

Mitch Karunaratne

Wanders into his past to re-construct a social geographical narrative of place

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Still images are imbued with the movement of migration

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Eti Wade

Articulating honestly maternal subjectivity

UNCERTAIN STATES / 06





(IMAGE ON COVER)

ETI WADE

Motherhood is often perceived as uncomplicated, joyous and fulfilling. Albeit, some sacrifices have to be made, career aspirations restricted but on the whole motherhood is thought of as a welcome transition in every woman's life. Popular and traditional representations of motherhood, young, attractive smiling women holding beautiful, healthy babies in nappy adverts or highly publicised and photoshopped images of WAGs and other celebrity mums in the popular media, which resonate with the archetypal 'Madonna and Child' religious iconographic paintings confirming fulfilment and comfort women supposedly derive from the maternal role.

What is omitted and obscured in these dominant forms are the realities of motherhood as

experienced by most women, especially, and most intensely, with the first child. Becoming a mother affects an extreme and abrupt change in a woman's life, constituted of loss of identity, loss of financial independence, loss of personal space and time, loss of status and extreme restrictions of freedom in addition to the changes in the body; often irreparable scars and physical trauma. Going through these changes, learning to accept what is lost and discovering the joys of the maternal role is a gradual process.

When my eldest was born I found the transition to motherhood almost unbearable and the invisibility of similar experiences, the lack of realistic role models only increased my own feelings of isolation and insecurity. Only with the birth of my second

child I began to question and articulate my initial trauma. My work hence had been concerned with articulating honestly what I perceive to be my maternal subjectivity. Bathwomb is part of extensive maternal photographic work made in the intimate space of the bathroom, where fantasy and reality interlace, whereas 'Goodnight Boys' is a simple expression of the primal and immense fear of loss that is introduced into a new mother's life on a previously unimaginable scale.

www.etiwade.com



SARAH-JANE SAVAGE

THE PURSUIT OF HOME

Many living in England will be familiar with the experience of flying abroad for a holiday and, on the return flight, staring out the window at the bright sun only to observe, upon the announcement of the decent, a thick and foreboding body of cloud below. The plane descends, spends a good 30 seconds flying directly through the cloud, and then, there it is: the green grass of England with that oh-too-familiar shade of heavy grey hanging over and setting a dull tone to the daylight. Always in these moments it occurs to me how unfair it is that the bright sun that could brighten everyone's day both literally and metaphorically is physically so close, yet so frustratingly out of reach.

I have flown into the UK from abroad countless times in my lifetime. Born in the US to English parents, from a very early age I began joining them on the annual pilgrimage to the homeland. As a child, the experience of descending through the gateway of grey to visit greatly-missed family and friends, was one that elicited strong feelings of fondness and anticipation. After moving to England as an adult, however, that same experience gave rise to disdain, irritation and depression. In those later years the descent into the grey brought about feelings of being trapped, of living in a place I had initially been drawn to due to the appeal of returning to my second 'home', only to find it a place I felt caught in, from which I could not escape, where the awful weather, the atrocious public transport, and the reserve of the people dragged my mood down and further down.

On my most recent return to the UK, however, I reflected on a marked change in this typical response. While as grey a vision as ever, as the green grass, the boxy hedges lining the roads, the reds of the double-deckers came into view, a wave of warmth and endearment came over me. Those feelings did not, interestingly enough, surprise me. They have been a long time coming. But, in noticing that reaction in myself, has caused me to reflect on the slow internal change that has taken place to bring about this now unsurprising feeling of having arrived 'home'.

What makes a place 'home'? In a multi-cultural city like London where a great number of us are from 'away', this is no doubt a question that flitters through the minds of many. Experiences of immigration, emigration, cultural mixing and cross-cultural identity - all familiar occurrences in the modern world - impact upon an individual's sense of belonging and identification. Indeed, these are not concepts or occurrences that should be taken lightly given the strong correlation between a sense of 'home' and mental health.

'Home' is not only a psychological concept. Ask someone to reflect on its meaning and they will instinctively refer to concrete entities: a house, a city, a country, family, friends, food, smells, etc. However, dig deeper, ask more questions, and it quickly becomes clear that it is the psychological states that these physical entities give rise to that define what is felt as 'home': security, familiarity, (self) identification, affection, refuge, a freedom to be oneself, to associate with those one wants to be connected to, a place from which one feels better able to take on the challenges of life. When we feel unconnected to a psychological home - whether through choice or through force - we are inevitably psychologically weaker.

