

WE ARE Magazine

April 2026, from RPS Women in Photography



Highlights

Please visit isu.pub/oeGavXQ for the full issue

WE ARE

The RPS Women in Photography Magazine

A Bigger Splash © Eleanor Church



April 2026



THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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WOMEN IN
PHOTOGRAPHY
GROUP

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Eleanor Church

A Bigger Splash

"Our family shared the care for my mother as she reached the end of her life at home in a remote part of Scotland. Between shifts, I took my children to swim in a freezing cold waterfall they've known their whole lives. During these stolen moments of exhilaration at one of the hardest but also most special times, we felt in technicolour."



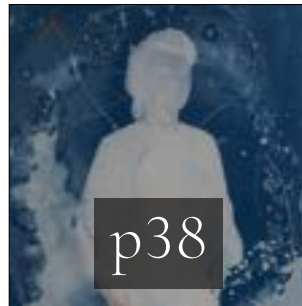
Anne Mason-Hoerter

Protea

"A continuation of my memory project in which I reassemble photos of parts of a plant. When I sat with this finished image, I was able to escape my issues that have come on with menopause and thus became more positive, focused, breathing better and calm. It was like looking at a plant in a garden. I felt less alone."

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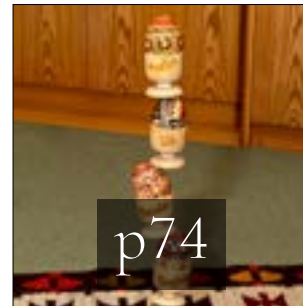
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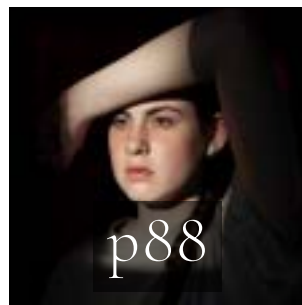
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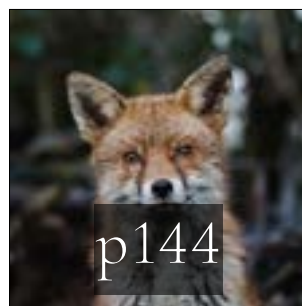
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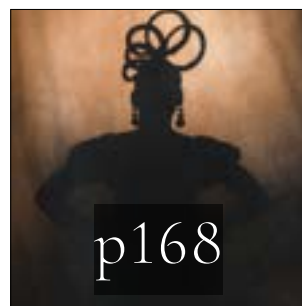
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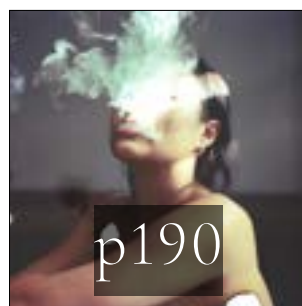
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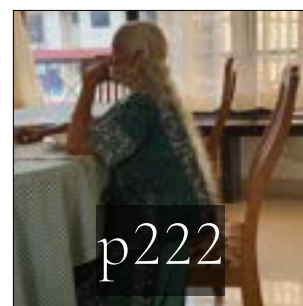
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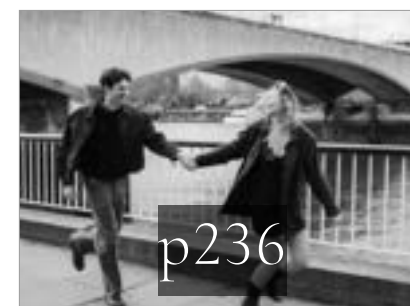
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FROM THE EDITOR

Hello!

Recently I've been reading *Art Work* by the renowned American photographer and writer, Sally Mann. Her forthright and funny book about the creative life is packed full of insights, including this one:

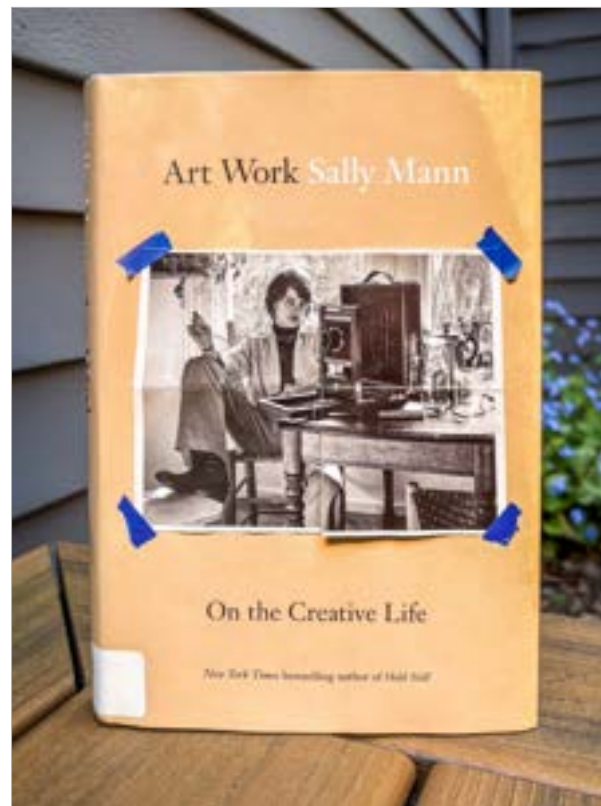
"Despite outward appearances, most of us have an interior edifice of complex emotions, whose dimensions are unexposed, unexpected, and profound. And some of us are lucky enough to have ways to express that dark geometry, to tell our own unique stories."

This latest issue of *WE ARE Magazine* is home to an abundance of photographers telling unique stories that dive deep into past and present realities.

Having reached the end of her extensive project to pay tribute to the 544 psychiatric patients murdered in Latvia by the Nazis, Sarah Ketelaars reflects on the importance of family history, memory, and image-making.

Elsewhere, Sarah Chandy explores the legacy of her great-grandmother-in-law in pre-independence India through her diaries and archives. Abhi Chinniah, a photographer of Jaffna-Tamil descent living in New Zealand, considers the migration of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora through her lens.

With a focus on individual families, we find parents and children collaborating to make sense of complex relationships and issues. Clair Robins and her daughter spent a year creating images tackling aspects of intimacy, distance, and femininity that define the intricate bond between mother



Art Work by Sally Mann

and teenager. Heather Mattera and her son Ben navigated his disordered eating through their own shared photographic project. And in this, Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, Michelle Webster writes movingly about documenting her mother's journey with the disease.

"And some of us are lucky enough to have ways to express that dark geometry, to tell our own unique stories."

Sally Mann

You'll encounter diverse approaches to photographing the land in this issue. Annie Green-Armytage takes a painterly approach to the North Norfolk saltmarsh, an unusual ecosystem that is at once beautiful and under threat. Tessa Sinclair sought out the remote, uneasy landscapes of Suffolk at a time of family crisis. And in a review of the OCA/RPS psychogeography course, Sarah Skinner recounts how she was able to look deeper — and differently — at familiar terrain.

I'd also like to draw your attention to an important conversation among three photographers — about something we don't talk about enough, in my opinion — money, or rather the lack of it. Speaking with colleagues Joanne Coates and Delali Ayivi, Francesca Hummler points out that the appearance of success as a photographer often masks considerable financial precarity. She writes: "Visibility cannot sustain a practice, and the economic conditions that make enjoying photography possible must be addressed with the same attention we give the work itself."

Impact

You can't fail to have noticed that our growing community is brimming over with talent and energy. Head straight to the Viewfinder section to read about an important milestone for the *40% Project*, a highly meaningful initiative spearheaded by our chair, Sue Wright. She has successfully mobilised photographers across the UK to document a historic moment in

political representation, and the collective results are stunning in their impact. In *Path to Distinction*, you'll learn about the black and white photography of Jayne Odell, an accomplished FRPS not once but twice over.

Congratulations to our cover photo winners, Eleanor Church and Anne Mason-Hoerter, as well as to the runners-up. Wishful thinking, perhaps, but I can sense the approach of summer with Eleanor's refreshing front cover. Anne's beautiful reconstructed Protea is a continuation of her memory project that she wrote about last issue. She is now seeking to have her images and approach used as a means of mental health support for women in menopause. Anne asks anyone interested to reach out to her.

There are many more contributions inside these pages; I wish I had room to mention all of them. It has been my privilege as ever to work with the brilliant authors and our editorial and design team — all of us volunteers — to bring this to life.

Wherever you are in the world, I hope you have a wonderful few months developing your own unique stories.

Rachel Nixon
Editor, *WE ARE Magazine*



WE ARE



VIEWFINDER

The 40% Project nears key milestone

With almost all women MPs due to be represented in the *40% Project*, plans are underway to broaden the visibility of this important photographic record.

by Sue Wright



“The *40% Project* is more than a portrait series — it is a collective effort by photographers across the UK to create a visual record of this historic moment. Together, we are ensuring that this moment, and the women shaping it, are seen.”

The *40% Project* is reaching an important milestone, with portraits of 265 women MPs commissioned as this issue of *WE ARE Magazine* is published.

Women now make up around 40% of the UK Parliament, and the RPS Women in Photography group launched the project to document this historic moment in political representation through portrait photography.

What began as an idea has grown into a remarkable collective effort.

Some 234 portraits have been submitted to the online gallery, and many others are in progress, meaning almost all women MPs are due to be represented in the project. With every new portrait added, the visual record becomes richer and more representative of the diversity of women in Parliament.

Collaboration

There has been an extraordinary response from photographers across the UK, many of them members of the RPS Women in Photography group. Some are experienced portrait photographers, others documentary photographers or students on their photographic journey. Photographers connected with the *209 Women Project* and members of Hundred Heroines have also joined the initiative, creating a truly collaborative volunteer effort.

Each portrait session is different. Some photographs are made in Westminster corridors and committee rooms, while others take place in constituencies across the country in community centres, workplaces and landscapes that hold meaning for the MP being photographed.

Wider impact

Plans are now underway to publish a photobook bringing together the portraits from the project.

The book will be published by Image & Reality, led by Colin Wilkinson, founder of Bluecoat Press.

The publication will be funded through a Kickstarter campaign, giving supporters the opportunity to help bring this important photographic record to print. Members of the RPS Women in Photography community can support the campaign by backing it when it launches and sharing it with their networks.

