

This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document and is licensed under Creative Commons: Attribution 4.0 license:

Scott, Grant ORCID: 0000-0003-2882-1380 (2017) Don't Forget Photographers of The Immediate Past! Witness.

EPrint URI: <http://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/5358>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

Don't Forget Photographers of The Immediate Past!

I am currently in the process of researching and speaking with photographers whose period of mass recognition for their work was the sixties, seventies and eighties for a film project I am working on. The work of these photographers once filled the photo magazines and galleries across the world. They were asked to speak at conferences and many of them taught on some of the most forward thinking, recognised and regarded photography courses in the UK and US. Now in their seventies and eighties that same work resides under beds, deserted darkrooms and within dusty cupboards unseen and forgotten. Meanwhile, the photographers themselves continue to work on projects and pursue the medium with all of the passion and determination that they once did even though they believe that they have been largely forgotten. Their emails to publications go unanswered, their attempts to be exhibited often flounder as they hope for deserved retrospectives and recognition.

Through my research I have discovered photographers I had no knowledge of and work that I was unaware of. I have had discussions which have made me re-think my understanding of photography and its history. And by listening to these wise, experienced souls I have been able to understand and challenge my own practice.

I am passionate about history, not only the history of photography but all history, social, political and economic and all of these come together in the work featured in the photographic magazines of the past. Not only those often cited professional titles but also in the enthusiast and amateur market, who were just as likely to interview or feature a 'named' photographer from the period as titles such as *Creative Camera*, *Camera*, *Blind Spot* or *Aperture*. It is in reading past issues of these magazines and others that we can re-discover the work of photographers still available to us to make contact and engage with.

Why is this important? Because the history of the medium is essential to our understanding of its present and future and by reaching out to these photographers we can experience living history outside of that written in books. The stories they have to tell are rich in detail and provide insight into realities that are too often handled with a broad-brush stroke of historical summary. As any journalist knows if you want the facts go to the source!

A photographic life can often be cyclical with times when even the most recognised photographers work is no longer in fashion or demand. I well remember working with William Klein and Jean Loup Sieff in the mid-nineties when neither of them were receiving commissions. Of course, this period was short lived for both but it is a fact that tastes in photography do go in and out of fashion.

Certainly, much of the work I have seen recently during my research is solidly rooted in the documentary and contemporary art aesthetic of the late sixties and seventies. Prints with deep, rich blacks and no fear of using grain to emphasize atmosphere and mood. These images are historical documents not only of time and place but also of photography. Where photography was at the time, its possibilities and limitations, it's power when placed in the hands of those who mastered its eccentricities.

However, it is rarely seen in exhibitions today. Too recent to be seen as truly historical and too distant to be seen as contemporary this work and the photographers who made it seem to have been placed into a photographic limbo by the taste makers and gate keepers of today.

I have previously written about the publisher Café Royal Books based in the UK and run by Craig Aitkinson concerning his independent approach to publishing books of photography. The imprint's personality is based upon a desire to create a multiple publication documentation of British life and in so doing Craig has been responsible for important bodies of work by photographers such as Homer Sykes, John Claridge, Daniel Meadows, Patrick Ward and Paddy Summerfield amongst many others. This work and these photographers fill the pages of the photographic magazines of the seventies alongside the more obvious names. Their work was important then and it is important now.

I have spoken to all of these photographers over the past few months, about their work, about photography then and now. Those conversations have been entertaining, informative and enriching and they all began by me emailing them out of the blue and just saying hello. It's something I recommend. However, many books I look at, articles I read, talks I attend and exhibitions I visit there is nothing better than sitting down with a cup of coffee and a photographer whom I admire and letting time drift as we talk. Those conversations are based on a shared passion for the medium and a life time of creativity and experience, which makes them invaluable and something to treasure.

The sad fact is that if I did not have these conversations now there is a time in the not too distant future when it will not be possible to do so. Many of the photographers I have spoken with recently are in their late 60s, 70s and 80s and despite not losing their passion for the medium of photography they are as are we all getting older. Their memories do not exist in books and their stories need to be remembered to be passed on to future generations. I believe that it is our responsibility to do so.

Every town and city has photographers and work of the recent past waiting for you to re-discover. They have stories to tell and work to show you so why not go out and find them, listen to them, talk with them, collaborate with them and most important of all learn from them. They are there now but they will not be there forever.