

Contemporary Photography



View from the Chair

I received, in the New Year, information that Jenny Ford's husband, Jim, had died. I would like to pay tribute to him because he was an enormous help and support to Jenny during the time she was our Group Secretary and Exhibitions Organiser. I don't think Jenny could have managed the Exhibitions for as long as she did without his help. Our condolences and thoughts are with Jenny.

Our AGM will be held at the Grafton Hotel in London, 23 March at 2pm. I apologise that this clashes with other events, but it was a case of combining room availability and our speaker, Liz Hingley. Liz is a British photographer and researcher specialising in documentary, reportage and portraiture. She will be talking about her recent work *Under Gods* and *The Jones Family*. Her website is www.lizhingley.com for further information. We hope to see many of you there; apart from your having the chance to have your say about the running of the Contemporary Group, you will also have an excellent speaker.

Contrasting Contemporary, our weekend in Plymouth, organised in conjunction with the South West Region, was a great success. Our speakers were excellent and were well received. It was also very gratifying to see so many students and many attended for the entire weekend. A great many of the attendees had been to all of our previous weekend events, but there were some new faces as well. Nigel Tooby, who is organising our North East group, talked about his Fellowship and the book that he produced for it. I think that it struck a chord with many of us, which was much appreciated.

The planning for the next weekend event has started. It is hoped that it will take place in the autumn, closer to London. When further details are available we will let everyone know.

A little late, but may I wish you all an excellent New Year.

Avril.

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

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patriciaruddle@btinternet.com

Cover: from the exhibition *Street Fixtures* of Tulsa
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Unless requested, discs will not be returned.

DEADLINE for the Spring 2013 edition is 31 March 2013.

ISSN 0959-6704

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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

Contemporary Goes Historical in the 50th Issue

Rummaging through my archives, I saw that our first issue, published April 1990, was called *Contemporary Photography: the Newsletter of the Contemporary Group of the Royal Photographic Society*, and this is its registered ISSN title. It kept this name until changed in 2009. From the original 8-page newsletter we have grown to a 40-page journal. To celebrate our 50th issue, its title returns in part to its original (or historical) title - *Contemporary Photography*.

Here are articles in which the contemporary has called upon the historical to provide opportunities for personal work. There is use of the historical in which photographs have been inspired by the nature of a once-disused prisoner-of-war camp; or the response evoked by the troubadour farrier using traditional methods to forge his trade in a new age. Again, the “spirit of the past” is evoked with imagery and poetry in the story of the Welland Canal. On a different tack, an iconic photograph is the inspirational source used to reconstruct a 21st-century photograph. Even the photomontages of Dave Ferry deconstruct views of British heritage, in some instances where, “a world of woollen comfort collides with the forces of history.” Indeed, all of the submissions can be seen to harken back to something that has given the photographers the material, the motivation, to inspire personal work.

There is an art historical approach used in the analysis of Minihan’s portraits of Samuel Beckett.

This dissects three images in a way that not only contextualises them in literature and photography, but also informs us about contemporary portrait practices. I suggest that White’s language, his often lyrical, striking use of words, is another effective by-product of the article, which again can evoke ideas. I have been enthused by White’s referral to the “dismal world of the slipper.” It elicits in me not a response to the greatness of neither the playwright nor the wish to explore portrait photography, but the idea of the ordinary. I want a project that will celebrate the prosaic or the humdrum of the everyday - something that contemporary photography does very well. Actually, there is something of a fusion with the portrait and the everyday in the old photographs of the deceased mother. The photographer’s process of freezing and re-photographing, and the resultant images, have helped her to deal with the death of a loved one.

It only remains for me to mention John Wood, whose article broadens our view of contemporary photography. He uses the science of light as the intellectual underpinning to create the work, in this case birds in their winter environment - in Regent’s Park, itself rich in history.

Wishing you all a good new year,
Patricia

Nice and Naughty: The Photomontages of David Ferry

Stephen Clarke

Grafted onto the Lancashire coastline looms an icon of Paris. Blackpool's Tower, inspired by the Eiffel Tower, marks the town out as a place where the synthetic and the fake reign. A leisure machine built for holiday madness, the town is certainly naughty but hardly nice. Born in Blackpool in 1957, the artist David Ferry recognises that this machine has stamped its presence on his work. Ferry made his first photomontages in the mid-1970s as an art student in London where the mocking and mischievous nature of Punk was absorbed into his practice. As Bernard Sharratt, in his essay on Ferry, observes: "period as well as place form an artist"⁽¹⁾. Ferry's heritage is composed of debased fragments.

The definition of 'photomontage' has been uncertain. Sometimes limited to images made with photographic processes and darkroom techniques, the Berlin Dadaists used the term broadly to describe work with photographic elements. John Heartfield, known as 'Monteur Heartfield' by the Dadaists, stated that: "A photograph can, by the addition of an unimportant spot of colour, become a photomontage..."⁽²⁾ Using combinations of cut-outs, overlaid with pencil, ink, wash and frottage David Ferry explores this more complex version of photomontage.

During the 1980s, the premiership of Margaret Thatcher provided political impetus to a number of artists using photomontage including Linder Sterling and Peter Kennard. Ferry's photomontages also referred to the political landscape of this period. His series *The Star Chamber* (1985-88) dealt with aspects of power, combining contemporary imagery with historical ones, setting the scene for later works that would deal with national identity. Lacking is the humour that makes his photomontages of the 1990s distinct.

The touring exhibition *David Ferry: Aspects of Our National Heritage* (1999) served as an overview to this work of the 1990s. The exhibition brought together a collection of Ferry's post-war tourist guidebooks to the British Isles. The books, bought from second hand shops, are filled with old photographs of a past age; a sentimental world where the old is preferred to the new. In these photographs the nice, familiar English countryside is unspoiled by the modern world. These books were naughtily defaced by Ferry as he inserted images from another period, mostly the DIY magazines from 1960s and 1970s. Puncturing sentiment with humour, fragments of modern architecture and machinery intrude upon the landscape of the nice.

Travel and its consequences are at the centre of his practice. He says: "I always ask for the window seat; it helps give a sense of where you are".⁽³⁾ As a child he remembers days out in the family car driven around the countryside. Writing about Ferry's excursions into the heritage of the English landscape, Brandon Taylor describes how it is the use of the motor car that gave the modern tourist access to this unspoiled land. Taylor quotes the complaint of Anthony Bertram about the vulgar, urban proletariat: "National beauty is being distorted into 'beauty spots' where ice-cream merchants thread their ways among the close-parked cars, and litter boxes and first-aid posts testify to the habits of the invaders".⁽⁴⁾ Like the modern motoring machine, Ferry's montaged fragments disrupt the comforting scene of national identity and historical narrative.

It was from the distance of New York in 2001 that he started to directly comment on the story of English history. *Faces and Places From History* (finished in 2006) traced

the history of England from the Stone Age through to Queen Victoria and the peak of the British Empire. Created from his original bookwork titled *A Picture History of England ... Mainly in Black and White*, he defiled an existing book on English history with photographic fragments from knitting patterns. A world of woollen comfort collides with the forces of history. This deconstruction of the notion of British heritage was continued with *Belligerent Rock Intrusions* (2010) that used tourist books and mountain climbing literature; and *The Stately Aquariums of England* (2011) that combined images of the ancestral homes of the aristocrats with exotic fish and the tanks filled with bizarre accessories. Made at this period of economic crisis, these photomontages may represent a world in which England is shaken by tremors and sinks beneath rising floods.

Ferry brings a heritage of seaside madness, Punk rock and political satire to a commentary on the place and period he inhabits. Through photomontage he reveals a parallel world that reflects the synthetic nature of our own. Continuing in the tradition of Heartfield's definition of photomontage, his latest works combine photographs, spray paint, stencil and varnish.⁽⁵⁾ The naughty boy from Blackpool adds something extra to the scene like that French tower dropped onto the shores of Lancashire.

