

ARCHIVE

IMAGINING THE EAST END



black dog
publishing

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Cover: Susan Andrews, Grace Gents Hair from the series *Up and Down Whitechapel High Street (A11)*, 2009.

Above: Mick Williamson, from the *Photo-Diaries of Mick Williamson*, 1973–2013.

Overleaf: Don McCullin, *Spitalfields Market*, c. 1984.

THE BROADGATE PROJECT

BRIAN GRIFFIN

WORDS BY SUSAN ANDREWS

The work of Brian Griffin in the 1980s was in many ways in keeping with the staged documentary practice that started to evolve at the time with artists such as Jeff Wall. Griffin constructed narratives in collaboration with those portrayed to investigate relationships between subject, photographer and commissioner. Griffin utilised playful references to art history, contemporary symbols and visual puns in order to construct a complex document that formed a commentary on the era. His practice represents both a subjective and inventive process, which he was able to explore despite the fact that much of the work was initially made for corporate organisations. However, unlike many photographers, he saw no distinction between personal artwork and his commercial

output, stating, "I was essentially a commercial photographer, even though my commercial work would always go on gallery walls... I would turn my commercial work into my own work, by taking it personally."¹

In many ways Griffin's photographic approach was exemplified in his commission for the development company Rosehaugh Stanhope to document the City of London's *Broadgate Project*, which was under construction between 1985–1990. Broadgate is an office and retail estate that covers 32 acres and is located on the original site of Broad Street station and beside the railway approaches to Liverpool Street Station. Originally, part of the site had been situated



Brian Griffin, *Big Tie*, from the *Broadgate Project*, 1987.

in the London Borough of Hackney but boundary changes made in 1994 now place the entire estate within the City of London. These shifting boundaries reflect changes to the traditionally defined borders of the East End, as areas have been developed and gentrified so that the East End moves ever outwards.

The Broadgate development was built in a period of boom in both the financial and property markets and it pioneered new methods of fast construction. Griffin's photographic approach reflected the innovative techniques; he was interested in exploring new possibilities, pushing the medium both technically and aesthetically and this project in many ways represented the epitome of his exploration of

new methods of documenting and photographing what was normally seen as mundane subject matter.

Griffin's work often developed through quick-thinking responses to situations that presented themselves. One afternoon in 1987 whilst an executive was showing a model of the new development to some clients his tie swung into the model; the tie was an 80s emblem of young upwardly mobile professionals (yuppies) and Griffin recognised this as an opportunity to explore the symbolism further. Consequently, he conceived *The Big Tie* series of photographs for the corporate promotional publication and ended it with *Big Bang*, a photographed explosion in the middle of the building construction site that refers to the

A PALACE FOR US

TOM HUNTER IN CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL UPTON

MICHAEL UPTON How did the project come about?

TOM HUNTER From a commission from the Serpentine and Skills Exchange—which was a project to encourage artists and community groups to engage, and in particular for artists to get the elderly involved. Most of my work has involved highlighting and or raising awareness of issues related to marginalised groups in society and this was a similar one in that sense. I did a lot of research meetings, going to community groups. All the cast are from the estate. I was illuminating their story, creating a document of their narratives perhaps—not a straight documentary. They had what’s called an “elders group”. I met them. The project grew from there.

MU What was it about this particular group?

TH They were angry. It really wasn’t what you might have expected. Old ladies sipping tea, sharing memories. These were a very vocal and opinionated group. And they had a wealth of information about the estate.

I spent three years visiting in six to eight week blocks. They had these three hour coffee mornings where I would have



Images from family albums belonging to the residents of Woodberry Down.



informal social chats and through these a detailed history began to emerge.... I began recording their stories, over two months I collected 25 oral histories.

One guy, Jim told a story. This woman, an air raid warden was out on the night of a bombing and heard that a house had been bombed. She realised it was her own and rushed from the scene to the shelter where she found her children safe. But her son didn’t recognise her because in those few minutes where she feared her family were gone she’d gone grey—literally. Jim—who was telling the story—was the son. There was a lot coming out of these conversations about the war period—the bombing of course led to the requirement for social

FOUND IMAGES— TUBBY ISAACS

WORDS BY DAVID HOWELLS

La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le cœur d'un mortel.

Baudelaire, *Le Cygne*

The identity of the photographer is unknown to me, nor his or her purpose in taking the picture. In terms of genre it would certainly be considered a documentary image, and its exact location is quite familiar to me. But no other information attaches to it; apart from the stall—which explains itself well enough—there are no obvious signs as to what it is I should be looking at, or why. My purpose is not so much to look at the photograph as to inhabit it, if only for a few moments, in which case the less I know of such things the better.

I could be standing there with the photographer, a few feet away from the stall. It is mid-afternoon, warm, probably summer—I know this from the shadows that fall across the pavement on my side of the street. The sky is a purple artefact of 1970s colour chemistry and has probably shifted in hue over the decades, but it is in any case impossible to verify such things. The colour of the sky almost exactly matches the printed floral pattern of the nylon dress that a middle-aged woman is wearing in the foreground. She is counting money out of a purse to pay for something, as another woman

(they are both wearing white shoes) turns back towards her. They do not look like tourists and quite possibly live here, part of an ageing urban proletariat that still inhabits the city centre. Their children will have already moved to the suburbs.

On this afternoon the stall is doing steady business but the food itself is invisible, hidden behind the counter. Nor do the signs give much away: "F...s for Jellied Eels"; "We Lead Others Follow". Something hand-written and sellotaped in the window, but illegible, can be had for 25p. There is a bottle of vinegar at one end of the counter. Three men are standing, one at the counter in flared corduroys and two others either side of the stall, all with their backs turned, heads down. I imagine them to be eating some small and gristly stuff that requires a degree of concentration on their part. Having bought their takeaway food they haven't taken it very far, and still face as if in deference toward the stall. Perhaps they do so in order not to face each other, and are slightly ashamed of themselves. A canopy in red and white Punch and Judy stripes keeps a white-coated



Found image, Tubby Isaacs stall, Goulston Street, c. 1972.

