

+ CRUEL TENDER

THE REAL IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY PHOTOGRAPH

Sponsored by UBS

5 JUNE – 7 SEPTEMBER 2003

Teacher and Group Leaders' Kit

Information and practical ideas for group visits

1. Introduction to the Exhibition

Welcome to Tate Modern and to the *Cruel and Tender* exhibition.

How to use this kit

This kit aims to help you carry out a successful visit to the exhibition. It includes useful contextual information and thematic cards to use with your students in the gallery or classroom. Although it is aimed primarily at teachers visiting the exhibition and planning work with school students, Tate Modern welcomes group leaders from adult education, community education and many other learning organisations across many varied disciplines. We have aimed to write this resource in a way that we hope will be useful to these wide audiences and do welcome your comments.

The exhibition

Cruel and Tender is the first exhibition at Tate Modern that is dedicated to photography. There are over 600 works on display, which explore ideas about representing the real through documentary photography.

For a concise introduction to the exhibition and artists on show, read the accompanying exhibition guide in this kit.

Complex aspects of photographic practice are explored in this exhibition including:

- Portraiture and how to represent a person through photography
- The problematic nature of documentary in relation to ideas about truth
- The role of the viewer and how we are implicated in the images we look at
- The use of series of photographs to build the way we 'read' works

These ideas are introduced and explored in the historical and critical context section and also crop up throughout the rest of the kit.

Please note, some of the photographs on display, for example the work of Boris Mikhailov and Diane Arbus, are extremely powerful and at times harrowing and disturbing. We suggest that students are supervised during their visit and that parts of the exhibition are not suitable for students under the age of 13.

Please visit the exhibition on your own prior to bringing students so that you are familiar with the content and layout of the exhibition.

Visiting the exhibition

Tickets are available in advance from Tate Ticketing, tel 020 7887 3959, schools and group bookings line. Price for school groups – £4 each.

Please ask Tate Ticketing when you book tickets if you would like to book lunch and locker space (there is a limited amount available).

As all exhibitions at Tate can be busy, please do not lecture to more than six students at a time. If you have a larger group we suggest that you divide into smaller groups and use some of the ideas and strategies we suggest in the kit.

How to structure your visit

When visiting we suggest you introduce the exhibition to your group in one of the concourse spaces, the Turbine Hall or the Clore Education Centre (see the Tate plan, available throughout the gallery). The information in the kit should help you create an introductory discussion about some of the issues which arise through the photographs on display. Work in small groups when you are in the exhibition, using the thematic sheets to prepare work and discussion topics. You can reconvene later in one of the spaces suggested above to discuss the exhibition as a whole group.

It is worth ensuring that students do not feel they have to see every work in the entire exhibition, which is extensive and may be busy when you visit, but instead focus on specific works or series of works, chosen by you in relation to students' age and subject or project specialism. You can use the thematic sheets to focus your choice.

Tate Modern's approach to learning

Tate Modern's approach to learning encourages students to think not of one correct reading or interpretation of an artwork, but of plural readings. These will be based on the evidence of the artwork itself as experienced by the individuals viewing it, and the awareness of the individual in noting their own responses. To construct meanings, therefore, the viewer needs to be aware of the experiences they bring to looking, as well as the information an artwork holds. This methodology underpins all our workshop, InSET and study day programmes here at Tate Modern.

This methodology and the ideas mentioned above are developed more fully in the *Tate Modern Teachers' Kit*, available in the gallery shop.

Booklist

A selection of books are available in the reading areas of the exhibition. Particular recommendations are:-

Emma Dexter and Thomas Weski, *Cruel and Tender* exhibition catalogue, 2003, Tate

An outline of the curatorial themes of the exhibition as well as biographies of all the artists included.

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1978, Penguin

This remains an iconic book in its exploration of the myriad problems raised by photography and our readings of it. It has specific references to the work of August Sander, Walker Evans and Diane Arbus. At times a complex book, it remains essential reading for any student (from approx Year 12 upwards) or teacher of photography. It remains on most reading lists at art colleges since its publication 25 years ago.

Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory: 1900-1990, 1992, Blackwell*

An invaluable anthology, this contains part of Walter Benjamin's classic text 'The Author as Producer' (pp 483-489). He raises issues about ethics and morality in relation to photographs that remain pertinent today. Also, he discusses the possibilities of photographic works becoming commodities and our responses to the subject matter becoming dulled.

Another relevant essay in this collection is Craig Owens' 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a theory of Post-Modernism' quoted in the introduction.

Catherine de Zegher (ed), *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, 1998, Ikon Gallery

Published to accompany Rosler's retrospective exhibition, the book gives many examples of this contemporary artist's commitment to art that engages with audiences outside gallery contexts.