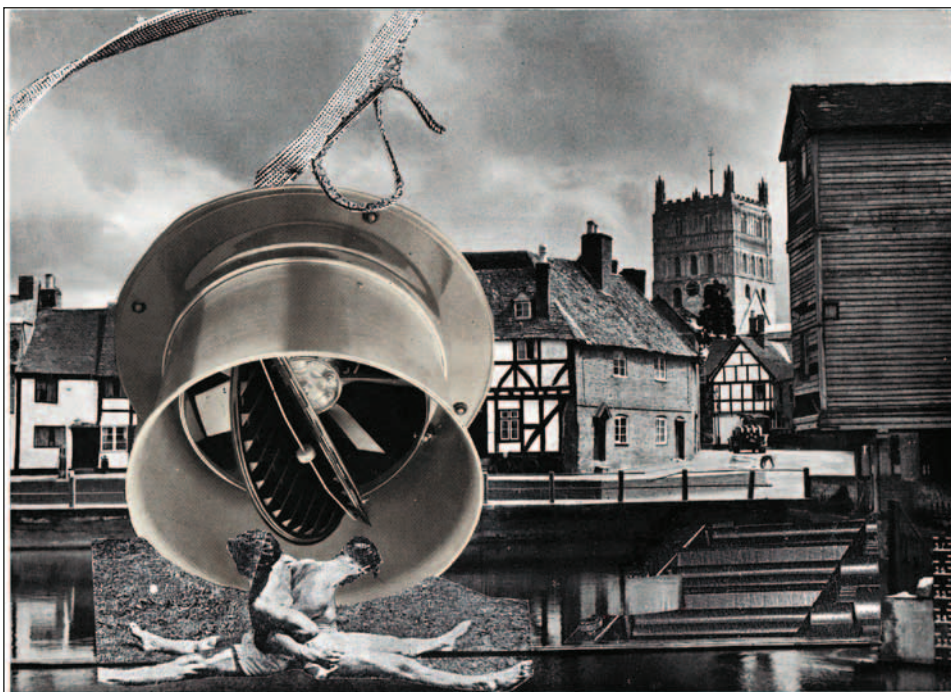
David Ferry RE is Professor of Printmaking and Book Arts at the Cardiff School of Art and Design. He has provided the images and given us permission to use them.

1. Ferry, D. and Sharratt, B. (2002) *Views from the Window Seat*. The Avram Gallery, Southampton College, Long Island University/ Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. p. 12
2. Ades, D. (1986) *Photomontage*. London: Thames and Hudson. p. 16
3. Ferry, D. and Sharratt, B. (2002) *Views from the Window Seat*. The Avram Gallery, Southampton College, Long Island University / Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. p. 7
4. Taylor, B. *Montage Over Britain* in Ferry, D. (1999) *David Ferry: Aspects of Our National Heritage*. Southampton: The Southern Arts Touring Exhibition Service. p. 15
5. Ferry, D. (2009) *Montage 2007 - 2010*. Canterbury: E. C. Parker



© David Ferry: *Wells Cathedral* original photomontage from the artist's book work *A Picture History of The West Country*, 1992/3. Courtesy National Print Gallery, London.

© David Ferry:
Tewkesbury Abbey
 original photomontage
 from the artist's book
work A Picture History
of The West Country,
 1992/3. Courtesy
 National Print Gallery,
 London.

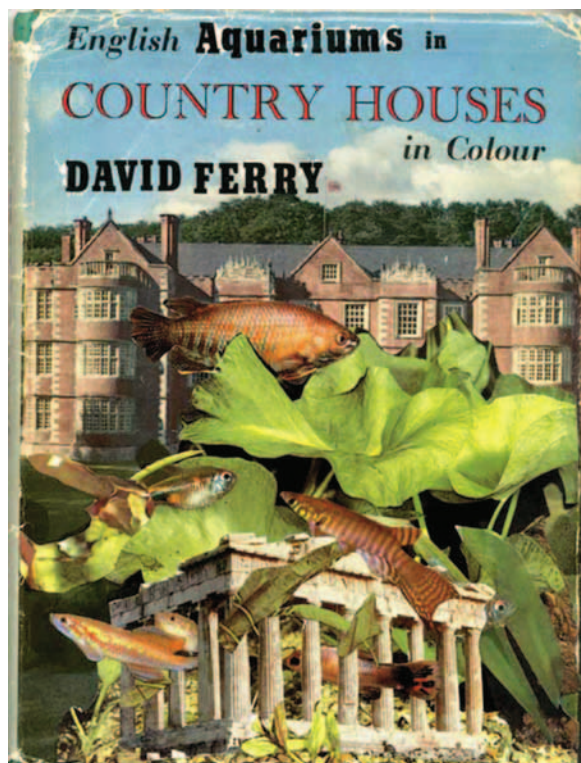


3. TEWKESBURY ABBEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE. The river is the Avon, which joins the Severn at Tewkesbury a short distance from this mill. Old brick and half-timber houses are a feature of the town.

© David Ferry: *Landscape near Litton*
 original photomontage
 from the artist's book work *A Picture History of The Peak District*, 2002.
 Courtesy National Print Gallery, London.



38. LANDSCAPE NEAR LITTON. The stone walls criss-crossing the fields are typical of much of Derbyshire. The village of Litton, a mile south of Tideswell, was the home of the ancestors of the Earls of Lytton and the birthplace of William Bagshaw, the Nonconformist divine called the 'Apostle of the Peak'.



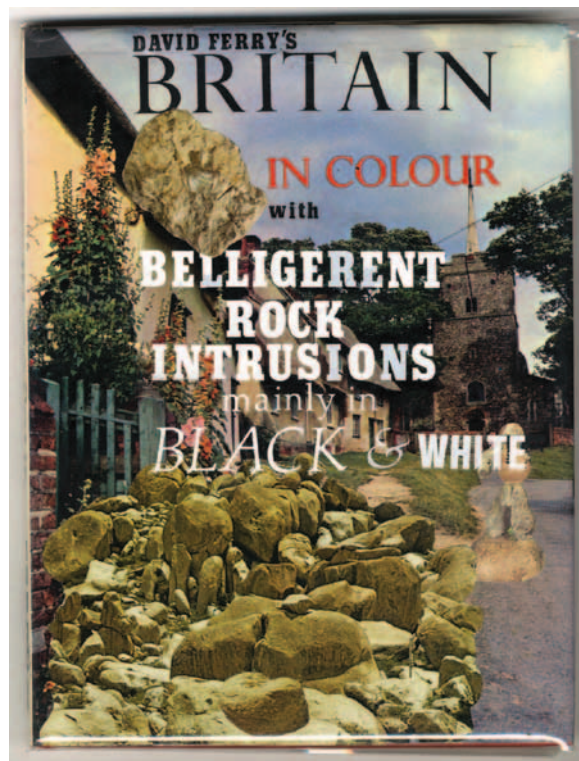
© David Ferry:
book jacket:
*Aquariums in
English Country
Houses*, Artists
Book, containing
original
photomontages
from the defaced
plates inside
the original
publication, 2008-
2010. Collection
National Art
Library at the
Victoria & Albert
Museum, London,
purchased 2011.