As children, home is most typically the house where our caregivers live and with which we share with them. Whether we love it or hate it, have good or bad memories of it, this is the place where - for better or for worse - we form an early understanding of how our small world works, where the rubbish is



Image: Mitch Karunaratne

put, what time we get up, what we eat for breakfast, how we treat others, what vision we hold of the neighbours next door and the world outside. Depending on the childhood that is experienced, this home can remain constant or can change; the family moves (voluntarily or involuntarily); members of the family move in and out of the family 'home'. In the family in which I lived my childhood, we experienced our fair share of geographical dislocation which, I have no doubt, has impacted upon my understanding of home to this day. New York, London, New York, Seattle, London, New York, California, my parents moved and the children with them, not only between cities but between countries. Of course, our experience of continued upheaval is not unique. But how does such experience of upheaval affect us?

It is perhaps no big surprise that, flicking through the undergraduate prospectus during my University years in Montreal, Canada (yet another home) I was drawn to the study of refugees, the beginning of a personal path which, it turned out, has led me to work in the field of asylum here in the UK. Quite a few years have passed since I first took an interest in the plight of the refugee and, while I can't say with any certainty what drew me to this field of study, it is of course likely, however, that it was, at least in part, due to a sense of identification and empathy with what it must be like to be forced from home, forced away from what is familiar and nurturing, to a place of newness, of unfamiliarity, of insecurity and all the implications such an experience has on one's sense of self.

When home is lost, how can it be found again? The loss of one's home is something that most of us experience at some point in life. The journey and transition from childhood into adulthood inevitably involves a loss of home. While it varies from person to person, family to family and between cultures, most children eventually move out of the childhood space of home and set off to create their own. In this sense, home is not not only an origin but it is also an aspired goal. We speak of regression, of returning home, of going back home, but, at one or another stage in life we also find ourselves in a place of needing to move towards something, to create a home of our own. It was in this uncertain space that I felt trapped during those years when, flying through the clouds, I felt miserable.

I would imagine, in fact I know from somewhat limited experience of working with people who have become refugees in England, that this is the same uncertain space they can get caught in, sometimes for years. While they did leave their former home by choice - they chose to flee to avoid death or persecution - what they didn't leave with was conviction or the real desire to start over and build a life in a new place. Finding themselves in England, they hover, confusingly, between nostalgic desires to return to the home they had and the necessity of creating a home where they now find themselves. Depending on the situation in their home country, there might be a realistic prospect of returning home. But when?

Renos Papadopolous, a Professor and Director of the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees at the University of Essex, calls this confusing in-between state the 'central paradox' of the refugee situation or 'refugeedom', as he calls it.¹ Also feeding this paradox is that the idea of home always tends to be idealised whereas the real home is based on lived reality. In treating refugees in a therapeutic context, Papadopolous defines a psychological condition he calls 'nostalgic disorientation'. This occurs when home is lost involuntarily. Such a condition is defined by a loss

of ability to 'read life', a sense of unreality, unpredictability, lack of familiarity which, in turn, brings on a lack of confidence, pervasive anxiety and feelings of disorientation. It is this disorientation that activates the yearning for return to (or creation of) a secure home and place of belonging.

These somewhat academic concepts strike a chord with me when I think about Mike², a Kosovan refugee I worked for when his initial claim for asylum in the UK was refused and he appealed to the courts to have that decision overturned. We became fast friends and have remain in touch long after our professional relationship ended. One morning in 2005 Mike left the large home he had built for his wife and three sons on the outskirts of Pristina, Kosovo, kissing his wife goodbye as if he was going to his job with the police force. Instead, he boarded a flight to the UK and claimed asylum upon arrival at the airport. He explained that he could not return to Kosovo as he feared for his life after he received death threats from both Serbians and Kosovans due to his intelligence work with the Kosovan police. He didn't see his family for a long year and a half until they were granted visas to join him in London after his refugee status was confirmed.

