

LIPSERVICE

Virginia Khuri



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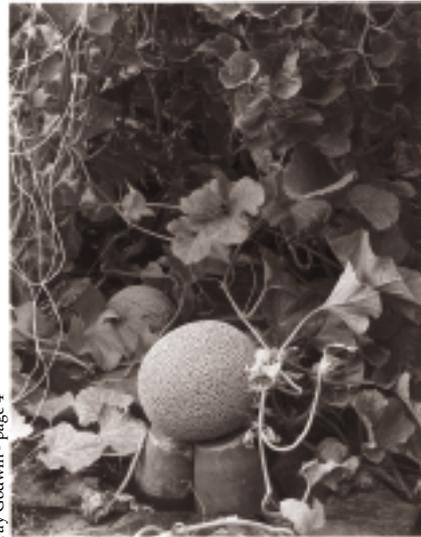
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An interview with Fay Godwin

conducted by
Virginia Khuri
and Jill Staples



Fay Godwin

Fay Godwin, renowned British photographer, explains the evolution of her work from family snaps through to her most recent colour work self-published as an artists book.

How did you begin in photography?

Family Snaps. . . What was important to me first was learning to print, printing the family snaps taught me about photography more than anything else. It was printing that informed the next picture if you like.

Who helped you to print?

The small camera shop took me into a back room and said, "you print on the shiny side of the paper,"

having forgotten that they had sold me matt paper! So I got some very blurry images up before I turned the paper over! I was entirely self-taught. I made a lot of mistakes. It was quite hard because there weren't any workshops in those days. I did go to an adult education class but it seemed to me that most of the people were only interested in the length of their lens.

When did you begin making more formal portraits?

My marriage broke up at the end of the 60's by which time I had done just one or two fleeting snaps of writers in our house because my husband was a publisher. I had been in publishing as well so I thought I'd see if I could do a bit professionally. I had a little leaflet printed up with the four or five writers' portraits which I sent to everyone I could think of. I was a

single mother so I didn't have very much time. I'd like to have done magazine work. Most people in those days naturally looked to magazines because there were no independent sectors. I was an independent sector all on my own as it turned out. That's why I feel such an affinity with the independent. I realize that I've never liked being commissioned very much - I don't like performing.

How did your first books come about?

I did do some work for various magazines like "New Society" and through "New Society" I did the illustrations for a small book about welfare rights. Now it was appallingly printed and designed, but for me it was very satisfying to have the pictures actually in a book.

Next, I went to take one of my literary portraits about a man who had just written a book about his lurcher dog. I took some snaps of the lurcher. The pictures of the man were all right but the publisher said "well, I was about to commission some line drawings of the lurcher to illustrate the book, but would you like to do it photographically?" So I did. I got some wonderful pictures of the dog. In fact the American publisher took an option on seeing the pictures and turned it down when he saw the text.

How did you begin to work in the landscape?

I decided I wanted to do a book half and half with the writer. I had always been interested in Wainwright's books of the Lake District and wished there were some books like that around London. I thought



Fay Godwin

it would be a good excuse to go out and take photographs in the landscape. It turned out that London Transport had very good books, but I had by then got a very helpful literary agent who put me together with someone called JRL Anderson and he said "well, how about a book about the oldest road in Europe?" This became "The Ridgeway," really my first book. I walked up and down it umpteen times. I thought taking landscape pictures was just taking pictures of the view.

The other thing that started me off in landscape photography, parallel to Wainwright, was meeting Ted Hughes in the middle of 1970. He said, "Do you take any landscape pictures?" I said, "I go for a walk with a camera sometimes." He said, "There's this area up North that I'd like to write about but I want photographs as a trigger." So I started going up there but I never saw Ted again for another six years by which time I had just been given a terminal sentence with cancer. He said, "How about those pictures we talked about all those years ago? Have you finished?" I had just done "The Ridgeway". and "The Oil Rush" which was very photojournalistic and had been appallingly printed. and was in the middle of "The Drovers Roads," but he said, "I'd like to get on with that book." I said, "I'm ready, but I'd like to start all over again." He said, "Can I have some of the old pictures to start writing from?" That's the way we worked. He had my original pictures and sent me the poems; then I would take some more photographs. What we didn't want was either of us to describe the other's work. He said the final edition of *Elmet* was his definitive edition. We each had a third of new poems and new pictures. It is not a reprint. It is a completely different book with a different title, better design. It, like "Land," won the best of British book design and printing award for that year. As recently as last March Ted said,



"We will keep that book in print. That is our classic. I did like the first one, but this one is even better."

How did "Land" come about?

"Land" came about because by this time I'd done a lot of not very well printed books, but people had seen my exhibitions and David Godwin decided to publish the pictures from the exhibition, "Land." It really was a collection of the first ten years of my landscape work.

"Wordless Eloquence" is how John Fowles described your work in his introduction. He also pointed out "a certain moral quality" in it. What did he mean?

