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THE CAMERA AS CATALYST, THE
PHOTOGRAPH AS CONDUIT:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE
PERFORMATIVE ROLE OF
PHOTOGRAPHY.

S L BONNELL

PhD 2013

THE CAMERA AS CATALYST, THE
PHOTOGRAPH AS CONDUIT: AN
EXPLORATION OF THE PERFORMATIVE
ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the
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of Doctor of Philosophy

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1. Abstract

This thesis is a retrospective examination of practice based research as constituted by eight published outputs spanning a period of twenty years. The field in which the research began was British feminist photography of the 1980s and 1990s, part of the postmodern response to modernism/formalism. The analytical text that forms part of the thesis argues that the key contribution being made to this field is 'Wilful Amateurism', a term I have coined to describe an aesthetic which can be compared, and possibly contrasted with the aesthetic of play and boundary transgression found in artists of the avant-garde such as Duchamp and Hannah Höch. My application of Wilful Amateurism is a fusing of sculpture and performance understood as photography. The experiential origins are feminist, inhabiting the domestic, absurdism and motherhood. In addition to traversing boundaries between mediums, Wilful Amateurism ignores distinctions between the genres of landscape, still life and self-staging and I cite this as my original contribution to knowledge.

The research is discussed within the prevailing attitudes in photography in the 1990s as a defiant attempt to bring a lived, feminine/domestic experience into the professionalized photographic domain that was categorised by either genre or gender. The research question and the driving force behind the work constituted within the submission is presented in the text as a desire to subvert the technical and professionalized aspects of photography so that my images are 'entered' and for the space between reality and fantasy to be experienced and understood.

Other key artists who I identify as Wilful Amateurs include John Cage, Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman and Helen Chadwick. The enquiry is underpinned by my research into the theories of DW Winnicott, Jean Rouch, Vilém Flusser and Bruno Latour.

As the study will demonstrate, my methodology encompasses bricolage, defined as an ad hoc synthesis of space/place, object, performance and absurdity aimed at creating fictions. As I will show, I use the camera as an agent of my will and imagination to act on its subject/object. The resulting photographs enable the viewer to 'willingly suspend disbelief' and become a performer. Finally the point is made that the aesthetic category of Wilful Amateurism that I have identified, is tentative, requiring further research to become a possible tool for continuing study of this field.

2. Introduction

This thesis is a retrospective reflection on practice-led research made over many years. It comprises a written analytical text and eight publications produced between 1994 and 2011. The analytical text articulates the research question that has served to underpin my long term enquiry, discusses my methodology and methods, and indicates how the publications contribute to an existing body of knowledge. The publications in both book and exhibition forms are bound into the thesis in electronic (PDF) book form.

The field of British Feminist Photography - The feminist Moment

The work in this study is rooted in the context of a feminist moment occurring in the 1980s; a key text for that time being Deborah Bright's *Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men* first published in the important journal of the time: *Exposure* 23:1 in the winter of 1985. Bright comments on her website that the essay 'was an attempt to answer the question: "Why are there no great women landscape photographers?"' (Bright: online) she notes that this essay still resonates today. (Ibid).

From the 1960s until this point, photography had been influenced to some extent by the modernist/formalist aesthetic of John Szarkowski who was the Curator of Photographs at MoMA, New York. His thinking was based on an art historical model, which was a specific modification of Clement Greenberg's notion of the integrity of the medium. A simplification of Greenberg's thought was that modern art was 'immanent to practice' (Greenberg in Harrison and Wood, 1992: 3). In his book *The Photographer's Eye* first published in 1966, he observes; 'these pictures are unmistakably photographs. The vision they share belongs to no school or aesthetic theory, but to photography itself.' (Szarkowski, 1966: 7).

In Britain the emergence of feminist photography in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to a postmodern response to this. Susan Butler, as co-editor (1984-6) of *Creative Camera* made a point of featuring and supporting the work of women (Brittain, 1999: 13) particularly that of Helen Chadwick, Hannah Collins, Karen Knorr, Jo Spence, Mitra Tabrizian and Mari Mahr. This was at a time when photography in the UK was polarised between "staged/PCL work, on the one hand and 'straight/documentary, on the other.'" (Butler in

Brittain, 1999: 13). Chadwick, Knorr, Spence and Mahr were particularly significant for me, especially in the early 1990s. Feminist practice within photography encompassed more than representations of landscape, still life or portrait but involved performance, sculpture and politics to push against the purist boundaries of modernism.

Out of all of this a new post-modern feminist photographic culture emerged in the UK of which the publications in this study are constituent. In mapping the trajectory of these outputs, they start off outside in the landscape, return to the home and end up in the *artist's cell*¹.

In tracing the movement of my practice transgressing boundaries and back again, I have defined an aesthetic area that I call Wilful Amateurism and that I cite as my original contribution to knowledge.

Wilful Amateurism²

My work has been defined over the years in terms of genre e.g., Landscape, still life and finally the self-image - all of which I find constricting. The minute I am classified I must move on to something new, so that I am always breaking boundaries, always difficult to place (always difficult). 'Sian's work has always defied categorisation, and she deliberately courts such ambiguities, along with the ever-present risk of the art evaporating into thin air.' (Chandler, 2013: unpublished).

I will be arguing that my practice of Wilful Amateurism functions within a paradoxical space between sculpture, performance and photography. It is made manifest through my own lived domestic experience and is fuelled by the following characteristics: play, imagination, dysfunction, irreverence, absurdity, chance and fiction – and, for reasons that follow, is understood as photography. It is within this paradoxical space that I situate the methodology for my research. In it my sculptural and photographic sensibilities do not exist independently, the one must pursue the other in an endless feedback loop; a Mobius Strip, an 'intermediate area of experiencing' (Winnicott, 1958: p 230).

¹ This phrase *artists's cell* I credit to Joanna Lowry who first coined it at an in-conversation event held by Photoworks in

² Throughout this text I use UK spelling except where quoting from sources using US spelling, which I retain.

According to a dictionary definition, wilfulness involves 'Asserting or disposed to assert one's own will against persuasion, instruction, or command; governed by will without regard to reason; determined to take one's own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse' (OED). As a child, to be described as wilful was not a compliment; for some it is a more positive term 'Willfulness as audacity, willfulness as standing against, willfulness as creativity.' (Ahmed, 2010: online). I want to indicate here that wilful amateurism, as I understand it, is feminist but more implied than asserted; it is a contrary signifier.

The word amateur defines an unpolished, unskilled or raw accomplishment as well as a lack of professionalism. There is also the meaning of doing something for the love of it: 'the Amateur renews his pleasure (*amator*: one who loves and loves again)' (Barthes, 1977: 52). I am re-claiming this word amateur to describe an attitude or state of mind, common to the work of artists who possess the aesthetic I am identifying - and the re-appropriation of the word amateur in both its meanings, I would argue, is a wilful exercise in itself.

Wilful Amateurism is conceptualized within the context of experiential practice, the origins for which lie in the domestic, motherhood, absurdism and feminism. The notion of everyday living as an experiential practice is not a new one; Dada was formulated a century ago with a similar aim (Jones 2004: 299) but I would argue that Dada was more knowing, more arch, more about Dada for its own sake; it had a manifesto. Wilful Amateurism is lodged in the real, it is art but despite itself not for itself.

Photography, a technical and professionalized medium and I suggest also, an intrinsically masculine one (taking itself so seriously) is a ripe medium for subversion by the likes of Wilful Amateurism. I documented my daily domestic life with my camera, hand held and without a tripod in the early 1990's. It was the means to enter another world, another dimension (Abbott 1952: 80) and in so doing disrupted acceptable subject matter for photography.



Bonnell, Kitchen Sink 1991



Bonnell, Living Room 1991

These images were made with the intention of revealing this almost hallucinatory space as a means of temporal elusion. My earlier use of the camera in the 1980's attempted something similar but the difference here was that these spaces were fabricated, not fashioned with the imagination from everyday existence.



Bonnell, Degree Show, Two Views, Chelsea School of Art, 1981

In re-imagining ordinary domestic space, the intention was escape rather than artifice.

This evasion of the domestic quotidian exposes the absurdity and isolation of mind that comes from the repetition of everyday tasks (Beckett 1961: 18) and their dangers (Zoline 1988: 27). The absurd in this context is uniquely female. I cite as an example, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (Rosler 1975). The female/feminist absurdism of Wilful Amateurism manifests itself completely in the series *Everyday Dada* made between 2003 and 2005.

As I have formulated it, Wilful Amateurism is a form of serious play derived from the chance and play of Cage and Duchamp reworked as a feminine/ist 21st century deviation of dada and conceptualism. In fusing the thinking of Flusser (the black box), and Latour (the object as actant) - Rouch (magic and ciné trance) and Winnicott (transitional space) I am proposing that Wilful Amateurism makes a catalyst of the camera interior with the *product* of this catalytic process - the photograph - acting as a conduit to ‘an address to the mind and the spirit...’(Gooding in Bonnell, 2004: 48). This is photography; the camera is the agent that allows the work to happen. The camera is integral to the making of my work. Wilful Amateurism evinces this potential space, the black box of the camera interior, [and, in turn the image it generates] as a space for the imagination to manifest.

Who shares the aesthetic of Wilful Amateurism?

In this section I will provide a brief survey of key artists who share some or all of these characteristics.³

No survey of artistic misbehaviour could exist without the inclusion of Duchamp. Duchamp’s great skill is his ubiquity within so many art movements whilst remaining completely elusive. John Cage tells of his maintaining two studios in New York, one which was empty - the public one - and the other which he worked in but kept secret. (Retallack in Basualdo and Battle, 2013: 241). Duchamp was a major influence on my education through his subversion and dissent; I do not agree with everything he stands for but I have to admire the absurdity of some of his ideas, for example his *Reciprocal Readymade* of 1913 ‘Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board’ (Stallabrass, 2003: 2). John Stezaker speaks of Duchamp’s readymade as ‘a point of interruption in the flow of

³ Unfortunately a detailed study is beyond the scope of this text.

images.’ (Roberts, 1997: 145). He goes on to discuss the way that Duchamp describes his readymades ‘as arrests, sometimes more pessimistically as delays.’ (Ibid 145). I agree with him; I believe that the object when *willed* to be something other - as a readymade or if placed in a new context, will provide an interruption, causing a stoppage.

My work has been underpinned by the history of Dada and Surrealism but much of the Women Dadaists’ work has been somewhat hidden. In *Women in Dada* 1998 Naomi Sawelson-Gorse writes ‘Dada embodied the male as a term and a movement’ (1998: x), she continues ‘This movement of absolute rebellion was also one of repression.’ (ibid: xii). Interestingly, Duchamp’s portrait of himself as his alter-ego Rose Sélavy, cited by Philip Auslander along with the work of Cindy Sherman in the theatrical category of imagery which is known occasionally as “performed Photography” (2006: 2), is seen as another form of female repression in Dada; ‘the feminine is often incorporated into the male, as in Marcel Duchamp’s Rose Sélavy, which effectively denies her existence and individuality. *He* becomes the alluring one as *she*.’ (Sawelson-Gorse, 1998: xiv) - one notes a contemporary equivalent today, in the pervasiveness of ‘Clare’/Grayson Perry speaking as/for women artists.

Hannah Höch is best known for inventing photomontage with Raoul Hausman in 1918. She also made sculptural assemblages (Dada dolls), drawings and *found* lace and handiwork patterns which she combined with photography combining traditional women’s crafts with mass culture. (Dickerman, 2005: 474). Höch was concerned largely with the representation of the ‘new woman’ of the Weimar Republic. She was the only female member of Berlin Dada and was a strong influence on my series *Everyday Dada*. This contemporary description of her as:

““a quiet” or a “good girl” with a “slightly nun-like grace” and a “tiny voice” who “made herself indispensable” by providing “sandwiches, beer and coffee” to “her masculine colleagues” of Berlin Dada’ (Sawelson-Gorse, 1998: xii)

seems completely at odds with the woman who made those photomontages. Her later imagery, The *Ethnographic Museum* series c 1929, raised shocking issues of acquisition and display and used images of women to comment on the New Woman as ‘the Other, the commodity, and the psychosexual.’ (Lavin in Sawelson-Gorse, 1998: 351).

Claude Cahun was both wilful and amateur. For Doy, her appearance which was referred to at different times as androgynous, masculine or lesbian 'amounted to a refusal of categorisation' (2007: 93). She was a prolific artist from around 1915 until her death in 1954, her work remaining largely hidden, although it did feature occasionally in survey exhibitions on Surrealism. In 1994 her work was shown in the exhibition *Mise en Scene* at the ICA. In an essay for the accompanying catalogue David Bate states that her images 'hit contemporary practice like an arrow through time' (Bate in Dexter & Bush, 1994: 6). Her photographs do feel remarkably contemporary and fresh. In looking at her self portraits, they remind me of Duchamp's interruptions and delays. One is slowed down when regarding her pictures, through their insistence on answers to their questioning. It seems Cahun possessed only a limited knowledge of photographic processes, maintaining the services of a processing laboratory for all her post production work and using the same camera for over 35 years. (Stevenson in Downie, 2006: 55).

Leperlier tells us that as a result of her self-stagings and autobiographical writings Cahun developed a 'theatrical calling' (Dexter and Bush, 1994: 18); certainly as Doy argues wearing make-up and doing one's hair constitutes agency and consciousness of an ideological representation of the feminine (2007: 57), so that for Cahun before she has even made the photograph she is fabricating and constructing herself - her everyday clothing, hair, make-up and posing are constituent of her creative activity. (Ibid: 83).

Cahun had a status in the theatre in the 1920s and 1930s in France and was also a prolific writer. One striking piece was her polemic 'Beware Domestic Objects' written in 1936. I have a special interest in this link between the amateur and domestic that appears to mark her work. The following year she worked with the poet and children's author Lisa Deharme on the book: *Le Coeur de Pic* in 1937. These images featured flowers, toys, other objects and a cat in a series of twenty photographs. She also made several images of domestic articles, masks and toy assemblages that she photographed in her garden and on the beach, and she made a series of photographs of stagings within the interior of her home, which suggest to me, a lived practice - where the line between domestic life, home and art and professional identity is blurred.

Cindy Sherman has most often been described as the natural successor to Cahun. I have to

admit that until recently I did not pay her much attention, since I saw my area as more object based. In making this study and also within the last three years where I have been making self-staged photographs, my opinion has been revised and I find there are resonances within each of our practices. I have always loved her series *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-80, because of their rawness and lack of *artifice*; obviously they are packed with artifice but the almost amateur snap-shot aesthetic of the photographs does a wonderful job in hiding it. In reading her 1991 interview in *Creative Camera Magazine*, I realise that she uses her body in the same way that I would use a *place*, so that she *herself* becomes the potential area. I notice that we are both working in a paradoxical space; mine is between photography performance and sculpture - hers between photography, performance and painting. I use objects - she uses make up. (Brittain, 1999:192).

Chance can be used to disrupt the predictability of established habits and norms in everyday life but more specifically within art practice. Chance is a key element in Wilful Amateurism. As in Duchamp's objects, chance arrests and diverts, sometimes courting disaster but occasionally the happy accident. John Cage utilised a complicated use of chance, most notably with the agency of the *I Ching*. In speaking of his music he called it 'purposeless play' (Tomkin, 2013: 31). Cage also embodies the spirit of the amateur who does a thing for the love of it. As he said, he saw creativity as 'an affirmation of life-not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord.' (Cage in Tomkin, 2013: 31).

Finally, as an artist who inhabits the paradoxical space between sculpture, performance and photography, I cite Helen Chadwick. She embodies the characteristics of Wilful Amateurism which she demonstrates in her palpable joy of making, which resonates with Cage's playfulness. In an interview she was asked what was the difference as she saw it between the way she used photography and a photographer? I can relate to her answer:

'I would say that my work is more of a construction of an image, in the way a sculptor might proceed, than a fixing of the moment. Mine are not moments that have occurred but moments that might occur; they are more tentative. I am a fond wrestler with photography. I respect photography but ... I don't like the fetishisation of technique, the concern with

size - grain size, camera size, image size - and with hardware.’ (Brittain, 1999: 148)

Concepts fuelling the aesthetic of Wilful Amateurism

In order to define the concepts which propel this aesthetic, I need to position them within my practice. Below I provide a breakdown of the space where the imagination functions, which I define as the Camera, the momentum which drives it which I define as Play, the idea of performance/theatre which I define as the Absurd and the sculptural aspect which I define as the Found Object.

The Camera as the Space of the Imagination

Jean Rouch, quoting the Russian film maker Vertov, suggested that ‘the “cine-eye” of the camera was a transforming agent that causes people to go into a “cine-trance”— an altered state of consciousness in which they self-consciously revealed their culture in ways unavailable to the researcher when the camera was turned off... In Rouch’s hands, the camera became a provocateur...’.(Ruby, 2005: 112). On the other hand, Vilém Flusser describes the camera as a black box, imbuing it with a power almost of its own; a sinister thing, like the computer Hal in Kubrick’s 2001. ‘The imagination of the camera is greater than that of every single photographer and that of all photographers put together: This is precisely the challenge to the photographer.’(Flusser, 2000: 36). Latour speaks of the black box as a word ‘used by cyberneticians whenever a piece of machinery or a set of commands is too complex. In its place they draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output.’ (Latour, 1987: 2).

Siting the camera in this way connotes a metaphorical implication: the camera as actor, as magical agent. Flusser’s camera/black box is a machine governed by exact processes; he calls it an ‘apparatus’ which is etymologically derived from the latin *apparare* meaning ‘to prepare’. (Flusser, 1983: 21) He goes on to describe the human being in possession of a camera in terms of hunting (ibid: 33). He explains that the camera and its programming is rigid but that it is possible to outwit it (ibid: 80). This is where postmodern feminist photography comes in with Wilful Amateurism, subverting the autonomy of the masculine black box and playing at being photographers.

Play

Play is a key element within my practice. Flusser, Gadamer and Winnicott all discuss play but from different viewpoints. What is compelling for me are the connections between these three theorists on their notions around play and playing.

Flusser talks of play in fairly oblique terms. Writing about photography he describes the processes of automation where ‘apparatuses’ programme our lives for us. Within this context he discusses the ‘tertiary sector’, i.e. ‘playing with empty symbols’ (Flusser, 2000: 79). I understand his meaning here to address an ideological programming via consumer products; cameras here are programmed for this, with end-products such as online photo-streaming and publishing, all set up and ready for the customer. For Flusser *the Photographer* is the opposite of this; someone who ‘attempts to place, within the image, information that is not predicted within the program of the camera’. (ibid: 84). This implies creativity of some sort as well as a certain wilfulness. My way of pursuing this in my own research is explained better if I substitute masculine/professional for ideology and feminine/amateur for resistance to it, giving us a masculinist professional camera programming challenged, (through play) by feminine amateurism. This fits with Flusser’s earlier description of the camera as a ‘plaything’ and talk of the photographer ‘playing *against* the camera.’ (ibid: 27) The camera here being a masculine space.

Gadamer writes on the ‘Concept of Play’ in his book *Truth and Method*. He describes every possible interpretation of the word; in the context of my research I am particularly concerned with what he has to say about play and art and his explanation of *serious* play. Gadamer speaks of art actually playing itself, in a to and fro movement (Gadamer, 1975: 106). He proposes the subjectivity of play both in terms of the creator or ‘player’ and the subjective response of the person who experiences the art, as it plays (ibid:102). In serious play he discusses that if the player is actively serious, then the result of the playing will not be (ibid: 102). My understanding here is that the player has to be so immersed in the act of play as to be almost unconscious or in a trance-like state (ibid: 105). This forms for me a connection with Winnicott.

Winnicott discusses play as the precursor for creativity but he also describes the importance of a space for play; the transitional/potential space. For my research, what is fundamental for me about Winnicott’s theory is that he was not concerned about the artist

at work and their processes. 'Rather, he insisted on the place of creativity in everyday life' (Townsend cited in Kuhn, 2013: 156), Winnicott's concept of living one's creativity was as something that takes place in the space of culture and in the everyday, not only within the artworld and is apposite to the methods of my practice.

Latour discusses the interaction between 'humans and nonhumans' (Johnson, 1988: 298). We might apply his ideas to the relationship between the camera (nonhuman) and the (human or nonhuman) subject/object before it. I propose that the agency of the camera acting as a catalyst, makes the subject/object perform. Similarly Rouch thought of the camera 'as a catalyst that when operated in an engaged, participatory manner could provoke the subjects into revelatory performances.' (Feld, 2003: 263). The camera appears to demand something; point a camera at any child, they will play up, show off, pull faces; adults will pose, all of this is performance - the camera has agency and demands it - and we are complicit.

But this is only half the story; if the agency of the camera provokes performance from its subjects/objects, what happens next? The agency of the camera with the imagination, sets a process of play in motion - Gadamer speaks of the action of *a playing* as a to and fro movement (Gadamer, 1975:104). The analogy I have which best describes this, is the momentum of a Newton's Cradle. If we continue this analogy of playing, the goal or result, is the photograph.

What kind of photograph is this? What is its status? If we return for a moment to the photographs of for example Cindy Sherman or Claude Cahun in which we recognise some form of theatricality, which occurred only to take place before the camera and which existed only for as long as the shutter remained open, the space of the document/record (the photograph) becomes the only place where the performance occurs. (Auslander, 2006: 2).

If now, we accept that this agency of camera, imagination and subject/object has produced a *kind of performance*, I want to suggest that this also occurs in photographs which do not contain human *actors*. If we now consider Cahun's *Le Coeur de Pic* (1937) images, the objects placed by the artist have been placed, I am arguing, to perform *themselves* through the agency of the will and the imagination, for this instant as the shutter clicks. To take this

idea a little further, if the will is operating on an object, the object becomes agent of the imagination. Huppauf and Wulf talk of *imaginative things*, that permit actors to enter the realm of the invisible, unknowable and unpredictable; the limit of what can appear is the stage upon which this imaginative process occurs (Huppauf & Wulf, 2009: 67).

The Absurd

What constitutes this theatrical event or performance? This suggests to me a quality of absurdity. Trying to define absurdity is somewhat paradoxical and absurd in itself. This is where I would place the elements of failure and collapse. This is where amateurism comes into its own; the use of the wrong materials to produce something or the incorrect tool for a purpose. Lack of skill, dysfunction, malfunction and madness are also situated here. There is a madness in repetition but repetition is also a form of play. The sculptor Eva Hesse understood the power of a repeated gesture to the point of exaggeration and absurdity (Krauss, 1993: 310). And Gadamer iterates that play fulfils its role only if the player is lost within the play (Gadamer, 1975: 102). He goes on, 'The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.' (Ibid: 104).

The Found Object

The found object or *objet trouvé* began to feature in art in the early 20th century. It was a term given to objects, found by chance and often juxtaposed with other materials or objects to feature in assemblages. The *readymade*, also classed as 'found', was the term used by Duchamp to describe common-place manufactured objects, the selection of which by the artist, transforms it into art. Duchamp saw the readymade as an act of aesthetic provocation to deny the importance of taste and questioning the meaning of art. According to Duchamp, the choice should be governed not by an object's beauty but by his/her indifference towards it, opening up the agency of chance in the selection (Gale, 2009: online).

'The true found object never quite forgets where it came from, never quite believes in its elevation to spectacle and display. It remains humble to the end, a poor thing caught up in the push and pull of desire and demand.' (Mitchell, 2005: 115)

Research Question

To summarise then, the field to which my work contributes is British feminist photography. I have a constellation of ideas that underpin my practice and which are cited within the aesthetic area I have identified and called Wilful Amateurism. I have outlined functions of the concepts which drive my work and all of this supports and informs all of the eight publications which are the focus of this study. But more specifically than this, they have all been attempts to explore one recurring question:

How can I subvert the technical and professionalized aspects of photography and in so doing, enter my own images; how can I make other people want to enter my images and what lies between reality and fantasy?

3. The Publications and a brief statement

1. Viewfindings - Book and national touring exhibition, UK, 1994

1992 Passage of Light

My contribution to this publication consisted of two images, situated in the book in a section titled 'Image, Metaphor, Myth'. The work was selected by Liz Wells from a larger series of photographs made between 1992-3, for publication in a survey book of women's landscape photography with an accompanying touring exhibition as part of the Signals festival of women's photography. *Viewfindings* was the first study on women's landscape photography in the UK.

2. Groundings - One person exhibition, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol, 1998

1996-7 Groundings

This one person exhibition consisted of fifteen archivally printed and selenium toned black and white photographs and two c-type prints, seventeen images in total. They were selected and curated by Philippa Goodall, the Curator of Watershed Media Centre. All the photographs were framed and matted and hung on mid-blue painted walls.

3. Shifting Horizons - Book and national touring exhibition, Derby UK, 2000

1996-8 Undercurrents

This publication was the second survey book of women's landscape photography. It was drawn from the IRIS Network of Women Photography, the book and exhibition were edited and curated by Kate Newton and Catherine Fehilley with Liz Wells. It was published by IB Tauris, London 2000. Six c-type images were selected for inclusion in the book and eight in the accompanying touring exhibition.

4. *From an elsewhere unknown - Monograph and one person touring exhibition, Ffotogallery, Cardiff, 2004 – 2005*

2003 Glowing, 2003 Gamma, 2001 Pinhole, with earlier images illustrating the texts

From an elsewhere unknown was a monograph published by Ffotogallery with Hirsch Contemporary Art in 2004. Two essays were commissioned for the book, written by Mark Haworth-Booth and Mel Gooding. The book accompanied a one person exhibition which opened at Turner House Gallery, Cardiff in July 2004 and toured on to three further venues in the UK. The images for this output were selected from three different series and in the exhibition were of varying scale and type: eight colour duratrans light boxes size 30" x 40" of the Glowing series, the entire series of twelve black and white, archivally hand printed and selenium toned gelatin silver prints titled Gamma in white box frames and sized at 4" x 5", plus five digital Lambda prints of Pinhole images from the series Constructed Landscape, mounted on Diabond and sized at 30" x 40".

5. *Everyday Dada, Book, Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1st Edition 2006, 2nd Edition 2007*

2003-5 Everyday Dada

Artist's book, of 50 images made from 2003-5; fifty colour photographs were arranged over four chapters, without text. The book was published by Dewi Lewis in 2006 and 2007 in two editions, the first for UK and European markets and the second for Canada and the USA. These photographs have been exhibited in several separate exhibitions: Aarhus and Odense, Denmark, Frankfurt, Germany in 2006, Toronto, Canada and Odense again in 2007, Charlotte, North Carolina in 2008 and Brighton in 2011. Selected images from the series featured in the following publications: *Everyday Dada* exhibition catalogue, Galerie Image, Denmark 2006, Odense Foto Triennial catalogue, Denmark 2006, *Food*, MIT Press, Cambridge Ma./London, 2007, *Dr Clock's Handbook*, Redstone Press, London 2006 and German edition 2008, *The Redstone Book of the Eye*, Square Peg, London 2011.

6. *Out of Order, Portfolio Magazine issue #47, Winter 2008*

2006 Kaput!

Seven images from the series *Kaput!*, made whilst undertaking the IPRN/Arts Council Fellowship at the Moravska Gallery, Brno, in the Czech Republic in 2006. The photographs were selected by Gloria Chalmers, editor of Portfolio and featured in the magazine with an essay by Pavel Buchler.

<http://www.photography-at-sunderland.co.uk/photographers/Photographer3.html>

7. *Auto Focus, The Self Portrait in Contemporary Photography, edited by Susan Bright, Thames and Hudson, 2010*

2007 Health & Safety

The complete series of nine images which made up *Health & Safety*, were included in this survey book featuring the work of 75 contemporary international artists who all utilise the photographic self portrait. These images were made whilst undertaking a research fellowship at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth in 2007.

8. *Fountains & Drains, The Sainsbury Gallery, The British School at Rome, Rome, June 2011 & The British School at Rome Fine Art Yearbook 2010-11*

2008 Ordinary Magic, 2011 Camera: How to be Holy & Camera: Stigmata

This exhibition was the end of academic year show at the British School at Rome. The exhibition featured the work of eight artist scholars and fellows and marked the completion of my Photoworks Senior Research Fellowship at the BSR. Ten photographs made whilst on the fellowship; five images from *Camera: How to be Holy* and five from *Camera: Stigmata*. were displayed in the Sainsbury Gallery and two images from the earlier series *Ordinary Magic* were selected by the Director of Fine Art to feature in the Yearbook. The work in the exhibition was from a much larger body of work which at the time was still in progress. The images were made with a digital camera, printed on archival inkjet watercolour paper, and hung unframed with small chrome clips. One image from *How to be Holy* was printed 30" x 40" and the other four were 20" x 24". All the *Camera:Stigmata* images were sized at 20"x 24".

Section 4

My contribution to knowledge and scholarship – a critical account

Outside

A quote from Deborah Bright's text opens the essay by Liz Wells in *Viewfindings. Women Photographers: 'Landscape' and Environment* (1994), suggesting that in art-historical criticism there are wide gaps with regard to the social representations of landscape. Bright states that the landscape image is 'a selected and constructed text' the 'historical and social significance of those choices has rarely been addressed and even intentionally avoided.' (Bright in Wells, 1994: 45). This helps to frame the intentions within Wells's book. Bright in her essay goes on to suggest that 'it is time to look afresh at the cultural meaning of landscapes in order to confront issues lying beyond individual intuition and/or technical virtuosity.' (Bright in Bolton, 1993: 127). She says later 'Other sorts of positions that might be articulated in landscape photography include land use, zoning, the workplace, the home. Women, I think, have a special stake in documenting this sort of "social landscape"' (ibid: 137). This appears to be exactly what happened in Britain in the 90s.

From out of nowhere it seemed, women slowly began to populate *landscape*; or began to be seen populating it. At the Rotterdam Biennale in 1992, which Liz Wells attended, it became clear that there were no British female photographers represented in the festival despite the presence of seven British males. (Wells, 1994: 6). This became the motivation for Wells commencing her *Viewfindings* project, providing a landmark in British photography, since it brought into focus an overview of the concerns of photographers with regard to genre and gender. Liz Wells' aim in her book and the exhibition were to provide a survey of contemporary British women 'landscape' photographers. Wells argued that traditionally, 'Landscape is associated with wide open vistas photographed from a commanding viewpoint, This landscape is rarely peopled. By contrast, women have tended to be interested more in the relation between people and places, in the consequences of human interaction with the land.' (ibid: 5). She goes on, 'given centuries of patriarchy within which legal and moral rights have been articulated differently in terms of gender, class and race, women do not experience land and land ownership in the same way as men. This influences attitudes to land and therefore landscape as a type of imaginary construct.' (ibid: 5). In describing this, Wells tells us that women tend to have more social awareness

of the land leading to, 'two rather differing types of imagery: first, pictures in the documentary idiom concerned with place and circumstances; second, more metaphoric staged or constructed imagery in which land and environment becomes the setting for more subjective explorations. Recently, women have also explored themes pertaining to landscape as practice or have investigated ideas about responses to 'out of doors' or 'countryside' from points of view which either implicitly or explicitly challenge landscape conventions and the mythologisation of the rural.' (ibid: 5)

These subjective explorations may well have been influenced by the earlier work of Helen Chadwick and Jo Spence who both made a set of photographs using their bodies which certainly held impact for me; Chadwick's *Viral Landscapes* (1988-9) and Spence's *Return to Nature* (1992). My series *Passage of Light* (featured in *Viewfindings*) was also made in 1992. Helen Chadwick had been particularly influential on my own practice, with ground breaking work such as the *Oval Court* (1984-6) and I would argue that this work was a *constructed landscape* in itself.

My concerns were around notions of what we term 'home' and a fascination with the rural; one could not buy a toaster or a set of pans in the early 1990s which did not have a sheaf of corn or a spray of blackberries decorating them. I was intrigued with the way these ideas, which alluded to an *idealised landscape*, were being sold to us. I would claim that my images of closed views were 'constructed' via the catalyst of my camera; transforming the *exterior* place to an *interior* space. I am suggesting that this 'constructed' method which I utilised, was a current and urgent response to historical trends in photography. The other photographers featured in *Viewfindings* were working similarly; most obviously in the work of Ingrid Pollard and Patricia Townsend, but also in subtle interrogative ways by Lynn Silverman and Miranda Walker.

The book came at a point where women were openly questioning the role of representation in terms of gender and oppressed, hidden communities. 'Women might recoup landscape for themselves in response to its present character as male preserve in art photography.' (ibid: 137). As Bright surmises, we were not interested in 'venturing forth into the wilds to capture the virgin beauty of Nature' (ibid: 137), but investigating where it really was and more importantly where *we* were within it. My speculation is that we were claiming it as *ours*.

The landscape photographs I was making, were, as I view them now, box-like, depicting an interior space which I can *enter* and inhabit; a latent space. ‘The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*. This distinction is decisive.’ (Barthes, 1980: 85). In revealing a latency in my images (and it is there in all of them) I am concerned much more with a concept of possibility; a *that will be*, or an *as if*. This brings me squarely back to Winnicott’s *potential space*. In constructing these spaces, the landscape was revealed to me differently, offering a new potential theatrical space for *play* and the potential for the viewer to enter the photographic image.



Fig. 4. Bonnell, *Passage of Light*: February 1992 2.00pm

The view in both the images [*Passage of Light*] is deliberately obscured, with the fog and hedging acting as walls and the road as floor.



Fig. 5. Bonnell, *Passage of Light*: February 1992 3.15pm

There is no grand vista, it is clearly local, and of *no interest*. These spaces though are theatrical - the lighting within them and the heightened colour of the beech hedge provide an air of unreality. (Being before digital manipulation people viewing the images questioned me as to the reality of that hedge colour. The truth was that I was so unskilled in photography at that time, I could never have manipulated the photographs, even if I had wanted to) and offers an intermediate area which I propose invites the viewer into the space/frame, to *perform*.

The work was conceived serially, although two were selected out of a body of six to eight photographs; to view one singly would not have worked. The locations in these images were *found*, literally come upon at the time of photographing. They were situated in the book in a section titled: Image, Metaphor, Myth. No mention other than: 'Sian Bonnell records the poetic effects of natural light within the rural environment.' (Wells, 1994: 6). The titles reference the time the photographs were taken and were as much what this work was about as anything to do with light, since they were working within a very tight window of opportunity that I had to make the work: 'cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing' (Barthes, 1980: 15). For Liz Wells, 'the notion of a binary divide between 'nature' and 'culture' continues to have some purchase, contributing to defining a relation to woman to nature which rather differs from that of man and nature. She is ambiguously dislocated somewhere between 'nature' and 'culture'' (Wells, 1994: 50). I would argue that this is a useful place to be. Wells continues 'Rather, she is interested in remarking mediations between people and land.' (ibid: 50).

In reviewing my images and my methodology at the time of their making, I see that, for me the 'out of doors' was my studio and creative refuge; it provided my potential space. One thing that rings true in the book was Wells' assertion that in referencing issues around childcare and domestic responsibilities for some women, 'it seems no accident that women end up making images closer to home.' (Ibid: 6). My concern was about the land and land-use; what it signified to me as a woman and as a mother, not 'landscape'. I would argue that this marked a contribution to knowledge within the context of feminist photography generally and specifically to that of wilfulness. This was developed further in the following work and outputs.

The biscuit-cutting edge

In questioning the effect of *Viewfindings*, I would suggest that it was both a key contribution to and indicative of a larger interest and growth in photography-as-art in the UK at this time. In the South West, the Arts Council of Great Britain had appointed a photography officer who supported regional photographers, encouraging meetings through the South West Independent Photography Association and through this and other Regional Arts Associations, women photographers began to meet and the Women's Photography Network, IRIS was formed. In 1994 the first of a series of landscape photography conferences, *Changing Views of the Landscape*, featured women photographers and the second conference in 1998 brought women curators and writers such as Martha Langford and Deborah Bright to the UK.

My introduction of domestic objects into these pictures was to some extent a 'pointed' rebellion against the continuing (mostly male, as Bright had observed) fixations on large format cameras and tripods prevalent at that time. It was a deliberate act of defiance against prevailing attitudes, to bring a lived, feminine/domestic experience into the photographic domain. The objects were placed using the method of assemblage, not to be juxtaposed with other objects but with carefully selected spaces and places. I use the phrase 'juxtapose *with*' deliberately as I selected the spaces/locations as *articles* in themselves to *play* alongside and with the objects.



Fig. 6. Bonnell, Groundings: Angel 1996-7

In the work following from *Output 1*, where the view was deliberately occluded, the view in many of these new images is open. There are some where the camera is deliberately pointing down to the ground so that there is no sky whilst in others the sky is absent or barely minimal. Again, the focus for this work is not ‘landscape’ but the, ‘mundane, literal, everyday landscape which might appeal to ‘women and the vulgar’ (Biggs in Bonnell, 2001: 6). In some of the images, e.g. *Chalk Down*, the image can be consumed in more than one *reading*.



Fig. 7. Bonnell, Groundings: Chalk Down 1996-7

For instance, the shiny sheep shape, is placed in the middle of sheep-grazing land. It is also on the chalky downland of Dorset so that the shining metal references the custom of chalk-cut figures which feature in Dorset - George III leaving Weymouth and the infamous Cerne Abbas Giant. It is at the same time an object from my kitchen drawer, (one I used daily to cut sheep-shaped sandwiches for my children when they were very small) and when placed on the top of the dry-stone wall is a landmark claiming that view and this land as mine.

The objects were not so much found as *re-found* in their new environments. What interested me was how these objects, although alien, still looked part of that environment. In these images they were at one with their surroundings because everything was monochrome. Unintended humour could be useful in drawing an audience in.



Fig. 8. Bonnell, Groundings: Fossil 1 1996-7

A comment from the visitor's book at Watershed Gallery has remained with me. Possibly intended with great irony, for me it was a gift - 'So, is this the biscuit cutting edge of British art?' - (For quite a while after, I used it shamelessly to promote my work 'Sian Bonnell, at the biscuit-cutting edge etc...').

Scale was important in this series. In order to hold the attention of the viewers, I knew that I must slow their perception in some small way. This was achieved through printing all the images to a scale where the objects are slightly larger than life size. This was enough to set

up an unconscious questioning which would run on from the other conscious questions such as, 'what is that biscuit-cutter doing in the middle of this field?'

I began to work in colour; tapping into wider changes in context happening at the time within photography. In introducing colour, suddenly the 'lie' (that these objects were naturally occurring in this environment - through the uniformity of the silver emulsion) was disrupted and the 'truth of the lie' (the introduction of colour rendering the objects absurd within their locations) made plain. The colour images I made that featured in this series consisted of two rabbits - one a pink blancmange placed in a rabbit woodland environment



Fig. 9. Bonnell, Groundings: Rabbit 1 1996-7

and the other a glowing green jelly on wild grassland.



Fig. 10. Bonnell, Groundings: Rabbit 2 1996-7

I was also making images using my children's animal toys and placing them in the habitats of their live counterparts. This gave, when viewed at the correct (i.e., slightly larger than life-size) scale, a most sinister effect; the animals glaring malevolently at the viewer.



Fig. 11. Bonnell, Animals Series: Rabbit 1996-7

In Philippa Goodall's text for this exhibition, she cites the work 'sidestepping' landscape photography's 'romantic and nostalgic limitations' (Goodall, 1998), suggesting that it is positioned 'firmly as a critical reading.'(ibid). An image from this series *Chalk Down* 1996 was featured and discussed by Liz Wells, both in her chapter 'Seeing Through Belief', in the *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, eds. Theo van Leeuwen & Carey Jewitt (2000) and again in her chapter 'Paradoxes of the Pastoral' in John Kippin's book *Cold War Pastoral* (2001).

In summing up the contribution to knowledge this exhibition made I am arguing it was a work informed by my lived experience as a woman at a certain cultural moment, time and place, which confronted political issues around childcare and economy faced by women who lived in rural locations. As Alexis Hunter stated:

'For feminist artists the 'personal is political' was one of the most important slogans in the 1970s. Being subjective as women in our work was the bravest and most radical thing we could do at the time. This subjectivity became the most hated aspect of our work' (Hunter in Roberts, 1997: 128).

As Liz Wells observed in *Viewfindings*, many women photographers are constrained by domestic routine; I made this an integral feature of my work by acknowledging and celebrating it. It was contrary to current preoccupations in the art world at this time. The photographs, 'seemed almost defiantly modest. This was the age of *Sensation* (Royal Academy, 1997) and the apotheosis of the YBAs' (Haworth-Booth in Bonnell, 2004). Where the images in *Output 1* evinced a latency and the potential for performance, the performance is manifest here, bringing this together with the landscape and the domestic female experience, areas that to my knowledge, had not featured before in one photograph.

However, in making this study, I found Claude Cahun's photographs of small toys and cutlery which she placed on the beach or in her garden. I would suggest that what she was doing was different; she was not a mother, she was a lesbian living with her partner and seemingly without financial constraints - it was a different age. These photographs of hers were not in the public domain until around 2006 but I got a jolt of recognition and real excitement when I discovered them two years ago.

The images in *Groundings* opened the way to me for further exploration and research into magic, the domestic and the potential space.

Emergence of props and the absurd

Shifting Horizons was a further survey book of Women Landscape Photography, drawn from the IRIS network. This was a more substantial book than *Viewfindings*, with the subtitle *Women's Landscape Photography Now* and going into much more detail regarding the photographers' working methods. Each artist was interviewed and these interviews were used in an essay by Liz Wells. At the time of this publication a large number of women had joined IRIS with just over a quarter of them working within the landscape genre. Given the interest generated by *Viewfindings*, it was by now generally acknowledged that there was a feminine strand to landscape and environment and this publication served to offer new research into current practices. Roshini Kempadoo and I were the only photographers to feature in both *Viewfindings* and *Shifting Horizons*.

My contribution to this publication was selected from *Undercurrents*, a project which was commenced at the same time as the *Groundings* series but which was continued until 1998 when I took part in *Exmouth Documenta*, a research project run by Plymouth University. Selected artists were invited to undertake short-term residencies, in a disused Customs House on Exmouth Quay in Devon, during late spring and early summer 1998.⁴ Six c-type images were included in *Shifting Horizons* and a further two in the accompanying touring exhibition. The images were sized at 20" x 24" framed and matted. I printed them myself at Exeter School of Art where I was teaching at the time.

This work was photographed entirely in colour, focusing on the coast and notions of the seaside. In all of these images, objects were placed within varying locations, but this time, they were not quite so 'out of place' in that their placements began a dialogue and interrogation between the sites and objects. The same objects were repeatedly used in different arrangements but now the photograph also came into play as these configurations were photographed in both monochrome, and colour with no decision made as to which was to be the final image until later. The use and re-use of images and in multiple

⁴ Some of the images were published in a further series of small books by South West Arts, featuring photography from the region, titled *Proof*, my images were in *Proof 3*, 1998.

photographic configurations made the whole process become much more experimental and, I would argue here, theatrical too. It is around this time, that I began to call and understand my objects as ‘props’.



Fig. 12. Bonnell, Undercurrents: Fossil IV 1996-7

The props are *willed* to be something other than themselves whilst remaining the same. The minute contextual alterations convey a sinister feel to the image, provoking a kind of fear. And madness. It is not *normal* to do this to your kitchen implements - generating the question ‘Is this person unhinged?’ This may explain the reaction of a gallery director to this work and his intense anger towards me. How *dare* I do this to my objects. How *dare* I do this to a perfectly nice landscape picture? This reaction reveals it as wilful; the almost violently hostile reaction of some people. This also implies that something is happening in the photograph. It makes me ask, what is the least one can do/perform in order to cause this affect? I am reminded of my mother’s milk-stained spectacles when she was in hospital (she was at the time, the same age that I am now. This was a tiny thing but totally upset me; it was truly frightening to see.)

The focus of *Output 3* was an overview of women’s landscape photography as selected from the Iris network. It was contextualised in terms of history, nature, memory, the urban experience and space. My work was categorised under the theme of collective memory. The contribution that my work makes here builds on that of *Groundings* in the confident

use of props within the images and the maturing absurdity and use of play, not only by me with the camera at the time of making, but of a ‘playing’ with the audience in experiencing these photographs, revealing a growing complicity with them. For example, in some images, the object is removed and only the traces of the object photographed.



Fig. 13. Bonnell, *Undercurrents: Trace* 1996-7

I suggest that my inclusion in *Shifting Horizons* arose through a developing interest in my work from 2002 when an image from my series *putting hills in Holland* was purchased and exhibited by the V&A⁵, being used as the poster image for the exhibition *Seeing Things: Photographing Objects 1845-2001*. Photography was continuing to be established within the art world and this trend was highlighted by the timing of the first photography exhibition at Tate Modern, *Cruel and Tender* in 2003. This in turn brought new interest from collectors, so that new photography art fairs were emerging e.g., Photo London in 2004. Photography was becoming a popular form of study with new photography degree courses emerging and seeming to attract a new female demographic of students. I would speculate that the higher profile of women photographers in the UK and the imprinting of a female presence upon the genres, as achieved by *Viewfindings* and *Shifting Horizons* had much to do with this. During this time my work was being featured and written about in Journals e.g., *Camera Austria*, *Next Level* and *Portfolio*.

⁵ And was reproduced, with text, in the book *Things: A Spectrum of Photography*, Mark Haworth-Booth & Marina Warner, 2005



Fig. 14. Bonnell, Putting hills in Holland #9 2001

Involuntary suspension of disbelief

Since *Shifting Horizons* my work had undergone some changes. The first was the use of a pinhole camera in 2001. Working with a pinhole camera utilises the methods of chance. There is no lens or viewfinder, so there is no way of knowing what the photograph will look like if it is successful. In making this work, I set myself the question, is it possible to believe that moulds and bowls could masquerade as hills if depicted in black and white?



Fig. 15. Bonnell, Silver Sea, 2000

This was important because having made one test image (*Silver Sea* 2000), the distortion of scale of the mould and the relatively readable location (Weymouth beach) allowed me to place objects in recognisable places to deepen the absurdity and force the imagination into play, especially if the print size was very large.

Having claimed the land in the previous outputs, this way I could construct a *landscape* out of artefacts traditionally associated with *women and the vulgar*, a home-made nonsensical female domain. Could I also convince if I did the same thing using colour negative film, which might render the landscape more ‘real’ but which again played with failure due to the use of out of date film and the reciprocity failure that long exposure times would cause. These photographs were very odd but strangely believable.



Fig. 16. Bonnell, Dutch Hills #5 2001

At the same time I photographed the same arrangements of objects using a medium format camera, as ‘belt and braces’, in case the pinhole negatives didn’t come out. In the colour pinholes (one of which is featured in this output), far more objects were assembled for each image, the colour is awry - it could have been rectified in Photoshop but I wanted to embrace any failure that might occur. Failure in these images was also in play through the wobble and collapse of the piled up articles; the quiet madness of which had a disquieting sense that I wanted to explore and celebrate. In this series, I was looking at consumption and excess; I wanted this to be explicit within the images, as absurdity.

The pinhole work had caused a shift in my approach to working with the camera. This new series was made in 2003. The contextual setting for the objects in these later images, was less overt - more implied. All the images were photographed locally but although necessary to frame the work in 'the countryside' the location was not important. This marks a significant change in approach from my previous attachment to location. Another change, was the time of day; all the images were photographed at dusk. This was conceptually integral to the project, since I wanted to create other-worldly, overtly theatrical, filmic effects.

The series *Glowing*, returned to single objects, placed closer to the frame, illuminated using an amateur ad-hoc array of torches and other domestic lighting sources. *Glowing*, was conceived from my anger, as a mother of sons, on the decision to go to war in Iraq. I needed to represent these greatest of absurdities (weapons of mass destruction and the war on terror) in a way that did not lecture or shout at my audience. The wilfulness is present, in the absurdity and irreverence to both the subject and genre. In alluding to poor quality science fiction films (amateurish?) e.g., *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (Wood, 1959), *The Blob* (Yeaworth Jr., 1958), *Son of Blob* (Hagman, 1972), etc., I was able to utilise a deceptively gentle absurdity which subtly conveyed unsettlement and unease to the viewer; a 'deeper sense of reality conceived as multiple, compounded of what is perceived, what is known, what is remembered and what is imagined' (Gooding, 2004: 47).

The photographs in the exhibition were large Duratrans images on light-boxes, using therefore exactly the same visual language as their own method of production whilst alluding to the light of the cinema screen. The objects, all portrayed much larger than life size, suggest an other-worldly quality which seduces and *pulls* one into the frame, luring the viewer in to perform within this intermediate *fictional* space. Phyllis Creme talks of the 'playing spectator' (Creme in Kuhn, 2013: 40). 'The process of luring and allurements of the spectator into the film activates her wish to be there, on the screen, playing her part.' (Ibid: 40).

In his essay in this output, Mel Gooding states: 'To turn Coleridge's famous prescription on its head, we are tricked momentarily into an *involuntary* 'suspension of disbelief'. (Coleridge wrote of our experience of the theatre as necessarily entailing the 'willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith': we *will* ourselves to believe that what

is happening onstage is ‘real’.)’ (Gooding in Bonnell, 2004: 45). This statement supports my argument but the use of the word ‘tricked’ here also suggests *magic* of some kind. *The magic of the photograph as conduit?*



Fig. 17. Bonnell, *Glowing* #49 2004

Gooding raises the concept of fiction in this work, or more precisely poetry. ‘They are poetic: they are *fictions*.’ (Ibid: 47). He goes on to discuss the dreamlike quality of the images ‘which has its origins in that faculty that Coleridge called ‘fancy’: ‘a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space’ but ‘[receiving] all its materials ready made from the law of association.’(Ibid: 47). Coleridge says that this mode of memory is ‘blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE.’(Coleridge, Eds., Engell & Bate, 1983: 305). I am struck by Coleridge’s identifying of the will here, and so by implication, *wilfulness*.

The last set of pictures featured in this output, titled *Gamma* is the reverse of *Glowing* and constitutes twelve tiny black and white hand printed and toned photographs. I wanted to create a sinister, post-apocalyptic, irradiated scene; as if objects from outer space had landed, settled and taken over the world, having leached all the colour out of it. I wanted to convey a darkness but utilising the opposite language - so a super-brightness that is harmful, as if looking into the sun; a cold tone to the printing that somehow suggests heat. The scale was again important. I wanted to provoke a monumental sense to the images

despite their being small. This series was about opposites; each visual sign pointing to and signifying its opposite.



Fig. 18. Bonnell, Gamma #9 2003

All the images in this output are sinister and absurd but not funny. They have a strongly fictional, cinematic/theatrical feel which is intended to draw the viewer into the frame whilst simultaneously never allowing them to forget that they are spectators. The dramatic scale in all these pictures, renders a filmic quality possible because they are too absurd and too other-worldly.

Absurd house

A decade earlier, I had left the home to *find* it; now the idea of food, family and home are brought back from the outside - much closer to home; to the inside of *my* home. Everything in this book is made from food, it is a fusing of sculpture performance and photography which I would argue constitutes theatre or *photo-theatre*. Photography as an art-form was highly collectible, the Tate had appointed its first photography curator and had begun to collect. Many more women photographers were being featured in exhibitions and in numerous new journals both on and off-line. There was a growing emphasis culturally on portraiture and especially youth culture.

Everyday Dada - which has proved very accessible not just in the UK but in Europe, the US and Australia - was made as a critical comment on what was happening socially in the UK between 2003 and 2005. These photographs feature room sets and situations which have been made specifically for the camera. The catalyst of the camera 'box' has acted and the resulting photographs pull us into the scenarios. We believe and we don't believe, at one and the same time.

The context was consumerism: the quality of food being sold in supermarkets, the housing boom, taste and excess. The book is tiny but features fifty photographs with no text. It is arranged in four chapters:

Scenic Cookery – This section depicted real places; famous landmarks and landscapes. It was commenced to subvert the copyright rule that had exercised a few photographer friends, being forbidden to photograph Durdle Door (a famous landmark on the Dorset Coast) which is owned, as is the copyright, by the National Trust. I photographed it but refashioned in mashed potato and peas.



Fig. 19. Bonnell, *Everyday Dada: Scenic Cookery* #6 2003-5 (not featured in the book)

House Beautiful – This featured 'decorative' installations made from food inside my house. There is a much more theatrical sensibility here. The space for each image was carefully delineated, before placing the foodstuff on the walls or floor. Where the camera's

‘eye view’ ended, so did the edge of the installation, i.e., we see what the camera sees.



Fig. 20. Bonnell, Everyday Dada: House Beautiful #4 2003-5

Forensic Housekeeping - Featured food used in close up views of household nastiness as a focus not only on bad housekeeping and filth but the horrific fascination one has in catching sight of something a little bit unpleasant and not being able to turn away from it. There is also the sense that bad things happen in homes; it isn't always the safest of places. Alluding to films like *Repulsion* (Polanski, 1965).



Fig. 21. Bonnell, Everyday Dada: Forensic Housekeeping #2 2003-5

Serving suggestion - Featured innovative alternative methods of food serving as a comment on the absurdity of food packaging and labelling. It also overtly *plays* with food, which is a forbidden activity (and which has received some negative comments).



