



The Photographers Gallery: Instagram Takeover

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1. Not long after I started to teach Documentary Photography at Newport, Clive Landen passed me a tray of slides and suggested I should get to know the work of the past students who might not have reached my Northern Radar. They were good pictures, all engaged and energised, following in a tradition of the immersed and curious that Documentary was supposed to be. One slide, though, seemed to somehow separate itself from the competent flow that filled the rest of that tray. It showed a mature couple in the street, so close that they couldn't ever be apart, so tender in spite of the world around them and with the kind of frayed edges that I came to see a lot during my time living in that city. The picture was by Tish Murtha and much like the Czech Vojta Dukat, who himself should be better known, she would be a photographer I always asked about and always mentioned in the many talks I gave to new students - as if perhaps understanding Newport -or understanding how to 'be' with people would be incomplete otherwise. I never met Tish Murtha -and my friend Killip assured me once in his usual whisper that 'if you had, you'd know about it...' but I've always felt close to her pictures and recognised something so joyful, so urgent when seeing her picture of need, love and solace for the first time. When I heard that the show at #thephotographersgallery was happening, I allowed myself to believe, just for a moment, that the world had finally taken a better turn.

2.

I woke up this morning to a twitter feed showing Derry ablaze, again. Scrolled, lapping flames of protest a night before the 12th of July and all the noise it brings in Ulster, Glasgow, Liverpool...Every year the same tensions and every year the same hope for some new dawn. Everton, where this picture was taken outside the Derry Club, is just a few miles from the centre of Liverpool and for much of my time as a photographer I've photographed in the city around the 12th....and here I am sitting in a car outside Lime Street listening to the Lambeg drums pound into the summer evening. The photographer Marketa Luskacova, my friend and the woman I worked with, talked to me in passing about the Jazz bands in the North east that she -and Tish Murtha- photographed, about the paradox of living sparsely but spending everything on a 'uniform of belonging' about what the music does and what it means, about braided and beautiful neatness walking through streets that could never seem

as clean. Simple music, easy tunes with refrains that spit lines of lament or history. Bob Marley was right on most things- football, unity, love....but he also said 'the one good thing about good music, when it hits you feel no pain'. Even Bob Marley was wrong on that one

3. For 10 years from 1993 I lived in New Brighton, just over the river from Liverpool. It was always a respite, hardly a 'last resort' as Martin called it and there was something terrific about living on the other side of the bridges that separate Birkenhead from the district of Wallasey (which translates as Welsh Island). Early last year, Tracy Marshall asked me if there had ever been an exhibition of the work Martin, Tom Wood and I had made here. There hadn't been - I'd never looked at most of what I'd done, it was a place I photographed on the way out to work or when I found the need for the sea at the end of a long day. The work Tracy gathered, now in the company of Tom Wood -who lived here from 1978 to around 2002 and that of @martinparrstudio who made several visits in the 1970s before settling in 1982 to begin the colour work we now know him for will be launched tomorrow as New Brighton Revisited. In a building that sits where the outdoor baths- capable of holding 7000 bathers- stood until the storms of 1989 rendered them unsafe, the exhibition also includes Keith Medley's double portraits and Bob Bird's familiar press work, from an age when Harry Seacombe mattered. It's the first time the work has been shown in the town that inspired it and in that respect it's a strange homecoming, not least for the constructing of a gallery in which the windows look out onto the scenes the pictures were drawn from. This is @kengrantinfo on TPGallery to coincide with the Tish Murtha Show. New Brighton Revisited is at the Sailing School Gallery, Marine Point New Brighton and runs from July 14 - August 25. It's open Weds - Sunday 12-7 pm. Free

4.

