



Independent Photography in the South East

IPSE Newsletter No 69. December 2011



Grace Lau at the Rawson Institute

George Redgrave

Jill's bit

We are twenty-one next year, unbelievable. Your committee thought we should celebrate in some way. Any ideas? Or any offers of help? We will be having a meeting to plan an event and will of course let you all know what we decide. We went to Crawley on the Sunday morning of Mike Seaborne's workshop – rather reluctantly. It was Mike's idea and proved a good one. We were lucky to have George Redgrave to show us some of the best bits of Crawley. It is a long time since we have gone out on a field trip at a workshop. Perhaps we should do it more often.

I look forward to our next workshop next year with Graham Murrell. In the last newsletter I mentioned the project and exhibition of work he has made at Blackwell, the Arts and Crafts House in Cumbria. I mention it again as he has just set up another exhibition of different parts of the work. So if you are lucky enough to be in Cumbria the exhibition is on until 31st December.

I have seen very few exhibitions, but I did go along to the V & A and saw their two shows. You have to be persistent to find the upstairs show of early pictures. It is worth seeing, but nothing very new in its approach. There was a very good and generous review in the Guardian. This exhibition is on for 18 months, a really long time. This leaves the downstairs show free to show more recent work. I was disappointed in the two shows.

Lastly what a pleasure to get John Blakemore's tome, *Photographs 1955 to 2010*.

A weighty volume, but so much to fit in. So much that brought back happy memories of workshops at the Photographer's Place, but also much that I had not seen before. Some of his early colour work as well as more recent and of course some of his hand made books were there. Quite a feast.

Future Events

Last Wednesday evening in the month

25th January, 28th March

Last Thursday afternoon in the month

23rd February

No meeting in April due to the weekend workshop

Saturday Workshop at Rawson Institute, Bolney

Mary Maclean will lead this one for us. Graham Murrell suggested Mary as he and Kathryn Faulkner both know her and her work. Graham thought her approach to photographing internal and external space would be a good lead into the weekend workshop at Micklepage he is leading for us.

Mary is an artist working with photography. Her work "explores the representations of the experience of place, questioning the relationship between the photographic image and the subjective experience of socialised, architectural space".

She teaches at Reading University. She has shown her work in many solo exhibitions and has participated in even more group shows.

Don't forget to bring a packed lunch. Also some work if you wish.

Date	Saturday 3rd March
Time	9.30 for 10.30 start
Cost	£20

Spring weekend at Micklepage

This will be a workshop with a difference. We are planning a more practical workshop than usual, making photos around Micklepage, the buildings the grounds, everywhere. It was felt that we would need someone to lead this and give some guidance. We don't want everyone dashing off to that very photogenic chapel. Who better to do this than Graham Murrell? Most of you know that he has made many bodies of work in interesting houses and grounds. His work with Kathryn Faulkner about Kettle's Yard is a delight. He has recently completed a project on the Arts and Craft House, Blackwell in Cumbria. He also made work in the New Art Centre Sculpture Park, near

Salisbury. He made a body of work *Silence* in a place dedicated to sound, Snape Maltings at Aldeburgh. His work is an exploration of light and space, qualities that will be of great help in our exploration of the atmosphere of Micklepage.

He will talk about and show us his own work. But he will also discuss with us how best to approach an exploration of Micklepage, what makes us feel such delight each time we visit the place. Maybe the project will end with a book, who knows? We do hope for good weather, but the joy is there even when the weather is poor.

Date	Saturday 28th to Sunday 29th April (Option to come Friday evening)
Time	9.30 for 10.30 start to 5 pm Sunday
Cost	£120 (members) £130 (non members)

Mike Seaborne Workshop, 17th/18th September *By George Redgrave*

What was the high point of the weekend? Some readers will pale ... a visit to Crawley!

Mike Seaborne was, until recently, the senior curator of photographs at the Museum of London where he has worked for some thirty years. He said that his role was probably unique in the United Kingdom as he not only had care of the photographic collection and the responsibility to enlarge it, but also the opportunity to enlarge it with his own photographs. He was a photographer/curator.

To start with he showed us photographs he had taken many years ago in the Kings Cross area with the iconic gas holders. In 1980 the West India Docks were closed, the cranes were still but there were still a few ships in port, their crews unsure what was going to happen. Mike realised that this was a photo opportunity on a grand scale. At that time he was using a 5x4 camera to achieve first class black-and-white images; later he used colour film and has now moved on to a Canon 5D digital SLR. He has a special adapter which allows him to move the lens and take three photographs which he stitches together to give a 60 Megapixel image.