Since his family finally arrived in London four years ago, Mike and his family have been moved around between at least three separate council flats while they struggle to build a new home and life for themselves. Every time they are told of a new move, Mike begs the council to at least keep them somewhere close so that his boys can stay at the same schools have some consistency in their lives. Every time Mike invites me for a visit, after proudly showing me the growing pile of glowing school reports, he pulls out the photo album and points longingly yet proudly to the big house they fled but still own and which sits empty in Pristina. He very much remains caught in that place of disorientation with the active yearning to return to that place of belonging.

My own sense of disorientation whilst trapped in the uncertain space between psychological homes when I first arrived in London was clearly based in a much less dramatic set of circumstances than Mike and his family. But I continue to empathise and identify with what Mike and many other refugees go through when they lose their real home and, in its absence, idealise what they once knew whilst trying to create a new home in England. What is the solution to the refugee plight in this regard? The UN Refugee Agency, for whom I currently work, has always advocated for what it calls 'durable solutions'. Whether that durable solution is repatriation to the home country, integration into the country of refuge, or in some situations, a move to a third country, what the agency appreciates is the human need for durability and the time and space to build upon that idealised vision to create a real home that, with all its faults, creates the conditions that allow us to be who we are.

1. Talk given at UNHCR London on 21 November 2008 entitled 'Working Psychosocially with Refugees', www.essex.ac.uk/centres/psycho/ctar

2. Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

The year 2011 will mark the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. UNHCR celebrated its own 60th anniversary on 14 December 2010. Visit www.unhcr.org.uk for more information.

Article by Sarah-Jane Savage
Sarah-Jane Savage works for UNHCR on a project that aims to improve the quality of the asylum decision-making process in the UK. savages@unhcr.org



FIONA YARON-FIELD

Uncle Tim
Someone decided his name was Tim but actually it wasn't. It was Simon. I only learned of this as he lay on a hospital bed aged 102 and the doctor asked, that if the need should arise, should Simon be resuscitated or left to die. I looked down at the ashen figure and back at the doctor wondering who he meant. Everyone called him Uncle Tim and he didn't seem to mind. Although I don't know what he minded since he would never say. He was my mother's uncle and her surrogate father, though more gentle than her own and less absent. He had lived with his sister, my grandmother, till she died then moved into his own flat. He was included in family celebrations and occasional Friday evening meals. Usually the cat was first to notice him patiently waiting for dinner and would fold herself very close so that his crooked fingers would spontaneously stroke her.

A tall slim dapper gentleman, who shyly pressed a five pound note into the palm of your hand whilst saying goodbye at the front door. Born in 1906, he grew up in an old Jewish Community in the North of England, served in the British Army in India, lived through two world wars, saw communism rise and fall, witnessed the technological revolution yet he appeared untouched and unmoved by change. I often wondered what touched him and as he barely spoke his silence filled my imagination. I imagined he'd been a soldier but I think he'd been a clerk. I imagined he had fallen madly in

love with an Indian Princess - unable to marry her had returned home broken hearted. He remained forever loyal to her and lived out his whole life alone. I imagined he must have been a spy who worked undercover in a shop selling hill's. He's cunning persona of a modest likeable man couldn't fool me. But when he died I helped clear out his home. There were beautiful tailored suits, now faded and real leather shoes, now worn down and silk cravats but no sign of a princess.

The frame is still, he sits in the armchair motionless and like a time lapse film I see the passing of babies and children as they climb over his lap, stopping to play with his hands or reorganize his tie. Probably first were my mother and her sister, later my siblings, cousins and then me. Some came fleetingly. Others stayed for longer. After came the nephews and nieces and babies of friends and finally my own daughters. By then his hands were thinner, his purple veins showed through his transparent skin but my girls still held them lovingly. And although he appears so frozen in time, I can still see his fingers moving, making their tiny soothing circular movements on the armrest of his chair (or the fabric of his cardigan,) as though searching for the now grown children or the cat who had long gone.

