



journal of
London
Independent
Photography

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Carol Hudson



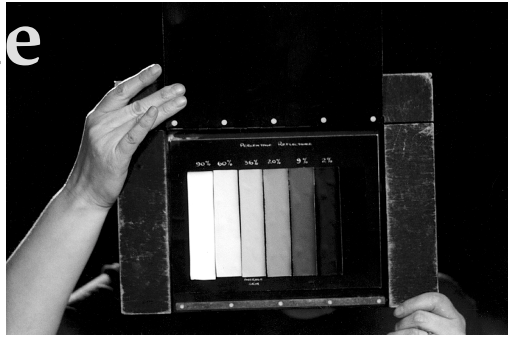
Jeanine Billington



Jonathan Bayer

LIPprofile

For the sixth in our series, Clare Glenister talked to Carol Hudson, recently elected Exhibitions Organiser



things. That was when I became interested in using a large format camera and making rather than taking photographs. The images I made at that time eventually became an exhibition which was quite well received. I also attended a bookbinding class at the college and made a number of small books. It is interesting to see how fashionable this has become now that desktop publishing has made it much easier

Beginnings

My interest in photography started when a friend of mine went to a photography evening class. I thought that it sounded interesting so I went with him. I did not have a camera at the time so borrowed one from my friend. I was really pleased with the first film I developed but my partner, Tony Mayne (former photographer and now cameraman with the BBC) said, "You'll never be a photographer". That was when I determined to be one!

I was working for an environmental health department - killing rats and clearing drains and things of that kind. (Well, what else can you do with a philosophy degree!) During the following year I bought a second-hand camera, went to more evening classes (City & Guilds 740 and A level) and gave up my job to do a foundation art course. I applied to a number of colleges for a full-time photography course.

At that time Derby and Nottingham Trent Universities offered a joint course in Creative Photography and you had to elect which one to attend. Knowing very little about the courses, I had no real preference but as I was waiting for my interview I chatted to someone called David Gepp who informed me that he would be going to Derby "to work with John Blakemore". I had never heard of John Blakemore but thought "If it's good enough for you...!" So Derby is where I went. It turned out to me a most fortuitous choice and photography became and remains an obsession.

I used to think photography was about creating pictures by framing bits of the world : selecting carefully those things that would make pictures, that would, if you like, bear witness. At some point, during my time as a student, I began to play around with things in front of the camera, to construct



Carol Hudson

Work

After finishing the photography course I came to London and worked with a community group in Barnet where I taught photography to young people with special needs. I really enjoyed the work which I did for a couple of years. In fact I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I did think seriously about teaching (but thought that I was probably too old to be competing with young graduates). So I freelanced for a while and had a number of interesting commissions. I began some part-time lecturing at Brunel University and I am still, to this day, enjoying my classes there. At around the same time I started working at Ealing College (now Thames Valley University) on a part-time basis. After a couple of years I was offered a position managing the media services department and I have stayed there ever since.



Carol Hudson

Personal Work

I have always been interested in photographing the domestic, the ordinary and everyday things of life and have rarely felt the need to go in search of the exotic (except, perhaps, when I needed a photograph of lots of snow for a piece of work I was making a few years ago). This may, in part, be a feminist issue. I am concerned that the personal is political. Often, I photograph things from the garden but I am not so much interested in making pretty pictures of flowers as in using the flowers as a vehicle for ideas. My photography has always gone hand in hand with an interest in philosophy and one of my first projects attempted to speak about perception - though it consisted of

photographs of flowers. The work was about the way the eye sees as opposed to the way the camera sees. We do not have stationary, one-eyed vision. The pictures were built up with layers of opacity so you had to look at the photograph as a picture and not as if it were transparent. The pictures were also made in opposition to the idea of perfection - finding the perfect mushroom and making sure that the light was absolutely wonderful!

