



Library of Birmingham Photography Project



Michael Collins, Library of Birmingham Site, 2012.





PWD, Model for the Central Library, c1970



PWD, Old and New Library c1975



Roy Peters, John Madin
Central Library, c1980

Background

The Library of Birmingham holds one of the UK's national collections of photography. The collection was awarded Designated Status by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in recognition of its national and international importance in 2006. Material from the collection has featured in a number of major national and international exhibitions. The Library also has an established track record of commissioning contemporary photographers and supporting the development of fine art and documentary photography.

Birmingham has been home to three public library buildings. Each has been the subject of photographic investigations, leading to an extraordinary visual archive which has informed and will form part of the current project.

The Photography Projects Team has played an important role in the creation and delivery of a range of new, ambitious and high profile photography projects; commissions, acquisitions of photographers' archives, exhibitions, residences, artist and the archive projects and professional development for photographers including mentoring and portfolio development. The Team is part of Birmingham Central Library, the largest non-national library in Europe. It is unique amongst UK public libraries for the depth and range of its special collections. The Library's photography collection, one of the UK's national collections of photography, consists of over 3 million items. These include the archives and works by nineteenth century pioneers, significant works and archives by leading twentieth century photographers and works and collections by contemporary photographers /artists.

Reference Works: The Library of Birmingham Photography Project

www.reference-works.com

The Library of Birmingham Photography Department and its partners established a significant and high profile photography project to enable four award winning contemporary artists to respond to the new Library of Birmingham, old Central Library and the transition. The project, starting in 2011 and completing in 2014 is the largest and most high profile photography commission established in the city and region. Partners include Arts Council England, Birmingham City Council and Birmingham City University.



Brian Griffin, Michael Collins, Stuart Whipps, Andrew Lacon

The commissioned UK based photographers are Michael Collins, Brian Griffin, Andrew Lacon and Stuart Whipps. They bring a diverse range of engagements and practices to the project, ranging from portrait photography to contemporary conceptual documentary photography. The project has achieved;

- A major art exhibition at the new Library of Birmingham. The inaugural exhibition in the significant new gallery space.
- An ambitious outdoor photography exhibition in the public realm
- A major new publication featuring over 100 photographs and writing commissioned from leading photography historians and writers
- A partnership with the University that led to a mentoring and professional development programme for student and graduate photographers
- A major new project specific website and social media activity
- A dynamic PR campaign that resulted in regional, national and international press including BBC TV coverage and features in leading international photography magazines and journals
- Over 100 new artworks were produced for exhibition and publication
- An academic symposium with delegates from all over the UK attending
- Audiences of over 150,000 during the four month duration of the exhibitions.

Guangzhou Library and Reference Works

The Library of Birmingham seeks to strengthen the cultural exchange with China through the partnership of the two libraries in the 'Sister Cities' of Birmingham and Guangzhou, through their Photography Collections and the celebrated REFERENCE WORKS project. REFERENCE WORKS was designed initially to enable four leading artists to respond to the new Library of Birmingham. As a result and as part of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two libraries we aim to take the REFERENCE WORKS exhibition to Guangzhou Library in late 2014 and to develop opportunities for two of the four artists to visit the library and its collections, to research their collections and to begin to make new work in response as part of a cultural exchange.

The project is supported by Arts Council England and the British Council.

The project is still seeking funding from partners in China and investment/support from the private sector.

This project is very important to us. It will deepen and strengthen our cultural engagement with our Sister City and will provide cultural links through photography. REFERENCE WORKS helped to celebrate the position of Birmingham as an important UK centre for photography and examines the relationship between the library and photography, between cities and photography and the citizens of the city and photography. Photography and the image is also important in Guangzhou as is the cultural offer of the city and its arts community.

Guangzhou Library is also a new Library and was established by the Municipal Government for the benefit of the public's welfare and to serve as a cultural and educational institution. The exhibition and the visiting artists will enable us to begin research about the photography collection and the library in Guangzhou in preparation for the creation of new work. We are also looking forward to the possibility of hosting a photographic artist from Guangzhou at the new Library of Birmingham. We hope this will be the first of many such collaborations as part of the Memorandum.

