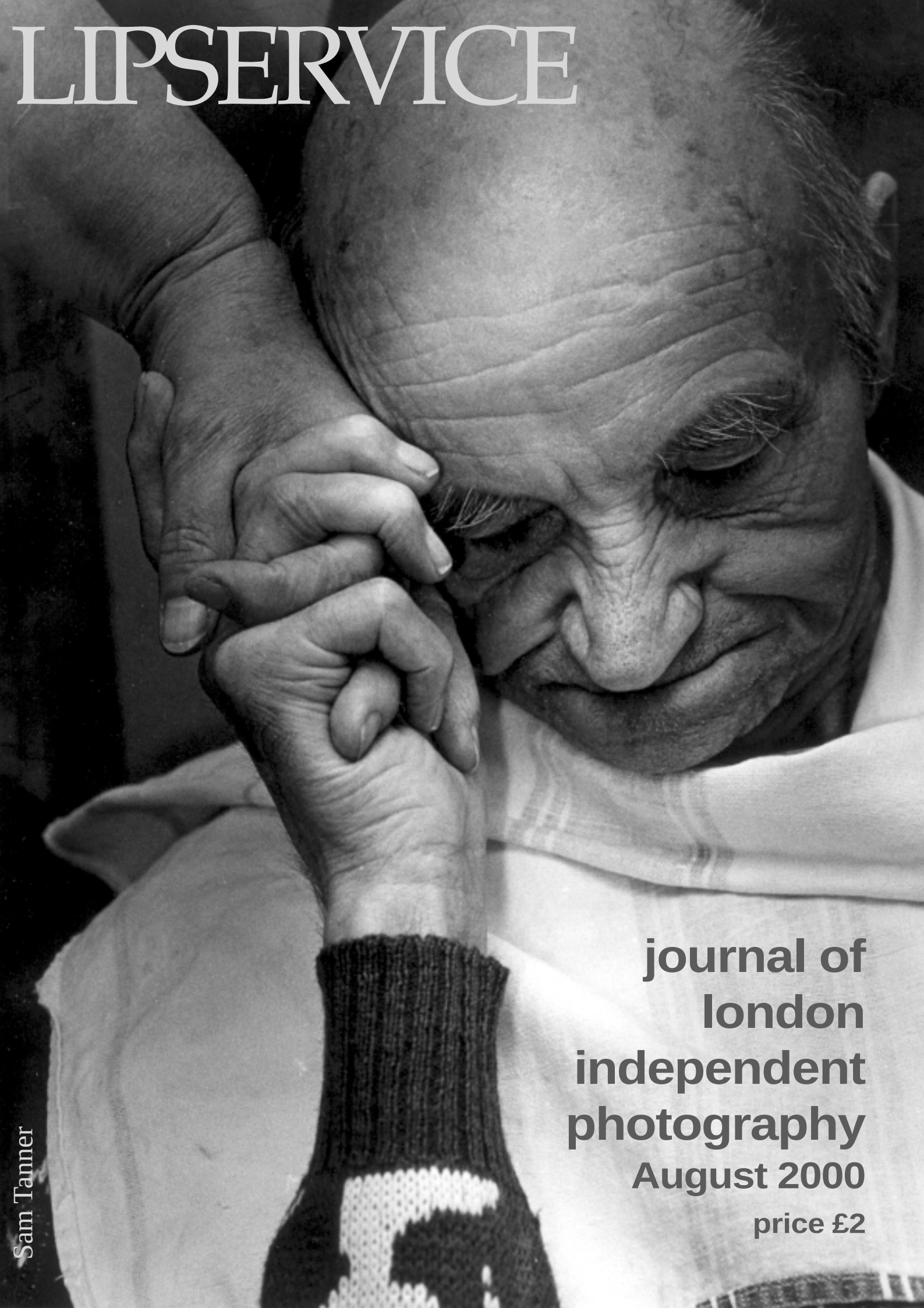
LIPSERVICE



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Sam Tanner

Contents

Paul Strand (1890-1976): Sixty Years of Photographs 4
Bryan Fairfax

In Reply to Peter 5
Matthew Rake

Coming to my senses: A review of Eva-Maria Riegler's Exhibition 6
Nancye Gault

The Wall: a poem 6
Joyce Fox

Snowdon's Peak: Lord Snowdon at the NPG 7
Peter Jennings

PhotoCine: Bringing photography to the Big Screen 7
Jennifer Hurstfield

Number 9: a photo essay 8
Quentin Ball

LIProfile: Sam Tanner 12
Jennifer Hurstfield

Photo Events 17

LIP Events **back cover**

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Eva-Maria Riegler

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Stop Press

In the last issue of LIPSERVICE we reviewed the Citibank Private Bank Photography Prize. Nominations are now being sought for 2001. Candidates for the £15,000 Prize must have exhibited or published (in print or electronic form) a substantial body of photographic-based work in the UK between 1 November 1999 and 31 October 2000.

The work of short-listed artists will be exhibited at The Photographers' Gallery from 2 February to 24 March 2001. The winner will be announced on 1 March.

Nomination forms can be found on www.photonet.org.uk or mailed from the Gallery (tel: 020 7831 1772 email: info@photonet.org.uk).

The closing date for nominations is 15 September 2000.

Editorial

Yoke Matze

Quentin at the Countdown 2000 Selection

Yoke Matze

Paul Hill & Mick Williamson

Countdown 2000 is ready for Lift-Off!
On 10 July Mick Williamson and Paul Hill made the final selection of images for the Countdown 2000 exhibition which runs from 30 August to 10 September at the gallery@Oxo. For new LIP members and those who have been hibernating here is a description.....
The exhibition represents the culmination of work by 43 members of LIP covering every day of 1999. The 365 photographs will give the audience an overview of the year in London interpreted by photographers who have responded in their individual ways to the spirit of the capital in the last year of the 20th Century. Thus the passage of time - how London celebrated this significant year - is perceived through a variety of approaches and techniques producing a visually stimulating show. The choice of images, to be displayed as twelve calender-like panels, was made by the members of the project. From these Paul and Mick selected sixty or so which will be enlarged and given prominence.