In another set of work I photographed a lot of dead birds. This series began when I found a dead wren in the front garden. The little bird, the victim of a road accident,



Carol Hudson

lay so silent and still (very different to its active scolding life). I picked it up to admire its plumage and was struck by the similarity between the stillness of this death and a photograph. Both stopped in time at one precise moment, both allowing me an intimacy (a kind of voyeuristic looking) which would never have been possible in life. Instinctively I decided to photograph the wren. I found more dead birds in the streets around my home and brought them back and photographed them before burying them in my garden. It sounds strange, but it was important to me that I should honour the birds and so I tried to make beautiful photographs. As the project progressed, I realised that I was exploring all kinds of attitudes towards mortality and death. I was aware of how these images might fit within the tradition of still life. Eventually I had a sufficient number of images to form an exhibition. Obviously, this project took a long time to complete as I didn't go out and kill the birds!

I have always had something of an obsession with dead things and right from the start I photographed dead cats or rabbits. I think lots of photographers are fascinated by death. Perhaps they find a similarity between dead things and photography in the way I do.

After that project I didn't do a lot of photography; I would take pictures but not do anything with them. Then, a few years ago, feeling the need to motivate myself, I changed direction a little bit and did an MA in philosophy at Birkbeck College followed by another in design and media arts at the University of Westminster. All this hard studying gave me even more excuses for not making photographs.



Carol Hudson



Carol Hudson

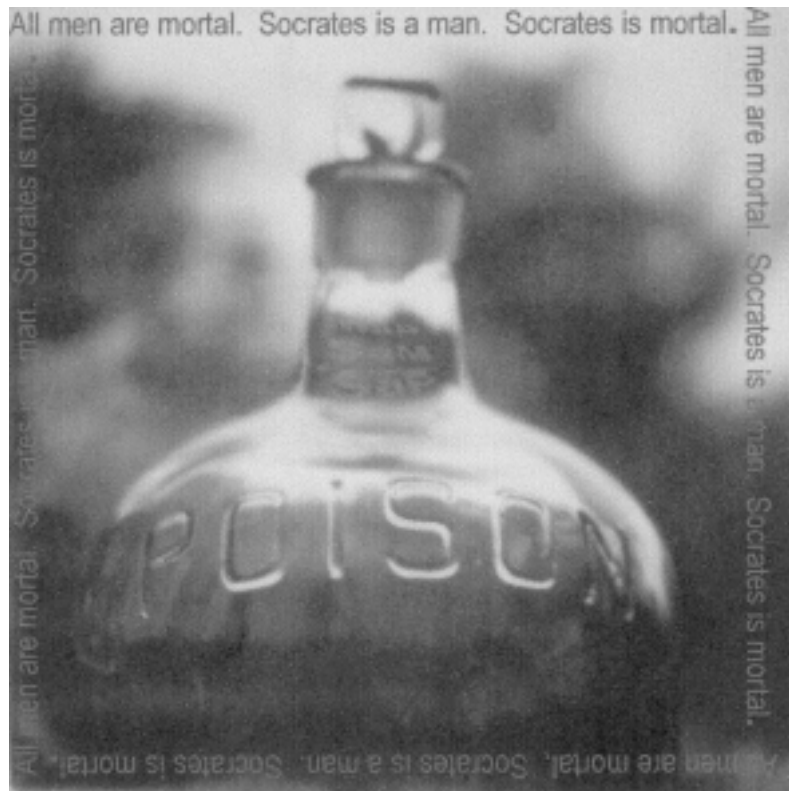
Eventually, I decided to try and combine photography and logic in an attempt to bring together the two disciplines I enjoyed. It was quite tricky! What I made in the end became more a piece of art than a photographic project. It used photographs but also screen printing and text.

Until this point I had believed that text and pictures didn't go together unless it was for photojournalistic or editorial reasons. Although, upon reflection I realised that this is not true.

There is a lot of political work that uses image and text together very successfully. I think you can do anything you want really. In the end it's about communication. Everybody should be encouraged to communicate through their photography instead of trying to make pretty pictures or imitate other photographs. This may

mean venturing outside the boundaries of what is traditionally termed photographic, especially within the sphere of personally expressive work. It is very important to have an awareness of photographic history. If people don't understand the tradition from which their work has evolved, they are just going to imitate what they see. Understanding and working within a tradition allows you to push beyond the boundaries in ways that are meaningful, not just for yourself but for others too.