Fig. 22. Bonnell, *Everyday Dada: Serving Suggestion #22* 2003-5

The home is sacrosanct, so there is something wilful about plastering the surfaces of one's home with meat, cheese and pasta. This hints at something obsessional and forbidden; suggesting protest behaviour in some way - *you don't do these things to your home*. This series not only touches on the concerns mentioned above but also on the whole area of madness, stress, obsessional behaviour and the human condition; with this also being a time of war. The humour, which was overt, worked on more than one level: it was at once, innocent, sardonic, nonsensical and very black.

'Yet no matter how artificial sliced meats look they can still generate associations with the body and skin. When the walls of a room are covered with meat it is given a kind of skin or membrane, emphasising the fact that we are *inside* the house, in many more ways than one. There is a reversal here: what is usually eaten by us has now swallowed us.' (Wolthers in Bonnell, 2006: 12)



Fig. 23. Bonnell, *Everyday Dada: House Beautiful #2* 2003-5

When scaled up for exhibition, they pull you in, even though it is obvious and one is very aware, that they are artifice. In the book this still happens, even though the scale is tiny; perhaps it is the lack of text - the lack of being told how to look at the pictures? But the viewer is complicit in what is happening. The *willing* of the object - in this instance food - to be what it is not - by the photographer behind the camera and afterwards by the viewer before the photograph.

Acknowledging performance

The images in *Kaput!* were made in 2006 at the Moravska Gallery, Brno in the Czech Republic for the IPRN/Arts Council of England Research fellowship commission. This was part of a high profile series of IPRN/ACE commissions supported by substantial European funding. It was a closed process with four photographers invited to put in proposals. The theme for the commissions was 'Work', which could be interpreted in any way. The residency was of six weeks duration, allowing a substantial period of research and reflection as well as time to make a coherent new body of work.

This output was published in the winter of 2008; just as the economy was crashing. The work itself had been made two years earlier. The commission was supported by a huge amalgam of funding from the Arts Council of England and the European Union. The EU

was expanding fast, with the imminent inclusion of East European countries including the Czech Republic, which was still emerging from its communist past.

Kaput! continued my exploration in the themes of consumption, acquisition and excess with a focus this time on the pressure to attain these things and the attending bureaucracy of the working environment. It became a project about stress in the workplace and the small interventions one makes when bored, unhappy or frustrated.

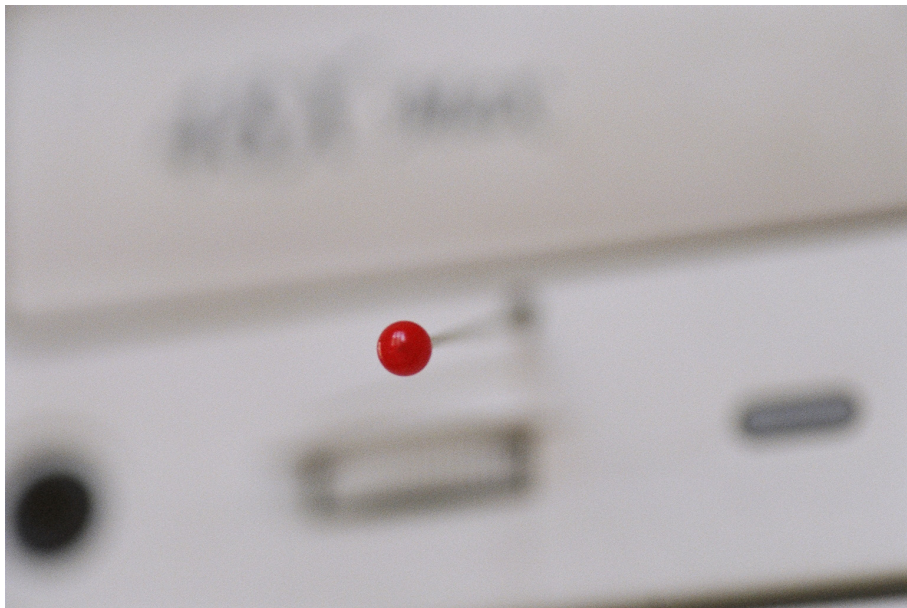


Fig. 24. Bonnell, from the series, *Kaput!* 2006

I used a 35mm camera for the first time in 20 years fitted with a macro lens, which allowed me to focus very closely on the disruptions made with props purchased in Brno. No food featured this time, the objects were all in some way related to work, or its opposite. The images when displayed were scaled so that the objects appeared very much larger than their actual size.

I found I was tapping into the past culture of the 1930s when much of the city was built. My research methods included travelling by train from my home in Weymouth to Brno, at the commencement of my residency (taking three days but allowing a slow immersion into Europe), studying modernist photography and theatre design both in Brno and Prague, listening to Janáček and reading Kafka and Bohumil Hrabal. This ‘tapping in’ to a new environment and its history is an expansion on my earlier tapping into the countryside and my search for *home*; it was about inhabiting the place/space.

Iain Biggs's essay comments on the performative elements in my practice, (Biggs in Bonnell, 2001: 8). Now seemed the perfect time to examine this. I made a series of short videos. I had not made video before and assumed the camera would function the same way as a still camera. So, absurdly, I turned it on its side to make the format portrait. The subsequent video can only be viewed with a very big pain in the neck. I was however able to take two screen grabs and these were the basis for the next body of work in 2007 and the next output.



Figs. 25 & 26 Bonnell, Screen grabs from Brno Video, 2006

Confronting the camera

Health and Safety was made in 2007 during my research fellowship at AIB, Bournemouth. It was a re-visioning and re-working of the short video idea tested in Brno. The work I made in Bournemouth was a series of self-images made with a digital camera, where I am getting dressed for 'work' under generic European Union health and safety guidelines but utilising domestic articles to stand in for the correct items; for example, a brioche tin as a breathing mask etc.. The photographs were made with the co-operation/collaboration of four assistants and exhibited in October that year in the Gallery at AIB,

Autofocus, features seventy-five photographers all of whom have photographed themselves. The notion of the ‘self’ in a photograph is problematic, ‘In many ways the author of a self-portrait is always presenting an impossible image, as he or she can never mimetically represent the physical reality that other people see. The ‘self’ therefore is always in some respects also an ‘other’.’ (Bright, 2010: 8). Bright admits that this genre is enormous, so she laid down some criteria for inclusion in her book: ‘..a contemporary self-portrait must show the artist, it must explore the concept of identity - either the artists’ own or something more broad and universal - and it must offer the viewer a tendentious point of view or contemplation about the self.’ (ibid: 12). The book is divided into five chapters or themes: Autobiography, Body, Masquerade, Studio and Album, and Performance; my work is featured in Studio and Album. In this chapter Bright sites historic sources of codes and conventions which contemporary artists still utilise today. (ibid: 21). I do not see these images of myself as portraits, I prefer to use the term which is used to describe Calude Cahun’s work – self-image.

When I talk about *Health & Safety*, I speak of it in terms of a confrontation: of coming out from behind the camera for the first time, of making a series of self- images at a time of life when women are meant to disappear, of allowing others while I direct, to light and ‘take’ the photograph and of the performative nature of photography.

The pictures were planned as a narrative build, commencing at the beginning of the dressing process and ending once dressed and ready for any/all ‘work’ eventuality.

As previously, I sourced props to act as items of safety gear, but for this first time I used costume. I found a white workman’s boiler-suit which I prepared by dyeing it pink. The props were all household kitchen articles which would *act* as items of safety clothing.



Figs. 27 & 28. Bonnell, Health & Safety #1 & #9 2007

This work tapped into my early career when I worked as a prop-maker and set-designer for fringe theatre companies in London. I had worked on one play where I had to find costumes for the cast. I knew about the nuances that a certain cut of coat or skirt can portray in performances. I had been very excited when in the Czech Republic as not only had I researched Czech modernist photography, I had also seen modernist theatre designs and costumes in the Contemporary Art Museum in Prague. I was intrigued by early visualisation of automatons and machines. I chose a black backdrop and floor, so that I would inhabit and float inside the black box. I visualised myself being *inside* the camera whilst producing this work.

What is going on in these pictures? Embodied bricolage performance for the camera or as I *will* it inside the camera? The images are overtly absurd, hinting at madness and obsession. They are unsettling and confrontational; I do not want to go near this person. It is not clear where she is; is she at work? In the kitchen? In the theatre? This space does not invite me in (perhaps because *she* is already in there?) I do not recognise myself in these photographs. ‘Bonnell wears the clichéd signifier of femininity – pink – but gone are any mixed messages about domesticity and femininity. The boiler-suit and its obvious

concealing of a feminine body is an aggressive act of defiance and appropriation of male working attire. She is a woman on the 'edge' morphing into a demented automaton'. (Bright in Bright + Bonnell, 2007: 6)

I would argue that the contribution here is the wilfulness of a fifty-year-old woman performing for the camera at a time when, in further areas of the media, women once they reach this age are removed, or they must construct a younger appearance through artifice. The confrontation in these images is shocking but at the same time utterly absurd. In the publication there are men in front of the camera but they do not have the same impact. In these images she does nothing; it is a confrontation; there is no attempt to convey meaning other than through the objects she hides herself with.

I understand that in these images the figure is the object and the objects themselves are *acting*.

The artist's cell

After *Health & Safety* and having by then traversed the genres of landscape, still life and self-image, I wanted to apply all of them to one piece of work. This I commenced in *Ordinary Magic* which was begun in 2008 and is not yet completed. I was given a residency in Cork, in the summer of 2008 and produced a set of images, two of which were published in *Portfolio #50* in 2009 and a further two were featured in this output *Fountains and Drains*.

In 2011 I was awarded The Photoworks Senior Research Fellowship at the British School at Rome which commenced in April 2011. My proposal followed the work I had commenced in the Cork residency, when I had been making images about superstition and fear. I had been interested to pursue this research further in the Roman Catholic faith and its antecedents, particularly from Roman and Etruscan cultures. I was given a studio, accommodation and a stipend for a three-month period. The fellowship offered the scope for research, study, reflection and travel; a giant potential space, in itself.

I became interested in the effects of looking at religious painting and iconography having undergone the catechism as a small child. It was surprising to suddenly be faced again with

my childhood concerns, dealing with the materiality of holiness. This was what became the driver for the work I made.

Ordinary Magic consisted of one image depicting a superstitious act of bad luck - two crossed knives - and one image of a landscape 'fairy' path where one might be cast astray.



Fig. 29. Bonnell, From the series *Ordinary Magic*, 2008



Fig. 30. Bonnell, From the series *Ordinary Magic*, 2008

Camera:How to be Holy featured self-images enacting religious gestures and *Camera:Stigmata* depicted the re-enactment of five versions of St Catherine of Sienna receiving the stigmata. One image from *How to be Holy* has also been shown in West Norwood Cemetery as an installation in the doorway of a disused mausoleum with the addition of fake apple blossom, throughout the Summer of 2013.



Fig. 31. Bonnell *How to be Holy* in *Curious Trail* 2013

My interest in the materiality of the halo led me to fashion rough halos out of domestic disposable plates and party servers. I had also acquired three housecoats from a street market. These were unflattering highly patterned garments, the kind worn by older ladies to do their housework in. I began making self-images wearing this clothing and the halos. This led to researching the gestures found in religious iconography of all kinds; not just in High Renaissance painting but in the cheap tat sold at the Vatican. I made a series of images re-iterating these gestures under the title *How to be Holy*. The concept was one of instruction, like a manual or like a TV programme that shows you how to do something. ‘Here’s one I made earlier’. So the table was a key part of the ‘set’ and it was important to ground the whole thing into an ‘ordinary’ space by working in front of the pipe.



Fig. 32. Bonnell, from the series *Camera I: How to be holy*, 2011

In the photographs I was being everybody but in an amateurish way. It was a testing out as in play and I was not confident as a performer in front of the camera, this being the first time. In *Health and Safety* I just stood still and looked at the lens as myself in a costume - this time I was *her being all these people*. I used available light in the studio as lighting, I sourced a costume, which the person who would normally be wearing it (a housewife or a cleaning lady) would not do what I was doing. My halos were made from picnic ware. Sometimes I was the Virgin, sometimes a priest, sometimes an angel; I was being both male and female.



Fig. 33. Bonnell, from the series *Camera I: How to be holy*, 2011

In all of these photographs, I am not there. It is not me I see, but *her*. I am the found object, the ready-made for these pictures. The costumes begin to take the place of my props.

In the same way that I utilised my own *lived* reality in *Viewfindings* with my kitchen items and my own home in *Everyday Dada*, I now introduced my own dressing gown (a hooded grey velour robe zipped up the front), with a selection of home-made paper and card halos for *Camera:Stigmata*. As in the previous set of pictures, I made no attempt to hide my status as a 21st century woman. This time, the table was removed and the angle of view was widened, revealing a 'stage'. These works, I would argue, are wilful, amateur and absurd. They are as much about this performance space as the figure depicted. They are a fusing of all the strands from my practice to date.



Fig. 34. Bonnell, from the series *Camera II: Stigmata*, 2011

At the exhibition when they were shown, I was shocked by the reaction of the audience. Men and women were affected equally; they would start with laughter and then suddenly they would be overcome emotionally, many cried. This, I had not expected and it gave me a jolt, in that I had underestimated the power that photographs can have to play with a spectator's emotion. My thinking on this now, is that these spectators must have actually entered the photographs or perhaps something had *pricked* them that I cannot see?

'Mad or tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative,

tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits (to leaf through a magazine at the hairdresser's, the dentist's); mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly repulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic *ecstasy*.' (Barthes, 1980: 119).



Fig. 35. Bonnell, from the series *Camera II: Stigmata*, 2011

What was new in these images was the introduction of gesture. Although relying on halos and paper plates, which hint at absurdity and the tragic and inhabiting the potential space of the artist's cell, the found *object/person* has lost herself in play using her face and body to convey meanings. 'Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.' (Gadamer, 1975: 102). These gestures must be rehearsed and repeated until they *are right* 'The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.' (Ibid: 104). I am arguing that it is this repetition that provoked such a response in the viewers.

5. Demonstration of a critical reflection of methodological issues and an indication of the future direction of research needed / to be carried out in the field

Methodology

The methodology which I have developed over thirty years is an open-ended experimental exploratory practice, most closely resembling Bricolage.

‘In its old sense the verb ‘bricoler’ applied to ballgames and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the ‘bricoleur’ is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman.’(Levi-Strauss, 1962: 16).

I like this implication of deviousness, as it fits well the context of Wilful Amateurism. I can site here my avoidance of tripods and flash and for the most part the professional photographic studio as examples of this deviousness.

Bricolage works as a term for me, but only so far. It explains what I do in making my work, in that I will use whatever is there *to hand* (ibid: 17) and I will work wherever I am. But the other ingredient in this recipe is the imagination. I won’t follow prescriptions - not because the proper tool or implement is unavailable, but because I want to see what it will do in a different usage or context; what it’s not supposed to be used for. This is beyond bricolage, going into the territory of wilfulness. Work takes place in a variety of situations encompassing both studio (e.g., professionally in an Artist Residency or Fellowship situation) and various ‘non-art’ environments. The resulting work is disseminated via exhibition and book form. My wilfulness revolves around a *lived* experience; it stems from my education in studying the art movements which influenced me most, Dada and Arte Povera and is woven through my everyday life: I will make a piece of work just out of my lunch.

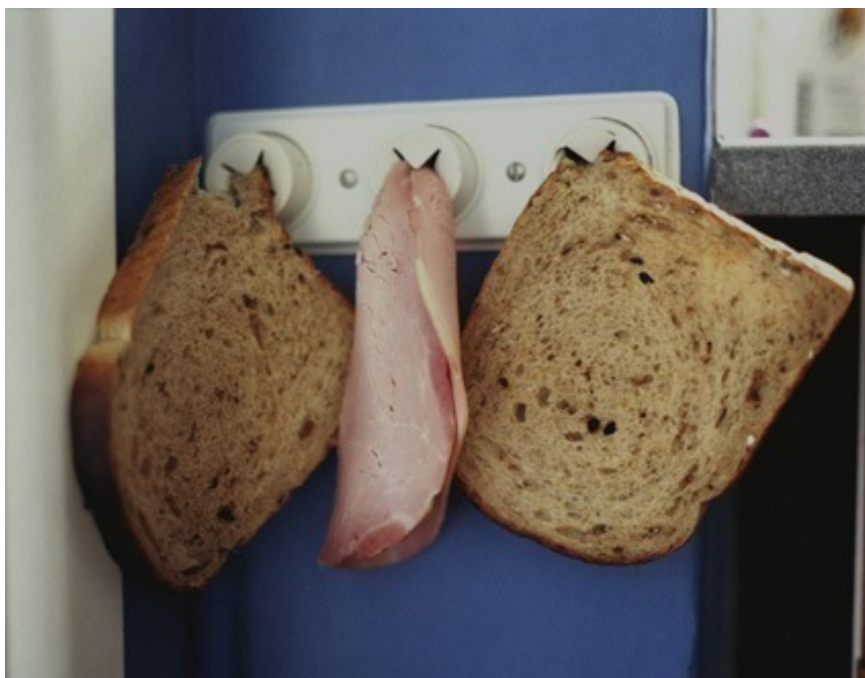


Fig. 36. Bonnell, from the series, Serving Suggestion

‘The dada artist thus can effect a profound change through intervention into the present quotidian moment, creating an explosive epiphany not through extraordinary discourses, abstract or academic theories, but through a strategic targeting of the most banal, ordinary and trivial.’ (Gammel in Jones, 2004: 299). My photographs which have the appearance of absurdity are conjured from the most banal of experiences and objects.

My work then, employs an *ad hoc* mixture of a number of experiential strategies which I have adapted wilfully for my own use and which is my established working method. ‘The phrase *Ad hoc*, meaning “for this” specific purpose reveals the desire for immediate and purposeful action which permeates everyday life.’ (Jencks and Silver: 1972, 16). My wilful methodology is so bound up with my practice: it *is* the practice. For me to make explicit what constitutes my methodology (this mobius strip operating between the methods to create the work to create the space to create the methods to create the work...and so on..and on..), I need to describe where, what and how it all happens.

Performing/Where

In order for me to make/do/perform something I have to prepare/create a space for it first. This is the paradoxical *potential* space. This space is always contained; like a box. It can take any form; shed, laboratory, kitchen; it is my choice, since I must create and prepare it.

The preparation of the space is something that has to happen in *real* time; I must put time aside in order to do this preparation. Always, at all times, the *work* is continuing in the background; it endures like breathing; like a heart beating. My visualisation of this is the giant factory in the film *Modern Times* (Chaplin: 1936), the ideas are constantly whirring, in flow inside my head; they never stop. Once the space is prepared, *play* can commence. I want to mention something here about the ‘concept of play’. Gadamer states that it is through play, that a work of art comes into being, *of itself* (Gadamer, 1975: 105). What I understand this to mean is that in taking my analogy of Chaplin’s constantly whirring cogs, it is only when *play* is commenced, that the work which has been making itself in the background, is revealed. This play is a form of ‘performance’ not just by me, but by the work, which is being evinced.

Where/How

The best analogy for this is of *being in the kitchen*. For me the creation of a piece of work is like the creation of a lovely soup. In the ad hoc manner in which I work (utilising all the things left over in the bottom of my fridge) I will make up a recipe and remind myself to write it down (particularly if the soup turns out to be good). I never make soup for myself; I make it for others to consume and if they ask, I will tell them what is in it. Here then, is an exact embodiment of my practice; through it, I am making a case for the experiential knowledge of the artist.

How/Performing

Where does the camera fit into all of this? Its usage was developed early on as a foil to counter a lack of skill in fabricating sculptures, becoming the means to access the work. (Interesting to note that Fox Talbot used it to counter his lack in drawing skills). Along the way it became my accomplice and driver. In the kitchen/laboratory the items to be utilised for work, are waiting in the space; they are in the fridge/freezer from earlier times, and they are on the table if they are less perishable ideas. *Everything else* not on the table or in the fridge is carefully compartmentalised and stored away in tightly sealed containers. In the middle of my kitchen is the most important thing; the appliance. Because it is *my* kitchen/shed/laboratory I can choose what form the appliance takes. It is usually a cooker - but it can sometimes be a mixer - either a food mixer or cement mixer. It always somehow turns into a *black box*. The appliance/black box is the camera: the camera is the catalyst. The kitchen/shed /laboratory, unlike *everything else* is not a sealed unit, it has doors and

windows. The door or window is the photograph: the photograph is the conduit. Doing the cooking is performing. Entering and exiting the *photograph* is a secondary performance which is repeated on each *re-entry* and *re-exit*.

To say all the above is not to suggest that the methodology developed all at once: wilful and amateur with its constituent elements of serious play and so on. Rather I have found that the focus for my work has so far undergone three key stages which I outline below.

Landscape and Object 1992 – 1998

My focus on landscape was not pictorial or classical. In the nature of play, I used juxtaposition (*Outputs 2, 3 & 4*) as a method to explore the flora and fauna of the local land and noticing that in *re-placing* disparate objects, toys and food into alien territory the objects began interrogating themselves and their dislocations, producing a variety of atmospheres that were not funny at all but sinister and frightening. I understand this to be what Barthes calls dangerous, ‘...all we can say is that the *object speaks*, it induces us vaguely to think. And further: even this risks being perceived as dangerous. At the limit, *no meaning at all* is safer.’ (Barthes, 1980: 38). I was examining every facet of the genre with particular emphasis on politics; land use, territory, ecology, sustainability and gender. It was at this point that the humour within my images became apparent to me. The absurdity was very much within the methodology i.e., repetition and working serially and I was well aware of this. So in utilising these methods to make the photographs, it never occurred to me that the humour might leach into the images themselves; I had not realised that the absurd would feature so overtly. I was deadly serious; the photographs were hysterically funny: in exhibitions people were laughing uncontrollably. I was mortified and very upset, seeing it as a huge setback but later realising that this was the method to draw - no - to *pull* the audience in to the world I wanted them to inhabit. I am suggesting here that I was working against the 'program' (in Flusser's terms) by offering something that seduced by covert methods .

Object and Context 1999 – 2005

The objects utilised in my photographs (*Outputs 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6*) play with an idea of Dada, in that one is utilising objects from ordinary everyday life and willing them a different existence (through the catalyst of the camera) in becoming and (not becoming) ‘art’ but only via the conduit of the photograph. This willing, I see clearly in retrospect, is a

performed action; it is wilful. The object through its de-contextualisation, is made useless: art. My object/works although designated art, I would argue are nominated as such only in the context of their uselessness; later they are always recycled and re-used in future work. Similarly, the focus of the work was an enquiry into the domestic experience, the desire for escape and wilderness. The objects' positioning either in the 'out of doors' or 'indoors' is both overtly comic and absurd connoting a madness in the placement - a form of desperation which is palpable within these images. There is more emphasis on the objects now, than the landscape - with the landscape being scrubland or lowly wasteland. In the case of *Output 5* the context has returned to the interior and the home, connoting amateurism.

Self-Image 2006 – 2011

Because the method has evolved itself, through the playing or the *game*, I realise that now in the methods utilised in *Outputs 7 & 8* I have developed a set of rules governing how I function in the space of play; the playing field. The space of play is in *Output 7* a black box and in *Output 8* a white cell. In the black box the found person does nothing. She confronts the viewer and her objects *gesture*. I note though that in doing nothing, there is a violent energy in this set of pictures. In the white cell she is not confronting but she is gesturing. In this set of pictures I know that she is working very hard physically, but the overall sense is of utter calm.

Conclusion

I began this analytical commentary by identifying a field, British feminist photography, where my work is situated. I then outlined a constellation of concepts which together form the aesthetic area which I have identified as Wilful Amateurism and which provides the grounding for my work within the field. I explained that my recurring question was:

How can I subvert the technical and professionalized aspects of photography and in so doing, enter my own images; how can I make other people want to enter my images and what lies between reality and fantasy?

Next, I argued for the specific contribution my research made to the larger field I had identified; important elements of the contribution made through the eight publications are discussed below.

Firstly, through taking wilful ownership of the camera, discarding any professional use of it, for example by not using a tripod, and through making a formal study of land use rather than landscape, I was claiming the land as feminine - as mine, both as a woman and a mother. This was followed by the introduction of domestic objects into my photographs, but more specifically through their recontextualisation in placing them within 'landscape'. This was an act of defiance to bring a lived, female/domestic experience into the photographic domain where it had not existed before.

As the work progressed, the imagination was brought more into play. For example in *Output 3*, the viewer expecting an object in the picture, is playfully confounded by its removal but a trace remains. As the work progresses, the viewer is made gradually more complicit. What begins to happen in *Output 4*, is a luring of the viewer into the picture's fictional space and an invitation to perform themselves there. This happens through a meeting of my and the viewer's *transitional* space and through their 'willing suspension of disbelief', evincing the magic of the *photograph as conduit*, but never letting the viewer forget that they are spectators.

As the work continues the images become more theatrical, more absurd. More is demanded of the audience. Humour is used to communicate uncomfortable truths, through *willing* the objects to perform; this occurs through the catalytic agency of the camera. Lastly in acknowledging the performance element within my practice, I confront the camera at a

time of life when women are expected to disappear. In this silent and motionless confrontation, a violence is conveyed in the picture whereas in the final work, the opposite is conveyed through gesture, repetition, action and absurdity.

Together these works have come into existence through the agency of Wilful Amateurism. As a tool it demands a looser and I would argue more honest and raw approach to communicating through art/photography. Artists have always broken rules and misbehaved. This is our licence. Through working with younger photographers, it is clear they are less constrained in breaking through, than we were; this is as it should be, they will have other constraints to break through. What I notice is that now less emphasis is placed on the 'professional' photograph; more women work within this 'industry' than before and there is scope for what I have called 'Wilful Amateurism' to be utilized in new ways by future photographers, both male and female.

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There are few well-known women landscape photographers. Historically, women have not made imagery which falls obviously and directly within the landscape tradition. The major exception in Britain is Fay Godwin whose consistent explorations, including challenge to the politics of land ownership and support for public rights of way, are familiar from her many exhibitions and publications. Women *do* engage with land, and with the rural environment. But, generally, their concerns have differed from those more readily associated with 'landscape' as a specific cultural construct or set of practices within photography. Landscape is associated with wide open vistas photographed from a commanding viewpoint. This landscape is rarely peopled. By contrast, women have tended to be interested more in the relation between people and places, in the consequences of human interaction with land. This has led in particular to two rather differing types of imagery: first, pictures in the documentary idiom concerned with place and circumstances; second, more metaphoric staged or constructed imagery in which land and environment becomes the setting for more subjective explorations. Recently, women have also explored themes pertaining to landscape as practice or have investigated ideas about responses to 'out of doors' or 'countryside' from points of view which either implicitly or explicitly challenge landscape conventions and the mythologisation of the rural. History, heritage and the romanticised rural idyll have been brought under scrutiny variously.

The purpose of this anthology is to offer an opportunity to consider work by contemporary women photographers who are British or based in Britain, and to explore ways in which women picture the environment. Most of the work included in this anthology has not been published previously. It brings together imagery which has been shown in different exhibition contexts. The intention is to offer

a concentrated focus on a range of aesthetic approaches and political concerns expressed in the work.

Women engage with land differently. In arguing this, I want to stress political and cultural influences and limitations. I certainly do not want to fall into some sort of essentialist position that would posit biology as the source of difference. If women make rather different sorts of images it is not because women are somehow closer to nature than men, but rather because ideas about nature and the natural have had different sorts of meanings for women. The scenario is complex. One key factor is that, given centuries of patriarchy within which legal and moral rights have been articulated differently in terms of gender, class and race, women do not experience land and land ownership in the same way as men. This influences attitudes to land and therefore to landscape as a type of imaginary construct.

Other limitations also intervene. These include safety considerations: it may be reckless for women to traipse around the country in remote open spaces on their own. Regardless of whether there is really any great risk involved, simply feeling insecure is in itself enough to limit what women undertake. Second, domestic commitments may prevent projects which involve walking or travelling long distances. Landscape photography is incompatible with domestic responsibilities, especially childcare. For instance, Helen Harris, whose work is included in this book, works methodically, sometimes waiting up to an hour to get the photograph she wants. This hardly fits with walks for children (or, indeed, anyone), or with other domestic deadlines. On this count alone it seems no accident that women end up making images closer to home. For instance, it is no coincidence that Ingrid Hesling's current project is based around the school run – a

journey undertaken twice daily by many women, especially in rural areas. All artists draw upon individual experience. The position of women as mothers within a culture organised around the idea of family means that women photographers have a very specific set of experiences which may both limit, and provide, material for image-making.

The seeds of this project lie in *Wasteland: Landscape From Now On*, the central exhibition for the 1992 Rotterdam Photography Biennale. Seven British photographers participated; none were women. Of course, particular festivals and exhibitions reflect the aesthetic and political preoccupations of their curator(s). In the case of Rotterdam, the range of themes and approaches was reasonably diverse, although there was a marked line of concern with the post-industrial urban landscape and industrial dereliction. The show did include work by women based in the Americas or elsewhere in Europe. This led me to wonder why no British women photographers had been included (especially when I later discovered that at least one had submitted work which was rejected). Is there something peculiar to the significance of land and landscape in the British tradition, or in the Anglo-American tradition, which has particularly marginalised women? Speculation led to my writing an article for *Women's Art Magazine* (No. 52, May/June 1993) which, in turn, led to the suggestion that I should put together proposals for this book.

The selection of contributors, particular series or portfolios, was a consequence of several months of contacts and studio visits. Some of the photographers were already known to me. Others were not. Encountering them and their work has been one of the pleasures of the project. I did speak with curators and lecturers in several venues, including the North of England and Scotland. In the end, most of the contributors are based in the South, South-West or Wales. This probably reflects the fact that I work on a London-Bristol axis and, perhaps, the relative autonomy of the various British networks? Work was also solicited through the South West newsletter for the Signals Festival of Women's Photography (1994).

The book is organised into three main sections, separated from one another by two written pieces. The first section concerns margins and borders, and related cultural ambiguities and political issues. Anna Fox explores the divide between public and private in

The Village; Helen Harris and Ingrid Hesling investigate the remnants of human activity as marked visually on the coast or in the rural environment; Annette Robinson records the struggle to avert closure of the *Jubilee Pool*, *Penzance*, and Miranda Walker focuses on more macro-political questions concerning radioactive pollution, in this case, of the Irish Sea.

This is followed by an amended and extended version of my essay, published in *Women's Art Magazine*, in which I explore the politics and aesthetics of landscape, arguing that patriarchal attitudes crucially underpin 'landscape' as a set of aesthetic and political practices. This prefaces a montage and three portfolios which, variously, engage with territory, location and identity. Stevie Bezencenet questions ownership, location and the mapping of space in terms of class and gender. This is followed by Ingrid Pollard's work which focuses on history, heritage and Black identity within British culture. The portfolio extracts included here offer an opportunity to consider continuities as well as developments within her work. *Strange Territory and Inscriptions (The Desert)* marks a new departure in the work of Elizabeth Williams in terms of aesthetic strategy and the relatively explicit historical engagement. She interrogates notions of land and its perceived nature from a broad, philosophic approach. By contrast, Roshini Kempadoo's work is more socio-economic in approach. Whose right to territory? Whose dislocation?

Lynn Silverman likewise is concerned with location. Meeting with Sue Isherwood, she discussed ways in which this concern is expressed in her work through scale, and an aesthetic which challenges the picturesque in landscape. In common with many of the contributors, she also lectures in photography, in her case at Derby University (near the Peak District), where landscape, as a set of practices, has been one of their traditional concerns. When I first approached her to contribute to the book, she commented that she has long been fascinated by the fact that so few women students work in relation to land and landscape, and suggested that 'land' must feed male subjectivity in ways which are not in operation for women.

This precedes the third section of this anthology, on image, myth and metaphor. Sian Bonnell records the poetic effects of natural light within the rural environment. Patricia Townsend interprets the

myth of Scylla. Glaucus the fisherman became a sea-god, fell in love with Scylla, the water-nymph, who spurned his approach. In despair, he consulted the enchantress Circe who, herself in love with Glaucus, transformed Scylla's lower body into sea monsters; she later turned into a rock on which several ships were destroyed. In Patricia Townsend's interpretation, the sea represents the unconscious (and sleep); Glaucus awakens Scylla's pleasurable yet forbidden sexual feelings, experienced by her as monsters which cannot be consciously acknowledged. Her vulnerable self remains hidden within the rock, possibly to re-emerge. In different mode, Claire Collison also re-interprets myth, in this instance, associations between maternity and nature idealised in classic Victorian painting. Originally made as a billboard, this reworking of Ford Maddox Brown's *Pretty Baa Lambs* questions notions of gender, culture and nature.

I should like to thank all the contributors to this book for their interest, co-operation and, of course, for the sheer quality of their

work. I should also like to thank Simon Butler of Westcountry Books, Andy Jones of Topics Visual Information and the Arts Council of England for making this book possible. I am grateful to the following people who have contributed variously to the development of this project: Nancy Honey, Stephen Hobson, Piers Rawson, Sue Swingler and, in particular, Jem Southam. I should like to thank Sally Townsend for her comments on 'Mr Andrew's Place' and *Women's Art Magazine* for permission to use extracts from that article within my amended and extended essay. Helen Harris would like to thank South West Arts for finance towards *Tidemarks*. Elizabeth Williams would like to acknowledge British Council support for her residency at North Sinai Heritage Museum. *Mr and Mrs Andrews* is reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees, The National Gallery, London; *Pretty Baa Lambs* is reproduced by permission of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; *Falls of the Ogwen* is reproduced by courtesy of The Royal Photographic Society, Bath. Acknowledgement is also due to Judith Goddard and Karen Knorr.

LIZ WELLS

Whether noble, picturesque, sublime or mundane, the landscape image bears the imprint of its cultural pedigree. It is a selected and constructed text, and while the formal choices of what has been included and excluded have been the focus of most art-historical criticism to date, the historical and social significance of those choices has rarely been addressed and even intentionally avoided.¹

DEBORAH BRIGHT

This essay engages with ways in which land and environment have been represented pictorially within the Anglo-American tradition. It opens with a brief critical account of 'landscape' as a genre in painting and in photography. The focus is on social as well as aesthetic issues. The relative absence of women landscape photographers is then considered. Landscape imagery reflects particular attitudes to property, territory and entrepreneurship within which women are located differently from men. Landscape imagery also reflects modern thinking in which 'nature' has been defined in *opposition* to 'culture' rather than in terms of a more organic conceptual model. As Barbara Kruger reminds us in her well-known photomontage, 'we will not play nature to your culture', within the terms of this binary opposition, women have been seen as somehow closer to nature. Despite post-modern critiques, this conceptual approach has continuing influence, contributing to defining a relation of woman to nature which rather differs from that of man and nature. This different positioning is reflected in the work of women artists. Contemporary women photographers *have* engaged variously with notions associated with land and landscape, countryside and notions of the natural, territory and location, identity and dis-location. However, women have tended not to work within landscape photography as traditionally defined.

The Roots of Landscape

It is no accident that the emergence of the British Landscape tradition in painting coincided with industrial revolution. Pre-industrial understandings of land were premised on more direct recognition of land as the primary source of sustenance. Under

feudalism, whose legacy persisted beyond the medieval era, local barons owned the land and peasants paid tithes in return for a place to live and land to work. There was also a system of communal grazing land, one which came under political dispute in the early seventeenth century with land enclosures, the private acquisition of common land. Access, ownership and control of land was, and still is, a political issue.

Industrial revolution dramatically changed both the actual, and the perceived, relation between people and land. A number of factors were implicated in this. First, as industrial processes interrupted the direct relation between labour and land, humans became increasingly alienated from the land. This was a matter of division of labour within cottage industry systems or, later, factory organisation. It was also a matter of the expansion of towns and the gradual conglomeration of people in new industrial areas within cities. 'Country' and 'city' gradually came to be viewed – and mythologised – in opposition to one another. Their interdependence was obscured. Second, imperial expansion led to the importation of foodstuffs and other raw materials from colonised territories. Few in Britain had any conception of how products such as tea or cotton looked, visually, in the plantation, or of how crops developed through seasonal change. Overall, industrial labour patterns and conditions distanced the British worker from the feelings and effects associated with climate, weather and seasonal change. Third, property ownership and land rights became associated with entrepreneurial success. Ownership pertained not only to English land but also to appropriated property overseas. Of course, such developments were not uniform nationwide. The legacy of

feudalism is marked, to this day, in areas such as East Anglia. But the seeds of change, which arguably date back to the voyages of the Elizabethan explorers, variously impacted on different parts of the country over the course of the centuries, with more or less resistance from workers most directly affected.

'Landscape' as a genre dates from painterly practices associated with the rise of the Dutch merchants in the seventeenth century. Flemish painting took an apparently natural landscape as context for the celebration of windmills, ships, fields, estates; in other words, the emblems of property ownership and mercantile success. Discussing estate portraiture in England and Wales in the later seventeenth century, Stephen Daniels makes the related point that 'prospect paintings', painted from a bird's-eye overview, generally centred upon the mansion and gardens but also included the rest of the estate.² The pictures were made for display, to reassure the owner of the extent of his landed property and to impress upon visitors his prowess at estate management and productivity. Prospect paintings were quite explicitly about territory ownership and control, as were developments relating to the mapping of the land which were generally concerned with military control.³

Discussing Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews* and their desire to own an oil portrait of themselves with their own land in the background, John Berger suggests:

among the pleasures their portrait gave to Mr and Mrs Andrews was the pleasure of seeing themselves depicted as landowners.⁴

Mr Andrews stands, gun tucked under arm, whilst Mrs Andrews sits, poised. The dog is near Mr Andrews, characterised in his role of hunter and gatherer. The landscape, as backdrop, is empty of other humans. It is theirs. Social class intersects with patriarchy. Mr Andrews stands, masterful. Property rights are invested in the male. Control of the land relates to masculinity. Land ownership symbolises entrepreneurial success, underpinning his position as head of family.

Precise subjects represented reflect particular cultural relations and concerns. Deborah Bright has suggested that English landscape in the eighteenth century did not simply echo the Dutch model but re-articulated the genre to incorporate the increasing emphasis on empirical discovery and technological achievement.⁵ Such



Mr and Mrs Andrews Thomas Gainsborough, circa 1749

representations not only serve as homage to entrepreneurship, they also mask the necessary involvement of labour in taming and maintaining the land. 'Landscape' is unpeopled. Work appears not to take place. For the aristocracy, landed gentry and, later, the new nineteenth century industrialists, land symbolised hereditary status or entrepreneurial success. It also symbolised the possibility of leisure, simultaneously masking the work by others necessary in support of this. One aspect of the impact of Realism in the nineteenth century was the challenge to ways in which 'landscape' traditionally served to obscure class relations.

By contrast with, for instance, American landscape, the British countryside seems compact and tame. Significantly, the term 'countryside' first came into use in eighteenth century England as a description of the domesticated rural areas of fields, villages and gentrified estates. As Raymond Williams has suggested, the contrast between country and city is complexly articulated, each with both positive and negative associations.⁶ Countryside has come to embody desires for harmony with nature, for a sense of community, for simplicity of lifestyle, yet is also seen as backward relative to the city, which stands for modernity, progress, education, affluence. 'Countryside' is a cultural construct consequent upon the increasing dominance of the urban and suburban. Images, stereotypes, myths associated with the rural are inextricably bound up with urban change. Cultural geographer Michael Bunce distinguishes between North American and English idealisations of countryside.⁷ In North America, the rural landscape

is valued more in terms of agricultural progress and desirable way of life than in terms of picturesque aesthetic; the search for scenery has tended to look beyond farmscapes to wilder open spaces. By contrast, British, particularly English, countryside is valued primarily as landscape aesthetic. As he suggests, this is evident not only in literary and artistic idealisations but also in its use as amenity (for instance, for day trippers) and in campaigns for the protection of the rural environment. Noting ways in which English countryside has been shaped by vested interests in which agrarian aims were often subordinate to the desires of the landed gentry, Bunce argues that 'there emerged a countryside in which the preservation of the status quo and the creation of a landscape for leisure and aesthetic enjoyment became as important as agricultural productivity and rural trade. This established the perfect conditions for the cultivation, literally and figuratively, of the picturesque character of the countryside. As the working population left rural areas in growing numbers... the countryside became even more amenable to being appreciated for its scenic beauty.'⁸

In terms of the scenic, there is also a key distinction between the Englishness represented in *Mr and Mrs Andrews* and images of wilderness associated with other areas of Britain such as Yorkshire and, to some extent, the Lakes, but particularly including Snowdonia in Wales and the Highlands of Scotland. Mountains were previously seen as natural boundaries or uncharted territory. As Barthes has argued in relation to Alpine myth, from the nineteenth century onwards mountains became viewed as spectacle for travellers, recommended in travel literature such as the Blue Guides.⁹ This was not simply a matter of the visual vista but also emerged from Christian morality in which notions of regeneration and purification were associated with the 'morality of effort and solitude' implicated in mountain climbing.¹⁰ 'Wilderness' became incorporated visually as picturesque, and attitudes to nature became idealised in terms of the sublime. Thus 'nature' was conceptualised as opposite to 'culture'. It was also exalted as awesome and inspirational. This view of nature as pure, wondrous and beautiful is complexly articulated with the idea of nature as territory for manly conquest.

Landscape, Photography, Aesthetics

It is illusory to develop beliefs and responses to landscape photography; it does not exist. This assertion does not contest

*that people walk about the land and sometimes take photographs or look at them. What it does contest is that there is an underlying reality to either landscape or photography and that we can know them by studying them directly or in isolation.'*¹¹

Photography has largely inherited the compositional conventions of landscape painting. But the apparent realism of photography adds to the authority of photographic representations. In principle, the camera can only record that which is in front of it: the image references actuality (although selection, editing, manipulation, cropping, contextualisation and so on contribute to constructing how we read it). This relationship between the photograph and that which was in front of the camera underpins the sense of authenticity, and consequent authority, invested in the interpretation of *photographic* images. In fact, a range of 'translations' is involved in reading the photographic image. For instance, landscape imagery is often monochrome, the countryside represented in terms of form and tonal gradings. Billowy white clouds against a clear light grey sky are accepted as indicating the blue skies of summer.

Landscape photography has been particularly associated with Ansel Adams. Minor White, Edward Weston and others working in the American West. Unlike Britain, America is characterised by vast open spaces. Nineteenth century pioneers, such as Carlton Watkins, photographed land then relatively inaccessible by rail: nature untouched, viewed as empty. (Native Americans did not figure.). The landscape was represented picturesquely as massive and unregulated. This is nature at its most challenging, the land of Marlboro Man, often described as 'virgin territory', viewed as ripe for discovery. Such attitudes inform image-making. Women photographers did not figure in this early American work. Given such attitudes, this is not surprising. Of course, reasons for the absence of women are more complex. Much of that early work was undertaken for government, for mapping purposes. Women would not have been considered suitable employees. Besides, scrambling through remote rocky areas with teams of men and heavy equipment would hardly have fitted notions of respectability, or femininity. However, that this is not simply a matter of propriety is indicated in the apparent absence of women from later American movements, such as the post-World War Two 'new topographics' of Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz.

Constructions of landscape not only reflect particular social attitudes and idealisations, they also accord with aesthetic conventions.



THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

Falls of Ogwen, North Wales Roger Fenton, *circa 1858*

Discussing composition and perspective, Bill Nichols notes that 'Renaissance painters fabricated textual systems approximating the cues relating to normal perception better than any other strategy until the emergence of photography', which offered the 'yet-more-perfect replication of normal perceptual codes possible with the camera and its photographs or films'.¹² Perspective involves organising the image in relation to a single, central, point of origin of the look. Arguably this contributes to our sense of ourselves as singular, unified individuals or subjects. The reader is centrally positioned and exercises a controlling gaze over the subject-matter depicted. Composition thus supports the emphasis on the individual which is associated with entrepreneurship within Capitalism. Similarly, Berger has commented upon ways in which the painting situated within the domestic context, perhaps above the fireplace, represents and reaffirms the status of the household.¹³ Nichols argues that the Renaissance painting and, by extension, the photograph 'allows us to think that what it displays is the riches of its owner (even spiritual riches) while this display simultaneously puts us in our place, fixing us there in a dialectic of appropriations, in a display of imaginary capture'.¹⁴ Thus, medium, compositional structure, and usage, together contribute to reaffirming class, status

and entrepreneurial success. This relates not only to the English landscape but also to overseas territory documented by photographers such as Francis Frith or Samuel Bourne, British travellers to colonial outposts.

By the nineteenth century, 'landscape' also stood as an antidote for the visual and social consequences of industrialisation. Art movements such as Romanticism and Pictorialism reflect changing attitudes to land. Ignoring ways in which industrialisation actually impacted on the visual environment, Romanticism in painting reified nature as idyll. Pictorialism, which particularly characterised a strand of photographic practice towards the end of the nineteenth century, offered a number of mini-narratives within which people are re-located in closer relation to what was perceived as 'natural' environment. Mike Weaver has described the aim of pictorial photography as 'to make a picture in which the sensuous beauty of the fine print is consonant with the moral beauty of the fine image'.¹⁵ There is no specific documentary or topographical location. Thus, for instance, the drowning of Ophelia is re-presented by Henry Peach Robinson as a picturesque morality tale; the Norfolk Broads are used by P. H. Emerson as a setting in which humans are depicted apparently in absolute harmony with the natural.

Photography has been described as a system of visual editing. Information may be emphasised – or excluded. Specific genres within photography have established their own conventions as to appropriate use of light, distance from subject-matter, depth of field, composition and framing, acceptable viewpoints. But the reading of the image implicates broader ideological discourses. Photographic imaging has an ability to incorporate change and render it part of traditional imagery and myth. Fences, the railway, brick walls, roadways, pylons, signs and hoardings have all, variously, become taken for granted within the landscape image. The photographic not only re-presents but also re-inflects its subject-matter in terms which reflect current cultural understandings and aspirations.

Myths associated with landscape and countryside clearly mark all fields of visual representation. For instance, early advertisements for Shell petrol exhorted readers to 'See Britain First on Shell', offering images of, for instance, the Scottish Highlands or the river at Bridport in Dorset. Roads, and the car, necessary for reaching these proposed viewpoints – and indeed for keeping up petrol sales – rarely appear in this imagery. Likewise cinema may draw upon

emotional responses through references to countryside. For instance the wartime film, *Went Well The Day*, underscored the danger of invasion through using a long tracking shot through English farmlands as its opening sequence. The threat to England is expressed as a threat to property ownership, to the land as a source of food and livelihood, and to the relation between villagers and the land. The people of the village who, needless to state, rout out the enemy in their midst, represent the English class system in microcosm. In a similar vein, Peter Kennard's re-working of Constable's *Hay Wain* for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, in drawing attention to the threat to countryside, paradoxically also serves to reaffirm the rural idyll.

Idealisation of landscape continues unabated, especially in popular imagery. Picture postcards and posters of beauty spots are carefully composed, framed and coloured in ways which often bear limited relation to what may actually be seen and certainly tell us little of pertinent socio-economic relations. The blue skies and green grass of postcards and travel posters glorify nature in ways which serve to distract from the complexities of seasonal change, not to mention the politics of property rights. The landscape is carefully organised as views which conform to expectations fostered by selected aesthetic conventions and historical references. Tourists are invited to take snapshots from particular vantage points. Dereliction, the legacy of industrialisation, or the effects of tourism are, either, eschewed in favour of the fantasies of rural bliss, or, incorporated and reworked as a part of 'heritage'.

Biographical accounts portray the male photographer, a lone hero figure, up in the middle of the night to capture the landscape at dawn, striding across the countryside, possibly braving rain or snow, rucksack and tripod slung across his back; a solitary figure, marking out the territory of his work. Fundamental assumptions relating to what is generally characterised as a dialectical struggle between 'man' and 'nature' persist. That noted, contemporary British photographers such as Keith Arnatt, John Davies and Jem Southam do engage in more critical terms with notions of landscape, commenting, for example, on the legacy of industrialisation, whether it be rural industry such as tin-mining (Southam) or the Northern industrial landscape (Davies). Fay Godwin's work on land, access and property rights offers further significant examples. But women photographers, other than Godwin, are not particularly noted within landscape photography, critical or otherwise.

Women, Photography, Landscape

Discussing Victorian women artists, Pamela Gerrish Nunn asks:

*What experience did the female artist have of the natural environment while J. M. W. Turner was conducting a vaporous romance with sun, sea and mountains, and John Constable was recording his rustic idyll?*¹⁶

Noting that women did not simply copy male art forms, she concludes that, by taking up art, they were challenging assumptions not only about the nature and status of art but also about the position of women in society. As is implied in her comment, the mobility of women was restricted; domestic subjects were more easily available and deemed appropriate. More research still needs to be done, but it seems that nineteenth century women photographers did not engage with ideas of land and landscape. No examples are included either by Val Williams or Constance Sullivan in their respective studies.¹⁷ Rather, women are mentioned in relation to portraiture, the family album or still life. For example, Anna Atkins, the first Englishwoman known to use photography, documented detail of flowering plants and ferns. Many of the renowned Victorian women photographers or writers on photography, such as Lady Eastlake or Lady Clementina Hawarden, were members of land-owning aristocratic families. As such, they might have been expected to be concerned with land. The absence of women making landscape imagery, in Britain and elsewhere, seems to be more a question of gender rather than of class. The nearest to 'landscape' women came was the garden or local woodlands. Given the domestic role assigned to women, not to mention Victorian sense of propriety, it seems no accident that women such as Julia Margaret Cameron or Lady Hawarden became notable for staged images using family and friends.

Women did figure within turn of the century pictorialism which, Val Williams suggests, 'with its emphasis on beauty and its use of subjects from nature, provided a link with the Victorian aristocracy which was particularly satisfying for the socially aware middle classes'.¹⁸ But pictorialism served to abstract and tame nature, rendering it in aestheticised terms. Such image-making is somewhat distant from, on the one hand, the mythical characteristics of the sublime landscape or, on the other hand, the descriptive topographical detail associated with images sourced in surveys and mapping. Williams only identifies one woman, Mrs K. M. Parsons,

who worked specifically in landscape in the early twentieth century. She notes that her imagery was pictorialist in idiom but that later she moved to documentary. Likewise, American, Laura Gilpin, is one of the few women included by Ian Jeffrey in his discussion of *Landscape*.¹⁹ Her picturing of the American West bears some compositional affinity to Ansel Adams (who was younger). But, as in her study of Navajo Indians, the great majority of her work is concerned with people and places, society and environment. Like Parsons, she began as a pictorialist but moved from the soft focus ideal towards a more objective style.

Introducing a historical survey of work by American women, Margery Mann suggests that 'few women have cared deeply enough for the landscape that they have allowed it to dominate their photographic work.'²⁰ Likewise, Martha A. Sandweiss suggests that 'as a group, women have developed a collective tradition of viewing the landscape that sets them apart from many of their male colleagues' and which 'emphasizes the links between human beings and the natural world'.²¹ Her essay introduces the 1987 exhibition catalogue *Reclaiming Paradise: American Women Photograph the Land*. This survey identified two kinds of picturing: documentary-style images concerning relations between humans and landscape as place, and, more autobiographical, staged imagery with landscape as setting.

There are a number of reasons why relatively few women make landscape imagery. In practical terms, exploring the countryside involves long walks, lots of time, much trudging around, possibly carrying a range of equipment, not always in good weather. In a documentary about her approach to her work which included footage of her exploring remote and blustery parts of the Scottish Highlands, Fay Godwin notes that the rural is threatening as well as beautiful and that she was 'quite often frightened out in the landscape'.²² Matters of personal safety, risk, or perceptions of risk, intervene. This, along with domestic constraints, household responsibilities and childcare, limit women's explorations.

The relative absence of British women landscape photographers is also a consequence, historically, of different attitudes to land founded in gender differences in property rights. Traditionally women have not been landowners. Their relation to land has been mediated through daughterhood or marriage. This is not to say that women have no investment in land or in notions associated with property ownership and estate management. Hegemonic processes are such that women are clearly drawn into dominant understandings and

idealisations of the rural. But, given their different cultural position, women have tended to view land less acquisitively.

Furthermore, despite post-modernist re-framing of conceptual approaches, the notion of a binary divide between 'nature' and 'culture' continues to have some purchase, contributing to defining a relation of woman to nature which rather differs from that of man and nature. She is ambiguously dislocated somewhere between 'nature' and 'culture'. This marginal position contributes to her self-conception and seems to exclude desire to use photography symbolically to 'tame' nature or to map territory. Rather, she is interested in remarking mediations between people and land. There is a distinction between 'land', which is always present, and 'landscape', which is an imaginary construct reflecting the concerns and priorities of the viewer. Landscape reflects male attitudes to land.

Thus, in considering issues of representation, the focus must be on the patriarchal implications of 'landscape' as a cultural construct. Contemporary women photographers *have* engaged variously with notions associated with land and landscape, territory and location, countryside, and the natural. Thus, for example, Jo Spence explored health, body and environment; Ingrid Pollard challenges the denial of black presence within British history and heritage imagery; Judith Goddard has directly questioned the notion of a nature/culture opposition, for example, through installing a circle of televisions on Dartmoor as a contemporary echo of Stonehenge; Susan Trangmar has explored the position of mastery implicit in the act of looking, thereby challenging assumptions about women's lack of right to look. Others have represented the rural environment and ambiguities relating to notions of the natural in more poetic terms. Thus, for instance, Elizabeth Williams has offered close-up, immersing images of water or mud which simultaneously fascinate in terms of textural detail and suggest metaphorical interpretation. In so far as they can transcend other (domestic) constraints, women *do* engage with land, with rural environments, but within terms which differ from those conventionalised as landscape. Arguably, it is the concept of landscape which should be problematised rather than the relative absence of women practitioners.