It contains her classic photo-text work of an area of New York notorious for street drinkers, 'The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems' 1974-5.

The book also contains many other examples of her video, photography, performance and installation practice which interrogates many of the issues of documentary, photographic truth and ethics discussed in this pack.

Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, 1997, Oxford University Press

This book traces the historical development of photography via a series of discussions of the major themes and genres of the medium, including a chapter on documentary photography. It also examines ideas by commentators on photography such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes.

Peter Galassi, *Walker Evans and Company*, 2000, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Including work by many of the photographers shown in the exhibition, this book traces the influences upon Evans' work, including that of August Sander. It goes on to chart Evans' own influence upon later generations of artists who work in photography and other media.

Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction 2nd ed*, 1997, Routledge

This introductory textbook examines key debates in photographic theory, for example photography as art and 'surveyors and the surveyed', placing them in their social and political contexts. It is aimed at students in further and higher education.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Barthes's last book, this combines a selection of photographs with reflections on photography. It examines themes of presence and absence and the relationship between photography and theatre, history and death.

Other current photography exhibitions

Philip-Lorca diCorcia – A Storybook Life

Whitechapel Art Gallery, London

7 June – 24 August

Walker Evans (1903–1975)

The Photographers' Gallery, London

15 May – 12 July

Cindy Sherman

Serpentine Gallery, London

3 June – 25 August

Wolfgang Tillmans

Tate Britain, London

6 June – 14 September

Thomas Ruff – 1979 to the Present

Tate Liverpool

9 May – 6 July

2. Historical and Critical Context

Photography as a medium and founding influences

Photography began as a medium approximately 160 years ago. It is not the purpose of this kit to provide a history of photography but in relation to the exhibition it is helpful to identify some of the influences on the development of this new medium.

Some early practitioners' work developed out of ideas relating to the fine art practice of painting. Artists such as Julia Margaret Cameron and Alfred Stieglitz (neither in this show) made use of the expressive possibilities inherent in the methods of exposing and developing film to create dramatic and moody images. Other photographers opted for an 'objective' or documentary approach where they tried to represent the world with images they believed shared the supposedly more neutral properties of scientific principles of the day. This type of photography was often referred to as 'artless' and was considered to deal with recorded fact rather than a more expressive point of view.

Charles Caffin wrote in 1901:

'There are two distinct roads in photography – the utilitarian and the aesthetic: the goal of the one being a record of facts, and the other an expression of beauty.'

A third, more conceptual approach was introduced by the avant-garde of the early twentieth century (for example Man Ray with his invented rayograms, Moholy Nagy, Hannah Hoch with her photo montage work, again not represented in this show). These artists tried to disrupt ideas of representing figurative 'reality'.

In 1933 Lincoln Kirstein described the work of Walker Evans as possessing a 'tender cruelty'. He was referring to the way Evans' images were spare and factual, and yet also suggested Evans' strong interest, even passion for his subject matter. Evans himself was influenced by the French photographer Eugene Atget, who Evans felt conveyed a strong sense of his own feeling and personality in his photographs of French domestic life, shops and homes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Evans wanted to achieve a balance between form and content so that the viewer would be powerfully affected by the image.

Craig Owens writing in *From the Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism* (see booklist above) points out:

'As an allegorical act ... photography would represent our desire to fix the transitory, the ephemeral, in a stable and stabilising image. In the photographs of Atget and Evans, insofar as they self-consciously preserve that which threatens to disappear, that desire becomes the **subject** of the image.'

Impact of photography on modern art practice

The development of photography has had an immeasurable effect on modern art practice. A few examples include:

- Photography had an impact on the development of abstract art as it was seen to be able to capture the real, so painting and sculpture needed to find a new direction.
- Manet used photographs of race horses to prove to sceptical viewers that the horse did lose contact with the ground with all four legs while galloping.
- The use of the photographic practice of photomontage by John Heartfield in anti-Nazi campaign collages was an example of the politicization of the medium.
- Photography took a central role in art and design classes at the Bauhaus, the iconic art college in Weimar in the 1920s and early 1930s.

The use of photographs in series and the role of film to present narratives were other areas adopted by many artists in the early twentieth century. Claude Cahun and Luis Bunuel explored this way of working to create photographs and films with a surrealist edge. More recently, major galleries and institutions have begun to acquire photography as part of their fine art collections. John-Paul Getty was one of the first fine art collectors to make a major commitment to photography as a medium by making major purchases for his collections in the 1970s.