Personal expression is always a bit tricky because you could say a screaming baby is expressive, but we cannot compare its cries to a piece of music or art. Our intention as photographers, or artists, or any kind of practitioner, is to make something that other people can relate to. In the end it doesn't matter in the least what you intended to make. Once the work is set free in the world it has to fend for itself. If it doesn't communicate what was intended, or says something else completely, this may not matter. The world will contextualise it, if it sees fit.



Carol Hudson

Sometimes we are not clear what we are trying to show or we fail to achieve what we hoped. However, I think it is a bit of a cop out when people say it's up to the viewer to read something into it. In order to understand any cultural artifact, we need a key otherwise it's meaningless. A private language is simply that - private. Not a bit of good to anyone who wishes to communicate.

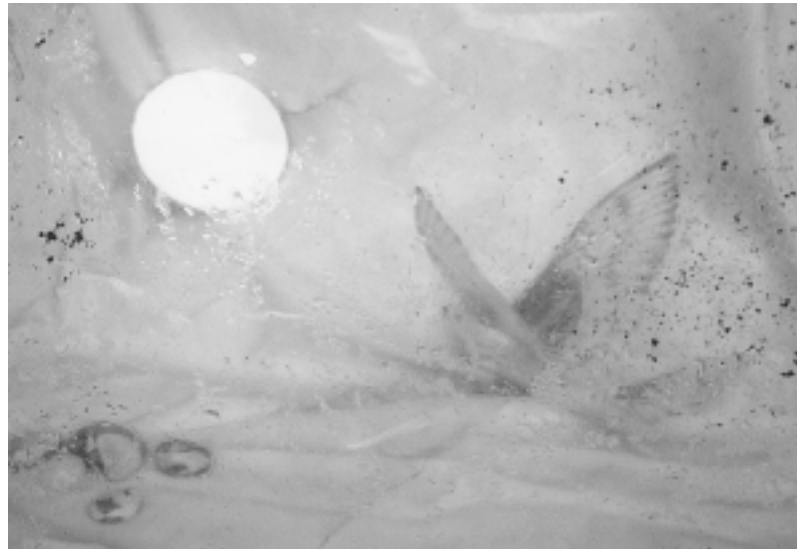
LIP

I had some work in an exhibition at Brunel University where I met Peter Marshall. He invited me to join 'Framework' which was a precursor of LIP. I went to the wonderful meetings that used to take place on Tuesday evenings at the Photographers' Gallery. They acted as a magnet for all kinds of people interested in photography. When LIP was founded I joined and have been a member ever since. I'm not always active but I've been involved in a couple of exhibitions and have recently taken on the role of Exhibitions Organiser.

Digital

In my last project, which I did when I was at Westminster University, I used computers so I am happy to use anything as long as it can make something that is communication. A computer is a tool in the way that anything else is. I can do darkroom black and white printing reasonably well but I don't enjoy it and would happily give it up if I could do it equally well digitally. At the moment, I think that very little good personally expressive work is produced on computers but this is not to say that there is no potential for it. The current emphasis is on print quality. I am sure that darkrooms will have the same fate as screenprinting and etching presses. Perhaps that is regrettable in one sense, but there will always be some that are interested in these techniques. I would encourage people to try traditional photography. There is still a lot of potential despite the changes.

Perhaps the golden era of photography as documentary has disap-



Carol Hudson

peared. It never really had a monopoly upon truth despite the fact that it was often considered an authenticating medium. It has taken 150 years for the public to acknowledge this. It is sometimes said that the devil is in the detail. And it was certainly the detail (especially that of spacial relationships) that proved so convincing over the years. Now that everybody can very easily manipulate images and delete the bits they don't like on their own PC, there is much more scepticism. Social anthropologists of the future will look back to the images before computers came along as the heyday of authenticity. Prints made after say 1980 will have a different historical value.

Current Work

The snapshot aesthetic is very fashionable. Some work I like and some I don't. Some of it is innovative and I can see that it has some purpose. I like the work of Nan Goldin and found Richard Billingham's first project very moving. Perhaps I am being a bit naive but I think there is an ethical dimension to work that uses friends or family to make intimate work which is then put on public display. It seems that the gallery-going public is voyeuristic and likes to look into these intimate worlds. When you are talking about the art world you are talking really about a commercial world. Prices for photographs are shooting up now and this means that the control of photography is in the

hands of dealers. They can make or break photographers. If photographers are taken into the stable of a dealer they will be guided in their careers and anything produced will be important and, therefore, saleable. If they are not part of this world then no matter how exciting and innovative their work, it won't have the same worth in terms of money. Art is a commodity and so are the artists. It is a commercial game and I am not sure it has anything to do with personal expression.

