



## COLLABORATION IN RECENT BRITISH PORTRAITURE

### *1+1=3 Collaboration in Recent British Portraiture*

**EMMA CRITCHLEY, ANNA FOX, SARA HAQ, PAUL JEFF, WIEBKE LEISTER, ANTHONY LUVERA, MELANIE MANCHOT, ADAM BROOMBERG AND OLIVER CHANARIN**

**Curated by Susan Bright**

This exhibition takes as its foundation the nature of collaboration. What exactly does collaboration mean and how does it manifest itself? Does collaboration really mean equal partners as one might originally presume or are the delicate power balances inherent in portraiture still very much at play? All of the artists represented in this group exhibition question what the term means and undertake collaborative work in a variety of ways. A collaboration is often seen as a working arrangement between an artist and another person, group, or institution. Present throughout art history, collaborations are considered unusual today when artists tend to be valued for their individual voice and contribution to society. Some artists form long-term working partnerships with other artists—these are seen as distinct from collaborations which are often temporary.

All the work here can be defined under the genre of portraiture – be that of one person, a group or a society. Laden with ambiguity and uncertainty, the portrait is perhaps the most complex area of artistic practice. Used by contemporary artists to explore issues of identity, national, personal or sexual, it has moved away from its commercial roots to become a powerful encounter of exchanges between artist, sitter and spectator. Motivations and desires are never really clear, and relationships and reactions to a portrait can vary enormously. To one they can be exploitative, engaging, ethically uncertain, and to another tender, informed and noble. These tensions make it one of the most compelling of artistic genres and also one of the most popular.

The ambiguities of portraiture and the rigour of a collaborative approach are highlighted in this exhibition. Bringing together some of the most exciting artists and photographers working in Britain today this show does not aim to be a definitive survey of contemporary portraiture but more a cross section of diverse photographic strategies and processes which offer insight into the complexities of photographing the human figure.

### **Susan Bright (curator)**

Susan Bright is a writer and curator. She currently works as a consultant for Sotheby's Institute, London on their forthcoming MA in the History of Photography. She previously worked as Assistant Curator of Photographs at the National Portrait Gallery and as curator at the Association of Photographers. She has curated a wide variety of photography exhibitions and writes for a number of journals and magazines including *Source*, *Tema Celeste* and *Contemporary*. Her first book *Art Photography Now* was published by Thames and Hudson in Autumn 2005 and will be translated into four languages.



Image © Emma Critchley & Sara Haq *Merge* 2005-2006 Giclée Print

### **Emma Critchley & Sara Haq**

Emma Critchley completed her photography degree at Brighton University in June 2004 and is working as a freelance photographer. In the last year she has won the AOP Student Photographer of the Year award and was also short-listed for the Schweppes Photographic Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery. Emma's work is primarily based underwater and she draws inspiration from a complete fascination with a world in which human life is at its most vulnerable. Her most recent piece of work 'Portraits' explores the concepts of time and space and is very much inspired by the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto and Bill Viola.

Sara Haq trained as a visual artist/ photographer at Goldsmiths College, and then worked as a freelance photographer/ project manager/ agent for 7 years. In 2002/3 she gained a scholarship for an MA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins where she started working collaboratively with artist Eldina Begic. The concept of the hybrid and cultural politics are implicit in her practice. Since graduation she has shown in group exhibitions in Britain, Malaysia, Philippines, Pakistan and New York. Her most recent curatorial practice is a multinational project exploring the possibilities of digital networking and curating via the internet. This culminated in simultaneous photographic exhibitions in Bangkok, Berlin, London, Los Angeles, Manila and Saigon in June 2005.

*Merge* (2005-2006) is a collaborative project dealing with different responses to water, from therapeutic immersion to aqua phobia.

"For me, this project has been a unique opportunity to work closely with someone in the water who has aqua phobia. We were both interested in photographing each other at the surface of the water, the space where the two 'worlds' meet. Initially, I was looking to capture Sara breaking through the surface and wanted really quite tense uncomfortable images. But as we progressed, what became really interesting is that I ended up producing very serene images of Sara, and Sara produced uncomfortable images of me. Totally subconsciously we projected our own feelings into the images. I then decided to focus on this concept, to capture serene, liberating images from photographing someone who is totally uncomfortable within their environment."