Photographic 'truth'

As photography practice has developed, the notion of 'truth' in photography has been an area of intense debate for many involved, whether as photographers, subjects or viewers. Is it possible to capture a particular moment in time which represents the event as it actually was, or do other questions also come into play? For example how does the framing of the scene photographed affect our perception of what we are looking at? We might wonder what is just outside the frame and how that extra knowledge of what we cannot see might affect our perception of what is inside the frame. What we see in a photograph is always the result of a choice the photographer has made as he or she edits and sifts through the world around.

The medium of the photographic print itself also throws into question the notion of a 'truth'. How can its flatness ever make a true representation of a complex, three-dimensional scene?

Many photographers in the *Cruel and Tender* exhibition take different positions from the essentially humanist view of August Sander who saw himself as neutrally recording the lives of German people. For example, the contemporary photographer Fazal Sheikh approaches his Somali subjects with a full historical awareness of the legacies of colonial photography and charity advertising. Sheikh uses this knowledge to inform not only the way he makes his photographs and accompanying captions, recording all the information concerning the person photographed, time, place and other information, but also in the way he displays and organises the methods of distribution for his books which benefit human rights agencies.

Within this exhibition it is useful as a viewer to be aware of the motivation of the photographers in taking the work. We suggest you do this by reading the biographical materials available and developing an awareness of the social and political contexts in which the photographers made their work, and by examining how and in what form the work is displayed.

Our role as viewers

When looking at the photographs on display, our perception of what our responsibilities are as viewers is crucial in completing the dynamic between audience, image viewed and photographer. However, the context of what 'the real' means and how we relate to the photographs varies widely for different photographers.

For example, the contemporary photographer, Fazal Sheikh, as previously described, takes his photographs with the agreement of his subjects, within the context of a human-rights campaign and to raise money for the communities living in the areas he photographed. Compare this to the way Martin Parr

observes the British through the composition and printing of his photographs and the titles he gives the works. His investigation of class and social systems inform his photographic practice. You could discuss with students what his conclusions appear to be.

Taking another aspect of subject and relationship to audience, Diane Arbus' photographs of children and adults, including those with a range of disabilities, were taken in the 1960s. These images can be seen very differently by contemporary viewers in the context of the social model of disability (which points out how society 'disables' through attitude, behaviour and distribution of power and resources) and the work of campaigners in the disability movement. These politics, similar to those informing gay equality campaigners and feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s, have largely emerged since Arbus' death in 1971. Our readings of those works are destabilised by the time and context in which we see these photographs as well as our own histories.

Series and display

Also displayed in the exhibition are some of the original books or other methods of publication and distribution in which many of the photographs appeared. This also provides a further context for our reading of the work today. The methods used to display these works influence the way we encounter the work, for example in the extensive use of series in this exhibition. A series of photographs expresses a much broader view on the subject matter concerned, since where one image might present a potentially banal scene, a series can show us the bigger picture. In this way narratives and typologies can also be created.

It is useful to note the possibilities that are raised by seeing works by one photographer in relation to another, some of whom all exhibited together (for example William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus in 1967, while others have not previously been displayed together (for example Paul Graham and Lewis Baltz).

3. Curriculum Links and Classroom Suggestions

Art and Design

The exhibition can support work at secondary, AS and A2 levels. For example:

- Using sketchbooks/workbooks and journals in a public exhibition
- Recording observations and documenting responses to works
- Recording specialist terminology as well as contextual information
- Analysing and evaluating their own and other's work, expressing opinions and making reasoned judgements
- Developing critical and analytic skills in students' own work and in relation to the professional practice of both historical and contemporary photographers
- Demonstrating how images relate to social and ethical concerns
- Giving examples of how the dominant meanings of imagery can change through historical and cultural shifts
- Investigating primary sources of information.

Links with other subjects

The exhibition makes a range of exciting links across many areas. We suggest as a start:

English writing

- Get students to think about the notion of photographic 'truth' (for more information, see the 'Historical and Critical Context' section in this pack). Using works in the exhibition, write a discursive essay on whether it is possible to capture a particular moment in time which represents the event as it actually was. How far is a photograph an expression of what was actually there and how far is it constructed by the artist?
- Some of the photographers in the exhibition confront the viewer with challenging and difficult images (see the 'Exploring Vulnerability' thematic card). How does viewing this subject matter make students feel, and do they think it is appropriate to present images like this to the public?

English Literature

- Students could compare works in the 'On the Road' thematic card with works of American Literature, for example Jack Kerouac's novel also entitled *On the Road*. Kerouac wrote the introduction to Robert Frank's photo-narrative book *The Americans* of 1959.

Media Studies

This exhibition has many links with the work of film-makers involved in the genre of road movies, from *Down by Law* to *Thelma and Louise*.