To mount this exhibition LIP won a Lottery Grant of £5000 under the Millennium Festival's *Awards for All* programme. It is appearing daily on the Internet at www.spelthorne.ac.uk/mp/. There is also a strong possibility that it will be at another venue in the Autumn. Hats off especially to Quentin Ball for organising the whole thing. See Photo Events for more infomation (page 18).
May we draw your attention also to the AGM on 30 September? This year it is being held in conjunction with a print critique by Addie Elliott from The Photographers' Gallery. It is important for the future of LIP that you attend in order to voice your opinions and to ensure that LIP is providing you with what you want.
See LIP Programme for more information on the AGM.

Clare Glenister *Jennifer Hurstfield*

Is this magazine your first introduction to London Independent Photography? Want to show your work to other photographers? Interested in looking at and discussing photography? Searching for new directions in your photography?

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PAUL STRAND 'Sixty Years of Photographs'

a review by Bryan Fairfax

Paul Strand was born in New York in 1890 of Bohemian descent. Together with Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) and Edward Weston (1886-1958) they are generally regarded as the central point around which the great American photographic movement developed. Their work spanned nearly one hundred years from the 1880s when Stieglitz reached early maturity to 1976 when Strand died in Orgeval, France, Weston occupying a nearly symmetrical position in between. These artists produced works of immense influence; late-impressionism through vivid realism to isolation of form and abstraction. Yet at all times they maintained absolute integrity in their use of the medium.

In the main, contact prints were made from large format negatives. All the information was contained within the negative itself requiring minimal printing in or dodging; exceptional skills in exposure and related development being the only controls. Toning was undertaken mainly for archival purposes. Strand went so far as to prefer to produce only one or two prints from a negative.

Theirs was an aesthetic which upheld the classical ideal of pure photography. Freedom extended only to observation, the imagination which flowed from it and the choice of angle, lighting conditions and visualisation of the end result. Manipulation was a painterly, not a photographic technique. I recently bought the Aperture monograph on Strand which was published in 1976 and found it to be a book of wide ranging insight. Aperture are the publications to go for. Always superbly printed and bound and with texts mercifully free from critics' cliches. Here there is an excellent essay by Calvin Toinkins and extensive excerpts from correspondence and interviews.