www.fionayaronfield.co.uk

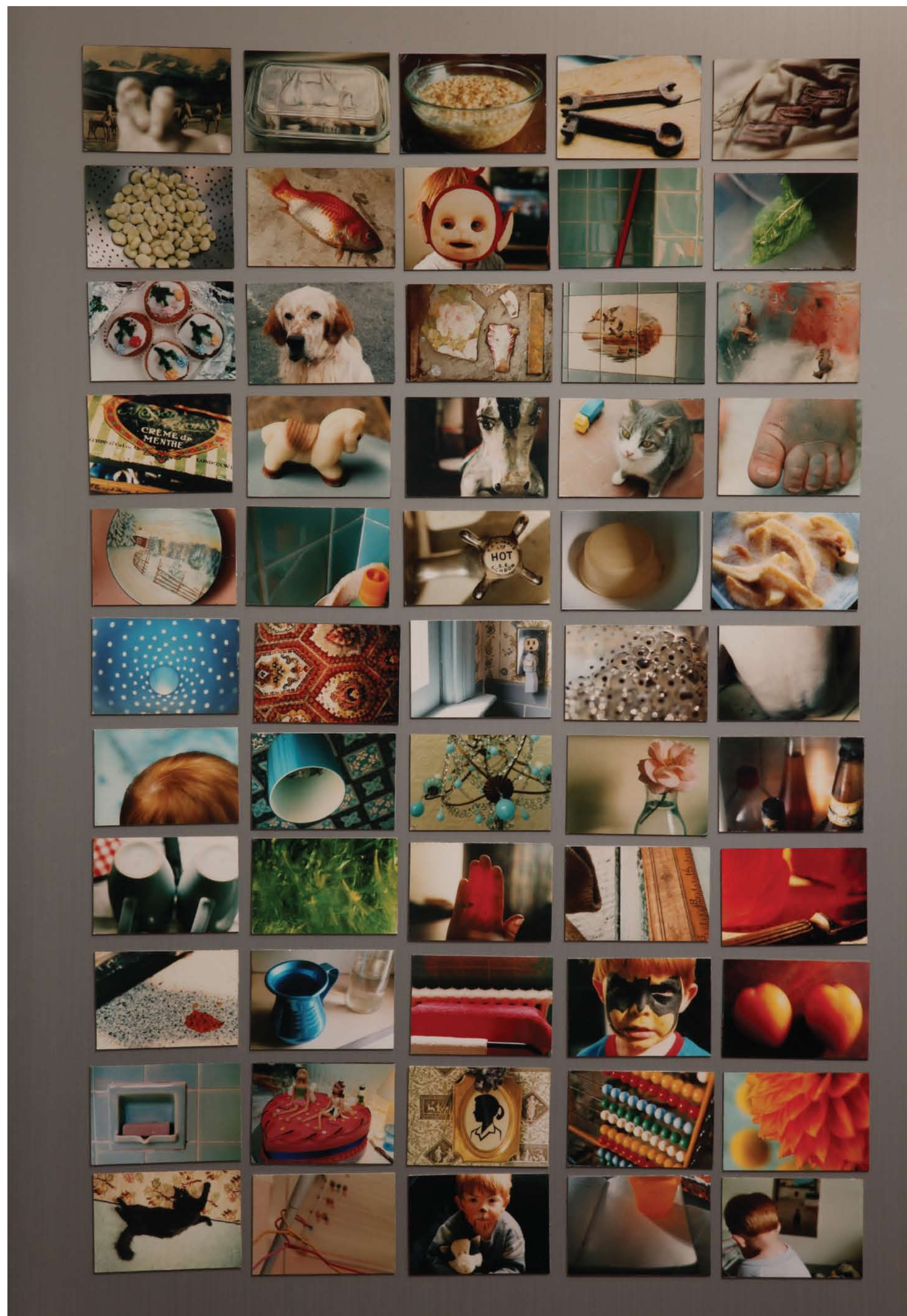


(IMAGE OPPOSITE) HEATHER McDONOUGH

Observation Diary
From the Observation Diary, we are given a glimpse of objects, situations, people and memories that within a short time vanish and alter. Home is often where these small moments are composed and being undisturbed in such an environment allows for precise scrutiny to occur. The juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated imagery can evoke in the viewer particular personal associations. For me these associations operate in the realm of longing and desire, especially since the photographic gesture is an attempt to capture forever a single moment but simultaneously emphasises the transient nature of daily life.