Television Circle Judith Goddard, 1987



Walking on the Water 1 • 2 • 3

Elizabeth Williams

1989

Landscape, Culture, Patriarchy

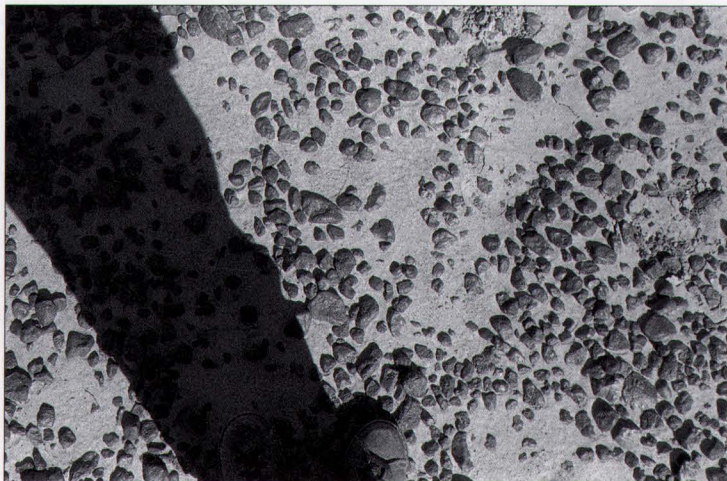
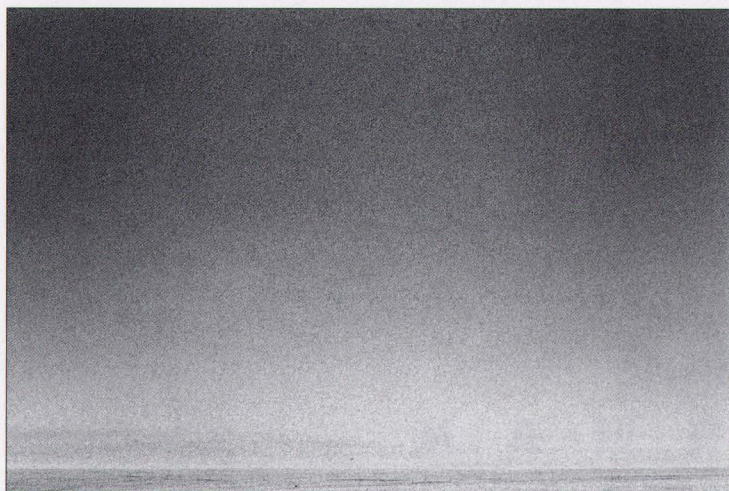
In her series *Connoisseurs*, Karen Knorr pictures a man in an art gallery viewing a landscape painting. This sums up much of what is associated with 'landscape' as a set of conventions within British painting and photography. Landscape imagery reflects and reinforces particular ideas about class, gender and race in relation to property rights, accumulation and control. The representation of land as landscape may be seen as male territory, both in terms of types of artistic practice and in terms of territorialism. Carefully composed images of the land as 'tamed' or 'tameable' environment are shot, framed, put on display. Men gratify

proprietary fantasies and a sense of masculine identity through creating, or through looking at, landscape images. Women do not conceptualise and experience property in the same way as men. Woman's historical relation to land is ambiguous, mediated through her relation to men and through historical attitudes which define woman as somehow closer to nature than man, positioning her differently in relation to the rural. Social and domestic restraints have limited women's work, historically and now. However, that few women work in landscape is more a consequence of ideology and social position as of practical constraints. Both politically and aesthetically, landscape reflects and reinforces patriarchal attitudes.

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Horizons



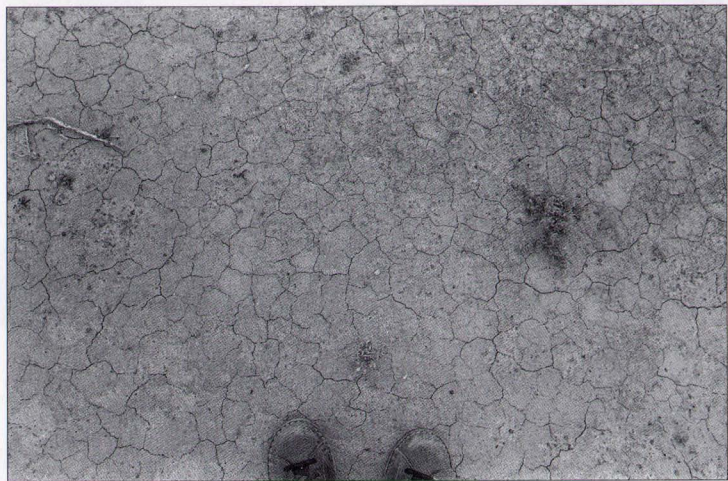
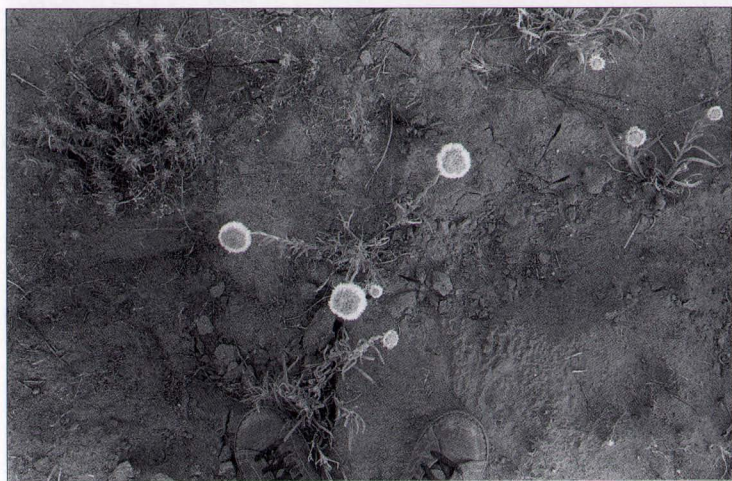
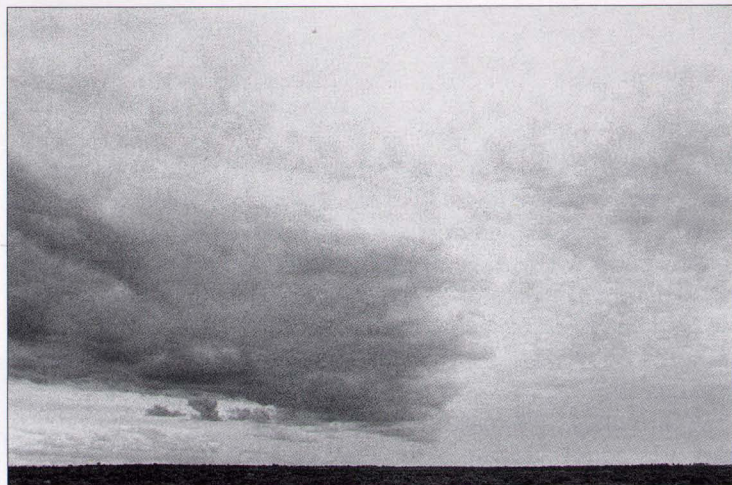
Between Arrabury Homestead and Betoota, Queensland

1979

Northern End, Birdsville Track, South Australia

1979

Horizons



Southern End, Birdsville Track, South Australia

1979

Between Mildura, Victoria, and Lake Mungo, New South Wales

1979

**S I A N
B O N N E L L**

PASSAGE OF LIGHT

February 1992, 2.00pm

February 1992, 3.15pm

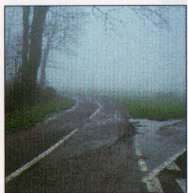




NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



Stevie Bezencenet, born 1950, studied photography at Regent's Street Polytechnic and for an M.A. at Sussex University. She has been teaching in London colleges since 1972 and is currently a Principal Lecturer in Media, School of Design and Media, University of Westminster. She has worked as an adviser in a variety of academic, media and arts organisations. She has published widely throughout Britain since 1976, including *Photographic Practices*, co-editor Philip Corrigan, (Comedia, 1986). Exhibitions include *Right of Passage* (Ecology Centre, London, 1988) and *Critical Land* (Impressions Gallery, York, 1989). Lives in London.



Sian Bonnell, born London 1956, studied at Harrow School of Art (1977-78), Chelsea School of Art (1978-81) and Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, M.A. (1983-85). She has worked as a designer, photographer and property-maker on theatre productions for various companies. Exhibitions include: *New Contemporaries* (ICA, London, 1980), *Tyne and Country* (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1985), *Time* (MOMA, Oxford, 1988), *Points of View* (Poole, 1993), *Mysterious Spaces* (Chesil Gallery, Portland, 1993), *Mothers and Daughters* (Cairn Gallery, Nailsworth, 1994). Commission: environmental sculptures for Theatre of the Heart, Garland Day performance, Abbotsbury (1993). Lives and works in Dorset.



Claire Collison, born Warwickshire 1963, lives Brixton, London; studied English and Drama at Goldsmith's, London University (1982-86), subsequently Photography and Film-Making at the Strand Centre, Lambeth Adult Education, London. Recent shows include: *Silent Health* (Camerawork, London, 1990), *A Search for Self* (Ikona, Birmingham, and touring, 1991), *Confrontations* (Walsall Museum, 1992), *One Girl's*

Adventure (Royal Albert Museum, Exeter, 1992; Metro, Derby, 1993), *Our Bodies Ourselves* (Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1994), *Women Light Up The Night* (Berlin, 1994). Work is published in *Silent Health: Women, Health and Representation* (Camerawork), *What Can A Woman Do With A Camera?* (Scarlet Press, 1995). Images editor, *Disability Arts Magazine*.



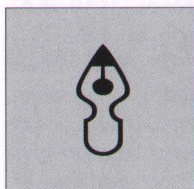
Anna Fox, born 1961, studied photography at West Surrey College of Art and Design (W.S.C.A.D.), 1983-86. Solo exhibitions include: Primavera, Barcelona (1992), Braga Photography Festival (1993). Group exhibitions include: *Through the Looking Glass* (Barbican, London, 1989), *The Fourth Wall* (Amsterdam, 1991), *ICI Fox Talbot Awards* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 1992), *Documentary Dilemmas* (British Council touring, 1993-94). In numerous collections including: The National Museum, Bradford; Royal Photographic Society, Bath; Photography Forum, Frankfurt. Curator: *The American Dream* (King's Lynn, 1991). Monographs: *Workstations* (Camerawork, 1988) and *Friendly Fire, A Study of Weekend Wargames in Britain* (forthcoming). Member, Format Photo Agency. Part-time lecturer, Kent Institute and W.S.C.A.D. Lives in North London with her partner and two sons.



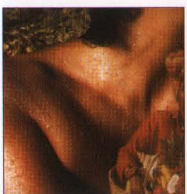
Helen Harris, born Devon 1954; B.A. Hons, Graphic Design, Bath Academy of Art (1974-77); Art Teacher's Certificate, Goldsmith's, London (1977-78); Honorary Fellowship in Photography, Bath College of Higher Education (1981-82). Lives Somerset, lectures part-time in Photography at Bath C.H.E. and at Central St. Martin's School of Art, London. Exhibitions include *Image and Exploration* (The Photographers' Gallery, London, 1985), *Tomorrow* (Royal Festival Hall, 1986), *British Contemporary Photography* (touring Eastern Europe, 1986-88), *Tidemarks* (Plymouth Arts Centre, 1989), *Mapping the Landscape* (Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1990), *13 Critics, 26 Photographers* (Santa Monica Arts Centre, Barcelona, 1990). Work included in the Arthur Anderson & Co. Art Collection.



Ingrid Hesling, born London 1953, lives in rural Somerset and has been working as a photographer for eight years. She teaches photography in Adult Education and has led many projects and workshops with schoolchildren, women and local community groups. Her work was seen recently in *A Daughter's View* (Watershed, Bristol, 1991, and on tour) and in *Standing in the Shadows* (The Photographers' Gallery, London, 1991). It is in the collections of Somerset County Museum and Somerset Education Department. In 1993 she embarked on *Anarchy in Arcady*, an on-going project interrogating 'landscape' and the contemporary rural environment.



Sue Isherwood, born Surrey 1947. University of Bristol, B.A. (Combined Arts – Drama, English, Philosophy); P.G. Dip Film; a Somerset-based lecturer and arts consultant specialising in photography, media and women's studies. She has worked for the British Film Institute, the Royal Photographic Society, the Open University and the Arts Council. She has been involved in a wide range of photography and media education projects, including booklets to accompany Channel 4 series, on the family album and on documentary photography. Co-curator with Joan Solomon of *A Daughter's View* (a Watershed touring exhibition, 1991-94); co-editor with Nick Stanley, *Creating Vision: Photography and the National Curriculum* (Cornerhouse Publications, 1994).



Roshini Kempadoo, born Crawley, England, 1959; B.A. Visual Communications (West Midlands College of Higher Education), M.A. Photographic Studies (Derby). Lives in Leicester; freelance photographer for Format, London. Photography Officer for West Midlands Arts Board, Birmingham. Solo shows include: *ECU – European Currency Unfolds* (Drik Gallery, Dhaka, Bangladesh), *Roshini Kempadoo – Culture and Identity* (Perspektief, Rotterdam, 1991). Group shows include: *Interrogating Identities* (Grey Arts Centre, New York, 1991), *Rencontres au Noir* (A/V, Arles, France, 1993). She is represented in many publications. Lecturing includes *Hedgehogs and Megabytes* (ICA weekend school), *Documentary Lives* (South Bank, London), *Critical Decade* (MOMA, Oxford), *Black Photographers in Europe* (Society for Photographic Education, Washington D.C.).



Ingrid Pollard, born Guyana, 1953, moved to London aged 4. A self-taught photographer, she worked in community arts before studying film and video at the London College of Printing (L.C.P.). Numerous group exhibitions include *Black Women Time Now* (Battersea, London, 1984), *The Thin Black Line* (ICA, 1985), *D-Max* (Ikon, Birmingham, touring 1987- 88), *Through the Looking Glass* (Barbican, 1989), *Interrogating Identities* (Grey Art Gallery, New York, 1991), *Stolen Glances* (Stills, Edinburgh, touring 1991-93), *Documentary Dilemmas* (British Council tour, 1993), *Critical Decade* (Arles, France, 1993). In collections at The National Museum, Bradford, Victorian and Albert, London, and in many publications. Studying M.A. Photographic Studies, Derby University. She acknowledges the continuing support of friends and their contribution to her work.



Annette Robinson, born Gloucestershire 1947, lived Penzance since 1979; Diploma in Photojournalism, L.C.P. (1987-88). Collective member, *Peninsula Voice* local news magazine (1984-87); administrator and founder member, Cornwall Independent Photographers Association (C.I.P.A.); management committee member, South West Independent Photographers Association. One person shows: *Reflections and Encounters* (Truro and Penzance, 1990), *Jubilee Pool* (Penzance, 1994). Group shows include *Women and Humour* (Hammersmith, London, 1987), Spectrum Women's Photography Festival (John Harvard Library, London, 1988), *Myths and Realities* (Newlyn Orion, 1991), C.I.P.A. (various shows, 1992-94). Currently pursuing several long-term colour projects on West Penwith and exploring digital technology.



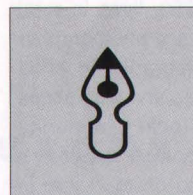
Lynn Silverman, born Syracuse, New York, U.S.A., 1952. Studied photography at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York (graduated 1975) and at Goldsmiths' College, London (M.A. 1992). Her work is in collections including: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Australian National Gallery, Canberra; Visual Arts Board, Australia Council of the Arts, Sydney; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Department of Education and Science, London. Her most recent one-person exhibition is *1:1* (Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham, 1993). Publications include *1:1* (Angel Row Gallery with Camerawork and Derby University), *Furniture Fictions* (Cornerhouse Publications, 1989) She is Senior Lecturer in Photographic Studies, University of Derby.



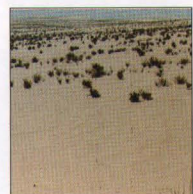
Patricia Townsend, born Lincolnshire 1947, convent educated, read Physics at Somerville, Oxford University. A psychoanalytic psychotherapist, NHS and private practice. Her photography has appeared in many venues including Camberwell School of Art (1988), Spectrum Open Exhibition (1988), B4 Studios (1989), Photofusion Open (1992), Barbican Library (1994), Coventry Gallery (1994). One-person show, Islington Arts Factory (1990). Member of a women's photography collective working on self-portraiture; participated in *In search of Self* (Photofusion, 1994) and *Creating the Subject* (Morley Gallery, London, 1994). Women Artists Diary 1993 included her image 'Personal Fragments'. Lives in London, husband and three sons.



Miranda Walker, born Dorking, Surrey, 1943. After a lifelong interest in photography, she took it up seriously in 1988 after her two daughters left home. Studied Documentary Photography, Newport College of Art (1991-93). Solo exhibitions: *The Forgotten Lives* (touring, 1990), *Traditional Donegal Musicians* (Glencolincille, Eire), *Karmaggeddon* (Watershed, 1994). Group exhibitions: *Documentary at Newport* (Photofusion, 1993), *Touched by Light* (Stoke Museum and Art Gallery, 1994). Her work is published in *The Forgotten Lives* (Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, 1990) and is in the collection at the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Based in West Wales.



Liz Wells, born London, 1948. University of Bristol, B.A. (Sociology/Social Administration), 1977; P.G. Dip Film; M.A. Visual Culture. Worked in theatre lighting (1968-74). Course tutor 'Popular Culture', Open University (1982-87); Lecturer, History/Theory (film and photography), Faculty of Art, Media and Design, University of the West of England (1979-93). A former editor of *Camerawork* (Issues 31 and 32) and erstwhile regular contributor to *The British Journal of Photography*, she currently writes for *Women's Art Magazine* and *Creative Camera*. Curator, *Viewfindings – Women Photographers: 'Landscape' and Environment* (Newlyn Art Gallery, touring 1994-96). Editor, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge (forthcoming). Senior Lecturer, School of Media, L.C.P. (from Autumn 1994).



Elizabeth Williams, born Middlesex, 1949. B.A. Hons Fine Art, Birmingham Polytechnic (1968-71); Higher Dip Photography, L.C.P. (1972-75). Work shown at: The Photographers' Gallery (1986); Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1987); Camden Arts Centre, London (1987); R.P.S., Bath (1991); Pitt Rivers Museum and MOMA, Oxford (1994); North Sinai Heritage Museum (1994) and included in British Council touring exhibitions in Greece and Cyprus (1984) and France (1987). Group shows include: *Sequences* (Cambridge and Bristol, 1984); *Multiple Originals* (Photographers' Gallery, 1986); *Towards A Bigger Picture* (V & A, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, 1987); *British Photography Since 1945* (Barbican, 1989); *Nature After Nature* (Southampton, 1990). In collections including the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; V & A; R.P.S. Lectures at Reading and Oxford Brookes Universities.



Watershed

1 Canon's Road

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Fax (0117) 921 3958
Email: info@watershed.demon.co.uk
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Photography

Gallery 1 is open 7 days a week
from 11.00am to 7.00pm.

Concourse 1 & 2 are open 7 days a week
until 10.30pm.

Admission is free to all exhibitions

Disabled Visitors

Watershed welcomes disabled people. There are assistance bells at the front entrance and next to the access lift at the side of the building. Once on the first floor there is level access to most areas including the adapted toilet, the exhibition spaces and the Café/Bar. For a detailed access sheet please contact Box Office.

Café/Bar

The Café/Bar is open for coffees, teas, pastries and light meals 7 days a week from 10.30am to 9.00pm (11.00am to 7.00pm Sundays) and is fully licensed until 11.00pm daily except Sundays (10.30pm).

Prices range from £1.50 to £2.50 for a sandwich or jacket potato to £4.00 for a hot dish from the daily changing menu.

Cinema

Watershed has two auditoria which show the best in world cinema. Pick up our free monthly film and events brochure for full programme details. Cinema tickets and party bookings can be organised in advance by calling Box Office on (0117) 925 3845

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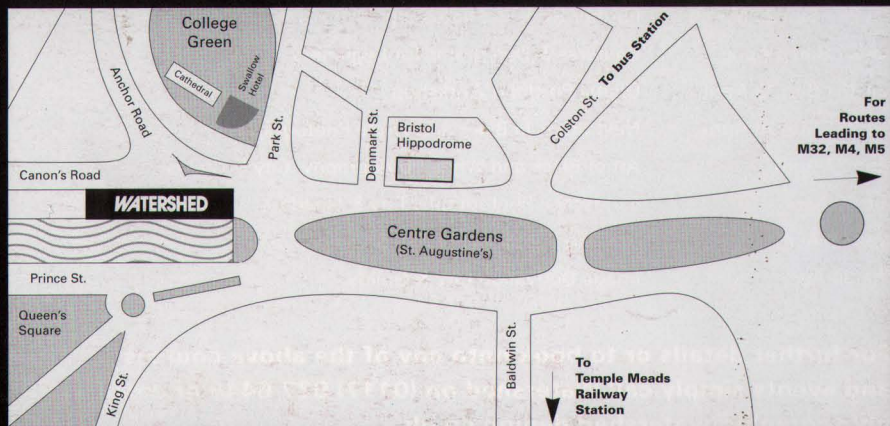
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Waterside

Groundings Sian Bonnell

Saturday 14 February -
Sunday 19 April

Groundings, a black and white series of prints taken in an area of outstanding beauty in Dorset, is an unsettling meditation on the fickle encroachments of the late 20th century. Sian Bonnell is interested in the particularity of place and how a stretch of land is portrayed. Not content with either the picturesque or the fine print school of landscapists, she seeks a different, often humorous perspective by bringing together her work on the concept of home with the history, archaeology and present day agricultural use of the nearby land.

By placing manufactured kitchen utensils within the landscape the viewer is led into to a game of hunt the mismatch, since the objects claim a distant formal relationship with the 'natural' world. These photographs are fine prints of beautiful places; the images are also funny, poignant and carry a darker dimension which hints at a loss of innocence.

Please see page 17 for details of a landscape photography course led by Sian Bonnell.



Cameras and Darkrooms for Beginners

Sat 14 Feb - Sun 15 Feb
Sat 4 April - Sun 5 April

This intensive weekend introduction will illustrate how to get the most out of your camera and teach you basic darkroom skills. An explanation of camera controls, functions and film types will be followed by taking photos, developing film and printing a contact sheet and enlargements in the darkroom. Please bring a 35mm camera and its manual, all other materials provided.

Women's Photography

Sat 7 - Sun 8 March

To mark International Women's Day this women-only course covers the basics of camera controls, taking photos and using the darkroom, under the guidance of tutor Ruth Jacobs. Over the two days you will shoot a roll of black and white film, make a contact sheet and print a selection of enlargements. No experience is necessary. Please bring a 35mm camera and its manual, all other materials provided.

Landscape Photography

Sat 21- Sun 22 March

To coincide with her exhibition **Groundings**, Sian Bonnell will lead this landscape course which aims to use the environment in an experimental way, constructing images about time and place. On day one Sian will talk about her exhibition followed by a location shoot in the area. Day two includes processing and printing in the darkroom and discussion of the work and ideas raised during the course. This workshop is for participants with some photographic and darkroom experience who are prepared to experiment. Please bring a camera and a roll of black and white film, all other materials provided.

Next Steps in Black and White Photography

Sat 25 - Sun 26 April

An intensive weekend of discussion and practical work with an emphasis on thinking conceptually to explore a theme using images. Participants will be able to negotiate ideas with the tutor, take photos, process film and improve darkroom techniques by controlling contrast and exposure during processing. Please bring a camera and a roll of black and white film, all other materials provided.

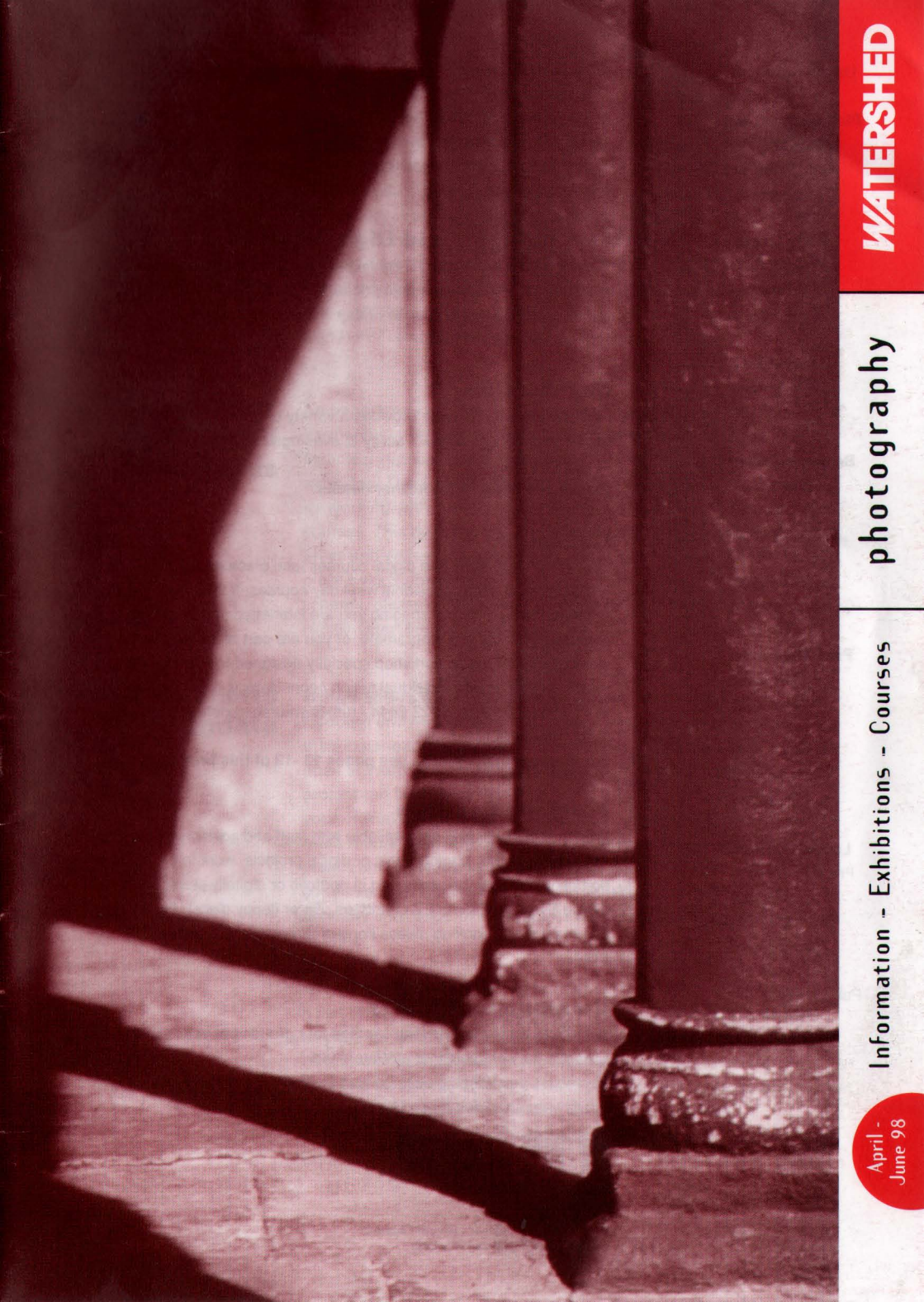
City & Guilds 9231 Photography Jan - April

These popular modular courses lead to certification based on assessment of a portfolio of 8-12 images together with evidence of planning and research. Participants achieving a high standard over five City & Guilds modules are eligible to apply for the Licentiate of the Royal Photographic Society, which is a nationally recognised standard of attainment. Each module consists of at least twenty two hours teaching time, plus a further twenty two hours of independent work which is recommended for completion of the module.

Watershed and Weston College are now working together to provide City & Guilds Photography 9231. The partnership will offer better value for money with more teaching hours per course and Weston College student benefits such as access to library facilities. Watershed will provide Weston College enrolment forms for participants to complete.

Times: 7.00pm to 9.00pm for 11 weeks

Fee: £70.00 full / £50.00 concessions



WATERSHED

photography

Information - Exhibitions - Courses

April -
June 98

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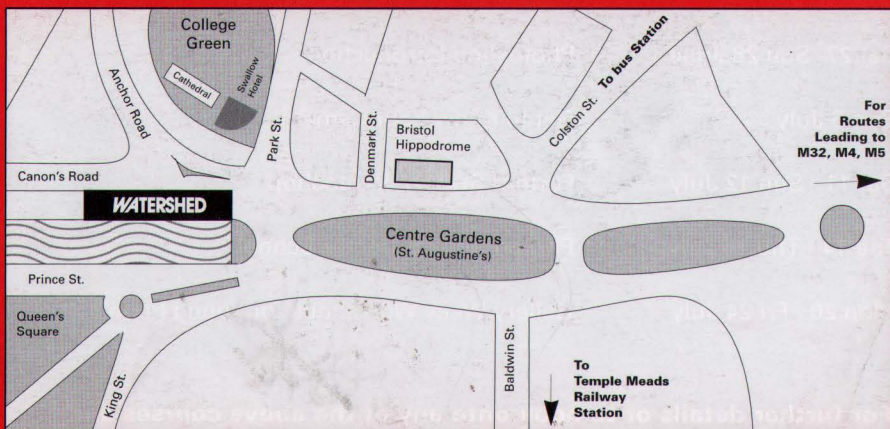
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Groundings Sian Bonnell

Until Sunday 19 April

Groundings, a black and white series of prints taken in an area of outstanding beauty in Dorset, is an unsettling meditation on the fickle encroachments of the late 20th century. It centres on a sense of place and how a stretch of land is portrayed. Not content with either the picturesque or the fine print school of landscapists, Bonnell seeks a different often humorous perspective by bringing together her work on the concept of home with the history, archaeology and present day agricultural use of the nearby land.

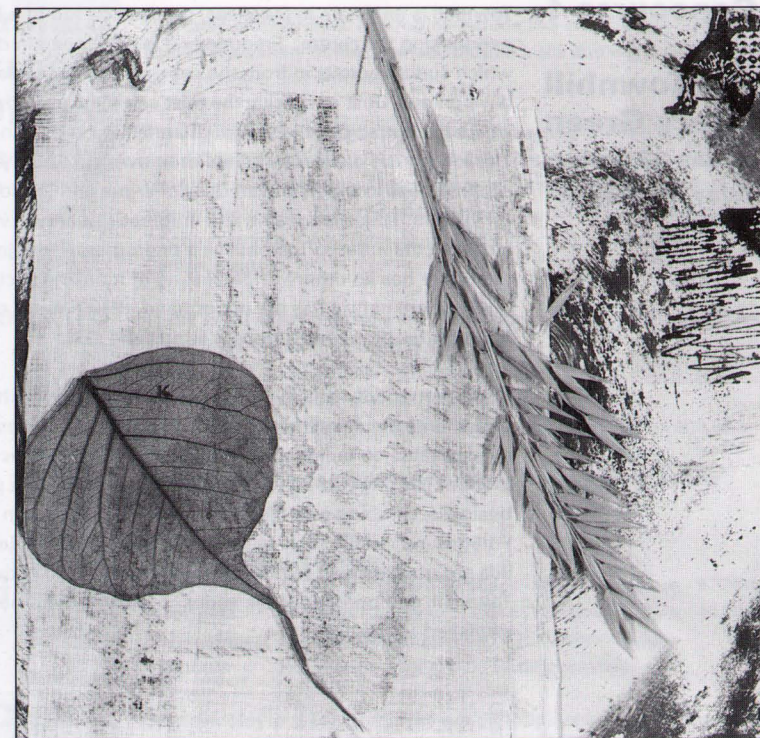
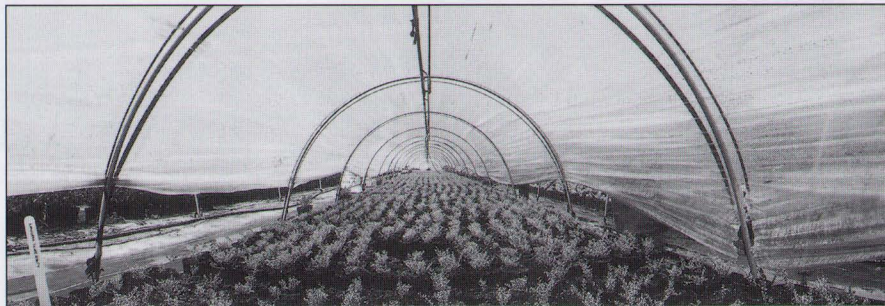


Concourse One

Tunnel Visions Gina Glover

Until Sunday 26 April

The plastic greenhouse or 'tunnel' is the focus of Gina Glover's exhibition. To the farmer and market gardener the tunnel is a cheap shelter for a high value product needing warmth, nurture and protection from our variable climate. To the photographer it offers unique properties by toning and softening natural light and by introducing an acute perspective which Glover exploits by using, amongst others, a panoramic camera. This work explores the visual qualities of the arched structure of tunnels and the taut plastic covers.



Concourse 1

Nine Months Azra Khaliq

Tuesday 28 April - Sunday 21 June

Nine Months is a unique and highly personal record of the artist's visit to her parental home in Kashmir, Pakistan, and further journeys in Pakistan and Cairo. Collages, postcards, text, photographs, polaroids and printmaking techniques are brought together to create images that attempt to record a fusion of Eastern and Western cultures, of travellers' perceptions and local landscapes. Seeds, fabric and leaves become integral parts of these small colourful images, Coca-cola labels rub shoulders with Asian texts, images are screenprinted across the whole collage.

Khaliq records 'an atmosphere of colour, a blending of cultures, endless outings in blistering heat; a journey through the heart and mind, in a country, with its people, where I should belong.' In doing so she pushes photography as a means of documenting reality into a realm where personal associations, intent and experiences behind the recording process, become transparent.

FOUNDINGS

Sian Bonnell

Groundings

Sian Bonnell

Sian Bonnell is interested in the particularity of place and how a stretch of land can be portrayed. Not content with either picturesque photography, or the fine print school of landscape, she seeks a different perspective.

Groundings was photographed in an area of outstanding beauty, in Dorset where Bonnell lives. She has placed manufactured objects in the landscape. These objects can claim some distant and formal relationship with the 'natural' world, and by placing them back within that world, it becomes possible to re-examine our notions of the rural environment and the symbolism of consumer goods.

Among Bonnell's themes in recent years has been a focus on the concept of 'home'. In English and some other languages home stands for the area or district a person lives in, the particular dwelling often associated with its occupants such as family members, and the country of origin. The term is densely packed with many complex meanings. So too is 'landscape' with its associations with the countryside, farming and more generally nature rather than culture. Frequently both home and the landscape are perceived as places to 'get away from it all' or to get 'back to base'.

However this exhibition has the unsettling effect of wittily and gently redirecting such comfortable desires. Instead it invites meditation on the fickle encroachments of the late C20th. The concept of home is brought into provocative tension with the history, archeology and present day agricultural use of the land. These images invite us to remember that rural areas can be heavily industrialised through modern farming methods, that homes are as often sites of family tension as of peace.

Yet the images allow the pleasure of looking and interpreting. They honour the specific character of land formations and vegetation, inviting wonder at the ancient chalk bedrock of the Dorset downs with its signs of inhabitation by man and beast over aeons of time. Sian Bonnell draws on and enjoys the traditions of landscape photography; she also sidesteps its romantic and nostalgic limitations, positioning her work firmly as a critical reading.

With thanks to Profolab, Weymouth for colour printing

Watershed Media Centre
1998





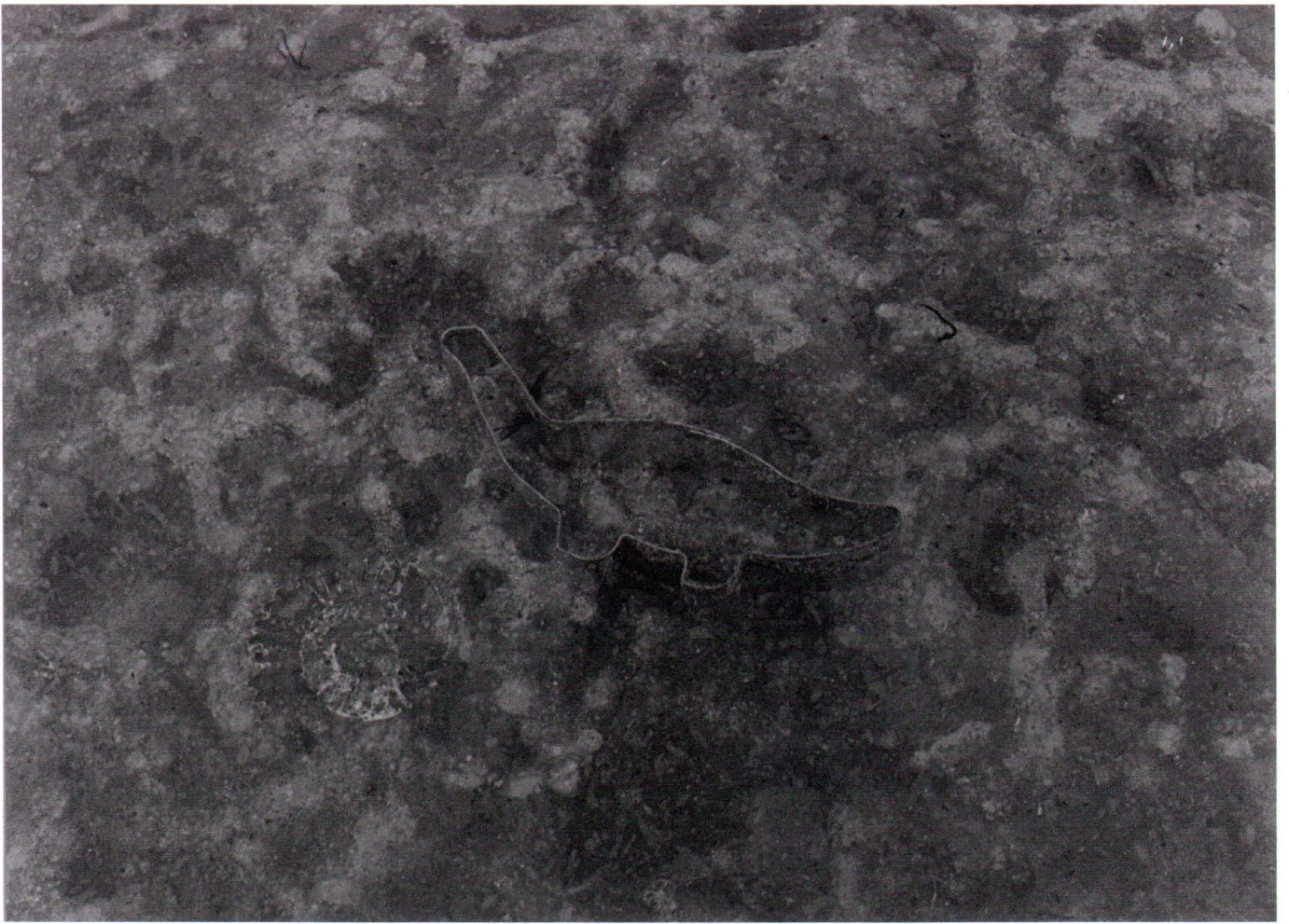














































ELLIPSIS

Volume 1

SHIFTING HORIZONS

WOMEN'S LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY NOW

*Edited by Liz Wells,
Kate Newton & Catherine Fehily*

I. B. TAURIS

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Shifting Horizons is for anyone who is interested in pictures, in landscape, in photography or in issues of gender. Twelve contemporary women photographers represent a wide range of approaches to a pictorial theme that has been dominated by men throughout its long history. Together, the portfolios of images and the collection of essays speculate on the nature of women's involvement in the development of a genre inherited by photography from painting.

The photographers adopt strategies ranging from the use of historical processes (non-silver emulsion, pinhole camera) through the development of traditional large format techniques to the manipulation of new digital technologies, in their exploration of landscape as a process in which they themselves are implicated. What emerges, through concerns with intuition, transience and with the rejection of simple, fixed dichotomies, is a general conviction that the world is not fixed, but utterly shifting. The essays collected here provide a broad context, in both historical and geographical terms, for the pictorial speculations offered by the photographers, drawing on work from Britain, North America and Europe.

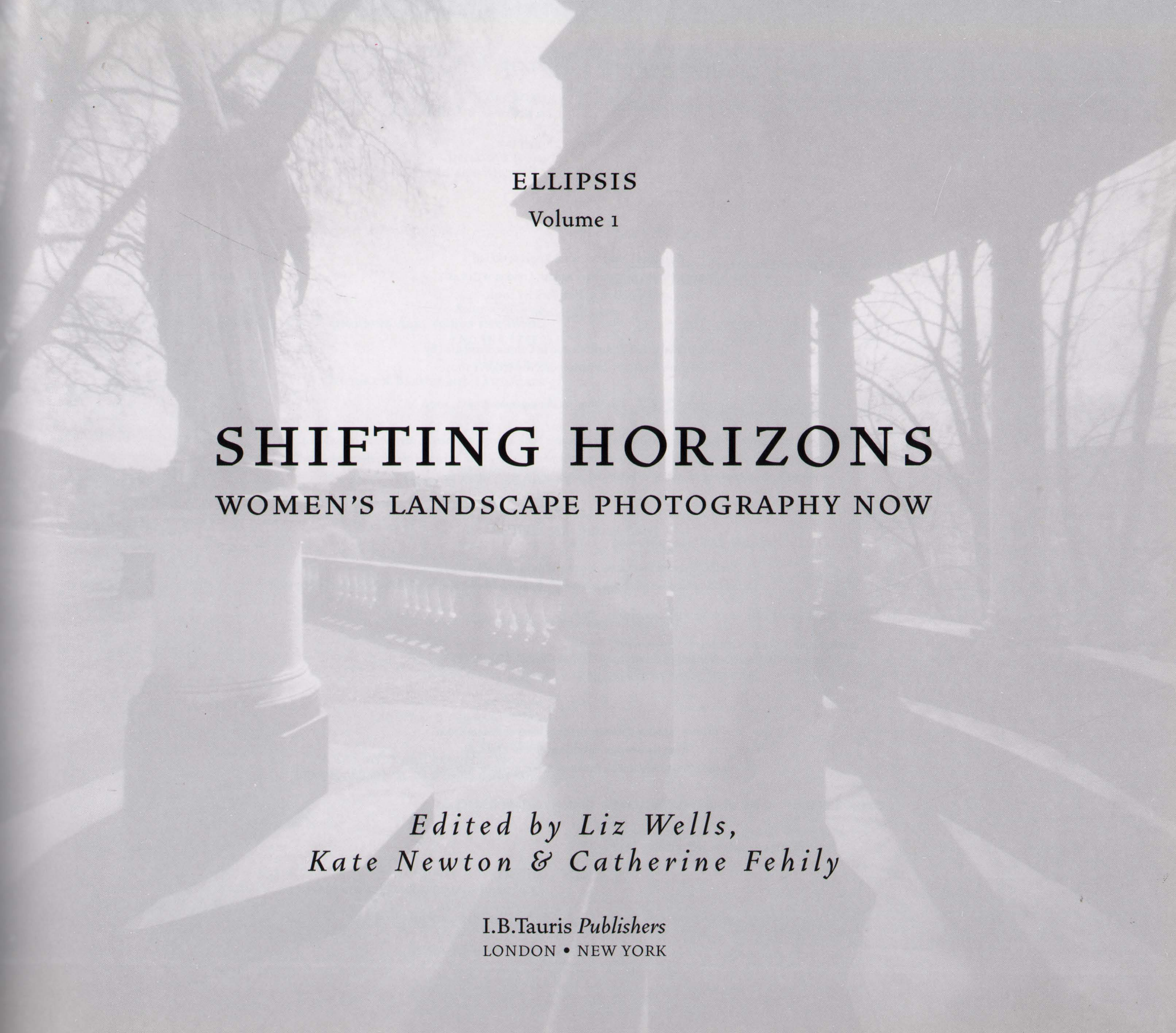
The photographers are Åsa Andersson, Michelle Atherton, Sian Bonnell, Gina Glover, Su Grierson, Roshini Kempadoo, Kate Mellor, Liz Nicol, Julia Peck, Brenda Pelkey, Lou Spence and Sally Waterman.

The writers are David Bate, Stevie Bezencenet, Martha Langford, Roberta McGrath, John Strathatos, Sue Swingler and Liz Wells.

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ELLIPSIS

Volume 1

SHIFTING HORIZONS

WOMEN'S LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY NOW

*Edited by Liz Wells,
Kate Newton & Catherine Fehily*

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COVER IMAGE: 'Prospect of the Schloss at Baden-Baden'
from Kate Mellor, *In the Steps of Robert Pinnacle*
BACKCOVER IMAGE: Åsa Andersson, *Writing Water in its Absence*

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FOREWORD



Catherine Fehily & Kate Newton

IRIS – The Women's Photography Project, at Staffordshire University, exists in order to recognize the valuable contribution made by women practitioners to the development of photographic theory and practice, through research into and promotion of the work of contemporary women photographers and women writing on photography.

IRIS aims to:

- promote the work of women in photography through exhibitions, events and publications
- document women's photography and writing on photography
- provide a networking resource
- foster an awareness of women's practice.

Since the establishment of IRIS in 1994 these aims have been pursued through a series of exhibitions, events and publications, including a national conference in 1995 and a website, *Ariadne*: <http://www.staffs.ac.uk/ariadne>. The exhibitions, 'Touched by Light' (1994), 'Resourceful Women' (1994), 'City Limits' (1996), 'In Spite of Appearances' (1997) and 'Child's Play' (1998) dealt with a variety of themes and successfully presented the work of IRIS members to a wide audience. During these years, the resource – a collection of slides, artists' statements, written material and biographical information – has grown steadily so that, from representing around one hundred women in 1994, it now contains the work of three times that many.

We were convinced from the outset that this collection would always form the heart of the organization, and were

determined to keep it alive and growing through research and development. For this reason we adopted the word 'resource' in preference to 'archive', as we felt that the latter implied a kind of stasis. Our intuitive sense of the importance of the resource has been vindicated by the productive use that historians and academics have made of it. *Nexus: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Women's Photography*, a series of six interdisciplinary volumes which addressed imagery drawn exclusively from the IRIS resource, was edited by Dr Marsha Meskimmon and published between 1997 and 1999.

While the *Nexus* series was essentially theoretical in nature, it demonstrated the potential of the resource as a rich source of material for the exploration of ideas about photography, and of the book form as an effective way of achieving IRIS' aims. We decided to concentrate our efforts on the use of the resource for research and publication; a decision which coincided, opportunely, with our meeting Philippa Brewster, of I.B.Tauris. The first outcome of this new policy was *I Spy – Representations of Childhood*, which grew out of the 'Child's Play' exhibition, and which we edited with the invaluable collaboration of Jane Fletcher. Published by I.B.Tauris in 2000, *I Spy* provided an example of the way in which the thread of a single theme could usefully be traced through the resource. It offered us a model for the design of a book where images were presented in the context of words, without being relegated to a secondary, illustrative role.

ELLIPSIS

ellipsis, ellipse, n. Omission from sentence of words needed to complete construction or sense; omission of sentence at end of paragraph; set of three dots etc. indicating such omission.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary

We had, for some time, been looking for a framework within which to examine the wealth of material available to us, and a way of reflecting the richness and complexity of the resource. *I Spy* seemed to offer a solution; if we could trace a number of different threads through the collection, in a similar way, we might begin to approach that extremely difficult, almost unaskable, question: do women see and represent the world in any definable 'feminine' way? It does not seem an unreasonable question to ask, given that women share a physical and cultural experience (with all the historical, geographical and social differences acknowledged). But which threads? In what ways are images grouped? Which are the dominant themes? This last question led us, inexorably, to the categories, or 'genres', inherited from painting in which pictures have been grouped throughout the history of photography, – genres, based on themes which have indeed been dominant, and which have been dominated by men. We decided to embark on an investigation of the ways in which women negotiate the traditions, conventions and theories accrued around the medium of photography. The rigid structure, or framework, for this enquiry would be provided by the (patriarchal) grid

FOREWORD

of organization implied in five genres: landscape, portrait, still life, social realism and the nude. A series of five books would attempt to trace the threads of women's weaving in, through, around, against and beyond that structure. We decided to adopt the format of *I Spy*, in that the portfolios of images would be presented in parallel with the essays, and to invite men, as well as women, to write for the books, so that the context for the images would be broad and inclusive.

It is not our intention to attempt to answer the intensely problematic question raised above, but we have a hunch that women are operating, very productively and with great success, in the in-between spaces (the 'ellipses') of photographic history. In this spirit of speculation, and with the expert collaboration of Liz Wells, we searched the resource for work that seemed to belong within, or to respond to, the tradition of 'landscape'. We were amazed to discover how many (around 27%) of IRIS' members were

working in this area, and fascinated to find that they unanimously reject any notion of a fixed, immutable or stable landscape. They deal, intuitively, with the world as process, where everything is fluid, transient and in momentum. They share Virginia Woolf's conviction that life is far from solid, that it is, in fact, shifting. The result is this first volume of *Ellipsis: – Shifting Horizons*.

Catherine Fehily and Kate Newton

INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN SEEING AND KNOWING



Liz Wells

The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it ...

Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green.

Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire ...

Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold. VIRGINIA WOOLF¹

What contribution have women made to illuminating our relation with our environment? This collection of portfolios and essays about landscape includes contemporary work by eleven women photographers and seven writers. Addressing a diversity of themes the photographers explore the perimeters of vision, focusing on land, sea, environment. In effect, they test the boundaries of a genre which has been dominated by male perspectives throughout its long history. Water recurs often, as a potent symbol of fluidity, flow and flux. We are reminded of ways in which the rural is referenced in literature or inscribed in the domestic. Whether literal, rhetorical or metaphorical in her approach, each invites us to examine the construction of space and its mythologization, and, indeed, ways of seeing. Deploying a range of aesthetic strategies, our attention is drawn to fundamental affects of the environment we inhabit. Taken together the work testifies to ambiguity, uncertainty, transience, indeed, the speculations are as much about knowledge as they are about photography. Modes of expression range from historical (non-silver) processes to the use of new (digital)

technologies. We are invited to look at and enjoy the image, whilst simultaneously looking through it towards the implications of that which is being articulated.

The five portfolio sections are organized, loosely, according to themes: investigations, personal and cultural memory, urban constructs, journeys and histories. These themes interact throughout the book, resonating not only within and between the portfolios of work but also in relation to the written contributions. Determining the order of work, and which essays to put near which portfolios, involved taking into account visual juxtapositions as well as thematic links. Books are linear in construction; this forces a particular sense of order on the work, but the web of connections and provocations is potentially complex and haphazard. Despite the siting of essays beside particular portfolios, and the specific conjunctures of visual work, the collection should be enjoyed serendipitously.

The first three bodies of work indicate a range of responses to the environment in terms of ideas and visual strategies. Åsa Andersson creates images through water,

working with the immediate poetics of translucence and fluidity. Julia Peck invites us into direct engagement with the minutiae of our environment through her close-up images of the quarry face. Lou Spence photographs farmland, eschewing pictorialism for a more worrying realism intended to debunk myths of the picturesque. In terms of scale, aesthetic strategy and technique, each portfolio is distinct, but together they invite us to reconsider our feelings about our relationship with nature.

The second portfolio focuses our attention on memory, both subjective and collective, and on ways in which marks in the landscape reflect histories and trigger recollections which may not necessarily be reassuring. Gina Glover returns us to the formal garden, familiar from childhood, which she has re-examined as a pathway to memory. Sian Bonnell draws our attention to marks found on rocks by the sea, and to ways in which fossils, souvenirs and childhood toys reference centuries of history. Michelle Atherton and Sally Waterman offer a more urban, and disturbing, focus. Michelle Atherton photographs parks at night, conflating the appearance of

daylight with the presence of artificial light, thereby disorienting our sense of time. Referencing Virginia Woolf, Sally Waterman expresses the unease and alienation of everyday experience of the urban space. Liz Nicol and Su Grierson focus on our experience of space. Through collecting rubber bands dropped as the post is delivered daily, Liz Nicol traces patterns and congestions of communication, expressed abstractly through photograms. Su Grierson draws our attention to the experience of journeys, using video and video-stills to capture and express movement through space.

On what basis is landscape constructed? This is particularly addressed in the final portfolio section which includes Roshini Kempadoo's reminder that legacies of imperialism are marked as much in the preservation of the vistas of English country estates, built on the basis of economic exploitation of the colonies, as in contemporary global communications and power relations. Kate Mellor reminds us of particular histories, here, the decaying health spas, once designed as restorative places and social spaces for the European leisure classes.