Most of Mike's photography is of the urban scene so he was keen to visit the 'New Town' of Crawley as he'd never been there before. So on a fine Sunday morning we drove over and climbed to the top of the multi-storey car park above the shopping centre. We looked out across the town and Mike told us that this would be his first shot with a plane taking off in the distance. He didn't have a camera with him and he said that his practice was to reconnoitre a place first before taking any photographs - we weren't so restrained. Later we strolled through the town centre, built in the fifties, and on to the

High Street which has a wide range of buildings from the fifteenth century to the present day. We looked at the old parish church and then drove to West Green shops to see one of the earliest of the New Town neighbourhoods. All the while Mike was pointing out how he would photograph the town. I know the place well, having lived in Crawley for over fifty years but Mike was able to help me and the rest of the group to see it with the stranger's eye. It was a memorable trip ... part of another splendid IPSE weekend.



Josephine Evans

Crows



Mike Seaborne

Jeff Hutchinson

Mike Seaborne *David Malarkey*

Dr John Watson was frequently amazed by his friend's knowledge of the more obscure streets of London. We had much the same sensation when Mike Seaborne showed us his work. At the time, Mike was Curator of Photography at the Museum of London. Not merely a curator, his own photographs are an important contribution to their archive. He has been photographing London for more than thirty years, in various formats, and seems to have tramped almost everywhere. Showing a view of some long-demolished street, he could name the street, when he had taken the picture and probably what had replaced it. Although these are photographs of streets, they are not 'street photography' in the sense that the phrase is currently used. Street photography seems to be concerned with the transient accidents of human interaction and Mike is dealing with London itself.

We had to curtail our usual viewing of participants' work to indulge in a field expedition to Crawley, shepherded by our trusty native guide, George. Crawley is not a name to make the heart sing and the scene around the station is particularly dreary, like a discarded set for *Blade Runner*. Nevertheless, we followed Mike and George around the town, with Mike picking out vantage points and composing pictures in his head. Before he uses a camera, he determines the exact tripod placing, the angle of view, the lens, and the significant details of the scene that he wants to be recorded.

Not only that but the optimum time of day, and in one case, the time of year are assessed. This is a very long way from photographing one's own internal sensations although clearly the process is not without feeling.

I should add that parts of Crawley are not as bad as I suggest, so my initial prejudice is not justified. No doubt one could become quite fond of it.

This workshop and Brian Griffin's workshop seem to have sharpened our appetites for practical things and there are plans afoot to have workshops where we have rather less passive sitting down and rather more practical work to do. We shall see...

Tackling the Urban Photography Project for Micklepage.

September 2011.

Comments from Anthea Clarke



Anytown

Anthea Clarke

When Jill first emailed the Urban Photography Project from Mike Seaborne I gave the final paragraph a cursory read, decided it looked pretty straightforward and put it on one side until nearer the time. Nearer the time came. I read it through from start to finish and revised my initial impression of 'straightforward'. Mulling it over for few days produced a couple of ideas but before embarking upon any photography I had a look at Mike's website to see what his photos were all about. Ideas 1 and 2, views from a London bus and pictures taken within a mile radius of a central point, were immediately jettisoned as he had clearly got there before me and the excellent results were there for all to see. Idea 3 had yet to be born but then I had occasion to visit Swindon, notorious for its ghastliness, which set me thinking about the small market towns in Britain which over the last few decades have been rendered more or less unrecognisable by the town planners. Thus I decided to photograph my local example, Woking. In my pictures I have tried to convey

the fact that it has been robbed, in the name of progress, of any character it might once have had and in both the shops and the streets could now be Anytown, South East England. Given that the pictures were shot around midday on a Friday the place seemed strangely deserted, presumably due to the current economic problems. I think it will be very interesting to see what happens to these places, particularly the indoor shopping centres, if, over the next few years, retail therapy ceases to be a national sport. Perhaps another project will present itself!