I had ambivalent feelings about some aspects of the introduction at the beginning because he kept talking about the femaleness of my work. Coming from a male I wasn't about to accept it and he did take certain things out because I found them patronising and embarrassing. But extraordinarily I later on had a very very interesting review written by the people who are now the Ansel Adams Center, Friends of Photography, written by a woman who said many of the same things that John Fowles had said about the care for the land.

How did "Our Forbidden Land" come about?

"Our Forbidden Land" was intentionally just going to be about the fact that we're not allowed to walk in our own landscape.

Now I do feel passionately about that and I've said I won't use

my camera again for propaganda because I find that a very painful and ambivalent thing to do. I'm quite happy for the pictures to be taken and used for somebody else's propaganda but I don't want to do it myself. But when I started doing the work about access, it became quite clear to me that I couldn't separate the question of access to the countryside from the question of

what sort of a countryside are we asking for access to?

So in the end "Our Forbidden Land" became a real look at what is happening in the environment now, and although I did most of the work in '88 and '89 and it was published in 1990, there is nothing that has come up which isn't covered there. I really did it very thoroughly. It was a whirlwind of investigation. It is one of the books I am most proud of having done. Unfortunately, the only regret I have is that there is no index, and because I wrote it in a circular way, ten years on even I can't remember all the references. I had no idea that this book would be picked up and used as teaching material.

I used a lot of poetry in the book and I still get a terrific buzz when I look at the picture which is on the cover together with Adrian Mitchell's poem. That was one of those pictures which I took not even thinking that it would be for the book at all, certainly not for the cover, but this is where I believe that pictures even on the level of a polemical book do sometimes come from somewhere else. That book is divided into what I still regard as very creative pictures and some like the sewage and things which are simply reporting.

Describe the move from the landscape to the colour.

I had a fellowship in the National Museum of Photography in Bradford and they said we think we should push you in a new direction, so we'd like to offer you the Fellowship in colour. It was a very documentary set of pictures

about Bradford and I really liked the pictures, but this was my first encounter with prejudice. One young photographer said "It's far too late for you to change now." This was 1986! I said other photographers and painters have moved on. "Well, it is far too late for you!" Well, I only started photography very late in life so why am I supposed to have a cut off point? I continued to work in colour.

When did you begin the work which is in "Glassworks and Secret Lives?"
When I was in Bradford doing the fellowship work, and was starting to work on "Our Forbidden Land," I began photographing in a nursery garden very formally, using my Linhoff as a view camera on a stand. It was like a magic garden for me, and eventually I had colour film in my camera. I bought a little auto-focus camera with a close up attachment and I got in there with the high speed film I had been given, and thought "oh, that's nice - very interesting." So I went back with my 30 year old Nikon and its micro-nikkor and started working. Then, based on some small colour enprints I had shown her, Rosemary Williams from Richmond asked me for an exhibition that year, 1990.

Some people think that you sit down and think up your next series. I find that by looking at work one begins to see the threads that are emerging. I got very excited about these pictures. I hadn't seen anything like them before. Of course in the end everyone's done something similar. But they were different enough for me to feel that this was nothing that I had cottoned on to from somewhere else; they came out of me. I feel that they are more interior photographs, They are very intimate. I see them as being extremely personal work.

You mentioned finding some Polaroids made some fifteen years ago which seem to anticipate this work.
Yes that was very interesting. Recently, I was looking at pictures to show John Hoole of the Barbican Art Gallery, I found a whole box full of Polaroids which I had forgotten all about. I was given a Polaroid camera but I couldn't afford to buy the film so I only had

film when someone gave me some. It was the most creative thing for me to work with Polaroid. I was in ecstasy doing it; painting gives me the same feeling of being completely outside of myself.

I have never worked with flash but the Polaroid had flash. I found this wonderful technique of moving rather slowly with flash. So I worked in colour by moving flowers and things in the garden. I had completely forgotten them but they are a definite link with the colour work I'm doing now.

Why did you decide to self-publish "Glassworks and Secret Lives?"
So far sixteen books have been commercially published, so I didn't think of self-publishing for quite a while. Publishers who saw the work all liked it very much but said they wouldn't know how to sell it because it was fine art. What made me finally decided to publish it was a feeling of real disappointment that I had had no reviews from a beautifully mounted 60 piece exhibition that went up at Meade Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre. I had read a piece in "Contemporary Photography" by Virginia Khuri who said that if there are no reviews the exhibition ceases to exist. This completely echoed my own feeling and I decided that the work does exist.

What determined the size of the book?
First of all it had to be on the small scale because self-publishing is very expensive. And I see the book as an "artists book", a small book, not a monograph. It is 180mm square. It is in paperback with a numbered hardback cased version limited to 250 copies.

Were you implying that you would have preferred it to be larger?
Oh yes, the pictures look really good larger. It would have been a different book. I love it as it is, the smallness is lovely but it won't get reviewed very much because it is an artists book. But I do believe in design and I was very lucky because the designer of the lovely Elmet book designed this book.