The project has also begun to attract interest from major institutions, including the National Portrait Gallery. If chosen, a selection of portraits would become part of the gallery's permanent collection.

For most of the history of Parliament, women's voices were absent from the chamber. Today, their presence is visible, influential and growing. The *40% Project* is more than a portrait series — it is a collective effort by photographers across the UK to create a visual record of this historic moment. Together, we are ensuring that this moment, and the women shaping it, are seen.



LEFT-HAND PAGE - LEFT TO RIGHT

Claire Hanna MP @ Allyson Klein
Abena Oppong-Asare MP @ Maria Akore
Sarah Pochin MP @ Sue Wright

THIS PAGE - LEFT TO RIGHT

Alison Griffiths MP @ Jules Renahan
Alison Bennet MP @ Livvi Grant
Hannah Spencer MP @ Alice Armstrong



Victoria Forrest presenting Léonie Hampton's *In The Shadow of Things* at Format Festival, 2023 © Fra Beecher

The fine art of the photobook

There's an art to taking a photobook from concept to print. In this Q&A, writer and editor Miranda Gavin talks to VIKA Books founder Victoria Forrest about technological developments in the rapidly evolving world of fine art publishing and how to achieve the best results when creating a photobook.

Victoria is also an RPS trustee and Women in Photography group member.

“A book allows space — for pacing, silence, and emotional development. Images are not isolated; they speak to each other.”

MG: | In the initial stages of consultation with a photographer, what is the first thing you do?

VF: | I try to understand the project and what is happening in the photographer's mind. I listen carefully to what the photographer wants. Initially, I gather images, texts, audio files, reference links, past publications, short films or voice notes.

I read any supplied texts or articles and review an initial edit — usually a relatively tight selection, often around 10 to 20 key images that they feel represent the work. I attempt to position the book in context — not just as a standalone object, but within the wider arc of the photographer's practice and ambitions — and determine its most authentic voice.

How do you collaborate with a photographer to select, edit and sequence photographs for a book to shape the visual story, particularly if the photographer is attached to some of the photographs?

After the initial stage, I usually have a brief check-in conversation with the photographer and often suggest looking at a wider archive which can vary hugely. I've been sent archives of thousands of images. Ideally, I like to see several layers: a tight edit, a wider working edit, and then the broader archive. A great deal of this process is about trust-building.

Once I have the wider archive, I review it independently. I need to look with fresh eyes, without being led. Attachment is a profound part

of photography — an image may carry immense personal meaning because of what happened just before or just outside the frame. That meaning is valid, but I must also assess the image objectively. By working independently first, I can identify images with formal and narrative strength on their own terms and sometimes introduce images that the photographer may have overlooked. Once I have looked independently, I go through the images with the photographer to hear their voice. I'd miss the soul of the work if I didn't do this.

Then, I print the images. Sequencing begins physically. I work with the prints, sorting, stacking, and grouping — sometimes by format, sometimes by tonal relationships, sometimes by theme or emotional register. Sequencing is a slow process. It can take days or weeks. It is less about chronology and more about rhythm, tension, release, and narrative arc.

Editing and sequencing are distinct stages. Editing determines what belongs. Sequencing determines how that tells the story. As I move the prints around, patterns begin to emerge. Sometimes stronger images shift the narrative direction. An edit for press or portfolio review is different from an edit for a book. A book allows space — for pacing, silence, and emotional development. Images are not isolated; they speak to each other.



Editing Kirsty Mackay's *My Favourite Colour Was Yellow*
© Kirsty Mackay

continued overleaf



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
 Pages from Ania Ready's *I Also Fight Windmills*
 Cover of the same book
 Both images © Fra Beecher and VIKA Books

How do you integrate diverse material — the photographer's images, archival images, poems, prose — so the photobook is still coherent?

Increasingly, photographers are working across multiple forms of media. Within what might still be called a traditional photobook, there may be essays, captions, transcripts of conversations, diary entries, poems, archival documents, manuals, instructions, background research, and sometimes audio files. All this material must be considered carefully.

With Ania Ready's book, *I Also Fight Windmills*, the archive texts were integral. I typeset them inspired by the visual language of the archives themselves. Typography became a way of honouring the source. The names, fragments, and historical references were interspersed carefully, creating rhythm without overwhelming the photographs.

The key to integrating diverse material is hierarchy. Every element must know its place. A large photographic plate carries the highest authority. Supporting materials — text, transcripts, archival fragments — either contextualise or amplify that authority. They should not compete with plates unless that tension is intended.

Coherence comes from the underlying grid — the structural framework governing typography, margins, placement, and rhythm. The grid is rarely visible, but it holds everything together. It allows contrast while maintaining unity. It ensures that when different voices enter the book, they feel intentional rather than chaotic.

Each book has its own architecture. The photographs form the foundation. Everything else is scaffolding — supporting, clarifying, and expanding what the images already carry.

How do you decide on the key design elements — format, typography, page layout — when creating a photobook?

The first major decision is format. Format is not arbitrary — it is practical, financial, and strategic. Format must be locked early. Changing it midway can be disruptive. Is this a dummy edition produced in small quantities? If so, it needs to suit standard print machines. Is it going straight to press? Which press? Where is it being printed? What are the sheet sizes?

Scale has implications. Larger books allow images to breathe at size, but they increase print costs significantly. Smaller books can allow more pages for the same budget and often result in a stronger spine presence on a shelf. The spine is critical — a book lives spine-out for most of its life.

A thoughtful balance between scale, thickness, and presence is important.

Typography is drawn from the work. Everything is bespoke. The typeface should either harmonise with or intelligently contrast the photography. It should also function impeccably — correct size, line length, character count, and spacing for legibility. I am very particular about typographic clarity. The design should feel effortless, but that effortlessness is constructed.

continued overleaf



Cover detail of *In the Shadow of Things* by Léonie Hampton © Rebecca Symm and VIKA Books

“There is a push-pull dynamic throughout a book — density followed by stillness, intensity followed by breath.”

Page layout is about pacing. Some images function as pivot points — they need scale and space. Others bridge or provide tonal transition. Some sequences demand uninterrupted flow; others benefit from pause. White space is important. It allows the reader to process and reflect. There is a push-pull dynamic throughout a book — density followed by stillness, intensity followed by breath.

Titles sometimes emerge during design. For Kirsty Mackay’s photobook *My Favourite Colour Was Yellow*, the phrase came from a transcript, and the design was intentionally simple, allowing

the concept and sequencing to carry the weight. Similarly, Ania Ready’s *I Also Fight Windmills* came from a line spoken by the book’s subject, Sophie Gaudier-Brzeska. For Léonie Hampton’s book, the cover design referenced a tablecloth pattern present within the archive photographs.

I tend to keep graphic intervention restrained unless the imagery demands otherwise. The photography should speak clearly. Not every page needs to work hard. The design builds gradually: early drafts are expansive, later stages reductive. The process is one of distillation.

What are the most important production decisions before going to print?

There are several critical decisions, but one of the most significant — and often the most contested — is reprographics. That is the process of translating an image from screen to printed page. It is highly skilled, technical, and central to the quality of the final book.

I have been working in this field for over 15 years, and I still consider repro to be one of the most specialised aspects of the process. Colour management, ink behaviour, paper tone, press calibration, and duotone or tritone conversions for black and white all influence how an image appears in print. Technology is constantly evolving with new presses, inks, and stocks; there are numerous variables.

Reprographics is expensive and often the area people try to minimise, yet it makes a profound difference to the finished work. Proofing is critical because once a book is printed, changes are not possible. Colour sign-off, tonal balance, and density must all be carefully checked in advance.

Print method is another major decision, as is understanding the capabilities of the specific press being used. Binding is a further consideration: perfect binding, section sewing, saddle stitch, singer-sewn, hardback casing with endpapers and foil blocking — each option carries financial, aesthetic, and practical implications. Another important decision is whether someone will be “on press” — aside from being a magical moment for a

photographer to see their pages printed for the first time, there is rarely a press pass where an aspect of the print does not benefit from adjustment on those first sheets.



Jesse Alexander press passing *Silent Land*
© VIKA Books

You use immersive technologies, such as augmented reality. How do you use these platforms and what does this mean for photo-oriented works? Does it create a new or expanded art form?

The role of immersive and creative technologies in photography is constantly evolving. What interests me is not simply what is technologically possible, but how that potential relates to the artist’s intention and to the reality of how people experience images.



Patricia Lay Dorsey press passing *Falling Into Place*
© VIKA Books

continued overleaf

The aim with immersive technologies is not spectacle; it is enhancement. A photobook is already an immersive object. It allows nonlinear reading, invites physical interaction and creates intimacy. Digital layers can expand that experience by adding voice, sound, motion, or extended archival material that would not comfortably sit within the printed form.

With Léonie Hampton's *In the Shadow of Things*, we developed the *In the Shadow* app through a research grant with the University of Bristol, working alongside academics. The core question was whether the intimacy of a photobook — that close, private encounter with images — could be translated to a screen without losing its emotional depth. The project has stood the test of time, and the design principles developed there are now informing new projects, including Marc Wilson's *A Wounded Landscape*, which integrates photography, moving image, Super 8 footage, illustration, archive material, and sound within a unified digital structure alongside the book.

The concept I have been developing through Innovate UK and related research explores what I call "Connected Books" — printed works surrounded by a carefully structured digital ecosystem. That ecosystem might include audio,

video, interviews, podcasts, or an evolving website. The book becomes the enduring physical archive; the digital layer allows expansion, context, and continued dialogue.

I do not see these technologies as replacing the photobook, or as creating an entirely new art form. Rather, they expand the reading experience. The printed book remains the primary object — the thing that endures. Digital layers allow additional voices, processes, and temporal elements to sit around it, enriching the encounter without overwhelming it.

Victoria offers a free
consultation service:

vikabooks.com/collaboration/
free-half-hour-consultation/



Léonie Hampton's *In the Shadow* app.
© Rebecca Symm and VIKA Books

5 TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS MAKING A PHOTOBOK

1. BEGIN WITH INTENTION

Ask yourself why this work needs to exist as a book. What does the format allow — in terms of intimacy, pacing, and depth — that another format does not? Clarity at the beginning strengthens every decision that follows.

2. EDIT WITH HEART — AND DISTANCE

Personal attachment to images is natural and important. At the same time, consider the reader. What story are you telling? What larger conversation does the work enter? A photobook is a narrative experience, not simply a collection of strong photographs.

