

Kuba Ryniewicz

Parallel Stories From Here

Friday 9th September - Saturday 8th October 2022
NCA Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne

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The intertwined stories in this exhibition are intimate records of the photographer's daily routes and routines, over the past few months and years: mainly Newcastle, sometimes as far as Sunderland. (Self-) imposed constraints: this neighbourhood, this demolition ground, here now, this short metro journey, this corner of a studio. My friends and family. Time and again. He shares his photographic fascinations, orchestrating a weave of images, narratives that connect but don't cohere. Impatient of any notion of photographic objectivity, his 'here' is compellingly subjective. It's how he sees and maps the world photographically. Limitation as possibility.

Kuba moved to Newcastle from his native Poland in 2004 and has been here ever since. Home is here with his husband Jon and their extended friendship networks in the artistic and LGBT+ communities. Here is where he first studied photography seriously, graduating from Northumbria University with a degree in contemporary photographic practice. He is now Visiting Fellow at the Northern Centre of Photography in Sunderland, where much of the work here was printed. Kuba continues to establish his photographic pathway in fashion and editorial as well as the more intensely personal practice we get to share in this latest exhibition.

In conversation about the exhibition, Kuba mulls over his fascination for photography's relationship to time. He recognises and loves the cliché: the sense that whatever is photographed now, immediately becomes then, the just-has-been. He isn't particularly interested, though, in the line of thought that connects photography to time in any mournful sense. There is little longing or nostalgia in his work. On the contrary, the moments in time he renders are often joyful, sometimes playful, other times just simply there: temporarily coming into view, and then disappearing again. Time in his vision is connected to other things: to rhythm, routine, repetition. It flows both forward and backwards.

Some of the work in the exhibition tackles time directly: most obviously the three grids mapping the demolition of one of the city's iconic blocks. Time passing. What was once solid, vanished into dust – and quickly so. Rhythm: early, mid and late story. The images are contained; ten minutes of shooting a day, just sixteen frames a time. Kuba's studio was once nearby, in yet another recently demolished block. Now other artists witness an end to their own temporary community. Kuba doesn't take a position, but also doesn't shy away from the precariousness. This is just what cities do, they morph and they change over time, shifting our perceptions and experiences in the process

Time is different in other series. The oldest images in the exhibition are the framed ones. Framing can sometimes give closure to images, implying some ending to the story, the beginning of an archival purpose. But the past of these images isn't very far away at all. Made just before and then through the recent lock-downs, they are images of a near-past, of the unexpected and mostly unwelcome constraints imposed on many of us. Kuba embraces the constraints, training his eye and his camera on the near at hand, mapping his own closed-in world with a freshness that belies the circumstances. It's his neighbourhood, his nearby garden and fields, and, above all, it's his close friends and family we encounter.

Daily Weeding is the title of the book of this series. It's weirdly evocative; the photographer-gardener locked in an endless - but loving and careful - cycle of every-day maintenance: looking, finding, shooting, editing, printing. Repeat. Rhythm. Time. Weeds, though, are the gardener's enemy: wild nature in the wrong place, to be weeded out. But not in Kuba's vision. He is more a photographic rewilder, embracing ordinary people, places and things, welcoming them into his space and celebrating their beautiful coincidences and differences.

Mainly, but not always, it's in the evening that Kuba moves indoors to the studio, to photograph his friends, family, neighbours, other studio holders. Time has moved on. The old studio is gone, the new one is in a different part of the city. Instantly recognisable, it also could be anywhere, another abandoned office from a previous decade. Every portrait is shot in the same corner, yet there is no sense of being hemmed in. The children can hardly contain themselves. There is a lovely flow between the casual and the controlled, just being oneself and performing for the camera. The photographic aesthetic is precise, the feeling already vintage, heightened by the repeating patterns and textures on the carpet, walls and door. Everyone is individual, everyone different. It is signature Kuba. Beautiful rhythms of the dancer; someone else's accidental bruises; a Buddha-like pose; he, she, them, us.

The latest work here is diaristic, shaped by another precise rhythm, shooting in bursts every day for the duration. There's a playful urgency here, a momentum and impulse to explore within the constraints of the half-frame, 72 exposures per film. Such images are slices of time (a nod to yet another photographic trope). Accompanied by headlines from discarded free newspapers, cut out with a scalpel or maybe a kitchen knife, they are a poem to the energy and edgy undercurrents of his city.

Kuba's hand is everywhere in the crafting of this exhibition. The photographic stories are purposefully and elegantly choreographed. They don't sit separately, but blend, overlap and repeat. The whole is far more than the sum of its parts. As viewers, we are free to fabricate our own stories from and with the works in the exhibition. That's exactly what Kuba wants. I'm reminded of the Preamble to Life: a user's manual by Georges Perec (1978), one of Kuba's favourite writers and a constant source of inspiration. Perec ruminates on the 'art of jigsaw puzzles': "you can look at the pieces of a puzzle for three whole days, you can believe that you know everything there is to know about its colouring and shape, and be no further on than when you started. The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces". Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) is another constant literary and philosophical inspiration, one that Kuba carries with him whenever he travels. The story-teller in Calvino's literary masterpiece, is another traveller, Marco Polo, whose job it is to regale the Emperor with stories about the many cities he has experienced/imagined. Cities that exist, yet don't exist, where time, memory, imagination and desire fold in on each other, rather like Kuba's *Parallel Stories from Here*.

Carol McKay

List of works

1. Daily Weeding (2019 – 2021)
2. Daily Weeding Appendix (2019 – ongoing)
3. Cornered, Studio (2021 – ongoing)
4. Diary, Headlines (2022)
5. Cornered, Studio – Bruised Series (2022)
6. Demolition (2022)
7. Gay Stuff Installation (2022)
8. NewBridge Studios Before Demolition (Commissioned by Newcastle University) (2017)
9. Cornered, Studio – “Not Out” Series (2022)

In Conversation Event | Thurs 6th October, 6-8pm

Join us for an informal discussion between Kuba and Carol McKay, photography and art historian at University of Sunderland. The conversation will be an opportunity to hear the stories behind the photographs and find out how the different series of works presented in the exhibition intertwine and overlap with one another. This event is run in partnership with NEPN.

Kuba would like to thank:

My friends and family featured at this exhibition, strangers features at this exhibition, NCA and High Bridge CIC, Carol McKay, Amanda Ritson, Stephen and Michael at Northern Centre of Photography, Arlo Brown, Joe Spence, Jade Sweeting, Janina Sabaliauskaite, Lucien Anderson , my publishers at Note Note Editions, Jop van Bennekom, Niomi Fairweather and Jemma Hind at Baltic, Pete Jackson, Mark Duffy and anyone else who helped make this show happen– big love!



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