

# JERWOOD **PHOTOGRAPHY** AWARDS

## **Jerwood Photography Awards 2003**

### **Award Winners:**

**Veronica Bailey, Polly Braden. Edgar Martins, Danny Treacy, Naglaa Walker**

### **CATALOGUE TEXT**

I know that I can speak for all the judges in saying that we immensely enjoyed viewing and thinking about the portfolios submitted for the first Jerwood Photography Awards. The spacious room in which we worked was filled with beautiful Edinburgh light and an atmosphere of keen expectation. There was a sense of privilege in being given the opportunity of encountering the works of so many emerging photographic talents. The judging panel brought many different approaches and backgrounds to the photographic medium and we were delighted to find works of such vivid diversity. The day of looking, evaluating and deciding was intense and finally – after much discussion – extremely satisfying. We felt that we had met with a good number of vital talents and that the five we chose in the end are worthy representatives of a lively and very promising generation. It is typical of our colleges that the award-winners should reflect today's internationalism – both in the origin of the photographers and the geographical range of their projects. Also, the award-winners demonstrate another fascinating point about creativity. The creative act often consists of bringing together two interests, loyalties, even obsessions.

There are fine examples here, in which this wonderfully elastic medium of photography (made even more elastic in the digital era) accommodates fascinations with the library in a remarkable house, the world of physics – and black holes – grey as understood in Japanese aesthetics and the booming

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manufacturing economy of China. All of these photographers have found ways to give their private preoccupations a personal signature and a public presence.

We hope that the process of submitting portfolios for the Awards was also valuable for those who did not make it into the final five. For most creative people the act of making is quite different from those other activities that are required: first the editing, then the organisation and presentation of a project for the scrutiny of the outside world. The creative individual has to become a slightly different person to carry out these other roles. We hope that the experience of submitting work to the first Jerwood Photography Awards will stand the participants in good stead. Many of them, of course, will have the opportunity to submit works again next time round. We hope that they will feel inspired by the splendid diversity, high ambition and technical excellence of this year's winners.

Mark Haworth-Booth, Chair, Selection Panel

### **Veronica Bailey : 2 Willow Road**

These photographs are part of a series involving magnified book edges, taken from the library at The National Trust Property, 2 Willow Road in Hampstead, London. This modernist house, owned and built originally by Austro-Hungarian architect Ernő Goldfinger in 1939, reflects a treasure trove of 20th century art, history and culture.

The images form an alternative portrait of the private, but now public, lives of Goldfinger and his wife, artist Ursula Blackwell, since their deaths in 1987 and 1991. Their interconnecting careers of architecture and art are revealed in this fascinating amalgam of reading material, which ranges from anthropology to literature, politics and sociology, in fact all aspects of contemporary life. By exposing the edges of the pages of chosen books, one is reminded of the everyday human interaction we have with the written word and the paper on which it is printed. There is symbolic meaning behind what we choose to read, keep and share with others. As a former Willow Road guide, I was able to piece together traces of history about the lives of the Goldfingers through the book's titles, but it was only through exploration and exposure of the unseen

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edges that we can discover the assembled paths of knowledge that have been consumed.

My process uses modern digital technology to capture the splayed book edges. The beauty in the form is clear, with its subtly-defined linear abstraction. A new, non-conventional narrative is formed, reconstructing past relationships and encounters through the ghost traces amongst the bruised paper edges. The titles of the books, such as Human Response to Tall Buildings, Kitsch, or A Girl Like I, can be juxtapositioned against The War's Best Photographs, Born Free, and Goldfinger (Ian Fleming), revealing the Goldfinger narrative from a different perspective.

### **Polly Braden : Made in China**

When you see Made in China, do you wonder by whom? One morning I went to Top Shop on Oxford Street and saw the shoes I had seen being made in a factory in China: English size eight, made by girls with feet of size four.

Ho Ping is 20 years old, a typical age for a factory worker; she comes from Henan Province, 24 hours' travel north of the factory. For two years now, she has been working and, like all her co-workers, living at Selena. Once a year she goes home to visit her family during the Chinese New Year.

After leaving school at 16, Ho Ping says it was 'interesting and exciting' coming to work in the factory. For the first few weeks there was little pressure, and workers were allowed to make mistakes. After the initial period of meeting co-workers, learning the company song and settling in amongst the other 6,500 other employees, work became more demanding and the following six months were really tough. This being her first time away from home, she began to miss her family and friends very much.