3. LET THE PHOTOGRAPHY LEAD THE DESIGN

Sequence first. Design later. Typography, format, and cover decisions are most powerful when they emerge from a resolved edit. The structure should serve the work, not compete with it.

4. PLAN REALISTICALLY — CREATIVELY AND PRACTICALLY

A book involves many moving parts: editing, text preparation, reprographics, proofing, paper, binding, distribution. Supplying clean captions and organised material makes the process smoother for everyone and protects your energy. A photobook is a serious investment — financially and emotionally — so build in time and budget accordingly.

5. THINK OF IT AS A TRIATHLON

There are three distinct stages: creating the work, creating the book, and creating the legacy. Printing is not the finish line. Once the book exists, the final stretch begins — sharing it, placing it, speaking about it, ensuring it finds its audience. Pace yourself so you have the energy to carry it into the world.

About Victoria Forrest



© Guy Bellingham FRPS

Victoria Forrest is an award-winning graphic designer, founder of VIKA Books and a trustee of the Royal Photographic Society. With a first-class BA from the University of the Arts and an MA from the Royal College of Art, she has spent over 15 years shaping contemporary photobook practice through a distinctive, understated design language and rigorous approach to production. Her work combines the conceptual depth of book arts with high production values and creative technologies, crafting photobooks and connected publications that balance narrative clarity with tactile presence.

VIKA's projects have been featured by the BBC, *The Bookseller* and the *British Journal of Photography*, and recognised through awards including Innovate UK's Women in Innovation and D&AD Future Impact. As a designer and creative technologist, she advocates for collaborative, thoughtful approaches to authorship and legacy, helping photographers realise work that is meaningful to audiences and enduring in its craft.

vikabooks.com • instagram.com/vikabooks



Valuing the small moments, noticing the details, and the importance of patience and empathy. These are just a few of the lessons learned from photography in this issue.

The one thing I know is this: life doesn't wait.

Photography taught me that in the quietest, most honest way. It showed me how easily moments slip past — a glance, a laugh, a fleeting expression — here one second, gone the next. Through the lens, I began to understand how precious these fragments of time really are.

We often think the big events define our lives, but it's the small, unrepeatable moments that truly shape us. The ordinary days. The subtle shifts we barely notice until they're already memories.

Life flows quickly — faster than we expect, faster than we're ready for. Photography doesn't stop time, but it teaches you to see it. To value it. To be present in it. And maybe that's the point — not to hold on, but to notice. Because once you truly see a moment, you realise it was never small at all.

Irina Godden

Hastings, UK

[instagram.com/zoompro_photography](https://www.instagram.com/zoompro_photography)

Photography has taught me that we need to not judge someone until we know their story.

Debbie Todd

Durham, UK

[debbietodd.co.uk](https://www.debbietodd.co.uk)

Photography has taught me to pay attention and appreciate the world around me more. In a fast-moving city like Singapore, it's easy to get caught up in the busyness of modern life and drift through my daily routine, distracted and mentally elsewhere. Even living overseas, what at first feels new quickly becomes familiar, and then you stop noticing.

Using a camera slowed me down. Walking more intentionally through neighbourhoods and parks, I noticed details I'd overlooked. I saw roots pushing through cracked paint on old buildings; I actually stopped to look at the street art around my apartment; and every time I went out to the coastal park, I saw a pair of kingfishers who must've been there all along, but I hadn't

been looking. (But then I noticed I needed a longer lens!)

Kamsin Kaneko LRPS

Katong, Singapore

[kamsinkaneko.com](https://www.kamsinkaneko.com)

Photography has taught me to look for beauty long before I expect to find it. When a scene falls apart or a plan unravels, something quieter often appears; a shift of light, an imperfect detail, a moment that feels truer than anything I imagined.

Over time, this has taught me acceptance: to let go of the version I thought I needed, and to stay open to what unfolds instead. Not every frame is what I hoped for, yet many become something better — softer, more honest, more alive. Photography reminds me that joy often arrives in the unexpected, and that there is always something worth noticing if I'm willing to see it.

Gosia Matejuk

Newark-on-Trent, UK

[instagram.com/gosiaunframed](https://www.instagram.com/gosiaunframed)

Photography has taught me to appreciate creation more deeply. I believe in God as the creator of everything, and photography has made me slow down and notice the beauty in what He has made, in people, in nature, and in the quiet details we often overlook.

Photography also reminds me that creativity is part of who we are. If we are made by a creator, then creating is something we are meant to do. Photography allows me to honour what already exists while expressing the creativity placed within me.

As someone who is introverted, photography has really helped me to step out of my shell. It has become a bridge between me and the world. It has changed how I see people, how I approach my work, and even how I see myself.

Rahimat Onize Shaibu

Birmingham, UK

[instagram.com/rahimart_](https://www.instagram.com/rahimart_)

Architectural photography has taught me to stop, to circle,

and to wait until the light is perfect. Buildings are complex, layered, and ever-changing; no two visits to the same site ever produce the same image. A facade at dawn and the same facade at noon tell two entirely different stories.

Chasing that light has made me more disciplined and observant than I ever thought possible. Beyond that, it has taught me to seek clarity and silence. I consciously aim for a clean frame, stripping away the fleeting and the accidental to let the architecture stand alone as a pure, autonomous form.

In this pursuit of precise, perfect geometry, I find a profound sense of order. It has taught me not just to look, but to truly see — to distill the world to its essence by removing the noise and revealing the soul of the form. This practice has brought a sense of structure to my life, proving that patience is my most essential professional tool.

Svetlana Fadeeva

Doha, Qatar

[instagram.com/fadeevaphotography](https://www.instagram.com/fadeevaphotography)

As a documentary photographer from the age of 20, I have travelled to different places, lived with different people, and experienced different religions and cultures. I laughed with some and cried with others. I did not look at them as objects but as people with emotions who experience what they do for a reason.

Throughout this journey, I learned not to judge or label, but to understand and empathise. I noticed that the more empathetic we are, the more human we become. Not to empathise to gain something, but to empathise for the sake of humanity. I understood that non-biased empathy is a marker of civilisation.

Thus, one may encounter a highly civilised person in the middle of a desert or on top of a mountain in an unknown place, and a person of the opposite quality at the top of the highest civilised institutions.

Sarah Jabbari

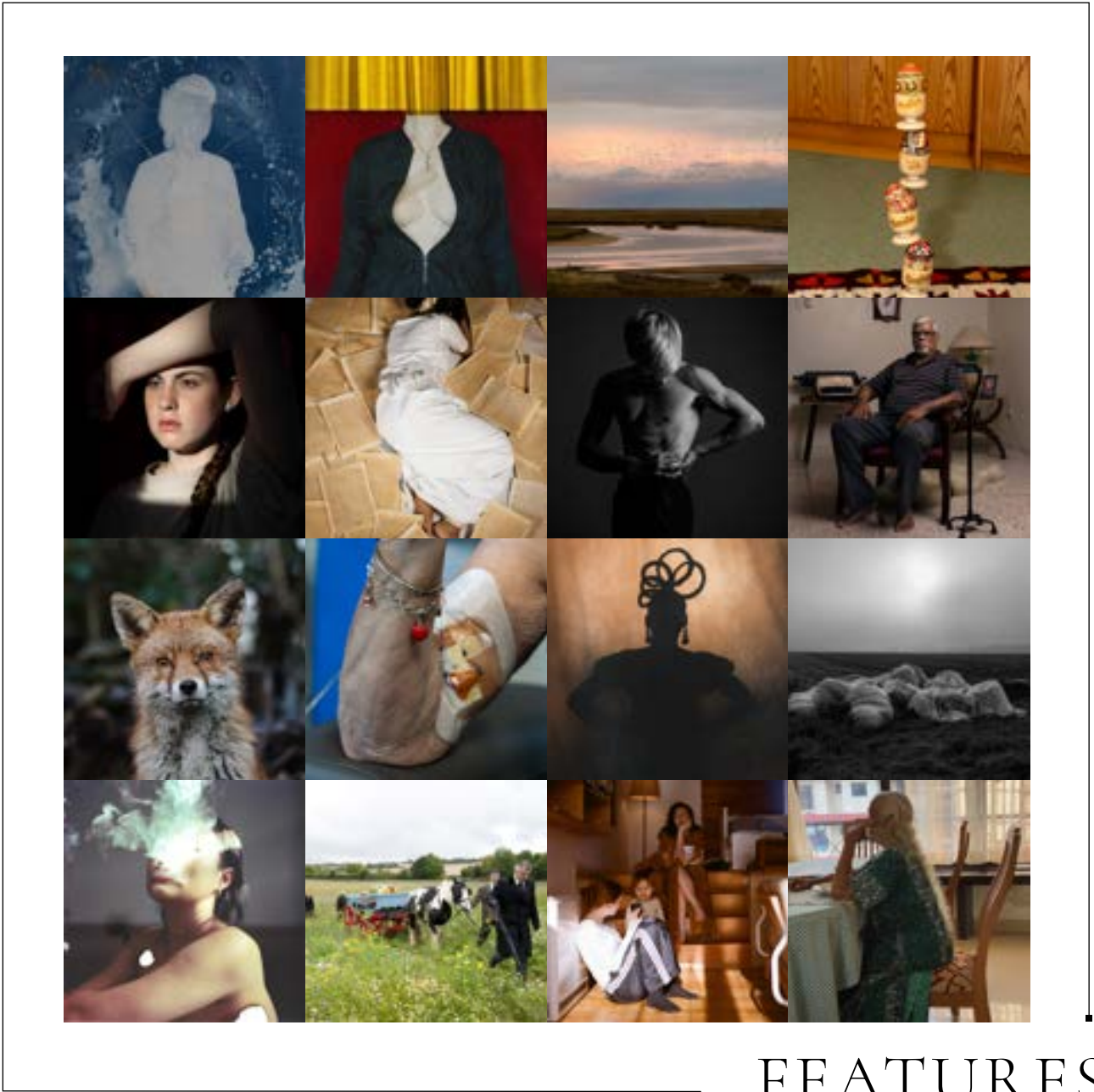
London, UK

[visura.co/sjabbari](https://www.visura.co/sjabbari)





WE ARE



Traced in blue — still present

Working with cyanotypes, a British photographer with Latvian heritage brings into view archival fragments from World War Two and family history. With the project now at an end, she examines what endures through memory and image-making.

by Sarah Ketelaars

All images © Sarah Ketelaars

On August 22nd, 1941, the Nazis murdered 544 psychiatric patients in Daugavpils, Latvia: 269 men, 227 women and 48 children, some of them healthy orphans who had been placed in the hospital as a temporary measure. Classed as “useless eaters”, they were seen as using up valuable resources in a newly invaded country and, furthermore, could not be forced to work for the invaders. My grandmother was working at the hospital from which the 544 patients were taken, and I grew up familiar with her refugee story. But I was an adult when she told me about the 544 for the first time, recording her on a now wonky cassette tape and making hasty notes in my journalist’s notepad. She said she would have told me before, but hadn’t wanted to upset me.