I have assembled my own series of photographs on fridge doors, making collections of specific events, places or objects that have been archived and catalogued over a period of ten years. Each constellation of images is constructed anew for different contexts. This piece has been featured in the European Women's Photography Award, Italy; Daze, a group show at the University of Texas, at Dallas, USA: Single images from this piece were exhibited at the Frankfurt Art fair, and The Collectors - a group exhibition at the Great Eastern Hotel in London.

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CAROLYN LEFLEY

Belonging

"It was one of these mysterious fairy calls from out the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its very familiar appeal, even while yet he could not clearly remember what it was...Home! That was what they meant, those caressing appeals, those soft touches wafted through the air, those invisible little hands pulling and tugging, all one way."

Home: a place of comfort and love, a container of memories, a site for longings and a place to belong. Much like Mole's search for his Dolce Domum in *The Wind in the Willows*, for many years my practice has explored this elusive state of longing for home. The setting or stage for these photographs has moved from my childhood home, to strangers' empty homes to doll's houses. The doll's house has captured my imagination from an early age since watching the film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* as a child, where the film's diminutive hero is relegated to the doll's house only to be attacked by a ferocious pet cat. A doll's house is a dream home in miniature, a place for childhood imaginings and adult escapism. I have used the construct of the miniature home to make photographs that depict a world that floats between reality and fantasy, between believable spaces and sites of make believe.

The empty and neglected bedrooms in *Belonging*, that seem to groan with implicit memories, loosely represent the unease and weariness encountered throughout my own uncertain quest for home. In fact the repetitive representation of rooms has haunted my photographic practice for many years. Rooms which once served as the playgrounds of childhood fantasy, sometimes become places of paradox; where the perfection of the fairy-tale is found by adult experience to be wanting. Betrayed by the conviction of innocence, we begin the grown-up search for that elusive place and position in which we can truly feel at-home; where we belong.

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DANILO MURRO

It has been almost ten years since this series was photographed. I remember I was writing my dissertation and studying Henry Lefebvre and his "Production of space" when I read for the first time *Envoi*, a poem by Mexican poet Octavio Paz.

Envoi
Imprisoned by four walls
(To the north, the crystal of non-knowledge
a landscape to be invented
to the south, reflective memory
to the east, the mirror
to the west, stone and the song of silence)
I wrote messages, but received no reply
Octavio Paz

At the time I was photographing external walls around the perimeter of some London penitentiaries and desperately trying to get permission to photograph the inside of these institutes of justice. Ironically, inmates are desperate to be freed and I was desperate to be allowed in just for the sake of taking a few photographs. The reason why, I am not sure, curiosity I guess was one of the elements. When I was much younger and still living in Sardinia and my Dad was still serving the state as an Anti-narcotics cop, he was the one taking the bad guys inside and I was always asking him to take me with him for a visit. I believe it is part of human nature to be curious about such an evil place which we would never want to experience in our own skin.

Before I began photographing I didn't know how I was going to execute this project, I had no idea what I was going to find inside and how I was going to react to these places. The one thing I was sure about from the very beginning was that I did not want to photograph the inmates but rather the environment in which they reside, the cells where they live amongst their belongings. I strongly believe we don't need to see their face in order to feel their presence. *Envoi* for me was simply a search for the essence of life, "a reinvented life". Imagine, someone serving a long or life sentence, you don't know where you belong anymore. Those 4 walls become your existence, your belongings become your identity. Some of

those cells were so homely and well looked after as one would do only with their own home. While I was photographing I was constantly escorted by guards and every time I asked to photograph a cell the decision was down to the occupant. Some of them took so much pride in showing me inside, introducing me to their families through the pictures on the walls, offering me a coffee like anyone of us would do with a guest.

Some people asked me if *Envoi* had some political connotations. No, I know nothing about prison and this project was never intended to make a statement about the justice system in this country or in Italy or anywhere else. *Envoi* was and still is simply an outsider's observation of something that is part of our society without making a political statement as to whether it has the right to exist or not. *Envoi* was eventually photographed in Sardinia and Sicily after a year and a half of letters addressed to Italian the Minister of Justice. It doesn't really matter to me whether it was photographed in Italy or elsewhere. It speaks only of life inside.