- How are road movies defined by culture and gender and how is this replicated in the exhibition? For example look at the work of Robert Frank or Lee Friedlander.
- Screen or arrange to view *Down by Law* (directed by Jim Jarmusch), sometimes screened at the National Film Theatre. What mood and effect does the black and white film stock give to this anti-heroic, anti-Hollywood values story of three prisoners on the road in the mid-West?

History

- The work of August Sander is significant in relation to German social and political history of the 1920s to 40s. His photographic project *Face of Our Time* was begun in 1911 and attempted to chart the range of German society. The project was vilified by the National Socialist party in 1934 for not portraying the Aryan ideal and all unsold copies of *Face of Our Time*, as well as the printer's blocks, were seized and destroyed. Students could consider how this relates to what they may already know about the rise of the Nationalist Socialist (NAZI) Party in Germany.
- Walker Evans travelled through America in 1935 recording the effects of the Depression. Key Stage 3 students could use his findings as primary sources to support their work on this subject.
- Michael Schmidt's photographic series *Ceasefire*, 1987, looks at Berlin's architecture, urban decay, graffitied swastikas and the Berlin wall. Students could use these as source material for discussing what it might have been like to live in a divided Berlin.

Citizenship

- Students could examine Fazal Sheikh's images of refugees and refugee camps in order to think about the political and other circumstances that cause people to leave their homes. In the early 1990s, Sheikh photographed refugees in camps near the Somali border in Kenya and wrote texts explaining why they are in that situation. These beautiful yet saddening images could be used to encourage students to think about the human beings behind the statistics, the human cost of conflict and lead into discussions on Britain's role in offering refuge to those displaced by war, persecution, environmental or political upheaval.

Links with other Artists and the Tate Modern Collection

Photography is integrated across the collection at Tate Modern. Examples of artists whose work might be considered in relation to this show include those represented in the Body and History sections of the collections displays (on level 5 in the gallery).

If there are particular artists you wish to study, ring the Information Office on 020 7401 5120 to check their work is on display prior to your visit.

John Coplans, a contemporary American artist, has made several series of large-scale black and white photographs of his own naked body. His work evokes comparisons with classical sculpture as it is at once monumental but also far from the body ideal this sculpture represents. His honest presentation of his aging naked body can be challenging to some audiences.

Doris Salcedo is a contemporary sculptor from Columbia who uses a range of materials including human hair, concrete and furniture to refer to the complex and violent history of Latin America. She skillfully uses these materials to suggest emotion and a sense of time and place. The way materials can evoke multiple layers of meaning and the evocative responses they draw from us are useful areas to explore with students involved in making art themselves. Salcedo's work *Unland: Audible in the Mouth* is explored as one of the key work cards in the *Tate Modern Teachers Kit*.

The artists below are not currently on display at Tate Modern, but you are able to research them further through the Tate website (www.tate.org.uk)

Hannah Collins, a contemporary British photographer, is concerned with observing specific spaces which have cultural and historic significance (see for example *In the Course of Time II*, 1994). She uses both the scale of her work and its method of presentation, (monumental fibre-based paper mounted on cotton) to convey a fragile sense of history in an evocative style.

William Kentridge, a South African filmmaker, uses charcoal to draw and redraw hundreds of images concerned with the layering of history, apartheid and culture in South African history. These images then become the frames in his animations. The fact that he chooses not to use photographic processes in the initial work, instead laboriously drawing and redrawing to change and layer his imagery is crucial in our readings of his work. His work is again very useful to students involved in art practice themselves where the choice of media used, scale and methods of display are all areas to be considered and choices to be made.

Thematic links (see thematic cards in this kit)

In addition to adapting any of the above ideas to the age and subject of your particular group, we suggest discussion based around the thematic cards which follow. Artists we focus on are in bold; others in the exhibition that link with the themes are in normal text. Some artists could be considered under more than one theme.

- Occupied Spaces

August Sander, Walker Evans, Paul Graham

Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Boris Mikhailov, Michael Schmidt

- On the Road,

Walker Evans, Stephen Shore, Robert Frank

Robert Adams, Stephen Shore, Gary Winogrand, William Eggleston

- Exploring Vulnerability

Rineke Dijkstra, Diane Arbus, Boris Mikhailov

Michael Schmidt, Walker Evans, August Sander,

- Industrialisation and Consumerism

Bernd and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky, Lewis Baltz

Albert Renger-Patzsch, Robert Frank, Robert Adams, Lee Friedlander, Paul Graham, Martin Parr

- Life Stories

Fazal Sheikh, Nicholas Nixon, Rineke Dijkstra

Many artists in the exhibition are concerned at some point with portraiture but in particular you could also look at the work of:- Paul Graham, Garry Winogrand, Walker Evans, Thomas Ruff

4. Occupied Spaces

What is interesting about these places is that they are where a political policy and people collide, where economic decisions and human lives meet head on. This is the primary concern of the work.