'Landscape' is a cultural construct, an imaginary space which resonates through landscape gardening, parks, archaic sites considered of historic interest – such as Avebury or Stonehenge – through painting, photography, postcards and travelogues. The seven essays included here address recurrent concerns with aesthetics, land in relation to the self, memory, cultural histories, gender. Historically women have not taken a prominent place within the landscape tradition. Women look differently, refusing the more categorical strictures and disciplines of the genre, perhaps offering a more affective response to the environment as perceived and experienced. This is particularly indicated in the first essay: Roberta McGrath emphasizes the 'journey' which is life, a learning

experience upon which children embark very young. This journey is one of learning and forgetting, of looking, and maybe seeing. The status of photography in relation to memory is further addressed in Martha Langford's discussion of work by Brenda Pelkey which challenges ways in which the photograph, however flawed as a token of memory, may nonetheless be taken as a stand-in for actual memory.

There is a key definitional distinction to be drawn between 'land' and 'landscape'. In principle, land is a natural phenomenon, although all land in Britain, has been subjected to extensive human intervention and, indeed, as David Bate notes, conceptualized in terms of 'beauty' through which, he argues, we aim to code and contain our relation with land. Likewise, Stevie Bezencenet suggests that ideologies associated with 'wilderness', in relation to the American West, interact with gender and identity and influence the language of 'landscape' to an extent that renders it difficult for women to find a new symbolic in terms of perception and representation of space.

Relatively few women artists have been formally employed as landscape artists, whether as painters or as photographers. This is not to say that women have not painted views. Women with leisure have been as susceptible to the picturesque as their male counterparts. However, sketches and watercolours thus produced are the legacy of an 'amateur', often aristocratic, leisure pastime. Furthermore, as Sue Swinger observes in her discussion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photographs were made not for framing and hanging in public spaces but rather for inclusion in the family album. John Stathatos' discussion of women and landscape in Europe and his conclusion that women photographers in Europe have had only a conditional presence in landscape practices, further underlines the historical marginalization of women within the genre.

Photography portfolios included in this collection have been selected from a single source. As co-editor, I enjoyed working with Kate and Catherine, exploring the IRIS resource in some detail. In considering bodies of work, we enjoyed the inconsistencies of theme and aesthetics, yet were surprised by certain convergences, most particularly by the open, exploratory approach characteristic of all the work. Each woman sites her practice in an 'in-between' sort of space, drawing upon a subjective vision which questions dichotomies and acknowledges complexities. The artists address borders: between land and sea; between light and dark, inside and outside, absence and presence, space and enclosure, image and words; between past, present and future.

I had the opportunity to interview all the artists about the processes and practices through which they make work; this interview material is the basis of the final essay. Here, my interest was in research and development processes, but discussions with the artists indicated the extent to which the biographical was marked within their approach, variously noting problems of the precarious balance between letting a project 'take off' yet supporting it through research. The influence of pictorialism and the extent to which not only what we see but *how* we see is culturally constructed is also a common concern. This awareness is reflected in the attitudes and strategies adopted by the artists in developing their work. A sense of exploration and a desire for fluidity characterize their approaches. As Liz Nicol remarked, 'I think through doing!' – not, 'I think therefore I am!'

In 1972 John Berger observed that 'the relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled.'² This draws attention to the tensions inherent in observation, both in terms of seeing and of the ways in which conformity

to the rules of seeing offers us a sense of security, however falsely earned and transient. This is acknowledged through the exploratory approach adopted by the contributors, as artists or as writers.³ All investigate historical presences within the contemporary, explore resonances between subjective and objective, and question in-between seeing and knowing.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Woolf, Virginia, *The Waves* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).
- 2 Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p 7.
- 3 Indeed, in relation to the latter, I was interested to note ways in which changing titles reflected the exploration process. For instance, I asked John Stathatos to write on women and landscape in other parts of Europe;

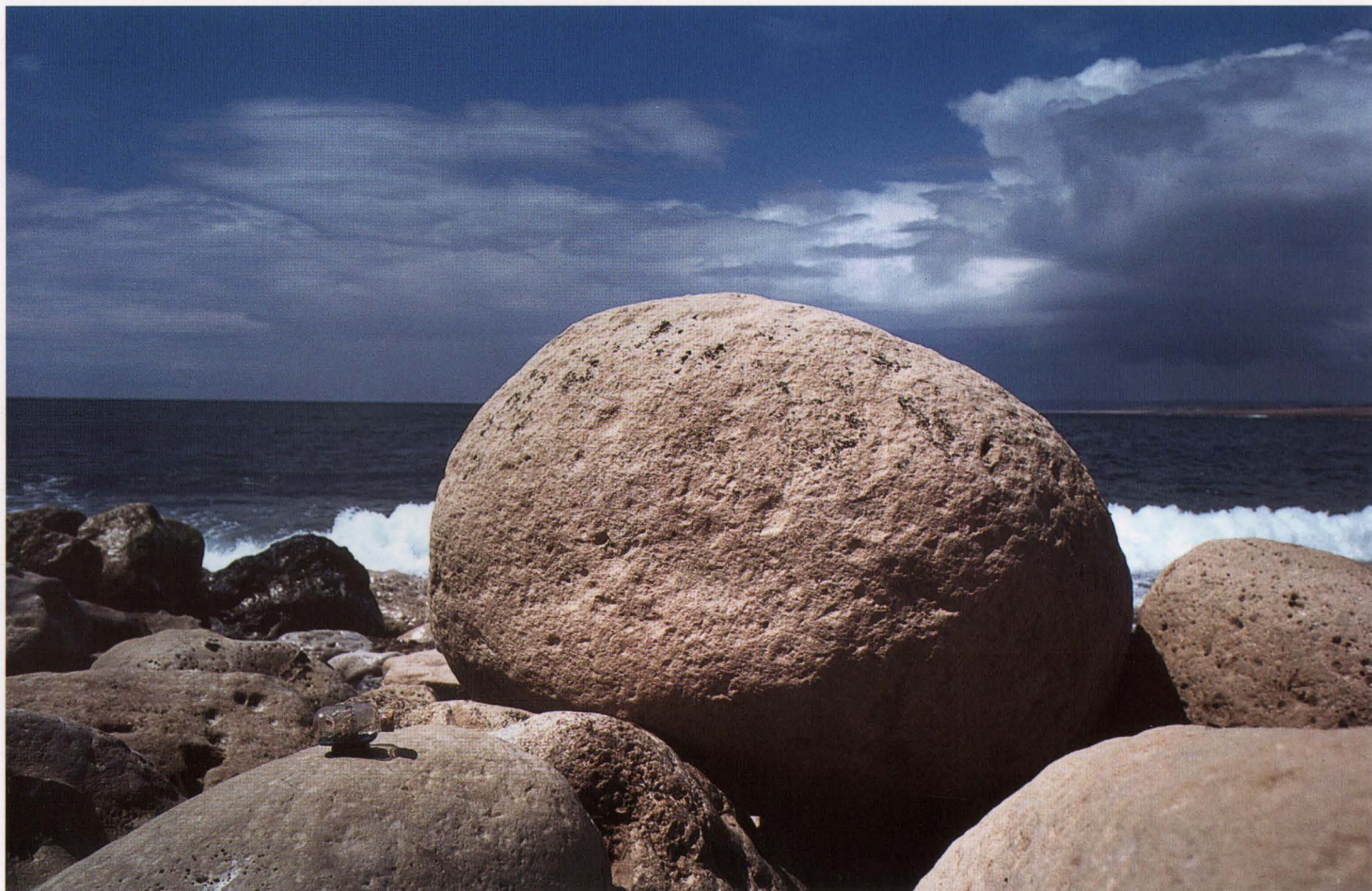
the first draft arrived under the title 'an absence in the landscape', but later, as he drew together his research information and made sense of it, the title changed to 'a conditional presence'. Similarly, Roberta McGrath, invited to write on women looking, at first suggested the title 'on not being able to see the wood for the trees', but arrived at conclusions better indicated by her revised title, 'on seeing the wood and the trees'.

SIAN BONNELL

UNDERCURRENTS

The influence and presence of the sea is always with us in the island Britain. Reminders of the course of evolution, as creatures emerged from the sea to inhabit the land can still be seen as the coast erodes. These traces are embedded in our consciousness and link us to a distant past we can still experience through sight and touch. This timeless immediacy contrasts with our own souvenir culture.

GEORGE MEYRICK













ENVISIONING: PROCESSES AND PRACTICES



Liz Wells

INTRODUCTION

Readers flick through books. Visitors to art galleries consume images ritually, pausing maybe for 30 seconds in front of a picture, perhaps taking a little longer to engage with installations. Yet each image, installation, portfolio or series results from serious exploration of particular ideas, and from commitment to communication. In making work for publication or for the gallery the artist sets out to affect the viewer, to offer pleasures which may both delight and disturb.

Creative production is founded upon in-depth research and development processes; but these remain largely hidden. In Britain, recently, there have been attempts to better comprehend the relation between research and practice.¹ In particular, debates have focused on the nature of research into practice, on questions of what constitutes originality in practice-based research, and on how to identify and talk about experimentation within creativity. Co-curating *Shifting Horizons* gave me an opportunity to ask the artists about their approach to project research and realization.²

Curators and editors have privileged access to artists. We are among few who sometimes get to see some of what has been discarded, or transcended, in the journey of exploration which forms the creative process. This process is always fragile, involving retreats from cul de sacs, and panic in blind alleys. We know something of this from diaries kept by writers and artists, but it is relatively rarely discussed (except in biographies). As one of the artists remarked, as a lecturer

and artist she is quite confident about talking about her work in itself, but less accustomed to discussing experiences involved in researching, developing and making the work. Indeed, such processes remain private, except where artists have chosen to meet regularly, whether this be within a formal forum such as a taught MA³ or through self-managed workshops.⁴

This essay is based upon comparing approaches to project development.⁵ Thus it focuses, in turn, on research processes, on the purposes and contexts in which work is made, on the intentions of the artist, on titles and on being a woman and an artist. In addition some reference is made to technologies and to funding issues. All the artists had pertinent comments and experiences to recount; inevitably it has not been possible to include every story. Hence, in relation to each topic, I have selected a few examples for particular attention, using comments and quotes from each of the artists to enliven the general discussion.

Overall I was struck by convergences of views and objectives despite, as can be seen from the portfolios, distinctly different practices. This is not entirely surprising; for a start, all have chosen to be members of the IRIS women's photography resource and, as such, acknowledge themselves as women artists although none would actually describe herself in this way. Nonetheless, gender is pertinent, not only in stories told about circumstances and experiences, but also in the remarkably organic, non-linear, 'feminine' ways of working which characterize research explorations.

The feminine, as a term referencing both behaviour and sensibilities, is not exclusively associated with women. However, our experience is gendered, and this necessarily infects and inflects creative practice.⁶

All the artists are interventionist, variously aiming to alert us to issues and to subvert more traditional aesthetics. All view ideas as more important than technology, but note ways in which the actual physical process of making is marked in the resultant imagery. Differences of approach did emerge, particularly as a consequence of differing types of practice. Ways of working also reflect personality and particular histories, domestic contexts and constraints. Overall, however, it seemed that each artist has found operating patterns which work well enough for her.

RESEARCH AS EXPLORATION

Research can feel messy, rather than methodological. 'Method in her madness' is a phrase which might have been coined to express something of the serendipity, and freedom of the associative, implicated.

All the artists emphasised intuition and fluidity within project development. As Åsa Andersson notes, 'it's not like I'm driven by an idea which I'm consciously exploring, it's more intuitive – everything can't be described or determined'. Thus her work, which now often takes the form of a layering of two slides, is based upon images made because she has been drawn to some feature intuitively and

emotionally. 'I have got better at defending this.' She reflects upon projects, and this reflective process or experience becomes 'intuition for the next project'. Although her concerns are very different, Lou Spence also 'accepts a reasonably intuitive way of making photographs', the concerns that have initiated them sometimes only becoming apparent on viewing the prints.

The artists also all emphasized the centrality of research. Some work in a fairly systematic, library-based fashion; others explore primarily through 'note-taking' with the camera – although reading and observation are never mutually exclusive. Several take a very open approach to their work. For instance, Gina Glover says she works in an eclectic manner, as well as being highly intuitive. Her research involves working on location, in-depth interviews, photographic sketchbooks and what she terms painting with her camera. Reading around the subject includes poetry as well as more factual writings, philosophical and neuroscience texts. Personal meditation and reflection on the work of others also informs her practice. Likewise, Su Grierson's sources are broad. She reads books on contemporary science – including the brain and mind-mapping – philosophy and human nature, and the physiological expansion of knowledge which 'help me see possibilities when I'm playing with the computer' and is interested in perception and how vision can affect what and how we think. Her video installations express her interest in perception, colour and movement. Her photographic and digital images are often derived from video footage taken when travelling. Some projects challenge traditional form, others explore the relationship between the image and the viewer. She describes her research as very circular, non-linear, organic.

Here, the relation between the particularities of the specific medium and modes of expression is central. To 'play'

with the computer or to 'note-take' with the camera is to explore and experiment with photographic seeing or with the interactivity of the computer as well as to sift the interrelation of the visual and the philosophic in connection with a specific issue or idea.

Michelle Atherton is particularly interested in the materiality of photographs. Projects act as focus points or springboards, but there is no specific beginning or end to the research process. Her work comes from an amalgamation of areas and she oscillates between production and theoretical reading. 'What I select to read may be very specific, so the work is a response to reading and also to the ontological debates relating to photography.' Much of her work has taken the form of site-specific installation. She is interested in the mundane spaces that we exist in and pass through on a day-to-day basis. Theories play a part in fuelling the work, which may in its turn serve to make shifts within a discourse. She emphasizes the idea of *taking* a photograph. 'For me it is about *taking* because the photographs come out of a sifting process, a sifting from a pool of existing visual images. I take from it in order to question everyday perspectives.'

Åsa uses the camera both for sketchbook work, when thinking about objects in terms of sculpture and installation, and in order to create photo-based images. Previously she used photography to document sculpture and installations. But recently she has worked with photography as a means of exploring space, both the space beyond the camera and the space within the photo.

What is interesting and what has been liberating is that the photographic medium has enabled me to work in a mode which is more flexible in that the environments and objects I photograph may only last for ten seconds rather than being elaborately structured. The camera helps me to frame 'miniature-worlds' within the world and the process of

layering creates yet another unexpected aspect and perspective from which to view the world.

Likewise, for Julia Peck, initial ideas come visually; she develops them through photographing, at that stage on medium format. Later she re-shoots on large format.

Emphasis may be upon observation. But, what is seen, and how it is framed – in terms of knowledge and through the rectangle of the viewfinder – is informed by personal history. For instance, Sian Bonnell describes her work as about understanding space and about memory, by which she means both unconscious childhood memory, some of which resurfaces subsequent to the making of particular pieces of work, and collective memory, inscribed variously in local culture.⁷ Research, for her, is about looking repeatedly at particular places, seeking out detail which can inform her exploration of the environment. Her original training as a sculptor has left its mark in her concern with form and with scale. She emphasizes an evolutionary process, being open to projects shifting and changing.

Props may offer a starting point. Sian collects toys and souvenirs, leaves, twigs and feathers, and kitchen utensils shaped to reference the rural; all inform her interest in relations between inside and outside. In a previous project, *Groundings*, she took objects from her kitchen and photographed them out of doors, for instance, the sheep-shaped biscuit cutter which she used to cut sandwiches in order to encourage the children to eat. Subsequently she raided junk shops and car boot sales, increasing her repertoire of utensils. *Undercurrents* includes seaside souvenirs – the cuddly seal, chosen by one of her sons as his holiday present one year in St Davids, which looks distinctly alarmed beached on the ridged rocks, or the miniature lighthouse which, placed on a boulder, shifts the whole sense of scale within the picture. Likewise, Åsa collects and keeps a

stock of props – a stuffed leather anchor, cloths, also flowers and fruit, all of which are re-used in various sites then photographed.

Liz Nicol also views herself as investigative and describes her process of 'taking and making photographs (as) one of drawing attention to and making sense of'. She photographs objects found in museums, churches, zoos, aquariums, in the streets and in her home and is concerned with the relationship of objects to photographs.⁸ Although she studied photography, she has long had an interest in fabrics, and in the tactile and emotional dimensions of objects in space. Thus she describes a research 'dialogue' between herself and the locations which she is exploring. As with Sian, her work is based upon collecting, finding herself interested in particular objects or images. 'I start with something, and I play with it, and it sits in a drawer for a while, and then it comes to the front of my mind.' Previously she took photographs as a method of collecting, now she is as likely to collect the actual object (for instance, rubber bands). Her work process is 'sculptural' in its physicality; this is extended through the process of presentation wherein she pays attention to display. For Liz, the potential for a project to develop exists at the point of collecting, when she realises that objects are amassing, although, as with all the artists, the gestation process may take several years.

By contrast, Sally Waterman's interest is in narrative and the art of storytelling.⁹ She defines herself as an 'image-maker', doing literary adaptations (in the manner of adaptations for film) using staged settings and operating directorially. Thus she places herself somewhere other than as 'artist' or as 'photographer' taking, as her starting point, 'something that triggers', perhaps an object or a location or, more usually, a text. With *The Waves* her approach was very

methodical, commencing from personal identification, through 'brainstorming' to select sequences or aspects of the novel. This led her to examine a number of critical issues, for instance, what processes are central to the translation from one form, the novel, to another, the image? What is reading about, and how does 'reading' a photograph differ from reading a novel? How best to approach a text for adaptation purposes, in terms of narrative, or character? The sketchbook is central to her research process. It functions as a diary, as a notebook for contacts; also for cuttings and quotes drawn from fiction and from more critical texts. She describes her way of working with models as 'quite organic'. Images are not fully pre-conceived, rather she has 'something in the mind's eye, an idea, a starting point' then, together with her models (usually friends), she constructs scenarios which illustrate an image or a scene.

There are distinctions between 'taking' photographs, using montage as method, or 'making' images based upon constructed scenarios and working with models. There are also distinctions between exploring through observation, response to space, and the collecting of images and objects, and the more explicitly historical or political concerns which lead to archive-based research. But this is a question of balance: all the artists draw on library research, and all 'play' with visual ideas. Roshini Kempadoo's concerns are sociopolitical, and her research always draws extensively on public archives internationally, but she often starts a new project with an image. She uses quotes from contemporary and historic writings, fiction and non-fiction, including press cuttings alongside more academic historical resources, such as anti-slavery documents, as well as contemporary post-colonial theory. She collects and digitizes materials so that she has her own developing archive of resources.¹⁰ Her method combines the

academic with more intuitive visual experimentation.

Similarly, considering the terms of the society which grew up around spas historically and linking this with the history of photography as a recording device, questioning the role of the artist, led Kate Mellor into wide-ranging research including the academic, tabloids, radio, talking to people, contemporary fiction and poetry. She describes fiction and poetry as a different route to 'truth'. The academic includes the scientific. 'I take in as much as I can until it's all swilling around like a huge soup. Then it has to be narrowed down.' In this instance the conceit of 'Robert Pinnacle', an imaginary 'amalgam' figure emerged. She was interested in the image of the artist portrayed in popular culture, especially fiction, and in what this reveals about specific desires of society projected onto artists. Pinnacle thrives because of qualities other than being a skilful painter. So, her intention was a bit of a 'piss taker' in terms of the role of the artist and his aspirations. Given that the project was based on actual history, he was inevitably a male figure. She adds that the artist would have to pander to that sort of society and a woman would not have been in that sort of role, 'It's a complete fiction, but one doesn't want to leave logic entirely aside!'

Overall, what is notable is the range of sources and resources drawn into play. All the artists work heuristically, discovering through enquiry, and all seemed remarkably open and methodologically undogmatic in their approach, letting systems appropriate to particular projects emerge. It is tempting to speculate whether or not this is particularly associated with women as artists; however, that would be to move beyond both the scope of this essay and the interview material on which it draws.

TECHNICALITIES

Given the long history in photography of technophilia – or f-stop fanaticism – it was interesting to note that none of the artists mentioned the technical in its own right. Rather technique and technicalities become concerns only in conjunction with the demands of particular ideas. For instance, for Kate, the use of the pinhole camera in *Robert Pinnacle* reflects the fact that artists used pinholes as a tool. (She sees 'Pinnacle type' landscape painters as forerunners of today's landscape photographers.) She wanted to build into the work questions about history and, as part of this, about the history of photography. For this reason she used a range of formats and processes from pinholes (earliest record of effects dates from 2000 BC) to the digital. She matches photo processes to particular ideas and to what can be said using that aesthetic. 'In the beginning the technical gets in the way as it holds up the creative process, although as you get more experienced you find you really do know quite a lot.'

It is the actual process of making images which reveals what Liz is doing. She describes the process as physical, playful and responsive. The making of images involves physical contact with that which she has collected, as the work is made through photograms (using a sunbed for contact exposure). By contrast, Roshini's production method is now entirely digital, and final images are planned with manipulation already in mind.¹¹ Her montages always question race and gender, power and exploitation; questions of history are articulated, but through both using, and interrogating the implications of, new technologies.

Although lacking masculine obsession with the technical, these examples all testify to an awareness of discourses of technology, but the means of production remain subservient to image as expression.

FUNDING SOURCES

All the artists experience some tension between the freedoms of personal work and the need for finance given costs of studio facilities, film stock, cameras, travel costs and so on. They tend to combine commissions, teaching and sales of work as income-sources. Some sell through picture agencies. For example, Roshini remains an associate member of Format, the women's photography agency, for documentary stills, and is a member of Autograph, The Association of Black Photographers, for digital work. Sally is represented by Millennium Picture Library and has sold a number of works through them, for instance, for book covers. Her work is always self-generated which means that, as she puts it, she is 'not constrained by art directors'. She prefers to make work 'freely' – if it sells that is a bonus.

Kate also feels that the best work comes from artists' own concerns and knowledge. Commissions may stretch creativity, but they may have inbuilt constraints. For instance, *In the footsteps of Robert Pinnacle* was a commission with a fairly open brief to look at European spa towns, but it *had to include* Harrogate. Commissions may involve very fast, perhaps over fast, research. Most commissions come through in November, but landscape projects take a long time conceptually, in terms of working within the seasonal restrictions of natural light, and also in terms of travel time and getting to know a place. Access to locations can be difficult, especially if you are trying to do a commission in the space of a few months.¹² However, work which has been commissioned gets shown. This means that you know in advance that you will have an audience. It is difficult to get galleries to show self-generated work, and equally difficult to cover the costs of showing in non-gallery spaces.

Gina has adopted a sort of 'parallel tracks' solution. She

was a photojournalist for many years. Then she was ill and unable to work professionally for four years in the early nineties.¹³ This proved a turning point. Aside from her more personal work, she now seeks bursaries and commissions working with staff and patients in psychiatric hospitals both to run workshops and to document the environment.¹⁴ Exhibition is assured, although imagery may remain within the institution rather than being on public display. Her own creativity is challenged; for instance, since she is not permitted to photograph the patients themselves, she has been exploring how traces of mental illness can be read through the fabric of objects or furniture, for example, cigarette stub marks on tables or carpets which have been ironed. Such work pushes her to more elliptical modes of image-making.

Several teach alongside their own work; and Su has used the lecture tour to support travel.¹⁵ Liz quite specifically noted that her position as a university lecturer supports her practice (viewed by the university as a form of research). This not only offers funding, but also opportunities for questioning and discussion in research forums and when teaching.

INTERVENTIONS

Radicalism in art is interventionist. New means of visual communication are sought in order to make memorable impact, to disrupt that which might otherwise be taken for granted, to interfere with accustomed aesthetics, to explore the seams of the semiotic.

Julia is centrally interested in the visual, 'in what you can say visually, in visual strategies'. Photography, and the gaze, are strongly linked and she questions visual pleasure, wondering, in theoretical terms, whether it can ever be legitimate to make and take enjoyment in the gaze to which

photography is tied. She is also interested in what she termed 'the meeting place between intuition and conceptual content'.

Working in landscape can become a complex experience:

the environment is bigger than you, and the noises become frightening ... I have never been afraid for my life, but have sometimes felt unease and certainly not at peace with the environment.

She delves into this environment, in her current work using tiny depth of field to be really inside of bushes; an uncomfortable and uneasy space. Her imagery is relatively abstract and she acknowledges the influence of American formalism. In her view art should offer space for contemplation. This stems from her passion for things and places which are beautiful. 'The sublime has had a small revival in modern art in terms of shock and feelings of horror. Contemplation is a very sticky issue, however.' She hopes people will *experience* work, rather than consume it.

For Åsa the issue is how to find one's own voice, to articulate what she sees as a 'fluent' relationship, especially within an academic framework. Here she stresses the necessary relation between philosophy and fine art. Negotiations are constant: sometimes a philosophical theme, such as issues of spatiality and temporality, emerges through making of work; sometimes philosophical discussion stimulates new considerations or material within her art practice. Her PhD dissertation was about intimacy in terms which examined a quality of encounter with objects or places which is sensuous, 'that moment which resists explanation, yet one is strongly affected...'.

Michelle's main interest is in dialogue around issues of spectatorship and in interrogation of certain spaces. Photographs have frames, but Michelle is trying to move away from the traditional image in ways that unsettle the framing effect. She remarks that you capture your person or

subject on film, thereby positioning the person or subject. Her piece 'Cornered' was a small corner piece photograph of a male figure. Normally the female position is the marginal position; here the male figure is marginalised, although, as she remarks, issues relating to patriarchy and equality cannot be raised simply through direct swapping of position. But she's 'pushing back on the spectator by a process of disturbance'. Her work uses tricks, but is more than a trick as she is always concerned to think about spectatorship.

Lou is also concerned with viewing, and sets out to avoid the conformity of landscape aesthetics, noting that cultural expectations and landscape sensibilities determine the public viewing of our countryside and set up false expectations of the agricultural landscape. *Maddle Farm* is both the place where she grew up and a personal response to the crisis of British agriculture which became a major factor in the potential end of an era for her family farm. As agricultural policies make the small family-run farm economically unviable for the current generation, a traditional way of life becomes unsustainable. She sees making gallery-based work as a means of penetrating urban consciousness. Julia likewise refuses 'certain typical conventions of landscape: the horizon, the high vantage point, the gaze of acquisitional ownership, etc.' But her work is typical of landscape in that it uses aesthetic rhetorics including the seductiveness of colour. With *Face* she sought flatness, a sense of wall directly in front, no ground or sky, disorienting feeling of space, enclosure. One aim is to dissolve the effect of the frame of the photograph so that the experience of the image is more immersive:

The viewer is confronted by the faces and made uncomfortable with being enclosed. A quarry as a space is something that prevents us from moving out, seeing out and is restrictive. The work aims to mimic this experience, each image is tightly

cropped and we do not know where the walls begin and end. The viewing is an encounter rather than something to be packaged and taken away with you. The trees become figurative and the fissures reflect the gestures of the trees. At this size (152 cm x 122 cm inch gallery prints) we become aware of our own presence, the differences and similarities in scale and the relationship to ourselves.

As Su remarks, 'Vision activates so many parts of the brain. Does vision have the power to alter the way we see (understand) things?' Her work aims to take us beyond points of comfort. For instance, her title, *Scenario*, reflects the use of this term in business think-tanks challenged to imagine responses to that which does not seem possible. Her early digital explorations revealed the possibility of utilizing the zones of instability that can be found within technology: an early piece, *Collapse*, which engages intense polar opposite reds and greens, caused the computer to collapse in that it ran at reduced speed. Contrary to prevalent assumptions, the technology cannot necessarily hold stability when dealing in binary opposites. As with all the artists, she is interested in points of instability which allow space for change.

TITLES AND WRITING

The majority of the artists find titling problematic, acknowledging the extent to which titles influence audience response. As Sally remarked, straightforward titles may oversimplify, but elusive titles may exclude the viewer. All seek resonances which get to the heart of the work and reflect cultural complexities appropriately, given the particular aesthetic. In addition titles have a P R dimension; marketing concerns affect titles in both exhibition and publishing.

Often the title comes last: Michelle does not even think about titles until after the work is made. Sian describes the

process of titling as evolutionary: individual images are pre-conceived, but each series is crystallized through editing and the title comes at the point when she knows she is about to stop a particular line of visual exploration.¹⁷ Julia initially refused the idea of titling as she didn't want to use titles to 'illustrate' images, for instance, phrases such as 'quarry in Derbyshire' or 'flat surface with colour'. Now she lets the title emerge after work is finished, still finding it difficult to find the word that sums up her work given that the process is very abstract. For instance, at first her quarry work was titled 'Silenced Earth' but now she finds that too romantic and prefers the more literal and cryptic statement, *Face*. By contrast, Gina considers titles right from the beginning as they help her to place a piece of work. 'Working from a solid starting point allows me to fly'. Likewise, Åsa notes that *Writing Water in its Absence* was formed from the work, but then framed the making of further images.

Two seemed more relaxed about titling; interestingly both read fine art (rather than photography) and are process-oriented, which may contribute to accounting for a more fluid attitude. Su changes titles, seeing no necessity to label work forever. She also remarks that 'A title has to really hit the right point in a work, but I don't mind if this is quite a simple, banal point'. For Liz straightforward titles locate her projects in terms of collecting and categorization; literal titles 'ground' the work, countering the abstract visuals. For instance, 'The River Exe, Swans Feathers, cyanotype' located the blue horizontal strip included in *Littoral*, a group show based at what was the Exeter Maritime Museum.¹⁸ Michelle notes that correspondences between titles and images are important as they add a sub-text to the work. With *Park* the time of day when the image was made is a key element in how each piece works with the viewer. *Park* is the overall title but

'the images are about sense, distortion and a contradiction of emotional feelings that can go on in a particular space. That they're all parks is important because of public access, but I would not say that this work is about parks *per se*'. Whether functioning primarily literally, or operating more poetically, titles exercise the artist – precisely because they contribute to focusing the viewer.

Poetics may also resonate through graphic style. For instance, in incorporating quotes, partly to keep the reference to *The Waves* live, Sally decided to use her own handwriting to express personal involvement. She comments that the editing process, including allying quotes with images, is just as important as the original intention: overall she wanted to express a sense of 'English sadness', a restrained melancholy. Åsa also commented on writing, noting, in relation to *Writing Water in its Absence*, that the poetics of communication is evident through use of graphic traces, suggestions of writing, rather than actual words. Here, both Sally and Åsa are identifying the *implications* of writing, especially handwriting, rather than questions of word and meaning.

ON BEING A WOMAN AND AN ARTIST

All acknowledged issues associated with the feminine, or with being a woman and an artist. Whilst none nowadays would insist on labelling themselves as women artists, all made some reference to the feminine within their practice. For example, Sally specifically noted that research on gender and identity in art and literature, the influence of feminism, and her interest in the work of women writers, are philosophically central to her work. Likewise, being a woman influences the nature of Gina's work, both its overt personal starting points and the locations. The garden is not obviously either a male or a female domain, but as a setting it references

nurturing (generally associated with the feminine). But for her, the central issue is communicating as an artist, finding ways of making personal work that has broader resonances for a wide audience.

Here, there is an awareness of changes which have occurred over the past 30 years or so. As Gina remarks, to declare yourself a woman artist at art college (Chelsea) in the 1960s would have been greeted with the injunction to 'go home and knit'. Liz remembers 'In the early days I was working oblivious of being a woman ... I had no women role models'. In the past she felt she had to fight to be taken seriously as both an artist and a lecturer, especially because of working with the decorative and feeling that what she wanted to do might be belittled. 'I don't think I'm exclusive in working with the things around me – male artists do it – but I think I have much more in common and to share with women practitioners.' When teaching foundation students, she started working more autobiographically, at the same time wondering who would be interested in her autobiography. Later, working in fine art ('very much an old boys network'), she felt that she was at the bottom of the heap as a young woman working in photography which, along with ceramics, was viewed as inferior due to being process-oriented.

Julia, nearly a generation younger, feels that being a woman only influences her work in mundane ways, for instance, it takes strength to carry a large format camera. Similarly pragmatically, Michelle remarked that she took someone with her when shooting *Park* as it was at night and it would be silly not to recognize vulnerability, especially with cumbersome and/or valuable equipment. Company gave her freedom to concentrate on what she was doing as she did not have to remain alert to threat. Julia also commented,

I think the reading and the knowledge of past struggles of women to practice does influence what I think and how I view my position now. I do not fool myself that I am working in an equal world, but many of the practical obstacles that women artists have faced in the past are now not so predominant (for example, it is not a problem to be single and living independently of the family). I recognise that for women with families life is still very difficult, but this is ... beyond my experience.

More generally, she feels that 'needing and wanting to practice is more important than making a statement about being a woman artist'. She sees women's artistic practices gaining ground and feels encouraged by this especially where we begin to recognize diversity within women's practice. She acknowledges the contact and support she had when working with a group of women artists. She distinguishes this from the 'networking and dealing' she has experienced working with male artists (although notes that she is sure there are plenty of men who support each other in their practice).

Roshini adds that, working with new technology, she continues to encounter absent-minded sexism: students tend to direct technical questions to male colleagues and, she commented, 'the "geek" is quite young and quite male'. But then, as she remarks, what's new? The phenomenon of 'f-stop obsession' is familiar to all who work in photography. In relation to the digital, she notes a need for active discussions focused on gender, media and art, and for support among women. It is worth re-iterating that those for whom technology is central, such as Roshini and Su, eschew technophilia.

More generally, it seems that it is not being a woman so much as being a parent which limits explorations. Liz's *Rubber Band* project started as a pastime pursued with her son, an avid collector, and consumer, on the way to and from

school. 'I can talk about it in terms of gallery work, but I can also talk about it in terms of my son and other things very close to me.'¹⁹ Likewise, Sian moved from London to Dorset in 1991 and views her recent work as part of a process of exploring her new environment, of putting down roots; also, anxiety to make a good home for the children. By 'home' she means locality, as well as household. Living in a village, she used to drop the boys at school, then go for a two-mile walk every morning so, over the years, she became familiar with the local environment and with the effects of seasonal change. Most of her work is made in winter. This is partly because of quality of light, but also because the boys are at school so she has more time.

Lou feels that being a woman doesn't affect her way of working, the open landscape (family farm) is a familiar space, although 'the practice and the aesthetics obviously jar against the landscape tradition'. She notes that in the male dominated domains of both agricultural practice and landscape portrayal she maybe has a more feminine emotional response to her surroundings. Like Lou, Su has lived on and worked the family farm so landscape is not alien space. Regarding gender, she notes the dangers of stereotyping but comments that 'the men I know tend to function in a more linear way, don't like change, like to know where the boundaries are'. She suggests that there is a female interest in passage through landscape, rather than in domination and control, and tells an apocryphal story of the traditional landscape painter in Tasmania who kept labourers on standby to chop down trees to create the ideal view for him to paint! Likewise, Kate comments that, archetypically, male photographers stand on top of a rock or a mountain and look down, and women explore in more intimate, close-up ways. 'Culturally speaking women are now taking on the role of explorers in some ways, but you still find yourself experiencing landscape as culturally inherited ... how

you see is culturally learnt'. As women our experiences of environment are formed and framed through the influences of a traditional landscape aesthetic, in its turn, informed by gender.

There is a distinction between, on the one hand, recognizing the struggles which, in the past, have been faced by women artists and, indeed, by artists working in photography, and, on the other hand, acknowledging distinctions between the masculine and the feminine and ways in which these are articulated within work. For instance Åsa comments, 'my work is quite gendered, but I am not working with issues of gender'. Rather her concern with intimate spaces, layering (for instance, between clothing and skin), references the feminine and lends vulnerability. She also questions notions of the feminine: for instance, how might one talk about feminine sensibility in relation to an object which is red/pink, velvet, but incorporates concrete? She is interested in the resonance between the otherness of objects or materials, the distance between them, and yet the immediacy of their presence.

Likewise, Michelle notes that being a woman influences her work 'completely, as I am in the position of being a woman whether I like it or not. It involves a complex set of relations that cannot be simplistically identified, as is clear from contemporary (post-) feminist debates.' The question of the effects and affects of being a woman is a very broad. Liz describes being a woman as becoming a lot more of a positive recognition and pleasure. The objects she uses are to do with a historical feminine, whether lace handkerchiefs or female figureheads for the prows of ships. The domestic is a big part of her work which involves decorative elements; the placing of objects within the photogram relates to display. Also, processes may be seen as gendered, for example, her work with paper involves cutting, tearing and wrapping paper

which is associated with women artists. Tearing is to do with a softening of the edge and is textural, rather than intellectual (as, for instance, in photomontage).

FLUXUS

Åsa grew up by the sea, and makes frequent allusion to water. Her piece *Harbour*, which encompasses the notion of 'arbor', incorporated reference to shelters: the allotment shed, the glasshouse, the beach hut, all in-between spaces. Sally articulates the personal elliptically: *The Waves* was made when she had just arrived in London and felt 'lost in a sea of people', in other words, she identified with the characters in terms of obsessions, emotions, personal feelings. Sian's work is at one level, an intellectual quest, but at another level, is seated in personal psychological and spiritual needs and is intricately bound up with the forging of a sense of belonging. Roshini always acknowledges her own position within the web of circumstances which she is investigating and invariably ends up putting herself, or members of her family, in the picture; as a black woman staging herself within the image, she is concerned to work against the stereotypes of exotic otherness, earth mother, and black female sexuality. This act of self-incorporation, although planned from the start, occurs towards the end of the work, perhaps helping her to draw a project to resolution, marking ways in which she herself is implicated within the histories which she has invoked. Diverse aesthetic strategies are used to invite us to reconsider our relation with 'landscape' as the artists variously exhibit concerns with position, identity, and belonging – be/longing.

Personal experience is influential, and acknowledged by all the artists; likewise, relations between personal or domestic circumstances and artistic aspirations. The fluidity

of female experience is marked. In considering what the artists have to say about research processes and practices it is clear that this fluidity extends into artistic processes. Gendered experience is articulated with exploratory attitudes in which the intuitive and emotional are acknowledged as central to visual experimentation even where projects are explicitly underpinned through more academic interests and forms of research.

ENDNOTES

1 This has been driven, in particular, by a focus on research within British universities and art institutions. Formalization of practice-based research as M Phil or Ph D studies has induced a range of methodological debates relating to the inter-relation of theory and practice, to definitions of the innovatory in research into practice, and to attempts to position and take into account experimentation and creativity.

2 In organizing an exhibition it is quite normal for the curator to visit the artist at her studio, select work, and discuss ways of contextualizing the work – statements, titles and so on. Thus the curator may learn a lot about the creative process of the artist. This is not a situation of mutuality. In my experience artists ask about the proposed book or show, especially, who else is to be included and where will it tour. Rarely does the artist ask for the curator's c.v. or interrogate her about her work.

3 Several UK universities offer taught MAs which inter-relate theoretical concerns, questions of aesthetics and communication, and technical aspects of practice. Teaching is normally based upon weekly seminars and workshops in which students are acknowledged as the key source of expertise and mutual support.

4 For instance, Gina Glover was involved for several years in a group which met regularly to discuss and critique each other's ideas and also put on a number of group shows on self-portraiture. *Pathways to Memory* was first shown in 1999 as part of a four women exhibition, *Obsessions*.

5 The full interview notes can be found at the IRIS resource. The

method was collaborative: each interview took two or three hours, then I wrote up my notes and sent them to the artist for checking. Discussion centred on:

- * source(s) of ideas for projects;
- * whether projects are usually self-generated or commissioned;
- * how the artists set about researching ideas;
- * how/where they seek locations;
- * whether being a woman influences work and ways of working;
- * titles;
- * new work and new directions.

6 See, in particular, Luce Irigaray (1993) 'Women's Discourse and Men's Discourse' and 'Writing As a Woman' in *je, tu, nous - Toward a Culture of Difference* (London: Routledge).

7 For instance, contemplating seasonal change over the centuries, Sian set about finding marks on Monmouth Beach at Lyme Regis (Dorset), which is renowned for fossils. Lyme also satisfies her interest in souvenirs, in treasures brought home from holidays and days out.

8 Liz references Anna Atkins as an influence. Anna Atkins, active in the mid-nineteenth-century and often cited as the first woman photographer, used cyanotypes to document flora and fauna in images which have a highly textured, relatively abstract appearance.

9 A graduate in English literature, Sally notes the influence of poetry and novels such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, or Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

10 *Sweetness and Light* draws upon nineteenth-century documents and campaigns from the 1970s, both found in Marylebone Library, Westminster (London). Roshini notes a 'productive tension' between the older and more recent writings, through which the ideological becomes evident.

11 Thus, the shadowy figures in *The Head People* are sourced from an archive (the Smithsonian in Washington) whilst the columns and land which form the setting under interrogation were photographed at Windsor Great Park a symbol of wealth founded on exploitation.

12 The Spas project, and funding, was finalized in early 1998, shot and

first shown later that year. For landscape work this is very fast, so Kate had to travel, shooting and researching simultaneously, which led to taking a lot of photos that were not used as they turned out to go off at tangents; also to difficulties getting access to places or buildings discovered. She remarks that time allowed to research and organize access is very important, and can take weeks – especially if it is a matter of either trust or credibility. This can be done in advance along with practical matters (such as arranging translators, etc). Sometimes compromises are involved: for instance, the Lasné hotel is completely disused, it was only with difficulty that she persuaded the Czech municipal authorities (who were very helpful) that she really did want access to it. In the end, she had a guide and only one hour to look and take photos. She shot four films in one hour (48 exposures) working with her Hasselblad on a tripod using

slow exposure and cable release, responding intuitively to what she saw and just hoping to get something good!

13 Due to an adverse and depressive reaction to anti-malarial pills while photographing Mozambique refugees in Malawi, Africa for the Red Cross and Oxfam.

14 She has been involved in setting up photography projects for patients at The Royal Bethlem and Springfield psychiatric hospitals and aims to expand this line of work. In 1999 she undertook a residency in Queen Charlotte's psychiatric hospital which is situated on the cliffs overlooking the sea at Hastings.

15 Including her visits to Australia and New Zealand.

16 Camera manipulation is crucial. The series is not primarily about space, but about discovery and examination of texture, and other detail, in particular, subtleties of colour. She shot in winter, without fill-in light, in

the afternoons when the daylight would be diffuse with no strong shadows; the cool light brings out the blues in the rock. Surface also matters – she does not use projection as the effect is 'too grainy'.

17 The 'problem' of finding a title of appropriate resonance is usually only addressed at the point when a series is about to be exhibited – and is discussed with the particular exhibition curator.

18 'Littoral' refers to the shore zone between high and low tide marks.

19 It was first exhibited as a number of panels of (abstract) images relating to each day. Later she reconfigured the project for the IKON Gallery in Birmingham through pre-selecting nine streets, then visiting to pick up rubber bands as a sort of social anthropological investigation. When working similarly on Bristol Ridgeway there was one street with no bands; each house had a long drive so the post was delivered by van.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



ÅSA ANDERSSON, born Stockholm, Sweden, 1965; studied art history and printmaking in Stockholm before undertaking an MA in Fine Art, followed by a PhD in Fine Art and Philosophy at Staffordshire University. She has exhibited widely, including shows in the UK, Europe, America and China. Her work explores issues of identity and perception through theory and practice, employing diverse means, including object-making, photography, printmaking, text and site-specific installations.

MICHELLE ATHERTON, born Manchester, 1967; gained a BA Hons in the History of Art and Design, from Leicester Polytechnic, followed by a BA (Hons) in Fine Art, from Sheffield Hallam University. Her work has been widely exhibited and published in the UK, and frequently takes the form of site-specific installation. Informed by critical theoretical discourses around photography, her practice is based on a long-standing fascination with 'the promiscuous culture of reproduction' and 'photography's ambiguous relationship to "reality"'. She combines this practice with lecturing in photography.

DAVID BATE, born Worksop, Nottinghamshire, 1956; studied photographic arts at the Polytechnic of Central London and the social history of art at the University of Leeds (MA and PhD). He is an artist and writer, and is currently Course Leader of the MA Photographic Studies at the University of Westminster. Recent exhibitions include

'Beauty of the Horrid' at the Five Years gallery in 1998 and 'Zero Culture' at Daniele Arnaud, London, in 2000. His work has been published in *Afterimage*, *Artifice*, *Third Text*, *Creative Camera*, *Portfolio*, *Parachute* and *Camera Austria*.

STEVIE BEZENCENET, born Chalfont St. Peter, 1950; studied photography at Regent Street Polytechnic, and language, art and education (MA) at Sussex University. Lecturing since 1972, she now works with graduate students at the University of Westminster, in Design and Media Arts. Her writing on photography has been published since 1978 and she is now increasingly interested in a visual practice. She has been working with the relationship between landscape and ideology, with particular emphasis on issues of gender, space and imagination.

SIAN BONNELL, born London, 1956; studied sculpture at the Chelsea School of Art, and took an MA in Fine Art at Newcastle Polytechnic. Her work largely consists of photographs based on intimate installations and interventions made within the local landscape. She explores concepts of 'landscape' and is concerned with history, memory, time and our perceptions of beauty, the picturesque, the sublime and the ridiculous. Her work has been included in a number of group exhibitions including 'Viewfindings' (curated by Liz Wells, toured England 1994/5). Her series, 'Groundings', was shown at the Watershed Media Centre, Bristol, in 1998. Since 1991 she has lived and worked in Dorset and is a visiting lecturer at a number of colleges in the

south-west, including Falmouth College of Art, Exeter College of Art and Design and the Art Institute at Bournemouth. She is co-founder of the Trace artists collective which promotes collaboration between visual and literary arts.

CATHERINE FEHILY, born Cork, Ireland, 1956; graduated from Derbyshire College of Higher Education with a BA (Hons) Photographic Studies in 1984. She has been involved in photographic education since 1986, joining the staff at Staffordshire University in 1992. She co-founded IRIS in 1993 and was appointed as Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Design: Photography course in 1997. She has exhibited photographs in the UK and Ireland and her work with IRIS has included curating exhibitions, organizing a national conference, editing publications and Internet projects.

GINA GLOVER, born London, 1945; studied fine art at Chelsea School of Art and photography at the University of Westminster. She is a photographic artist, educationalist and founder-director of Photofusion Photography Centre in south London. She has worked extensively in photojournalism and social documentary. Since the mid-nineties the themes of her work largely focus on our relationship with nature. She tries to find imagery which visually symbolizes our own complex inner thoughts in order to make sense of the world and our place in it. She runs photography workshops in psychiatric hospitals and lectures on creativity, photography and the mind.

SU GRIERSON, born Gosport, Hampshire, 1942; studied fine art at Duncan of Jordanstone, Dundee and at Glasgow School of Art (MFA, 1995). She lives in Perthshire, Scotland, and works with installation, video, photography and digital media. Her work has been widely exhibited in the UK, Europe, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. She is a member of the management committee of Glasgow Visual Arts Forum and a panel member, Artworks for Glasgow.

ROSHINI KEMPADOO born Crawley, Sussex, 1959; BA Visual Communications (West Midlands College of Higher Education), MA Photographic Studies (University of Derby). She lectures in photography and digital imaging at Napier University in Edinburgh. She lives in London but has spent ten years in the Caribbean (Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana). Her work has been exhibited widely in the UK and internationally and includes Internet projects. She is a member of Format women's photography agency and of Autograph, the Association of Black Photographers, who published the monograph, 'Roshini Kempadoo' in 1997.

MARTHA LANGFORD, born Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1953. Her forthcoming book, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, explains the amateur album as a network of photography and orality. As a Post-doctoral Fellow with the Institute for the Humanities of Simon Fraser University, she is currently researching the expression of memory in photographic art. She was the founding director of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (1985-94) where she organized numerous solo and thematic exhibitions, including 'Anima Mundi: Still Life in Britain' (1989). At the Photo 98 conference, 'Changing Views of the Landscape 2', she presented the work of Canadian, American and European artists in 'The Photographic Landscape in

Reprise' and 'What is Nationhood?'. In 1999, she was the curator of 'Interior Britannia: Richard Billingham/Anna Fox' for the Saidye Bronfman Centre and *Le Mois de la Photo* at Montreal.

ROBERTA MCGRATH, born Johnstone, Scotland, 1956; studied at Glasgow School of Art, Stourbridge College of Art and The University of Leeds. She is an associate lecturer in the theory and criticism of photography at Napier University, Edinburgh. Publications include 'Geographies of the Body and the Histories of Photography', *Camera Austria* 51/52, 1995; 'Dangerous Liaisons' in Boffin, T. and Gupta, S., (eds) *Ecstatic Antibodies* (Rivers Oram: London, 1990).

KATE MELLOR, born Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire, 1951; BA Photography (Manchester). She lives in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, where she co-founded Outsiders Photography in 1987 (with Charlie Meecham). She works freelance as a photographer and as a lecturer. Her work has been exhibited throughout the UK as well as in the USA and Hong Kong. She has been the recipient of numerous commissions and residencies and her work is held in several international collections. Publications include *Island* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publications, 1997) and *Unnatural History* (Rochdale Art Gallery, 1985).

KATE NEWTON, born Newton Abbot, Devon, 1967; received a joint BA (Hons) in Photography and Design History in 1995 from Staffordshire University. Since 1994 she has played a major role in the expansion and development of IRIS, curating touring exhibitions, organizing a national conference, editing publications and coordinating Internet projects. She also lectures in photographic history and theory and continues to produce her own work.

LIZ NICOL, born Merseyside, 1956; BA Creative Photography (Trent Polytechnic). She lives in Exeter, where she has worked as a lecturer in fine art photography and media arts (University of Plymouth) since 1982. Her work has been exhibited widely in the UK, as well as in Europe, and features in numerous catalogues, including 'Swinging the Lead', 1996, and 'Umbra Penumbra', 1994. She works 'at home, in a domestic space, reflecting aspects of family history and cultural history'.

JULIA PECK, born Portsmouth, 1972; BA (Hons) Photographic Studies (University of Derby, 1994). The recipient of a number of awards from East Midlands Arts, she has exhibited at a series of UK venues, at the same time as being involved in gallery-run educational projects and lecturing in photography. She was Artist in Residence at Photographers at Duckspool, Somerset, in 1998.

BRENDA PELKEY, born Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 1950; moved to Saskatchewan in 1980 where she became involved with the photographic community through The Photographers' Gallery and the magazine, *Blackflash*. In 1994 she completed her MFA at the University of Saskatchewan where she is now an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art History. She has exhibited throughout Canada, as well as in England, Scotland and Finland. Her works are in numerous public collections, including the Mackenzie Gallery, the Mendel Art Gallery, the Art Bank of the Canada Council, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Dunlop Art Gallery and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

LOU SPENCE, born Lambourn, Berkshire, 1965; BA Photography (The London Institute: London College of Printing). She worked and travelled for several years as a

cook before turning to photography. She has exhibited in Liverpool, London and Berlin. Her work emerges from a general sense of malaise, apparent in the press and the rural community, about the British countryside's bleak future.

JOHN STATHATOS, born Athens, Greece, 1947; studied philosophy and political science at the London School of Economics. He is a London-based artist, writer and freelance curator. Publications include *The Book of Lost Cities* (London: Wigmore Fine Art, 1998) and *The Invention of Landscape* (Camera Obscura, Thessaloniki, 1996). He recently curated exhibitions including 'Image & Icon: The New Greek Photography' (Greek Ministry of Culture) and 'Fleeting Arcadias: British Landscape Photography' (Arts Council of England). He is currently working on 'The Vindication of Tlön', an international survey exhibition on photography and the fantastic for the Photosynkryia festival in February 2001.

SUE SWINGLER, born Birmingham, 1946; studied art history at Bristol University. She is a freelance curator and researcher and worked extensively with both historical material and contemporary photographers while exhibitions officer at Watershed, Bristol. Historical exhibitions include 'Harewood Exposed' (photography); 'The Yorkshire Princess' (biography); 'Views on Sydney Gardens' (art and architecture). She is currently developing 'City Space – City Flows' comprising an exhibition by Jem Southam, an archive-based, web-sited project and an interactive digital installation. She lectures on the MA in Landscape Studies, at the University of the West of England.

SALLY WATERMAN, born Isle of Wight, 1974; BA English/Design Arts (University of Plymouth), MA Image and Communication (London, Goldsmiths). She lives in London and works as archivist at Pentagram Design. Recent employment includes running photography workshops for the education department at the National Portrait Gallery

and acting as director of photography for Bateau Ivre Theatre Company, London. Her work has been exhibited in the UK, Germany and the USA.

LIZ WELLS, born London, 1948; BA Sociology/Social Administration (University of Bristol), Postgraduate Diploma, Film (Polytechnic of Central London), MA Visual Culture (Bath College of Higher Education). She worked in theatre lighting for several years (1968-74) and has taught widely, most recently as a senior lecturer in film and photography-related theory at the School of Media, London College of Printing, The London Institute, and, from September 2000, in Media Arts, University of Plymouth. She has published extensively, and is editor of *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge 1997; 2000) and *Viewfindings, Women Photographers, 'Landscape' and Environment* (Tiverton: Available Light, 1994). She is currently working on *The Photo Reader* for Routledge and researching further exhibitions exploring landscape.





























from an elsewhere unknown

sian bonnell

sian bonnell from an elsewhere unknown

Emancipated from the familiar order of things, alienated from the domestic environment, Sian Bonnell's objects – jelly moulds, colanders, plates and glasses – are charged with an energy whose imaginary sources we can only guess at. *From an Elsewhere Unknown*, the British artist's first major monograph, with essays by Mark Haworth-Booth and Mel Gooding, brings together a number of mysterious and beautiful tableaux which are transformed by the magical alchemy of photography.