There is an essay in the book by Ian Jeffrey. How did you decide that Ian Jeffrey should do it?
Well, he wrote the essay for the

exhibition at the Meade Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre and was one of the few people in the photographic establishment who allowed me to do the colour work, and actually told the Meade Gallery they should see it. I feel he is one of the people who actually looks at people's work to see what they are doing, not what he thinks they should be doing. He wrote a very interesting essay called "Landscape and Metaphor" in the small British Council Catalogue of my work. He saw the metaphorical side of landscape; a lot of people couldn't see that. It's a lovely little catalogue and the first time I've ever had anything decently printed.

So perhaps it's that metaphorical aspect of your work which has carried on into the colour?

The pictures in the colour work are quite complex, many layered and I think his text reflects that. I think of music. I listen to Messiaen's music, it is many layered and seemed to have analogies with my work.

Do you feel that this is the most important book to you of all the books you've published?

I don't know. I haven't had it long enough to put it in the category of the three books I'd really like to be remembered by which are "Our Forbidden Land", "Land" and "Elmet", the second Elmet. But that doesn't mean that I don't love "The Forest of Dean" as well.

Does putting out the book mean that for you this particular colour project is finished?

There are a few threads from it that I am following where I'm now living, but they aren't gardens at the moment. Whenever I go to a place I always investigate the dirty glass, but most people keep their greenhouses too clean! It isn't about transparency; very strangely it is something quite oblique. It is still landscape but an intimate, humanized one⁵

If you are unable to obtain "Glassworks and Secret Lives" in your local bookshop, make a request and cheque payable to Fay Godwin (£12.99 Paperback, £25 for the hardback, £1 p&p c/o Martello Bookshop, 26 High Street, Rye, East Sussex TN3 7JJ). Also look out for Fay Godwin's Retrospective Exhibition at the Barbican Art Gallery scheduled for late 2001.

The Citibank Photography Prize

Anna Gaskell



American photographer **Anna Gaskell** is the winner of the prestigious **Citibank Private Bank Photography Prize 2000** which was sponsored by *The Times*. Her images of "young women dressed as nurses performing odd, vaguely disturbing actions" (*The Guardian*) were selected from a shortlist of five which also included Tim Macmillan (UK), Tracey Moffatt (Australia), Jitka Hanzlova (Czech Republic) and James Casebere (USA).

Born in 1969 in Des Moines, Iowa, Anna Gaskell studied at Yale University School of Art, followed by the Art Institute of Chicago and Bennington College.

She made her international debut in 1997 with a series of twenty colour photographs loosely based on Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. In 1998 and 1999 she had solo exhibitions at

Casey Caplan in New York, White Cube in London and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami. The announcement of the winner of the £15,000 prize was made by Minister for the Arts Alan Howarth at an awards evening at The Photographers' Gallery on 2 March.

The prize was established in 1996 to reward the individual who is judged to have made the most significant contribution to the medium of photography over the past year through exhibition or publication in Britain. It has previously been won by Rineke Dijkstra (1999) and Andreas Gursky (1998).

The exhibition (which ended on 25 March) was a particular success, with over 14,000 visitors a week, and Channel Four broadcast a series of short films about the shortlisted artists.

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An opportunity to exhibit

Yoke Matze been negotiating with Denise Brooke of Refocus Now for exhibition venues in London for LIP members. The following exhibition opportunity is open to all LIP members, but in particular for members who do not take part in the Countdown 2000 exhibition.

Title of the exhibition: INSPIRATION POINT - open exhibition and print sale. Dates: 5 - 23 July, 2000. Venue: The Jersey Galleries, Osterley Park, Isleworth, Middlesex TW17 4RB. Open: Wednesday-Sunday 13.00-16.30. Any LIP member who wishes to take part in this exhibition should contact Denise Brooke by the end of April 2000. For submission details and entry forms ring: 020 7231 9756, or send a SAE to: Refocus NOW Ltd., Penthouse Suite, Empire House, 175 Piccadilly, Mayfair, London W1V 0TB.

The Jersey Galleries is a National Trust Property consisting of 6 rooms. If there is sufficient interest from LIP members, Denise may be able to set aside a room for them. The normal entry fee is £20 per print, but for LIP members, an entry fee of £5 per print has been negotiated. There is a commission of 30% for gallery sales.

SEEING
THINGS
with
PAUL
KILSBY

NANCYE
GAULT



Clare Glenister

There is no better way to get real value for money for your LIP membership and some sort of feed back on your photography, than to go to one of the talks or workshops organised for us by Janet Hall. Saturday, March 13th was an excellent day for the stimulation and encouragement of ideas, when Paul Kilsby talked to us at the Camera Club in Bowden Street in Kennington and treated us to a slide show of his work.

The morning started at 11 o'clock with an informal chat over a cup of coffee, before Paul began a highly informative and wide-ranging discussion of his own vision of photography. This very much had a circular theme with the main ideas centred on looking, seeing and the gaze. He suggested that great work is timeless, but should still be about the moment you live in; "Bequeath to the future, the present moment", mentioning Martin Parr's current work, which features sleeping commuters on Japanese trains. He confessed to a fascination with the uncanny, that originally seems to have been sparked off by a visit to the Czech Republic where he was impressed with the work of Josef Sudek and some of his other compatriots. Photographers there were producing exciting experimental work, for which they risked imprisonment, at the same time as photographers in New York were selling their work for as much as \$30,000.