Strand studied with the outstanding photo-researcher Lewis Hine whose work exposing child labour brought about legislation which ended the abuse. Significantly he tought at the Ethical Cultural School in New York and ethics governed the integrity of Strand's work thereafter. This quality was quickly acknowledged by Stieglitz, to whom Strand was introduced by Hine, and the last two issues of Camera Work published seventeen of his photographs. Incidentally Camera Work (1903-17), the finest of early photography periodicals, is available complete in the marvellous Taschen series published in 1997. Otherwise there was no wide recognition of his work. He was, for some years, an independent cine cameraman yet his profound artistry and a thoughtful unworldliness never gave him commercial success.

The famous monumentality of Strand's output, the stillness, the serene moment before action, produces a hypnotic effect upon us as we gaze into, and further into his images. Cartier-Bresson said "looking is a very heavy thing", his nice Englished version of his French thought, and this weight of meaning, of juxtaposed forms, of tone, texture, human gesture, can press upon us to an extraordinary degree in Strand's images. One is gripped not only by the seductive quality of the print itself but by our attraction to a presence, and emanation which confers an existence, a soul even, upon rocks, trees, buildings and upon men and women who are lost and confused by an all-defeating world.

It was Strand himself who defined his personal approach. He quoted Cartier-Bresson's celebrated 'decisive moment' and translated it into his own terms as the moment of decision. Cartier-Bresson reacted to a momentary happening: Strand acted when his thoughts were marshalled into a decision. Few photographers have so revealed the inner, the unseen essence of a subject in their images. The stoical, uncomplaining existence of nature; the once-loved child beyond the broken and begrimed peddlar. Strand was never tired by waiting. The correct light and its direction might not be a matter of hours, but rather of weeks or seasons. Even the tone of the sky, or the cloud formation had to accord exactly with the mood which he visualised.
For his version of a wonderful primitive church in New Mexico he would watch for storm clouds to come over the horizon and when they began to gather he would set off in his car to arrive when, with hope, they would form the desired backdrop. But not always. He had to journey in hope many times before finding the image which he had visualised; three simple adobe forms, windowless, shaddowed from white to black against a sky of identical tones and textures. Earth to air.

So deeply rooted in aesthetic foundations was he that it seems oddly out of character to have attached a false lens to his huge 5x7 reflex camera so that he could tuck the taking lens under his arm and so disguise his actions. Though he never used this to voyeuristic ends it was in this way that he produced some deeply moving portraits. Most memorable perhaps being the tragic portrait of a handsome beggarwoman with 'blind' written on a label hung around her neck; her open eyes staring wildly. His sensitivity was so near the surface that when a street seller questioned that he might be taking her picture he virtually gave up this method.

Strand's artistic goal, appropriately simple yet monumental, was to make a portrait of the world. But then there was not the facility for rapid travel and he never had the financial resources to fulfill his intentions geographically. His creed expressed rather his artistic sensibilities; his empathy with all peoples and all places. The extent of his travels was limited to the US and Mexico, parts of Europe (especially France), Morocco, Egypt and Ghana. In Ghana he was considerably hindered by the ebullience of the people and their natural curiosity, his wife's good humour and patience affording the protection which eventually made success possible in one of his world-portrait books.

The world-portrait can also be taken to represent the all-enveloping range of his vision the world in a grain of sand. Rarely has such mastery been shown in so many subjects: portraiture, landscape, still life, venacular or folk architecture, archeology, traditional occupations, abstracts, city and village life-styles

all portrayed in prints of sumptuously resonant tones. Not high-key as Cartier-Bresson, not uncanny as Ansel Adams nor pungent as Weston, but tactile and textured with dimensional qualities. His most wonderful tone is a rich charcoal grey which acts as the tonal focal point for the blossomy whites and infinite blacks.
He was able to print on platinum papers, which he obtained from England, until the mid-thirties. When the source discontinued he added his own platinum coating to bromide paper and intensified the image in gold toner. It was not labour but artistic reservation that compelled him to limit his work to unique prints; usually contact prints. He was never into print sales - Stieglitz sold barely a handful at his Gallery 291 - and a talent for self-promotion was not part of his make up.