London Street Photography

The London Street Photography Festival 2012 will take place in June with a focus in King's Cross. The programme will be announced in the new year. Info at www.londonstreetphotographyfestival.org

Profile: Jackie Harford *Josephine Evans*



Jackie Harford

Josephine Evans

Jackie was very reluctant to be interviewed. However, I finally persuaded her to let me talk to her and she told me that her grandfather had been an official photographer during the first world war. He had joined the RAF as an ordinary airman but soon discovered that, if you went into the photography

service, you were given an extra allowance of about 6 pence per day! The government was keen to appoint photographers and artists to record the war, but the photographers were also used for reconnaissance purposes. The photographers flew in WW1 aeroplanes which were fitted out with a camera in the place of the guns and her grandfather photographed behind the enemy lines and made a record of the different German aeroplanes as they were produced. He set up a darkroom in the back of a lorry which he used to develop his photographs as he travelled from one airfield to another. Another task was to produce slide shows to boost the troops' morale with staged dog fights in which the Brits always won! Jackie still has some of these photographs.



When did you first take photographs?

I was about 10 years old and we had a box Brownie. We didn't take many photographs because my grandfather took all the family photos. He carried on as a photographer after the war, still employed by the government, and photographed Churchill, Eisenhower, and also the Queen's Coronation.

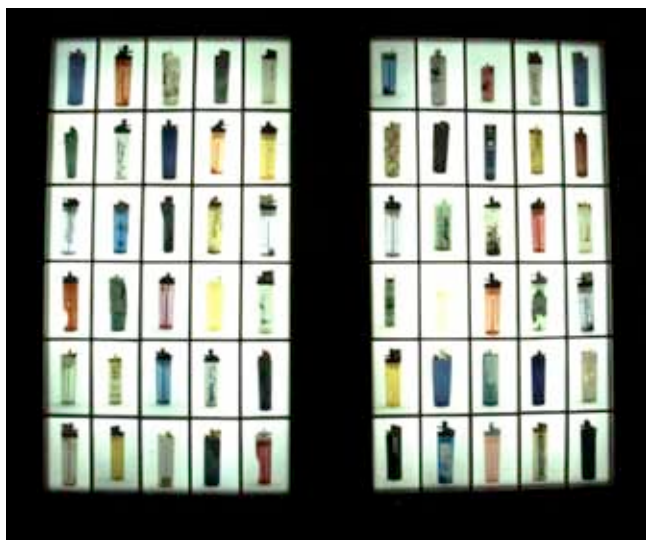
I remember him telling us how he was asked to photograph the Queen standing on steps with her cloak arranged down the steps in front of her. He had to fold the cloth very carefully as it was actually full of holes and they had to be hidden. He used a Rollei and he made montages of us all. If a member of the family wasn't there for an occasion he would stick their portrait into the montage. So photographs were always a part of my upbringing. I used the box Brownie when my school went on a trip to Venice. In fact I still have those pictures of me and the teachers. Later on I took pictures of my sister and her boyfriends, often in the woods near Featherbed Lane in Croydon where we lived. I arranged fashion-shoot type images making use of rusty old cars with my sister sitting on the bonnet. I had a Praktica by this time and I took loads of pictures that I could never afford to have developed. I eventually developed those films quite a long time later and they were very interesting. They recorded another time.

Did you have an interest in art while you were at school?

Art was really a very sad subject. We were just given bun tins with six paint colours and a small piece of paper and told to paint our holiday or some such. I left school when I was 15 and signed up at Croydon College for evening classes in painting and later went on to do welding and sculpture. I was married when I was 19. I would have liked to go on to art school but I hadn't got the necessary qualifications. Later, when the children were in their teens,

my husband, John, suggested I gave up my job in order to go to college. It was a good job too. I was in charge of the Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes for the Borough of Croydon with responsibility for all the activities in all the schools and youth organisations. It was more a way of life than a job and I was really busy.

In 1995 I attended a part-time pre-foundation fine art course in South Norwood, progressing to Croydon College. I applied to the Guildhall School of Art and Central St. Martins and was offered places at both, but accepted the place at the Guildhall. It was in my second year that I was fortunate enough to have Mick Williamson as a tutor. Up to that time I had been doing sculpture, print making and photography. I found that as we went through the sculpture course the instruction became minimal and I was learning a lot through books and so I decided to switch to photography where I could learn new skills. In the 3rd year the tutors were not allocated any time for tutorials but Mick gave up his own time after 5 pm on Mondays for his final-year pupils. I knew that I would gain a lot from being with such a committed tutor.



Lighters

Jackie Harford

What kind of work were you doing in photography?

The environment was my main concern. In fact, nearly everything I have worked on has been to do with landscape and the environment.

I remember the work you showed at an IPSE exhibition – an installation of found cigarette lighters.