Having studied sculpture at University, he came later to photography, which he found to be a medium through which he could better express himself. His highly poetic earlier photographic work, with its circular format, seems to have anticipated his recent fascination with images of the human eye, in particular of the iris. Originally working in black and white, the allegorical, collaged images reflected his love of bird watching, astronomy and classical mythology. Birds, as carriers of meaning and messages, featured significantly. We were able to see, in the progression of his work, an increasing fascination with the gaze and vision as a phenomenon in itself. He talked about the Power

of the Gaze and we were shown some interesting and surrealistic images he had made exploring the intercepted gaze.

Until this stage, all the work we were shown had been in monochrome, so there was considerable impact from a sudden switch to colour, with his significantly enlarged images of the human iris. With this new work we were given some fascinating insights. Facts, such as, that each person's iris becomes completely individualised soon after birth, and because each pattern is more distinctive even than finger prints, Paul's images could be on the cutting edge of identification technology (as well as art!). In spite of each individual's iris pattern being totally unique, you cannot tell a person's age, sex or character from it; the iris is the only part of the human body which does not show the effects of aging. With all these interesting ideas in our heads, it was time for a little break.

After returning from the local tapas bar where we had a chance for friendly informal discussions over lunch, Paul made himself available for viewing work that one or two workshop participants had brought along for comment and advice. As a lecturer in photography and art theory at the Royal College of Art, with a PhD in European Modernist photography, his comments were of particular interest. Work discussed included Sarah Thelwall's poignant images of her dying grandmother. We were also treated to a preview of two of Jill Staples' newest books that she herself makes. Her digitally produced flower photograms (if you could call them that - they were produced by placing her flowers directly onto the scanner) were exquisite.

By now it was time to wind up the proceedings, and reluctantly acknowledged that we had to let Paul go home. We had had a marvellous day. I came away with one of Paul's aphorisms to consider: Instead of taking photographs of things, start making photographs about things.

Photo Essay Buildings of the Millennium Avril Harris

Avril explains how her participation in Countdown 2000 was the inspiration for the featured photo essay – a set of beautifully rendered photographs of buildings in the Borough of Enfield that span 500 years.

When I decided to commit to Countdown 2000, I felt it would be necessary to have an ongoing project. Not a 'people photographer' I enjoy landscape and the built environment. Thinking more about it I thought of familiar and daily things in our lives. Our social history and our way of life through the years. I live in Enfield, I was born here, went to school here and raised my family here. My grandchild is also here. When I was young the fact that Elizabeth I had a palace here and the Royal Chase literally meant that, was fascinating - ever the romanticist. From all of this came the idea that when my project was finished I could hand down to my children a book of photographs which encompassed all the buildings which we had grown up with before they are destroyed by "progress".

I made a conscious decision that the buildings had to be within walking distance, i.e. five miles of my own home. The next decision was the time scale. As we were all allocated a minimum of 20 days it worked quite easily: 1500-2000 AD equalled a building every 25 years. Next, research. I spent the Christmas holidays of 1998 delving into the many history books that I already own establishing buildings and dates. After all this I was stuck on a few dates and I discovered that the Local History Librarian, Graham Dalling, at Palmers Green library was literally a fount of knowledge when it came to the Borough of Enfield I am very grateful for his help and encouragement particularly as his own department's future was and probably still is threatened.

I started with a church because (A) it was one of the earliest buildings I could find and (B) I felt that this was the centre of the community whether it was religious or social. By coinci-

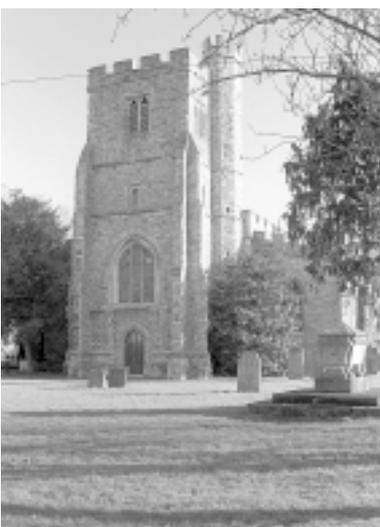
dence the church selected was the one in which I was christened. My final building is a Leisure Centre in the process of being built and it should be finished in the year 2000, so again, a centre for social life. In between, great houses and small houses, churches and pubs, railway stations and tube stations, schools and schools converted to flats. There were occasions when the building that was to be photographed had been pulled down and I would have to find a replacement.