Paul Graham

This theme refers to the way in which many of the photographers in *Cruel and Tender* have selected specific people to photograph. How people are shown, what and how the sites are selected for the work, clearly influences our perceptions of these photographs. In the work of many photographers an idea of social history is expressed because of the particular cultural and social environment in which sitters appear – a sense of the space they occupy adding to the meaning of the work.

August Sander

In his project *People of the Twentieth Century*, Sander aimed to document as wide a range of German people and occupations as possible. Sitters are often presented in the centre of the frame, in a setting which refers to their occupation or personality. Sander used a large format camera with glass plate negatives, requiring considerable patience from his subjects as they would have to wait for long exposures.

Although Sander was essentially humanist in his approach, in the early twentieth century there was much interest from the fields of science and medicine in using photography as a taxonomy to collect 'types' of people, with interest in the idea that criminality or insanity could be identified through the studies of photographic portraits. The implications of this have clear political and ideological connotations. Although Sander's portraits were not used in this way, his broad-based approach to portraiture was open to such uses.

Farming Couple – Propriety and Harmony 1912

The couple appear to have dressed formally for this portrait, the woman wearing a full silk bonnet and the man wearing his suit. Their faces and hands are lined and worn by decades of hard physical work, photographed outside in what appears to be the edge of a forest. They look out at us with dignity.

Beggar 1926

The man, perhaps in his late forties is unnamed and looks straight out at us, unsmiling and direct in his gaze. This photograph was taken in 1926 when Germany was suffering the social chaos caused by the First World War. The beggar's crutches and stick remind us that many ex-soldiers were both disabled and unemployed and the country was in economic recession. The social and political climate in Germany was ripe for the false promises of the National Socialist Party a few years later.

Walker Evans

In 1935 Evans travelled across America, documenting the effects of the Depression.

Floyd and Lucille Boroughs on Porch, Hale County, Alabama 1936

This is one of a series featuring Floyd Boroughs' family and their few possessions. Despite the evident poverty there is a feeling of composure in much of Evans' portraiture.

Floyd Burroughs' Shoes 1936

The worn, worked quality of these kicked-off shoes suggest Van Gogh's iconic painting of leather boots made in 1886. Shown without the owner or any other context than the dusty earth, the image contributes another layer to Evans' description of this farming family and the sheer physical toil of their lives. Van Gogh shared with Walker Evans a respect and admiration for the sweated labour of farmers and other manual workers.

Paul Graham

A contemporary British photographer, Graham was influenced by both Sander and Evans in his early work. The work described here comes from the book *Beyond Caring*, 1986, a study of Social Security offices across Britain.

Mother and Baby, Highgate DHSS, North London, 1984 1985 (image)

Here the room is a cramped and uncomfortable space where there is an almost tangible sense of the physical heat and noise of packed bodies, impatient, restless and bored with waiting. The sheer inadequacy of this space to the task of helping any of the people in it, especially the mother and child of the title, is only too apparent.

Discussion points

- How does Graham convey a sense of his involvement and connection with the people he photographs? Notice the composition and where and how people are placed in the space they occupy.
- Do you think the people in these photographs have been given a say in how they are to pose, what objects are photographed beside them etc?
- In the work of August Sander discuss your thoughts about classifying people into categories that represent a cross-section of a nationality of people. Do you think it is possible to do this successfully or comprehensively? How could such a project be co-opted for other means?
- Is there a particular place or space that is significant for your students in their everyday lives (for example an assembly hall, canteen, club)? At what times is it at its most, and least, characteristic? Discuss and plan how you might photograph this space, perhaps as small group work, sharing ideas and tasks (for example in getting permission, talking to people who might use it and whether they will agree to be photographed etc).

5. On the Road

American photographers are often on the road, overcome with disrespectful wonder at what their country offers in the way of surreal surprises.

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, in her discussion of the work of Robert Frank

The theme of exploring urban and rural space informs many of the photographs in this exhibition. It is useful to examine the particular historical and cultural factors that contributed to people travelling and the photographers who took to the road to examine the nature of their changing country.

Walker Evans

Joe's Auto Graveyard, Pennsylvania 1936

As well as observations of people's lives and homes, Walker Evans' journeys through America resulted in photographs which explored the changing landscape of the country as it moved from industrial to technological civilisation. In this photograph the frame is partly filled with the wrecks of cars, recently new but now rusting and abandoned. Behind these wrecks the Pennsylvania land rolls on. There is a sense that this land has exhausted these supposedly strong labour-savers and that the sheer expanse of the land will continue long after the last wreck has rusted away.