Mark Haworth-Booth is one of Britain's leading authorities on mainstream international photography and is the former Senior Curator of Photographs at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. He is Visiting Professor of Photography at the University of the Arts London and a freelance curator and writer.

Mel Gooding is one of the UK's most respected writers on the visual arts whose informed criticism spans the last 25 years. He has written extensively on abstract art and his writings have been published worldwide in numerous publications and periodicals.

From an Elsewhere Unknown is published by Ffotogallery, Cardiff & Hirschl Contemporary Art, London.

Sian Bonnell is represented by Hirschl Contemporary Art.





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sian bonnell · from an elsewhere unknown

with essays by

mark haworth-booth & mel gooding



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sian bonnell

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Sian Bonnell · *From an Elsewhere Unknown*
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high jinks and black jokes

the art of sian bonnell

mark haworth-booth

Sian Bonnell was born in London in 1956 and attended a Catholic primary school where she learned about guilt and the soul. Sian saw the soul clearly. It was suspended inside her like a white table-cloth or sometimes a doily. Hers urgently needed washing. A plastic glow-in-the-dark Virgin Mary gleamed from her bedside table.¹

Sian studied sculpture at Chelsea School of Art in 1978-81. She opened up to the extraordinary opportunities available in those relatively grant-rich days – when most materials came free – and to the stimulus offered by London's galleries and theatres. She arrived at Chelsea the term after Helen Chadwick left, met her briefly and saw all of her major installations over the next few years. There are interesting resonances between the two artists – for example in their teasing feminism, their use of domestic items for art-making (both made startling transformations of cleaning materials), the use of high and low technologies and their gleeful interest in bad taste and black jokes. Like many students at the time, Sian found much to admire in the work of Eva Hesse, shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1979. Hesse demonstrated, among many other things, a simple but useful truth – that the same objects could be used in a variety of separate art works.

Although Sian has a broad appreciation of Western art, including a passion for Piero della Francesca, she has a predilection for *intimiste*, domestic artists such as Chardin, Morandi, Gwen John and Winifred Nicolson. She became fascinated in her final year by the 'Red Studio' of Matisse, then on loan to the Tate. Sian created her own Red Studio in her space at Chelsea and placed her sculptures within it. Her sculptures at the time were brightly coloured



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transformations of stools and chairs found on skips or purloined from the canteen. Her overpowering red space was followed by a 'blue cube' made in her final year – a space (top-lit through slats), its walls splashed with many layers of mainly blue pigment. Terry Frost came to see the blue cube and spent the day talking with Sian about its 'transcendental' qualities and its relation to theatre. She worked part-time at the Royal Court and wrote a thesis on Samuel Beckett's precise control over sets and props, as laid down in the texts of his plays. Her knowledge of the Theatre of the Absurd underlies the work by which she has become well-known 20 years later, although Jacques Tati and favourite B movies like *The Blob* also play their parts. She helped build sets for a production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Old Vic and afterwards photographed the production. She wanted to take up a place to study theatre design at the Slade but this was financially impossible. Instead Sian took up theatre photography. With waitressing, she was able to survive economically and to work as an artist.

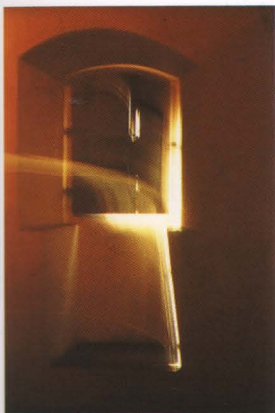
Sian left London to take up a part-time post-graduate degree in Newcastle, partly as a result of a fire which destroyed most of her existing work. She recalls making a photographic series in her studio about the way sunlight travels around a space, placing objects in pools of light.^[fig 1] She thought her other sculptural work was uninspired and artificial but received her MA in 1985. She moved back to London, married and worked alongside her husband professionally photographing art work and exhibitions. She exhibited in a number of group shows in the late 1980s: Helen Chadwick selected two photographic pieces – including this remarkable vision of the convent of San Marco in Florence^(fig 2) – for the exhibition *Time* at the Museum of Modern



1



Art, Oxford (1988). Children, economic and space constraints led to a relocation out of London to the South West in 1991. Sian talks of her life in a Dorset village as like "a very long instalment of *The Archers*". She recalls herself, as a young mother, "baking for England" – like Sylvia Plath in Devon 30 years earlier. The birth of her son was experienced as a highly creative moment, followed soon afterwards by the fulfilment given by the birth of a second boy. By 1993 she managed to organise her domestic life to allow some time for photography and in 1994 exhibited landscapes in *Viewfindings* selected by Liz Wells. Sian often gathered shells, pebbles or feathers on family walks and brought them home. In 1996 she reversed the process by taking domestic objects, such as biscuit-cutters, into the landscape and photographing them in situ. Tin sheep glint from dry-stone walls or fence posts in grazing land.^[fig 3] The shining animals in silhouette echo their historic (and sometimes prehistoric) counterparts – the horses cut into the green turf to reveal the white chalk. Sian's tiny interventions also miniaturise the world. If the animals seem as vulnerable as toddlers, so does the world around them. The small black and white photographs look backward and forward across time and ask questions about our internal diagrams of Nature and its famous foil, Culture.



Glittering metal rabbit moulds appeared in the landscape, followed by pink blancmange and bionic, yellow jelly rabbits.^[fig 4] Such kiddies' party creatures looked rather different in the fields, resonating subtly with the controversies around the irradiation of food-stuffs and the warning bells ringing around the letters BSE. (The jelly itself – in these artificial replacements of natural animals – was made from animal gelatine.) The resonances continue. A bright green rabbit dashes through the pages of Margaret Atwood's *Orix and*



5

Crake (2003). When I first saw these works, at a conference on landscape photography at Falmouth College of Arts in 1998, they seemed almost defiantly modest. This was the age of *Sensation* (Royal Academy, 1997) and the apotheosis of the YBAs. Sian's first solo exhibition – *Groundings* at Watershed, Bristol – came later in 1998. Alongside the *Groundings* series, Sian was working on *Undercurrents*, in which domestic objects appeared on the sea-shore. Sian teasingly opposes the assumed positions of the female/internal/domestic and the habitually male/external/landscape. Soft toys and the momentary impressions left by biscuit-cutters occupied the rugged coastline. The more I saw of the developing work, the more I recognised that if the images seemed whimsical their author must possess a whim of iron. The images insisted on the frailty of human constructions – and yet seemed to thrive on this knowledge.

The humour became both more flippant and more poetic in the series *When the Domestic meets the Wild* (1999). In an inspired move, Sian turned her circumstances as an artist – enforced domesticity but (ironically) no studio in which to work – into a creative opportunity. She took even more of the home outside. A duster (perhaps recalling Sian's early idea of the soul) alights on a bush. An ironing-board perches on a rocky shore^[fig 5] and starts to become something else – a wading bird intent on its scavenging, its stiff limbs designed by millions of evolutionary years in precisely this remarkable form. It is odd how waders, especially the larger ones like herons, look improvised, as if they have metal joints. Or is this a picture of a surf board that has evolved legs to wade ashore for a breather from the endless, boring waves? Such works recall Sian's love of Beckett and the Absurd. They relate too to

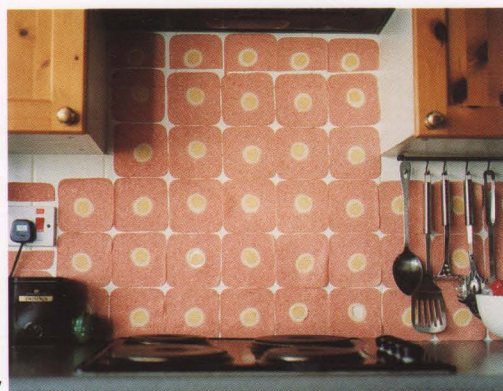


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the stripped-down metaphysics and glinting wit of such Central European poets of the mid-20th century as Zbigniew Herbert. In his prose poem 'Objects' we read that 'Inanimate objects are always correct and cannot, unfortunately, be reproached with anything... tables, even when they are tired, will not dare to bend their knees.'² As we read that, Herbert's tables simultaneously preserve their decorum and seem, surreptitiously, to bend their knees.

Groundings opened up teaching opportunities and other shows. A move to Weymouth in 1998 brought a permanent studio and larger darkroom facilities. In 2001 Sian received an award from South West Arts. It meant recognition as well as the opportunity to travel to Holland in 2001 to make the series *Putting Hills in Holland*. She worked with both a medium format camera and 5x4 pinhole. One of the series was included in *Seeing Things: Photographs of Objects 1850-2001* at the V&A in 2002.^[fig 6] It took its place in a section devoted to still lives made only to be photographed, a world of temporary – often dream-like – illusions that is one of the most intriguing strains in contemporary image-making. The nonchalant nonsense of Sian's image made it the ideal poster-image for the exhibition.³ However, the pictures offer more than high jinks in the Low Countries and do more than displace the domestic: the constructions possess a strange presence as they occupy space and are enveloped by the weather. Like all Sian's series, they move the mental furniture around.

When the Domestic meets the Wild, an exhibition at Bridport Arts Centre in 2001, presented work from 1999-2001. The 30 black & white and colour photographs were augmented by an installation featuring resin moulds laid



on green-grocers' grass. Although Sian thought the installation unsuccessful, the resin moulds play a key role in the series *Glowing* illustrated in this publication. A new series, *Serving Suggestion*, featured in the group show *Play with your Food* at the Houston Center for Photography (2003). Some of the *Serving Suggestion* photographs, like *Ham Sandwich*, are very Beckettian. Luncheon-meat slices posing as kitchen-tiles^[fig 7] may satirise the current, TV-engulfing fad for the house beautiful – but as black jokes they are genuinely funny and horribly memorable. The *Glowing* lightbox/duratron series, with its engaging mix of the post-Apocalyptic and sci-fi schlock, was shown in photographic print form originally as *They Came* at her London gallery, Hirschl Contemporary Art, in 2003. The present exhibition and publication take the presentation of Sian's work to a very welcome and deserved new plane.

FOOTNOTES

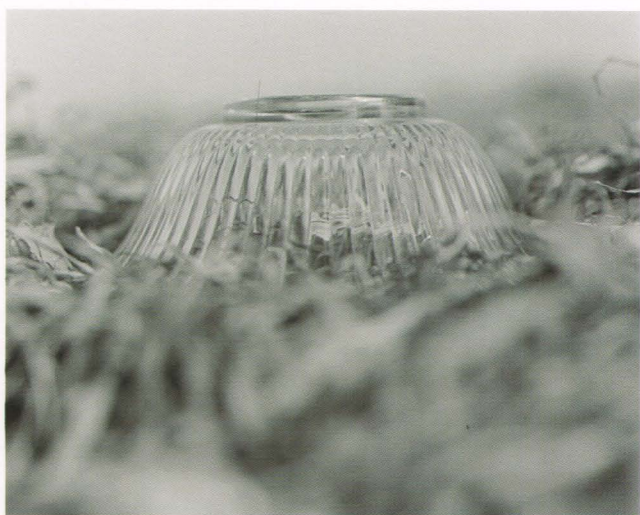
1. This essay is based on an interview with Sian Bonnell for the Oral History of British Photography, which is part of the National Sound Archive at the British Library. The interview took place on 7-8 April 2004.
2. Zbigniew Herbert, *Selected Poems*, Manchester: Carcanet 1985, p.63.
3. See Mark Haworth-Booth and Marina Warner, *Things: A Spectrum of Photography 1850-2001*, London: V&A Publications and Jonathan Cape, to be published in October 2004.

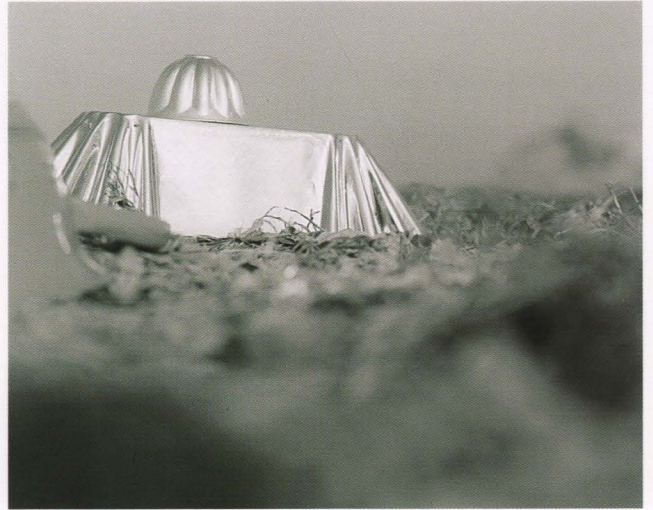


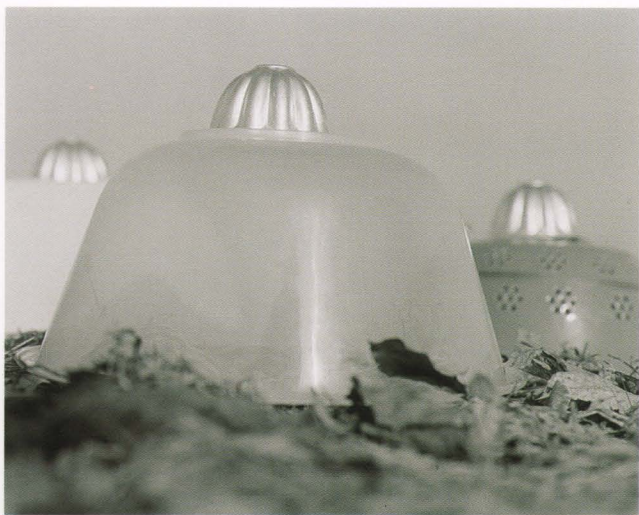
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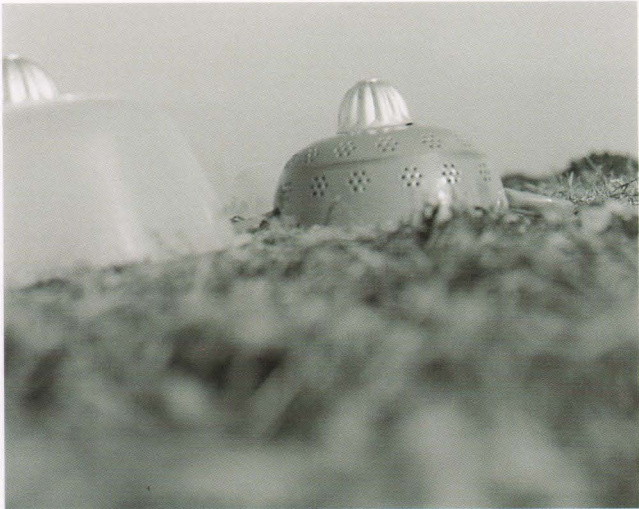
silver bromide prints, 2003
23 x 18cms











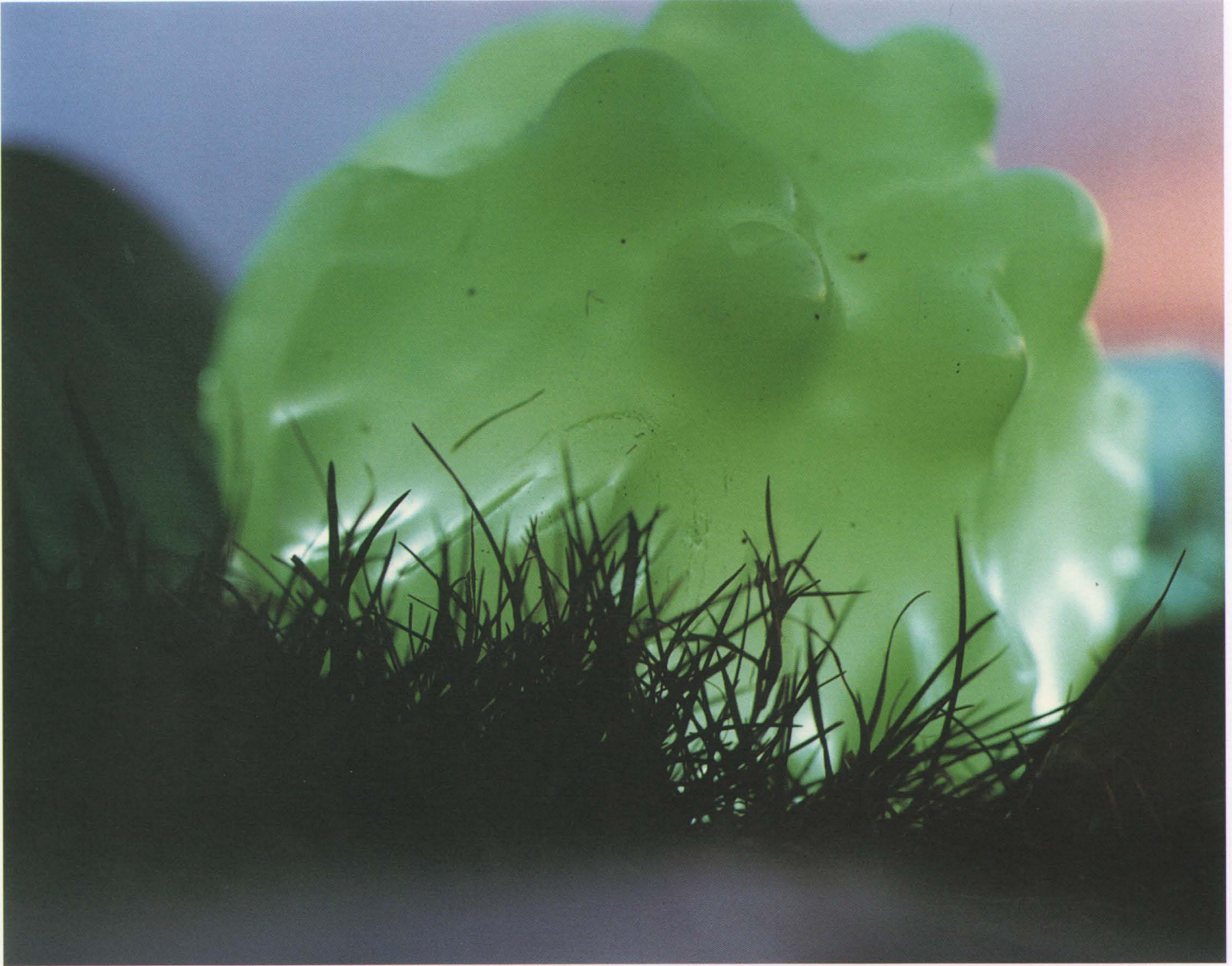


glowing

lightbox duratrans, 2004
76 x 102cms

















sian bonnell · poetic fictions

mel gooding

Sian Bonnell's latest series of lightbox works, *Glowing*, presents us with a number of mysterious and beautiful images in which, by the magical alchemy of photography, banal domestic objects – jelly moulds, colanders, plates and glasses – are transfigured into luminous objects that have arrived – who knows how? – from an elsewhere unknown. Emancipated from a familiar order of things, alienated from the quotidian domestic, they are charged with an energy whose imaginary sources we cannot guess at. If *They Came*, the title of the series when exhibited as photographic prints at Hirshl in 2003, deliberately evoked those science-fiction films of the 'fifties and 'sixties in which the earth was being constantly visited by things from outer space, the atmospheric and lucent intensity of these images, and the evident reality of their mis-en-scène – a function of specifically photographic persuasion – takes them beyond the creaky theatricality that added hilarity to the (false and faked) alarm that greeted the movie arrival of unlikely aliens.

They are images of a kind quite different to those of Bonnell's earlier series such as *When the Domestic Meets the Wild* and *Putting Hills in Holland*. Much of that earlier work achieves its effects – sometimes gently humorous and charming, sometimes simply comically absurd, sometimes disquietingly complex and ambiguous – through what might be called ironies of displacement. In the former, domestic objects with specific functions, or toys whose proper place is in the domestic nursery, are set in 'natural' locations inappropriate to their utility; in the latter, they are arranged into incongruous quasi-sculptural configurations or constructed into extravagant personnages. The implications of such displacements and reconfigurations are directly derived from our recognition of the objects, relating to our knowledge of



their everyday uses, and to our sense of the incongruity of their plein-air settings. Their synthetic colours and manufactured textures (plastic, glass, metal) emphasise their alienation from their new surroundings.

On the other hand, the settings themselves – fenced farmland, roadside edge, beach, copse and cut reed-bed – are anything but truly 'wild': they are not landscapes conceived as representing the 'natural world', or as having any aspect of the sublime about them. The placing of the objects – teacloths, cuddly lambs, plastic models, pastry cutters, jelly moulds (and sometimes the jellies made in them), scrubbing pads etc. – do not have the character of aesthetic interventions, 'art-acts'; they seem to be, rather, of a class of actions, which, though strange, are well within the compass of the 'housewife' or domestic worker to whom the images ironically allude. Mops are stood up in a neat rank (on the beach)^[fig 1], scrubbing pads are strung out in a row to dry (on hillside barbed wire fences)^[fig 2], teacloths hang out to air (on a branch in a wooded copse), jelly moulds and custard tarts are neatly stacked (on a polder floor). Their disposition is, if anything, advertently inartistic.

If feather dusters acquire suddenly the propensities of exotic flowers, or coloured plastic pegs cling like butterflies to hanging leaves,^[fig 3] or plastic scourers appear at dawn like brilliant fungi on a woodland floor, they signal the implication that modern nature is itself denatured, the 'wild' is in fact domesticated, and suggest that these transformations are, as we say, quite natural, in the sense that they are predictably in order. (As, for example, all societies tend to think of their own typifying conventions as 'natural!') If there is no wild nature, then that which belongs to the human world belongs



wherever it finds itself in that world. As 'at home' as a red corrugated-iron barn in a green field, say. It was, of course, the subversive transgression of a rebellious nature (albeit a rather 'tame' rebellion) which so arbitrarily de- or re-contextualised and de- or re-classified the familiar object. (What, the observer asks, is this artist playing at?) As all this demonstrates, multiplying ironies make it difficult to put one's finger on what actually is happening in those photographs, what it is that makes them disconcert. Several things are happening, of course, at the same time. Certainly it is nothing so simple, or as recognisably gestural, as a feminist protest against the domestic, though that may be our initial assumption.

In the earlier series, the objects so comically or disturbingly displaced retain, nevertheless, their identity, precisely because it is their resemblance to other things of quite different orders (natural, sculptural; minimal, modernist, surreal) that is exploited for comic or ironic effects (simple or complex). With those objects in those photographs we do know to that extent where we are. The objects in *Glowing*, have, however, undergone another, deeper, kind of transformation. Where are we when we first glimpse these translucent presences? It is as if we have just come across them, encountered them unexpected in the crepuscular thicket, half-hidden by the damp grass or leafmould, or been mystified by their cold clarity on the crisply frozen turf. 'It is as if': that is, we may know they are staged arrangements, set-ups, but we encounter these images as having the quality of the poetic.

To turn Coleridge's famous prescription on its head, we are tricked momentarily into an involuntary 'suspension of disbelief'. (Coleridge wrote of



3

our experience of the theatre as necessarily entailing the "willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith": we will ourselves to believe that what is happening onstage is 'real'.) Film and photography are unlike theatre or performance in precisely this respect: we are screened from the sound, smell and atmosphere of the contingent, the creaky actuality of things, by the silver chemistry of the process and the lucent surface of the presentation. Without an act of the will, a deliberation to accept the provisional reality of a fiction, we believe in, however momentarily, what is, transparently, an artifice. With regard to (in looking at) the images in the *Glowing* series it is a conviction engendered by the homogeneity of the image, the completeness of the fiction, in terms of both material form (surface, light, colour: the constituents of their 'beauty') and content (the objects partially disclosed, partially hidden, their strange unearthly inner light, their appearance as of arrival in a believable but unexpected place: the constituents of their uncanny 'mystery').

This is what happens in art; and the 'special effects' of the most advanced technologies of visual trickery (in photography, in film) cannot enhance the magic of that moment of belief, the special property of experience that permeates the encounter with poetic truth. It is necessary to our reading of fiction and to poetry; it is the essential aspect of looking at paintings, whether figurative or abstract. Amazingly, though, any old sci-fi B film can work the effect (as Bonnell implies in her evocations of them) although, as my use of the term 'theatrical' above was intended to suggest, certain obvious devices break the spell and bring us back to earth, so to speak, or to our cinema seat. It is a function of criticism to evaluate the relative qualities of these varieties of aesthetic experience. What is especially surprising is that the magic can



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happen again and again, with each renewed encounter with a painting in a church or a gallery, or each re-viewing in cinema's dark Platonic cave, and even as we look with half an eye at re-runs in the corner of the lighted living room.

Each time, however, is different. With *Glowing*,^[fig 4] our acknowledgement of the artifice behind the poetic effects and our recognition of the materials adds something at each re-visit, each review, to our experience: a complex irony. Not the easy irony of amusement at our 'seeing through' the transparent trickery, even as we enjoy its effects; rather, the deeper sense of reality conceived as multiple, compounded of what is perceived, what is known, what is remembered and what is imagined: the profound irony which consists in holding poised in the mind oppositions or contradictions in which each of the terms is equally true. Bonnell's uncannily luminous arrivals from somewhere else are at once strange and strangely familiar: there is nothing 'homely' about them. Alive with an inner light, like fire or ice, they have come to inhabit a region at the back of the mind: they have landed in the domain of art. The actual is but a portion of the phenomenal, and the imagination comprehends both in its creative transformations into art of the world as given. They are, more precisely, somewhere beyond the conventional secondary worlds (the genres) of still life and landscape, and most certainly outside the categories of photographic documentation. They are poetic: they are fictions.

Contradictions, oppositions, ambiguities are the solvents of the unconscious, out of which an imagery emerges in dreams and reveries, an oneiric imagery which has its origins in that faculty that Coleridge called 'fancy': "a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space" but "[receiving] all



its materials ready made from the law of association."¹ These later images of Sian Bonnell's are indeed 'fanciful' in this sense, but they have as well a deeper imaginative reality. That is to say, they persuade us that the world they picture is of a piece, it exists with the same kind of self-contained coherence that informs any effective work of art, any convincing painting, say, of a supernatural, or for that matter, a natural, event.

As I have suggested, this is an imaginatively transformative photography, different in kind from that of those earlier series (including, as well as those I have mentioned, *Waterworks*,^[fig 5] *Mont Saint Michel Souvenirs*) in which the photography was essentially instrumental and reflexive, having as its purpose the record of what was self-evidently staged by the photographer. In those earlier works the wit – sharp and generous, comic and complicated – was in the intelligence of the conception and the deadpan actualité of the demonstration. In *Glowing* and in the silver images here presented in *Pinholes* and certain of the images in *Gamma*, the game is deepened: the camera becomes the means not so much to thoughtful provocation as to an address to the mind and the spirit, to levels of affect and contemplation untouched by the earlier work. We are presented with a new kind of photographic art.

FOOTNOTE

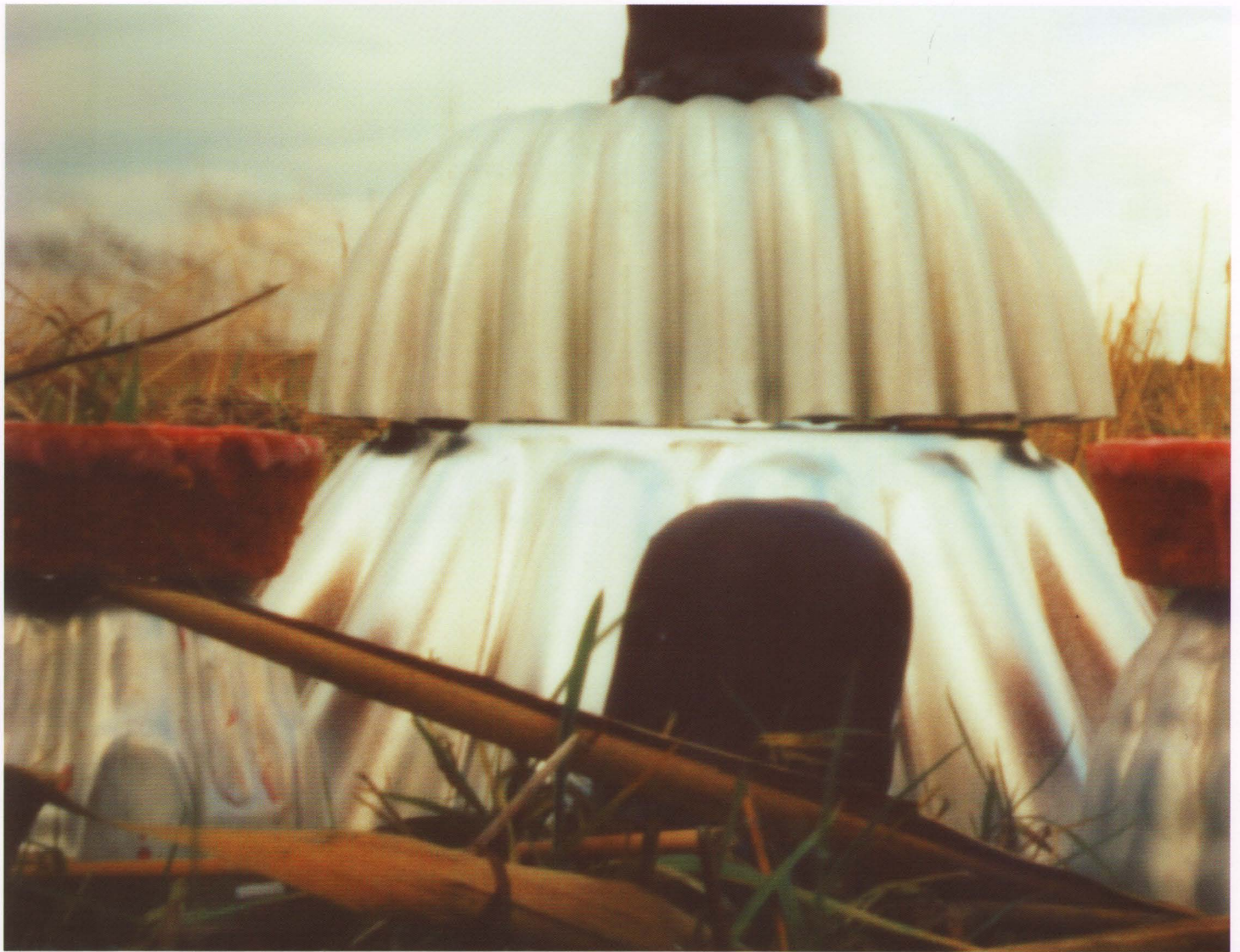
1. Coleridge is quoted from *Biographia Literaria* (Chaps. 12 and 13) where he defines and distinguishes between 'fancy' and 'imagination'. Where the 'fancy' is a function of memory and association and operates creatively through a conscious choice of materials, the 'imagination' operates at a deeper level. As a 'prime agent of all human perception', an essential aspect of being, 'it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create... It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead'. Imagination is, then, the faculty that actively animates the objects in the world with constantly changing meanings. 'This power... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant properties: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects...'

pinholes

pinhole digital prints, 2000/01
125 x 97cms













from an elsewhere unknown
touring solo exhibition



from an elsewhere unknown
Ffotogallery @ Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



from an elsewhere unknown
Ffotogallery @Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



from an elsewhere unknown
Ffotogallery @ Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



from an elsewhere unknown
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Ffotogallery @Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



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Ffotogallery at Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



Ffotogallery @ Turner House, Cardiff, 2004



from an elsewhere unknown
Mission Gallery, Swansea, 2005



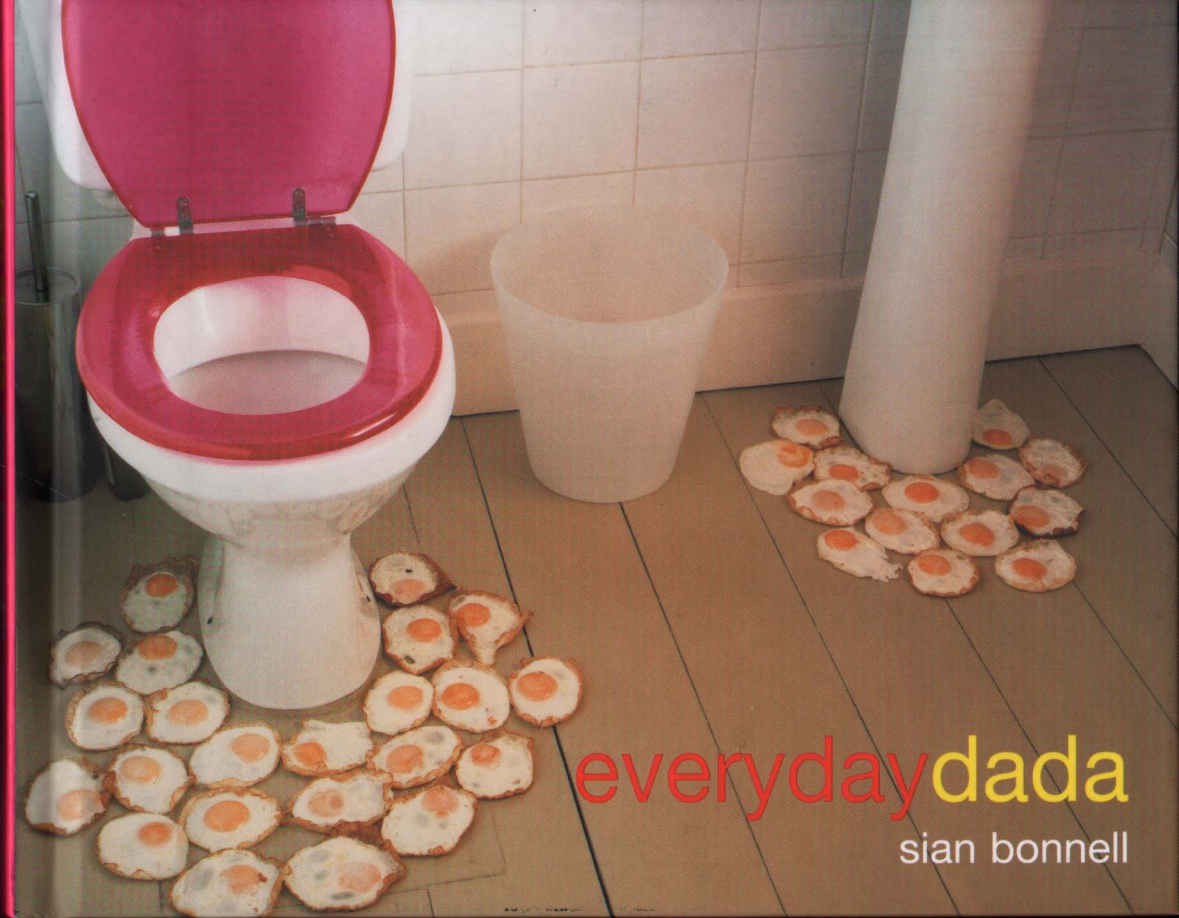
from an elsewhere unknown
Mission Gallery, Swansea, 2005



from an elsewhere unknown
Mission Gallery, Swansea, 2005

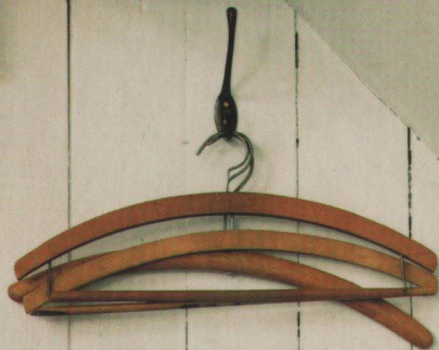


from an elsewhere unknown
Mission Gallery, Swansea, 2005



everydaydada

sian bonnell



£9.99 UK

ISBN 1-904587-31-3



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everyday dada

by Sian Bonnell

www.sianbonnell.com

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dada
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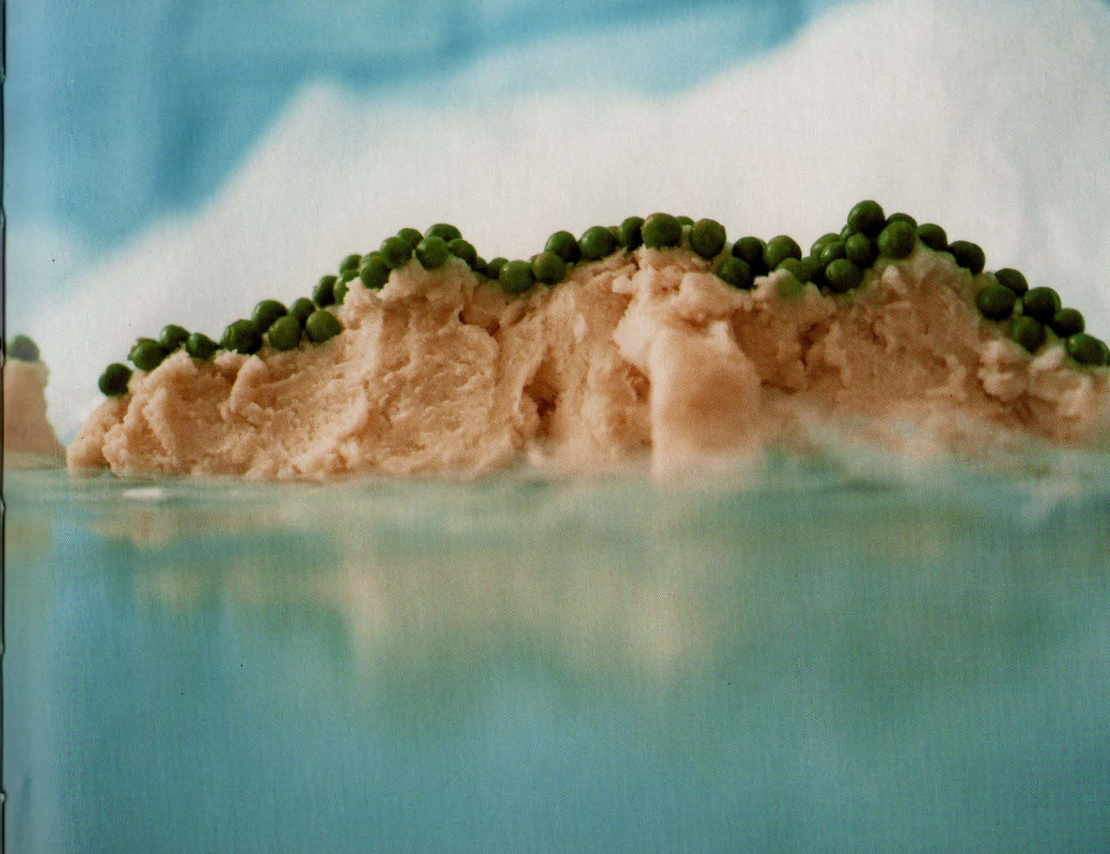
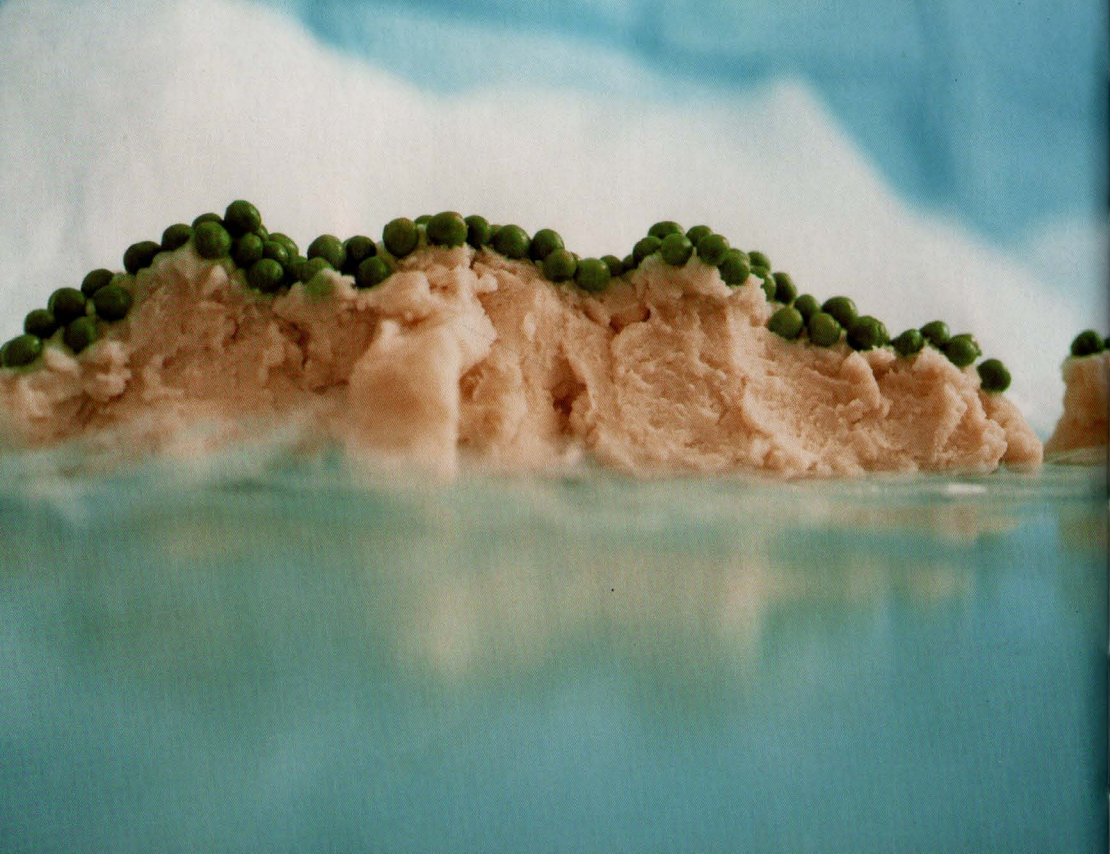
scenic cookery

house beautiful

forensic housekeeping

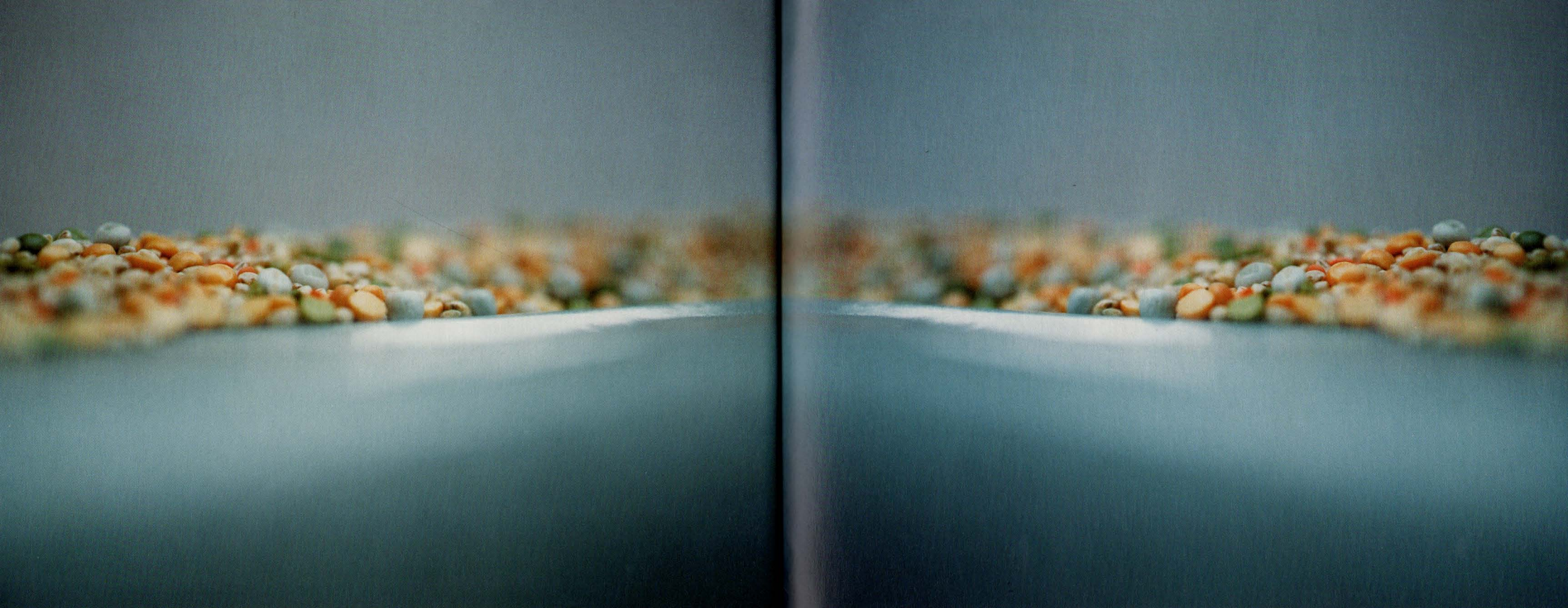
serving suggestion



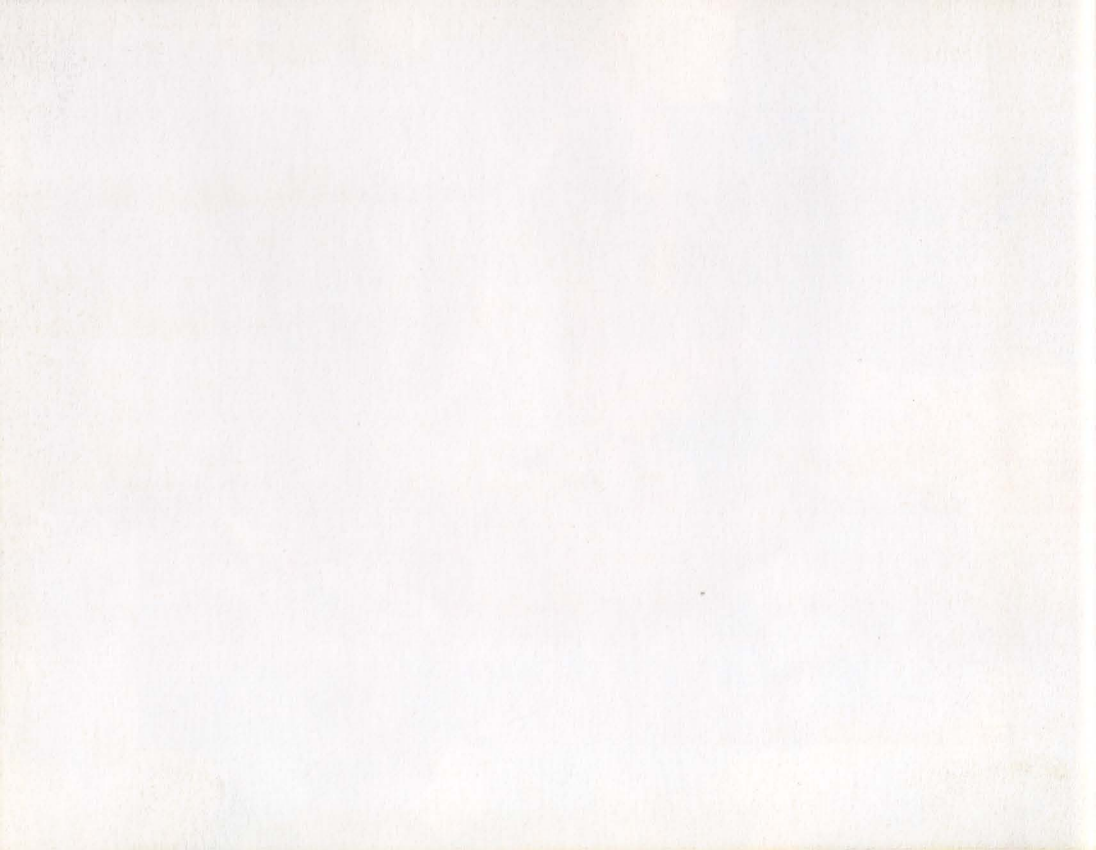












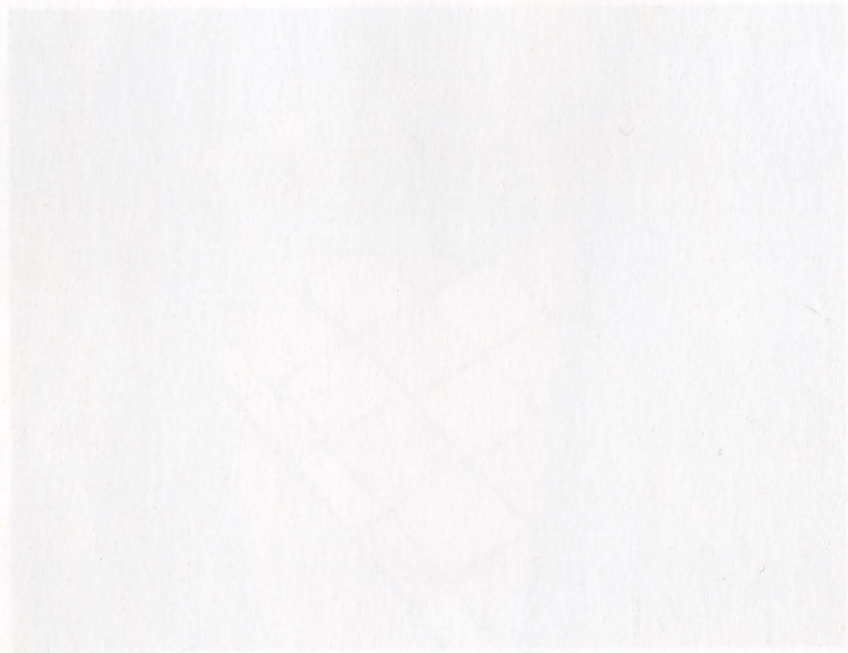
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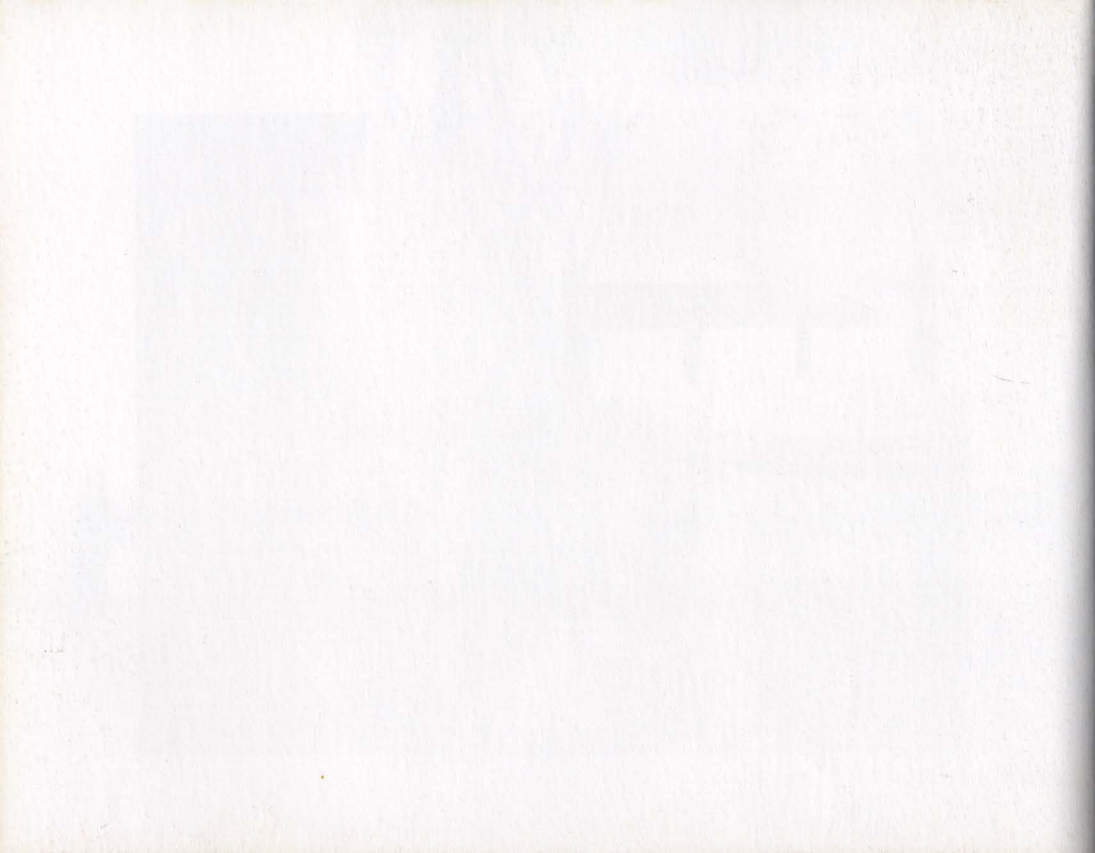
scenic cookery