Perhaps I should not have worried about the images being in chronological order but it is evident that one should take more notice of what is around one. Buildings can be torn down in less than two weeks and I certainly regret not having an image of one of the more dramatic houses in the area. It just did not seem possible that it would be destroyed but land is valuable and buildings are expendable. Towards the end I had more pictures than days to cover so those illustrated here are only the tip of the iceberg and the only ones

seen by members of LIP. It has been fascinating for me and very satisfying. The weather could have been better a lot of the time but I will probably photograph again those buildings which suffered from the dreariest days. Eventually I will put the book together with the addition of anecdotes recounted to me by the people most closely involved with the houses - their owners. S



1. 1500 - All Saints Church, Edmonton in the Borough of Enfield.
The tower is built in York Stone and is reputed to date from 1500 although the present church has within it some Norman fragments dating from not long after Doomsday.



2. 1500 -The tower of All Saints Church.



3. 1525 - St. Andrews Church, Enfield.
The first vicar of Enfield was recorded in 1190. The church probably dates back 800 years but the area photographed, the crypt entrance, has been dated 1525. There is a famous brass in the church of Joyce, Lady Tiptoft who died in 1446, it now lies under a stone canopy erected in memory of Isabel Lady Lovell in 1530.



4. 1575 - Salisbury House.
Now a centre for art run by the Borough of Enfield. It is without doubt one of the borough's finest and oldest surviving buildings from the 16th century. It is timber framed with over hanging upper storeys, gabled roofs and tall impressive chimney stacks. Faithfully restored in 1992 using ancient techniques and materials.



5. 1625 - Forty Hall

Built by Sir Nicholas Rainton. He became an Alderman of the City of London in 1621 and Lord Mayor of London in 1632. It is a magnificent house with adjoining stable block and farm buildings. The house has survived intact and still retains plaster ceilings, fireplaces and panelling from Rainton's time. The building is now a museum, though under threat of closure, and the stable area is used for receptions etc.



6. Forty Hall from the grounds showing the enormous cedar tree.



7. 1650 - Clarendon Cottage. Enfield.

One of the many cottages lived in by Charles Lamb when he lived in both Enfield and in Edmonton. During necessary restoration work the cottage interior was discovered to be much older than originally thought and English Heritage stepped in with financial aid and expertise to help with accurate restoration.



8. 1700 - The Hermitage. Forty Hall

A large, mellow redbrick house with canopied windows. At the rear is an Elizabethan building, recalling the fact that this area had a Royal Palace, Elsynge Palace- whose remains are still under the parklands of Forty Hall. The palace was for the use of Henry VII and his son. The royal children Mary, Elizabeth and Edward were frequently there. The palace fell into disrepair upon the ascent to the throne of James I.



9. 1775 - Woodside Cottages. Winchmore Hill

This particular cottage was used as a school. At one time the three clapboard cottages were threatened with demolition to enable road widening. Fortunately a preservation order was placed upon them and although they are in a very dilapidated condition there does appear to be some renovation in progress though it is very slow.



11. 1850 - St. John's Church, Clay Hill, Enfield.

Built to the designs of James Piers St Aubyn and financed personally by the Rev. John Moore Heath, Vicar of St. Andrews. The building incorporates some remarkable polychrome brickwork in the window heads.



10. 1825 - The Vestry House. Enfield Town.

The beadle lived at a rent of £6 6s a year until it became the police station in 1840 when parish constables were made redundant. In 1872 a larger police station was built but the Vestry Offices were used to administer the parish charities and the parish church.



12. 1900 - Enfield Magistrates Court. Enfield.

Built as a petty sessions court.



13. 1925 - The Kings Head, Winchmore Hill
 Originally a Railway Hotel until 1899 it was then demolished and rebuilt at a cost of between £7000 and £8000. It would appear that the building is now being refurbished to possibly open as a bar as opposed to a public house.



14. 1975 - Enfield Civic Centre.
 Designed by architects Eric G. Broughton & Associates of Ealing. A steel and glass clad skyscraper offering panoramic views from the upper storeys. It tends to change colour according to the light from dull grey to sunset yellow-grey in the evening.



15. 1999 - Leisure Centre
 In the process of being built, it will be finished in the year 2000 and will be a centre for Enfield's social life.

16.
 This is the house that triggered the idea. I realised how important it is to record our surroundings because one day they will have disappeared. It only takes a couple of weeks to demolish a building that has stood for a hundred years or more.

Some Memorials: The Photo Diaries of Mick Williamson

A review by
Siobhan Wall



A stone bottle, half defined by light from an unseen source on a single bench in a darkened room, lending a long shadow across a wooden floor. An otherwise empty room.

A table laid for eating outdoors, the shadows of leaves creating patterns on the tablecloth in the morning sun.

A child draws a heart into the sand, her body half-visible. We see endless, unlimited space. A young person making her mark which will soon be washed away.

These descriptions of typical shots in this 44 page collection of photographs by Mick Williamson reveal more about his approach than about the subjects we encounter. Having shot thousands of black and white images over nearly thirty years, often "held at arms length or at the hip" he seeks to capture what is incidental and unexpected rather than reproduce the formally composed shot.

Rather like the haiku-like poems preceding the work, the images act as partial, gentle fragments which invite an attentiveness towards the everyday, the non-glamorous. They are gentle, non-insistent images which provide a welcome antidote to the demanding, spectacular environment in which we are distracted by demands to achieve or be entertained. Instead, Mick's images offer a mode of viewing which is closer to the act of contemplation. They are like secular prayers, subtly implying that we

can escape from work, routine and worry.