These days, some two years later, she enjoys the university-like atmosphere and life at Selena, saying that there is always something new to learn. In a grey coat, she is a supervisor, overseeing the work of 35 young girls who sit in a row on the factory floor, stitching the upper part of shoes. There are 18 levels in the factory. The system defines the colour of your coat - pink for

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factory floor workers, grey for everyone above that. It defines the restaurant you eat in, the size of your dormitory and your pay.

### **Danny Treacy : Grey Area**

The body of work Grey Area is the appropriation of spaces with a camera. I paint the entire surface of a particular space in a uniform grey tone. The spaces themselves have a feeling of unease, of a sexual tension - wasteland, car parks and faceless buildings – spaces where, we've been told, people experience intense moments of pain or pleasure.

Through meticulously painting these unspectacular spaces, they are both beautified and fetishised. The spaces become bleached and anonymous, wiping out their surface identity. Now bearing witness to a violation, they become both literal and metaphorical grey areas.

The colour grey, as defined in Japanese aesthetics, is the colour of no colour, in which all colours are cancelling each other out. The new hue is a distinct colour of its own, neither black nor white, but somewhere in between - in the middle where possibilities are boundless, whereas in Christian symbolism, grey designates the resurrection of the dead, a place for transition and hiding, a place for change.

Appropriation, desire, and intimacy with those around me; the uniting element in the work is that the intimacy gained becomes a subversion, a desire to get close, which results in violation. The photographs are a result of my actions whereby I put myself in closest proximity to others, to strangers, without them actually being there. This closeness is both stimulating and disappointing and so the photograph becomes a fetish object, a trophy and a proof of failure, failure to gain possession of something that I'm not sure I want anyway.

### **Edgar Martins : Black Holes & Other Inconsistencies**

In Black Holes & Other Inconsistencies, urbanism is portrayed as a movement of isolation. It is the setting for spatial and temporal dislocation. I operate

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within a landscape of uncertainty, a culture landscape of permanent flux, transition and opposition. Spaces are primed with a sense of purpose, yet they are marginal, fragmented and dispersed.

In the fragile weight of these landscapes, human perception seems to enter a different register. It is as if everything expresses contingency, as if space and time are about to simmer and disperse. A stage for the encounter with the everyday, this work calls to our attention that all is flow, all boundaries are provisional, all space is permeable. 'Black holes' reflect a society of dislocation and bewilderment.

At times this work seems to question whether the city as a totality escapes the perception of the individual; whether our experience of place, as a whole, has become an incipient forum of disruptive experiences and expression; whether the movement of information and people and the commodification of cultural forms outline a unique body of flow and false consciousness. But at other times it simply proposes that we are no longer mere transients.

*Black Holes & Other Inconsistencies* is a journey of recognition: the city and – in a broader sense – space, as our object of understanding, is changing and because of this one needs to find a new critical language that supports it as well as a new system of knowledge from which to derive our glossary of life. In this work there is a permanent ambivalence between poetic failure and the promise of success. In summoning a poetic memory awakened by the presence of a representation and the illusion of a recognition, *Black Holes & Other Inconsistencies* positions us on the boundaries of alterity and introspection.

### **Naglaa Walker : On Physics**

My work draws on aspects of my background, focusing on a renegotiation of seemingly overdetermined spaces or stereotypes, and our personal relationships to them.

Much of this work is informed by my formal training as a scientist, and brief experience as a physics researcher. In

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On Physics, diptychs juxtapose constructed blackboard images of chalked equations with carefully staged photographic images. The use of the blackboard references its object-ness as synonymous with knowledge, whilst in the corresponding image possible elucidation is offered via the performative: the viewer is invited to make connections between a physical law and an image. The diptychs are not meant as text-book illustration, and to this end people enact the role of objects, planets, electrons and other sub-atomic particles. Science is thus presented not as instructive, infallible authority, but re-negotiated as object of enquiry and speculation, relevant to day-to-day life.

The permanence of the painted then photographed equation meanwhile alludes to the constructed nature of our knowledge system: this act of fixing theory in time additionally raises questions around the progress of rational theory and scientific practice: the idea is thus not simply to contribute to a 'sense of wonder' around science, but to actively criticise and analyse its methods and results.

The work engages with the scientific environment from an artistic viewpoint, rendering an intuitive sense rather than a literal interpretation of physics, and thus challenges preconceptions about science and its accessibility. Exploring the boundaries which support the knowledge/power relationship and the idiosyncrasies of the scientific experience, the work can be situated within the contemporary paradigm of sci-art, in that it aims to create new, cross-disciplinary understandings, and contest established responses.

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