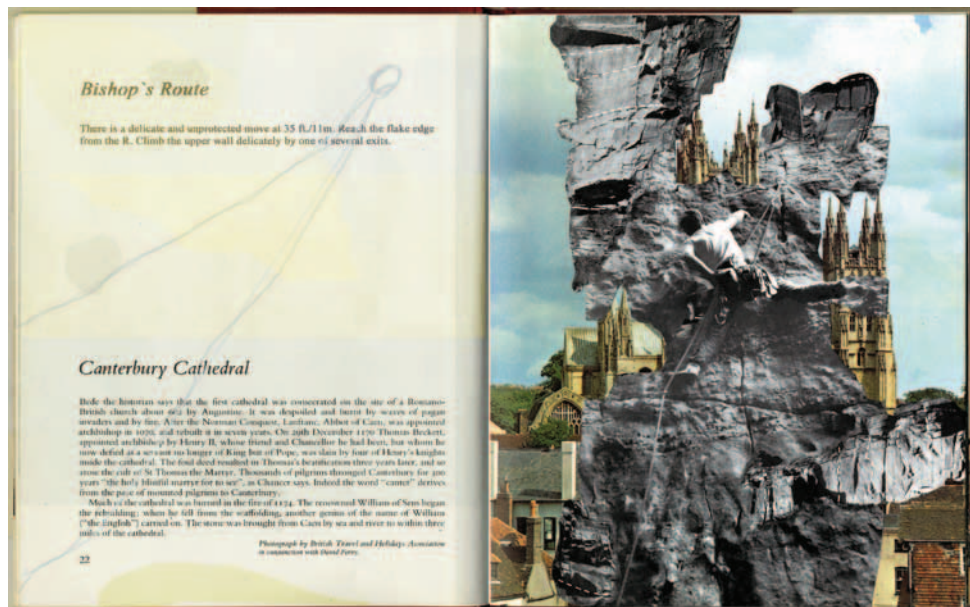
© David Ferry:
*The Aquarium,
Petworth, 2011*



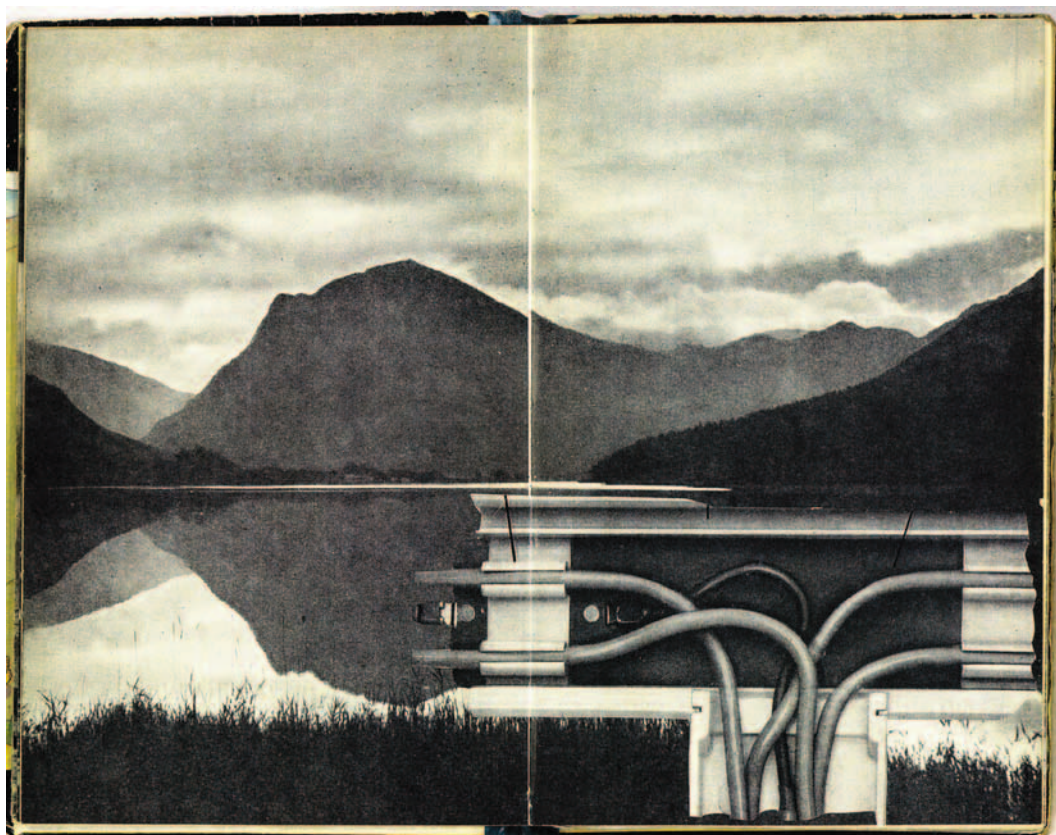
© David Ferry: *The
Aquarium, Woburn
Abbey, 2011*



© David Ferry: *Belligerent Rock Intrusions: Mainly in Black and White*. Original dust cover of artist's book 2008/9. The Ginsberg Archive, Johannesburg, RSA.



© David Ferry: *Canterbury Cathedral*, from *Belligerent Rock Intrusions*, 2009/10. Archival Inkjet print on hand-made paper. Print from original montage.



© David Ferry: *Derwent Water* original photomontage from the artist's book work *The Lake District*, 1995. Collection Flaxman Library, Art Institute of Chicago, USA.

Creebridge Caravan Park

Armando Jongejan FRPS

Armando Jongejan has visited the UK many times, sometimes for photography, sometimes for family holidays. In 2009, Armando went to south-western Scotland to a campsite in Newton Stewart. When he arrived he was surprised. The atmosphere was completely different from what he was used to in caravan parks. The experience was strange; it felt like something was 'weird', but he could not explain it. The laundry room and toilet blocks were a little old, although well-painted and clean. After two days he started to photograph around the campsite. The owner of the campsite, John Sharples, saw him with his camera and tripod. He was surprised that Armando was taking photos. After his explanation about the atmosphere, Mr. Sharples explained why the campsite was different.

During World War II, Creebridge Caravan Park in Newton Stewart, Dumfries & Galloway was a prisoner-of-war camp. In 1941 the camp was called "Holm Park Camp, Newton Stewart, Camp No.113", and it was used for Italian prisoners of war. The Italian prisoners were repatriated to Italy in 1943. The camp then housed German prisoners of the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht. After the war in 1945, the camp became a displaced persons camp for Soviet refugees coming from former Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In 1964 the camp became a campsite. Original parts of the prisoner-of-war-camp were still visible in 2009. The roads were built by Italian prisoners - in the concrete you can see the name "Italy 43". The guard tower is not in use, but overlooks the campsite. The storage room/garage is an original barrack with the original fire buckets posed in front. The house/reception was the prison for violent prisoners. The phone box

was formerly the sentry-box, and the foundations of the barracks are used for static caravans. The laundry room was built in 1968.

John Sharples has owned the campsite since 1998. Sometimes he meets old prisoners from the former camp days. At the reception desk he has a framed black & white photo to show those interested in the history of the camp site.

After Armando made his 'stills', he knew that he had missed taking one important photograph for the series. He needed to make

a portrait of the owner in front of the reception building. One evening he was able to convince Mr. Sharples to stand outside the reception building, and pose with the old, framed black & white photo from World War II days.

Sources: John Sharples and the *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)*











Burial

Caroline Silverwood Taylor ARPS

This work was made in a direct response to my mother's death in July 2010. I found a photograph of her that I had taken ten years earlier just after my father died. I submerged the photograph in water and then froze it. Then I re-photographed the photograph beneath the ice, at intervals, allowing the ice to crack and melt, and then freeze again. The resulting images symbolise my feelings and thoughts about death, memory and loss.