She spoke of the deep pain of leaving her parents and her homeland (neither of which she would ever see again), of running through a pine forest while being shot at by Russian soldiers, and of emerging from the trees onto a sandy beach, before swimming out to a small boat that would take her to safety. These images were like a film constantly screened, becoming the backdrop to my childhood. The Nazis would go on to murder over 2,000 psychiatric patients and some staff across the country. The killings continued the practices of Aktion T4 — the code name given to the Nazi campaigns of mass murder by involuntary euthanasia, which targeted people with disabilities



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and the mentally ill. This was justified by the Nazis on grounds of eugenics and “racial hygiene”, as well as a cost-cutting exercise.

LEFT
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“At night, I dreamt in blue. I saw curious blue figures twisting and turning, restless and arresting.”

I visited the hospital in Latvia in 2013, and the hospital director confirmed her story. The only official record I could find was a short paragraph in the Nuremberg military trial records, based on the evidence of two Latvian psychiatrists. So far, I have not been able to find a list of their names. Once I knew this story, the urge to share it was intense. As a child at school, I filled composition textbooks with the story of my grandmother's escape from her homeland, sometimes using up an entire book and having to finish it in a second one. Eventually, the school asked me to stop. They could not afford to keep giving me new books to write in. One teacher advised me to wait until I was grown up and then write her story as a novel. For many years I believed I would do this, but eventually I realised that the best way for me to explore our family history was through image-making.

▪

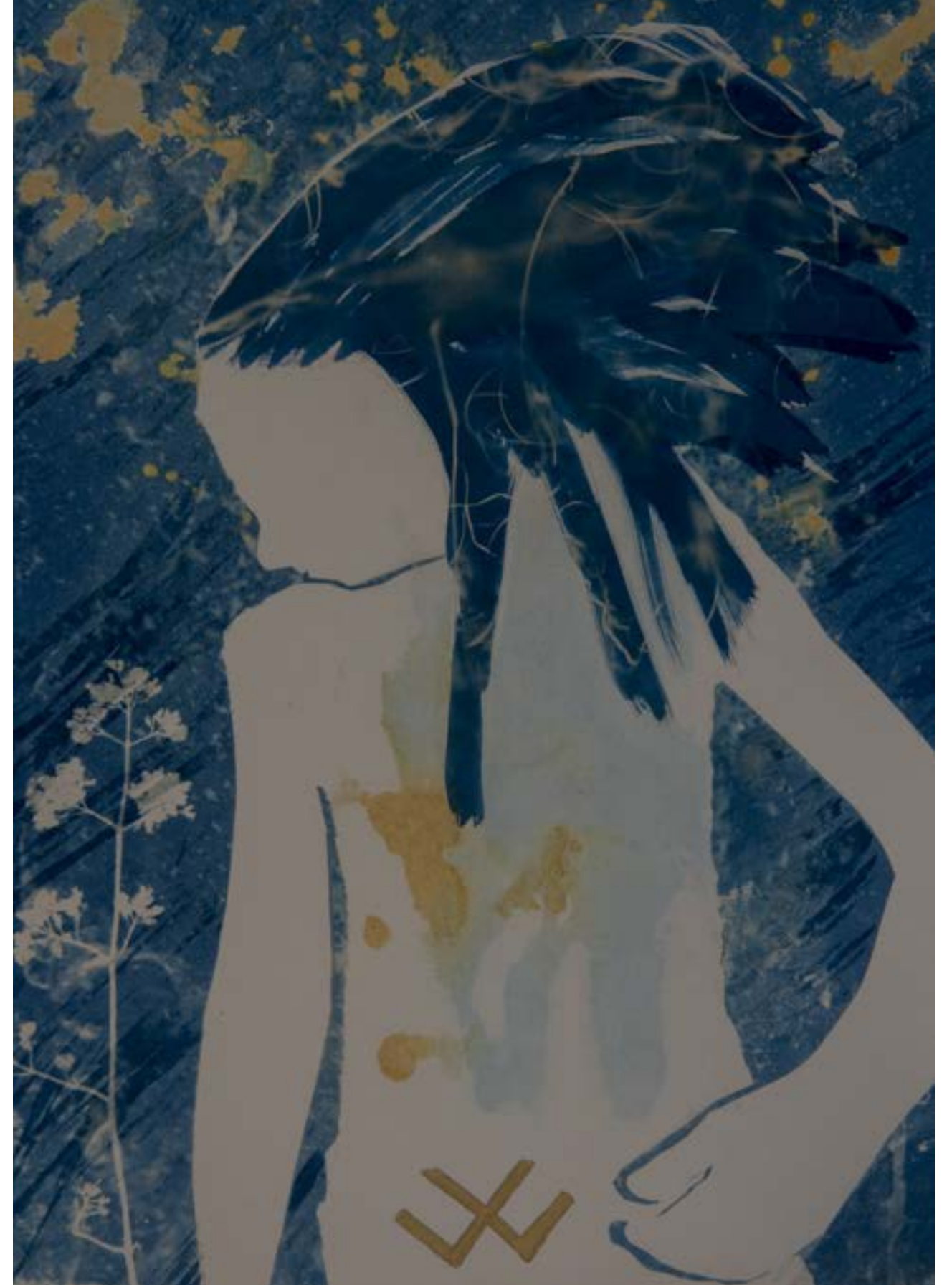
Over 80 years after the event and more than 30 years after first learning about it, I found myself mixing chemicals, coating paper, cutting out human figures, and layering them with plants, flowers, scrap paper, and salt flakes. The figures I used are from original photographs posed by models. For a couple of years, I entered a world of blue. The work was all-consuming. At night, I dreamt in blue. I saw curious blue figures twisting and turning, restless and arresting. By day, I made cyanotypes, pushing the process as far as I could each time. I never stopped experimenting, tweaking both chemistry and techniques, and making new discoveries until the very last image was made.

As if the shades of Prussian, deep indigo and pale sky blue could somehow speak eloquently



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of the loss, the crime, and the particularity of the individuals who were killed. As if blue could weep and heal simultaneously. Whilst working on this project, *The 544*, I thought often about the colour blue — the colour of sadness, or my school uniform, much the same. But it is also the colour of “distance and desire” and of memory.



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LEFT TO RIGHT
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The wet cyanotype process is a forgiving one. It teaches you something new with every image you make. Using a traditional technique seemed fitting when looking at an event from a historical perspective. I enjoyed the fact that I could be so precise, but I also had to let serendipity play its part in the making of every image. There is an element of magic in making cyanotypes. I found the process fluid and spacious, allowing for alchemy; it gave me room to take risks, explore mystery, and enjoy the unexpected gifts of chemistry. Each finished print is a one-off handmade object, just as each figure

depicted was a unique individual. The images are finished with a small, hand-drawn Latvian pagan symbol in gold ink, referring to Latvian culture and adding a spiritual and decorative element. The glint of gold in the hand-drawn symbols seems hopeful to me, like the gold in the Japanese art of Kintsugi, visibly mending the broken, and the gold in Western religious art, which often symbolises the Divine.

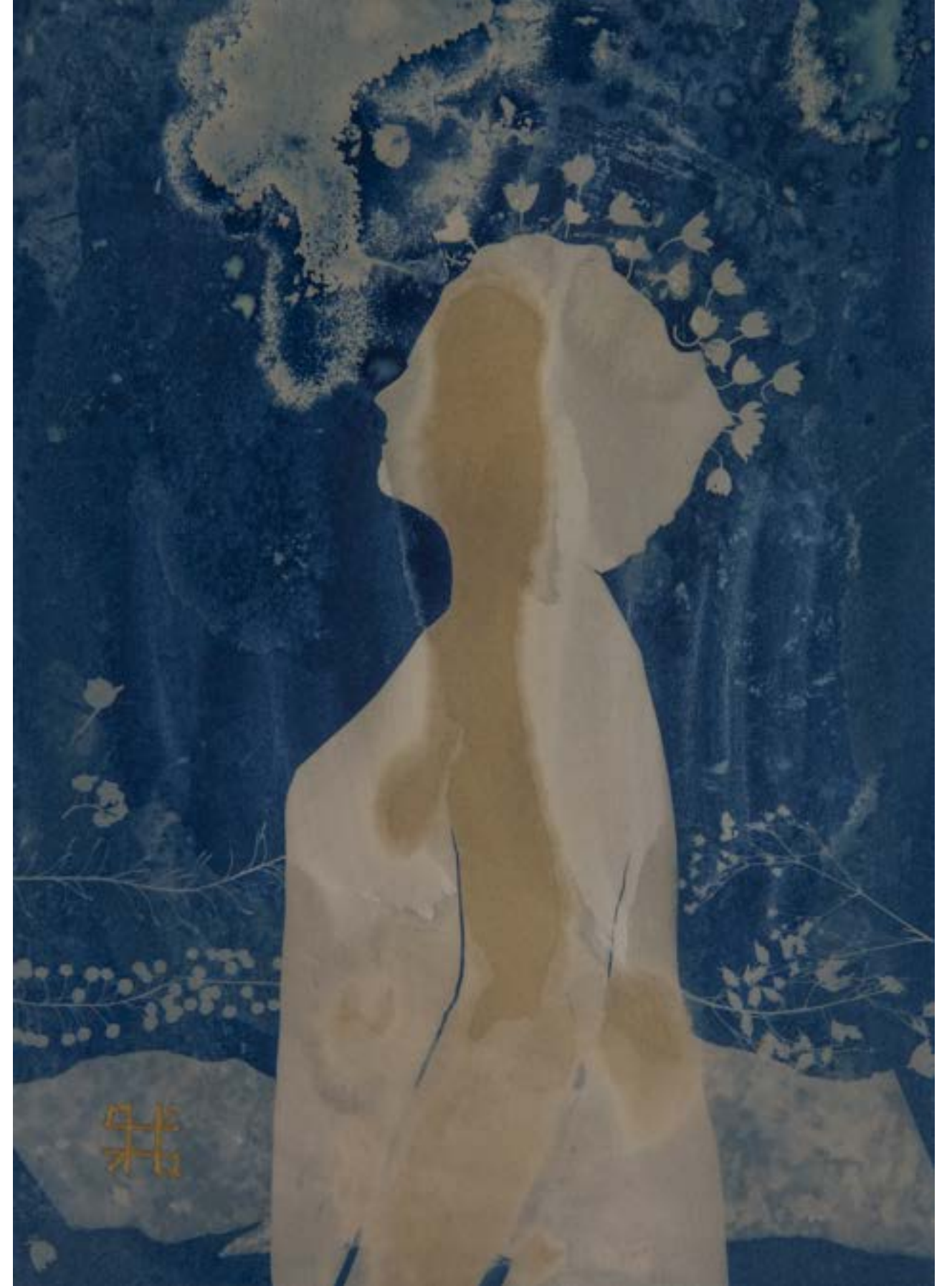
At times, while making this work I was overwhelmed by a new fact I discovered in my research, and an obscene detail about Nazi history floored me. Do you know what a "kicker" is? I didn't.