We had a chalet on Dungeness which we stayed in often, and I was concerned about the amount of rubbish I saw thrown up on the shore. I collected masses of those disposable cigarette lighters from the beaches. There was so much pollution. Black tar, oil, fishing line, etc. When I was in my foundation year I became obsessed with photographing the groynes. They are now replaced with new ones which are not nearly as interesting. There were breakwaters zigzagging down the beach. I didn't know that this was worthwhile work until I encountered a book by Fay Godwin which contained all the groynes and views I had been working on, and I realised that my work was relevant. I was working in black and white and made quite large prints. I have never been one for small prints. John had been given a Minolta SLR for 25 years of service with BP and I 'acquired' it!



Shirley Hills



Jackie Harford

What was your main body of work for your BA?

The lighter series was important. Mick introduced me to duotrans. I made several pieces with the lighters. One of the Croydon College technicians made up a lightbox on which I could show the duotrans. Another piece of work was concerned with the building of the tram lines in Croydon. There is an area of countryside near the centre of Croydon known as the Shirley Hills where we used to play there when we were children. I was very upset to see that the tram line went straight through the middle of this area and, in order for the line to be laid, a lot of trees were felled. It made me angry to see that our play area was being destroyed. The trees were sawn down and chipped and made into piles. These heaps started to compost and release steam. I felt that they looked like funeral pyres and I photographed them. I made an installation for my degree show using some of the chippings. John had kindly filled some sacks with the chippings very early one morning! I made a recording of the noise of the chainsaws and also recorded bird song and made up wooden boxes fronted with wire netting in which I mounted my images. The netting related to the wire fences erected to keep people out of the area.

When did you learn about IPSE?

Mick Williamson introduced me to IPSE at the end of my course. I had a lapse for a few years because of illness and have now rejoined. I have a compulsion to take photographs however, and never stopped.

(On a personal note, I also grew up in Croydon, very near where Jackie lived, and also played on the Shirley Hills at about the same time. It was a different era, when children could run wild in Croydon without any concern. Now there are trams running through those parts and I doubt if any children play there now. JE)

Grace Lau. 19 November 2011
Chris Morris



Grace Lau

Jeff Hutchinson

As we shivered in Bolney village hall, just off the A272 in sleepy Sussex, photographer Grace Lau told us how she has tied up judges and barked at dogs.

After talking her BA in Photography from Westminster University, Grace Lau worked for the British Museum photographing papyrus. She was bored; she wanted to photograph people. At the Newport College of Art, where Grace Lau went on to study for her Diploma in Documentary Photography, exploration of contemporary "issues" in society was encouraged. In the 1970s Vivian Westwood had put punk on the catwalk, and over the following decades leather, rubber and bondage fetish gear emerged from dark basements in Soho into the bright lights of the fashion world. With Tim Woodward, Grace Lau co-founded the magazine *Skin Two*¹, and it was in this magazine that she advertised her services as portrait photographer to active members of the fetish club scene. The response was overwhelming, and by the end of the year she had doubled her session fee.

Her clients were middle-class men with the disposable income to indulge their expensive hobby, including the purchase of leather accessories, the hire of a dungeon with a professional dominatrix... and a photographer. A challenging environment for the young portrait photographer as she struggled to find space for her tripod amidst the racks and mirrors in claustrophobic,

¹ Describing itself as "essential for the thinking fetishist's coffee table" *Skin Two* was founded in 1983 and is still going strong.

dimly lit basements; trying to avoid tripping over chains as the dominatrix told her to: "Get out of the way Grace!". The ever-present mirrors, at first a problem, became a signature feature of these pictures, revealing the photographer in the process of making the exposure. As a professional dominatrix was not always available, Grace sometimes found herself having to tie up her clients (for an additional fee, of course). While admitting to occasionally feeling uncomfortable with this, she said that she soon relaxed when she began taking pictures of her helpless subjects. Other clients were photographed in their own homes, dressed in costume role-play; in one case multiplied as self, wife, daughter and mistress. All seemed very satisfied with the result of this exercise in validating their fantasies, and often returned to Grace for further sessions. This project later became the basis of her first book *Adults in Wonderland*².

Grace describes her relationship with her subjects as "a little bit of therapy". This seems perhaps a little naïve, or even a denial of the true role she was sometimes playing in these transactions.

In her essay *Towards a Feminist Erotica*³, Kathy Myers suggested a number of "questions that need to be asked when producing or appraising potentially progressive images of women." These included the following:

Whose fantasy is being recorded?

What power relationship exists in the photographer-model relationship?

How are models selected?

What kind of pleasure does an image offer its audience?