Rather than "finding" oneself, such an ephemeral vision implies that we can "lose" what is instrumental, conflictual and monotonous. These moments fix what is transitory whilst retaining the arbitrariness of the initial moment. They belie the effort needed to produce a vast personal archive that consistently avoids the heaviness of the usual documentary shot or the posed



family portrait. These are "snaps" in the best sense of the word, capturing what is fleeting about childhood; rare moments of pleasure and wonder that are unusually innocent.

Considering the abundance of writing about the simulacra and the loss of authenticity, these images might be seen as deliberately refusing such scepticism about locating traces of spontaneity and delight. However, a seriousness is present in such Edenic scenes in the form of an indirect hint of mortality. This is revealed in the image on the front cover which gives the book its title. "Some Memorials" suggests the ponderous weight of tradition and this is only undermined by the fact that the image of a blank gravestone in a stonemiller's window emphasises the fleeting effect of light on semi-transparent curtains behind.

The majority of images seem to refuse to accept the inevitability of "death" but paradoxically in doing

so they remind us of our mortality; how these intimate or casual moments with friends and family are infinitely precious. We cannot fix what is "living" and inherently mutable but what makes these images compelling is their ability to suggest that immortality exists alongside the possibility of death. Having been shot without the photographer actually looking through the lens, they also suggest the possibility of unmediated representation. Such an effect is illusory as no image can avoid a process of selection, of discrimination. However, the fantasy that our lives can be recorded without preconceived ideas interfering with the unfettered flow of events, is a powerful one. Such forms of escape from what is predictable or monotonous are enticing. These images suggest that we possibly have to structure such moments ourselves, rather than rely on the mass media to do this for us. The taking of such unintrusive shots implies that we can be hopeful about our capacity to see things as if unencumbered and that potentially we retain a sense of awe. To retain the capacity to be childlike and non-ensorious whilst being a competent adult is both elusive and yet often longed for. Mick Williamson's recent work reminds us that our ability to achieve this may be possible, even if the pursuit of such freedom may be difficult when faced with many burdens and responsibilities.⁵

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Some Memorials: The Photo Diaries of Mick Williamson is published by Coracle Press, Tipperary, Ireland 1999.





Clare Glenister

LIPprofile

For the second LIP profile of the series, Clare Glenister interviews the co-founder member of LIP, Virginia Khuri.

My father was an amateur photographer and I was given a Baby Brownie when I was seven. I photographed my little brother but didn't know about keeping things level so I tilted the camera to fit him in - very modern! On that same roll of film there is a traditionally composed landscape with a lake and a building and a tree in the foreground as my father had told me to do. One Easter, the daffodils were all covered with snow so I took a picture and sent it off to a contest. I never heard anything more but even then there was the excitement of seeing something that would make a picture. When I was sixteen, I went to Japan on an exchange programme. I borrowed my father's 35mm but you couldn't buy film for it so he loaded some into canisters for me. I set off for three months with 25 rolls and no light meter! I didn't dare bracket as I didn't want to waste any film but I came back with a lot of interesting pictures. The Japanese camera industry was just getting going and everybody else came with money to buy cameras there. I moved to Lebanon and when I started having a family I didn't travel but I did take family snapshots and put them in albums. I started doing black and white with my children and I really preferred it. There were some good local photographers and I was getting up courage to ask one of them to teach me how to print when the civil war broke out. We came to England and I signed up for an ILEA course. It was

taught by John Newton who was a very good portrait photographer and a member of the Royal Photographic Society. By the end of the course he was able to pick out my pictures from the others which pleased me. We all used the same wash water so some of those prints are now turning yellow! I had one of Ansel Adams' books and I saw the Cartier Bresson and Bill Brandt exhibitions but I didn't know of anybody else. I had seen Raymond Moore's exhibition at the Hayward not realising that I was going on his workshop - I hadn't connected the two! At The Photographers' Place I discovered all these other photographers such as Paul Caponigro, Minor White and Harry Callaghan. It didn't change what I wanted to do but verified it. These people had done wonderful

work but there was no reason why I should not do my own thing in this vein. I had already attained an ARPS and it amazed me that I could achieve that whilst being sort of photographically illiterate. One of the reasons for forming the Contemporary Group was to try to alleviate this. It's not a criticism of the RPS as they are not responsible for education but how can there be any depth to your work if you don't know where you've come from?