Emma Critchley

### **Anna Fox**

Influenced by British documentary tradition and US 'New Colourists' Anna's first body of work Workstations observed with a critical eye London office culture in the mid Thatcher years. Later work documenting weekend wargames, Friendly Fire, was exhibited in Warworks at the Victoria & Albert Museum, as well as the Netherlands and Canada. Her solo shows have been seen at The Photographer's Gallery, London, The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago and her work has been included in numerous international group shows including - Through the Looking Glass, Documentary Dilemmas and New Natural History amongst others. She has had several monographs of her work published and a new major show of her work will be touring internationally from 2005 with accompanying book. Anna is Head of the BA Photography Programme at The Surrey Institute of Art & Design.

Anna Fox's photographs and video document the life of her friend, Linda Lunus from the time that they met in 1983 to the present day. The "collaboration" between artist and subject has transformed and changed over many years depending on the shifting balance of power between the two parties.

"After my initial interest in candidly photographing her the following years were spent with her choosing when to be photographed and how - she was leading and directing. I became quite frustrated; it felt more like her interest than mine. I didn't really think about it as a body of work then, it was just me photographing Linda for her use."



Anna Fox IMAGE © Anna Fox Linda Lunus 1983 onwards

### **Paul Jeff**

Paul Jeff is a practicing artist working in the field of 'Performed Photography', a hybrid form incorporating both photography and live art. The main vehicle for this is PAUL+A (pronounced Paul & Paula) which is Paul plus a female collaborator; different on a project by project basis. The work is situated in an interrogation of gender discourse and comes out of a previous collaboration, Klanger and Boink, with Elizabeth McDonough. In 1992 they were nominated for the prestigious Fox Talbot award at the National Portrait Gallery in London. Paul Jeff is Head of the masters Art & Design Programme at Swansea Institute of Art. He is a founder member of TRAWS, the Inter-University Research Group into Performance in Wales.

"I describe my practice as Performed Photography which is a term I have borrowed from Jennifer Blessing (curator at the Guggenheim, NY) but I am developing the concept in a slightly different way. I mean it primarily in that I am performing the act of photography in a live art sense, but I also use it as an umbrella term to cover my experiments in highlighting differing aspects of the performative within photographic practices.

*More Beautiful than God* is probably the purest manifestation of 'performed photography' as I am developing it. Also it is an absolute joy to do. Initially people are very reticent and scared, then one brave soul volunteers, usually out of a vain bravado and people get involved with it. Everyone who has done it has experienced an exhilarating high and we often get people queuing for another turn if they don't take enough clothes off! People crowd around the TV screen often cheering every turn of the cards and as the night goes on the queue gets longer. It is a truly interactive piece, and really a party game."

Paul Jeff

### Wiebke Leister

Wiebke Leister studied photography at the University in Essen and is currently finishing her PhD by practice at the Royal College of Art in London, while lecturing on the MA photography programme at the London College of Communication. As well as writing for magazines and giving talks on photography, she has exhibited her work internationally. In 2001 she was commissioned to photograph a book for the SK-Stiftung in Cologne (Theaterszene Jahrbuch), and in 2003 to collaborate on a book for the Junge Akademie of the Academy of Science in Berlin (Ethisierung – Ethikferne). Currently, she is co-editing the forthcoming book *In Pursuit of Luxury* (2006).