Until his later middle age when the Museum of Modern Art devoted its first one-man photographic show to Strand and his remarkable series of world-portrait books was published, Strand was little known outside artistic photographic circles. He never commanded the attentions of the major magazines as did de Mayer, Hoyningen-Huene, Horst, and later, Penn and Avadon. But he did achieve a reputation for a small number of outstanding films, most especially for the Walt Whitman inspired 'The Plough that Broke the Plains' of 1935.

From the first attraction of a Strand photograph one has the growing sense of an undivided subject matter made powerful through the image's structural form. To study every print in depth is a lesson through which we can clean our own powers of observation and reinforce the need always to ask oneself "what am I trying to photograph", to identify the essential.

In a Strand image there is an underlying cohesive structure: triangle, rectangle, parallel and converging lines, diagonals, S-curves, receding planes, structural blocks. There are amazing crowd scenes based upon one of these formations which hold together many vignettes of social interaction. These scenes overcome one's normally instant response to two-dimensional art for one is drawn into the many little events which lie within and it takes time to identify and enjoy each detail.

Strand positively excluded colour from his work - it is the material of painting - and used monochrome to represent every hue with the advantage of a unified palette: Whistler's 'symphony in colour' translated to the photographic print. Yet supreme control, profound artistry and intimidating integrity set aside, there is freedom, joyous and sympathetic, in all his subjects. Admiration and love of all things motivated his desire to acquire them and enshrine them according to his own talents. I had no idea of the strength and range of Strand's work until I saw the Aperture monograph - one has always to do so much homework!

Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photographs was published by Aperture, 1976 (£22)
Three of Strand's films may be seen by appointment at the British Film Institute for modest charges. Call Kathleen Dixon on 020 7957 4726 for details:
'Manhattan' 1921 7 mins
'The Plough that Broke the Plains' 1935 28 mins
'Native Land' 1942 90 mins (the latter two also on video)
'Strand under the Dark Cloth' 1989 81 mins (a documentary made for TV is also at BFI)

In reply to Peter

Matthew Rake

It was interesting to read in January's LipService Sarah Thelwell's desire to gather stories to complement her photos together with Peter Jennings' pronouncement that photography is a 'wordless medium'.

'As anyone who has any love of the medium knows,' Peter declared, 'photography must stand up without words or face losing a hundred and fifty years progress. It is a wordless medium. Those who use words to support their photographs lack confidence in themselves and the medium. Or are they trying to justify being an artist to the 'marketplace'? To hell with that! If you are a frustrated writer or film director go elsewhere.'

A film director? But film was once a 'wordless medium' and I am sure that when talkies emerged in the late 1920s, there were critics who claimed that the integrity of the film medium was being undermined.

So how far are we to take this 'wordless medium' idea? Are we not allowed to read the text August Sander wrote explaining his People of the Twentieth Century photos? If we come across a copy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, should we look at Walker Evans' photos but ignore James Agee's accompanying text?

Was Duane Michels wasting his time when he wrote stories to his accompany his photographs? Should Gillian Wearing not have asked the strangers to write a message and then photographed them with it? Were these photographers 'losing a hundred and fifty years of progress'? Or were they helping to make it?

Peter ends his article exhorting photographers to work 'outside society' and not be 'accountable' to the 'art establishment' or to 'commerce'. But this, I suggest, is not always the way to create great art. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were in thrall to the commerce and the art establishment of their day. They worked within society – accepting commissions from rich patrons, the Church and the various governments in Italy.

The battles that Peter fights – the photographer as independent artist, the assertion of a 'true photographic vision' – are ones that Stieglitz wrestled with 100 years ago. He won those arguments. Let's move on. Let photographers not just look at the world, but question the way we look at the world. Let Cindy Sherman stand with Edward Weston. A few years ago, LIP's annual exhibitions were made up exclusively of black and white photos - today we are inundated with colour. Now I'm looking forward to LIP's first conceptual artist!

Oh and another thing: this young man and his shed that he decorated in the style of the eighteenth century. If we are to hail him as a great artist, I think it has to be as conceptual artist. Any vaguely competent interior decorator (Lawrence Llewlyn-Bowen for instance) could decorate a shed in the style of the eighteenth century. The boy's art surely lies not in the decorating itself, but in the innovative idea that informed it. The Concept.