I met Janet Hall on a workshop where there was a discussion about "Beauty with a big B"! We remained in contact and then at the V&A I met Sam Tanner and Chris Beard. It was wonderful to have a conversation about the photography we had just seen and I thought, "Why can't this happen more often?" With this in mind, Janet and I decided to find out if there were other photographers in London who would like to get together on a regular basis. Before we started LIP you were working in isolation. There was nothing apart from camera clubs where it was all very competitive. There wasn't anything that was nourishing. LIP was founded with the idea of people getting together to develop this interest in photography and to be supportive of one another. It's not, "I'm in this to see if I can be better than everybody else." It's "I'm in this to see if I can do the best that I can and there are



Virginia Khuri

people that will help me to do that and I will help others to do that." That is the true sense of community. I think we still have that and I was really pleased to see in the last newsletter Tony Wallis' exhibition review which reflected this ethos. He is one of the newer members and it's a wonderful thing to see that it has passed down after twelve years and that the new people are picking this feeling up out of the air. It's good to have professionals and non-professionals, students and retired people because everybody has something to offer. Keep the commercial bit out in the market place where it belongs.

I did the MA at Leicester because I wanted to see if I could place myself in the contemporary context and within academia rather than on the commercial front. I don't think it changed my photography but it gave it some validation. I'm really thankful to the director Paul Hill for allowing me



Virginia Khuri

to develop in my own way. He encouraged me to do something in colour which I hadn't done since the family snapshots and travel pictures. When we were living in Lebanon I was a silk screen designer and worked directly with very bold graphic designs on fabric. The way colours interacted with each other was magic for me. When people found out I was doing black and white photography they could not understand it but it was another kind of interpretation. For the MA project I wasn't



Virginia Khuri

happy with the lack of control in colour printing. I don't like just clicking the camera and sending the roll of film to somebody else to interpret. If I were set up to do colour printing then it might be a different story but the interpretation is as important to me as the actual making of the negative. I see the colour part of chemical photography disappearing. I think the computer offers possibilities of interpretation. The colours are no longer harsh and subtle and there is the archival thing they are coming up with and the nice papers. I have started work on a most unfashionable colour project - sunsets! Not long before he died, Ray Moore held a workshop where we talked about colour. He was saying the same thing on the matter of interpretation but he said, "You know, one of these days I'm going to work in colour - sunrises and sunsets."

And he was the consummate black and white photographer!

My photography is a way of exploring - landscape, seascape, a journey, still life, an idea. I don't want to give up black and white printing to do it on the computer. I like the sloshing of the chemicals and the magic of watching the print coming up and the safelight atmosphere. I feel like an alchemist making transformations. I'll never forget the first time I saw John Blakemore doing a print and I was watching his hands flitting all over it. It was like a ballet with his hands. To me that's very exciting and doing it on the computer loses that magic for me. I think the black and white silver based prints will

become a sort of specialised thing just as there are people now doing the old methods. What worries me is that you will not be able to get a variety of good papers and chemicals. One could stockpile them but they don't keep! For this reason I may have to go to the computer. You will get the good papers and you will have the control of light which is what black and white printing is all about.

I also love making books. Every time I have a group of photographs that needs to be put together I will make a book which forces you to do two things. Firstly, you have to sequence them so that they make some sort of sense. Even in terms of pairing pictures on the page, you learn very quickly that some pictures fight and some live happily together. Sometimes you need to have three pictures. You don't learn this unless you do an exhibition or a book. Secondly, I sometimes like to combine a few words with pictures.

You should never have pictures that are explicable only through words but they can give an extra dimension or layer to make you think a little more about the picture. If the picture can't speak for itself first then there is something wrong and the photography is not being used to its full advantage. The pictures become secondary and they must always be primary. That is an old fashioned way of thinking and probably I will be taken to task! It's very important to be able to articulate but if you are a photographer, rather than a poet, it's more important to be able to see.⁵



Virginia Khuri

Susan Sontag's On Photography

An appreciation
by Bryan Fairfax

First published in 1977 this astounding *jeux d'esprit* of six essays and an anthology of quotations should be on every photographer's bookshelf- and for an impressive number of us it is. The following comments are to remind myself and, if need be others to keep rereading it.

In her brief preface Susan Sontag recalls that the nucleus of the book lay in a single essay which engendered further thoughts which, in turn, reproduced additional concepts and so on and on. The organic growth, surely not ended on publication, is the essence of the book and its disarming title. *On Photography* makes none of the usual references to equipment, materials, processing. There is no index - but is a meditation of cosmic scope on thoughts, at times subliminal, dredged up on the subject of appropriating a thing, the world even, via the camera.

To a considerable extent one is illumined, entertained, dumbfounded by literary legerdemain, intellectual virtuosity and stunning to-the-point comment, but the yin and yang which Sontag discovers within the complexity of photography scarcely outlines an artistic credo which might influence ones work. Indeed, the approach is to concentrate upon a philosophy of aesthetics, so the study of *On Photography*, its rereading that is, is broadly enriching rather than specifically instructive. The interplay of ideas can be complex and frequently one questions whether a point of exact focus is intended. Perhaps not. Ideas may simply be offered to engender our own further thoughts. But the language is always straightforward and mercifully without recourse to a thesaurus, as with many writers on art. For example: ensorcelled, erethism, oneiric, proleptic, velleity

from another writer's pretentious article on Mapplethorpe.