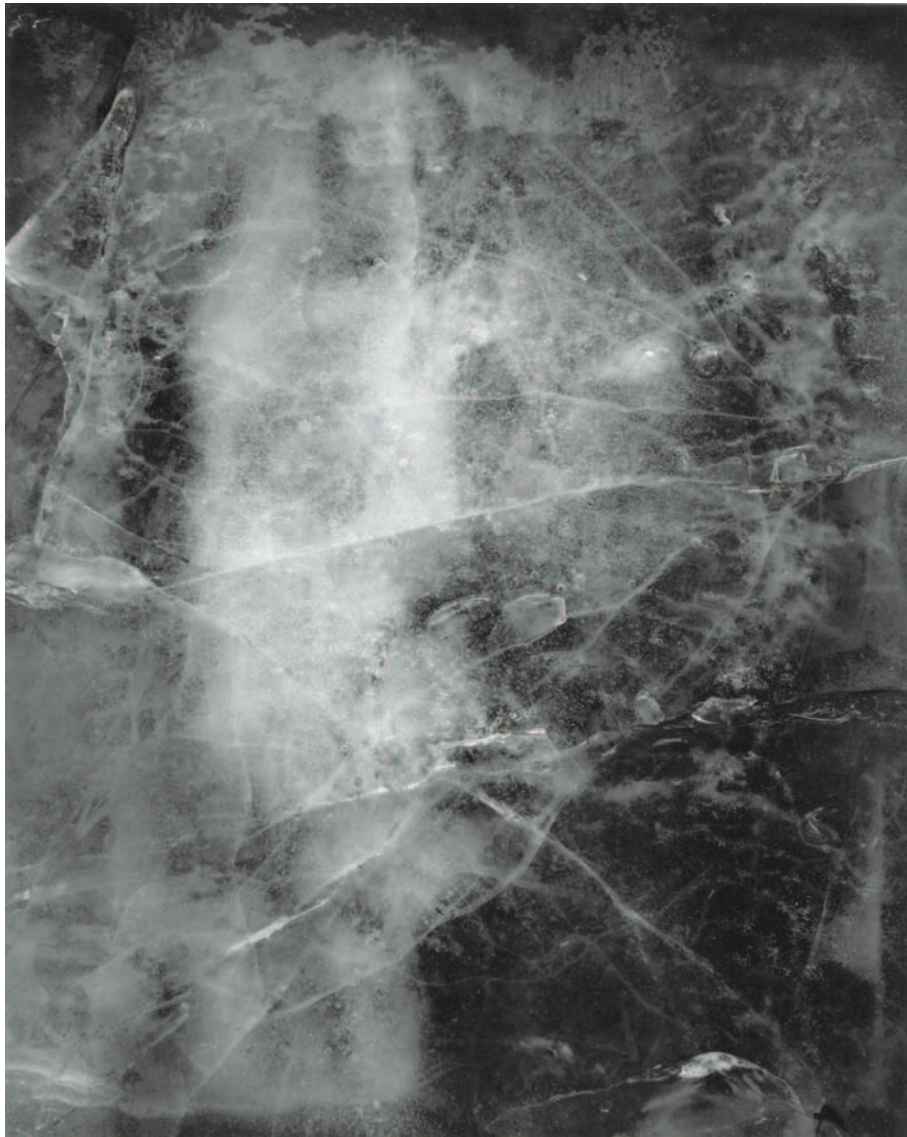
The attention of the viewer shifts between the icy surface of the image and the underlying shape of the human face beneath, which is beginning to lose its identity and shape. The ice forms a window on my mother's face but it is also a barrier: just penetrable by gaze, but impenetrable by touch.

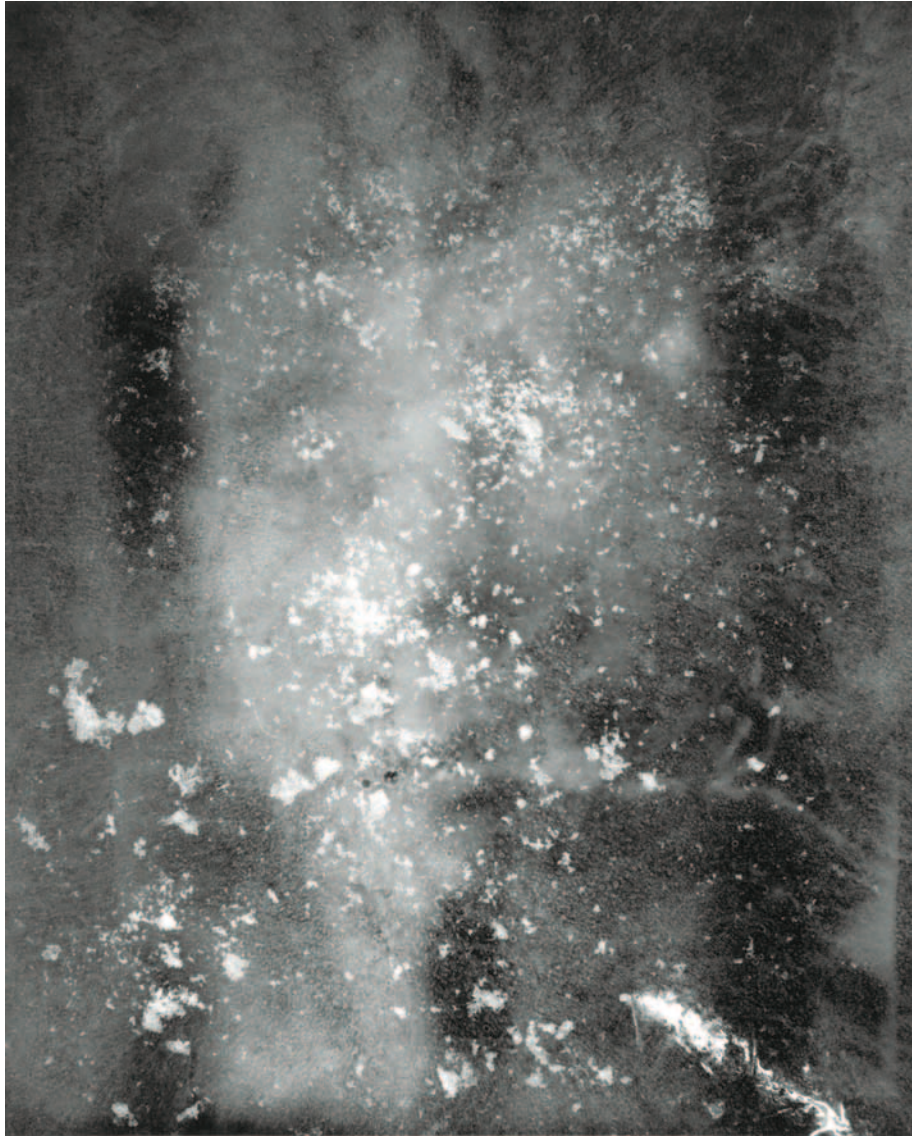
Ice has many associations; it is hard, cold and fixed, smooth and slippery; it has some of the properties of glass (alluding to the tendency to put pictures of loved ones behind glass); it is a preservative; it kills. Objects can be kept safe in ice but they can also be trapped. As water freezes it expands, and like water, ice warps what we view through it.

The repetitive nature of re-photographing the photograph beneath ice is significant because it echoes the nature of remembering. The same memory shifts with time and changes according to mood and context.

In order to come to terms with and move on from the death of a loved one, we need to cultivate a small shard of ice in our hearts. We need to put a barrier of coldness between us and them. Placing my mother's photograph below ice is, both literally and metaphorically, a form of burial.