My favourite photograph in all of photography, for what it's worth, was made by Henri Cartier-Bresson in Liverpool in 1962. It shows three young girls walking through a city still baring the rough open spaces of world War II bomb damage. The girls are walking past the stubborn outer wall of a raised tenement giving it little regard - we know the business of youth is to do with the urgent self centre of everything. It seems to be morning, softened as it is by a hanging wet mist-but knowing the Liverpool weather as I do (and it's raining now on this July Friday afternoon) it maybe later. It's the kind of weather that could easily put you off, but thank God Cartier-Bresson was hungry enough to be determined enough to work enough. Neil Burgess, the agent who ran Magnum's London office in the early 1990s, told me that Bresson made the work whilst commissioned by a TV company to make stills- and used what spare time he had between obligations to photograph. No plan, just the chance to work. The good pictures come at the strangest times by people who work enough. It was made in the streets where the terrific filmmaker Terence Davies grew up, where Beryl Bainbridge was inspired to write 'the Dressmaker' and where decades later Michael Head would write his inner city folk songs and I would try to make sense of my city with photography. Liverpool draws this kind of interest, from home and abroad - and I'm glad Cartier Bresson pulled such a remarkable scene out of an ordinary day, a day when nothing was happening and life, remarkable life was being lived. This is @kengrantinfo on #TPGallery to coincide with the exhibition there by #tishmurtha The photograph shown by #kengrant is currently included in New Brighton Revisited, at the Sailing School Gallery, Marine Point, New Brighton 14 July

- 25 August (Weds - Sun 12-7pm with photographs by @martinparrstudio @kengrantinfo and #tomwood

5.

Saturday morning in the Northwest of England and heading to New Brighton for the New Brighton Revisited exhibition with @martinparrstudio and #tomwood, curated and made possible by the wonderful @tracyemarsall This is @kengrantinfo on TPGallery, to coincide with the #tishmurtha show. Photograph from the Marine Lake, #newbrighton , just a few yards from where the exhibition #newbrightonrevisited will launch today and run til 25 August (Weds-Sun 12-7pm). #kengrant #newbrighton #thesailingschoolgallery #marinepoint

6. My friend the publisher Rudi Thoemmes likes a good book title when he sees one. It either makes everything work or it kills it dead for him. He's right. For the last few years we've been looking at pictures I made between 1989 and 1997 and which will come together for the first time next year. I passed this place today, in the North end of Birkenhead on the way to #newbrightonrevisited. It's quiet now, landscaped and turned into an urban woodland, a strange hill that should feel integrated and natural but never does - perhaps because all I still see when I look is the stumbling and falling, or perhaps because all I can smell is the gas from the compressed waste packed beneath the quick growing trees that betray what went before. The land isn't neutral, the land isn't innocent- it's owned, stolen, prohibited or simply our place of labour. At the turn of the 20th century Edwin Muir wrote his poem 'the difficult land', where 'here things miscarry'. When it comes to titles, there's always something to learn from Edwin Muir.

7.

Every Friday afternoon for a couple of decades I went to Birkenhead Park to play on the Field of Dreams with Charlie Galloway, Kevin Sampson, Jegsy Dodd, Blackie and the usual musicians, writers, poets and performers able to tug on some boots. My night last night was a steady and serene procession of some of these men, squeezed into #newbrightonrevisited amongst the North West of England great and the good- with a few blow in visitors from as high as Glasgow and as low as France. Today will be quieter - England no longer sparking the kind of ambulance dancing nutcase revelry and the Marine Street bar next door will be an emptier shed of hard wooden benches and early Sunday cleaning. It's more of a beach day than a match day but somewhere in Russia someone will win something. For 30 years I photographed football in Liverpool. The photograph shown is taken from the series 'A Topical Times for these times' and was made at the Dockers Club, Everton Park Liverpool 1990.

8.

Last night I got my first email to remind me its time to update my fantasy football team. Another season another routine of statistics form and strategy - none of which ever seems to matter. Still daring to dream, still believing in Liverpool. In the last days of his life the playwright Denis Potter was interviewed by Melvyn Bragg. He talked about his father and how he'd never found the time to listen to him when he was alive and then said something that made me think about photography in a way I

hadn't been able to describe before....he talked about 'cheap songs', those songs we grow up with, fall in love to -that reach us in ways that belie their simplicity or lack of craft. Even the cheap songs - perhaps like the cheap pictures, the easy ones, the ones without craft or refinement, are worth something. 'The cheap songs', he would say 'have something of the psalms of David about them'.