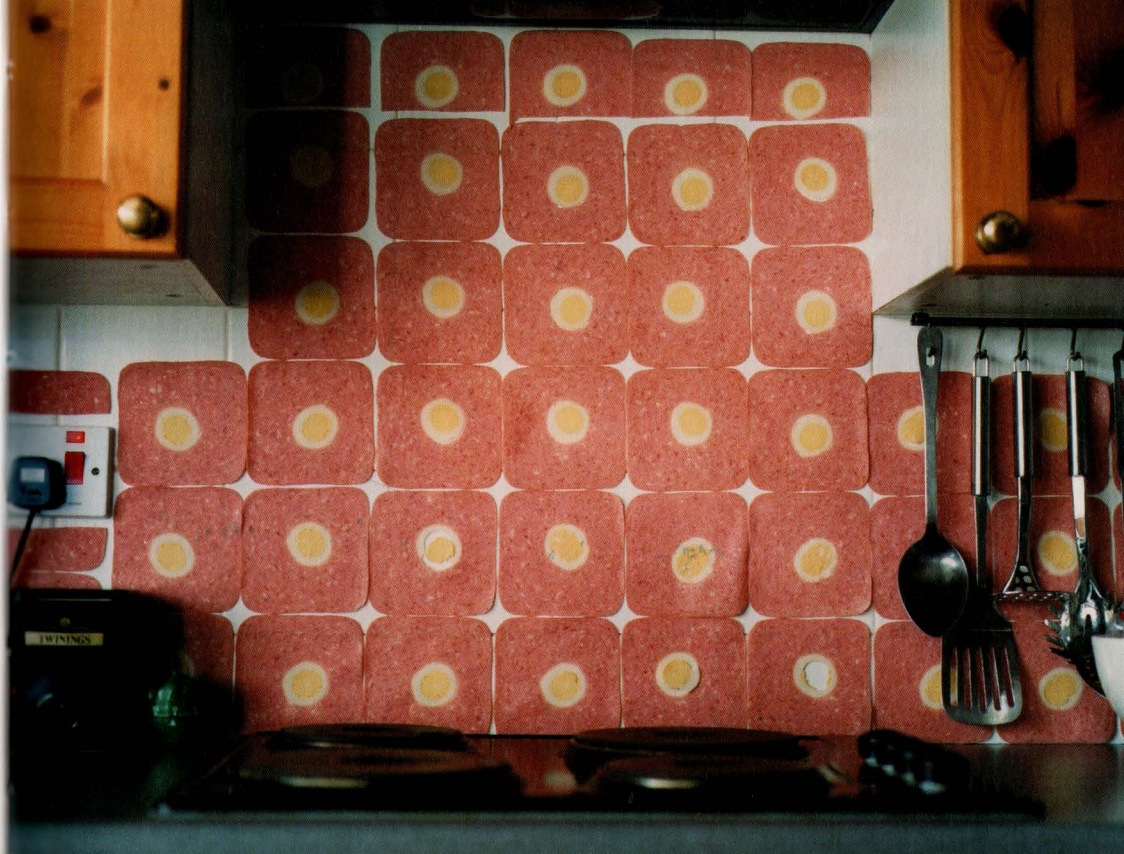
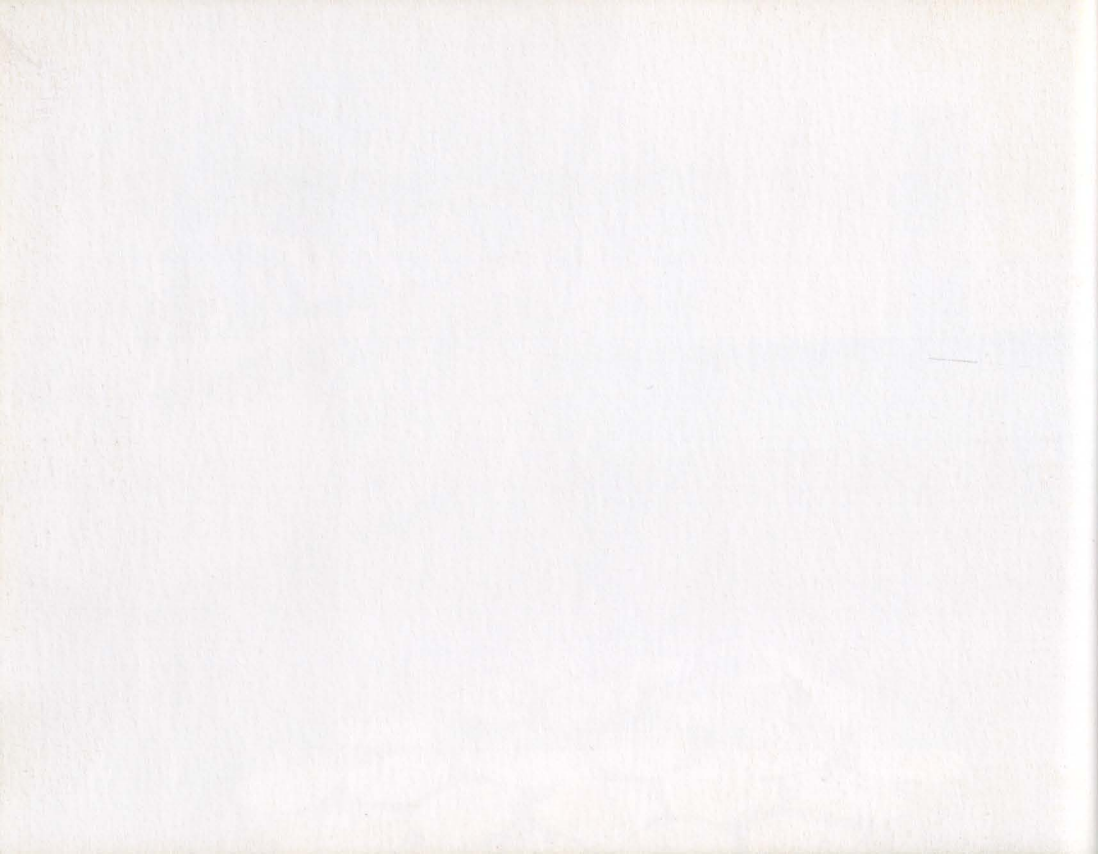




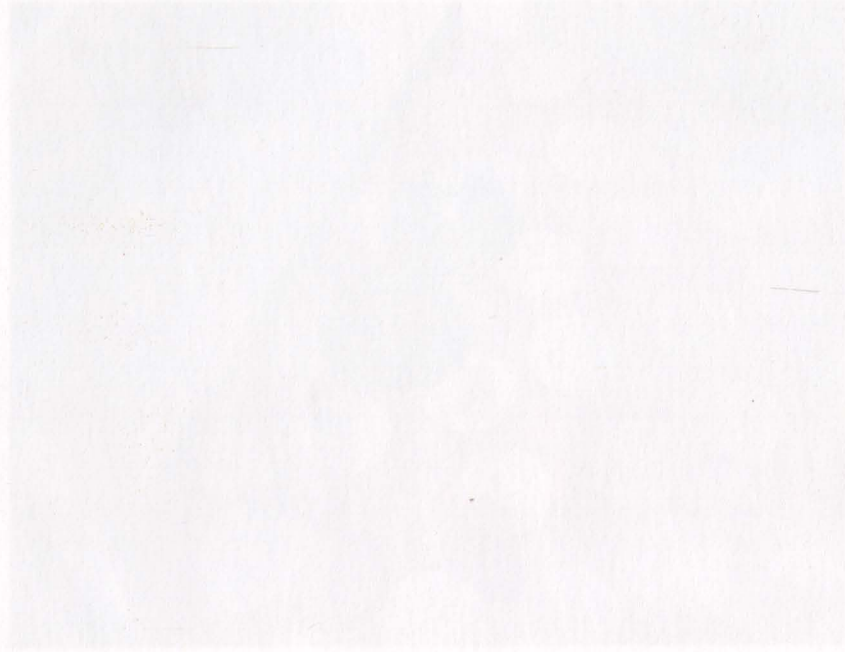


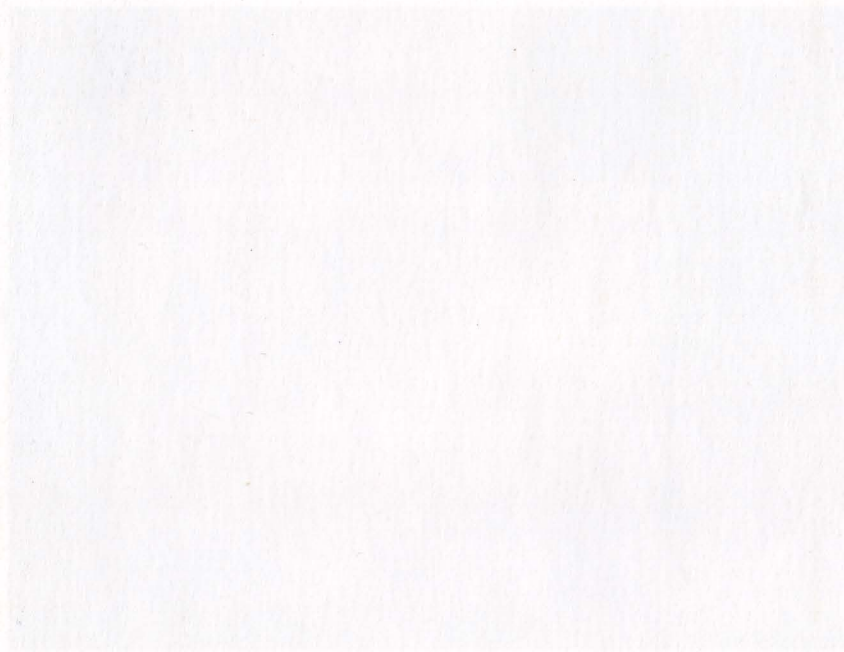




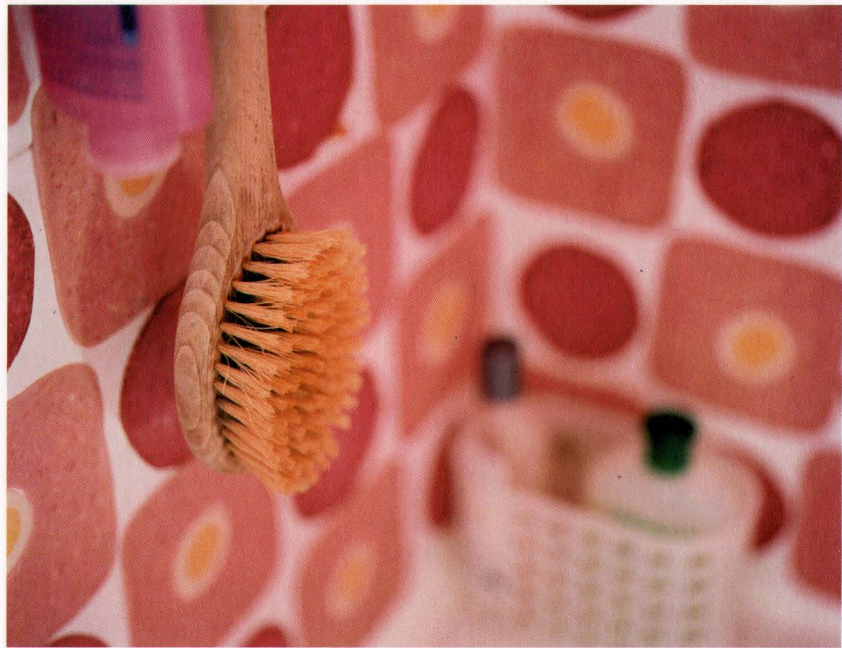


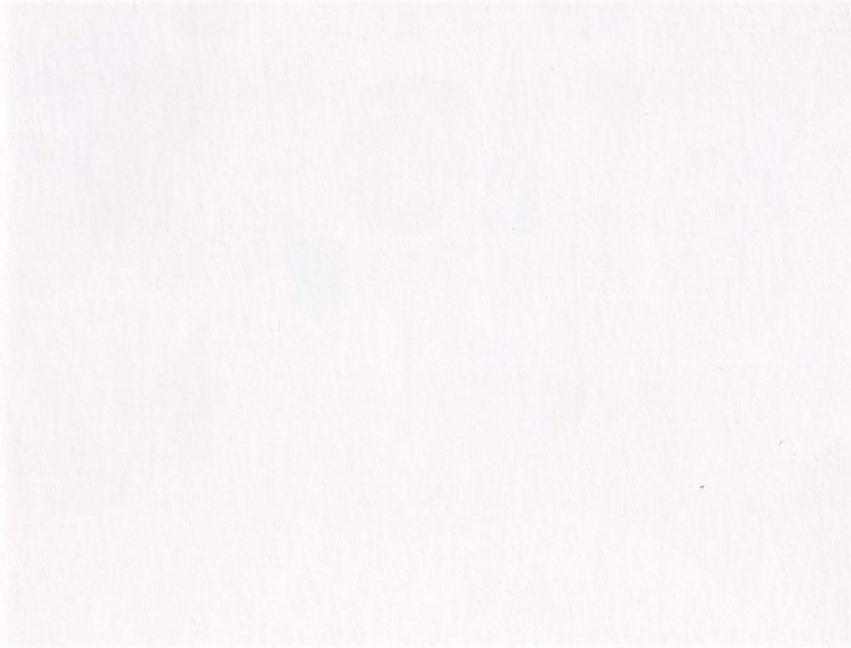




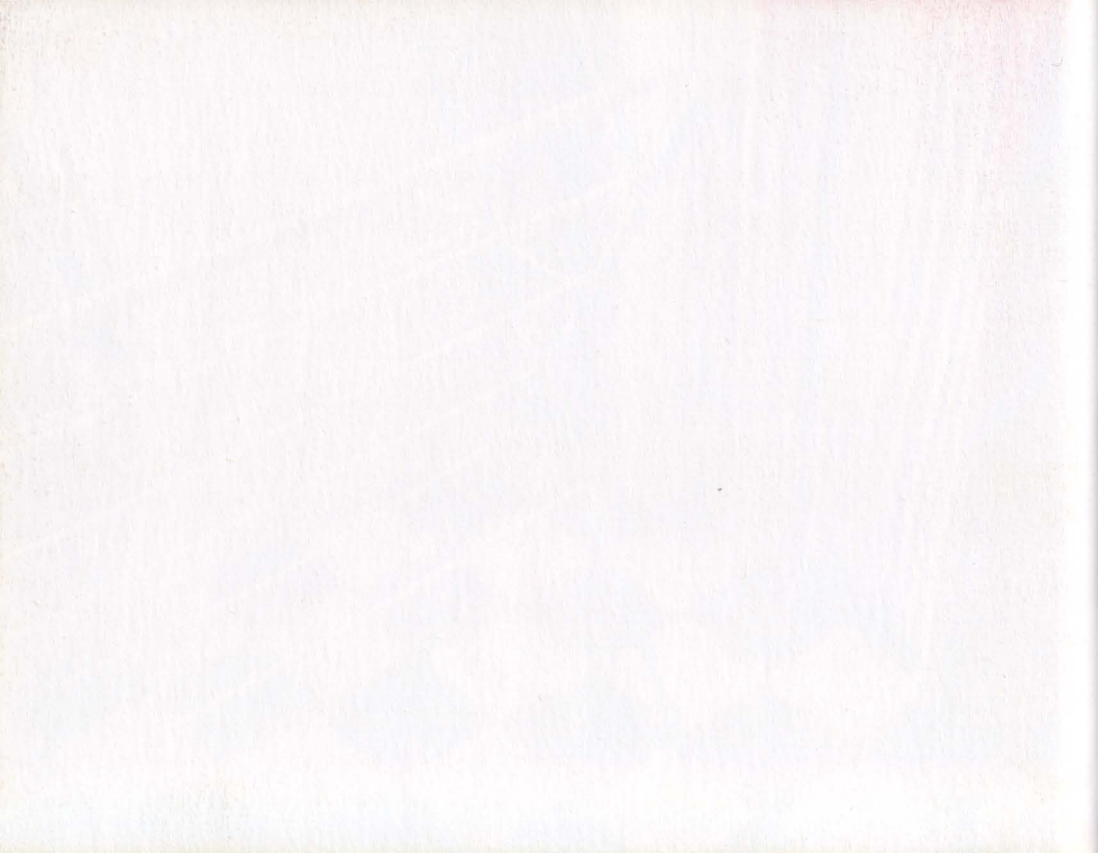










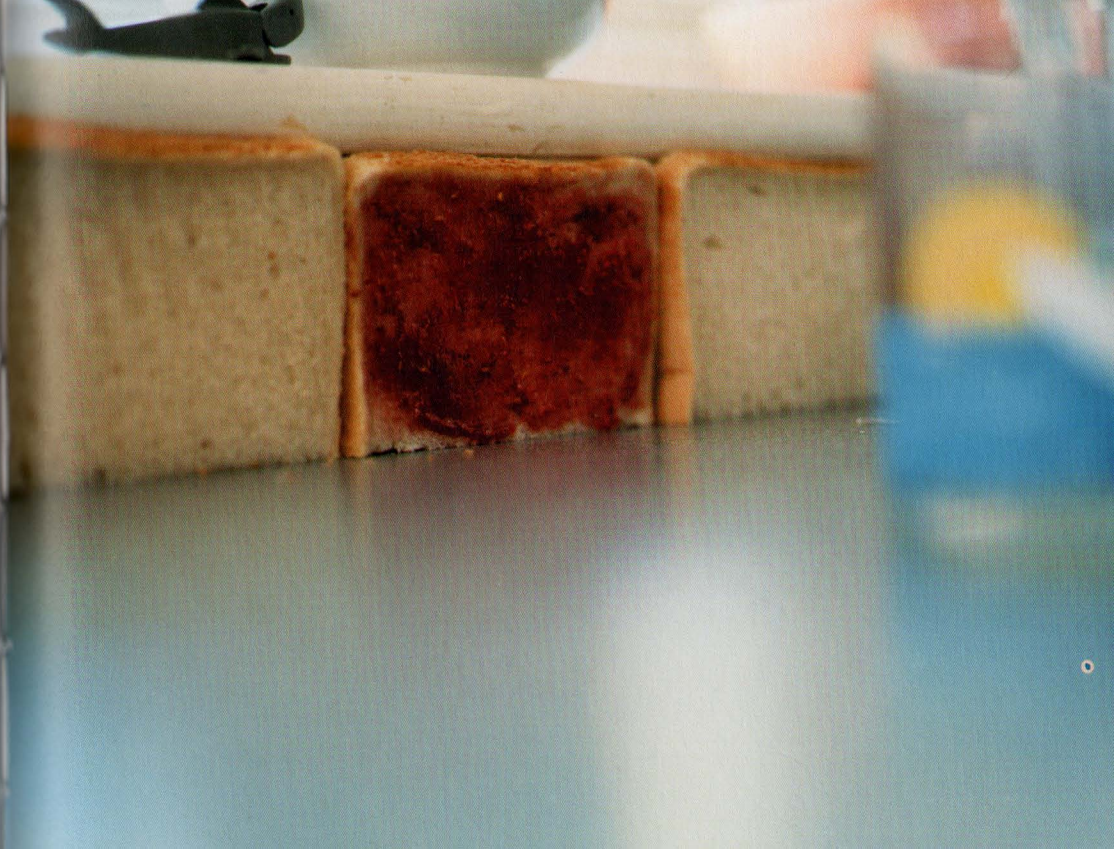


forensic housekeeping

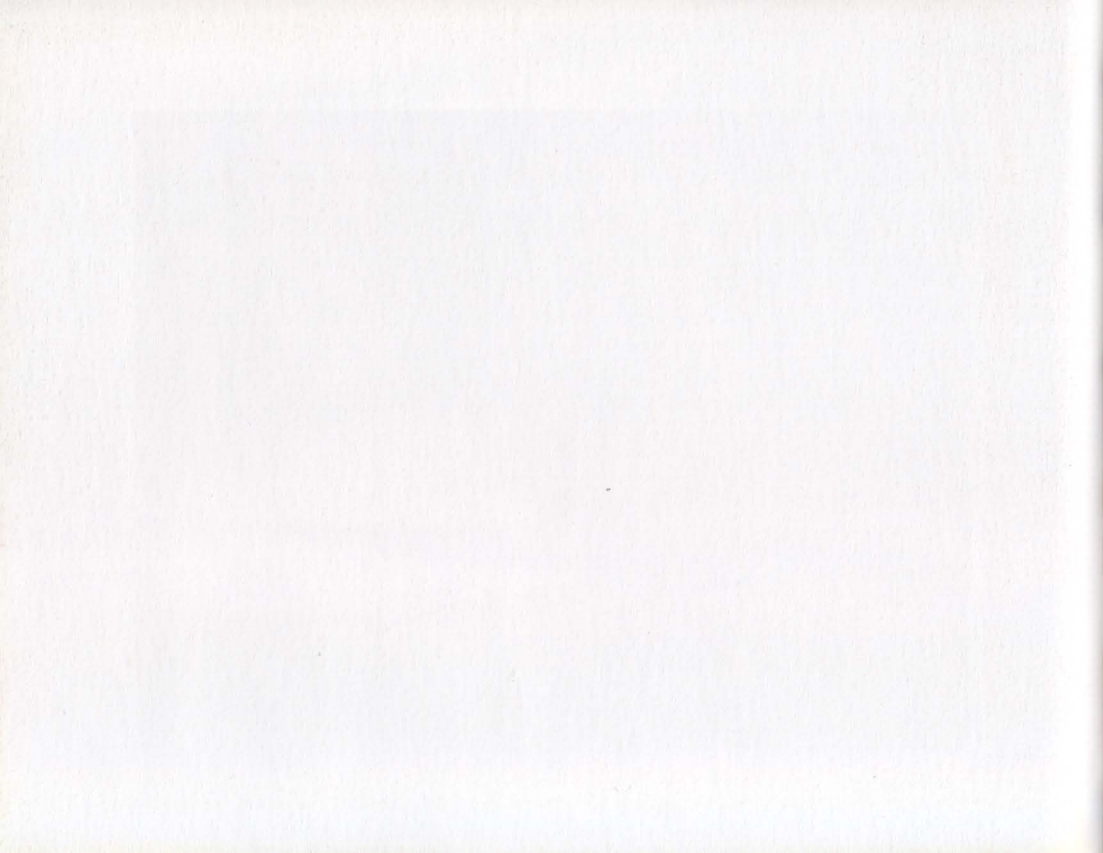
serving suggestion

scenic cookery

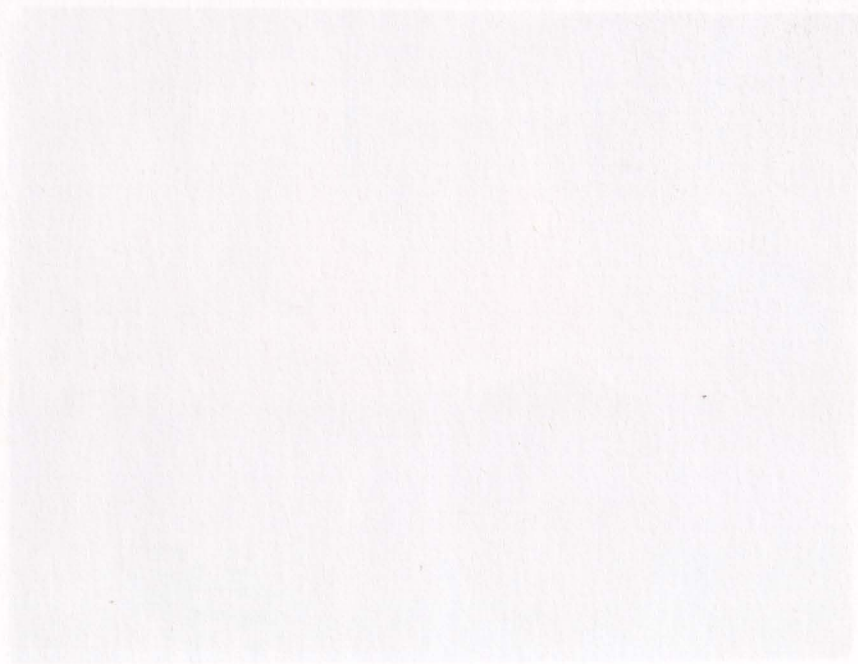
house beautiful

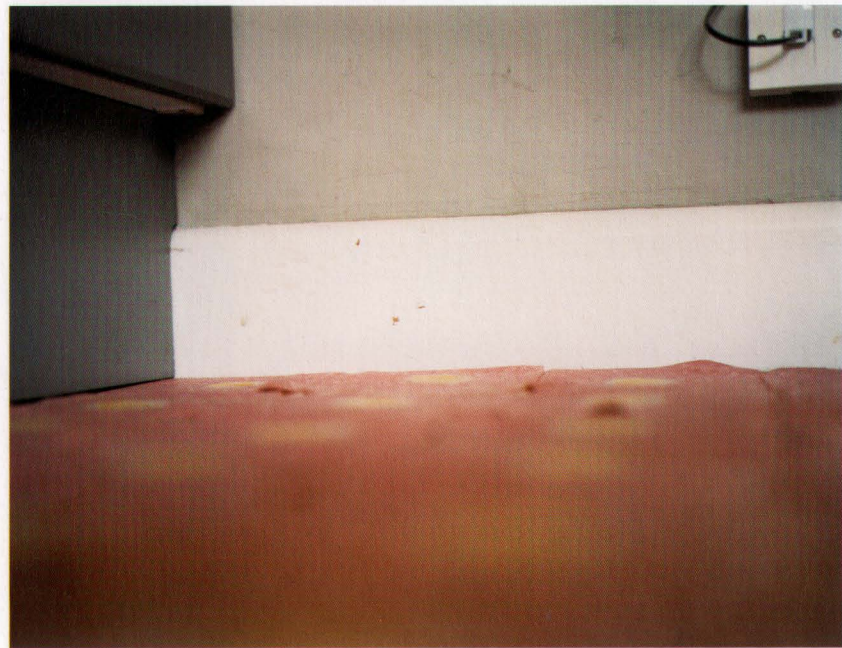


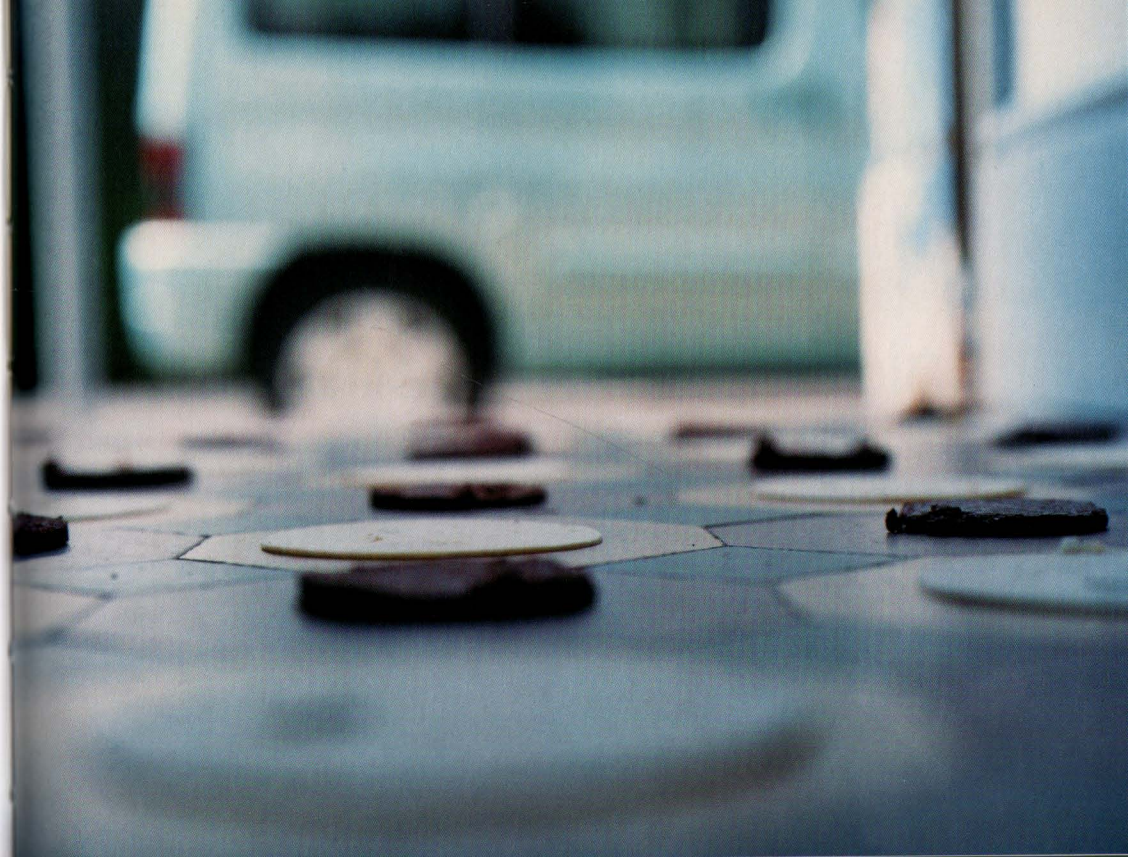
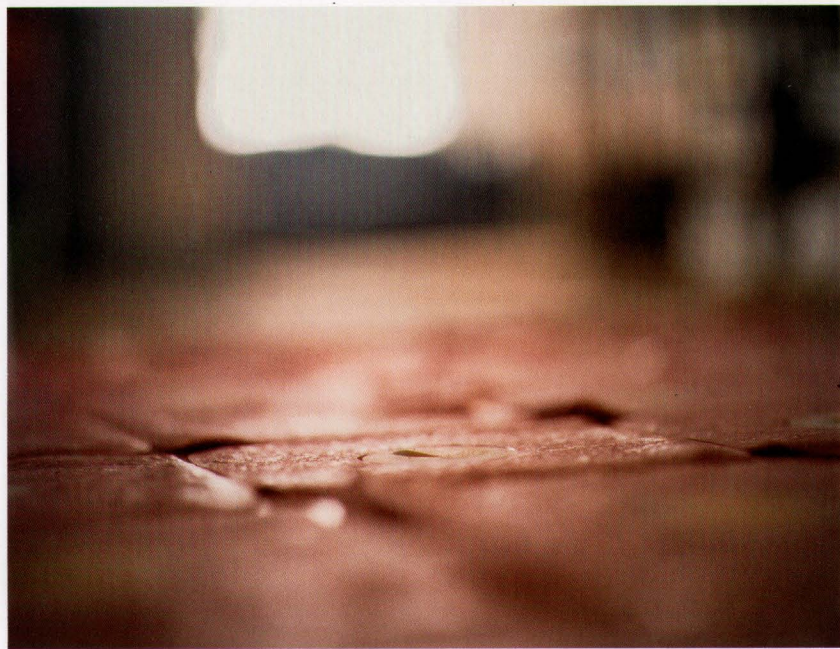










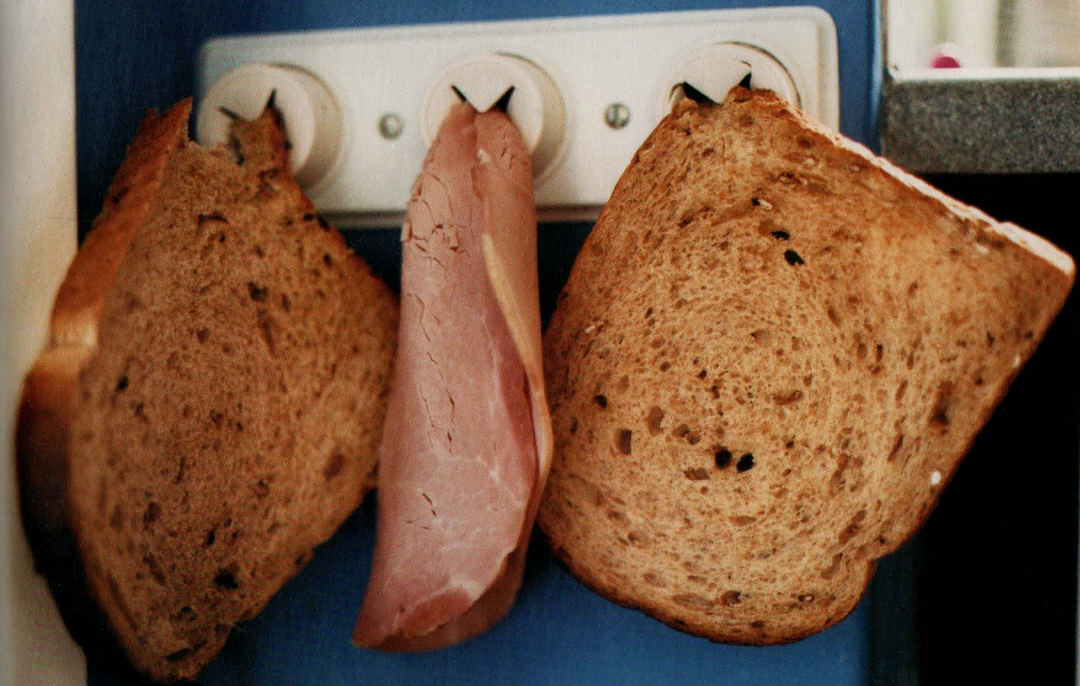


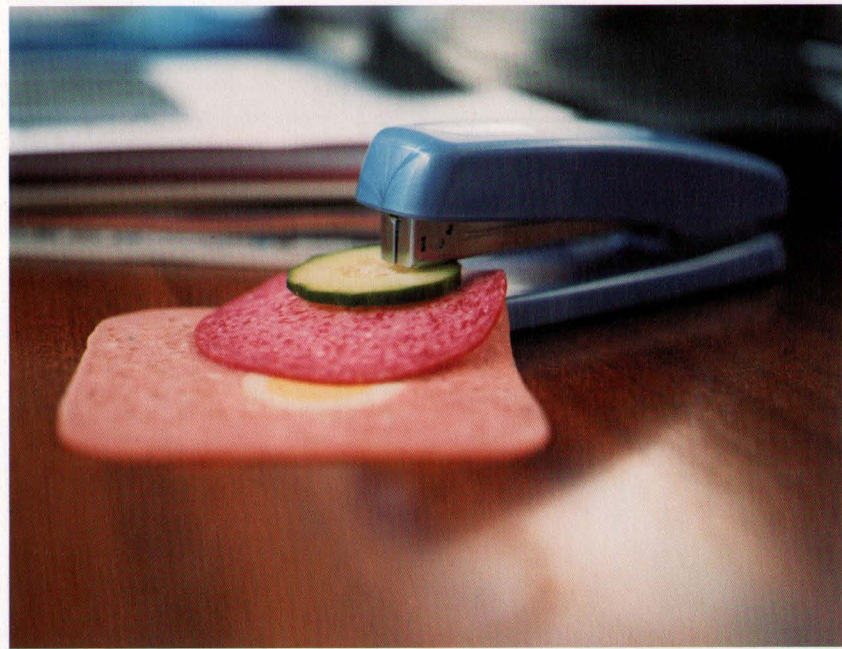
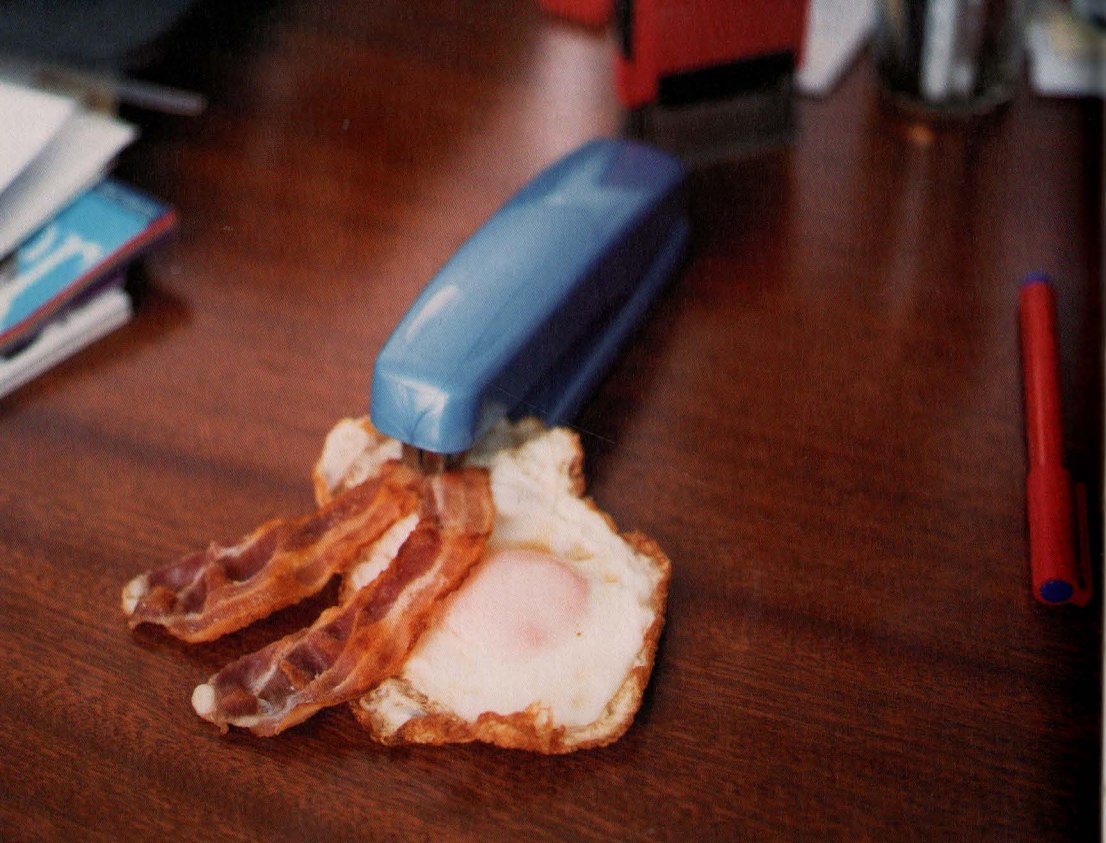
serving suggestion

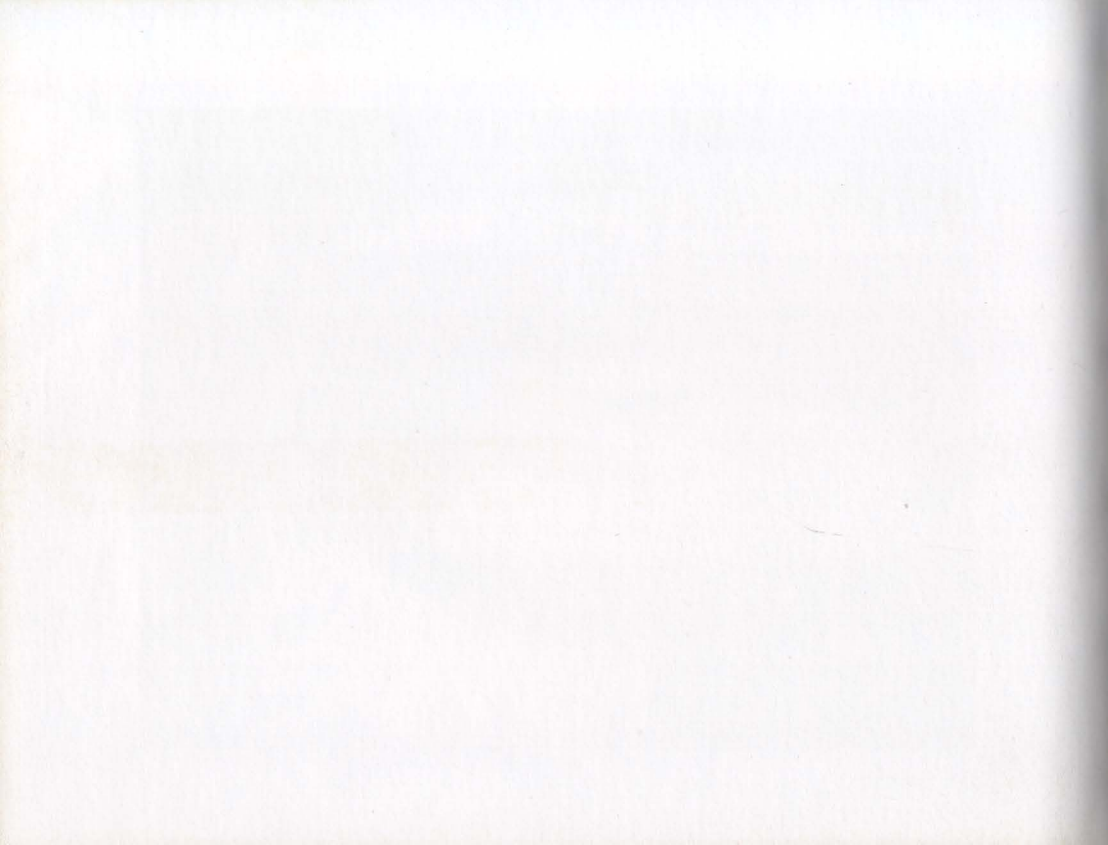
forensic housekeeping

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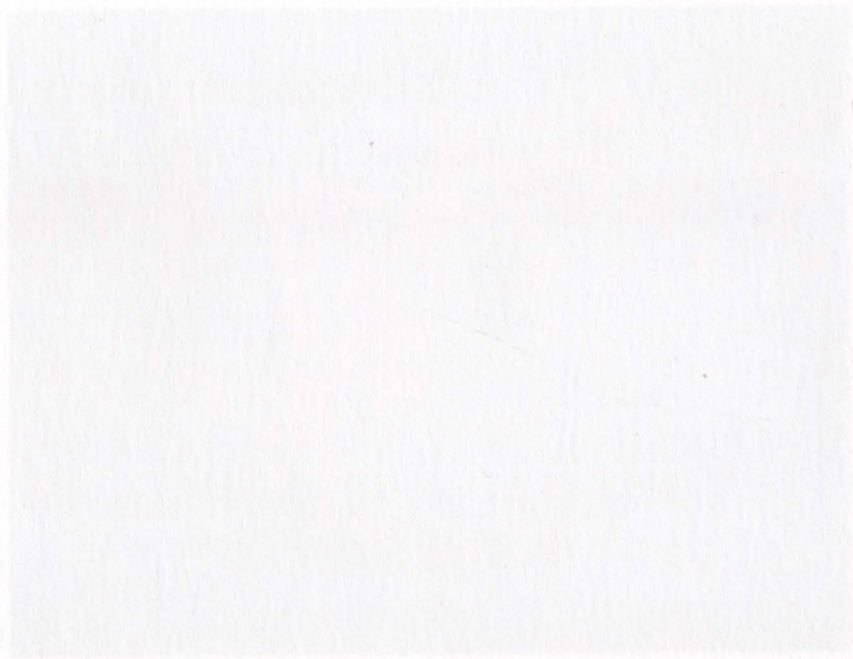


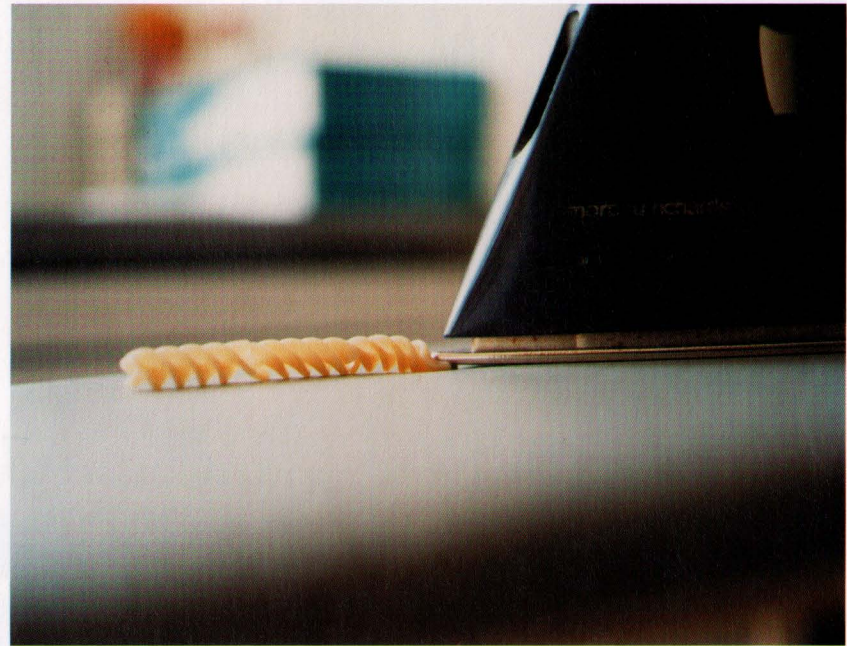




















everyday dada
solo exhibition



Galleri Image, Arhus, Denmark, March 2006



Galleri Image, Arhus, Denmark, March 2006



Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark, March 2006



Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark, March 2006



Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark, March 2006



Galleri Image, Arhus, Denmark, March 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006



Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt, May 2006

portfolio

contemporary photography in britain #47 £10 \$25



Edward Burtynsky Ori Gersht Sian Bonnell Emily Allchurch Monica Takvam
Marjolaine Ryley Jasmina Cibic Ebru Erülkü Bianca Brunner
Damian Uceda Cortes Stuart Whipps James Tye Alison Stolwood
Duncan Forbes Carol Armstrong Pavel Büchler Val Williams Nigel Warburton

ISSN 1354-4446



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47



Edward Burtynsky
Silver Lake Operations #2, Lake Lefroy, Western Australia, 2007
Copyright Edward Burtynsky, courtesy Flowers East Gallery, London

portfolio

contemporary photography in britain

introduction



Edward Burtynsky, *Rock of Ages #7, Active Section*, Wells-Lamson Quarry, Barre, Vermont, 1991

This issue features Edward Burtynsky's monumental photographs of landscapes transfigured through the extraction of resources – stone, oil and minerals – and includes a selection from his most recent work on Australian minescapes. Burtynsky's visual spectacles embody the labour inherent in processes of industrialisation and the effect of our dependence on nature to provide materials for our ever-increasing consumption. In an accompanying essay, Duncan Forbes traces 18th and 19th century landscape traditions and discusses the ways in which Burtynsky's vision presents a radically different relationship between humankind and nature.

In Ori Gersht's two new series – *Blow Up* and *Time After Time* – flowers, often the symbols of peace, have become victims of violence, resulting in an uncomfortable sense of beauty. Carol Armstrong discusses the poignancy of these works. Sian Bonnell's series *Kaput!* takes as its starting point the high stress levels found in an office environment during a residency in the Czech Republic. In *Résidence Astral*, Marjolaine Ryley has constructed a family archive informed by memories and a sense of place.

London is the subject of impressionistic photographic works by Ebru Erülkü, and also by Emily Allchurch, whose series *Urban Chiaroscuro* pays homage to Giovanni Battista Piranesi's dark work *Imaginary Prisons*. Also presenting new photographic work in this issue are Jasmina Cibic, Monica Takvam, Bianca Brunner, Damian Uceda Cortes, Stuart Whipps, James Tye and Alison Stollwood.

The 2008 Jerwood Photography Awards have recently been announced and are open for registrations. Now in their sixth year, these annual Awards are financially supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation and organised by Portfolio Magazine. They are open to artists who work with photography, and aim to assist recent graduates in their transition to professional life. The five Awards are each worth £2,500, with a group exhibition and publication in the autumn issue of Portfolio. Details are available in this issue and on the Portfolio Magazine website.

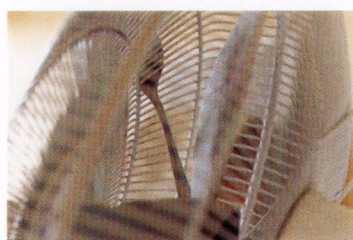
Gloria Chalmers
Editor



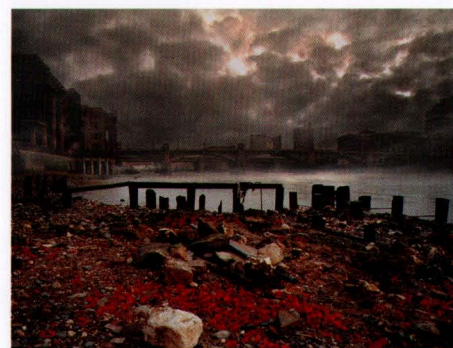
Damian Uceda Cortes, *Simulacrum*



Ori Gersht, *Blow Up, Untitled #05*



Sian Bonnell, *Kaput #1*



Ebru Erülkü, *Dämmerung – Eventide Visions of London*

number 47 May 2008

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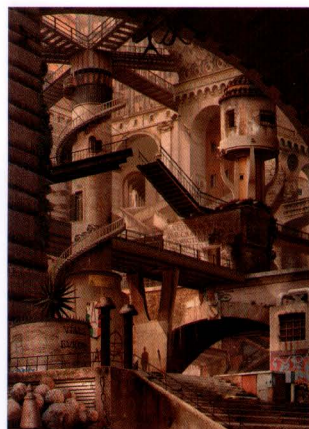
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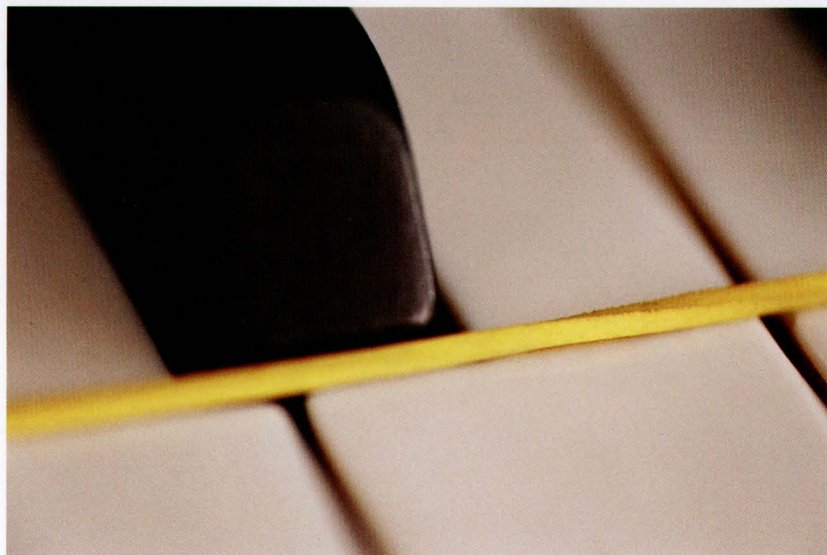
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ENGLAND

Sian Bonnell: Kaput!

