

SHIRLEY BAKER: WOMEN, CHILDREN AND LOITERING MEN 17 JULY - 20 SEPTEMBER 2015

19 May 2014

The Photographers' Gallery present *Women and Children; and Loitering Men*, the first London exhibition by pioneering British photographer Shirley Baker (1932-2014).

Thought to be the only woman practicing street photography in Britain during the post-war era, Shirley Baker's humanist documentary work received little attention throughout her sixty-five years career. This exhibition includes previously unseen colour photographs by Baker alongside black and white images and ephemera such as magazine spreads, contact sheets and various sketches. It specifically focuses on her depictions of the urban clearance programmes of inner city Manchester and Salford. This intense period of study, spanning from 1961 - 1981, documents what Baker saw as the needless destruction of working class communities.

Her photographs testify to the poverty and resilience of communities under siege. In examining these street scenes, the exhibition aims to highlight Baker's appreciation of alternate values and life experiences found in this community while conveying her compassionate affection, empathy and indignation for the plight of her subjects.

Images are presented in narrative and thematic, rather than chronological sequence, in which people and places from different times co-exist to evoke experiences, memories and relationships. Photographs are arranged in groupings starting with mothers and children and continuing with gangs of children playing in the street, single figures and couples engaged in everyday life. Men, mainly elderly or unemployed, make rarer appearances in her compositions. Their idle, sidelined presence conveys a sense of the passing of time and of loss.

The final set of images presents broken urban landscapes, rubble, junk and abandoned shops and houses. These stark vistas emanate social destruction and a feeling of vulnerability which stands in sharp contrast to the lively scenes of the early 1960s.

Accompanying the exhibition is a specially commissioned sound piece composed by Derek Nisbet.

Baker claimed never to have posed her pictures, an action inimical to her documentarist ideals, however her multi-layered images and exacting compositions imply dwelling on a scene till each element falls into place. Her visual puns, often the result of juxtaposing 'chance' elements in her field of vision, result in a humour and everyday surrealism that would have eluded most passer byes.

Objects and scenes take on significance beyond their literal appearance. Half demolished walls and peeling wallpaper resound with the lives once lived. Her meticulous focus on graffiti, brings the plain brickwork to life and generates backdrops for scenarios in which her ordinary subjects, in their functional environments, become momentarily extraordinary.

The Photographers' Gallery
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Notes for Editors

Shirley Baker

Shirley Baker (1932 - 2014, UK) was a pioneering post-war photographer, whose humanist documentary work in Salford and Manchester traced communities through the 1950s and 60s into the 80s. Born in Kersal, Salford, Baker studied Pure Photography at Manchester College of Technology. She did not have the opportunity to own a union press card for the Manchester Guardian newspaper so was unable to work for the paper, instead pursuing over 60 years her own projects in the North West and the South of France, with periods in London in the 1980s. Baker's passion for photography is perhaps best epitomised by her documentation of the daily life of the working class terraced streets in Salford and Manchester. Her first book 'Street Photographs: Manchester and Salford' was published in 1989, and had solo exhibitions in 2012 in Oldham and Salford. Baker continued photographing and completed an MA in critical history and the theory of photography at the University of Derby in 1995. In September 2014 Shirley Baker passed away after a short illness at the age of 82.

Anna Douglas

Anna Douglas has built up a reputation for imaginative exhibitions that integrate archive and contemporary photography and that provide audiences with thought-provoking new narratives. Her 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: the authentic moment in British Photography', commissioned by Djanogly Gallery, Nottingham in 2012, brought together a vast array of previously unseen photographs depicting Northern Working Class life, from the late 1950s, by an extensive range of professional and amateur photographers and drew a record attendance of 18,500 visitors. Whilst the touring exhibition 'Life Less Ordinary' focused on a rarely seen body of anthropological photographs by Alfred Duggan Cronin, in a dynamic display that included some of South Africa's most provocative and controversial contemporary artists each exploring the idea of race today.

Derek Nisbet

Derek Nisbet is a composer, musician, sound-designer, film-maker; Co-Artistic Director of pioneering theatre makers Talking Birds. Derek's previous work includes Eye Witness - A Response to Raymond Mason's 'Belsen Head' for the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry; One Voice performed at the national Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in 2009; and over 50 scores and sound designs for theatre, aerial work, dance and radio. www.dereknisbet.info

Mary Evans Picture Library

Mary Evans Picture Library is the UK's leading historical image library with over five decades of experience in supplying historical and vintage images to the editorial and design markets. Our own archive consists of hundreds of thousands of pictures from a vast collection of books, magazines, photographs, prints, maps and ephemera, visualising the world as it has changed over the centuries. We also represent over 300 varied contributor collections from the archives of large Institutions, Galleries, Publishers and Museums to personal collections and the Estates of notable Artists and Photographers. The Library is based in Blackheath, south-east London. www.maryevans.com

Women and Children; and Loitering Men Publication

The first publication of Shirley Baker's street photographs since 2000 features 107 black and white and 36 colour photographs, including many previously unpublished. It is accompanied by a commissioned short story by award winning author Jackie Kay and an essay by curator Anna Douglas. The book presents a photographic narrative that engages viewers in an affecting journey through an array of human experience: companionship, kindness, kinship, and creative resourcefulness as well as life's more ruthless side with its instabilities, rejections, and childhood cruelties. This publication was generously supported by Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University, Arts Council England and Symon and Mary Elliott.

This exhibition was supported by Arts Council England

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Great Newport Street, London, as the UK's first independent gallery devoted to photography. It was the first public gallery in the UK to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastião Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009, the Gallery moved to 16 - 18 Ramillies Street in Soho, the first stage in its plan to create a 21st century home for photography. Following an eighteen month long redevelopment project, it reopened to the public in 2012. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture. www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor Information

Opening times: Mon – Sat, 10:00 - 18:00; Thu, 10:00 - 20:00; Sun, 11:00 - 18:00

Admission: free until noon (Mon - Sun) and then £3 / £2.5 concessions

Address: 16-18 Ramillies Street, London W1F 7LW

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Press information

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THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALJERY

PRESS IMAGES

SHIRLEY BAKER WOMEN, CHILDREN AND LOITERING MEN 17 JULY - 20 SEPTEMBER 2015



Image 1
Shirley Baker
Manchester, 1968
© Shirley Baker Estate
Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library



Image 2
Shirley Baker
Manchester, 1967
© Shirley Baker Estate
Courtesy of the Shirley Baker Estate



Image 3
Shirley Baker
Hulme, 1965
© Shirley Baker Estate
Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library



Image 4
Shirley Baker
Hulme, July 1965
© Shirley Baker Estate
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Image 5
Shirley Baker
Hulme, July 1965
© Shirley Baker Estate
Courtesy of the Shirley Baker Estate



Image 6
Shirley Baker
Hulme, May 1965
© Shirley Baker Estate
Courtesy of the Shirley Baker Estate



Image 7
Shirley Baker
Manchester, 1964
© Shirley Baker Estate
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Image 8
Shirley Baker
Near Upper Brook St, Manchester, 1964
© Shirley Baker Estate
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