Robert Frank,

U.S. 90, En route to Del Rio, Texas 1955 (image)

The photo is blurred, with part of a bulky car in frame, and the occupants are unclear. The vast expanses of road covered, and more still to come, are somehow suggested by the unclear prickly-eyed exhaustion that seems to seep from the slumped body of the sleeping woman in the passenger seat. Frank took this photograph during a year-long journey across the States in 1955. He took 28,000 frames, choosing 83 for exhibition.

His snap-shot style ran counter to the dominant style at that time, championed by Ansel Adams and Edward Weston who aimed for technical perfection and often awe-inspiring shots of dramatic American scenery.

New York City 1955

As part of the same series (*The Americans*), this photograph shows three young men, one in drag, one in make-up, one shielding his eyes from the camera. There is a complex atmosphere of display and camp, but also distrust and concealment. It is important to remember the climate of homophobia in 1950s America. The writer James Baldwin made the decision at this time to leave America due to its intolerance and persecution of gays and head for what he saw as a more tolerant society in France. These attitudes of prejudice were not only held by those of 'middle-America' but were echoed by many in the left and liberation movements (for example Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X).

It seems plausible to think that these young men, playing with notions of identity, masculinity and sexuality, would have had no particular reason to trust Frank or what he planned to do next to them or with their photographs.

Stephen Shore

American Surfaces 1972

In the series *American Surfaces* Shore built up a picture of subjects or landscapes through a series of images he took as he travelled throughout America. In the form of a snapshot-style essay, he made a record of what he did everyday such as places he went, people he met, where he slept and what he ate. Attention to detail has been Shore's trademark and he shows us the banalities of life with some objects in focus, some from odd angles, and some cropped at the edge – much like the way each of us perceives the world.

Discussion points

- Why do you think photographers choose to make work about travel or scenes from everyday life across the length and breadth of a country?
- After looking at the work of an artist such as Robert Frank, do you think he was successful in his aim to depict 'The Americans'?
- Investigate other artists or writers who have found inspiration from being on the road and the exploration of the national and the local. Look for cultural differences, for example you could look at the inherent wit and humour of British artist Richard Wentworth's investigation of North London roads with their café signs and shops. Are there particular roads local to students that are familiar or notorious? Why? How can they be investigated as a subject for art practice? Plan different methods you could use, for example interviews, rubbings of doors and drains, collecting polaroids or digital photographs of street furniture.
- Consider working across the curriculum, for example with Geography or History Departments on the above suggested investigation. You could get the input of urban geography specialists such as town planners or local history groups.

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6. Exploring Vulnerability

Photography was a license to go wherever I wanted and to do what I wanted to do.

Diane Arbus

Warning: In this section you may find works by Boris Mikhailov to be unsuitable for your students.

This theme allows us to examine what we each feel to be the 'cruel' elements of the exhibition and the reasons for this. Many of the subjects appear vulnerable under the intense scrutiny of the camera. The ethics, politics and morality of several works in the exhibition also demand discussion. In a culture saturated by imagery, we are in daily contact with images of those powerless through the effects of war or poverty.

However on closer investigation some of the work on display expresses a real concern with the life and situation of the sitters.

Rineke Dijkstra

Forte da Casa, Portugal, May 20, 2000 2000 (image)

Rineke Dijkstra in particular shows great empathy with her sitters and portrays them with a sense of both vulnerability and strength. In this work the matador's bloody face and lapels show his very recent violent engagement in the bull ring. There is a sense in his face of the raw adrenaline rush he has experienced and his animal relief in his survival. His tie is loosened but still knotted, strangely formal in relation to the physicality of his recent struggle.

In both series of the matadors and the mothers (see 'Life Stories' thematic card) the sense of naming, dating and placing these rites of passage is essential to respect and value the experiences of these people who have agreed to Dijkstra's requests.

Diane Arbus

The work of Diane Arbus has been written about extensively, for example by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*. Sontag notes that Arbus' early death was part of the creation of a mystique around the artist which has contributed to an apolitical reading of Arbus' work. In the quote below Sontag challenges Arbus' approach of photographing those who are often on the fringes of society, raising some complex issues:

'Arbus was... a photographer venturing out into the world to collect images that are painful... The photographs make a compassionate response feel irrelevant. The point is not to be upset or to be able to confront the horrible with equanimity. (...)

The camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility towards the people photographed... The photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear.

Sontag continues by pointing out that Arbus never chose subjects with ethical associations (for example people disabled by

Thalidomide or napalm) but subjects where she could believe private, secret lives were revealed by her camera. It is worth considering what we feel can possibly be neutral or apolitical in our view of these un-named, unidentified subjects of Arbus' camera.