Myers was specifically interested in the depiction of women in the context of "pornographic" versus "erotic" photographs. As such this may not at first seem to be directly relevant to Grace Lau's portraits of male participants in the 1980s London S&M fetish scene, but these simple questions lead to a better understanding of what might otherwise be seen as an unremarkable record of marginal society.

Grace's subjects were self-selected, paying for the privilege of being photographed while indulging in their sado-masochistic role-play. While Grace is clear that no explicit sexual activity occurred during these sessions, the auto-erotic context of the dominant female – subordinate male is undeniable. In this scenario of domination, the power of the fantasy is increased (one might say "racked-up") by the presence of the photographer. This aspect of the photograph, as a tool of dominance and power, has been discussed by other authors, including John Tagg: "The body isolated; the narrow space; the subjection to an unreturnable gaze; the scrutiny ... these are the traces of power..."⁴. As commissioners of the pictures, Grace Lau's clients received a physical record of their fantasy-made-real, complete with a reflection of the (female) photographer who observed and recorded their subjugation. It is little

2 *Lau, G. Adults in Wonderland, Serpent's Tail, 1997.*

3 *Camerawork, no. 24, March 1982 in The Camerawork Essays, ed. Jessica Evans. Rivers Oram Press, 1997.*

4 *Tagg, J. Power and Photography, in Screen Education, Autumn 1980, n.36, pp44-5. Quoted by Green, D. On Foucault: Disciplinary Power and Photography, in Camerawork, no.32, summer 1985. In The Camerawork Essays, Op.cit 1997.*

wonder that they came back for more.

Karl Marx wrote that: "The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit", but since its invention, photography has extended this privilege to the photographer as well⁵. Over the decades, photographers as diverse as Pierre Molinier, Robert Mapplethorpe and Claude Cahun have explored aspects of their own identity through this medium. This is not the same as the role-play that explores popular stereotypes (such as Judith Golden, Judy Dater, Cindy Sherman, Yasumasa Morimura) where the agenda is more political, more objectively analytical. Grace Lau's work fits into the former category, acting as professional photographer to those who would, if they had the skills (or weren't shackled and blindfolded at the time) have taken their own portraits.

We should not forget that there is a secondary audience: the gallery-going public, those who buy her book and, of course, us. Does this afford the work greater artistic value? Grace acknowledged that interest in these pictures is a result of the controversial subject matter as well as the photography, and added that sales through galleries did provide her with some "artistic satisfaction".

Her second body of work, *21st Century Types*, arose out of Grace's research into vintage photographs during her MA at the London College of Communications. This study took her into the Getty archives where she discovered John Thomson's (1837-1921) photographs of nineteenth century Chinese people. This led to an interest in the portraits made by western photographers in China during the period between the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion, and a study of the depiction of Chinese "types" in books and postcards.⁶ In 2005 she received an Arts Council grant to explore this further by reversing roles.

She set up a studio in Hastings to photograph passers-by, her "21st Century Types". The props included an exotic painted backdrop, old Chinese furniture from local junk shops and an "oriental" patterned carpet. A synthetic panda rug represented an ironic reference to the tiger skin rugs that were popular features in Victorian "exotic" photo studios. The gentle irony of the fake historical setting and the modern dress was deliberately highlighted by inclusion of the ice cream, mobile phones, sunglasses and plastic shopping bags brought in by her subjects. People intrigued by the unusual studio setting were generally happy to collaborate, and were rewarded with a digital print. Specifically, she was looking for "representative types"; not a representative cross-section of society, but a definitive typology of distinctive characters. In her collection of nineteenth century Chinese postcards Grace has courtesans, beggars, rickshaw-pullers, opium smokers and pirates, and prisoners in bondage, before and after execution. "Exotic Orientals" presented for voyeuristic consumption by Victorian westerners. There are obvious parallels here with the power relationships represented in Grace Lau's [fetish club project](#).

5 *Lingwood, J. in his introduction to Staging the Self: Self-portrait Photography 1840s-1980s, National Portrait Gallery, 1987.*

6 *Lau, G. Picturing the Chinese: Early Western Photographs and Postcards of China. Long River Press, 2009.*

Apparently the Hastings visitors and residents who were drawn into her strangely exotic studio showed little curiosity about her motives, regarding it as “a seaside thing”. A close cousin to that historic photographers’ entertainment: the painted board with cut-out for your face.