Out of Order

PAVEL BÜCHLER



Kaput #41, 2005

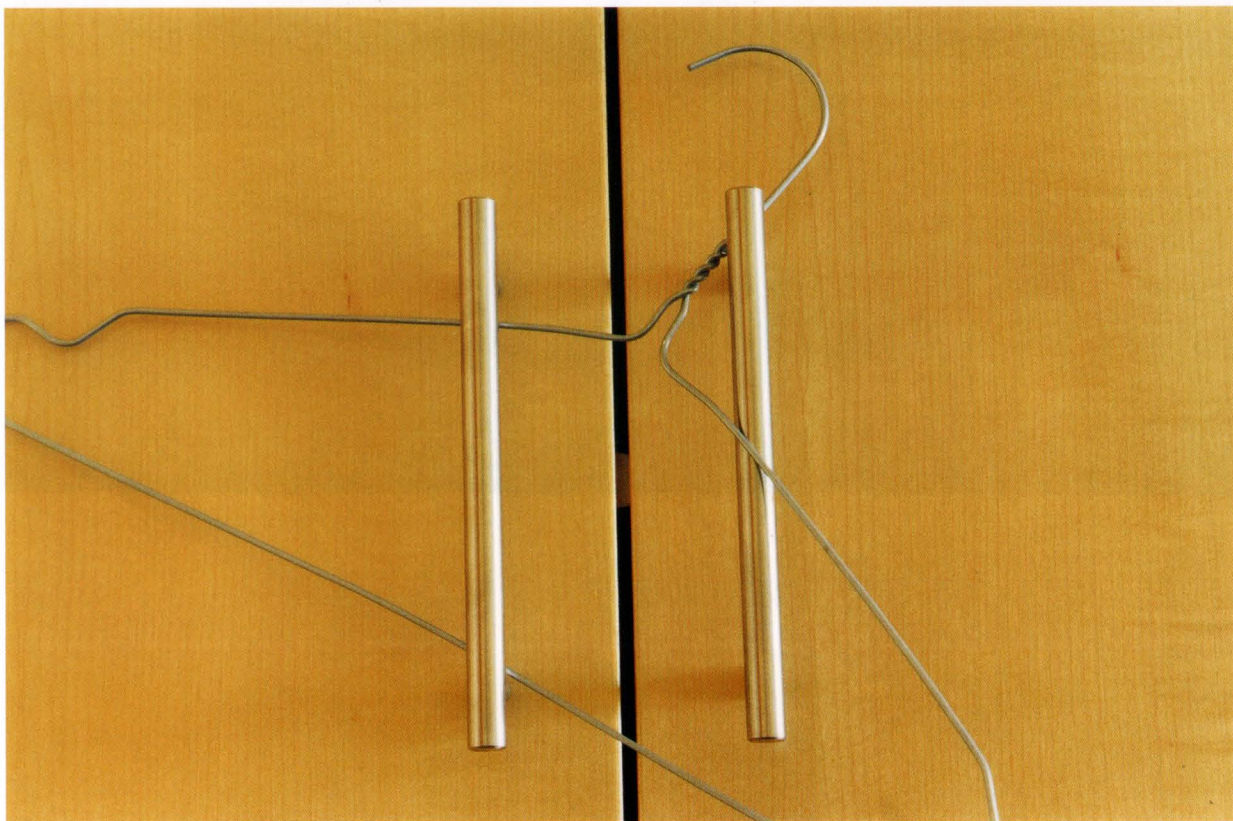
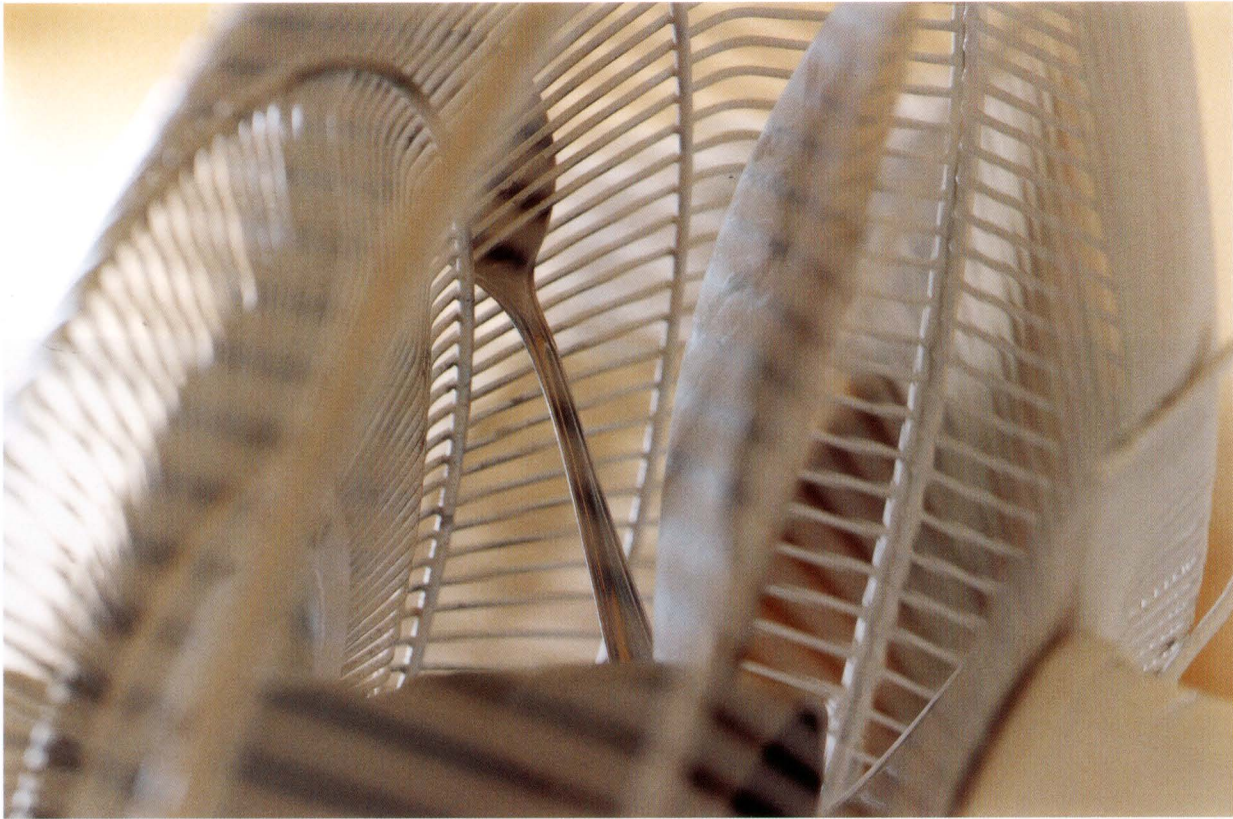
The editor's job is to make pictures work. In the present instance, so she tells me, the editor of this magazine has selected a handful of photographs, from a series of fifty, "all from the office environment". The choice is unsurprising – the office is an editor's natural habitat. It is where editors put to work an array of means, instruments and technologies, from the keyboard at the heart of the work station to the humble pencil sharpener on the corner of the desk, the coffee maker, pair of scissors or the omnipresent rubber bands and paper clips, to make the pictures do something meaningful for us. Not so for a photographer, an unsettled, migratory kind of creature who lives at large and drifts between light and dark stalking for images – which makes it equally unsurprising that when Sian Bonnell found herself temporarily resident in the administrative quarters of the Photography Department at the Moravian Gallery in Brno, she felt stuck.

The photographer's job is to halt things, to steady them, immobilise them for the benefit of the picture. In *Kaput!*, a four-part series on the theme of 'work', made during her stay at the gallery in 2005, Bonnell has done just that with a vengeance, twice over. To get going, she devised all manner of little interventions, obstructions and traps. She brought things to a standstill even before she took up her camera to take the pictures. She stuck paper clips, pins and cutlery in the gaps and apertures in the casing of the office machines, inserted darts where the leads should go, jammed a cupboard door with a wire coat hanger and the pencil sharpener with a referee whistle, propped up the telephone receiver with a half-eaten cheese sandwich. The initial aim of this doubling up may have been idle: to give herself something to do or just kill time (paper clips seem to have been designed for that), but in the process she discovered a metaphor for photography itself. In Bonnell's photographs, useful objects seem rendered useless, but this also seems to be their very purpose. It seems that Bonnell had noticed

that the world captured in photographic images is always in a state of irrecoverable crisis. Things don't work in pictures, or not in their ordinary ways. The functioning of the camera makes everything else malfunction. It turns everything into a paradox, a self-contradictory static event. It puts the spanner in the works (or a tea spoon in an electric cooling fan), as it were.

Or perhaps, the things shown here had been broken in the first place and have been fixed with whatever was at hand, and these provisional interventions may be makeshift repairs and ad hoc improvements rather than minor acts of sabotage. Perhaps the paper clip or the small ball of BluTac holding depressed the reset button on some piece of electronic equipment are improvised tools of the photographic trade, like the tripod or the head brace from the toolbox of a Victorian portrait photographer, and what Bonnell is after are simply the photographic qualities of the pictures. These are often expressed in a terminology borrowed from music: harmony, tone, composition. Indeed, later in the series, Bonnell turned her attention and her camera to an old piano. It is tempting to point out the close proximity of the musical instrument to office equipment through its use of keyboard (which would explain how one of these pictures found its way into the editor's selection). But Bonnell's innovative use of a blue scouring pad, stuffed between the piano strings and the hammers, or the yellow rubber band stretched across the keys, look like they may have come from the repertoire of techniques developed by John Cage, Alvin Lucier or Robert Ashley.

For the avant-garde composers of the 1960s, the tampering with the pre-determined possibilities of the instrument was a means of opening their compositions to accidents. They did not try to demonstrate how things worked, or even if they worked, but merely that the unexpected offered other ways of thinking about use and function which can refresh our perceptions of, and our interest in, the familiar. And they left it to the music to do the trick.

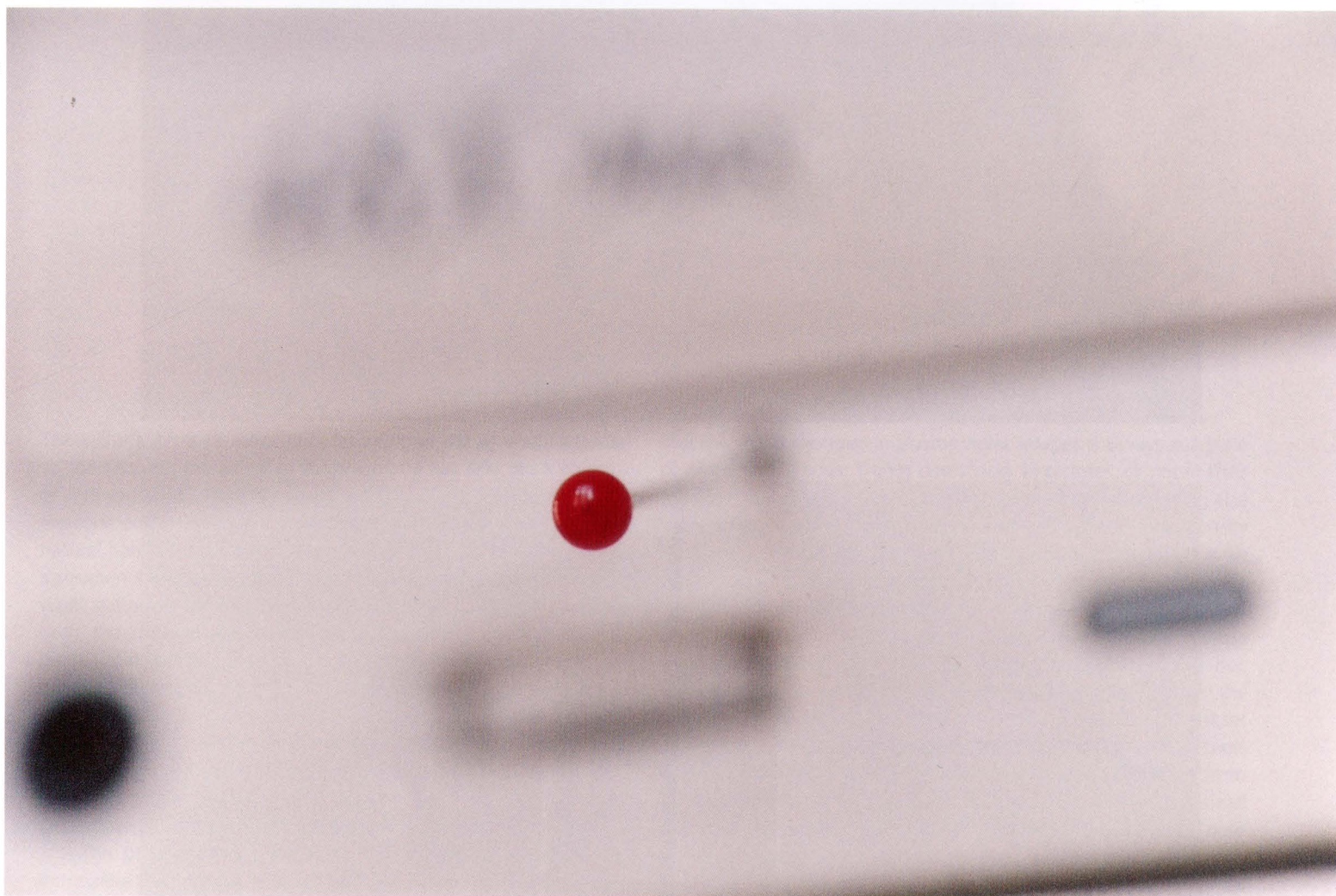


Kaput #1, 2005 (above); Kaput #4, 2005 (below)

Sian Bonnyll-Morris

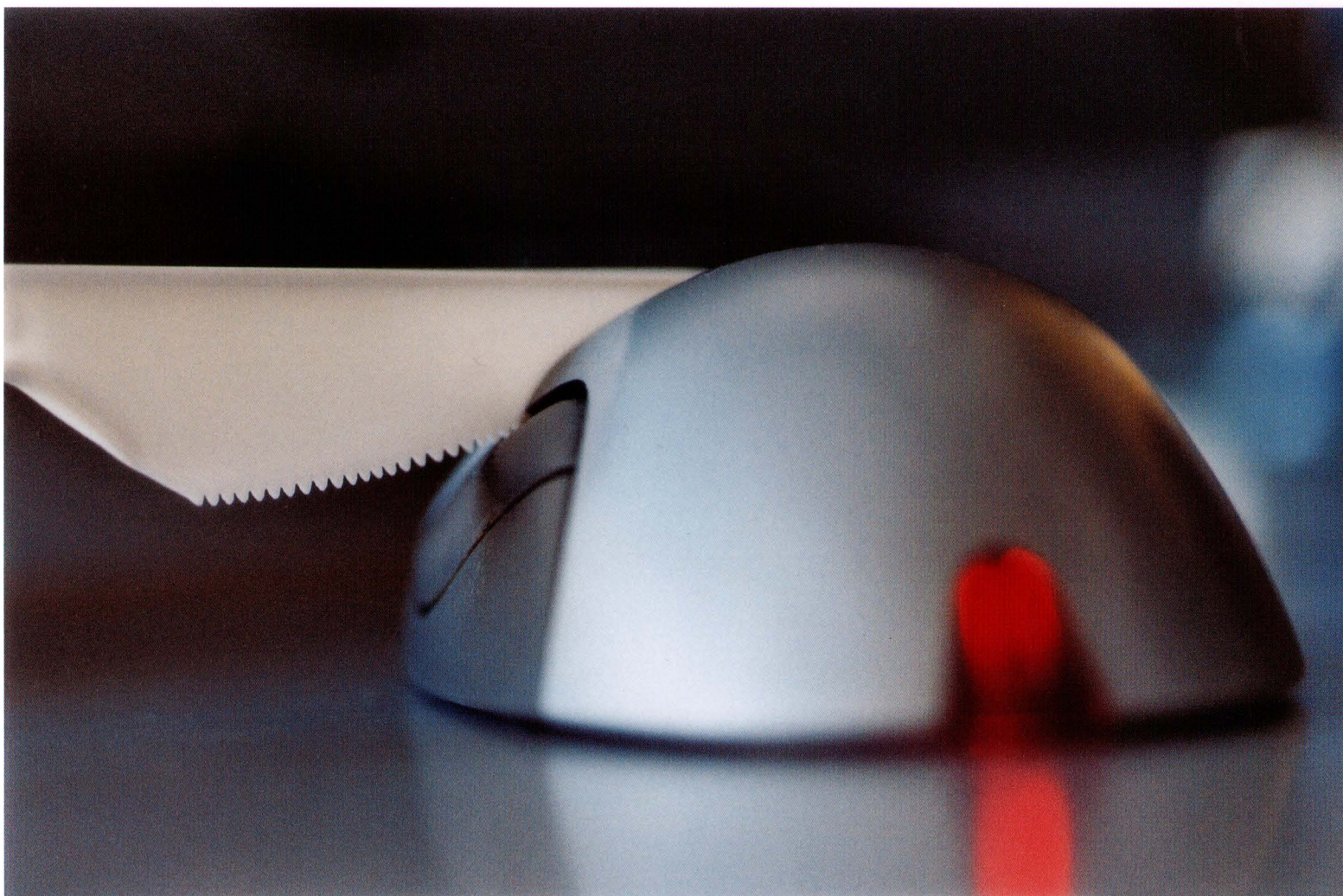
Out of Order

PAVILION



Kaput #17, 2005

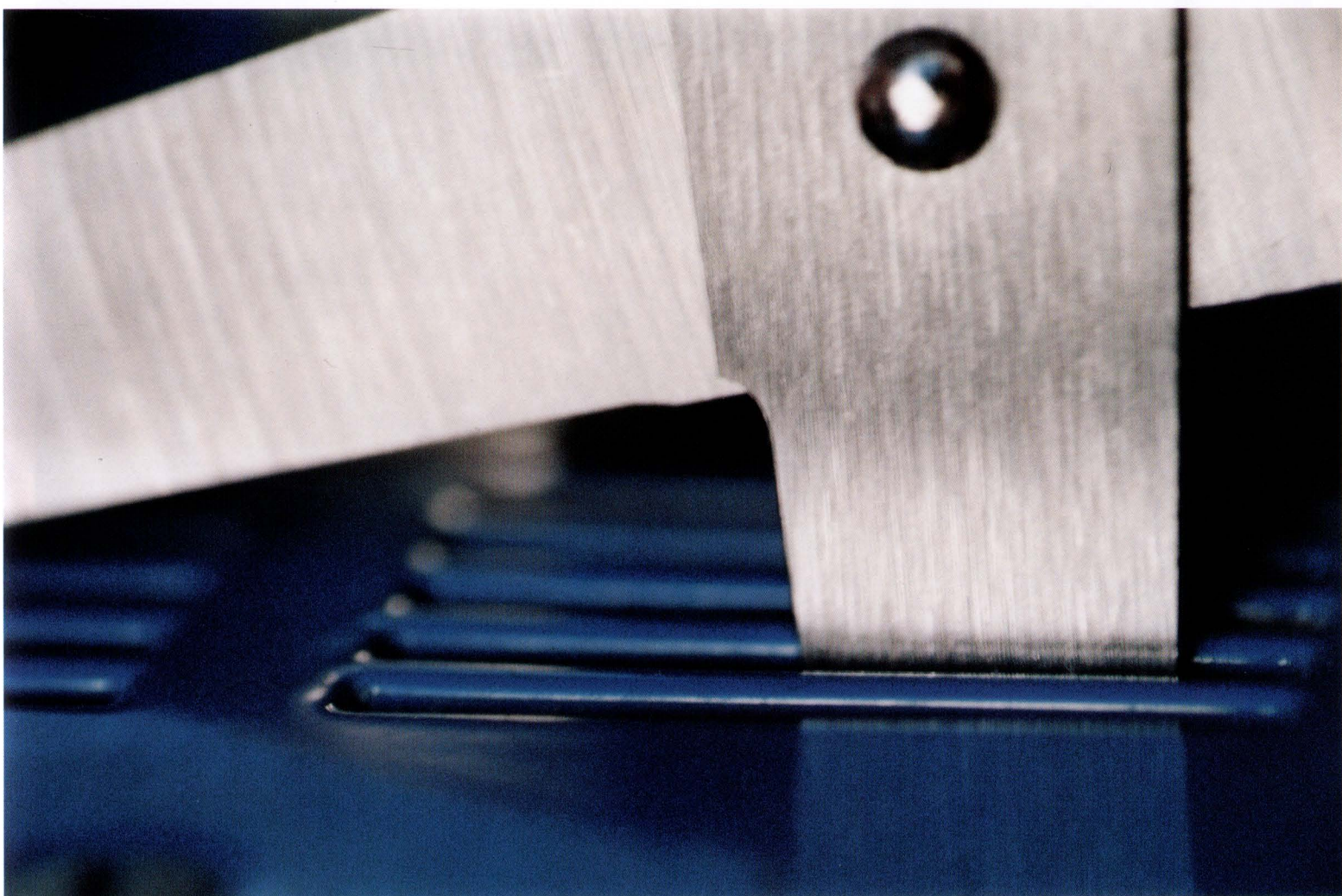
Kaput #12, 2005 (*opposite*)





Kaput #9, 2005

Kaput #50, 2005 (*opposite*)



Contributors

Artists

Edward Burtynsky

Chromogenic prints
Three sizes, maximum 48 x 60 inches
Editions of 6 - 10

Photographs reproduced courtesy of Edward Burtynsky and Galerie Stefan Röpke, Köln; Flowers East Gallery, London; and Galeria Toni Tapies, Barcelona.

Solo Exhibitions 2008/09: *Edward Burtynsky: The China Series*, touring exhibition, The Art Museum, University of Oregon, 15 January - 30 April 2008; *New Quarries*, Flowers East Gallery, London, 8 January - 2 February 2008; *In Pursuit of Progress*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada, 26 January - 12 April 2008; *Australian Minescapes*, Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle, Australia, 28 March - 27 April 2008; *Material World*, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 28 June - 29 October 2008; *Burtynsky: Oil*, Corcoran Gallery / Museum of Art, Washington, DC, USA (touring exhibition begins), November 2009.

Monographs: *Manufactured Landscapes (The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky)*, Editor Lori Pauli, National Gallery of Canada / Yale University Press, 2003; *China (The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky)*, Steidl, 2005 (ISBN 3-86521-130-5); *Quarries (The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky)*, Steidl, 2007 (ISBN 978-3-86521-456-0).

Ori Gersht

Blow Up, 2007

Untitled #01, #03, #05, #08
LightJet Prints 240 x 180 cm

Time After Time, 2007

Untitled #01, #08, #09, #20
LTV Prints 40 x 30 cm

Courtesy Mummery + Schnelle

Ori Gersht is Professor of Photography at UCCA (University College of Creative Art), UK. Solo Exhibitions (2008) *Blow Up*, *Time After Time* & *Pomegranate*, Centro Andaluz De La Fotografía, Almería, Spain; *The Forest*, Musée d'Art de Toulon, Toulon, France; *Time Folds*, Angles Gallery, Santa Monica, California; *Ori Gersht & Jan Breughel the Elder*, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; (2007) *Time After Time: Exploding Flowers & Other Matters*, The Armory Show (with CRG Gallery), New York, USA; *The Forest & Blow Up*, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, USA; *The Clearing*, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; *Time After Time*, Mummery + Schnelle Gallery, London; *The Forest*, Mic Toi Rerehiko Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.

Sian Bonnell

Kaput!, 2005

C-type photographs of variable sizes
Edition of 10

Kaput! was an Arts Council England and IPRN commission made entirely at the Moravska Gallery in Brno, Czech Republic, in 2005. Exhibitions: *Food for Thought*, curated by Ariel Shanberg, The Light Factory, Charlotte, North

Carolina, USA - 6 March - 29 June 2008. On-Line Guest Exhibition, curated by Finn Thrane at PhotoMondo Gallery, Denmark www.photomondo.dk. Publications: *Everyday Dada*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2006; *Food*, edited by John Knechtel, Alphabet City/MIT Press, 2007; *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, edited by Liz Wells, I B Tauris, 2008.

Jasmina Cibic

The Greenhouse Effect and Other Mythologies, 2006-07

C-type prints, 30 x 30 cm, Edition of 10
Jasmina Cibic received her MA from Goldsmiths College in 2006. She lives and works in London. Cibic's photographic works are constructed and theatrical-like spaces and events, which posit themselves as site-specific, performative interventions where myths begin to infuse with actual locations such as departure lounges, airport hangers, nuclear research facilities and other state controlled zones.

Forthcoming exhibitions at Umetnostna Galerija Maribor, Slovenia; Galerija Ganes Pratt, Ljubljana, Slovenia; and Adhoc Galleria, Vigo, Spain. Publications: Five Years Periodical Vol. 1, No.3, Five Years Gallery, London 2008; *PILOT:3 - Live archive for artists and curators*, London 2007; *Land(e)scape*, Kunsterhaus Graz/Umetnostna Galerija Maribor, 2007.

Marjolaine Ryley

Résidence Astral, 1993-2007

C-Type Prints, 24 x 24 inches
Edition of 7

Exhibitions: *Résidence Astral*, Impressions Gallery, Bradford, 22 April - 22 June 2008; Street Level Gallery, Glasgow, 2007; Harborfront Arts Centre, Toronto, 2007. Marjolaine Ryley is currently a Senior Lecturer in Photography and Video Art at the University of Sunderland.

Emily Allchurch

Urban Chiaroscuro, 2007

Transparency on lightbox,
117 x 164cm - Edition of 4
81.5 x 116.4cm - Edition of 4

Exhibitions: *Set in Stone* (group show) PM Gallery & House, Walpole Park, Mattock Lane, London W5 5EQ, 28 March - 26 April 2008. *Urban Chiaroscuro* (solo show) Galleria Galica, Milan, 9 May - 4 July 2008. *Transcriptions* (group show) Sarah Myerscough Fine Art, London, 1 - 30 August 2008.

Ebru Erülkü

Dämmerung – Eventide Visions of London, 2005-07

Ravens Flying up River, 2005
Houses of Parliament, 2005
49.2 x 64.1 inches
Blackfriars Bridge, 2007
59.4 x 76.4 inches

Low Tide, 2007, Relics, 2007, Night Walk, 2007, 29.1 x 34.2 inches
C-type prints, Edition of 5

Solo exhibition at Hoopers Gallery,

London (2007); group exhibition Phantasma at Ballhaus, Düsseldorf. Info online: www.ebru-erulku.com

Bianca Brunner

Wood, 2007

C-type prints, 96 x 120 cm, Edition of 5
In the series *Wood*, Bianca Brunner challenges the notion of photography as a 'realistic' media mimetically picturing the world. Although she takes actual pictures, the viewer is confronted with an imaginary scenario which the artist constructs herself before she photographs it. The objects have the quality of models, insofar as they are too abstract to be realistic, lacking any details. It appears that they were not built to be used, but rather to be depicted.

Group exhibition: *In Our World, New Photography in Britain*, Palazzo Santa Margherita, Modena, Italy, 20 April - 13 July 2008.

Damian Uceda Cortes

Simulacrum, 2005-07

Untitled #2, 2005, Untitled #6, 2006, Untitled #9, 2006, 80 x 100 cm

Broken Promises, 2007, 120 x 155 cm

Digital C-type prints, Edition of 5

Simulacrum is a series of photographs with its theoretical base in the work of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and other authors influential in contemporary photography. Through staging characters the photographer tries to construct a narrative in which the key idea is to copy reality so the photograph becomes in its own right a parallel truth, a simulacrum or a hyper-reality.

Exhibition: *Simulacrum*, Centro Doctor Madrazo, Santander, Spain 2009; *Convivir Convivencias*, Galician Parlament, Santiago, Coruña, Spain, 2008. Publication: *90/90 Galicia*, Dardo ds, Santiago de Compostela, 2008.

Monica Takvam

Janteloven – Small Town Mentality, 2005

Digital C-type prints, 72.5 x 50.8 cm,
Edition of 5

Monica Takvam was born in Norway. She studied at University College for the Creative Arts, Farnham, and currently lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include *NorskArt* at La Viande Gallery, London, UK; Degree show at The Boiler House, Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London; *Juvenarte* at DogA, Oslo, Norway; *This Working Life*, touring exhibition; Manchester, Renew Rooms - Liverpool, the AOP Gallery - London.

Stuart Whipp

Ming Jue: Longbridge and Nanjing, 2004-07

Digital C-type prints, 100 x 100cm
Edition of 10

Ming Jue is a reference to the re-branding of MG Rover since its move from the Longbridge plant in Birmingham to the new site for production in Nanjing, China. Originally

'Morris Garages', MG now translates as 'Modern Gentleman'. Stuart Whipp began to document the MG Rover plant in Longbridge in 2004. In 2005, the 6,000+ staff were informed of its temporary closure. Most never came back. This piece of work brings together photographs of both the Longbridge and Nanjing plants.

Ming Jue: Photographs of Longbridge and Nanjing is at The New Art Gallery Walsall 4 April - 1 June 2008. A fully illustrated publication is available (ISBN 0-946652-89-9). Other exhibitions: (2008) *Utopia*, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; (2007) Liangzou Photo Festival, China; New Generation Arts Festival, Birmingham UK; The Bag Factory, Johannesburg; (2006) Les Rencontres D'Arles Photographie.

James Tye

Still Standing, 2007

C-type prints, 65 x 75 cm, Edition of 8
James Tye graduated from the London College of Communication MA Photography course in 2007. His series *Still Standing* has been exhibited in Creekside 2007 at the APT Gallery, London; AOP Student Awards and AOP Open 2007 at the AOP Gallery, London; Exhibit 2007 at The Arts Gallery, London; Terry O'Neill Award 2007 at the IPG Gallery, Sussex, and subsequent touring show. It has also appeared in *LIP Magazine*, *Evening Standard*, *Image Magazine* and the *Sunday Times* magazine.

Alison Stolwood

Home Away from Home, 2005

Digital C-type prints, 50 x 33 cm
Alison Stolwood's photographic work concerns human interaction with landscapes and environments. The *Home Away from Home* series of six images respond to a notion of individuality within a mass-produced society through a study of static caravans from a site on the Essex coast. Work on show at Independent Photographers Gallery in Battle from 5 May - 9 June 2008 as part of the *Open Range* exhibition.

Writers

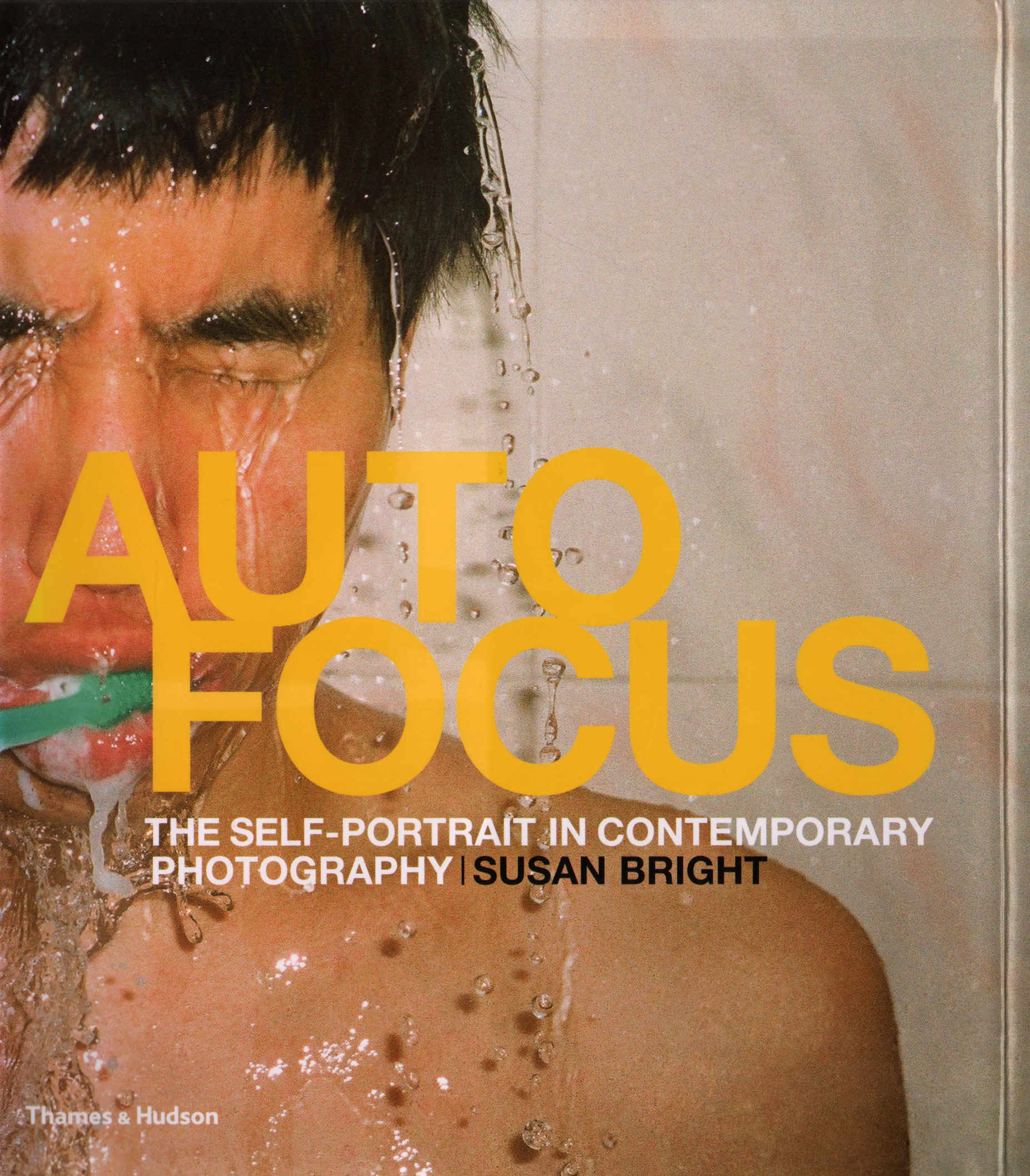
Dr Duncan Forbes is a curator of photography at the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Carol Armstrong is Professor of History of Art, Yale University. She teaches and writes about 19th century art and the history of photography, and is an active art critic as well as a photographer.

Pavel Büchler is an artist and Research Professor of Fine Art at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Val Williams is a curator and writer and is Professor of the History and Culture of Photography, University of the Arts, London

Nigel Warburton is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University. His books include *The Art Question* and *Philosophy: the Basics*.



AUTO FOCUS

THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY | SUSAN BRIGHT

AUTO FOCUS

THE SELF-PORTRAIT IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY
SUSAN BRIGHT

Auto Focus features a dazzling array of photographs by seventy-five of the world's foremost contemporary photographers whose work focuses on self-portraiture. The photography writer and curator Susan Bright provides a clear guide for readers through this significant and dynamic genre, showing how issues of identity – whether national, sexual, racial, personal or artistic – are key to understanding the work of many of today's leading photographers.

Bright's lavishly illustrated, accessible survey is clearly organized into five thematic chapters that deal with diaristic and autobiographical images; pictures of the body; the use of masks and masquerade; the return to studio portraiture and the photographic album; and performance, both public and private. An informative illustrated introduction to the book points to the history of the photographic self-portrait from the 1840s to the late twentieth century, providing an invaluable context for the recent surge in artists' images of themselves.

From intimate images of introspection and those that consciously challenge notions of ethnicity and sexuality, to dramatic, stylized photographs of dream-like scenarios, *Auto Focus* shows how one of the longest-established artistic genres continues to fascinate artists today.

WITH 332 ILLUSTRATIONS, 288 IN COLOUR

ON THE JACKET: My Little Dead Dick (Patrick Tsai and Madi Ju),
Untitled, "Beginnings", Macau, 2006. © the artists

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MARNIX GOOSSENS ANETA GRZESZYKOWSKA SUNIL GUPTA JEFF HARRIS
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AUTO FOCUS

THE SELF-PORTRAIT
IN CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY

SUSAN BRIGHT

WITH 332 ILLUSTRATIONS, 288 IN COLOUR



Thames & Hudson

This book is dedicated to Mike and Ruby Reynolds.

With special thanks to all the artists and galleries who so kindly assisted me and gave their time and energy to the project. Thanks must also go to the following: Pat Binder, Camilla Brown, Alejandro Castellote, Alasdair Foster, Gerhard Haupt, Jackie Higgins, Graham Howe, Allison Kave, Carrie Levy, Weibke Lister, Paul Moakley, Alison Norstrom, Jeusun Park, Aaron Shulman, Anne Sorensen, Joe Strubble, Toshie Takeuchi, Hedy Van Erp, James Welling and Richard West. And my grateful thanks to all those at Thames & Hudson, especially Jacky Klein, Ginny Liggitt, Katie Morgan, Anna Perotti and Diana Bullitt Perry.

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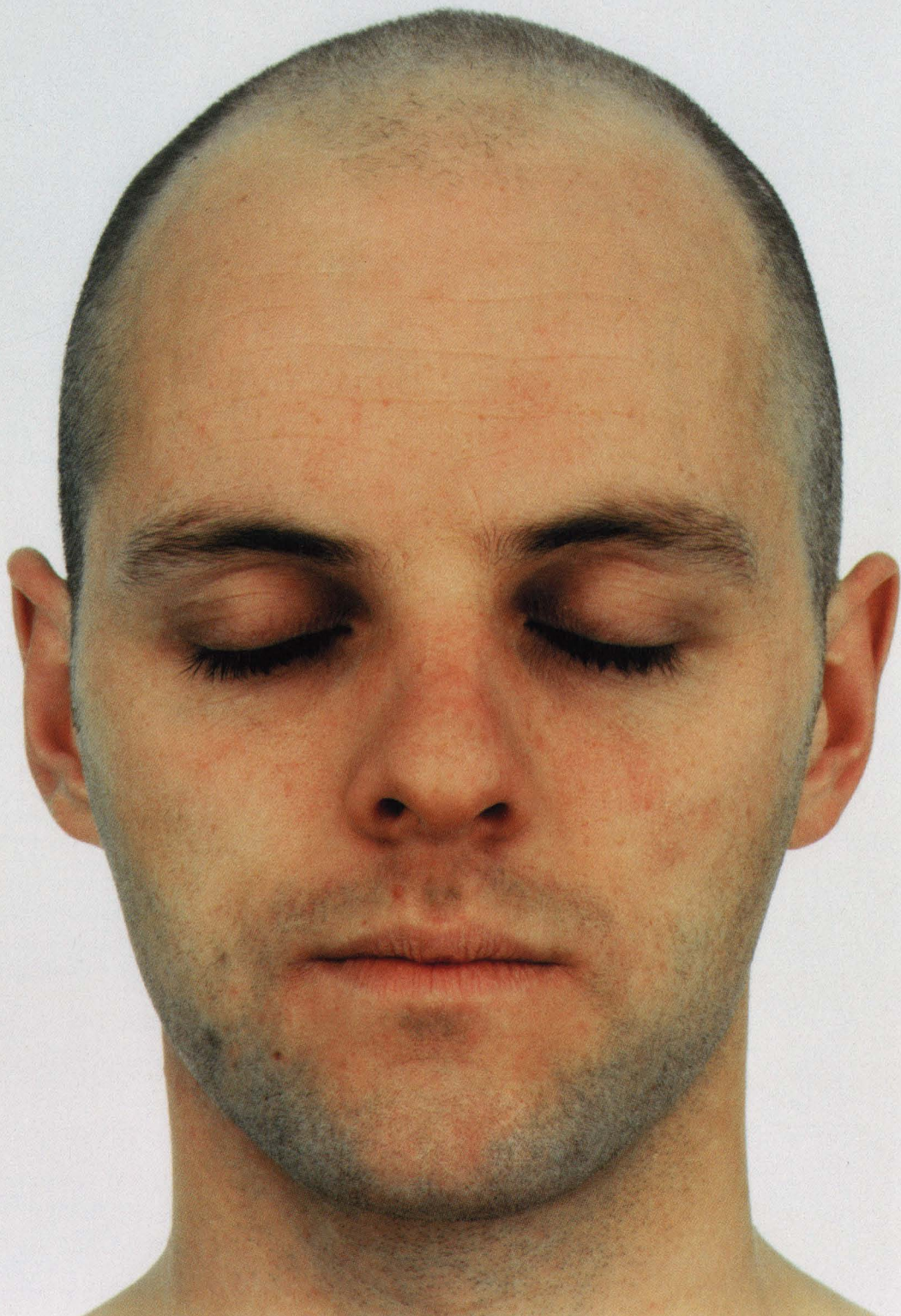
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UNCANNY LIKENESS:
PHOTOGRAPHERS PHOTOGRAPHING THEMSELVES



There is, in my opinion, only one conclusion that may be drawn from the idea that the self is not given to us: we must create ourselves as works of art.

Michel Foucault¹

In *Portrait of Something that I'll Never Really See* (1997), a self-portrait by British artist Gavin Turk (b. 1967), the artist's face has a deathly appearance. His eyes are closed, passive to the photographic act, and his deadpan pose and the severe cropping of the image emphasize a deliberate standing back from any apparent engagement with the camera. The background is emptied out and a 'neutral' grey fills the frame. The viewer is not sure if the artist is dead, pretending to be dead, asleep or just posing. Although Turk conceptualized and authored the self-portrait, he did not actually 'take' the photograph itself. When it was hung in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London the wording of the caption addressed this ongoing conundrum regarding the authorship of self-portraits, reading 'Though conceived by Turk, the photograph was set up and taken by Anthony Oliver', Turk's assistant at the time the portrait was made.



Page 6: Gavin Turk, *Portrait of Something that I'll Never Really See*, 1997.

Above: Hippolyte Bayard, *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*, 1840.

Inscribed on the back of this famous photograph – the first photographic self-portrait – is a long lament about why the photographer has drowned himself, that concludes: 'The Government, which has been only too generous to Monsieur Daguerre, has said it can do nothing for Monsieur Bayard, and the poor wretch has drowned himself. Oh the vagaries of human life ... He has been at the morgue for several days, and no one has recognized or claimed him. Ladies and gentlemen, you'd better pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell, for as you can observe, the face and hands of the gentleman are beginning to decay.'

It is interesting to compare this portrait with one of the first photographic self-portraits ever made: although more than a century separates the photographs, there are clear parallels. The portrait by Hippolyte Bayard (1801–87) is a mysterious tableau titled *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840). It shows a sagging figure, apparently dead, slumped unflatteringly next to some lowly props. *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* presents Bayard as a suicide victim, driven to drown himself by the failure of the French authorities to officially recognize his discoveries in photography as equal to those of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851).² Bayard may have failed to gain credit as one of the first inventors of photography by (allegedly) delaying the announcement of his direct positive process – now referred to as the calotype – but ironically he has gained immortality by being the first to present to the world a photographic self-portrait. This photograph continues to be a touchstone for scholars, writers and artists engaging

with photographic self-portraiture, and for good reason: this one image alone raises many issues and paradoxes within the genre.

The Bayard and Turk photographs are both self-referential, focusing on the conceptual presentation of an artist's persona; both question the value and integrity of authorship and a coherent artistic identity; and both illustrate the nebulous and ambiguous concept and location of the self in a self-portrait. Both are 'impossible' images as the artist never actually saw (nor could he ever see) in real life what he is representing in the image, as is so clearly indicated in the title of the Turk photograph.³ In many ways the author of a self-portrait is always presenting an impossible image, as he or she can never mimetically represent the physical reality that other people see. The 'self' therefore is always in some respects also an 'other'. Technically this means that a photographic image is flipped or is always a mirror image, but psychoanalytically or philosophically it has come to mean something quite different. Such paradoxes have indefatigable contemporary continuums as artists continue to grapple with locating the 'self'.

The Self in Self-portrait

So what does the 'self' in self-portrait actually mean? Historically the self-portrait (specifically the painted self-portrait) has been understood as a representation of emotions, an outward expression of inner feelings, penetrating self-analysis and self-contemplation that might bestow an immortality of sorts upon the artist. The self has been understood in humanist terms, indicating something inherent and nameable, and by extension a stable universalized subject. It can also be understood (as postmodernist theory has so clearly outlined) as something more indexical, as a reflexive conditional concept, which leads to the belief that

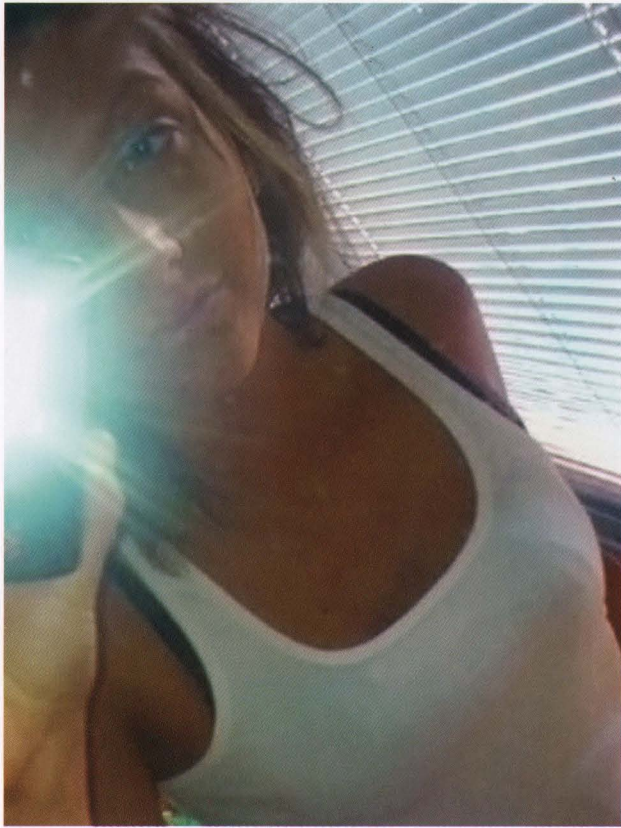
there is no 'true' self. If we follow this idea to its logical conclusion, the self splits, merges, fractures and becomes so performed and so constructed that nothing authentic remains: it becomes an 'every' man or a 'no' man, and ultimately a true self is nothing more than a fabrication and a void. Added to this is the complication that any representation of the self is a subjective rendering by the author. When we look at a photographic self-portrait we do not see an individual or a visual depiction of an inner existential being, but rather a display of 'self-regard, self-preservation, self-revelation and self-creation' open to any interpretation imposed upon it by each individual viewer.

One might then ask why self-portraiture was not killed off by postmodernism. On the contrary, the genre has gone through something of a renaissance over the last ten years in both photography and painting. Many contemporary artists who use self-portraiture in their work shun modernist notions of an authentic, unitary self, and continue to break down identity into various elements in an attempt to discern what remains of an objective self. A dialogue around what that tangible element might be is encouraged and explored. Answers are not always forthcoming, but conversations that postmodernism shut down are re-opened and the notion of the self remains as beguiling and fascinating a subject as it ever was.

The Photographic Compulsion

A crucial consideration in any analysis of self-portraiture is its ubiquity. It is a compulsion for almost anyone with a camera, artist or not, to turn it on themselves, and a photographer or artist who has never taken a picture of himself or herself is a rarity. There is always a ready model and the self is a fascinating subject, as a plethora of recent websites dedicated to self-portraiture so clearly illustrate. The Audrey and Sydney Irmas collection of self-portraits by leading artists and photographers held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is one of the most important collections of the genre.⁴ It includes a large number of works by photographers and artists – Eadweard Muybridge, Alfred Stieglitz, Walker Evans, Irving Penn, Bruce Nauman, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Joel-Peter Witkin and Imogen Cunningham among others – who produced a 'one-off' or a few self-portraits alongside the other photographs for which they have become famous. Additionally, the collection features artists such as Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89), who have produced significant series of self-portraits or have even spent their entire professional lives addressing issues of self-portraiture.

The self-portrait has increasingly become very much a part of our vernacular and all the more widespread with the growth of photosharing websites such as MySpace and Facebook, which promote photography as an essential component of online communication. However, one must ask oneself whether these images are really self-portraits or simply pictures that people take of themselves.⁵ The 'self-portraits' on these sites adopt a new stylistic language of low production values. The photographer, arm outstretched, holds a small digital camera facing back at him or her, or points it at a mirror to aid posing and captures a reflection. Many artists and photographers have turned to the internet and appropriated images found there to interrogate and question this new strain of vernacular photography.



Ole John Aandal, *Never Try to Trick me with a Kiss*, 2007. Aandal's work re-contextualizes amateur self-portraits intended for an online audience by appropriating them and displaying them in an art gallery. The images he chooses question adolescent desire and self-image, and reveal how different generations might perceive the same images in dissimilar ways: posturing that might seem remote or even alienating to older viewers is read as hopeful and funny by a younger generation fluent in the visual language of the internet.

In the ongoing series *Juvenilia* (2007–) the Norwegian artist Ole John Aandal (b. 1960) has carefully edited generic self-portraits posted to the internet by teenagers into an artwork that investigates adolescent imagining. These pictures tend to be gorgeous, over-sexualized and 'home spun', usually taken in domestic interiors and often heavily abstracted, focusing on a single body part such as a lip or an eyelid. As a result they act as a fascinating collective self-portrait of a younger generation and their visual literacy.

Another example of the universality of the self-portrait, and one that is beginning to seem quaintly old-fashioned with the rise of digital cameras, is the portrait taken in the photobooth. As a purely mechanical process with no camera operator, it could be argued that the photobooth is the perfect environment for a self-portrait and as neutral a space as possible. It has long been used by artists attracted to its restrictions and apparent creative limitations. Most famously Andy Warhol (1928–87) used the space as a tiny theatre, posing in the manner of a generic movie star in an environment that could not be further away from a traditional celebrity portrait setting. The mechanical nature of the booth perfectly complemented the air of conceptual detachment and passivity that he adopted as part of his public persona.

Impostors, Impressionists and Fakes

Warhol's obsession with celebrity, being surrounded by celebrities and wanting to be one, has now become commonplace in Western contemporary culture. The rise of reality TV and the growth of tabloid magazines has greatly influenced our notion of identity with regard to attitudes to fame and indeed the self. If we can't become celebrities ourselves, then to be surrounded by them may be enough. It is as if some of the 'fairy dust' might rub off onto us. Our surroundings and the people we associate with tell us much about ourselves – or what we would like other people to see as ourselves.

Infatuation with celebrity can be seen in a number of self-portraits that integrate performance with impersonation. This is done by the performer either inventing a character or playing the part of an 'other' before returning to his or her 'real' self. It could be argued that all self-portraiture uses elements of impersonation, invention, mimicry or masquerade, but the artists discussed below take this idea further: they do not simply act the part for the duration of taking a photograph, they live out an impersonation for long enough to trick or deceive those around them into believing that they are another person, in order to get photographic evidence of this alternative existence. The purpose of these strategies is to comment on humanist ideas of a fixed identity, illustrating how malleable the self can be.

American artist David Henry Brown Jr. (b. 1967) uses impersonation and humour to satirize the vacuous, insecure world of celebrity, and to critique a contemporary obsession with fame. By posing as a famous person, Brown manages to meet scores of 'real' celebrities, and has himself repeatedly photographed with them. Unlike the fictional impostor Mr Ripley,⁶ Brown uses his celebrity role as a form of self-reflection;

his ultimate artistic aim is to reveal himself as an impostor at a later date, just as comedian Sacha Baron Cohen (b. 1971) reveals that his various personas, such as Ali G, Borat and Brüno, are all part of an act.

Taking a similar idea about the fluidity of self to more serious ends is Nikki S. Lee's (b. 1970) well-documented *Projects* series (1997–2001), which deals with issues of identity relating to race, sexuality and gender. By infiltrating different social groups in New York City, Lee becomes an amateur anthropologist mimicking the members of the groups around her through appearance, clothing and hairstyle. As viewers we suspend disbelief and accept the staged images choosing to concentrate not on the differences but rather on the similarities between Lee and those around her and the subtlety and skill of her transformations.

The artworks created by Brown and Lee highlight an important question within self-portraiture, showing how far artists and photographers will go to investigate the notions of self and other. The goal of these works is not to comment upon the relation between the two (as is often the intention of a self-portrait), but to let the other take over the self and become part of 'real' life for a protracted period of time. Such vicarious

Nikki S. Lee, *The Hip Hop Project* (1), 2001.





Tseng Kwong Chi, *Pisa, Italy*, 1989, 1989.
From 1979 to 1989, Tseng (1950–90) travelled from one Western tourist site to the next, dressed in a second-hand Mao suit and impassive mirrored glasses. He posed as an archetypal Chinese tourist for approximately 150 deadpan self-portraits in the series *East Meets West*. Because Tseng never travelled to China – he was born in Hong Kong but grew up in Canada and lived in North America and Europe – these portraits question what it means to be a ‘Chinese’ artist. They also serve as a counterpoint to nineteenth-century photographs of ‘exotic’ China taken by Western travellers, and as a commentary upon Tseng’s ease of movement in the West in contrast to the restricted freedoms of many Chinese citizens at the time.

strategies can be seen in the photographic work of Adrian Piper (b. 1948), Sophie Calle (b. 1953), Ria Pacqué (b. 1954) and Tseng Kwong Chi (1950–90), and the film- or performance-based self-portraiture of Eleanor Antin (b. 1935), Katarzyna Kozyra (b. 1963) and Lynn Hershman Leeson (b. 1941), all of whom have adopted a different identity for the purpose of gaining access to situations that they might not otherwise be able to.⁷

Breaking the Rules

There are many works that we call self-portraits, or understand conceptually to be self-portraits without being able to articulate why they fall or might fall into the genre. Indeed it has often been argued that all photographs are self-portraits of sorts as the photographer projects himself or herself into the image. The same argument could be made for any form of creative output – be it painting, sculpture or literature – but this idea of autobiography or

self-reflection is too vast to consider here. For inclusion in this book, a contemporary self-portrait must show the artist, it must explore the concept of identity – either the artist’s own or something more broad or universal – and it must offer the viewer a tendentious point of view or contemplation about the self. That does not mean to say that other works cannot be considered as self-portraiture, but they are not within the confines of this book other than in this introduction: the following examples break the rules somehow and show how all-encompassing the genre of self-portraiture can be.

The self-portrait is often used as a tool for addressing social issues, or as a metaphorical symbol for a universal being. The *Self Portrait* series by Jack Pierson (b. 1960) consists of a range of photographs of different men, from young to old, none of which shows Pierson himself, and touches on the clichés of masculine representation in both pornography and portraiture. By using stand-ins and eliminating himself from the suite of photographs, Pierson comments on the cultural construction of the individual and the ability of ‘self’-portraits to conceal as much as they reveal.

Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) refers to the concepts of the self-portrait in his *10 Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski 1946–1964* (1972), a work that pretends to show the artist from the age of two to the age of twenty. The photographs are read (through detailed captions) as family snapshots of Boltanski’s life, even though they are not images of him. The work makes a nod – knowing or not – to the Dada legacy of provocation. In the catalogue *The First Papers of Surrealism* that accompanied a 1942 group exhibition in New York organized by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and André Breton (1896–1966), both artists used the same strategy of taking photographs and drawings of completely unrelated or unknown people and titling them with the names of the participating artists.

Lee Friedlander, *New York City*, 1966. Friedlander used his shadow and his reflection to question the nature of self-portraiture in a series of images taken over a number of years. The use of the shadow takes away any modernist 'objectivity', which had been one of the main ways to read a typical street photograph until artists like Friedlander, Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus began photographing the complex and dynamic nature of American streetscapes in the 1960s.

An empty room or space that holds the presence of the subject is also often referred to and understood as a self-portrait, although nobody is actually seen – just a trace or an indexical sign of the self. The shadow has often been used in a similar but more tangible way, most consistently and successfully by Lee Friedlander (b. 1934), who turns the self into mere reflection. Friedlander's densely packed images show him to be predatory on some occasions and vulnerable on others, and as someone who demonstrates how his physical presence is crucial to the construction of his image making.