A Jewish Giant at Home with his Parents in the Bronx, N.Y. 1970

All three people appear less than real in this black and white photograph that emphasises the strange at the cost of the human. The composition of the photograph contributes to the sense of these people being somehow inhuman in their experience of each other. The fact that the three adults are in fact a family becomes a further bizarre detail where, as the audience, we become bemused outsiders in this strange scene.

Boris Mikhailov

From Case History (197) 1997-98

In this portrait from the series *Case History*, one of the couple wears a coat but is naked underneath with unbuttoned trousers. He holds a large raw fish and looks out at us while his companion, a woman, is naked under her unbuttoned coat and looks away while holding a cup. Within an art context the image is surreal, the fish's slippery nakedness linking to the exposed flesh of the couple. These large scale colour photographs are often shown in vast commercial and public spaces (for example previous exhibitions have been at the Saatchi Gallery and in the Barbican Centre) where they have been displayed alongside many more smaller photographs that Mikhailov has taken of this group of impoverished and dispossessed people. The overall effect of the number and scale of this imagery becomes numbing. We only know a little about the subjects' relationship to Mikhailov. He would for example sometimes pay people to be in his photographs or give them food or a hot bath. As we wonder about the future of these people and think about their lives, our thoughts seem redundant. What can we possibly do with our speculations? This seems to come close to Sontag's description of Arbus as a supertourist.

Discussion points

- In examining our responses to Arbus' photographs do we agree with Sontag that we are encouraged to passively accept her subjects 'oddness'?
- Discuss how Arbus' and Mikhailov's work relates to contemporary popular television programmes that explore the lives of 'odd' looking people, or people on the fringes of society.
- Discuss with students how they can consider ethical questions in relation to their own art practice. For example this could be through shared discussion of ideas, group exploration of themes, looking at diverse publications that include examples of imagery from non-art, fashion or advertising press, or publications such as *The Big Issue* and *Disability Arts in London*. Engage students in a critical discussion of who takes photographs and why.

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7. Industrialisation and Consumerism

In the industrial sector history speeds by, a dragonfly that lives for one day and undergoes its entire development in this short period.

Bernd and Hilla Becher

The industrialisation of the West during the nineteenth century was not often thought a valid subject for art and indeed, even with the advent of photography, those working in this new medium often took refuge in a naturalist or romantic approach to landscape. The first photographers were concerned with how their work related to painting and it was for this reason they tended to focus on subjects deemed suitable by proponents of traditional fine art. *Cruel and Tender* shows examples of photographers who did, however, map the changing industrial landscape, and its eventual decline.

Bernd and Hilla Becher

Cooling Tower, Ebbw Vale, South Wales, Great Britain 1966

The Bechers have spent over forty years recording a range of vernacular, industrial architecture and engineering that has included water towers, electrical pylons and silos. The work is presented in groups, resulting in a survey of heavy industry across Europe and North America. The Bechers use a large format plate camera for precise documentation. Through their photography teaching they have been influential in their work at the Düsseldorf Art Academy Their pupils have included Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth.

The use of series in the Bechers' work encourages you to consider previously unnoticed details about building types, noticing how each one has its own different personality, with almost human qualities, as well as being one of a particular type.

Andreas Gursky

99 Cent 1999 (image)

Using an approach to subject matter and a technique influenced by the Bechers, Gursky's formal concerns are applied to all aspects of the industrial process. Here this is extended to an American store. The extreme geometry of the photograph and the sheer number of food items serve to remove all domestic ideas of cooking or the pleasures of eating. Instead we are left with an impression of units of types of fuel, with a small amount of minor distinguishing features. The sheer quantity of items present encourages us to consider the mass production and wastage inherent in Western consumerism, as well as the overpowering desire to buy colourful branded goods.

Louis Baltz

The New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California 1974

Nothing is given away about what might be going on inside these buildings. However, devoid as they are of any human presence, the structures seem to stand for the mundane and repetitive work inherent in the capitalist world they were built to service. It seems insignificant where these buildings are located, and almost ironic that we are given such a defined title to the series, as most people have seen a multitude of similar sites. Their anonymity brings to mind shopping malls and airports built over the last forty years, similar in design across the western world.

There are 51 works from this series of photographs on display. At this time Baltz was preoccupied with the idea of man-made landscape and the shifting systems of labour and technology that changed the American environment. Running counter to the romanticism of Robert Frank's work is an insistence on the banality of these landscapes and the relentless colonisation of land space for profit. His later work from the 1980s onwards explores empty industrial spaces and technology suites which are deserted but resonant with the new styles of work emerging through digital technologies. There is a subtle sense of political interrogation as to how economics is used to frame environmental decisions.