August Sander’s *Face of our Time* (1929) and Irving Penn’s *Small Trades* (1950-51) present a pseudo-scientific record of social “types”, referring back, without irony, to Victorian traditions of photographic social taxonomy. Grace Lau brings a distinctly post-modern perspective to this established genre. Her good-natured, uncritical representation of her subjects has humour without any trace of condescension or patronization (as one might discern in the work of, say, Martin Parr or Richard Billingham). Grace Lau has defined the setting, but her sitters present themselves, even if she has to bark at the dogs to get their attention. The question is: has the power relationship changed?

Christopher William Morris ARPS, November 2011

Notes from the North

News from Andy Biggs

Although the days may now be getting shorter and the weather becoming more of a challenge, there are some positives to living in the North. In recent years there has been a continued expansion of galleries and active groups. The Manchester based group Red Eye has gone from strength to strength, the opening of the Impressions Gallery in Bradford and new Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool are such examples. This year has also seen the first festivals of photography in both Bradford and Liverpool, it has therefore not been a better time to move further up the M1. There may also be other advantages but they are beyond the scope of this article! I’d managed to visit all of these at some point in recent weeks. The highlight of the Liverpool festival was Paul Trevor’s exhibition of his work documenting life of the city’s children in the early 1970’s. There is a good video on the BBC website - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-13379872> - where he is shown returning to find how his subject’s lives have changed. There are some wonderful moments, as the strength of the community comes through. It was a pity that some of the new work was not also on show. The new Open Eye gallery is on a prime spot in the regenerated docklands. The first two exhibitions perhaps show how documentary photography has developed over the last 25 years. Both were political in nature, but different in approach. While Chris Steele Perkin’s “The Pleasure Principle” followed the traditional approach of the roaming photographer, as the observer using a small handhold camera, while Mitch Epstein’s work “American Power” was produced using a large format camera in a completely measured way. Both were in colour and it could be argued that Perkins was actually breaking the mould by working in colour, when many believed that it beautified the scene and true documentary photography should be completed in black and white. With space limited only a small selection from each project was visible, owning both books and using the internet would give the viewer a more complete insight.

If there is a comparison to Trevor's work then it must be Daniel Meadows's Bus project. This is one of the best known UK documentary projects. A cross between Cliff Richard and Robin Hood, Meadows travels the country in a double decker bus distributing free portraits to anyone who stands in front of his camera. The current exhibition at the Media Museum in Bradford, concentrates on his early work, initially as a student at Manchester, where he opened a free studio in an old barbers shop, his work with Martin Parr looking at people's lives in the "real" Coronation Street through a series of interior portraits from June Street and summers spent at Butlin's. On show were also the Bus project and other documentary commissions looking at the lives of ordinary people. His continued commitment to storytelling cannot be questioned and has led to him developing this approach using new technology through his digital story telling project. His website www.photobus.co.uk gives a good insight to this work. The early portraits from the barber shop used a black background and strong side lighting, indicated the temporary nature and low budget that Meadows was working with. I'd recently finished reading his book "Nattering in Paradise", which like many of his contemporaries, looks at life of those who benefited from the Thatcher years. However, this book is an example of how he differs from many other photographers, he can write as well! This skill is reflected in his current post at Cardiff University. The current exhibition in Bradford is a combination of large scale prints, smaller cases showing copies of newspapers and personal memorabilia. The one disappointment is the omission of, what I feel is his greatest triumph, the portraits from the 1990's as he retraces the lives of those who were the subject of the original Bus project. There was an electronic display of these and I appreciate this exhibition was about his early work, but not to include this work must be seen as a mistake. For those who did know of his work before visiting the exhibition, they will have been sold short. The new book by Val Williams also does not cover this work and uses Meadows as a vehicle to look at the growth of British photography. An interesting read but there was really nothing new and in fact at one point I felt it was more of a name dropping exercise and list of practitioners, rather than a true academic scrutiny of the work being completed in the 1970's & 80's.

Also on show at the Media Museum is a series of large scale colour work by Donovan Wylie, entitled Outposts. In this he looks at three different locations, The Maze Prison, British Watchtowers in Northern Ireland and more recent work, where he was stationed with Canadian forces in Afghanistan's Kandahar province. This last series required close inspection, so the details and smaller scenes within the image could be observed. Shot from a high view point, there were some parallels with John Davies' landscapes from the 1980's, which also included smaller scenes within a larger frame. But I left feeling that access was all, while Davies worked within very public spaces, Wylie took us to places most of us are unlikely and perhaps fortunate not to visit. These two practitioners perhaps illustrate to us why photography is important. Providing an insight to a subject that most of us would never see and a different view of the well-known but often over looked.