Ice on Regent Park's Lake

Winter Water Colours

The project exploits optical processes in nature – reflection, refraction and caustics from natural focusing that act on a water surface. Here in first phase, colour harmony is explored in a natural theatre between water and waterfowl. I chose Regent's Park where I noticed colour patterns in the water made by reflections of the sky and diverse flora.⁽¹⁾

The Regent's Park project crystallised after visiting the lake in winter. At the solstice, the sun rises above the surrounding buildings at eight o'clock. Anticyclonic weather gives crisp frosty air and light or no wind. The clear blue sky is veined by contrails from aircraft flying in to Heathrow. The early sunlight shines on the lake like a searchlight illuminating the surrounding trees

and bushes. The reflections of the flora paint the lake in brilliant colours. The winter light at sunrise also shines on the birds, bringing out the colours in their feathers. This is the breeding season, so their plumage is at its most showy.

Focusing on the colours of the birds and the colours in the water surface, my intention was to produce a set of photographs, each with a different chromatic harmony between the two ingredients: the bird and its surrounding water. The birds are mostly static, like the bathers in classical paintings. I was familiar with colour theory developed by painters, for example, Gury's *Color for Painters*.⁽²⁾ In some images the water colours echo those in the birds' plumage; in other they contrast with it. The



John D Woods

photographs were taken during two winters (2003/2004 and 2004/2005) when an anticyclone had settled over London. The results of the project can be seen in the Blurb book that I made *Winter Water Colours* (www.blurb.com/books/3303252).

The concept developed for the Regent's Park project - an actor (the bird) on a colourfully-lit stage (the lake) - was used in other situations. In the next project, the actor is a swimmer and the stage is the open sea during the Mediterranean summer solstice at noon. The book, *The Joy of Swimming*, illustrates the sensual, visual and intellectual pleasures enjoyed in swimming, as well as the science behind the patterns created by the different refracted light sources (www.blurb.com/

[books/1350244](http://www.blurb.com/books/1350244)). The third book *Spring Water Colours* (www.blurb.com/books/3763111) explores the art and science of natural focusing in seascapes using swimmers again. I'm currently developing a fourth project for this series which depicts small boats and kayaks surrounded by colourful water on the Riviera - again, images that illustrate the effects of optics, without a political or social message.

1. Planted in 1830 by the Royal Botanic Society with the intention of rivalling Kew Gardens. A recent census recorded six hundred birds with an astonishing ninety species. The waterfowl centre at Regent's Park supplies all eight Royal Parks.
2. Al Gury. *Color for painters: a guide to traditions and practice*. New York: Watson-Guptyl, 2010



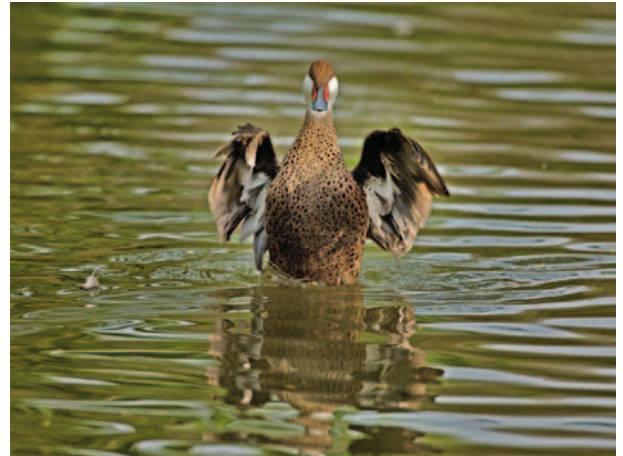
American Wigeon



Tufted Duck



Moorhen



Red-crested Pochard



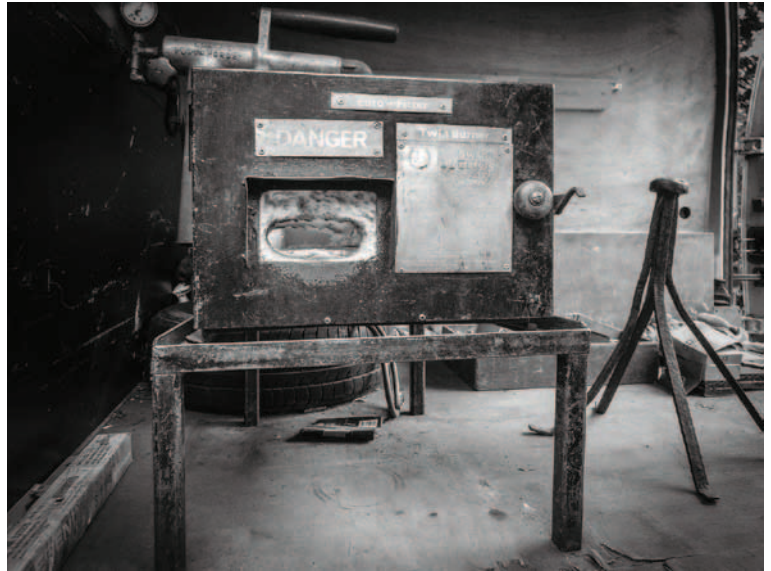
Mallards

The Mobile Farrier

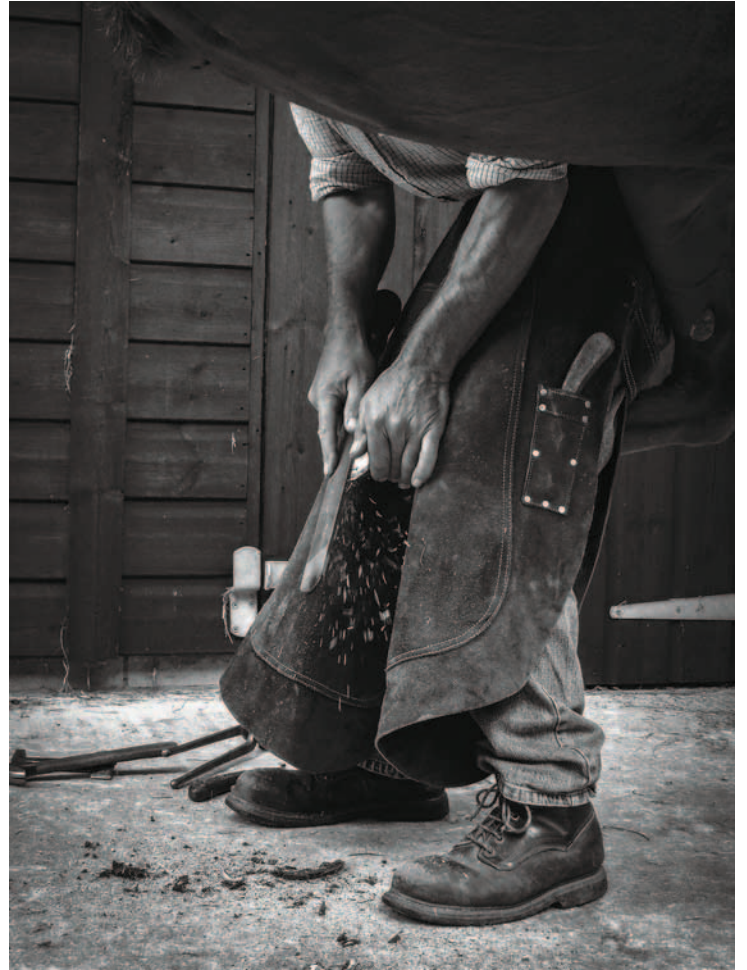
Lesley Treloar ARPS

Ever since I can remember, I have always loved and ridden horses, but particularly now I love to photograph them in all aspects of their lives. It was while visiting a friend when the Mobile Farrier from Hidden Lizard arrived on one of his home visits to shoe Paddy. They say that the best camera is the one that's with you; well, the one I had that day was a very small Nikon compact, but it proved to be good for the job in hand. In fact, it is quite liberating and a great way to explore a new idea, and perhaps challenge the camera to see if it can deliver - it is just like having a sketchbook to take notes and play around with a few ideas.