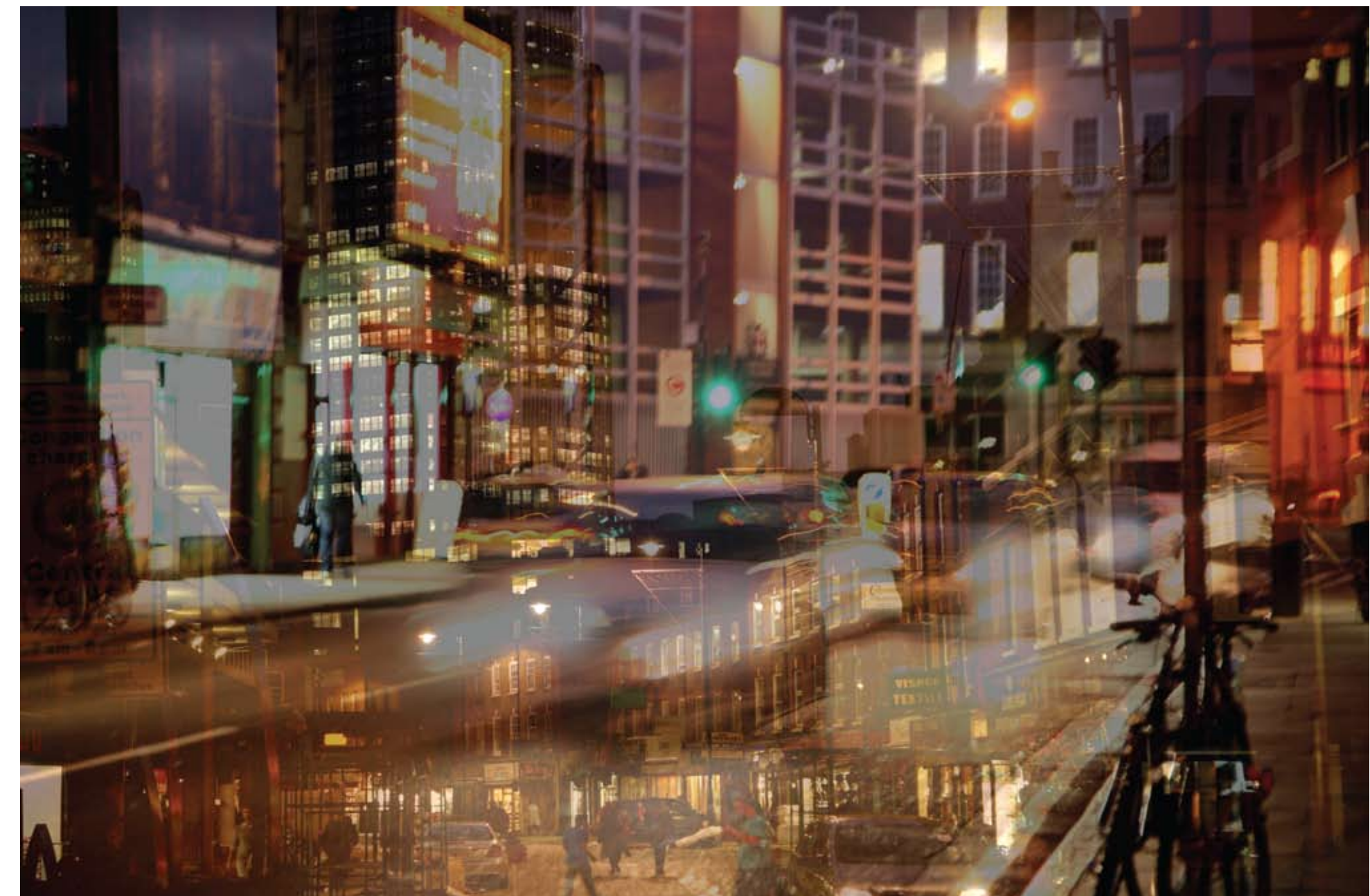
It was only when I finally stepped inside for the first time that I realised what I was going to do, and that was much more than just a few pictures. I was about to experience something that still after ten years makes my stomach shrink.

On the first day I did not take a single photograph.