Coming to my Senses: A Review of Eva-Maria Riegler's Exhibition

Nancye Gault

When I first saw Eva-Maria's photographs I was reminded of the work of Mari Mahr, whose beautiful metaphorical black and white collages I remembered as the highlight of an exhibition at the Barbican in 1994. Using a similar technique of montaging meaningful objects against a photograph, Eva's images have an

'Heimat 1' from the series 'Coming to my Senses'

approach which look back to a troubled homeland and memories of place.

Eva's latest exhibition at the Austrian Cultural Institute in May showed a great leap forward in the development of her ideas. Using colour effectively she produced a beautiful series. Returning to the village of her childhood for inspiration, she took black and white photographs of places empty of people but full of memories and meaning. The next stage was contemplative. Using colour to suggest the present, she superimposed significantly blood red objects onto the monochrome. Her work is informed by theories of the Freudian unconscious and frequently reflects an anxiety with the current political developments in her Austrian homeland.

'Father can't you see? II' from the series 'Coming to my Senses'

An important theme which runs through the work is that of the influence of the maternal as a link between past and present. A set of four focuses on the eyes of her grandmother, mother, herself and her daughter and she demonstrates a significant link within their lives to history, both personal and cultural. Eva is a very independent London photographer and her imagery is strong and poetical. It is on view again as part of her University of Westminster MA degree show and I would recommend that you see it if you can.

*See **Photo Events** for venue details*

'Encore! 1' from the series 'Coming to my Sense

The Wall

New LIP member Joyce Fox was inspired by a photograph given to her by a friend.Do you know of a poem that we could share ? Please send it to Clare or Jenny.

One day my mother handed me a wall.
"Take care", she said, "it's old,- and beautiful.
Trace it's goldlichencrusted patchwork now;
Bounce gentle fingertips on it's round moss cushions;
Save it to lean against when you are tired;
Keep your back to it when foes close in;
And though there's little time to turn around
Be sure that on your wall
The moss and lichen's tenderhooded spores
Will unfurl in the whispering winds of spring
Happy to be alive and spreading free."

Joyce Fox 1994

Snowdon's Peak: Lord Snowdon at the NPG

Peter Jennings

I do like to wince at photographs, sometimes. Snowdon informs us you shouldn't. But I could not wince at Lord Snowdon's pictures, because on the whole he is the victim, of his own epithet that 'photography is just a job like being a secretary.' Veterans of LIP may remember that remark angered Paul Hill in the 1970's. Not suprising, but 'Is Art, photography?' aside, we cannot fault Snowdon on a technical level. Workmanlike, his photographs are good. He is right about his vocation, so much of photography, God knows, is a job. Doggedly, he has set out to go no further than direct communication and surface appearance - his photographs are simple and easy to look at. It is as he wishes. Full marks? Not quite- Snowdon does not push on further to achieve the bite of his peers in this field: Bailey, Beaton, Parkinson. These, as portraitists, reached below the surface of their subjects to reveal, even criticise. But with Snowdon there is humour, not satire, affirmation but not confrontation. No angst, even though his photographs are memorable images. He is right, though, that photographs should have a wider appeal than just photographers, but 'easy to look at,' is a school that offers a limited curriculum. It is unarguable that all art has different levels - Barbara Cartland, displayed in full blooming pinks in one Snowdon portrait, chose the same medium to express herself in, as Chekhov. Going round the exhibition, I mused that our right royal photographer was faced with as many advantages as subjects. A little bow and scrape on both sides and then click! But like most advertising photographs they have been set up to tell the lie. Faced with the portraits of extraordinary people like Sir Lawrence Olivier in The Entertainer - a good, even a classic theatrical photograph - I found it difficult to fathom Snowdon's belief that 'photography's point is to make ordinary people react.' I am not sure who 'ordinary people' are: all people are extraordinary in some way, and the best portraiture reveals the conflict between private persona and public exterior. Snowdon does not seem to achieve that with the celebs, instead he works better with outsiders - in environments where he is thrown out of his social depth. His pictures of social concern, like his series on mental patients, were closer to the edge. I wished for more. I guess it's to please the crowd, but there are too many photographs in the show. Not so well printed either in a lot of cases - strange for a major photographer. Stylistically, exhibition-wise, Snowdon is right up to date - the photographs are out of their frames, dry mounted and banged straight on the wall, no messin' - just as I used to do at art college in the 1960's. Full circle and very egalitarian - though in Snowdon's plea for simple values I'm sure he is not claiming to be a post-modernist - that is, if he knows what one is!