Turning the much used auteur theory⁸ on its head, American artist Walead Beshty (b. 1976) issued a press release in the form of a poem (2008), drawing quotes from reviews of his work and reconstituting them into a rhyme scheme. Beshty transformed the term 'press release' into a pun, literally releasing the press to the press. Through this complex layering and re-editing of artistic identity, an oblique, verbal self-portrait is created.

Nineteenth-century studio practices are interesting to consider in this context. A photographer would often test his equipment, lighting or props on himself, and would sit in the portrait chair for a picture to be taken. The resulting image sometimes captured a blurry ghost-like figure, with certain of the sitter's body parts caught in motion. These





Pierre-Louis Pierson, *Scherzo di Follia* [Game of Madness] Countess de Castiglione, 1863–66. The Countess de Castiglione was known as a glamorous beauty of the Second Empire and an influential member of Parisian high society. The many self-portraits she choreographed for Pierson's camera depict her playing various powerful and sensual characters, at turns seductress, coquette and virgin.

images are beguiling and mysterious because of their fleeting apparitions, but they were never intended for public consumption, nor considered serious self-portraits.⁹ A modern parallel can be found in the many thousands of Polaroids (before the common use of digital cameras) taken in portrait and fashion shoots to test the lighting.

The Early Days: Saints and Sinners

There have been moments throughout photography's relatively short history when self-portraiture has been particularly widespread and strong. These include the latter part of the nineteenth century (coinciding with technical advancements and the use of photography as an instrument of the state), the early to mid-twentieth century, broadly understood as the Modernist period, the 1970s and early 1980s (in conjunction with postmodern theory investigating issues of race, gender and sexuality), and the 1990s and 2000s, when many artists and photographers have turned to themselves to metaphorically address issues of national identity in an ever more globalized world.

In the second half of the nineteenth century – a period rich in photographic output – two distinct styles of self-portraiture

emerged in Europe, both dependent on role-playing or masquerade. In the less flamboyant style we see artists representing themselves as scholars or learned men, often seated at a desk and reading, or with their belongings around them to illustrate their great wealth. The other type is highly theatrical, depicting make-believe characters in elaborate costumes.

The self-portraits by British photographers Francis Frith (1822–98) and Roger Fenton (1819–69), the French portraitists Nadar (1820–1910), Charles Nègre (1820–80), Pierre Loti (1850–1923) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), and American Napoleon Sarony (1821–96), show a heady exuberance and a bourgeois view of the extravagance of the wealthy. Coinciding with a 'golden age' of travel, colonialism, Romanticism and a mania for exoticism, these portraits may at first seem playful, but they reveal an inherent racism and fascination with the foreign 'other'. They were made as harmless tableaux, played out for fun, but such an obsession with the exotic, and the stereotyping and archotyping of cultures and races had a far more unintended sinister side: later claims of the scientific objectivity of the camera coupled with the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology resulted in the creation of codes and systems for classifying people into 'types', which led to experiments in eugenics, and racial and religious social control.

The masquerades of the Countess de Castiglione (1837–99) show a more transgressive element of self-portraiture than the eccentric fantasy of dressing up that many male photographers of the period displayed. In forty years of collaboration, from 1856 to 1895, with the photographer Pierre-Louis Pierson (1822–1913) the Countess commissioned and

created over four hundred elaborate self-portraits. They show her in a range of elaborate costumes, enacting roles from history, mythology and art. The photographs became more beguiling and increasingly bizarre as the Countess aged and allowed one body part or another to stand in for her as a whole. A photograph of her swollen, aging feet and ankles suggests that she was not completely vain, but rather aware of the fleeting and fickle nature of beauty as well as her own mortality.

In contrast with European theatricality and exuberance, American self-portraits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seem far more conservative and staid, often showing men as great pioneers or adventurers exploring the American landscape, or as artists posing with their cameras (or in the case of Edward Steichen (1879–1973), his easel). The most notable exceptions to this generalization are the photographs by F. Holland Day (1864–1933), in which he repeatedly posed as Jesus Christ, and the early daguerreotypes by Warren Thompson dressed in the ‘typical’ male guises of the day – hunter, thinker, artist – and, more unusually, an Arab.¹⁰

The self-portraits by two American women seem more progressive and quietly rebellious, however. The committed photojournalist and social campaigner Frances Benjamin Johnson (1864–1952) is famous for her much reproduced self-portrait from 1898, in which she sits in a typically masculine pose, smoking and holding a tankard of beer. Likewise in the ‘snap shot’ self-portrait by Alice Austen (1866–1952), *Trude and I, Short Skirts, 11 pm, August 6th (1891)* (see p. 24), traditional ideas of feminine acceptability are challenged by the two masked women sharing their cigarettes in ‘short’ skirts with their hair daringly hanging loose around them. The two images, although very different in construction from each other, both depart from the photographer’s usual work, which atypically for the time was mostly done outside the confines of the studio, and are interesting in regard to the construction of femininity and what was socially acceptable behaviour for women in the late nineteenth century. By portraying themselves as behaving differently from the norm for women of their class, they used their self-portraits to reconsider the idea of the feminine and suggest the masquerade of everyday life for wealthy women at the time. Self-portraiture continued to allow female artists a certain amount of freedom from the constraining traditional artistic representations, in which women were so often muses for men. As critic Susan Butler states, ‘Women like Frances Benjamin Johnson, Alice Austen, Florence Henri, Annie Noggle,

F. Holland Day, *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, 1898.

In 1898 Day produced a series of more than 250 photographs of the Passion of Christ. They differ from contemporaneous examples as Day’s constructed semblances form a serious character study, for him, if not the viewer, and the integrity behind these self-portraits makes them shocking still.





Above left: László Moholy-Nagy, *Self-Portrait*, 1926.



Above right: Ilse Bing, *Self-Portrait with Mirrors*, 1931.

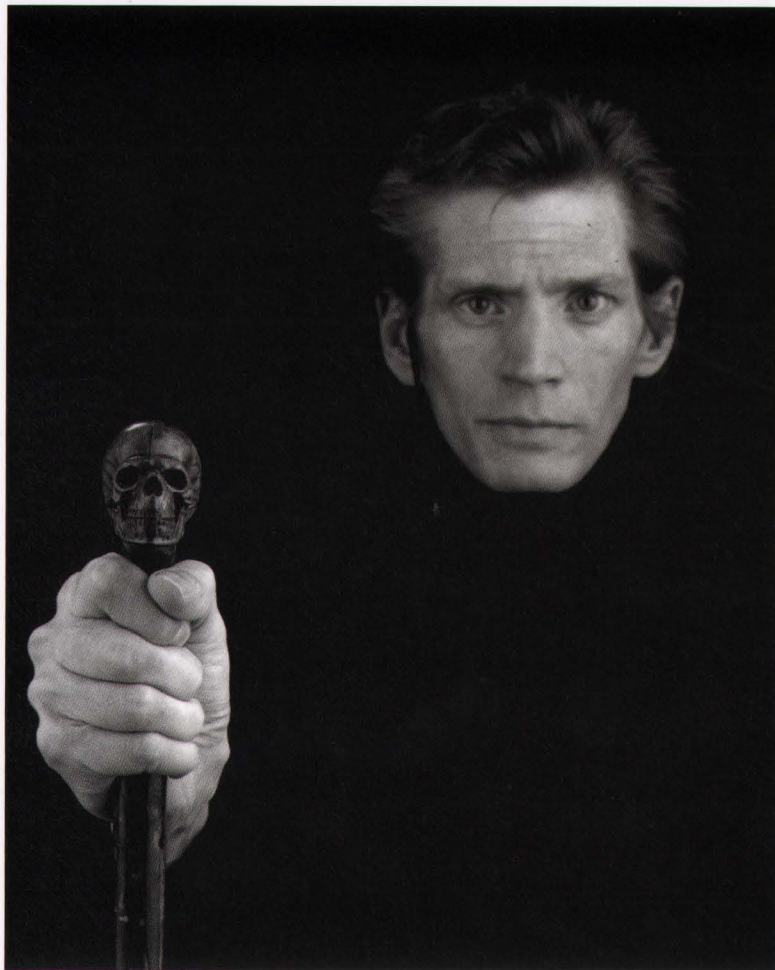
Bing was an important figure of 'New Photography', a German avant-garde movement that relished the many experimental possibilities of the camera. She was well known as an early adopter of the 35mm Leica camera, which is featured so prominently in this image.

The use of mirrors and reflection is worth mentioning explicitly as it is a common metaphor used for photography itself. The frequency of mirrors in self-portraiture can be read as an attempt to see all sides of the self and a desire to capture something more personal than mere likeness. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's (1885–1939) famous *Multipart Self-Portrait* (1917) used a mirror to kaleidoscopic effect, and the clean linear composition of Ilse Bing's (1899–1998) *Self-Portrait with Mirrors* (1931) appears effortless despite being carefully constructed. Bing's photograph is about the act and art of photographing as she illustrates so succinctly through the methodical positioning of the camera, the mirrors and her face.

Postmodern Voices

It was in the early 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of identity theory and postmodern theory, that the self-portrait became an important vehicle for those who were beginning to consider their personal positions within a political and creative context. Artists increasingly turned to photography to express their identities in terms of race, gender and sexuality, often using their own bodies as perfect instruments to draw attention to those who had been traditionally overlooked in the predominantly white, middle-class, male canon of the Western art world. Postmodern inquiry demonstrated that the self could operate in multiple roles rather than being merely a display of inward emotion or autobiographical exchange. The voices of American black, feminist and gay artists were particularly strong and had a profound impact on many artists working in Europe at the time.

Adrian Piper has been one of these powerful voices since the late 1960s. Her series *Mythic Being; I/You (Her)* (1974) charts her imagined transformation from female to male, staged across ten photographs and accompanied by autobiographical text to highlight racist and



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self-Portrait*, 1988.

With the knowledge of Mapplethorpe's death of AIDS the year after this photograph, it is impossible not to see the image as a memento mori. The prominent placing of a skull in the foreground alludes to historical vanitas still lifes, paintings that use symbols to suggest mortality. Mapplethorpe's white face and hand are in stark contrast with the black background and clothing, making a graphic and metaphorical statement about life and death, light and dark.

sexist situations. The sliding personal pronoun of the title highlights the questioning of the self as well as inherent views on gender and racial stereotyping. The audience is forced to ask: Who is the 'I' represented? Is it me or is it the person depicted? It also asks: Do I, the viewer, hold the same views as those expressed in the text? Because Piper 'turns into' a man by the end of the sequence, the idea of the self-portrait concludes with a mutable self (for both the viewer and the artist) far removed from the strict categories that informed identities of race, sexuality and gender before postmodern thinking became the basis of our contemporary philosophy. In the subsequent decades many politicized messages were developed into sophisticated fine art, allowing artists from once marginalized groups not only to contribute to the trajectory of photographic art history but in many instances to determine it.

The work of Robert Mapplethorpe is a case in point. Using the techniques of classic art photography, which many artists rejected in the 1970s, his finely crafted photographs, mostly done in the studio, did much to establish homoerotic and gay culture at the centre of the New York art scene in the 1970s and 1980s (as well as fuel controversy about funding for the arts under the conservative Reagan administration). His many self-portraits show him

engaging in a range of masquerades, from the deliberately provocative and sensational butch stereotype with a bullwhip placed in his anus to an artfully made-up feminized torso, and in the last year of his life, a haunting 'memento mori' reflecting upon life and death.

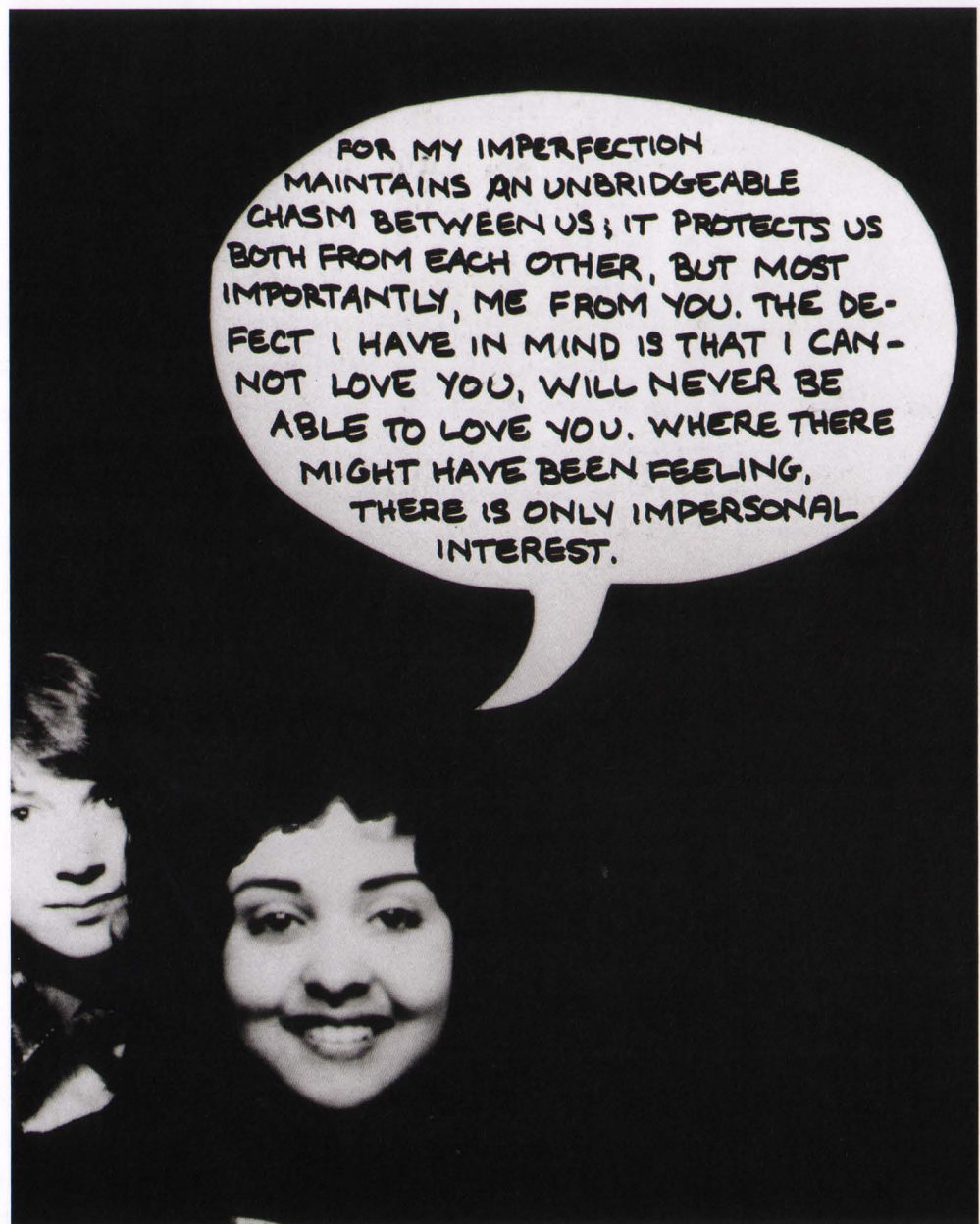
Transition and Transformation

Since the turn of the new century we have been witnessing a period of change, characterized by a return to the figurative and a resurgence of not only self-portraiture, but also portraiture in general. Curators, editors, picture editors (those professions that encounter contemporary images in large quantities) have commented on the recent increase in self-portraits particularly.¹⁴ It is important to understand why and to recognize that the abundance of self-referential work demonstrates very different approaches to the genre.

There is a blending of personal and national identity in much of the work. Most obviously this can be seen in the work of many non-Western artists who turn to a portrayal of the self to represent a nation in transition: just as the nation's identity and future may be in flux so too is the artist's personal identity. Over the last ten years a growing number of artists and photographers from South America, the Middle East and China have gained exposure in Western art markets through a plethora of exhibitions, books and auctions. The face of Europe is also changing greatly as it extends its borders and Russia shrinks as its satellite states gain autonomy and independence. The global shifts in power, alongside the growth of the economies in India, Brazil and China, means that the beginning of the twenty-first

century is a time of great uncertainty for many. Additionally, recent political events in the Middle East have focused the West's eyes on the region and more contemporary art from the Arab states has been shown and written about as a result.

Along with widening acceptance of non-Western art there has been a palpable increase in political works of art, with a return to documentary modes of practice and the personal taking a much more political position, as it did in the 1970s. The body has again become an important site for investigation, and many Chinese artists in particular, including Wang Wei (b. 1976), Zhou Xiaohu (b. 1960), Song Dong (b. 1966), Ma Liuming (b. 1969), Rong Rong (b. 1968), Qiu Zhijie (b. 1969), Huang Yan (b. 1966), Zhang Huan and Li Wei (b. 1970), often combine performance and skilled photographic 'evidence' of these performances to produce challenging self-portraits.¹⁵



Adrian Piper, Selection from *Mythic Being*: *I/You (Her)*, 1974.

In addition to being one of the most prominent conceptual artists to emerge in the 1970s, Piper is also a respected philosopher. Her work continues to use a mixture of personal experience and political engagement to address issues of race and gender.



Li Wei, *Mirror 010-03*, 2000.

There is a surreal humour in many of Li's performances and photographs of impossible scenarios, which often play around with visual manipulation of his body. In this image his detached head floats around Beijing, while other photographs show the lower half of his body sticking out of the ground as if he has just plummeted out of the sky. Li is a master of digital imaging, and the dynamic and cartoon-like images he creates continue to become more elaborate as his work develops.

It could also be argued that the depiction of the self in photography arises from a need to return to some kind of empathy and updated humanism within photographic practice generally. Work by artists known as the Becher School, named after Bernd (1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (b. 1934) – Andreas Gursky (b. 1955), Thomas Ruff (b. 1958), Thomas Struth (b. 1958) and Candida Höfer (b. 1944) – is relentlessly 'deadpan' and unemotional. Likewise, the highly staged narratives and tableaux by artists such as Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962) and Anna Gaskell (b. 1969) who were so prominent in art photography in the 1990s, can seem unattainable, even cold. A younger generation of photographers with a much more DIY aesthetic has emerged, making work that is easier to engage with on a personal level. One of the easiest ways to relate back to a more spontaneous and immediate photographic process and the world it touches is to put the self back in the image, which is what we are seeing.

Uncanny Likeness

Issues of identity – national, sexual, racial, personal or artistic – are key to all the works featured in this book. Historical examples are used to enrich the understanding of how self-portraiture was first used in photography and to illustrate how the contemporary self-portrait derived and developed from those origins. By no means a survey, this book is organized around five themes dominant in

contemporary self-portraiture to examine the work of artists who have dedicated a significant amount of their practice to the photographic self-portrait. The chosen themes – Autobiography, Body, Masquerade, Studio and Album, and Performance – will guide readers through a vast genre, in which many artists overlap in their approach and intentions.

The idea of a diaristic approach is expanded in the chapter on autobiography. The diary is commonly thought of as an intimate chronicle bound up with a description of an artist's daily life. For the photographers in this chapter, self-portraits are seen as self-scrutinizing markers of transitions in their lives. An element of fiction is often woven into the 'diary' in the form of staged or invented moments. The work claims to reveal private details of the photographer's everyday life, often frank and sometimes raw in feeling, as well as his or her various states of mind, although not necessarily implying a coherent self or a belief that photography conveys the 'truth'. These photographs can often be read as forms of expressive therapy or catharsis through visual autobiography.

The body is still commonly used as a political vehicle in much self-portraiture, and artists often use their own bodies as a ready-to-hand model to express abstract or non-narrative, concepts. The human body's relationship to space, land, history, age, race, religion, sexuality and gender is often explored in visceral ways. Through the use of

Hannah Wilke, June 15, 1992/January 30, 1992:
#1, from *Intra-Venus*, 1992–93.

Wilke (1940–93) was a contentious artist whose use of her naked body in photographs and performances often seemed at odds with feminist reactions to objectification of the female form. She used herself as a model throughout her career, notably in the period leading up to her death, when she produced *Intra-Venus*, a series of photographs that show her body ravaged by the effects of treatment for terminal cancer.

the body the fragility, vulnerability and indomitable presence of the human condition can also be scrutinized by artists.

In the chapter on masquerade, the notions of impersonation and disguise within self-portraiture challenge the idea of a coherent self. Through a multiplicity of characters, these photographers investigate identity as a culturally constructed phenomenon with a malleable and sometimes playful element. Many of the photographs are auto-referential, deliberately acknowledging the artifice of the medium and the camera's role in creating and disseminating stereotypes. The theatricality of the images captures the changing nature of the self through shifting identities and alter egos.

The chapter focused on the studio and album looks at particular codes and conventions commonly used by contemporary artists. The photographic album is particularly interesting as it is a disappearing form that few continue to make for themselves; many artists are realizing the preciousness of their existing family albums and incorporating them into their work. The album style is a fitting counterpoint to the preconceived and mannered control of the studio. This section proposes that contemporary self-portraits are often derived from nineteenth-century sources, when photographic self-portraits were first widely made.

The final chapter examines how photographs are used to document performances, as well as highlighting 'performed photography'. Self-portraiture based on performance most clearly stems from conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s. Scenes or tableaux created exclusively for the camera, in which performance and photography are totally reliant on each other for success, have become increasingly popular. There is an element of risk and potential failure in performed photography, and the process through which a 'successful' photograph is achieved is often more important than the photographic outcome.

The self-portrait is a richly mined vein in photographic practice and one that directly mirrors both the intensely personal and the wider issues of the world. The contemporary self-portrait is far removed from René Descartes's declaration 'I think, therefore I am', and

the articulation that the self is located in the mind.

The portraits in this book show that, for many, the self is difficult to represent and may be captured through a depiction of the face or the body, through a performance or a location, or purely as a theoretical concept ripe for sabotage. It is all-pervasive but also elusive, hidden, collaborative, duplicitous, camouflaged, constructed, disguised, discursive and fleeting, always present but impossible to pin down.



STUDIO AND ALBUM



I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know I am posing, but ... this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality.

Roland Barthes¹

The codes and conventions of contemporary portrait photography have their roots in two nineteenth-century 'sites': the studio where portraits were made and the album where those portraits were then displayed. Photo albums became the repository for a range of images, from personal photographs to pictures of celebrities, and were passed down through the generations. Neat little carte-de-visite photographs, made in the many portrait studios that proliferated in towns and cities by the 1890s, captured family gatherings and celebrations with a formality that seems at odds with the relaxed snapshot style now more commonly associated with family photography.²

The studio and album, once dimensions of the same photographic phenomenon, are generally separated by contemporary artists into distinct, occasionally overlapping, categories with different aesthetics. Family photographs taken in a studio setting are no longer automatically intended to go into a photographic album, a traditional genre that has all but been abandoned, as digital imagery and the internet have completely redefined the notion of the album as well as the role of the studio. Yet studio photography and photo



The studio is not only a space where family photographs and portraits are made, but also one where fashion, advertising and still life photography is undertaken. It is a controlled environment where the photographer has great influence over the result of the picture, and surprises and accidents can largely be kept in check. The photographer has the opportunity to create a scene exactly as he or she would like; the studio can be stripped down to its bare essentials and used as a neutral space or filled to the brim with props. The fact that the space can be constructed and arranged reflects the possibility that the sitter can present a constructed physical appearance as an outward manifestation of the self, and many photographers acknowledge this through an emphasis upon theatrical staging and sets in the studio. The dynamic British society photographer Madame Yevonde (1893–1975) produced some of the most unusual and flamboyant portraits of the 1920s and 1930s. Her best-known series featured debutantes and society hostesses as her muses, whom she dramatically transformed into Greek goddesses, using exaggerated makeup and lighting. In a highly stylized self-portrait from 1940 she called attention to her profession by surrounding herself with tools of the photographic trade. Madame Yevonde's extraordinary portraits were 're-discovered' in the 1980s when fashion stylists and designers developed a fresh interest in her spectacular style.

The fashion shoot is commonly referenced in portraiture that utilizes the studio, as in a self-portrait by Cecil Beaton from 1938. Always the dandy, Beaton poses in a contrived, relaxed manner leaning against the wall with his hand tucked into his jacket pocket. In the series *Australian Graffiti* (2008),

Page 140: Rod Morata, *Carmine Watching Television*, 2005.

Above: Cecil Beaton, *Self-Portrait*, 1938.

British society and fashion photographer Beaton produced a vast amount of self-portraiture during his lifetime. These portraits display his wonderful sense of humour and whimsy, as well as his utilization of the studio's setting and props to indulge his love of posing. Beaton had an interest in Surrealism, which he applied in a commercial setting for his portraits and fashion work, as well as in photographs he took as a photographer for the Ministry of Information in London during the Second World War. In this image, common Surrealist props – the bell jar, hair and masks – are carefully strewn about the studio, suggesting a wild and fantastical stage set that contrasts with Beaton's composed, dapper appearance.

albums continue to fascinate artists working in self-portraiture, as the perceived limitations of the studio and the changing complexity of a 'family' constructed for an album provide rich contexts in which to examine the self. As both studio and album have become less common in everyday photography they have acquired a certain exoticism; for this reason, some artists use the historical resonance of each to explore issues of national and personal memory and heritage.

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew (b. 1964) creates self-portraits that directly address the Western conventions of the studio portrait. In a series of diptychs, Matthew juxtaposes historical portraits of Native American with portraits of herself, an Indian American, in which she re-stages the studio setting and mimics the original sitter's dress and pose. Her images undermine the objectivity that the nineteenth-century studio apparently offered, particularly in terms of anthropological and ethnographical photography of 'others', and reveal the powerful effect of colonial studio photography on our understanding of national identity.

Christian Thompson (b. 1978) poses against an empty studio backdrop, wearing colourful jumpers. Headdresses he made from native Australian plants obscure a clear view of his face. The images, which comment on his aboriginal heritage, could be something out of an edgy men's fashion magazine. Similarly, a series of self-portraits from the early 1980s by Judy Dater (b. 1941) features the artist in a studio wielding feather dusters and brooms like a ludicrous vaudeville performer. In the politicized yet playful *Ms. Cling Free* and *Death by Ironing* (1982), Dater parodies the role domesticity plays in women's lives. The stereotypical representations of women that dominate much of fashion and advertising also influence the work of Julie Pochron (b. 1969), who combines the distinctive visual aesthetics of food and fashion photography to surreal effect.

In contrast to the 'clean-slate' potential of the studio setting, the photo album is a loaded site where memories are contained, and family histories and identities are invented. It is not surprising that many artists are interested in the concept and format of their own families' photo albums. Self-portraits based upon personal albums often feel like excavations of the past, in which artists hope to find the answer to the question 'Who am I?'. Numerous contemporary photographers explore their identities through engagement with their family photographs, using a variety of methods that dismantle the album or fetishize its structure. These include digitally altering old photographs, adding text to existing photographs, projecting them onto buildings, using pictures of themselves as children in installations, and re-casting the roles in family snapshots to produce re-staged, updated versions. These approaches reference memories, real or constructed, of the artists' own pasts and identities and make public a private viewing experience.

It is interesting to note that looking at an album in the family home is generally a communal activity, with family members contributing stories and anecdotes crucial to the understanding of the narrative. When artists use album photographs out of a familial context they strip the images of a specific narrative component. For the audience to understand artwork based on these images, artists are reliant on a general familiarity with the generic language of vernacular family photography. This universal understanding, as in the work of Gillian Wearing (b. 1963), who uses specific images of her family as examples

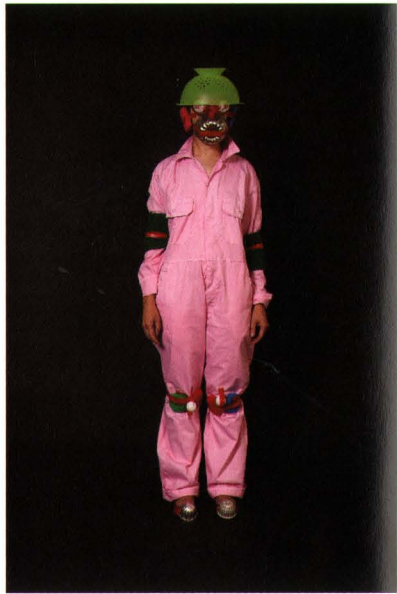
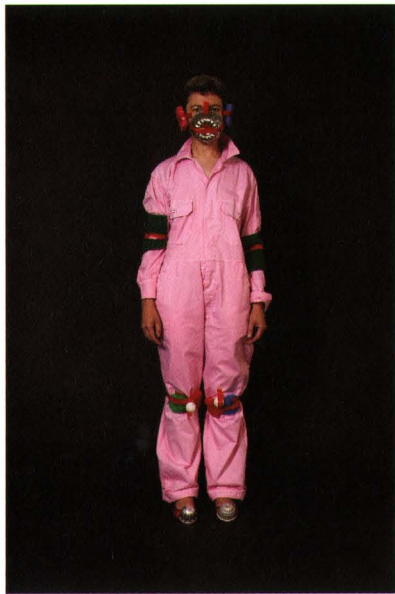
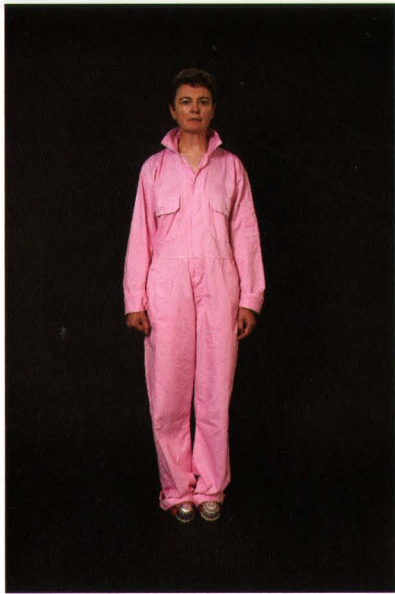


of the genre, makes it possible for the artist to engage in very personal self-exploration.

Studio photography and photo albums have gone through radical changes with the development of digital photography. But despite the fact that digital has revolutionized them, they are still different ends of the photographic spectrum – the structured realm of the professional studio at one extreme and at the other the amateur's informal snapshot in an album – both types of photography are steeped in custom and ritual. The artists who re-examine these modes of portraiture do so in an attempt to explore issues of remembrance and remembering – both crucial shapers of the self and the formation of identity.

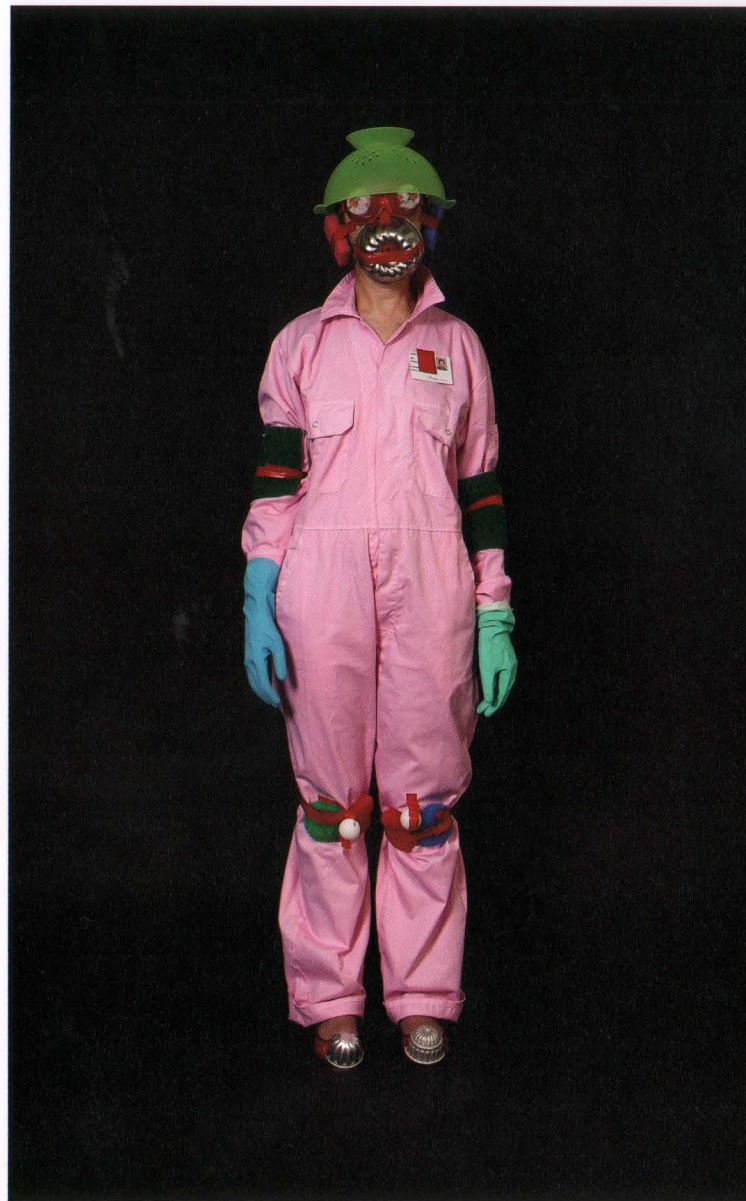
Madame Yevonde, *Self-Portrait with the Image of Hecate*, 1940.

Madame Yevonde is surrounded by photographic equipment artfully placed around the ornate gold frame, one of her ubiquitous studio props. A photograph of Dorothy, Duchess of Wellington, in the role of Hecate from Madame Yevonde's *Goddesses* is visible at the top of the frame. This self-portrait demonstrates Madame Yevonde's practice of playing with scale in her self-portraits, and shows her exceptional use of colour in composition and her pioneering use of the Vivex dye transfer process.



SIAN BONNELL

Health and Safety (2007) is British artist Bonnell's first venture into self-portraiture, and the photographs in this series are darker than her previous bodies of work, which have tended to be overtly absurd. The portraits, although humorous in a straight-faced and sardonic manner, lack the lightness of touch so apparent in the earlier work, which was created outside the confines of the studio. For this project, Bonnell worked within a self-imposed set of parameters, dependent on a studio setting, and this shift in location gives the images a strong visual charge. She is obviously ill at ease in the studio and visibly intimidated by the space, where she poses with a trepidation manifested physically in one portrait in which she has a clenched fist. Far removed from the familiarity of her home, where she is most comfortable working, Bonnell brings everyday props associated with cleaning and cooking into the empty studio. Over the course of nine self-portraits, she appears to morph from a woman on the edge into a demented automaton; in the final photograph Bonnell has become the opposite of a 'domestic goddess', an archetype that has gained a higher profile through the recent explosion of reality television programmes devoted to homemaking. Although Bonnell wears pink, a clichéd signifier of femininity, there are no mixed messages about domesticity and womanhood. Her choice of a boiler suit, which conceals her female body, is an act of defiance and an appropriation of male working attire, and creates an interesting tension when paired with her overtly feminine shoes.



Opposite and right: Sian Bonnell, *Health and Safety*, 2007.

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fine ARTS 2010-2011



THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ROME



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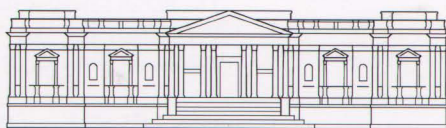
Martin Sims

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Léa-Catherine Szacka

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THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ROME



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PREFACE

The Fine Arts catalogue is an opportunity to celebrate achievement, and we have much to celebrate this year. At the Hayward Gallery's *British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet*, three British School at Rome scholars were chosen 'on the grounds of their significant contribution to contemporary art in the last five years'; Spartacus Chetwynd, Varda Caivano and Elizabeth Price.

At the same time, in London, at exactly the period we were choosing next year's artists, Jacopo Benci and I observed that several other British School at Rome artists were exhibiting in major shows, including Julian Opie in *Modern British Sculpture* at the Royal Academy, Bethan Huws at Whitechapel Art Gallery, and in private galleries, including Chantal Joffe at Victoria Miro, Sharon Kivland at DomoBaal, Tom Price at Hales Gallery, and Amikam Toren at Anthony Reynolds.

It is also to be noted that Jacopo Benci himself has had a substantial exhibition looking back over 30 years of his own practice at the 'Sapienza' University Museo Laboratorio di Arte Contemporanea, and that two former award holders, Andrew Hazewinkel and Catrin Huber, have brought shows to the British School at Rome this year.

This level of success is a gratifying reminder that the artists who come to the BSR are extraordinarily talented individuals with a capacity for changing the way we view and interact with our world.

Creativity is an essential part of a civilized society. Only through refreshing and reinvigorating our ideas and our commitments do we affirm the values upon which our culture depends. In all the conversations over the politics of social cohesion, and the extent to which British research institutions have, or have not, responded to the debate, we have rather lost sight of the pressing need continually and critically to re-examine the values which underpin the way we work and live together.

Through imagination, invention, and inspiration, British School at Rome artists make a vital contribution to this conversation. Our determination to sustain the Fine Arts programme is unequivocal. We remain committed to the view that an intelligent and constructive approach to Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences must include the creative arts in all their complexity. Our Architecture programme this year has included exhibitions and lectures by some of the most successful and influential planners and architects, including Allies and Morrison (Bob Allies was Architecture Scholar in 1981), Stefano Boeri, and OMA. As we address the challenges of the twenty-first century, it is creative, inspired and committed individuals who will help society comprehend our world in all its complexity through the application of their talents.

The Fine Arts at the British School at Rome must continually move forward. We are therefore delighted to be able to announce a new scholarship, funded by Creative Scotland, which will be advertised for the first time in 2011-12. This year has seen the first artists supported from the William Fletcher Foundation in Australia, and also from the National Art School in Sydney. Members of the Faculty of Fine Arts generously supported the refurbishment of our workshop, and I am grateful both to them and to our artists who helped draw up the list of what was needed.

I would also like to thank all our friends and supporters, both institutional and individual, who have joined us in sustaining the richness and diversity of the British School at Rome. The need for private support has never been greater. We have a clear vision for the future of the School, and the Fine Arts remain at the heart of our mission, and the unique intellectual contribution we make.

Professor Christopher Smith

Director

INTRODUCTION

The new academic year started in earnest in October 2010 with the first of three informal presentations by Fine Arts and Humanities scholars at the School, as well as the participation of resident architects Alison Crawshaw and Léa-Catherine Szacka (invited by Lorenzo Pignatti, Director of the Rome Programme of University of Waterloo School of Architecture) as guest tutors, alongside colleagues from the American Academy and two Rome based practices, IAN+ and Insula, in the international design workshop *The Re-thinking of a Section of Via dei Fori Imperiali*, organized by AACUPI and held at the Testaccio branch of the School of Architecture of University Roma Tre.

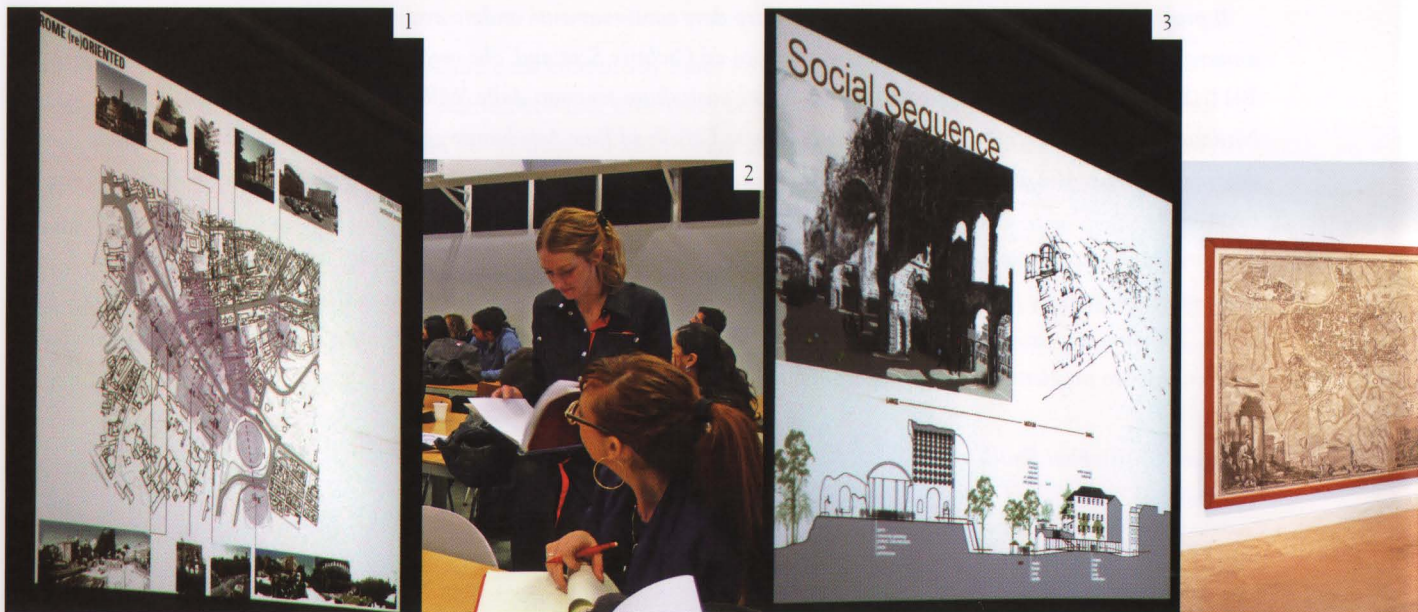
Visits to twentieth-century sites in Rome this year included the film studios at Cinecittà; a walk through EUR encompassing visits to Adalberto Libera's Palazzo dei Congressi, Gaetano Minnucci's Palazzo degli Uffici and, for the first time, a glimpse of the newly restored Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana; and Garbatella's council housing estates. The yearly informal programme of film screenings 'Contemporary Rome in Postwar Cinema' included Rossellini's *Rome Open City*, De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, the omnibus film *L'amore in città*, Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, Pasolini's *Accattone*, Antonioni's *L'eclisse*.

The first Fine Arts scholars' exhibition of the academic year, titled *Meet Me at the Cemetery Gates*, opened on 10 December. The exhibition presented works by artists Joanna Bryniarska, Richard Gasper, Martin Sims, David Smith, Emma Stibbon, and architects Alison Crawshaw and Léa-Catherine Szacka. On Friday 18 December Léa-Catherine gave a lecture on her research subject, the groundbreaking exhibition *Roma interrotta* held at Trajan's Markets in 1978.

The second Fine Arts exhibition of the academic year, *The Producers*, opened on 11 March 2011. The works on display were created by artists Janet Haslett, Mick Finch, Richard Gasper, Barbie Kjar, Annee Miron, Elizabeth Price, Diana Taylor, and architect Alison Crawshaw. The public praised the exhibition's installational character, including Alison Crawshaw's work *The Big Balcony*, involving the entire façade of the BSR, with a video projection and a documentary display, related to her research on illegal building activities in Rome; Janet Haslett's and Diana Taylor's installation *Isola Sacra* in the atrium; and a wall painting by Diana Taylor.

On 12 April, Léa-Catherine Szacka came back to Rome to present a paper on *Roma interrotta* at the international day conference *Grand Tour del Terzo Millennio*, organized yearly by professor Claudia Conforti at the Department of Civil

1-3. Alison Crawshaw, Léa-Catherine Szacka, and their students' presentation at the AACUPI workshop, University Roma Tre, October 2010



Engineering of the Università Tor Vergata, with the participation of fellows of the foreign academies and institutes in Rome. On 5 and 6 May, the 2011 edition of the international art fair *Roma The Road to Contemporary Art* brought groups of visitors to the artists' studios at the School.

June saw the participation of BSR artists in the *Spazi Aperti 2011* event at the Romanian Academy, curated by Luisa Conte; and the third and final Fine Arts exhibition at the School, entitled *Fountains and Drains*, which opened on Friday 10, with new works by artists Sian Bonnell, Joanna Bryniarska, Varda Caivano, Richard Gasper, Kevin McKay, Rosslynd Piggott, Diana Taylor, and architect Katherine Lapierre.

The Fine Arts programme could not succeed in assisting award-holders without the valuable contribution of Research Assistants and interns. Alice Bygraves, BSR Administrative Assistant, has given a valuable contribution by starting a detailed inventory of the contents of the Fine Arts archive individual scholars' files, which go back to the beginning of the 1990s and are a useful research tool, so far largely untapped except by a handful of Italian students researching degree theses on contemporary British art or the foreign academies in Rome. Alex S. Anderson, a student from John Cabot University, worked at the BSR as voluntary Research Assistant during the winter and spring months of 2011. Besides helping Alice inventoring the Fine Arts archive files, Alex assisted with the preparation and invigilation of exhibitions.

On behalf of the resident artists and architects, as well as my own, I want to thank all of the staff at the British School for their constant help and support; especially Sue Russell, Marina Engel, Maria Pia Malvezzi, Donatella Astolfi, Alba Coratti, Marisa Scarsella, Fulvio Astolfi, Antonio Palmieri, Renato Parente, Giuseppe Pellegrino.

Jacopo Benci

Assistant Director Fine Arts

7. The BSR courtyard

8-11. *The Producers*, BSR, March 2010: works by Diana Taylor; Mick Finch; Janet Haslett & Diana Taylor; Richard Gasper, Janet Haslett



EXHIBITIONS

MEET ME AT THE CEMETERY GATES

10-18 December 2010

Joanna Bryniarska, Alison Crawshaw, Richard Gasper,
Martin Sims, David Smith, Emma Stibbon, Léa-Catherine Szacka

THE PRODUCERS

11-19 March 2011

Alison Crawshaw, Janet Haslett, Mick Finch, Richard Gasper,
Barbie Kjar, Annee Miron, Elizabeth Price, Diana Taylor

FOUNTAINS AND DRAINS

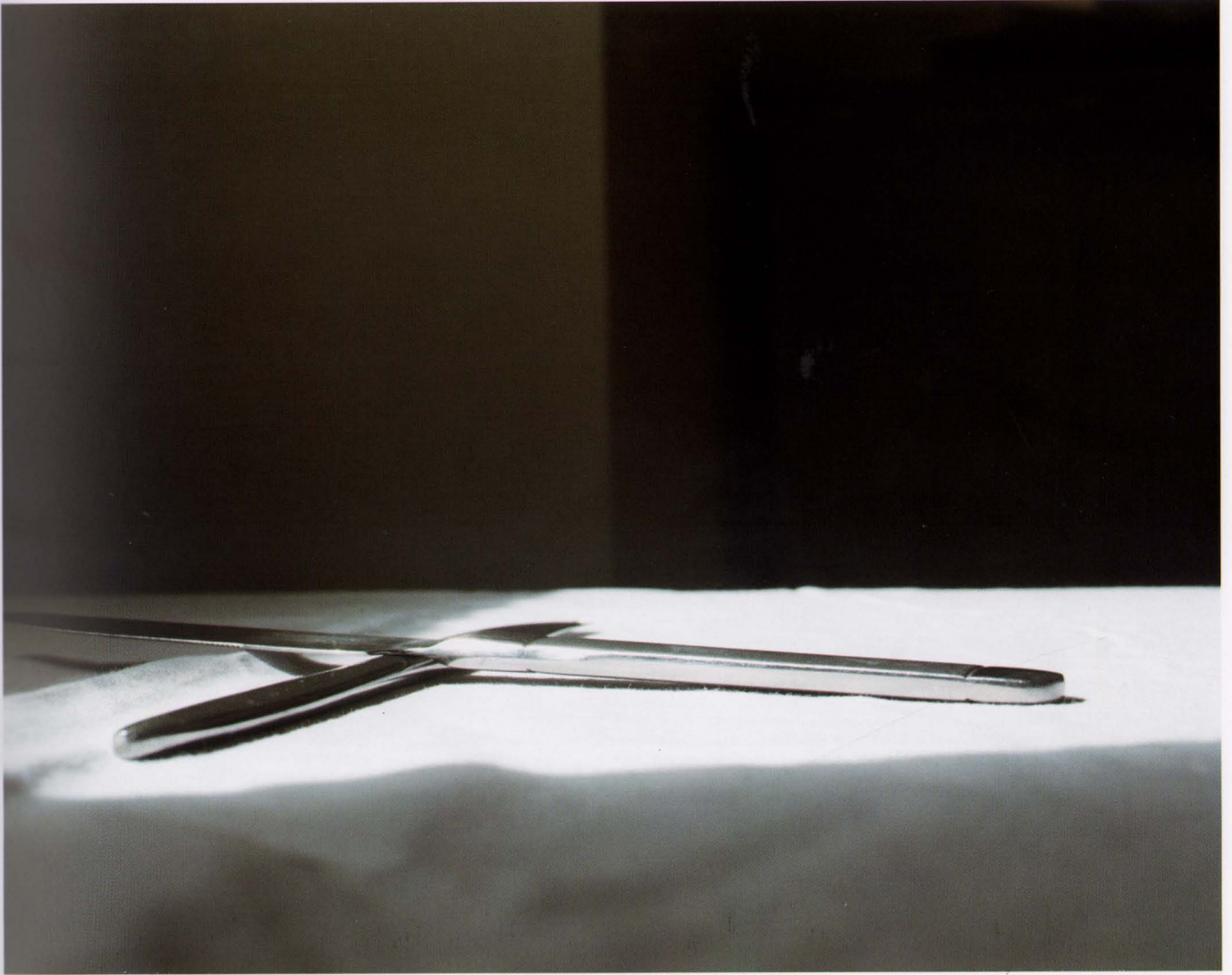
10-18 June 2011

Sian Bonnell, Joanna Bryniarska, Varda Caivano, Richard Gasper,
Katherine Lapierre, Kevin McKay, Rosslynd Piggott, Diana Taylor

Sian Bonnell



Ordinary Magic 2008
digital C-type, 76 x 102 cm



Ordinary Magic 2008
digital C-type, 60 x 76 cm

SIAN BONNELL

Photoworks Fellow, April-June 2011

Born in London

www.sianbonnell.com

EDUCATION

1983-85 MA Fine Art, Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic

1978-81 BA Hons Fine Art Sculpture, Chelsea School of Art,
London

1977-78 Harrow School of Art

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 *Food*, CONTACT Gallery, Alphabet City Festival,
Toronto, Canada
- 2006 *Ridiculous Sublime*, Olin Hall Galleries, Roanoke
College, Salem, Virginia, USA
Everyday dada, Galerie Image, Aarhus, Denmark
Täglich Dada, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt
- 2004 *from an elsewhere unknown*, Ffotogallery, Turner
House Art Gallery, Cardiff
- 2003 *They Came*, Hirschl Contemporary Art, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 *Domestic Interiors* (Sian Bonnell, Nigel Shafran &
David Spero; curated by Celia Davies), Regency Town
House, Brighton
- 2007 *One Shot Each: Humour*, Brandts Museet for
Fotokunst, Odense, Denmark
- 2006 *The Image Wrought*, Ransom Center, Austin, Texas
- 2005 *Place: Photographs of Environment and Community*,
Ransom Center, Austin, Texas
Lichtwiesen – Inszenierte Landschaften, Darmstädter
Tage der Fotografie, Darmstadt
Play, Woodstock Center for Photography, Woodstock,
New York
- 2004 *Fotofest Discoveries Exhibition*, Houston, Texas
LAN2D: Beyond Landscape?, Dean Clough Gallery,
Halifax, Yorkshire
- 2003 *Psycho-Geography*, Hirschl Contemporary Art, London
(3 person show)
Play With Your Food, Houston Center for Photography,
Houston, Texas

SELECTED AWARDS

- 2011 Photoworks Fellowship, The British School at Rome
- 2010 Honorary Fellowship, Royal Photographic Society
Nominated for 2010 Prix Pictet, Switzerland

2005 The 2005 ACE / IPRN Commission, Moravska
Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic

2004 Individual Award Arts Council England, South West

SELECTED PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston, Texas; Ransom Center, Austin, Texas; Bibliothèque
Nationale, Paris

JOANNA BRYNIARSKA

Sainsbury Scholar in Painting and Sculpture,
October 2009-June 2011

Born in Swindon, 1981. Lives and works in London

EDUCATION

- 2006-09 Postgraduate Fine Art, Royal Academy Schools,
London
- 2001-04 BA (Hons) Fine Art, University College Falmouth,
Falmouth

ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *we are not hatched from eggs*, Post Box Gallery,
London
- 2005 *Project Room*, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh
Girl and Dead Goose, Spike Island, Bristol

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Meet Me at the Cemetery Gates*, The British School at
Rome
Nice Work, The British School at Rome
Accademia delle Accademie, Complesso Monumentale
Santo Spirito in Sassia, Rome
Andata e Ritorno, Esc_Atelier, Rome
Se non è vero, è ben trovato, The British School at
Rome
- 2009 *The Things I Did And The Money I Spent*, The British
School at Rome
Royal Academy Schools Show 2009, graduation show,
Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 2008 *New Works*, FAFA Finnish Academy of Fine Arts
Gallery, Helsinki, Finland
Premiums 2008: Royal Academy Schools Interim Show,
Sackler Wing, Royal Academy of Arts, London
The Painting Room, Transition Gallery, London
- 2007 *Influx: Group Exhibition*, Royal Academy students,
Nolias Gallery, Liverpool Street, London