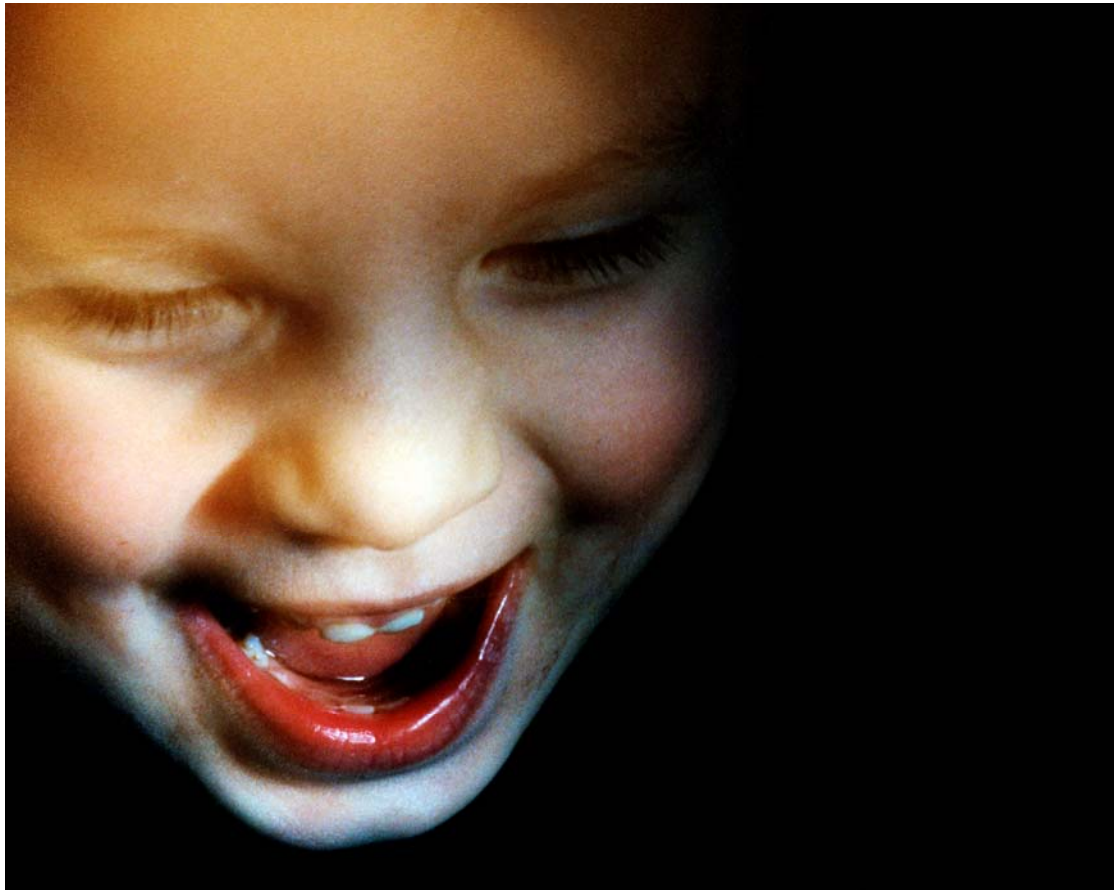


IMAGE © Wiebke Leister *Ticklish Relations* 2005-2006 type C print

“My work is an investigation into photographic portraiture beyond the limits of the individual ‘likeness’. In exploring the gap between emotion and expression – for instance in capturing a moment when laughter is not simply joyful – I want photography to act as a site of projection and reference to shared experiences. My tickle project is based on the idea that laughter is not just a pleasurable and exhilarating experience. Showing a physiological as well as a psychological event, my photographs aim to take the viewer back to those tickle-fights of our childhood – loving and hating them at the same time.

The sociologist Provine points out that ‘children (...) often run away shrieking from the tickler, only to return seconds later for another dose of tickle and laughter. This is their way of regulating the duration and intensity of tickle’. If they are not forced to stay their encouraging giggle turns into hysterical screaming, their joy into pain, leaving me as a photographer with the questions: what does the wide-open mouth signify in this context? Which motivation does laughter indicate? Can I touch photographically on the blurred turning point involved in this and at the same time the universal experience of tickling?”

Wiebke Leister

### **Anthony Luvera**

Originally from Western Australia, artist Anthony Luvera (b.1974) is currently based in London. Primarily concerned with facilitating relational, process-based and collaborative strategies, which acknowledge and interrogate the failings of the photographic document in the representation of 'reality', Luvera's practice to date has focused on social issues such as homelessness, addiction and mental health.

Since 2002 Luvera has collaborated with homeless and ex-homeless people living in London on a number of sustained photographic projects, including the creation of a photographic archive **Photographs (2002-2005)**, and the series **Assisted Self-Portraits (2003-2005)**. In 2005 a presentation from these two conjoining bodies of work was displayed on the London Underground, across 12 central London tube stations.

The archive **Photographs** was assembled by Luvera through weekly workshops hosted across London attended by over 200 homeless and ex-homeless people. Providing his subject/participants with cameras, Luvera facilitated the building of each individual's contributory portfolio toward the larger bank of images, gathering diverse viewpoints on the experience of homelessness from the *inside*. Comprised of contributions ranging widely from intimate portraits and images of the everyday experiences and surroundings of the contributor, through to visual explorations of concepts and ideas to do with the notion of homelessness and the experience of the city, the images from the archive **Photographs** are an insightful presentation of homeless and ex-homeless people portrayed in a way previously unseen, by simply allowing the individuals to represent themselves and their own points of view.