RECOGNITION

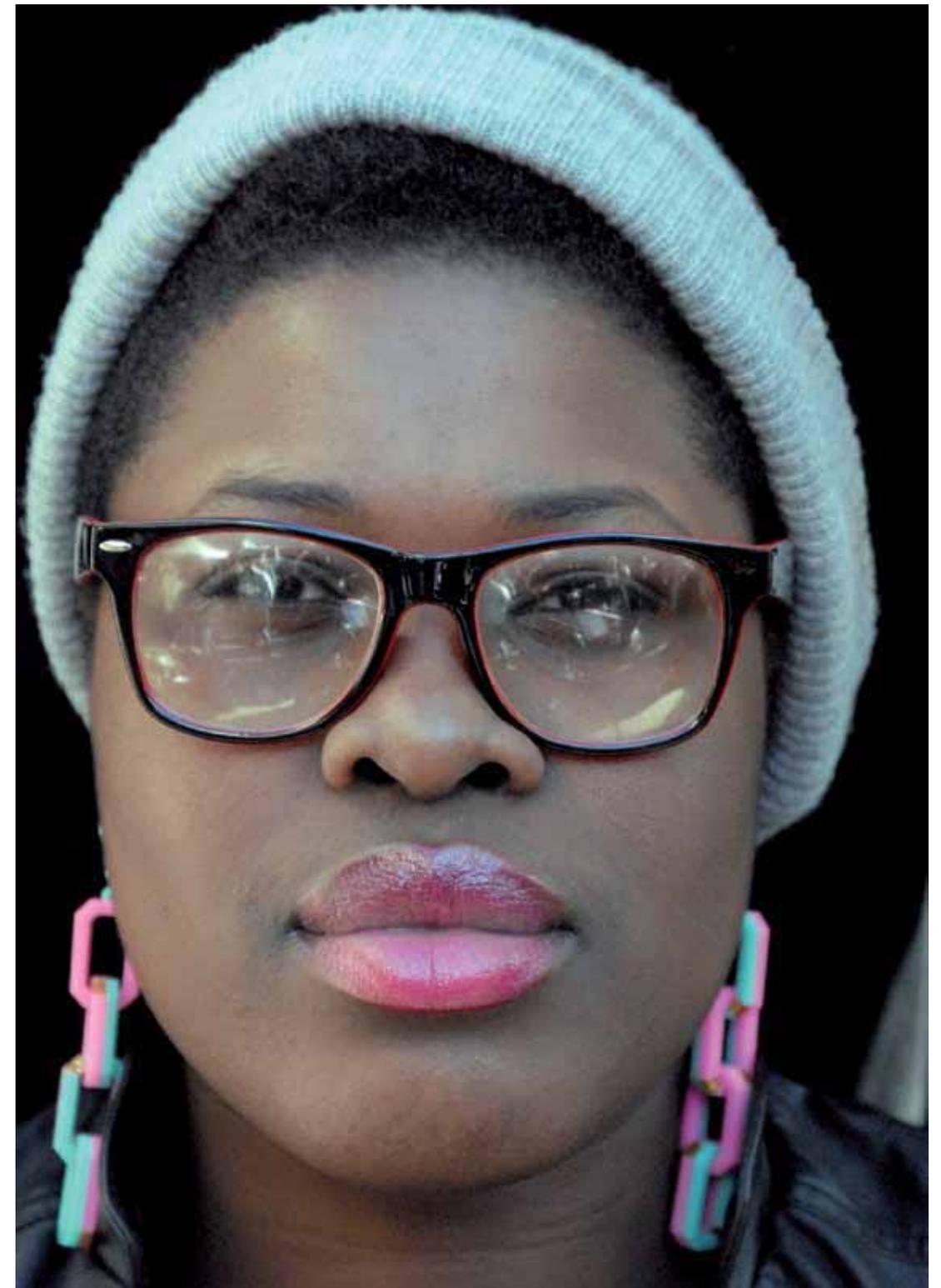
HEATHER MCDONOUGH AND ROD MORRIS

These portraits are selected from two Photobooth events made by the photographers Rod Morris and Heather McDonough for the Museum of London and the Hackney Museum. The work was originally one of many projects undertaken by London Transport Museum for the exhibition *Overground Uncovered: Life along the Line*, where photographs were taken of people along the route of the six boroughs of the new London Overground extension.

Depicted here are people from the stations and local markets of Ridley Road Market, Dalston, Haggerston, Shoreditch, Canada Water and Brick Lane, Whitechapel. This process allowed the Museum to investigate how transport regeneration impacts on London and its people, exploring notions of identity and the shaping of communities. Subsequently, Hackney Museum commissioned the *Photobooth Project* to record the faces of Hackney

residents at various public events as part of their *Mapping the Changes* project, shown at Hackney Museum 2012.

The photographers invited members of the public to pose for their portraits in a temporary photobooth, which utilised available light and a black backdrop to isolate the sitters from the chaos of city life. The work references the automated photobooth convention of direct head and shoulders shots, a mode particularly used formally for the purposes of identification. However, in this work there is no detached officialdom present; the details are clearer and sharper, and the images, frequently printed larger than life, reveal the sitters' humanity. Seen collectively, the portraits are not only indicative of demographic changes within the region but a celebration of the diversity of the communities they represent.



Above and overleaf: Heather McDonough and Rod Morris, from the series *Recognition*, 2011.