Photocine: bringing photography to the big screen

The Photographers' Gallery has underway an exciting experiment in bringing photography to cinema audiences across southern England. In three London cinemas – Stratford East Picture House, Curzon Soho and Clapham Picture House – slides from the Gallery's current exhibition [Altered States of America] are being projected on screen 15 minutes before the start of the advertised programme.

David Shrigley

Slides of the work of two artists Gregory Crewdson and David Shrigley, specially commissioned for the Photocine project, are being shown in cinemas in Brighton, Exeter, Cambridge and Oxford. Of the two, Crewdson's work is the most striking. Entitled 'Twilight', the images are photographic constructions in rich colour reminiscent of a film like 'American Beauty'. They are intriguing and disturbing. As each slide stays on the screen for a couple of seconds, it evokes the power of the still image just as the audience is preparing to view a film at 24 frames a second.
Shrigley's slides are a jokey send up of the Board of Film Censor's ratings. Each slide is an image of a film certificate with a title and classification. Examples include: 'Film in which the hero dies at the end'. Classified as U; 'Skeleton made from pipe cleaners. Classified as PG. After the first few slides the joke wears thin and becomes repetitive. His work may make audiences laugh but Crewdson's images might make some people want to go to a photography exhibition..

Jennifer Hurstfield

Gregory Crewdson

Number 9

Quentin Ball ARPS

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Vera Florence "Mimi" Ball 21 January 1912 - 18 June 2000

As with many events in our lives, it is very easy to start something. Seeing it through to fruition is often a very different matter.

I have no idea how many 'projects' I've started; many have died, but also there are many that are incomplete, not through lack of work, but mainly knowing when the last image for the project has been taken.

I'm always wondering if there is one more image out there to improve on the project statement. Not in the present case, however. I do not have to worry. In this instance there are no more images to shoot.

Number 9 covers the death of a home.

I was raised in Number 9, and though I left home when I was 21, it was always there - a safe refuge I could always go back to. And have done. Life/time step in and 30 years later, I am the responsible adult, moving my mother into care, and having to sell the home.

In one respect, the project is complete. All the images of the death have been taken. All that remains to debate, is the question of selection. But all the images have been taken. True, it wasn't my decision...or maybe it was.

This article was originally published in Inscape no. 35. Since then I have seen a format used by Len Salem to collect all his Millennium Project images together, with the aid of 160-weight inkjet paper, the appropriate digital stuff and a visit to an office supply store an excellent book can be produced; this format will work well for *Number 9*.

As I said "all that remains to debate is the question of selection", that's the tough one when I see the images Oh! The memories come flooding back...feeling the warmth of the coal fire, listening to Radio Luxembourg...

LIProfile

For the third LIP profile of the series, Jennifer Hurstfield interviewed the documentary photographer Sam Tanner who is one of the founding members of LIP.

Jennifer Hurstfield

I was in my late 30s when I first got into photography. Before that I was a sculptor for 10 years and before that I wrote stories and plays. I was trained as a sociologist. I did all sorts of part-time jobs: labouring and working in offices. I would work for three or four months to earn some money and then take time off and make sculpture. I also worked for several years as a social worker in a home for children with severe emotional problems. I did that until the early 1980s and then began totake photos just to see what would happen - the way one blunders into things. I didn't really know what I was trying to do.

In 1985 I took a photograph of my mother-in-law and sister-in-law on a family outing in Germany. I think it is the first serious photograph I took. It's about relationships and there is quite a lot of tension. Suddenly I began to realise you can show things about people and their relationships through photos.

At the time I was looking at other people's work a lot, particularly Eugene Smith. But nobody taught me photography, I just picked it up. I bought a cheap enlarger and used a Minolta SLR. I printed grey sludge until I went on a one day workshop with a professional printer and realised it didn't have to be like that and I started printing on fibre paper.