Education

Photography (now called lens based media) is being taught to thousands of students but I am unsure whether it is being taught in a way that is useful to the individuals. Many colleges and universities now teach business and management skills alongside photography but it is still the case that few students will get jobs related to the media industry. It is said that there are more students studying at the moment than there are jobs available. The lucky ones will end up teaching and the unlucky ones will work in a bar somewhere and try to pay for their photography as best they can. Media is still a sexy subject and college courses are expanding like crazy. The experience of having studied photography is absolutely wonderful and it is good that everybody has an opportunity to do this. If you can afford not to earn a living from it that's even better.

Communication

In photography you need a key just as much as you do for propositional calculus. We all think we can read photographs and we

terrible but using aesthetic criteria (picture quality and craftsmanship) they would have to be right at the top. Changing context changes meanings and the best pictures are made for a particular reason. They

events without photographs differently from ones with them. As time passes, the photograph becomes the memory because that is all we have left! I have seen photographs of the Taj Mahal so I think I know how it looks! When I see it for myself and it doesn't look like that I will still have that image in my mind because it is so strong. Somebody said we have reduced the world to a handful of postcards and I think it is true!

Photography is very influential on our perception. We use photographs as evidence that we were there. We collect experiences and have our pictures taken in each place to prove to ourselves that we have been there. It's like looking in mirrors!

The Future

In the most foolhardy way I have just committed myself to something. I contacted Professor Paul Hill and asked him what he thought of the idea of my doing a PhD at De Montfort. He seemed to think this feasible so I expect to begin in September! I will have to rearrange my life to make time for it. I hope to carry on from the work I began at Westminster, combining logic and photography. At the moment I am researching the possibilities connected with fuzzy logic. It has to do with class inclusion and is interesting photographically because it means that things do not have to be just black or white. The photograph I would take to a desert island is the one taken of the Earth from space. That would give me a sense of where and who I am. I don't know who took the photograph (or if it was a human being!) but there is no other to compare to that!



Carol Hudson

can't. Many times I have been asked "What's a good photograph?". It is an interesting question and you have to learn by looking and making and looking again. It has nothing to do with preferences. Pictures I like are not necessarily good. There are some pictures of cats that I just adore but I know that they are trash photographs! Some pictures that I evaluate as being good I don't like at all. For example, some of the Mapplethorpes are excellent but I don't like them!

I think that criticism is a positive thing and that critics have a valuable role. They point you in the right direction and give you insights and allow you to make assessments based upon other pieces of work. They have to be good and give reasons for their evaluations. There is a metaphorical level of interpretation. It is not just a description of what is out there. Good photographs have layers of meaning. They can be evaluated according to the criteria you are using. Using feminist criteria, I am going to think that Mapplethorpe's pictures are

are focused on a particular area that they are trying to record.

Memory

There are some pictures of my family that I like that I know are not good pictures. They have captured moments that mean something to me. One of the valuable things that photographs do is act as aides memoires. Having photographs has changed the nature of our memory and it will change again now that we have digital ones. Apparently, we have forgotten about 80% of what we ever knew but when we look at a photograph of an event we are reminded of it. We remember



Carol Hudson

Jeanine Billington INDIA



Jeanine Billington

My first trip to India was for a gallery that needed some photographs as part of an exhibition on Indian Art. For me there was a double attraction: India's endless source of imagery and the gallery's offer to show my own creative work. I spent over two months on my own exploring the sub-continent, concentrating my work on Benares and the Thar Desert in Rajasthan.