My latest project "Sea-cieety" which I am working on currently is now visible on my website www.danilomurru.com It will be exhibited alongside the concrete artworks of Naomi Doran www.naomidoran.com at: The Original Gallery, Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, London, N8 9JA. The show will be open for the private view Wed 30th March 2011 from 7-9pm and will continue until 20th April 2011.

Tel: 020 8489 1419

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SANTA PITERNIECE

Shoreditch of my illusions
These works by Santa Piterniece represent the Shoreditch area, which has been the artist's adopted home for the last year. They are an interpretation of how she sees and feels in this artistic environment and how she visualises herself as a personality within its locality.

Shoreditch is now Santa Piterniece's home – it is the places, memories, feelings and her own unique views of her home area. By getting to know surroundings and passing places many times over the time it has created these illusions about photographer's home that are represented in her multi-dimensional photographs which challenge perceptions of time, space and scale. Harriet Beecher Stowe once said: "Home is a place not only of strong affections, but of entire unreserved; it is life's undress rehearsal, its backroom, its dressing room, from which we go forth to more careful and guarded intercourse, leaving behind...cast-off and everyday clothing" and Santa Piterniece is exploring these unreserved layers and finding her true point of view on life in Shoreditch and her part as inhabitant of her home. Piterniece's layered compositions capture elements taken at different times and places and subvert the conventional idea that a photograph represents just one instance. She constructs scenes that are surreal yet familiar and engaging.

www.santasstudio.eu



MITCH KARUNARATNE

Private Geographies

I grew up on an island, Canvey Island, in the Thames Estuary, and whilst I left the island many years ago, it still holds a deep-rooted connection for me.

I've spent the last year making return visits; visiting the hairdressers where I had my long hair first cut and sold for a wig, visiting the stage on which I performed in Swan Lake, later to be told I lacked the grace and finesse to ever be a dancer, visiting the memorial hall where I was baptised in my Brownie Uniform, visiting the working men's club – for the first time going inside.

I've walked the route to school, stood outside my old home and retraced the pavements connecting our house with my cousins, but more than that – I've just been there. I've just wandered, stood, looked and listened, to both my younger self and myself now.

From these attentive wanderings the series Private Geographies is emerging. I'm making photographs that explore the constructed mythology of place, where our own histories, memory, story and fantasy collide. By looking back at my home – seeing the objects, the places, the under loved and the over looked, all with their traces of social history – I hope to give meaning to our sense of belonging and our relationship with place.

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Basil: George Town British Columbia to Southampton 1950



Keith: Savanna-la-Mar Jamaica to London 1959



Donal: Belfast Northern Ireland to Preston 1973



Wallace: Birchip Australia to London 1936

JAMES RUSSELL CANT

Divided to the Ocean

James Cant

*'I don't really know where I belong
Yes divided to de ocean
Divided to de bone'*