REFERENCE WORKS will strengthen existing cultural collaborations between Birmingham and Guangzhou concerning photography. In 2009 an exhibition of work by Guangzhou based XU Peiwu was exhibited at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and in 2012, the Library of Birmingham loaned 26 vintage prints from the photography collection to the Unseen exhibition presented at the Guangzhou Museum and Art Gallery.

The impact of this cultural exchange between the libraries of Birmingham and Guangzhou will further strengthen the cultural knowledge exchange between the two cities, enable a sharing of cultural history, a strengthening of the strategic relationship with the two cities and the potential to enhance further the business investment in the cultural activities of the two libraries. The longer-term impact of the project will be to strengthen further the relationship between the two cultural institutions and enable them to fulfil further the partnership desire expressed by the MoU between the two libraries. This project will also enable further the fulfilment of the MoU between the two cities, to strengthen links in education and culture.

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Artists Biographies

Michael Collins

The photographer gives fascinating and faithful accounts of British landmarks. Collins applies the principles of record picture photography to his images – placing an emphasis on clear, unadorned, detailed description – to give a photograph that is as plainly realistic as possible. This results in pictures with a seemingly neutral mode, which leaves the viewers free to explore the photograph on their own terms. Based in London, he has covered subjects including the redevelopment of St Pancras, the construction of the M6 Toll Motorway and Battersea Power Station. His work has been exhibited in London, New York and across the UK. His work is in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum and Birmingham Library and has been published in The Guardian, Granta and the Daily Telegraph, for whom he is a former picture editor.



Michael Collins, Library of Birmingham site, 2009-2012. .

Brian Griffin

This Influential and acclaimed photographer was born in Birmingham, studied in Manchester and became a freelance photographer in 1972. He 'has had a profound effect on photography in the last 30 years- he creates works of art that leave the viewer mesmerised' (British Journal of Photography). His portraits are of renowned politicians, designers and singers and they all undergo a complete transformation in front of his camera. He can take what could be dull, corporate, everyday or commercial and magically transform it to be the most insightful, mesmerising, personal and exciting work. Birmingham Library recently acquired 36 vintage prints by Griffin.



Brian Griffin, Library of Birmingham portraits, 2012

Andrew Lacon

Andrew Lacon was born in Dudley in the West Midlands and recently graduated from the Royal College of Art London with an MA in Fine Art Photography, previously studying at The University of Plymouth. Andrew has developed a practise that engages the viewer with the overlooked, the abandoned and manipulations of the English Landscape. Since Studying at the RCA, Andrew has been commissioned alongside photographers Olivier Richon and Sarah Jones to make work at the House Hold Cavalry Knightsbridge Barracks and has started to exhibit national and in Europe including a group show alongside artist Peter Kennard and solo shows of his work A Magnitude In Albion (2011) at Outpost Norwich and previously The Priory at Wolverhampton's Light House and Dudley Museum and Art Gallery. He was presented with the Metro Imaging Award for his final show at RCA and was previously shortlisted for the Deutsche Bank Art Award 2011 and Prix Leica 2010.



Andrew Lacon, Library of Birmingham site, 2010- 2012.

Stuart Whipps

Birmingham based photographer Stuart Whipps was awarded joint first prize at East International 2009. He is best known for his ongoing documentation of the redundant Rover works at Longbridge. In 2006 he was awarded first place in the prestigious Observer newspaper Hodge photographic prize for this body of work. He has exhibited at Luminous at Rencontres d'Arles, France (2006) and Bill Brandt in Bournville, a commission to create and exhibit new work as part of the Bill Brandt in Bournville group exhibition, at the International project space, Birmingham (2006). In April 2008 he had a solo exhibition at The New Art Gallery Walsall and launched his book featuring the celebrated Longbridge: a project supported by the Library. Birmingham Central Library acquired work from his Longbridge series in 2008. Work in development includes Blaenau Ffestiniog and a solo show at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.



Stuart Whipps, Birmingham Central Library, 2011 - 2012