The farrier had a gas-fired furnace in the rear of his van and a stock of ready-made shoes in various sizes; everything he needed as though in a traditional forge. I could not help but imagine what the farriers of 100 years ago would have made of this. In a way, nothing has changed in the method of his craft, just the ability to go wherever and anywhere required.







Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man: Photographs of Samuel Beckett by John Minihan

Michael White

The glasses are for reading, for close work, for eyes now more suited to the far distance. Folded and clenched, the best they can do is look at the floor, trying to bring into view a tiny slipped foot that could be miles away and certainly not big enough to support a literary giant. As is the case with many images of writers, John Minihan's Beckett is rarely seen with the instrument of his craft. The act of writing, hardly the most photogenic of practices, takes place off scene. Pen stays mainly in pocket. The erotics of modern author portraiture demand either the before or the after, a build up of concentration or a moment of relaxation

after the work is done. On the edge of a bed yet to be slept in, the courtship between photographer and subject begins. Glasses are removed but not put down. The right hand hangs on, so intent on staying clothed by what it grips that the ring finger must flex or purchase on the knee. The finger looks spastic, delinquent, arthritic even, but it's the only thing stopping the further slide of the hand towards the dismal world of the slipper, a route its partner seems intent on taking, caterpillaring down a trouser leg. For the

time being, right hand keeps the carpet at arm's length, observing it through spectacles wielded like a magnifying glass that miniaturizes the world until put near enough for gross detail.

Moving up and away, denuded of glasses whose imprint it still bears, the face is not sure where to look. The concentration of furrows across the brow point down with all the clarity of an arrow, as suggests the angle of the head also, but the eyes have a different idea. It's little wonder that they usually need the assistance of spectacles to compete with the size of the other sensory organs in evidence. (Beckett



© John Minihan, *Close-up of Beckett's Hands*, Room 604, Hyde Park Hotel, London, 1980

chose a profile shot as his first publicity photograph but was soon able to dispense with standing out quite so obviously.)⁽¹⁾ If weren't that his head seems to rise forever upwards, the ear would look animal in elongation. And all of this propped up on the sparsest of armatures.

As the veins in his hands show, he has been sitting like this for awhile, not in a state of inspiration but one of intense thought: concentration rather than rapture. Although not columnar, he is nonetheless stiffened into

a monument. With both arms extended identically, he has become something of a sphinx. The faint ribbing and weave in his jumper and trousers might hint at skin and bones beneath but, by and large, the high contrast of the photograph creates a single weightless, black shape of them, one which frames his hands below and face above. This silhouette carves Beckett out from the everyday stuff of the room around him. We do not really need to know that this is a hotel room or to scrutinize the anonymous textiles and furniture which occupy it in order to sense that Beckett is not at home here. Nor is he, as so many writers find themselves when photographed, pinned against the bookshelves of his study. Apart from the bending sheets of books cast aside on the bed, the symbolic register of writing has been dispensed with. His head is neatly mounted by the window frame to the right and bedstead below, occupying the most privileged space of the photograph, not just the full top third but the only area of blank background available. Not heady but still all head.

In this improvised studio, light falls onto the subject from the front, etching the lines into his face, and from behind, eradicating obvious shadows and clipping the edge of his forehead, making it flush with the force of his deliberation. Placing face against space not only isolates it from the room and makes it so much the centre of our attention; it allows the photographer to burn in every wrinkle and whisker, concentrating the force of the enlarger's bulb onto this spot. The plane of focus passes through the eyes whose sharpness is enhanced by the

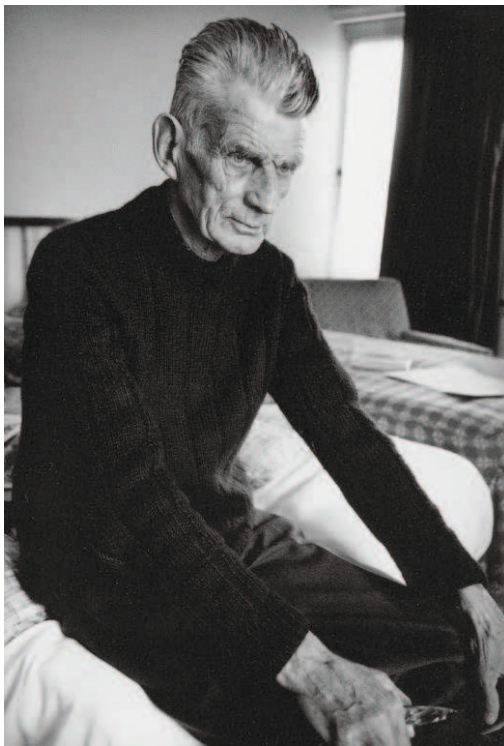
already blurred right hand in front and edge of bed behind. Fully present in this photograph is only the countenance. Although stilled, Beckett's face is all action, composing itself, ear, nose, eyes, lips all busy seeking his image.

Although Minihan's photography is one of candidness and informality, of which the setting speaks volumes, these images remain heavily encoded in the conventions of the portrait. From its nineteenth-century inception

on, photography has always taken on the task that painting and sculpture had pursued for centuries, that of providing insight into the character of the individual subject. How might we read the person from the face? Rather than putting the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and physiognomy out of business, photography was their richest fertilizer. The demand for images of notable personalities was unabated. Each edition of Goupil's weekly *Galerie Contemporaine* featured a portrait photograph of a leading public figure accompanied by a short life story. Years earlier, Nadar (one of the photographers who contributed regularly to *Galerie Contemporaine*) created the *Panthéon*, a large lithograph comprising 270 notable faces. In this collection of the great and good, the exceptionality of

such cultural celebrities was intended to be legible from their physical appearance. The cold glare of the camera exposed their human weaknesses at the very moment it asserted their genius.

Beckett was fortunate to have a phizog more fascinating than his poor character Moll, a photograph of whom Macmann "carried with him and contemplated



© John Minihan, *Beckett Sitting on a Bed in Room 604, Hyde Park Hotel, London, 1980*

from time to time.” Instead of her, what Macmann “liked best in this picture was the chair, the seat of which seemed to be made of straw. Diligently Moll pressed her lips together, in order to hide her great buck-teeth. The roses must have been pretty, they must have scented the air. In the end Macmann tore up this photograph and threw the bits in the air, one windy day”.⁽²⁾ This is certainly not the only occasion where Beckett has violence done to photographs in his writing.⁽³⁾ In this instance, it appears to be precisely the inability of photography to make the person present that leads to its disdain and destruction. While it had offered so much material for the study of character, photography’s use in the developing field of pathognomy (the study of emotions) had broken the spell and revealed the face to be just a mask which could adopt any number of forms, none of which might be ‘true’ to the person.⁽⁴⁾ While Nadar was photographing the famous, his brother took pictures of an anonymous old man whose paralyzed face was provoked into expressions with electrodes. Was any of what he appeared to be feeling actually what he felt? It was precisely photography’s ability to seize the momentary that made it complicit in dissemblance. Like Moll, we hide the bits of us we dislike and in doing so the images of our diligent performances become less interesting than furniture.

