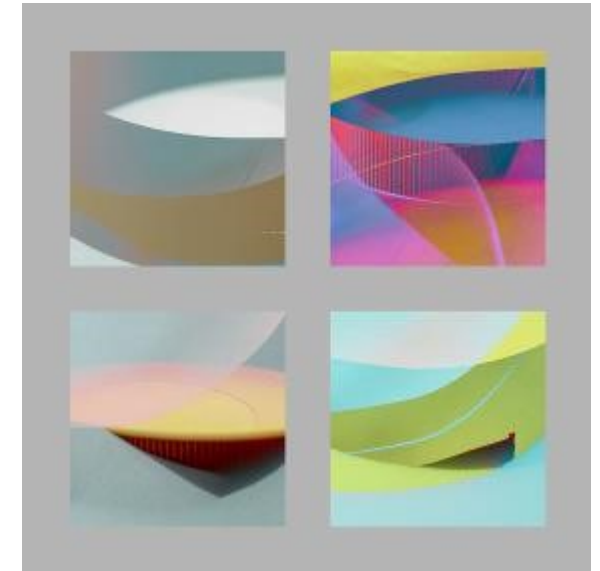
<https://guytal.com>

"In our time it seems entirely appropriate that the widest choice be open to artists. Those using a camera or other photographic means to produce works of artistic merit should seek to exploit their medium in the most adventurous way."



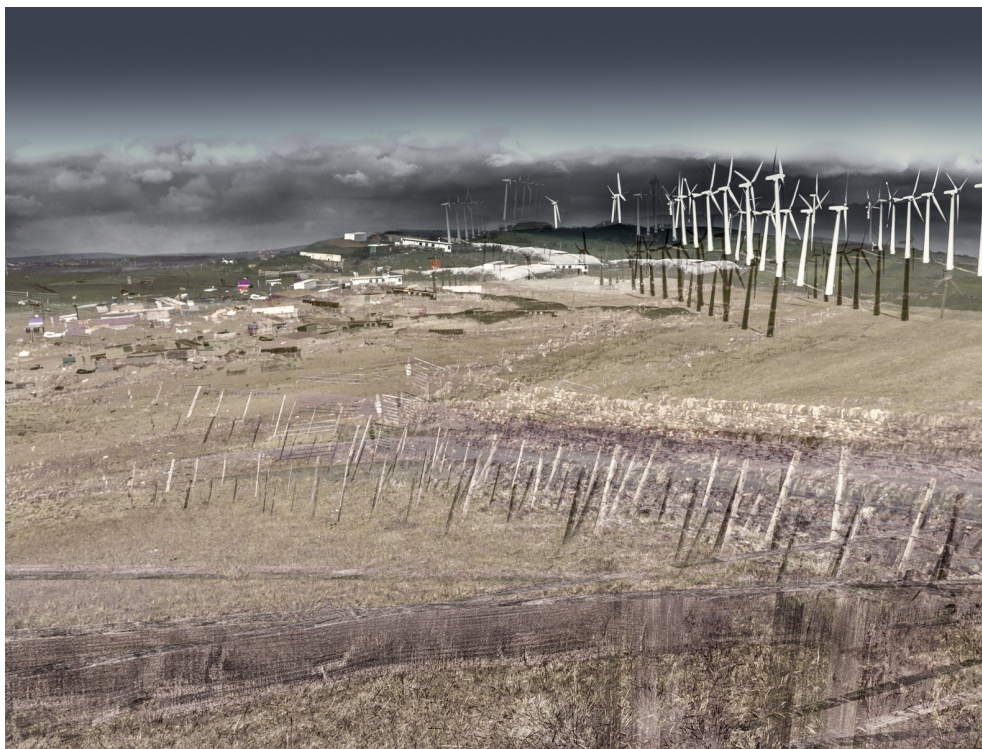
Just like many of us, Wendy found that a step in one direction can lead to unexpected places. Her journey started back in 2016 when she attended a creative photographic course led by **Valda Bailey** and **Doug Chinnery** that helped her to explore the technique of using in-camera multiple exposures to produce abstract images.

In April, 2021 when she was recovering from an operation on her ankle and was still not fully mobile, she embarked on a project that involved using in-camera multiple-exposure to create abstract images using a strip of red paper and a circular piece of acetate.