Discussion points

- Compare the methods of display of one of the Bechers' series with Sander's work. (The Bechers were influenced by his methods.) What similarities can you find in terms of style, method of recording and accompanying text details?
- Explore methods of display using one example from the Bechers' work where a series of groups of photographs are used. How does the use of multiple photographs extend our understanding of each image?
- Discuss industrial buildings photographed by the Bechers. Are there any types of industrial process shown in the exhibition which the students don't recognise (for example lime kilns)? Are there other more recent methods not shown by the Bechers (for example computer components, clothing manufacture)? Check Gursky's work, as the next generation of photographers, to see if he has shown any of these newer methods which have replaced the older, heavier and more manual processes. What differences can be found in the style of photography (for example, use of colour, role of advertising)?
- How does the work of Gursky affect your thoughts about the consumer society we live in?

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8. Life Stories

As the days passed... the shock of the first encounter began to fade away, allowing a broader, expanded sense of the refugees and their situation to emerge.

Fazal Sheikh

Most of the portraits shown in *Cruel and Tender* try to avoid sentimentalising or dramatising the lives of their subjects, unlike much photo-journalism which aims to pull at our heart strings and dramatically convey a newsworthy event. There is a sense here that people in the photographs have not been objectified by what has happened to them, and particularly in the work of Fazal Sheikh they are portrayed as dignified individuals who can stand above the horrors happening to them and around them.

Often the sitter is positioned in the middle of the frame, looking straight out at the camera, with little or no objects and scenery around them. In the case of the three photographers considered here there is a sense that the sitter has colluded with the photographer in their representation and that the final photograph has come about after they have formed a careful relationship over a period of time.

Fazal Sheikh

A Camel for the Son 1992

These dignified images confront our own assumptions and prejudices about representations of Africans, referencing the language of colonial photographs and charities' depictions of 'victims'. The family members who present themselves to the camera are resolutely real, underlined by the specific information given about them and their history. The series was produced as part of Sheikh's ongoing project to raise awareness of human rights abuses, in this case relating to the plight of women refugees who have been forced to leave Somalia for Kenya.

Abshiro Aden Mohammed, Woman's Leader, Somali refugee camp, Dagahaley, Kenya 2000 (image)

Sheikh also presents this series in a book, again entitled *A Camel for the Son*. His experiences of visiting the refugee camps are documented here as well as testimonies from the Somali people themselves. Abshiro Aden Mohammed writes:

In our culture men and women are not the same. When a mother gives birth to a boy, there will be the gift of a camel for the son in the expectation that when he is a man, that one camel will have sired a whole herd, and his birthright will start him out in the world...

When the newborn child is a girl, there is nothing for her. She will have no inheritance to start her out in life and she will remain at home doing the domestic work as her brothers go to school.

Many photographs by Sheikh in this display show women with their children.

Nicholas Nixon

The Brown Sisters

Nixon uses a large-format camera for his work which features his wife and her three sisters every year onwards from 1975. While the composition, framing of the photograph and postures taken by the sisters varies from year to year, Nixon uses the same photographic equipment and the same approximate eye level view. It is a compelling use of the series format, creating a narrative that takes place not at a particular moment in time but over a period of years. However it is the stories that are not told that take hold of us as we scrutinise the sisters' faces looking for signs of what might have happened in their lives from one year to the next.

Rineke Dijkstra

Julie, Den Haag, Netherlands, February 29 1994

Proud and protective, standing naked except for hospital knickers and a sanitary pad, the young woman looks out at us, shielding her newborn child across her chest. The photograph of this woman shows her as immensely powerful yet at the same time vulnerable, the new mother's identity almost taking shape in front of us. Shown in context with other photographs of young women with their babies, all named and dated, these are documents of specific personal moments of extreme emotion, while being linked to a wider human experience of rites of passage.

Discussion points

- Compare portraits in *Cruel and Tender* to news images of people you find in the newspapers, particularly recent images from the Iraqi war. Discuss how the images differ. Do you think, for example, news photographers negotiate how they will represent people before photographing them? Do you feel people's rights to be represented as they want are important, or is it more important for those further away to see such images so they can gain an understanding of events in the world?
- Also compare *Cruel and Tender's* portraits to images in fashion magazines or exhibitions of fashion photography, by artists such as David LaChapelle, Nick Knight and Rankin. Again what do you think is the relationship between the photographer and sitter?
- Using Nixon's idea of photographing his wife and sisters in the same order every year, set up a project where students photograph their family or friends over a period of time. Get students to discuss issues of audience with their family and friends before starting work, agreeing ground rules such as who will see the photographs, who can have copies etc. Discuss with students the inherent problems in photographing one's family and friends!

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