From: Wherever I Hang Grace Nichols
1989

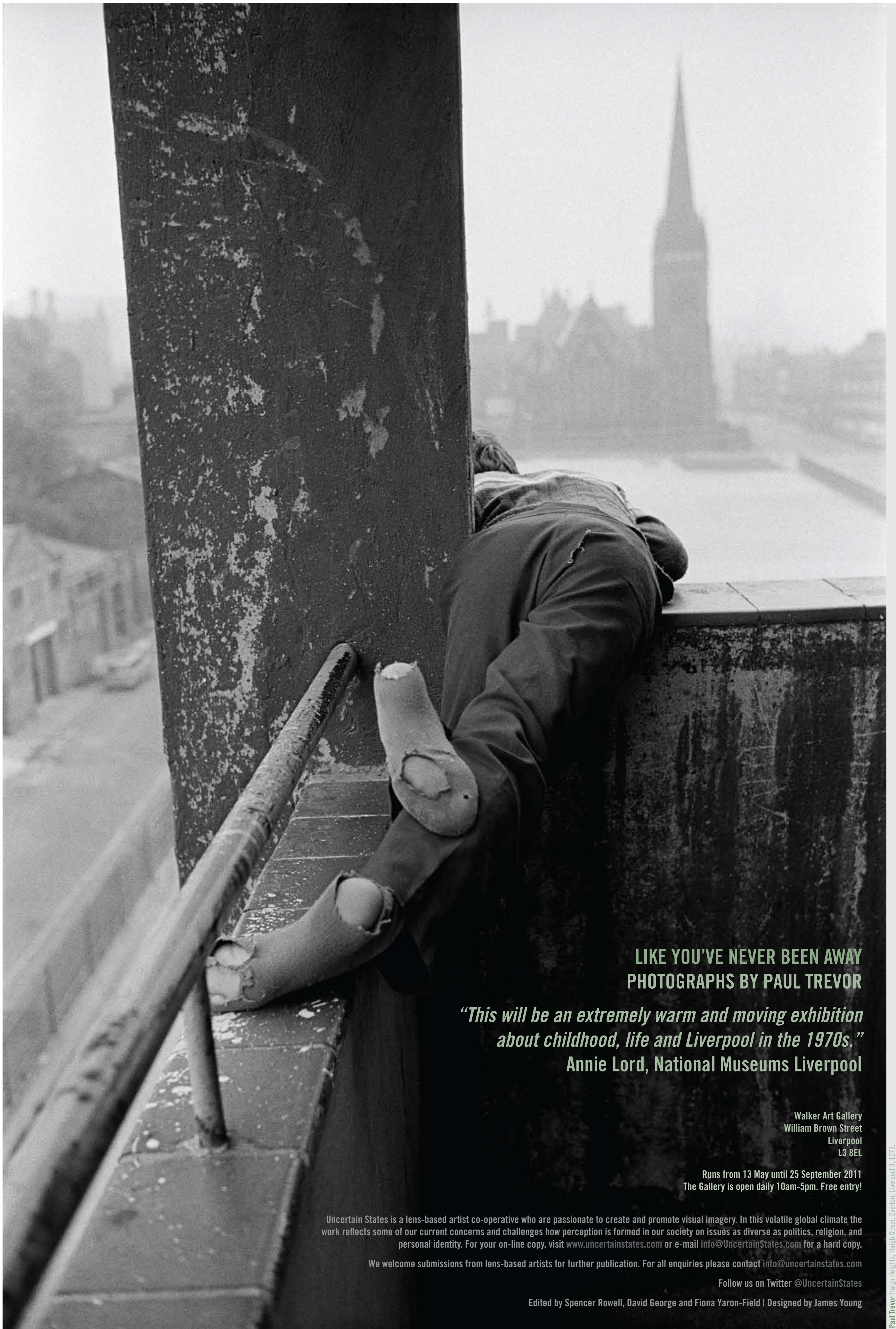
"The last time I saw Peter was when we were 14 and we went swimming down by the river estuary in Maldon. We stayed late and I lent him 4 pence ha'penny so he could get the bus home. Two weeks later I heard that he had been sent to Australia. I met him again after 50 years and he told me how he used to go to the beach in Perth and stand up to his knees in the sea because then he felt connected to Maldon."

Divided to the Ocean is a series of eleven portraits of individuals, including my own father, who have migrated to England by sea. Clearly migration can be an enriching and liberating experience but this work uses the sea and tide as metaphors, to consider the inherent divisions of time, space and self as well as a potential for melancholy in the processes of emigration and exile. The photographs are composites, palimpsests of twenty-four images. Made over a period spanning high water, they record a

duration, as each person returned to, and was photographed at, the approaches to their port of arrival. They are portrayed in a liminal, hybrid space that is sometimes land and sometimes sea. The resulting backgrounds are seascapes of the actual seas that they crossed on their arrival. As in Nichols' poem these waters not only act as conduits for travel but also as a kind of sublime barrier. Ebbing and flowing, they both connect and divide the subjects to their land of origin and represent the sometimes hidden confrontation between present, past and future as the forces of rootedness battle with those of movement.

The subjects stories, hinted at through the titles, reflect the confluence of the private and personal with broader and grander narratives. This group however is not intended to be representative of patterns of migration into England. It is contingent, built on connections of family, friends and neighbours. Its purpose is to consider the schisms of migration through an empathetic imagining of each individual's narrative. An imagining that hopefully will eschew the geopolitical, demographic and what Homi K Bhabha's describes as the stereotype's simultaneous recognition and disavowal of difference.

www.jamesrussellcant.com



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We welcome submissions from lens-based artists for further publication. For all enquiries please contact info@uncertainstates.com

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