Devised to provide a representation of the contributors to the archive, each image in the series **Assisted Self-Portrait** is the trace of a process that blurred distinctions between Luvera and his subject / participants during the photographic sitting, investing in the subject a greater level of control, collusion and power in the creation of their representation than is usually offered in a traditional photographer / subject relationship. Played out in locations of the participant's choosing, over repeated sessions, Luvera taught each participant how to use large format camera equipment using Polaroid and a long cable release. Each subject was an active participant and co-creator of the image, while Luvera, as the photographer, served more as a facilitator, tutor and technical advisor.



IMAGE © Anthony Luvera Piers Lockwood 2

### **Melanie Manchot**

Since completing her MA in Photography at the Royal College Melanie Manchot's work has been concerned with notions of portraiture explored through photography as well as increasingly through video works. In that context the work has been examining relations between the individual and public space, both socially and culturally constructed. She has exhibited extensively throughout the world including the USA, UK, Germany and Russia. Her book *Love is a Stranger* was published by Prestel in 2001. Melanie is currently working towards a museum show in Berlin in 2006.



IMAGE © Melanie Manchot *Aeroflot* 12.36pm 2004

*"Groups and locations (Moscow)*, explores ideas regarding street photography and contemporary urban culture. The work builds on two concerns central to my practice: One is the performative quality of photography; the other is an ongoing investigation into our understanding of and participation in the realms of the public and the private. In particular I am interested in investigating how private gestures can occur in public as well as how moments of intervention and defiance have the ability to charge public space.

*Groups + Locations (Moscow)* references aspects of historical Russian photography, and combines them with observations on the use of and suspicion towards photography in contemporary urban space. At the same time these works aim to establish particular references to the language of film, especially those brief moments of arrested or slowed movement familiar from the genre of horror and thriller. It is those moments of intense psychological suspense in which the viewer is confronted with a large number of people on screen, which interest me here."

Melanie Manchot

## Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin are a photographic team based in London. They have produced three photographic books; *Trust* (2000) which accompanied their solo-show at The Hasselblad Center, *Ghetto* (2003) a collection of their work as editors and principal photographers of *Colors* magazine and *Mr Mkhize's Portrait* (2004) which documented South Africa ten years after apartheid. They are currently working on a commission for Photoworks (UK) and their next book to be published in 2006 by Steidl. Broomberg and Chanarin tutor on the MA photojournalism course at London College of Communication. They regularly teach workshops in photography and continue to work editorially for magazines including *The Guardian Weekend*, *The Observer Magazine* and *Life*. Last year they produced their first film commissioned by Channel 4.



IMAGE © Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin  
Oreste 2001 digital type C print

"We first started working together at *Colors* Magazine eight years ago. Our first experience of photography was looking at images rather than taking them. As Editors of *Colors* magazine we would sift through hundreds of images sent to us every day. It was a real education. But there was something frustrating about it in the end. The pictures we were seeing were full of people we knew nothing about. The way we were using them felt quite abusive, removed from their context and juxtaposed against some statistic or provocative quote. After a year at *Colors* we decided to leave and go back to London. At that point we picked up a camera (one between us) and began working on a series of images that turned into our first book, *Trust*.

Shortly after it was published we were invited back to *Colors*, with the opportunity to re-launch the magazine and develop a new approach.

We decided that if we were meeting, interviewing and photographing the subjects ourselves we would have a greater sense of responsibility to the way they were portrayed. We made certain rules: we would never use an image of someone we had not spent time talking to, we would always send the magazine back to the community we were documenting and we would try and make the process of documenting the communities into a dialogue.

This particular series of self-portraits, made in a psychiatric hospital in Cuba, are part of a broader project which we later collected together in our second book, *Ghetto*. We decided to dedicate one chapter of the book to the issue of mental health, looking at how, and why, psychiatric patients are still isolated from their broader communities. In preparation, we began looking at how mentally ill patients have been portrayed in photography in the past and tried to find a way to make the process of photographing more collaborative."

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

This exhibition was curated for FotoFreo 2006