Andy Biggs – Lancashire 2011

ADMISSION

By Mike Shanahan

My favourite joke concerning Theresa May is as follows

Knock, Knock. ...

Come on in!

Anyhow, perhaps by dint of oversight by Home Office Officials I was allowed to return to some of my London haunts a few weeks ago. I had a social engagement to attend, but thought that I should at least check out some Art before a late Lunch.

My first port of call found me at the National Portrait Gallery wherein some recent additions to the Photographic hall of fame included images of a number of Contemporary Comedians. Now, I appreciate that the individuals depicted were supposed to be some societally approved clowns to the Court of modern mores, but I was rather disconcerted by the postures into which they had been asked to deform themselves so as to signify that they were FUNNY people. Holding mice and owls, peering around the frame or frozen in middle jiggle, their poses seemed to me to rather over egg the custard cake. But then again, I guess that they were simply hiding behind masks. Why should the general public be granted access to their inner selves?

Then I pootled off to the Tate Modern to bear witness to Tacita Dean's FILM projection within the Turbine Hall. The first thing that struck me upon entry was how poorly the crack that had denoted the concept of Shibboleth has been filled in. You may recall that the word Shibboleth was used to test whether one individual, otherwise apparently identical to another, could pronounce that word. If he or she could do so then that individual was on "your side". If not, however, then that individual was an enemy and warranted execution on the spot. It seems ironic therefore, that something that had warranted such great attention whilst presented as an Art work, could pass into recent history and be completely ignored by those paying homage to Ms Dean's magnum opus.

Anyhow, this little pilgrim followed the shadow of the crack along the Hall and settled on a not too comfy seat to watch the FILM loop along its mazy tract. So I sat and watched and tried very hard to pay attention, learn and understand. And failed. So I tried again but became marginally distracted by a young lady who sat down beside me, whipped out her camera and started taking digital snaps of an analogue film entitled FILM. Then she left before the loop had completed another cycle. I became confused. Any fool knows that you never really look at something during the actual moment of taking a photograph of that object, so how could the lady in question have engaged with the subject of her attention during such a fleeting engagement? Or had

she never really intended to do so? Or perhaps she had returned to obtain evidence as a form of homage, like an acolyte securing a few shards from the one true Cross. I shall never know, maybe she was a member of a different tribe with different values from mine.

Distracted, and deciding not to hunt her down and execute her, I tried again to engage with the projected image. But, yet again, I failed to divine the mysteries that had so illuminated those critics who had awarded the work a celestial 5 star review that had in turn tempted me to bear witness in the hope of amazement and revelation.

So, duly miffed I decided to walk towards the huge screen, with a view to changing the scale of my perspective and possibly gaining enlightenment. Unexpectedly, looking down I saw that I was still following the route of the crack in the floor and so followed it to the rear of the screen. At this location, I became quite entranced with the way in which the shadow of the screen reminded me of the shadow thrown by Kubrick's monolith from his film 2001 A Space Odyssey. It struck me that the conceit of the monolith was that it had been used to denote moments of transition and development of understanding, whilst I had seemingly failed to achieve such an epiphany during my visit. I therefore removed myself from the perpendicular altar of high art and wandered off to Lunch feeling slightly alienated from the realm of critical faculties that had so gushingly endorsed this particular project.

However, much later imagine my surprise on reading a number of reviews reporting that the work FILM was indeed like Kubrick's monolith. And that it was supposed to engage with the viewer to instantiate a moment of reflection, consideration, investigation and personal resolution. And that the viewer should be involved, disturbed (in a good way) and possibly granted access via some portal to a more enhanced sense of perception than had previously been the case.

So there you go. Sometimes Art sets borders that you believe you don't want to cross. Sometimes, you believe that you are somehow going to be denied access to closely protected secrets. And at other times, you can just blunder over presumed borders into a whole new way of looking at the world.

Ain't Art wonderful!

A legend re-born.

David Malarkey

I've often heard the legend of a camera club photographer who was presented with some work by photographers and asked to comment on them. The legend is that he made a fool of himself with crass and stereotypical comments. How we laughed! We're not club photographers and we (we happy few) know so much better.

Recently, I discovered that it's not a legend at all but an actual event, documented on the web. The volunteer judge was Ray Brightman ARPS and it all took place at Ilkley Camera Club on 25 September 1998. He was not, in fact, ambushed, as I'd been led to believe, but understood and agreed to take part.

You can see the site here:

<http://www.cameraclub.demon.co.uk/CameraClub.htm>

Please take a quick look at it.