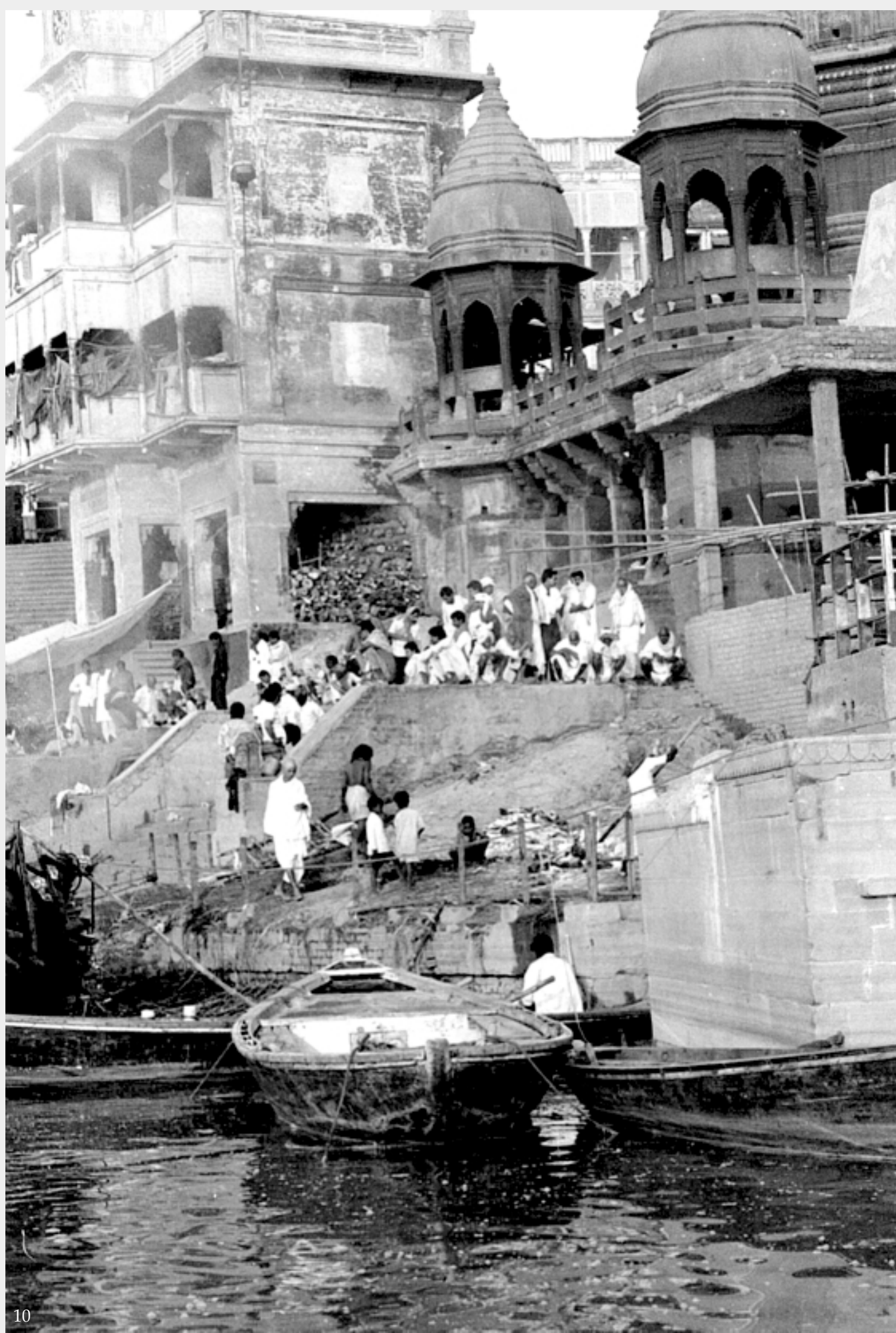
I was attracted by India's ethereal quality, by its culture rooted in a timeless past, and by its unique mixture of religion, commerce, beauty and decay. The intention was to

record a feeling about India's peculiar complexity. For this, I concentrated on the details of everyday activities. Often I found myself observing an ambivalent spectacle that had no single meaning or clear resolution.

The photographs were mostly taken at dawn and dusk through the ever present haze of dust and smoke. And the images were determined more by colour and shape than by specific objects. I used negative film to get a more faded, dusty quality. In the end almost everything was shot on a Leica with an 80 mm lens. Travelling alone made it easier to meet

people and be accepted. At the camel fair or on the Ganges, I always started before daybreak when the fires are lit and tea is brewed. After a few days the camel traders invited me to their tents to share those early morning cuppas.