Never have I been able to mark (though I shouldn't!) so many pithy turns of phrase: we can hold the whole world in our heads through photography; they are pieces of the world; movies flicker and go out but photographs are objects that we can store (how one would value a photograph of Shakespeare); they are pieces of the world that anyone can acquire; they package the world; they are the most mysterious of all the objects that thicken our modern environment. Powerful statements which exist without further explanation. Most ironic of all is the tourists' snapping which is evidence that fun was had.

Each of the six essays deals with a central idea. Perhaps the leading one is *Photographic Evangels* in which she faces the knotty question: "Is photography art?". Sontag persuades us that it is, but in her many shades of qualification. Again you will not get a single positive lead. Nadar said that his finest portraits are of people he knows well, while Avedon responds to an instinctive first contact. Ansel Adams condemns the machine-gun approach as fatal

to serious results whereas many photographers believe in the virtue of lucky accident. She draws upon a wide range of artists: Cartier-Bresson, Minor White, Stieglitz, Callahan, Fox Talbot, Robert Frank, Weston; her examination is exhaustive. Throughout the book she deals with well over fifty major photographers from all periods to a greater or lesser extent.

Her deepest examination, uncompromising in fearless expression, concerns Diane Arbus; fashion photographer who portrayed the "beauty" of freaks and, as we now say, the disadvantaged. Dating from the 1970s her language is not that of today's political correctness.

During this essay Sontag delivers her broadest statement: "Much of modern art is devoted to lowering the threshold of what is terrible". Continuing her approach, even to this violent statement, she finds duality: that art can expose arbitrary taboos but at a stiff price: we become dulled and less able to react to real life.

Persevere through the maze and we find that photography beautifies all things even though, and here is the twist, some subjects, like sunsets, are too corny to photograph - because they look like photographs S

Susan Sontag's "On Photography" is published by Penguin Books.

Lineage

Valerie Josephs

A few years ago my father showed me a small (90 x 57 mm) carbon photograph which looks uncannily like me. It is a 'carte-de-visite'. Invented in Paris by André-Adolphe Disdéri in 1854, they were introduced into Britain in 1857. Eight or more images were made on the same glass negative, so that they could be produced in large numbers - the first form of photographic mass production. These paper prints were mounted on card with the photographer's details in decorative script on the reverse. There was a craze for collecting 'carte-de-visite' in special albums.

No one knows who she is.
She stands a little to one side,
the standard studio props,
gilt console table and tasselled drapery, behind.

It's circa eighteen eighty.
She holds a closed fan, her dress,
high neck edged with a 'pie-crust' frill,
has pleated flounces and a train.

Unlike photographs of my mother or grandmother,
I can't say "this is how she was when",
but I move back in time to a place
I've never been that may not be on a map.

And when I read Tolstoy or Gorky
I feel the wind from the plain,
hear the sounds of rivers,
see traces of blood on snow.

The London Artists' Book Fair

Helen Griffiths

The London Artists' Book Fair, which has been running for four years, was held at the Barbican Centre from 19th to 21st November 1999. This year's event was bigger than ever with over 100 exhibitors from France, Germany and Austria as well as from the UK.

I was there as part of the Brent Artists' Register*, a voluntary organisation with members drawn from inside and outside of Brent. Membership is by means of submitting work to show in the Artists' Gallery at the Willesden Green Library Centre. The Gallery is run by artists for artists of all levels of experience. We are always looking for new artists to show their work. This year for the first time we participated in the Book Fair.

What are Artists' Books? They are a way of presenting an artist's work in book format, instead of a book authored by an artist. Ever since books were appropriated by artists in the 1960s, they have contained a diversity of media encompassing photography, typography, print making and the electronic arts. Last year, Julia Wilson of 'Artbound'

put her book between two pieces of brown bread! The full range of artists' book production was on sale ranging from £2 - £1000. The energy and innovation of the Fair is reflected in the artists' encouragement of the handling and inspection of books. On our stand we were no exception. We had 10 artists with examples of their work. I was showing photographs but the other work was a mixture of monographs, books made from existing books, personal diaries, and blank books for commissions of work by calligraphy artist Pansy Campbell. We were organised by Bill Allen who has been making books since the early 1970s and who gave demonstrations of how to make humorous collages using free material found around the Barbican Centre. Another member, Marko Stepanov, read his diaries in Serbo-Croat with the English version projected onto a screen. There were other talks and performances held throughout the weekend. We sold work and this is always rewarding but we all felt we were participating in a stimulating and exciting environment. Approximately 2100 people attended the weekend. I visited the stand of LIP member Bartool Showghi and saw other LIP members who came to the event as visitors. I really enjoyed myself. s

**If you would like to know more about the Brent Artists' Register please tel: 020 8968 0551.*

Countdown 2000: the final hurdle is passed

The very last selection meeting for Countdown 2000 took place at the Radisson Grafton Hotel on the 17th February. The wine flowed freely and Quentin was naturally in expansive mood, having steered the project from its beginnings to this, the final selection of photos. Indeed the idea for the project came from him in the first place. Currently exhibition space is proving hard to find. If you have any ideas on this, please contact Quentin Ball urgently. Tel: 020 8444 5505, email: quentinball@aol.com



Tony Mayne