

‘Facts of life’ – ‘British Photography 1974-1997’

Curator: Katy Barron

This year's Photomonth in Krakow will include a panorama exhibition of British photography from 1974-1997, a period in which it underwent a remarkable evolution.

The exhibition, curated by Katy Barron, is meant to give the Polish public as broad a spectrum as possible of British photography over the space of three decades. Thus the multitude of names, the diversity of artistic approaches, and the numerous perspectives on the same medium. The photographers chosen by Katy Barron whose pictures will be shown at the exhibition are key figures for the development of photography in Great Britain, and also have a great deal of recognition abroad. The majority of them are employed by prestigious photography agencies, such as Magnum Photos or Viva. Owing to the wide span of the project's content, the curator has divided the exhibition into a few independent theme-based parts.

The photographers in brief:

Chris Killip (1946) – gave up taking commercial photographs in the 1960s in order to do documentary work. His photographs maintain a classic, black-and-white tone, they portray the vanishing customs of the residents of the Isle of Man (*Isle of Man*, 1973), where Killip is originally from. From 1976-1987 the artist took pictures in Northeast England for the album *In Flagranti* (1988), summing up the Margaret Thatcher years, which resulted in irreversible changes to the traditional industrial landscape. He received the 2nd Henri Carter-Bresson Award for his published photographs. In the late 1970s he opened the Side Gallery in New Castle, where the British documentary photograph community gathered together.

Chris Steele-Perkins (1947) – took photographs of the progressive commercialisation of English cities. He was also interested in the relatively new phenomenon of youth sub-cultures – in his famous album *The Teds* (1979) he took portraits of the Teddy Boys, who drew from Edwardian fashions. The majority of his projects are devoted to Third World issues, and modern armed conflicts (*Beirut: Frontline Story*, 1981; *Afghanistan*, 2001).

Jem Southam (1950) – a landscape photographer. His work shows the changes that have taken place in the British countryside. He is interested in the relationships between people and the nature surrounding them. His photography series include: *The Red River* (1982-1987) and *The Raft of Carrots* (1992).

John Davies (1949) – a landscape artist known for his subtle and analytical style. In taking pictures of urban and industrial landscapes, he uses classic black-and-white film. An artist who is interested in the “pure” landscape and its metaphysical dimension. Light plays a considerable role in his work. At the beginning he concentrated on wild and natural landscapes (the albums *Mist Mountain Water Win*, 1985 and *Skylines*, 1993). In the 1980s he became interested in post-industrial urban spaces (the album *A Green and Pleasant Land*, 1996).

Paul Graham (1956) – the first documentary photographer to use colour film, which was reserved for commercial photographs in Great Britain. In 1981-1982 he photographed a main freeway in Northern England (*A1 – The Great North Road*, 1993). He simultaneously tried to problematise complicated issues through photography – the album *New Europe* (1992), whose photographs were taken from 1988-1993, deals with the issue of the homogenisation of European culture in the late capitalist period.

Tom Wood (1951) – a major figure in British documentary photography, who has had a powerful influence on the younger generation. He made the *Looking for Love* album (1989), in which he took portraits of the young British disco culture. From 1982-1985 Wood visited the Disco Reach Night Club in New Brighton – the first club of its sort in Northern England. The observations made by Wood are extraordinarily insightful, almost anthropological in character. Other albums by Wood include: *All Zones Off Peak* (1998), *People* (1999) and *Photie Man* (together with Pdraig Timoney, 2005).

Martin Parr (1952) – the most recognisable British documentary photographer. Presently an icon of post-modern photography, he concentrated mainly on the industrial landscapes of Northern England in the 1970s (*Bad Weather* 1982, *A Fair Day* 1984). Since 1984 he has been taking distinctive colour photographs. His first colour series was *Last Resort: Photographs of New Brighton* (1986), in which he continued observations of Britons in their leisure time, in the spirit of Tony Ray-Jones. Much like Ray-Jones, Martin Parr also collects postcards. Some of them, made by John Hinde, are direct inspirations for his colour photographs. Parr's series include *Signs of the Times: A Portrait of the Nation's Tastes* (1992), an unflinching summary of the customs and tastes of contemporary Britons.

Anna Fox (1961) – a photographer influenced by the American 'new colorists', known for her investigations into the phenomenon of "office culture" in the latter half of the 1980s (the *Workstation* album, 1988). She also made a photographic album from 1989-1994 illustrating corporate integration sports, such as paintball and other war games (*Friendly Fire*, 1995). Fox is presently a lecturer at the University for the Creative Arts in Farnham. In 2007 she had a monograph book published, entitled *Anna Fox Photographs 1983-2007* (2007).

Richard Billingham (1970) – is among the Young British Artists. He was nominated in 2001 for the Turner Award, and became famous in a series where he took portraits of his family living in a typical block of flats in Cradley Heath. *Ray's Laugh* (1996) shows the artist's father – Ray – an unemployed alcoholic, and his morbidly obese mother Liz, a jigsaw puzzle enthusiast.

Tom Hunter (1965) – the first and only photographer thus far to be honoured with an exhibition at the National Gallery in London (*Living in Hell and Other Stories*, 2006). His photography draws from the paintings of the Old Masters. The protagonists of Hunter's photographs are mainly young people with artistic aspirations living in Hackney – the eastern district of London. The *Person Unknown Series* of 1997 combines compositions reminiscent of Vermeer van Delft's pictures with depictions of everyday activities performed by residents of London squats.