It was someone whose job it was to stand at the edge of a pit dug to bury murder victims and kick in any corpses that had not fallen inside. I saw a photograph of a Latvian kicker in the Holocaust Museum in Houston. I tried to imagine what was going on in his head and asked myself what I would and wouldn't do if I found myself at the wrong end of the barrel of a gun. How do we face the knowledge of what we, as humans, are capable of? Especially in a world where we only have to turn on the news to hear many examples of present-day brutality and wonder how best to speak out.

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At a lecture on intergenerational trauma I attended with a friend, the lecturer explained the biological and chemical process by which trauma is passed on: epigenetics. I was convinced. Then she told the audience that before your mother is even born, half of your genetic information is already there in her eggs, already formed while she is still in the womb. Three generations in one body. My grandmother in a displaced persons' camp in Germany, my mother, curled in the womb, washed in cortisol, her eggs soaking up the complex inheritance that was the birthright of the generation born in, or after, World War Two. The lecturer even used the word "blueprint". My friend and I looked at each other and whispered the word "cyanotype!" It sounded like an incantation.



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It is impossible for me to look at the images without thinking about how the lives of these people ended. However, the project is primarily intended as a memorial. I wanted the images to hint at more celebratory moments and to remember the lives they lived before they entered the hospital and died. Not knowing anything about their identities, I tried to imagine each one as a unique, precious being, and to give back to each person a little of the character that was stripped from them when they were murdered and reduced by history to a number on a list of nameless victims.

The project is the second part in a trilogy exploring my family history and examining themes of cultural inheritance, identity and intergenerational trauma. I'm now looking forward to working on single images that look at intergenerational trauma and will enjoy the freedom of working at a larger scale after two years confined to A4 paper! For the moment, *The 544* are all neatly filed in acid-free archival boxes, stacked up in my studio. Two shows, one here in the UK and one in Riga, Latvia, are in the planning stage. I am working to raise funds to mount the work and to make a book of the cyanotypes to accompany the exhibitions.

▪

After working so intensely for the best part of two years, it is strange to have finished this work. What a privilege and a joy it was to spend a couple of years in the company of the 544. When I found out there was no memorial to them, I knew that whatever my shortcomings as an artist, it seemed that I was all these people had. I felt honoured and humbled to be the one to have made this work. For a long time, I was crippled by fear when approaching this subject matter, unsure whether I was good enough to do it justice and create the memorial these people deserve. Finally, through my research into intergenerational trauma and by facing the weight of my family history, I realised I had no choice but to make the work. The story had chosen me — it wanted to be told and it didn't mind if I told it.



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LEFT
534/544

The 544 will be on view at the Bethlem Museum of the Mind in November 2026, and will transfer to Latvia in 2027.



About Sarah Ketelaars

Sarah Ketelaars is a British photographer from Brighton, UK. She holds a BA and MA degree in English Literature from Jesus College, Cambridge, an MSc in Social Science from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, and a Diploma in Photography from City College, Brighton. She began her career as a journalist, and her images have appeared on book, CD, and magazine covers. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and she is represented by 35 North Gallery in Brighton.

Sarah was selected as one of the LensCulture Critics' Choice winners in 2021 and was a finalist with *The 544* project in the LensCulture Art Photography Awards in 2024, when she was also a Photolucida Critical Mass finalist. In 2025, she won the Shutter Hub Yearbook Magnum Award and was a Klompching Gallery Fresh Photo Award finalist. This year, she has been shortlisted for the Sony World Photography Award.

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Fragile world

Where land meets sea on the wild North Norfolk coastline, a rare and little-known ecosystem is under environmental threat. The author explores both its hidden beauty and the jeopardy it faces.

by Annie Green-Armytage





PREVIOUS PAGE

Flying to safe roost

A lone brent goose, *Branta bernicla*, stands by the shoreline, another flies low over the water, while a flock of smaller birds fly to roost in safety out on the marsh. In the far distance an offshore wind farm, a small but hopeful example of human endeavour to repair the massive damage we are perpetrating on the natural world, and in consequence, to ourselves.

LEFT

*Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta**

The avocet has a conservation status of amber in the UK. It is the iconic emblem of the RSPB, and symbolises bird protection.

I've just got back from a walk on the saltmarsh. It's midwinter, and the low-tide, primeval oozing mud was lapped by the North Sea. The east wind clawed at my sinuses. It was bleak. But then there were clouds of lapwing swirling. Brent geese muttered like grumpy old men as they browsed the seablite. Redshank and curlew searched for food and then rose into the air, calling their haunting marsh song. My heart lifted.

Bitingly cold, grey-brown and featureless — this was certainly my view of the saltmarsh when we bought a home in North Norfolk several years ago. With a long career in garden photography, I was used to colour and form in my plant life, often choreographed with great skill by a gardener with a detailed understanding of their patch of the (semi-) natural world. The saltmarsh was something "other". There was no one here to design, nurture, or control. And yet. Looking more closely, the tapestry-like layers of plants were arranged perfectly: grey-green purslane, the red flush of samphire, silvery brown seedheads. Herbaceous borders of the natural world.

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Winter on the saltmarsh (1)
Frost and ice on the saltmarsh with lapwings flying overhead.



Sea lavender on a summer sunrise

I started my professional creative journey making a decent enough living photographing and writing about gardens and plants. I contributed to books, magazines, stock agencies. Then the world moved on. Print media went into terminal decline, and corporations grabbed more and more rights for less and less recompense. Microstock arrived. I could no longer sustain myself.

Thanks to a small grant from the Arts Council, I was able to take time out to regroup. I spent time expanding my post-production techniques — layers, comping, creating textures and brushes — and experimenting in different ways of responding to and making images. I reflected on

my focus on gardens and the increasing human disconnect from nature.

As I explored fine art imagery and created workshops encouraging people to connect with nature through photography, I was awakened to what was happening globally: pollution, massive biodiversity loss, the climate crisis. A realisation of how we extract from nature as if it were solely for human use. A recognition that nonhuman species have as much right as we do to live meaningfully on the planet, and that more-than-human ecosystems — like the saltmarsh — are critical to our shared continued existence. We are part of nature, not apart from it.

“I was awakened to what was happening globally: pollution, massive biodiversity loss, the climate crisis. A realisation of how we extract from nature as if it were solely for human use.”

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During the pandemic I began to take frequent walks along the local coast path. In the beginning this was a way of caring for my mental health. As time passed I started to notice more, and to walk with my camera. With the turn of the seasons, I watched changes in plant colour and form, and in migrating birds: geese, egrets, arctic terns, and, more recently, the return of the spoonbill — a conservation success.

I learnt more about the intricacy of this ecosystem and what it does for us all. The saltmarsh is a natural sponge city soaking up water and tidal energy, protecting the coastline and human habitation from extreme storms. It is a carbon sink, storing carbon so efficiently that it is sometimes referred to as a blue forest. But it is in decline: since 1860, more than 85% of England's saltmarshes have been lost, either to rising sea levels or changes in land use.

The saltmarsh is resilient: native plant species have evolved to survive submersion for short periods on exceptionally high tides. Short periods. UK Environment Agency flood predictions have this area of coastline (North Norfolk) regularly underwater at high tide by 2050 due to rising seas and more extreme storms. This potentially spells the end of this important ecosystem.

▪

My work plans evolved: I wanted to increase appreciation of both the hidden beauty of the saltmarsh and also its jeopardy. I started to consider touring an exhibition. As my process unfolded, it increasingly became a case of honouring the nonhuman, more-than-human, life here in the best way I could. This translated into diverse imagery made over time: painterly and textured landscapes capturing spirit of place, complemented by plantscapes which emphasised their independence from human control and demanded to be seen as living tapestries, complex and interwoven. More recently, I have felt a driving urge to document every aspect of this intricate ecosystem, in particular the diverse birdlife, with an intentional focus on locating each species within the context of place.

In autumn 2024 I broke my wrist. It was a severe break, and complications developed, which are likely to be lifelong. I was completely out of action photographically for six months and am, at time of writing, still only able to hold a camera, or manipulate a tripod, for around 90 minutes before



I am in pain. I suddenly had to face the very challenging fact that commissioned work was no longer viable. However, the saltmarsh is close enough to home — most of these images were made only a 10-20 minute walk away — to allow me to continue working in short bursts.

Winter on the saltmarsh (2)

A hard frost on the saltmarsh, with redshanks hunting for food in the creek mud. Brent geese fly overhead. A hard frost on a saltmarsh is currently a rare thing.

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Sea lavender, *Limonium vulgare*, partially underwater at flood tide.



Plants underwater (2)

During a high “marsh tide” overflowing the saltmarsh, the reflection and distortion created by the layer of water add to the complexity of the image, rendering the plant life as a disturbed tapestry.

The project has helped me to move through a sense of loss and regret to acceptance and a determination to make the best of where I am right now. It has been vital to my mental health. I cannot imagine a life without photography; it is part of who I want to be in the world, for as long as I am able. It has given me purpose.