The twentieth century’s response to the crisis of reading identity from exterior characteristics was, paradoxically, the cultivation of the blank look, the mug shot, the cheerless photo booth format which guarantees that I am who I look like precisely through renunciation of expression. While the deadpan view was taken to its apogee in the aesthetics of an Andy Warhol, some still sought faces that could not lie, be they Paul Strand’s blind woman, Diane Arbus’ photos of the mentally ill, or Walker Evans’ photos of unsuspecting and often catatonic subway commuters. In his narration of his encounter with Beckett, Minihan tells how their meeting was mediated by the author’s interest in Minihan’s images of the small town of Athy in County Kildare which he took to show

him (these are probably what we see strewn on the bed), including “a sequence on the wake of Kathy Tyrell at Sam’s suggestion” that would have included images of the deceased.⁽⁵⁾ What could be more expressionless than the face of a dead person whose inertness is made



© John Minihan, *Beckett at a Café, Paris, 1985*

all the more compelling by the warm throb of mourners around her? Here is a mask that cannot dissemble, a surface explicit as such but still there to be read. It might have reminded Beckett of one of his first musings on photography: “I had seen faces in photographs I might have found beautiful had I known even vaguely in what beauty was supposed to consist. And my father’s face, on his death-bolster, had seemed to hint at some form of aesthetics relevant to man. But the faces of the living, all grimace and flush, can they be described as objects?”⁽⁶⁾

Photography can turn faces into objects, but not when they have already suffered rigor mortis. It is not without reason that it is a practice that has been compared to

mummification or the taking of a death mask.⁽⁷⁾ Would it surprise anybody to know that the era of photography's dawn was also the high point of production of these "undying faces" shaped when "the blood is yet warm and the muscles still in action," so that "the face is transfigured as if in a final glow of youth"?⁽⁸⁾ Beckett is prepared to undergo this alteration, to lose his grimace and become an un-likeness.

The courtship initiated in London is consummated in Paris, a café rendezvous where the two empty cups and full ashtray tell us about an exchange that has already taken place. Neither in the hubbub of the interior nor out on the street, our table is in the DMZ of the terrace where Beckett can comfortably remain completely bundled up in heavy coat and scarf, and shrouded in the warmer glow of artificial light. A bulb flames just behind his ear and merges into the back of his head, bouncing its beam out the other side onto the roof of the canopy. The left hand is once again making to leave; it wants to push up out of the chair, but we don't want to listen to it and keep it covered in darkness. The right hand will not relinquish a prop, still not a pen but this time a cigarette. It is extended toward us, more animated than the face of its owner whose attention has drifted to nowhere. The neckless head nestles in the folds of the scarf but keeps floating off it towards us; the camera's focus brings it closer to us than the outstretched hand. Lamps, eyes, arm, and hand are all aligned along a powerful diagonal that turns the shoulders inward as much as it pushes the face outward. It puts a big cross at the point where this image stops being a photograph and becomes a portrait, tears it up, and throws it to the wind.

1. For a thorough account of Beckett's use of photographs of himself through his career see Stephen John Dilks, *Portraits of Beckett as a Famous Writer*. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29.4. (2006): 161–188.
2. Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, in Molloy, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*. London: John Calder, 1959: 281.

3. A similar act of tearing and scattering takes place in *A Piece of Monologue* (1979) in Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London & Boston, MA: Faber & Faber, 1990: 426.
4. See Robert Sobieszek, *Ghost in the Shell: Photography and the Human Soul, 1850–2000*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999: 41–51.
5. John Minihan, *Photographing Beckett*, in John Minihan, *Samuel Beckett: Photographs*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1995: 23.
6. Samuel Beckett, *First Love* (1946), in *The Expelled/The Calmative/The End with First Love*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber, 2009), 73.
7. Georg Kolbe, *How Death Masks are Taken*, in Ernst Benkard, *Undying Faces: A Collection of Death Masks*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929: 43.
8. André Bazin, *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* in *What is Cinema?*, v.1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967: 14; Susan Sontag, *On Photography* London: Penguin Books, 1977: 154.

Editor's note: Permission given to omit Michael White's analysis between photography and caricature. To read this please see *Modernism/modernity*, v.18/4, November 2011, pp. 833-837. Article originally published in *Beckett in Photographs* by John Minihan as part of Samuel Beckett: *Out of the Archive* International Conference and Festival, University of York, November 2010.

Making Meudon

Alan Organ

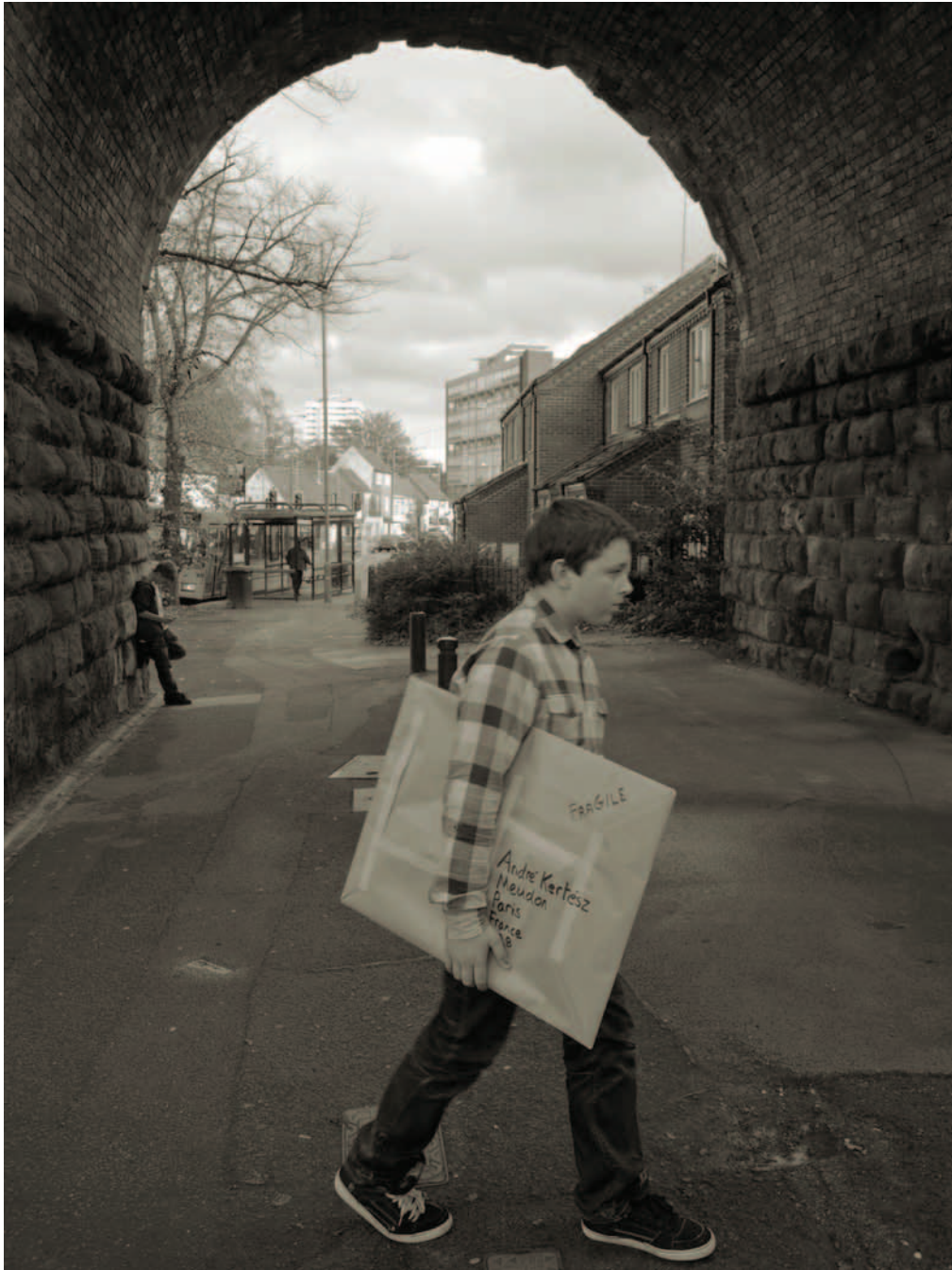
My twentieth-century image, *Spon End 2011 (Coventry)* was influenced by the André Kertész photograph *Meudon*, (1928).

The teenager with the parcel and teenager with the mobile phone are posed by me, but the rest of the scene captured the moment when the bus arrived, for which we planned and waited. The bus is my replacement for a train.