You may well think, after thirteen years, that much of what Mr Brightman says has stood the test of time rather better than the pictures. You may disagree, (and if you do, please write to the Editor) but it has suggested to me that perhaps we might attempt to regard the camera club movement (but not necessarily any one club) as being a repository of some kind of long-term wisdom, free from the fashionable ups and downs of market forces in the Art photography business.

See what the postman brought.

John Blakemore's Exhibition

David Malarkey



In the collective unconscious of IPSE, one of the constant names must surely be John Blakemore. Jill's studio walls are crowded with his work so anyone who goes to a Thursday night gathering will have been thoroughly indoctrinated, even if they've never heard of John.

Recently, Hoopers Gallery held a retrospective of John's work. Naturally, it included a selection of Greatest

Hits but the interesting thing for me was the things I hadn't seen and wasn't even aware of. The word "retrospective" suggests some sort of looking backward but this show demonstrated John's continued interest in new work. He seems to have an entirely individual approach to colour that would have been impossible to predict, if one knew only the classic black and white images of the natural world.

A gallery can hang only a limited number of frames and viewing images, even John's images, for an extended time can be draining but happily there is a remedy for both these problems: there is a new book, with the very accurate title: "Photographs 1955-2010".

I splashed out on the posh version with a slipcase and a signed and numbered print tucked inside. Mine arrived yesterday.

There's a certain pleasure in deferred gratification so I've only opened it gingerly and looked at a few pages, then replaced the print in its fold of tissue and slid the whole thing gently back into the slipcase. There will be another little treat after I've finished writing this. It's sitting on the sofa next to me, waiting to be opened.

As the worst kind of commercials say: "Rush out and buy one now!"

A Previous Century DM

In the course of a normal life, we gradually fill our houses with interesting things and from time to time, some of these things have to go. Alan found some old copies of View Camera and, rather than cast them into outer darkness of the appropriate (a word we seem to hear a lot these days) recycling bin, he brought them along to Jill's where they were snatched up by me.

View cameras are not everybody's cup of tea but they remain a viable image-capturing device and in some hands, provide the finest (awesome?) image quality available. On the other hand, images are images, no matter how they arrive in front of our eyes.

These magazines dated from the turn of the last century and are filled with the concerns of that period. There is still a modest preponderance of black-and-white images, but colour is beginning to intrude. For the most part, the colours are bright and saturated, betraying a "look what we can do" attitude. It may be that photographers in the USA prefer a bright "punchy" palette and Europeans are simply parochial in expecting something subtle.

There is a good deal in the magazine on how to carry a view camera in the field (and a view camera can be huge: 11" x 14", 20" x 16" or more), together with dark slides, a suitably massive tripod, dark cloth and associated impedimenta (compass, waterproof clothing, food, spare parts and tools) and in those days, this was a problem confined to the lumpy camera. Nowadays, a digital SLR and its immense optics can cripple the toughest spine, even without the tripod and dark slides.

There is a good deal on tripod heads, too, but the most interesting part is the debate on the dawning age of digital capture and printing. From timid beginnings in creating a larger negative for contact printing by one of the many "alternative" processes, to digital printing of a scanned and adjusted negative to early digital backs, the digital revolution creeps into the photographer's arsenal. Some embrace it; some swear eternal loyalty to Pyro or Palladium-under-Gum or some other process not yet available as a Photoshop filter or from the App Store.

Nowadays, digital is the normal method of capture and film, after a long and honourable history of producing masterpieces must be seen as "alternative" – a deliberate choice to do things the hard way.

And of course, the digital camera, as such, is almost obsolete, after a very brief history.

It can't be long before Apple, even without Steve Jobs, produces an iPhone with a built-in camera that will do everything that a bagful of Nikons can do, and with more social prestige than even the most shamelessly-over-priced Leica.

There is a small waiting list for Alan's cast-offs.



IPSE Dates for your diary

Informal meetings at Windmill House

Last Wednesday evening in the month
25th January 2012 – 28th March 2012

Last Thursday afternoon in the month
23rd February 2012

No meeting in April

Workshops

Mary Maclean at Bolney – 3rd March 2012

Graham Murrell at Micklepage – 28th/29th April 2012

New member

Grace Lau 2 Cobourg Place, Hastings. TN34 3HY

A note from the Editors

Please send submissions to jo@ipse.org.uk. Please send images as jpegs with a minimum size of 1500 pixels long side.

INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SOUTH EAST

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