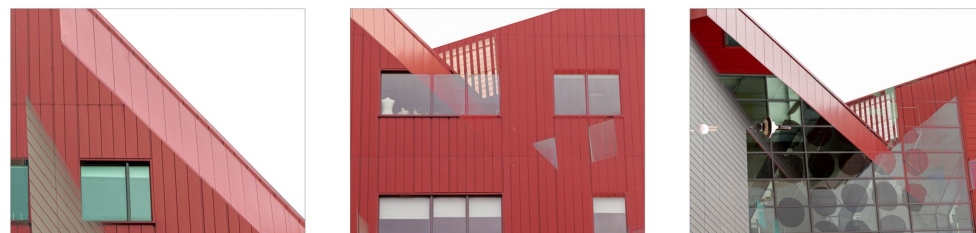


Wendy has been using the *Blipfoto* site to produce a record of her photographic life since Oct 2011 and shared some screen grabs of her diary for April and May to show that she had other projects happening during this time period.

<https://www.blipfoto.com/Viewpoint>



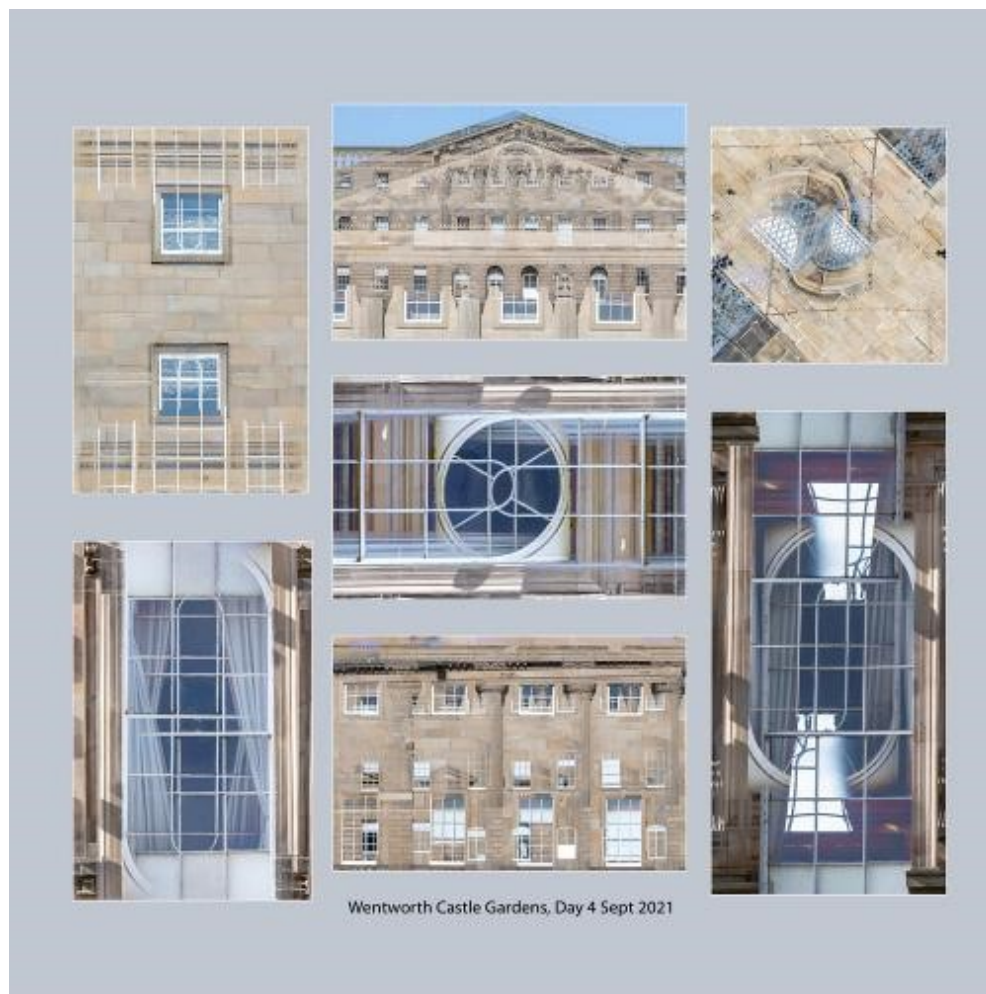
Once mobile, she began an odyssey to create multiple-exposure images of a range of local places which included Royd Moor near Penistone, Barnsley, Leeds.