I have been lucky enough to contribute to a local Greenpeace pop-up exhibition, and to have two spaces agreed for solo exhibitions in summer 2026. This positive, creative action gives me hope.

It is easy for me to slide into hopelessness at the state of our world right now. The situation is bleak. But there is still time. There are a lot of us. What we do, however imperfectly, matters. Knowing this, I can face the worst of it, and do what I can: making work, talking to people, educating, encouraging. My relationship to the project has developed from intellectual into emotional: a heart-led response to what is happening in the world, and a celebration of the beyond-money value of the natural world that we are part of and depend upon.

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Shrubby seablite, Suaeda vera, in spring



Sea lavender, Limonium vulgare



*Lapwings, *Vanellus vanellus*, at dusk*
The lapwing is currently on the UK Red List for birds.

When life gets overwhelming, I walk on the saltmarsh. I watch birds flying over, hunting, flocking, roosting. I watch the ever-changing sea roll in and out; the turn of the seasons, with delicate drifts of sea lavender in summer and a brief fiery blaze of

seablite in autumn. In those moments I can let go of anxiety for the future and be in the moment. I can find peace. My hope is that this project will connect others as I have been connected to this beautiful, resilient, fragile, more-than-human ecosystem.



About Annie Green-Armytage

Annie Green-Armytage is an award-winning garden photographer and feature writer of more than 25 years, published regularly in books and magazines worldwide. She is also an accredited counsellor and psychotherapist.

Recently she has shifted emphasis, creating work which makes links between mental health, the natural world, and climate change. She aims to inspire understanding and love for human interconnectedness with nature, and to encourage action to prevent its unnecessary destruction.

Her first solo exhibition, *Norfolk Saltmarsh: A Fragile World*, is showing at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust Education Centre, Cley-next-the-Sea from 26th June to 9th July 2026 and at The Maltings, Wells-next-the-Sea, from 11th to 19th July 2026.

Annie is based in Norfolk.

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Visible work, invisible money

Three artists discuss the hidden costs and financial precarity of a career in photography.

by Francesca Hummler, in conversation
with Joanne Coates and Delali Ayivi

The longer I work in contemporary photography, the more difficult it becomes to explain what I do or how I sustain myself financially. The misunderstanding tends to surface in unremarkable places. At the dentist, someone leaning over me with instruments in my mouth asks what kind of images I make and begins guessing through the predictable categories. Wildlife? Weddings? Architecture? The answer is none of the above, and yet explaining what I actually produce, and how that production translates into income, feels disproportionately complex. My work exists within a cultural ecosystem rather than a single marketable service, too niche to summarise in a sentence.

From the outside, visibility suggests stability. Friends see exhibitions, travel, and publications, and assume momentum equals security. Within the art world, similar assumptions circulate, where visibility is read as proof that one has crossed an invisible threshold into sustainability, as though a certain number of features unlock financial certainty. Artists are either emerging or established, and what happens in between is a black box. Gratitude, while not a tax write-off, is a major part of my economy, and I routinely invest more in my practice than I recoup. Invitations that appear prestigious often

involve unpaid labour or modest honoraria, and I have discovered, sometimes only afterwards, that older or more established colleagues were compensated for roles I accepted without pay, grateful simply to have accommodation covered.

As a freelancer based in the United States, my income is classified as "extremely low" by the state of California and assembled from a shifting constellation of teaching, writing, curating, editing, photography, and digital management. I move between roles as a matter of necessity, and while each task contributes to a visible professional presence, the compensation attached to that presence remains irregular. Healthcare is not guaranteed with employment. Administrative obligations, including taxes and insurance, generate a quiet anxiety. I spend a significant portion of my time applying for grants, residencies, and speaking engagements to sustain a practice. In one instance, a request for a fee waiver for a single-image online exhibition redirected me into an additional application process requiring paperwork and a reference letter, a reminder that financial need is met with more labour. The structure demands constant negotiation and, often, a performance of competence even when the numbers do not add up.

LEFT

Fabergé Egg Family © Francesca Hummler



Amber © Joanne Coates



Hold The Line © Joanne Coates

When I shared this with Joanne Coates, she responded from a position shaped by class and geography. "At the moment, it doesn't feel sustainable. I earn a living wage. I work two jobs, and honestly, I can't do it anymore. This is the most I've earned since graduating — that's £11k with both jobs. So that's about 80 hours a week." I have always appreciated Jo's transparency, entirely consistent with her no-nonsense clarity around economics that I first encountered when we met in Cardiff several years ago. Her calculation resists rhetoric and instead operates as a direct measurement of time against survival, transforming what might appear to be a simple figure into the lived accumulation of hours worked and energy expended.

What Jo emphasises extends beyond the visible cost of exhibitions, materials, and travel and moves towards the intangible. The most challenging part, she says, is not being "seen as difficult when I point

out I'm not being paid a living wage". This echoes a conversation I had in 2023 with a manager who insisted that I was being paid the London living wage, in a job where I was making two quid under that an hour. In our conversation, confidence emerges as a structural condition rather than a personal trait, shaped by how much risk a person can afford to carry. It is easier to ask for fair pay when you have room to withstand refusal, and easier to negotiate when a missed opportunity does not threaten your housing. For women in particular, the act of requesting basic compensation is frequently reframed as temperament, where firmness becomes "difficult" and clarity is misread as aggression, reinforcing a professional culture in which silence is often safer than advocacy.

About Joanne Coates

Joanne Coates is a visual artist exploring class, rural labour, and structural inequality through photography, installation, and collaborative practice. Rooted in her lived experience within farming communities in the North of England, her work examines how land, power, and access shape rural life, and how histories of labour remain embedded in the landscape.

Her research-led projects, including *Daughters of the Soil*, focus on gender, labour, and visibility in working-class rural communities. Coates' work has been widely exhibited across the UK and internationally at institutions such as Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, MIMA, Belfast Exposed, Jerwood Arts, and Somerset House, as well as major photography festivals.

Her work is held in public collections, including the Government Art Collection and Arts Council Collection. Educated at the London College of Communication, Coates maintains a long-term, collaborative approach grounded in place, contributing to critical conversations around class and representation in contemporary British art.

joannecoates.co.uk ▪ [instagram.com/joannecoates_](https://www.instagram.com/joannecoates_)

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Kaffeeante © Francesca Hummler

Jo highlights how working-class labour in the arts is frequently glorified, suggesting that anyone can succeed if they work hard enough and believe in their talent. Within that narrative, structural barriers recede into the background, and individual responsibility takes their place. The expectation to be grateful for cultural participation compounds the issue. If you question pay, you risk being framed as uncommitted or ungrateful. Exhaustion becomes a character flaw rather than evidence of imbalance.

As the child of upper-middle-class parents, I recognise elements of this dynamic from a different vantage point. There have been moments when institutions assumed I would manage

because I could move back in with my parents or rely on personal savings if necessary, and that perceived safety net becomes folded into expectations around pay. I am aware that my ability to remain in the art world is sustained, at times, by the knowledge that I could return home if work collapses, even though my parents have never paid my rent. The privilege attached to this form of class-conditioned employability shapes how urgently certain issues, such as months of outstanding invoices, are addressed; when delay is assumed to be absorbable, it becomes permissible. The possibility of fallback then functions as an unspoken justification for undercompensation. Personal biography is used to rationalise structural



Annestone Swale © Joanne Coates

imbalance, and the responsibility to absorb instability rests with the individual.

Jo makes a distinction that clarifies much of this tension. She speaks about the difference between pressure and precarity, explaining that while “many artists experience pressure to produce and remain visible, real financial precarity introduces a fear that continuing in the field may not be possible at all.” She has observed peers from more financially secure backgrounds struggle with overwork and burnout, and she does not dismiss their fatigue. The divergence appears in what follows the collapse. Some can step back and recalibrate, supported by savings or family resources. Others calculate whether staying in the arts is viable.

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The Joy of it All © Delali Ayivi commissioned by Stretch Studio, 2022



Accalmie © Delali Ayivi commissioned by PhotoVogue x Puig, 2023

A dance with money

Delali Ayivi enters our conversation from within fashion and editorial photography, working between London and Lomé and helming multiple cultural economies. Her career includes international publications and the long-term project *Togo Yeye*. She describes the financial landscape as an ongoing negotiation rather than a linear ascent. “Being a creative or being a photographer has you in an interesting dance with money, where often career-changing opportunities come packaged as free labour or even with the expectation to make a financial contribution out of your own pocket.” The choreography she outlines is shaped by uneven access to capital and time, where each step

requires evaluating whether exposure will translate into sustainability or simply extend precarity.

She continues, “Our profession is not as straightforward as conducting a good and professional job and being paid accordingly, but it demands a lot of strategic investments of your time and resources.” Strategy implies foresight, yet foresight depends on having the capacity to invest without immediate return. When that capacity varies, the ability to accept opportunity varies as well. A commission that requires travel, unpaid preparation, or personal financial contribution may open doors in the long term, yet it also carries risk.

About Delali Ayivi



Delali Ayivi is a Togolese and German photographer. Delali started by photographing her friends and family in Germany, Togo and Malawi. Finding the work of her great-great-grandfather, Alex Acolatse, one of the first Togolese photographers, inspired Delali to document her surroundings with a focus on fashion. Delali is now based between London and Lomé.

In 2019, Delali co-created a project called *Togo Yeye*. The project aims to create work to document and empower her creative community at home and in the diaspora, through creative vision and direction.

Delali creates images that are a celebration of colour and movement and an ode to her heritage for the likes of *Vogue US*, *British Vogue*, *Dazed*, *Nataal*, *Coach*, *Puig*, *PhotoVogue*, *Vogue Germany*, *Vogue India*, *Vogue.com*, *T-Magazine*, *Aritzia*, *Levi's*, and *Atmos*.

She has been named part of the New Gen 50 by the British Fashion Council, and included as part of the *Dazed* 100 list, and *Forbes' 30 under 30*. *Togo Yeye* was awarded the PhMuseum New Generation Prize, and her work was exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery as part of the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize in 2021. That same year, Delali was one of the recipients of the Foam Talent Prize.