My latest project is on the South Coast, waiting for the tide to go out in order to photograph the dead fishes left on the shores in various states of decomposition and decay. I am interested in the transience of their life and moved by the melancholy beauty and extreme sadness of the scene.





Jeanine Billington

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SMALL AND BEAUTIFUL

Andy Moyer reviews The Photo Book

The millennium provided publishers with the perfect excuse to launch a number of retrospectives, compilations and general histories of photography, three of which I felt compelled to buy, in the way that you do. They range from the absorbing and truly colossal "Century - a history of the twentieth century in photos" compiled by Bruce Bernard* - weighing in at an arm-straining 12 lbs on the bathroom scales, through the merely very big "How You Look At It: Photographs of the 20th Century"* to the pocket-sized "The Photo Book".

I'd recommend all three but if I had to choose just one of them it would have to be "The Photo Book". It may be small (and it's not perfectly formed) but "The Photo Book" is a real gem, a reference book that invites repeated visits and explorations. Containing 500 photographs (give or take a few multiple images) by 500 photographers, arranged alphabetically from Aarsmann, Jacques-Laurent to Zachmann, Patrick, the book covers every

genre of photography and every epoch from the early pioneers to the present.

The book's strength is its organisation. All 500 photographers get exactly the same treatment: one page each with one photograph, uncropped, captioned and dated, given pride of place; with a brief text combining a discussion of the image with a few lines about the photographer's work and something of the contexts - aesthetic, commercial, personal, technical - that have influenced it.

Obviously you can't get to know a photographer's work from a single photograph however representative it might appear. But the combination of photographs and written commentary opens up the image in a way I found stimulating. I don't agree with a number of the comments about the work of photographers I am familiar with and a few of the images chosen jar (a colour work to represent Fay Godwin?) or disappoint (William Eggleston's least interesting photo ever). But then it would be odd if everything felt just so.

The photographs - black and white, colour or tinted - are reproduced well. And great credit must go to Ian Jeffrey for his succinct, informative and beautifully crafted commentaries.

The publishers have clearly made a big effort to be as internationally representative as possible. Photographers from 59 countries are included, and although the USA and Europe dominate this doesn't feel unbalanced. (However, as I write this, I realise I'm simply not qualified to judge whether the claims of others to be included, say from Africa, have been fairly treated or not. Suffice it to say that African photographers number less than 10 in this collection of 500.)

Most (all?) of the big names in photography are here and many of the classic photographs of the last 150 years as well, amongst which the news images grant inclusion to some otherwise little-known photographers such as Bill Epbridge or Nick Ut.

Above all, this is a book to go exploring in, to make discoveries in. Hands up who knows the work of, say, Ouka Lele (Barbara Allende) or Guy Le Querrec or Raghu Rai? I certainly didn't - and a lot more besides. One of the principal discoveries I made was not of a particular photographer but of the connections between them. Simply by grouping all these photographers together and treating them all equally it's possible to see the associations between their work emerge, not just in the suggested cross-references (some of which I found illuminating, others not) but simply by turning the pages.

How about this example? I came across a French photographer who began working over a century ago and "specialized in the architecture of Paris", especially "the old streets of central Paris before their demolition". Eugene Atget, surely. But no, this is a description of the work of one Charles Marville who, just like Atget, produced his work as a historical record for the city authorities twenty or more years earlier (in the 1860s and 70s). The photograph of Marville's reproduced here - "Château de L'Ambigu" c. 1875 - bears an uncanny resemblance to an Atget work: a still street scene empty of people, full of the energy of its absent city dwellers, and in the centre foreground the most



Jan Groover - Tybee Forks and Starts (k)



George Hoyningen-Huene
Bathing Suits by Izod

minimal metal pissoir leaking into the street, topped by an elegant lamp. (Is this structure the 'château' of the title?) Astonishing!

Of course 500 is a small number in the global history of photographers and many names I know are not included, especially those working now. But Boris Michailov, the recent Citibank prizewinner is here, and so is Wolfgang Tillmans, the Turner prizewinner, as well as a surprising number of their (our) contemporaries.