Carers and their Families

My wife Jutta is a physiotherapist. She had started working with children with multiple handicaps and had taken some photos of the kids which weren't terribly good. She suggested that I took some photos so I did and they were pretty dire. I had no experience of disability and I found this very difficult but I kept going back and the photos did improve quite dramatically. I put together the first part of an exhibition about these very severely disabled children. I thought this gave a one-sided image of disability so I then photographed theatre and dance groups of disabled people and included those in the exhibition. I did everything including mounting the photographs and cutting the frames. The exhibition toured places such as libraries and community centres.

Somebody from Carers National Association saw the exhibition and contacted me to say they would like me to do an exhibition for them. At that time -1987 - there were six million carers in this country but they were largely invisible. It took nearly 18 months to get the money together - a tiny amount. I then spent 10 months photographing carers of disabled members of their families and did an exhibition about them. I just kept going back to each family until I felt that I was getting something. Although I got paid it was on a non-commercial basis. I ended up with £1000 for 10 months solid work, which was fine as I was earning some money from teaching photography in a primary school.

Sam Tanner

Sam Tanner

These photographs are about relationships which is what interests me enormously. I am interested in the way you can capture visually something about what goes on between people. In a thirtieth or sixtieth of a second you can define something about that relationship.

The exhibition contained about 100 prints of six families. Carers National Association toured it round. Most of the photos are fairly grim. Caring is not easy. At that time, as far as I could make out, there were no photos of carers. So this suddenly became the visual material about carers and the images were widely used in magazines and newspapers. Suddenly I was selling a lot of photos. Commercially it made a lot of sense, but it never occurred to me when I started that anyone would be interested in this material.

All the people who were photographed I met through the Carers National Association and they all agreed to be photographed. They gave me a lot of access. About a year afterwards one woman phoned me and said that her husband who has Alzheimer's had got much worse. So I went down and had a chat and shot a roll and a half of film and I took this one [cover photo]. It was just an offchance that I popped down there for tea. He was just sitting there, not really relating to anything, and then suddenly he held his wife's hand. It is a matter of capturing small moments between people.

I stopped teaching and took my work round to other charities. As a result of that I did work for the Alzheimer's Disease Society which the society used to raise awareness of the illness.

Poverty and Community

In the 1980s the Church of England produced a report called 'Faith in the City' about the new poverty of the Thatcher years. A new charity - the Church Urban Fund - was set up which started hundreds of projects in areas of urban depriva-

Sam Tanner

Sam Tanner

tion around the country. The Church Urban Fund asked me to do an exhibition about poverty to go around all the cathedrals in the country. I went to really poor areas in the provinces and some in London like Nellie's kitchen in Hackney. This is run by Church of England nuns to provide hot food for people who live on the street.

The image of two women was taken in a day centre in West London for the over 60s. They were just chatting. The one of three women of different ages was taken in an old people's home. The theme of the European Union that year was solidarity between the generations. There was a photography competition and I won first prize for that image - £1,000!

The image of the deaconess with the Hindu women was taken in Leamington Spa - again for the Church Urban Fund. It won first prize in the Professional Section of the Independent on Sunday photography competition last year. The theme for the competition was celebration. It's typical of my photos - just a small moment between people. It wasn't planned. You sense there is something happening. Most of the time you get it wrong which is why from a roll of film you end up with only a couple of images that look like anything. Even Cartier-Bresson with his decisive moment I suspect took a lot of indecisive moments!

Involvement in LIP

In 1987 I went on a John Blakemore workshop at Paul Hill's Photographer's Place and met Janet Hall and Virginia Khuri who were involved in starting LIP. Previously I had been in a camera club and that was fine but I didn't get much feedback and it was competitive. I don't see photography like that. It's not about competition. It's about trying to work at what you are doing and getting people to make some sort of sense of it. So LIP was very interesting. I was one of the first members and we met at Virginia's to talk. There were between four and ten of us. We would bring some of our work and chat about it and about photography generally.

LIP was very important - it gave everyone involved a support group: other people who were interested in photography. The meetings became larger and larger and eventually disintegrated! The lack of structure which worked with six or eight or ten didn't work when you had two dozen people. It broke up and I now go to Jim Barron' s group in Richmond [see local group details on back page].

At the time there was nobody in LIP doing work like mine - there were no other documentary photographers involved. My work still stands outside the main body of LIP members' work. It is part of a documentary tradition. And

Sam Tanner

while most of mine is commissioned and paid for it is still my interpretation of what is going on and my relationship to these people.