[instagram.com/delaliayivi](https://www.instagram.com/delaliayivi)

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ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT
Two Chairs and A Wall © Delali Ayivi, 2022
American Spread on German Bread © Francesca Hummler
Untitled © Joanne Coates

Delali notes that photography has undergone a transformation in which quantity often outweighs duration, and the lifespan of images has shortened. “It is not only about... talent, people want to buy into your story, your motivation, and your value systems.” The demand for narrative intensifies the labour attached to visibility. The photographer must articulate identity, heritage, and perspective in ways that resonate with audiences and clients. For Delali, working between Europe and West Africa, storytelling carries cultural and historical weight. The personal becomes inseparable from the professional.

In my work, I witness how much labour

underpins cultural production beyond the image itself. Community management, editorial oversight, programming, correspondence, and mediation require sustained attention and emotional investment. These forms of labour maintain artistic ecosystems, yet they are often invisible within funding structures that prioritise output. As women working across different contexts, all three of us are acutely aware that care work, mentoring, and communication are frequently expected and rarely remunerated at their full value. The expectation to be available, articulate, and responsive becomes part of professional survival.

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Balancing on Beer Jugs © Francesca Hummler

Across our conversation, what emerges is an insistence on describing how photographic careers are actually sustained, rather than how they appear from the outside. Cultural programming operates within constrained budgets, and funding bodies face limitations. The cumulative effect is that individual artists absorb instability through unpaid labour, personal investment, and strategic compromise. Recently, someone suggested that I should allow projects to “fail” when they cannot be supported adequately. I have begun to decline invitations that require unfunded travel or the like, a decision that is at odds with my child-of-immigrants work ethic and sense of obligation. Jo continues to measure hours against income, recalibrating

what sustainability might mean. Delali navigates commissions with an awareness of both visibility and long-term balance.

The appearance of success often conceals extensive negotiation. Our work circulates publicly, yet the financial architecture beneath it remains uneven and, at times, opaque. Bringing these negotiations into view does not resolve the imbalance; rather, it clarifies the conditions under which contemporary photographic practice is maintained and sharpens our understanding of what cultural visibility currently requires from those who participate in it. Visibility cannot sustain a practice, and the economic conditions that make enjoying photography possible must be addressed with the same attention we give the work itself.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Simélan © Delali Ayivi with Togo Yeye, 2023



About Francesca Hummler

Francesca Hummler (b. 1997) is a German-American visual artist, curator, and researcher working with photography, based in San Diego. She holds a BA in Media Arts and BS in Biochemistry from UC San Diego and an MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art, where she graduated with distinction.

Her work explores identity, familial intimacy, and generational trauma, drawing from her experience as the daughter of German immigrants. Influenced by photo-therapy, she uses self-portraiture and collaborative practices to examine healing and the archive.

Hummler has exhibited internationally, including at Paris Photo, Photo Elysée, and the Singapore International Photography Festival. She is a recipient of the Carte Blanche Étudiants and Vonovia Young Talent awards, and her work is held in the Odunpazarı Modern Museum in Turkey. Since 2022, she has worked with *Der Greif* as a community manager and programme curator and is developing a travelling exhibition on German-American relations for the German Embassy in Washington, DC. In Fall 2026, she will be joining the University of South Dakota as the Visiting Assistant Professor of Art in Photography.

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The rich fabric of a relationship

Over the course of a year, a mother and her teenage daughter explore the many subtle shifts and quiet negotiations that shape their bond.

by Clair Robins

All images © Clair Robins

With a simple but decisive gesture in April 2024, I embarked on a year-long photographic collaboration with my teenage daughter. I hung a length of rich, red fabric in the front dining room of our home. It would function as a backdrop, but also a signal. It became a permanent reminder that a commitment had been made. For the next 12 months, images would be created here.

Neither of us fully understood what we were agreeing to, only that we were stepping into something that would unfold slowly and demand attention. What began as a shared act of looking evolved into an intimate and, at times, uneasy exploration of love, distance, consent, and the shifting bonds between child, adolescent, and woman. The resulting project, *52 Weeks Stolen & Preserved*, is rooted in proximity, but equally shaped by resistance.

At the outset, the project resembled documentation. A record of a year. But as weeks passed, it became clear that something more complex was taking place. The photographs were not simply being made; they were being negotiated. They were “quiet negotiations” of what I (we) could explore, within appropriate boundaries, and how I, as the image maker, could explore them more deeply. Each image carried questions of presence and absence, willingness and refusal. Sometimes the camera was welcomed, other times endured. To my frustration, my daughter could make me wait and that sometimes affected the mood. Through this ongoing exchange, the work shifted into a collaborative space defined by courage, friction, and sensitivity, which I did find tricky. Photographer vs mother: Did I notice her, or did I just want to record the shot?

RIGHT
Future





Gap

Fluctuating dynamics

My practice has always been concerned with capturing the visible while probing the non-visible. These photographs exist both in the immediacy of the moment and as constructed, intuitive responses. They hold the “here and now” while allowing ideas, emotions, and narratives to unfold gradually. I work instinctively, guided by curiosity and by the fluctuating dynamics between us. This project intensified that instinctive approach, as I was constantly responding not only to light and form, but to mood, fatigue, resistance, and just bad timing!

Technically, the project was challenging from the beginning. We were entirely at the mercy of unpredictable seasonal light. Depending on the hour, the red fabric shifted dramatically, sometimes flattening into a matte maroon surface, other times erupting into rich, saturated reds with deep, theatrical

shadows. I knew I would have to embrace this instability rather than resist it. Some images failed. Others surprised me. Not all of them were “right” in a conventional sense, which often led to my daughter’s annoyance and my frustration. Our visual maturity and expectations were frequently misaligned.

Conflict did surface. Our thresholds for being patient were different. I was ready to shoot; she was often not ready at all — sometimes not even awake. Teenagers, I learned, operate on an entirely different internal clock. I had hoped to work exclusively with natural light, but in hindsight, the use of electronic flash might have offered more flexibility and reduced pressure. Still, the limitations became part of the language of the work. Constancy was not always possible, and once I accepted that, the project gained freedom.



Reflections



Sweet Treats

Some images began with a loose narrative, while others emerged from conversation, or even silence. Certain ideas unravelled and re-emerged weeks later, shaped by changes in our relationship. Looking back, the first image that truly set the tone was *Reflections*. In this photograph, she was comfortable being hidden from the lens. That concealment felt safe, even empowering. As the project progressed, this comfort shifted. Gradually, images became more revealing, though never without hesitation. Not long after, we made *Future*, an image that feels natural and composed, yet guarded. It holds both openness and self-protection in equal measure.

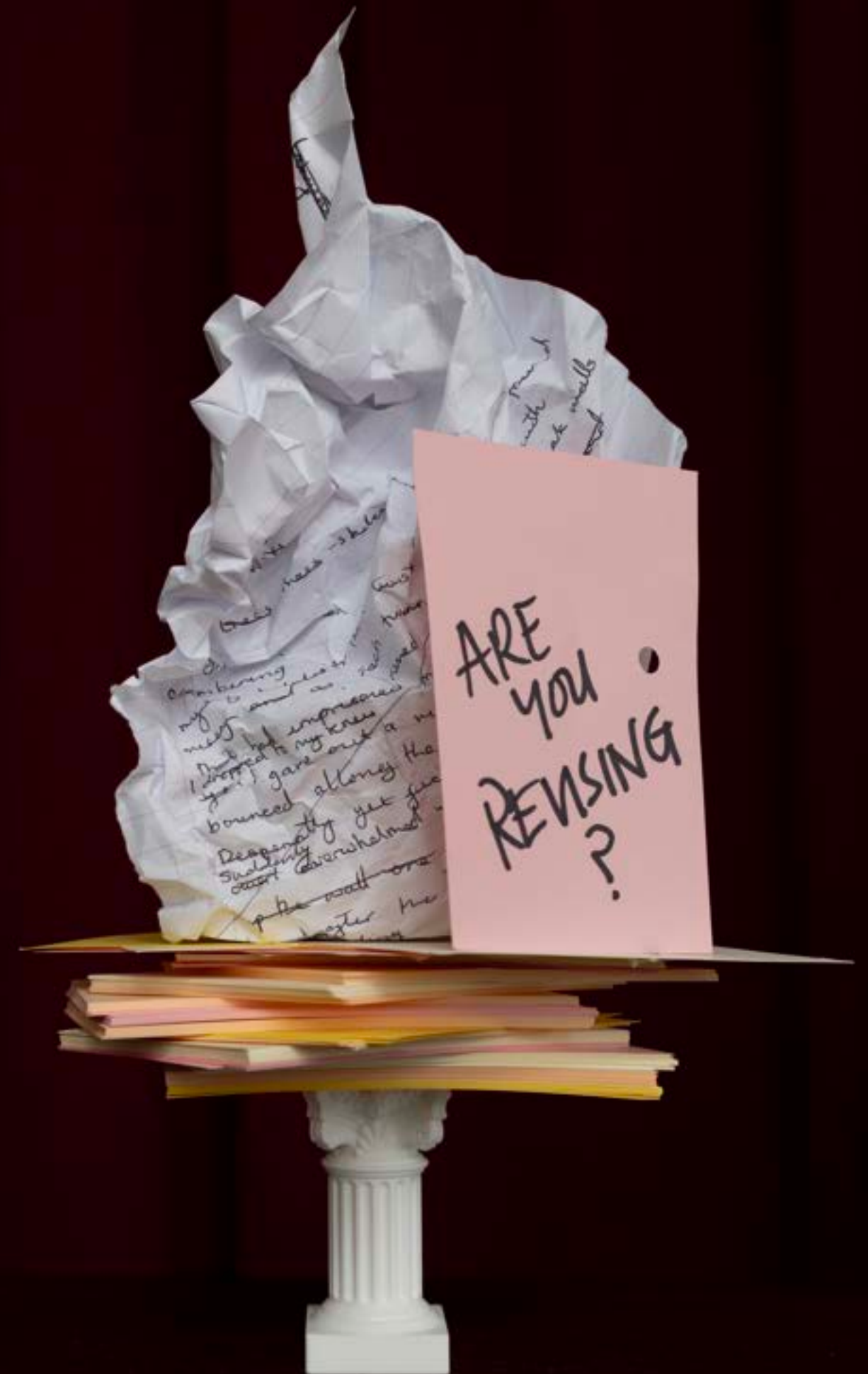
I quickly realised that the project could not rely solely on portraiture. While some images are formal and staged, others needed to remain ambiguous. I began moving fluidly between portrait, still life, and more experimental, tactile constructions. This

constant flux in approach created space for my daughter to engage on different terms. It also allowed me, as the artist, to introduce ideas in ways that felt less confrontational and more open-ended.