Like Kertész, after thinking about an idea, I visited the spot a couple of times and took some preparation photographs without the people. At first I considered the idea of photographing a scene encompassing the whole arch with a train going over the top, but what with the wide spans of Spon End Arches and busy road, the framing just didn't work for me. It was then that I considered moving in closer, concentrating on one paved arch and waiting for a bus rather than a train.

Like *Meudon*, my image gives the viewer a choice of what the subject might be. Is it either of the two teenagers, the bus, the parcel, the imposing railway arch, the mix of architecture from different ages (including the 1960s wing topped block of flats), the cloudy sky, the figure walking away from the bus or the mere fact that someone has left their wheelie bin out on the pavement?

The lines in the tarmac wind their way down through the arch and around the bend to the right, bringing all the elements of the photograph together for that one moment in Spon End's time.



Winter, by Jeffrey Conley

Book Review

Donald Stewart FRPS

Why is it that I, along with many others, choose winter as my favourite season of the year? Why do I prefer this over the sheer exuberance of spring, the riot that is summer, even here in Scotland, or the fecundity and charm of autumn? It has to do with the apparent simplicity and uncomplicated nature of winter, though nothing in nature is ever simple or uncomplicated, and the ability of photography to capture this more effectively than other seasons of the year.

Jeffrey Conley has caught much of this feeling and more. He captures not only the stark sharp edges of winter, the sense of isolation and individualisation which winter brings, the greater delineation of a more monochromatic landscape, but also the exquisite beauty of form revealed, the subtle variation in microtone and texture brought about by snow, frost and fog. This is not a book of grand landscape or of overdone chocolate box images of winter. It is an exploration, very personal, over a period of years of the elements which comprise winter. Neither is it a book of high key images. Conley has chosen his light carefully to produce, in the main, photographs of superb tonality and subtlety. The book is an object lesson on the effective use of black & white photography.

There is a tranquillity and stillness in all of the images - the feeling which comes in those best of days when the photographer feels at one with the environment. A stillness and tranquillity of mind and soul as much as subject matter. Many of the images would sit comfortably and convincingly alongside the minimalist music of Adams, Reich, Riley and Glass. Like this music, the images are a combination of the almost imperceptible variation and the unexpected which produce the most lasting impact. Indeed, Conley follows in the tradition of the great American landscape photographers such as Watkins, O'Sullivan, Jackson, Muybridge and Adams.

Perhaps a book for quiet introspection but nonetheless one which reminds me of a central tenet of photography; when the image is strong enough few if any words of explanation are needed.

Winter, Jeffrey Conley, Nazraeli Press, Portland, OR, 2011



© Jeffrey Conley

Welland's Past in the Present

Patricia Bashforth

I visited Welland, Ontario in May 2007, staying with friends from the Italian community, themselves inter-married with people from the Scottish and French communities, all with connections to the city's declining industrial past.

The "Rose City" gives its name to the Welland Canal, linking Lake Erie to Lake Ontario across the Niagara Peninsula. The first canal was built in 1829. The Welland Ship Canal that passes through the city today was the fourth and largest of successive canals and opened in 1932, taking ocean-going vessels right through the heart of Welland.

The building of the canal attracted an immigrant population of English, Irish, Scottish and French families. Industry followed the canal: iron, steel, and engineering. The Plymouth Cordage Company brought in and housed a community of skilled workers, mostly French, to make twine for harvesting and rope for every occasion. New waves of immigrants followed to build the nearby Niagara Power Plant: Italians, Croatians, Hungarians, Poles and Germans.

In 1973, the canal was re-aligned to the east of Welland, to become part of the St Lawrence Seaway. The by-passed canal is now the recreational heart of the City, where once it was the economic life-blood. Old industries are a memory, though Welland proudly celebrates its multi-ethnic heritage. On the canal side is a memorial

to the builders and their families, with the many nations represented in the sponsors' names captured in its walkway.

In 1988, in a spirit of regeneration and reinvention, the community invited Canadian artists to paint Welland's history on giant outdoor murals across town. The murals have become the cultural heart of the city and are now themselves the target of efforts at conservation and renewal.

My images of the murals and those along the canal aim to capture the spirit of this past as it is echoed in the present. However, my use of photography is conceptual rather than documentary. I frequently use close-up in order to dislocate perception and challenge expectations as to what a photograph might reveal.

In a similarly conceptual way I respond to the environment verbally, by translating that response into text. The text here relates to the *Four Elements*, and the foundation history of Rose City as it continues to reinvent itself: the earth which was excavated in its creation, the water which provided its life-blood, the fire at the heart of its industry and the air framed by its bridges and that oxygenates the people's memories.

Bibliography: Jerry Gibb, *A Festival of Canadian Art: Welland's Giant Outdoor Murals* (Welland, Ontario, 1991)
http://www.infoniagara.com/attractions/murals_of_welland/index.aspx (accessed 10 January 2013)







The Elements

EARTH

once I walked there
shovels pounding
burdened
with blackened soil

hands reaching
towards a landscape
that is just beginning

WATER

once I walked there
shales and sand
grains on the surface

individual stones
once pounded
now tiptoe
beneath the water

FIRE

once I walked there
sunsets of ochred metal
textured droplets of
steam and dust

conversations
merged into
languages of sound

AIR

once I walked there
towering statues
of coiled lines

strains of skylights
float
beyond memories



GROUP EVENTS

- January 29-February 10 Exhibition of *Grays Pick-your-Own Farm* photographs by Brian Steptoe. Norden Farm Gallery, Maidenhead. see www.nordenfarm.org for opening times.
- February 10 Contemporary South West meeting, Cornwall. Venue and time tba. Contact Rod Fry, email rod@rodry.eclipse.co.uk, tel 01803 844721 (after 7pm)
- March 1-29 Contemporary Group exhibit as part of the RPS Special Interest Groups exhibition at Fenton House, Bath
- March 16 *Photography and the Book*, in conjunction with the RPS, Chetham's Library, Long Millgate, Manchester M3 1SB. Approx.10.30 - 5.00, Dewi Lewis, Chris Coekin, other speakers and cost TBA. Contact Bob Gates ARPS, bob@robertgates.eu
- March 18 Contemporary North West meeting. Days Inn, Charnock Richard Services, M6 between J27 and 28. Contact Ian Maxwell mail@ihmaxwell.com, tel 01524 770278. New website address is www.contemporarynorthwest.co.uk
- March 22-24 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
- March 23 **Group AGM. Grafton Hotel, Tottenham Court Road, London. Start time 2 pm.**
A short AGM followed by a talk from our guest speaker, Liz Hingley who will present her *Under Gods and The Jones Family* projects.
- April 6 Contemporary North East. Meeting at Strensall Village Hall, Strensall, York YO32 5XW 2pm. Speaker - Rod Fry ARPS, Deputy Chair of Contemporary Group. Contact: Nigel Tooby nigel@mogulimage.co.uk tel: 01924 274100 and 07817 416286
- April 12-14 *Seeing Photographically*; workshop by Maria Falconer FRPS and Paul Hill MBE in Epping Forest at Zinc Arts, Chipping Ongar, Essex, See www.hillonphotography.co.uk/workshops.php
- May 20 Contemporary North West meeting. Contact and location as above.
- June 16 Contemporary South West meeting, Devon venue and time tba. Contact as above.
- Oct 12-13 **ADVANCE NOTICE. Contemporary Group weekend event. Reading College, Kings Road, Reading RG1 4HJ**

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Too much time to think, © Paul Hill MBE. Paul Hill was the first Chair of the Group when it was formed in 1989 and also chaired the Contemporary Distinctions assessment panel at that time. See Events page for forthcoming workshop.