The Health Service

In the early 1990s, hospitals were being turned into N.H.S. trusts and each trust had to sink or swim. Chris Steele Perkins had done an exhibition for St Thomas's Hospital and this made me think that there must be other trusts who would want photos. I wrote to a lot of them and I got a reply from St. Helier in Carshalton and took a portfolio down. The hospital wanted a 120 print exhibition and photos for publications. It was a very big commission so I lived in the hospital for a week - then a break - then another week.

What I'd omitted to tell the hospital was that I can't stand the sight of blood! I was petrified when I had to go into an operating theatre on the Monday morning. I began to photograph the staff gowning up but as soon as I started concentrating I calmed down. I thought, " I have a job to do here". I have subsequently photographed several hospitals and lots of operations and it is fine.

I was using a range - finder camera by this time. I had picked up an old Leica which I have updated since. I find the camera quiet and it focuses very well in bad light.

One of the problems was that I had to get every single patient to fill out a form saying, "Yes, this guy can take my photo". In the photograph of the man with a cut arm in casualty, he agreed that I could photograph his arm but not his face.

Sam Tanner

The Jewish Community

About three years ago there was a radio programme about the Jewish community in East London. I am Jewish but non-practising, non-believing and haven't been involved in the Jewish community at all since I was a teenager. A hundred years ago, there were a 100,000 Jews in East London - it was the immigrant area. I contacted the person who had done the programme and said I would like to take some photos. He was really helpful and said that there is not a lot of the community left - only about 4000 Jews and they are all old. The young ones have all left. I thought that there are not going to be any at all soon and I would like to do a project on this. I went to the Day Centre which is what is left of the heart of the community and to a handful of synagogues and to people in their homes.

This was not commissioned. It was a personal project. Advantage: no time limit. Disadvantage: no pay! It's more or less finished now. The photograph of the Jewish couple who have been married 61 years won a prize in the 'love' category of the MILK [moments of intimacy, love and kindness] photography competition.

I wanted to photograph in the Synagogues and that is extremely difficult. It took me months to get permission. You can't photograph on the Sabbath at all. I met someone who said that he went to the Synagogue every morning and that I could photograph him. I went there at 7.30 in the morning. The photographs in the synagogues are about gaps - spaces between people. It's about what is not there. They are very quiet photos; not much going on. But I thought it was important to document what is still there - there will be nobody left soon.

Individual photographs from this project on East London have been published and they will be on exhibition in the Sternberg Centre in north London from November

Sam Tanner

2000 to January 2001.

I have also taken some photographs of ultra orthodox Hassidic Jews. One day I was heading for Stoke Newington and got distracted and decided to go to a second-hand bookshop in Notting Hill. As I came out of the bookshop I saw about 150 ultra orthodox Jews demonstrating about the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Prague. Normally they hate being photographed but because they were on a demonstration they couldn't really say no so I got lucky.

Now I would like to photograph what is left of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe but that requires a commission. It would cost several thousand pounds for such a project.

Sam Tanner

Documentary Photography

I try to sit back and let things happen. I try very hard not to orchestrate things. Letting things be - the opposite of directing. The people I photograph invariably have never been photographed by a professional. It means they are confused and don't know what to expect. The first thing people say when you go into their homes is: "What do you want me to do?".

Sam Tanner

And I say, " I haven't the faintest idea"! Because what they are really saying is how do you want me to perform and I don't want them to perform. I just let things happen; sit around and click away. I try not to go in with assumptions although you can never be entirely blank.

When I photograph families I always give them a copy. It is important to say thank you in some way. In a hospital it's not possible but it is if you are working with a small group of people and you go back and back again.

If I photograph people begging on the streets I normally pay them money. It's the only time I do that. It seems the fair thing to do. I rarely 'steal' photos. I can't say I never have but I prefer to work with people's permission.

I did a personal project about dancing on the South Bank and in the Barbican. I just went and took photos. I can't dance. It was the mix of ages, black and white, that interested me. So that's a fun thing. Nobody seemed to mind. I went back and gave people prints.

If something feels like it needs doing, then you should do it and not worry about why you are doing it until later. You work on instinct and intuition.