We discussed compositions together, though not all suggestions were accepted. Some concepts were dismissed because they did not align with my creative vision, while others emerged unexpectedly. *Revision*, for example, came from a still life assembled from scraps of paper taken directly from her desk. I suppose in the shot I am echoing what I kept saying, mocking myself, not necessarily her.

Sweet Treats was included in the archive despite not being a personal favourite of mine; it references a key moment around her birthday, with family gathered, celebrating with cake. Her perspective mattered the more we shot images, even when it conflicted with my own preference.

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“The camera became a tool of connection and reflection, capturing subtle shifts in our relationship.”

The more I shot, the more I noticed that willingness and resistance coexisted within the viewfinder. Tension, closeness, and distance are sometimes subtle, sometimes unmistakable. These rhythms mirror the realities of motherhood and adolescence. Our relationship changes every day. While the project sits close to the idea of a family album, it deliberately moves beyond it. I wanted the images to be less concerned with how moments looked, and more with how they felt. In this sense, the work reimagines the family archive as both record and negotiation. From a self-critical viewpoint, some are maybe a touch clichéd.

Boundaries

The big question that has not yet been completely resolved with some of the photographs is around what is fair to reveal publicly. I am not exploiting my daughter — we did discuss the perils of work being seen by others. There are images she does not like, and in a few instances, I know I could have been a bit more gentle in my approach and observations. After all, I do want this work shared, in a publication, on a gallery wall or travelling around the world. She is aware of how my other work has been shown before, so is not completely in the dark about the potential destination.

Some of my favourite photographs are not hers. But I have included them anyway, aware that these moments cannot be retrieved or remade. With time, I hope she may grow to see them differently. Still, I respect the boundaries she has set, and have held back some photographs, even when I feel they belong in the archive.



Contained Butterfly

The camera became a tool of connection and reflection, capturing subtle shifts in our relationship. We explored intimacy, distance, femininity, and the quiet negotiations that shape the bond between mother and daughter. Often, her input was subtle: a word, a comment, a fleeting idea that seemed insignificant at the time but later became central to an image. The photograph *Contained Butterfly* is one such example.

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The Plan



The Ones I Wanted

continued overleaf



The Prom Dress



Where Are You?



So Proud

The timing of the project coincided with an especially vulnerable period in my daughter's life. Not only did she undergo surgery to remove teeth in preparation for braces, but she was in Year 12/13, at the height of GCSE pressure. The final year of school, mocks, revision, friendships hindered and competed constantly with the photography. What sustained her, and many others, was the promise of the prom. It sat on the horizon as a reward, a moment of release. Several images, such as *The Prom Dress*, had to be made outside my original timeframe. I had to relax my own rules to complete the body of work. I had to slow down and be realistic about light, opportunity and planning. The vision and concept, props and backdrop were there and ready, but we didn't always align in the moment.

Some photographs were created with very little input from my daughter; others were highly collaborative. The balance shifted week by week. Fleeting moments of hope, sadness, anger, strength, love, and tenderness are explored, discussed, and captured. Vulnerability is placed on display as both risk and celebration. The work offers a quiet, delicate witness to humanity. While deeply personal, it invites broader emotional connection from a feminine perspective, acting as both a step forward and a nod to the past.

As a visual artist, I found myself fuelled by the discipline of a long-term project. It allowed me to blend portraiture, still life, and experimentation while witnessing the beauty and fragility in both of us. This was a project of compromise and emotional discovery. Although framed as a collaboration,

it was often driven by me creatively. I could not help but continue formulating ideas once the agreement was made. She was an active partner in some images more than others. When my visual language faltered, I trusted that immersion in the process would lead me forward, even if that meant responding to a single comment or glance.

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I did financially reward my daughter for her time, framing it as a pocket-money bonus, along with a much-desired pair of fancy netball shoes. I don't think she fully realised how much time the project would demand (neither did I) or how these images might one day serve as emotional triggers, pulling memories back into focus.

continued overleaf



LEFT
The Puzzle

‘The light’s about to go’

Perhaps the most challenging aspect was learning patience. Our thresholds for how long an image should take to “make” or “capture” were vastly different. I remain frustrated that some photographs are not allowed to be seen, yet I respect that decision. I admire the shots that are more symbolic and metaphoric, but equally enjoyed the re-imagined works and direct portraits.

In truth, asking for 52 “great” photographs from a single study of this nature may have been unrealistic and somewhat overambitious. But within that ambition lies the heart of the project: an honest record of a year stolen, preserved, held between and now shared. Imperfect in places, engaging and emotional in others.

This body of work represents an area I return to repeatedly and deeply enjoy in my wider practice. Working with symbolism and metaphors and exploring the space between the real and the imagined is a compelling way for me to generate meaning. Narrative, still life, and portraiture offer powerful tools through which to share ideas and communicate experience.

I found myself saying, “Hurry up, the light’s about to go...” countless times during this project. Now my daughter is relieved that it has come to an end, although I suspect part of her misses the random conversations, the exchange of ideas, and her involvement, even if she would never admit it.

About Clair Robins



Robins is a photographic visual artist and FE educator based in Leicester, UK. An obsessive image maker, her practice fluidly overlaps traditional and digital processes, rooted in close observation of the everyday. Through portraiture and carefully constructed still-life photographs, she transforms the seemingly mundane into sites of curiosity, reflection, and meaning. Drawing on nostalgia, memory, and conceptually staged scenarios, Robins creates intimate visual narratives that blur the boundaries between document and fiction. Mundane objects and personal memorabilia are assembled into layered compositions that reflect on identity, habit, and domestic ritual. With warmth and subtle aphoristic humour, her work reveals the emotional, cultural, and psychological charge embedded in ordinary life.

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Unquiet places

Shaken by a rupture in her family, the author discovers the power of connection with the landscape in the remote horizons of Suffolk.

by Tessa Sinclair .



PREVIOUS PAGE
Hibernation

Some landscapes seem to have a particularly powerful impact on us. At times we feel so attuned to them that it is as though they resonate with our inner state of mind. To be in them is to see things, to understand and resolve them. I am not referring to the sense of calm and relaxation induced by being in nature — an effect compellingly demonstrated through studies measuring the reduction of stress after time spent in nature. I believe there is another kind of connection — one in which there seems to be a dynamic conversation between us and what we see in the landscape. It can feel as though the land becomes a mirror, reflecting our inner state back to us and revealing things we may not yet have acknowledged, even to ourselves.

RIGHT
Low Ebb





The Distance

“It is profoundly difficult to navigate a world that has fractured in a way you cannot mend.”



The Path

I have long believed that there is a deeper, more emotional relationship between us and certain places — one that is almost metaphysical. This idea took on a new significance when I found myself living in a world I had never imagined. Some years ago, an event changed our lives completely. Our much-loved daughter became increasingly anxious, resulting in a breakdown and her admission to hospital. I still find it difficult to forget the phone call from her friend who had taken her there. She was abroad at the time, and it was during lockdown, making it impossible for us to reach her.

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In the few conversations we managed to have with her by phone, the tension was palpable — like

a wire stretched to breaking point. Then it broke. She told us she was going to withdraw all contact with her father, her sister and me. It felt as though the ground had fallen away beneath my feet. For a long time, I lived in a state of bewilderment and disbelief. It is profoundly difficult to navigate a world that has fractured in a way you cannot mend. Invisible boundaries had sprung up to divide us, boundaries that I could not see or touch but kept us apart. During that time, with all ties severed, I felt a sense of grief, a grief that was without closure, without any clear sight of what lay ahead. I sought solace in the landscape, walking in a place that I knew well but with no destination. What I found was more than just a refuge from the emotions I was experiencing. I found a space which was to lead me out of the place where I had landed.



*The Discarded*

We were living in Suffolk, on the east coast where I grew up and to which I had returned. Suffolk is not a place of classic beauty. It is inseparable from the sea — a place of shingle and tides, heathlands and marshes. It lies low, hugging the ground beneath a vast sky. The horizon is wide and open; you can see for miles, and with that comes the sense of being seen in return. There is a sense of uneasiness. Inland from the sound of the waves, there is a certain stillness. Perhaps most importantly, it is a place I know intimately — a landscape threaded with memories of childhood, one which I feel a part of, and which feels a part of me.

After some time, I began to look more closely

at the images I had been making. It was winter, and the images were sombre. They were dark and quiet, often veiled in mist, revealing a sense of sorrow and melancholy. Others suggested suspension — things discarded, hidden, or waiting for something to happen. I noticed that the images of the landscape that called out to me were not an idyllic forest glade or a peaceful riverbank. Instead, they were the uneasy ones, the ones that felt like fragments of a journey: documents of the ordinary, of the overlooked spaces and edges which held my gaze. There was a sadness at the heart of them that mirrored my own state of mind. But I saw something in them, too.

*The Dew Tree*

The images that I made were of places that confronted me, gently allowing me to sit with those feelings rather than to resist them. In that space, I could simply rest and be with the feeling of sadness before letting it go. I began to understand the process as therapeutic. It felt as though I was in conversation with the landscape, as if it were asking quiet, metaphorical questions. Perhaps this was what allowed me to begin the journey from a place I found difficult to leave towards acceptance and reconciliation. It has been a journey, but the resonance I feel with this landscape has been invaluable — I had found a place where I could stand still long enough to begin moving again.

continued overleaf



LEFT
Sundown



About Tessa Sinclair

Tessa Sinclair is a photographer based in London and Suffolk. Her work draws on the wealth of metaphor to be found in landscape to convey not only the complexities of our inner state with which we are in constant dialogue, but also the subtle shades of the world we are experiencing. Tessa's images portray unremarkable places that have evidence of human presence with a subtlety derived from the way they allow the viewer to spend time in them, finding their way to the heart of them. Her work speaks eloquently of the diminishing wild spaces we need to preserve and of the powerful connection we have to landscape as human beings.

Tessa also makes unique handmade books with Japanese papers and has published two editioned photobooks. Made during Covid, her second book, *A Restless Land*, was shortlisted for the Charcoal Publishing Prize.

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