Barnsley College 08/08/21

In September 2021 she set out on a multiple-exposures project to photograph at Wentworth Castle Gardens, which is owned by Barnsley Council and run by the National Trust, where she wanted to create abstract images from elements she took from the building.

One of the things that came out of this project for her was how the overlaid window images reminded her of the pit wheels that had been so familiar when she was growing up in West Yorkshire. One of the things that struck her was that the wealth that built the house would have been derived from the mining of coal and built on the backs of those men, women and children who struggled to extract that wealth for a pittance. Wendy's grandfather was a miner at Glasshoughton Colliery before he was invalided out so her personal connections made this project feel particularly pertinent to her. A connection that might lead into a new project.





How is this photographic technique helping me to show my world in a different way?

Select, overlay, transpose, make connections - a different interpretation of the world



Wendy thought that now may be the time to share some of this work to photographers in the Contemporary North Group and to reflect on how this photographic technique of using multiple exposure was helping to show the world that she sees, in a different way?

And asked the question "How does this idea of being adventurous with your photograph work for others in the group that might for instance, be documentary photographers? After all, Contemporary Photography is a very broad church embracing many different kinds of interests.

Wendy added that she would like to acknowledge the mentoring role played by **Glenys Garnett** and how significant she was in helping her to develop understanding of the in-camera multiple-exposure technique.

Patricia Ruddle: *The Grapevine Project*

The project brought together 120 artists and writers, celebrating creativity and connection through challenging times. The project began with eleven photographers each anonymously submitting an image that was then forwarded on to artists, who produced a new artwork in response, beginning a thread of work that produced our 'grapevine' of original art, textiles, poetry, film, and sculpture. The process led to a series of beautifully interwoven transitions of thought, ideas and themes, and demonstrates art's ability to communicate and to connect people - even in isolation. There are eleven vines of art in the project.



The photograph to open The Vine No. 10 was taken by Patricia on the small, quiet Isle of Tabarca, a short boat trip from Alicante, Spain. Once a prison island for pirates, it's now the home of a small community of fishermen and their families.

During a walk around the island after a swim in its warm, tranquil waters and a seafood lunch in the Mediterranean sunshine, I spent an hour leisurely wandering around the empty lanes looking for images to use later as inspiration for artwork.

Working as both a photographer and printmaker, I enjoy the initial process of looking for an image which can later help me to explore the various ways to produce an impression of how I felt when capturing the scene.

The different shapes and texture, the symmetry, the hot colours of these houses shuttered against the intense afternoon sun caught my eye. Perhaps the scene will inspire another artist to create an artwork using these elements to find a rapport between my photograph and their own individual vision.

It is an interesting concept. The connection between each response along the growing stem is sometimes hard to fathom, despite statements by the artists, but is very worth the time to check it out.

<https://thegrapevineproject.co.uk/>
<https://thegrapevineproject.co.uk/vine10>

Alexandra Prescott: *Universal Truths*

One of our members of Contemporary North has achieved the highest accolade and award of a Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society with a portfolio illustrating the effect of ill-considered behaviour by humans on wildlife and habitats sharing our planet.

Statement of Intent

The universal truth of pollution, disrespect, greed and cruelty affect the creatures with whom we share our planet. This has been the inspiration for this collection of images which adds my voice to those work for and support change. My objective is to provoke and inform discussion to elicit change.

I have seen species suffer and their habitats deteriorate as humans population overload and consume resources because they can because culture demands it or because there is no immediate alternative way for some communities to exist. I have created these images as a set of stylised representation of the scenarios and outcomes that I have witnessed in my work as a wildlife conservation volunteer both in the UK and overseas. The images do not portray all creatures and scenarios but a sample of those that I have experienced.



Art, for centuries, has been a tool for protest, for social change and I have chosen this tool to represent my voice. The aesthetics of the images are to lure, to invite the viewer's attention. Pleasing aesthetics elicit an emotional response and encourage the mind to make a connection. This combined with the composition style, is an approach constructed to encourage people to see, not just to look. The symbolic informative artefacts have been placed to trigger curiosity leading to greater understanding, stimulate compassion and increase empathy. The whole concept encouraging behavioural change.

If you don't or understand the consequences of humankind's behaviour then you have no reason to care or make changes. These images are a tool to encourage the journey by understanding. Balance is easily broken; one indiscriminate action has the potential by degrees, to harm a species, disrupt a habitat and/or alternately hasten extinction – for us all.



