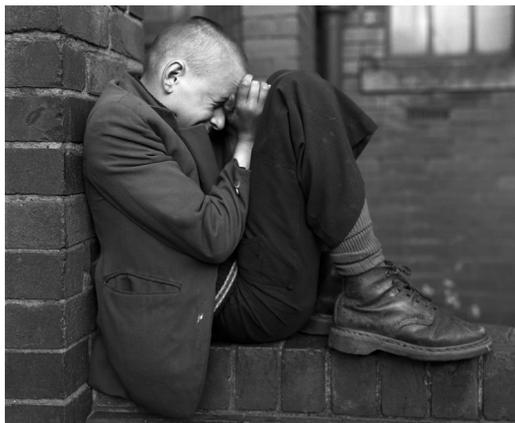


2 October 2013 - 24 February 2014



Chris Killip,
Youth on Wall,
Jarrow, Tyneside,
1976. Courtesy
Museum
Folkwang.
© Chris Killip

Chris Killip worked with commercial contracts – as assistant to advertising photographers – up to the end of the 1960s. A lot of his European colleagues also worked in the commercial field, commissioned by editors and art directors. By the late 1970s, there were few places in illustrated magazines for socially critical themes. However, advertising's adoption of illustrative colour photography continued unabated. Looking back, this decade was the last heyday of photojournalism, in which, however, a politically motivated generation of photographers came into increasing conflict with the diverging views of editors.

For young photographers, the social environs and their own country became a central theme, and not only in England: In connection with political movements, they employed their cameras as instruments of social change, with a glance back to the 1920s. As the use of the medium changed, photography gained more attention beyond the commerce in public institutions and galleries. In the 1970s an infrastructure for photography slowly developed among a cultural public, as did a market for their works. It was photographers who drove those changes.

With his photographic work, but also with his initiatives as curator, Chris Killip provided important input into the photographic culture of the 1970s and 1980s – as co-founder of Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Side Gallery as well as its director for a period of eighteen months, also curating many exhibitions between 1976 and 1984.

His photographs deal with the North of England – with the exception of the Isle of Man, where Killip grew up, and Ireland, where he accompanied pilgrims photographically over ten years until 2005. The topographical terrain is closely bound to his work; his themes complement each other. They deal with work and free time – voluntary or not – in an area confronting the de-industrial revolution, which is struggling with the transformation from traditional jobs in industry to the new world of high tech. Killip has observed the beginning and stalling of structural change for fifteen years, spoken with the people, made friends with them and photographed them with empathy. Unlike Walker Evans, an important figure for him, Killip has maintained another distance or, more exactly, has maintained a certain closeness to them.

He took his time for the book of this important part of his work; it did not appear, as mentioned above, until 1988. Before, that, in 1980, he had published his work on the ‘unspoiled world’ on the Isle of Man. Taking up the method of confronting portraits and landscapes that Paul Strand had developed in his book *Tir A'Mhurain* in 1962, Killip presented, like Paul Strand before him, the image of an unbroken relation between man and nature. This presentation of a seemingly intact agrarian society was perhaps a necessary confirmation of another, familiar world for the artist while he was living in an impoverished North of England, one marked by depression, and exploring it photographically.

Great Britain was the European pioneer in the support of independent documentary photography and the new definition of this genre: with the first gallery, the Photographers' Gallery from 1971, with a photography committee in the Arts Council from 1973 and with contributions in the magazines *Creative Camera* in the 1960s and 70s as well as the short-lived but influential publication *Album*, from 1970, and *Ten 8* in the 1980s, important forums for discussion existed there for photographic practice and theoretical construction. This public funding of photographic work encouraged a greater cultural valuation of the medium. Nonetheless, two of Chris Killip's series, *Working at Pirelli* (exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1990) and *Seacoal* (exhibited in the Side Gallery in 1984), only appeared in book form in 2006 and 2011 respectively. Chris Killip presented his few colour photographs in 2009 in the book *Here Comes Everybody* in small format, suggesting a photo album. His work is independent in its radical thematic reduction and resistant in the intensity of individual photos, whose questions find no answers, not even in the context of a series, instead expanding subtly what is seen.

In his admirable work, fascination and respect for normal and everyday life and its people has found an expression which makes differences visible: social and cultural differences and peculiarities which are becoming less visible in our globalized world.

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Chris Killip

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