I have a few quibbles, the main one being the miniscule (I mean



Fay Godwin

tiny) size of the print, a real problem for those of us with dodgy eyesight -especially as I can't put the book down once I've opened it... A great little book - and all for £6.95.

**Century* compiled by Bruce Bernard, Phaidon Press pp 1,120, hardback; £29.95.
How You Look At It: Photo-

graphs of the 20th Century, edited by Thomas Weski and Heinz Liesbrock, Thames and Hudson, pp 528, 300 duotone (black and white) 104 colour images, hardback; £29.95.

The Photo Book mini edition, Phaidon Press, pp 520, 500-plus photographs (colour and black and white), softback; £6.95.

QTip

Sunny 16!

One can find oneself in all kinds of situations taking outdoor photography. The light meter will generally think one is looking at 18% grey, and will give one a 'correct' exposure - the meter doesn't know what you are seeing. Or one can find oneself without a meter. If the lighting is bright and sunny, use the 'Sunny 16 Rule' - set your shutter speed to equal the film speed, and expose at F16, ie, your film speed is ASA 125, you would set your shutter 125th of a second and expose at F16. (There are obvious permutations of the formula.) Works like a charm.

EYE ON THE ESTUARY: THAMES LANDSCAPES

Photographs by
Jonathan Bayer

*A Review by
William Bishop*



Jonathan Bayer

One of the first things to be said about this book is that you will need a very deep book-case to house it since it is 40 cm in length. But, as far as displaying the images is concerned, this is a bold format which works.

Jonathan Bayer, a founder member of LIP, discovered that his particular taste for colour photography found very little support among the membership in those hoary days of LIP back in the late 1980s. He therefore has not taken an active part but has remained connected with our self-supporting institution.

The fact that he is American comes out firmly in his work: very wide views, apparently using three different panoramic formats. The colour is delicate and deliberate with sometimes a feeling of some of those U.S. East Coast beach scenes in the book 'Cape Light' by Joel Meyerovitz and at other times the muted musical qualities achieved in colour by William Eggleston. And yet Bayer has painstakingly used his own eyes and developed his own photographic voice - for he is no novice or innocent when it comes to photography.

Essentially these pictures have breadth and space to breath - and

that is not entirely due to format, though that helps. They are monumental and their stillness is a homage to what is in the picture: the quality of things and the being of place.

Other qualities to these images are elegance and elegy. There is even the sense, despite the wide format, of Raymond Moore's illuminated greyscapes but in colour, showing great delicacy in perception and photographic handling. It is akin to muted singing: an elegaic celebration; a contemporary American eye for the Thames estuary in the style of Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' where cattle have wound slowly o'er the lea and the ploughman has plodded his weary way homewards leaving the world to Jonathan Bayer: 'Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, And all the air a solemn stillness holds.'

There is a sense of the graveyard to this waterscape imagery and yet it is a graveyard full of life, yet requiring a keen eye to see it. That is the point on which this book turns to becoming a homage - a homage to the life pulse of the estuary beating beneath the environmental impact of a civilisation that has almost lost its soul. The book contains an introduction by Ian Jeffrey who ruminates from

his own cultural perspective and includes an afterword by the photographer to set the record straight. But whoever comes to this book will make their own judgements. It is said that any reviewer says more about themselves than the work under consideration. And indeed, for the best, a reviewer can only express their impressions as clearly as possible and bring in any references that they think relevant or offload any relatively suitable cultural luggage that they happen to be carrying. So, speaking for myself, I would say that this is a book worth having and certainly worth taking a look at. It is one that comes from the heart, and such things are really beyond price.

If you have ever considered buying a single photographic print, then the price of this book with 45 remarkable reproductions will seem like a give-away.

EYE ON THE ESTUARY: THAMES LANDSCAPES

Photographs by Jonathan Bayer,
JLB Publishing, London 2000. 96pp
21 x 40 cm. 45 panoramic colour
photographs £25.

Available for additional £3 p&p
from Jonathan Bayer, 29 Belsize
Park, London NW3 4DX.



Jonathan Bayer