

Urban Encounters (London, 16–17 May 08)

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Urban Encounters: Photography, Ethnography and the City
Conference, Exhibition, Workshops

16 & 17 May 2008

Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross SE14 6NW

This two-day conference at Goldsmiths, University of London, will bring together international photographers, artists and academics researching the city. The speakers reflect an interdisciplinary range of photographic, theoretical and research areas, and through six panels will explore the nature of past and contemporary photographic approaches to the representation and evocation of city life. The theme of 'the encounter'¹ is explored, not only in the way photographers experience the city, but also through discursive encounters between urban social science and visual practice. There is an associated exhibition, photographic workshop and curated urban walks programme co-ordinated by Photofusion and the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR).

Urban Encounters Conference Panels

Day one

Keynote: Liam Kennedy

1. Urban landscapes: mapping memories

This session will explore the cultural geographies of landscape in relation to photographic theory and practice. The presentations will focus on the changing nature of landscape photography, both as a spatial and cultural practice. Key questions addressed are:

How does landscape photography produce knowledge of space and ethnographies of place?

To what extent is landscape photography being redefined by the theoretical contributions of archaeology and geography?

How might an urban landscape practice rethink itself in relation to cultural sociology?

What role does the urban landscape play as counterpoint to the landscape of the suburban?

Panellists: Paul Goodwin, Ingrid Pollard, Gregor Stephan, Susan Schwartzenberg.

2. Architecture and photography

This session will focus on the relationship between architectural theory and photographic practice. We will look at how architectural photographers negotiate the complex task of producing meaningful images about urban architectural space, and how collective experiences and lives are visually evoked within such spaces. Key questions addressed are:

How do narratives of community coalesce with architectural space?

How might interior architecture manifest itself within a visual arts context?

Beyond buildings: is architectural photography just about the materiality of buildings?

What role do architectural photography archives play in understanding the multiple pasts of a city?

How do we understand architectural photography in the context of built spaces vs. found spaces?

Panellists: Michael Keith, Rosy Martin, Isidro Ramirez, Gary Van Zante.

3. Urban Portraiture and identities

This session will focus on the challenges of portraiture within the urban domain. Through a discussion of the psychologies and sociologies of self, the panellists will delineate key themes within a theory of photographic portraiture. The session will explore portraiture as a mediated practice concerned with the active construction of identities and will address the following key questions:

What role does psychological and psychoanalytic theory play within an understanding of portrait photography?

Is there a 'sociology of portraiture', and in what ways might this be framed?

What is the relationship between self and environment?

If the 'essential self' is dead, what remains?

How does photography explore the street as the site where identities are tried on and tried out?

Panellists: Les Back, Melanie Manchot, Daniel Meadows, Othello de Souza.

Day two

Keynote: to be confirmed

4. Street photography

In this session we will focus on recent developments within street photography, particularly with reference to its re-emergence as an important

part of fine art and gallery practice. Panellists will discuss the historical context of street photography, and why both a theoretical and practical reconsideration of the genre has led to such a renaissance of diverse forms in recent years. Key questions addressed are:

What is the relationship between street photography and the social history of the city?

What are the ethical and legal constraints faced by street photographers within London?

Why has there been such a significant upsurge in street photography practice in recent years?

What role does street photography play within a visual history of the city?

What is the relationship between street photography and the everyday?

Panellists: Paul Lowe, Paul Reas, Kirsten Campbell, Paul Halliday.

5. Visual Ethnographies and the urban encounter

This session will address the central question of whether urban photography might be thought of as a form of visual ethnography. The panellists will debate the changing nature of urban visual practice set against a blurring of the boundaries between visual practice and research-based urban sociology. Key questions addressed are:

What does urban photography tell us about the social world and how does this constitute a form of knowledge?

Many visual artists have, and increasingly are, locating their practices within a discussion of the ethnographic poetics of their work. Is this wishful thinking, or does it point towards a conceptual shift?

Is an urban photographer a sociologist with a camera?

How does urban photographic work explore the layered identities and memories of a place?

Panellists: Gabrielle Bendiner -Viani, Simon Rowe & Ben Gidley, Peter Coles.

6. Emerging forms

In this session, panellists will debate the changing nature of urban photography within visual arts and urban research practice. Panellists will map out personal ideas about where the future of their urban photographic practice and research might lead them. Questions addressed are:

Why has urban photography become such an important part of contemporary visual arts practice, and what role might interdisciplinarity play within the development of the field?

What are the possibilities for inter-textuality within urban photography?

What possibilities exist for curating/exhibiting/installing urban photography? What are the possible locales for this work?

Can urban photographic practice be seen as a form in which to engage public dialogue about the city in new ways?

Panellists: Britt Hatzius, Theresa Mikuria, Mandy-Lee Jandrell, Caroline Knowles & Michael Tan.

Cost: GBP 120 (GBP 80 students, Photofusion and LIP members)

Conference details and booking from www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/

Exhibition and workshop details available at www.photofusion.org

Reference:

CONF: Urban Encounters (London, 16-17 May 08). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 15, 2008 (accessed Dec 21, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/30330>>.