



**Education Resource
Whitechapel Gallery**

Paul Graham: Photographs 1981–2006



Paul Graham *Unriddled*, 1988 (ship jigsaw), from the series *New Europe*. Pigment ink print, 75 x 100 cm. © the artist, courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.

Paul Graham: Photographs 1981–2006

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This resource is a guide to *Paul Graham: Photographs 1981-2006*, giving you an overview of the key concepts and ideas that run throughout the show.

Produced by artist Marysa Dowling, it aims to encourage discussions and conversation about the main themes in **Paul Graham's** work.

Suggested activities act as a starting point with your group, whatever their age. They can be used as they are, or expanded on, taking into consideration your group's interests.

Some activities are specifically for use in the Gallery, [wavy lined edge] whereas others can take place elsewhere (the classroom, an education space etc), [diamond patterned edge].

The pack contains questions, prompts, discussion and research points to begin considering a selection of the work in this show in a variety of ways.

Enjoy your explorations...

Paul Graham: Photographs 1981-2006

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The exhibition consists of colour photography taking us chronologically through the last 25 years of his photographic explorations of the world, where he asks himself, and in turn us, to consider “What is the World?”

The exhibition begins with a road trip along the A1 in the series *A1: The Great North Road*, 1981–82. Graham takes us on a photographic, political and social journey along the A1 heading north. He mixes genres of photography; landscapes, portraits, still lives, social documentary and interior photographs highlighting the everyday situations and places he finds on route.

Influenced by the great American photographers such as Walker Evans and pioneers of colour photography Stephen Shore, and William Eggleston, Graham adopted the use of colour within his own work bringing a British sensibility to its use and the idea of the road trip.

This body of work was one of the first significant works of new colour photography at this time and was considered controversial when made. The subjects Graham photographed and the genres he used, were traditionally shot in black and white, seen as more suitable for such ‘serious’ subject matter. Colour had been seen to dilute the social documentary aspects of this type of work up until this point. Paul Graham showed that colour photography could tell a story in a new way and be considered a work of art.

Moving through the exhibition the next body of work we see is *Beyond Caring*. Shot in Social Security offices of a recession hit Britain of the mid 80’s. Graham worked discreetly with a medium format camera on his knee or at his chest, leading to the different viewpoints and angles in these photographs.

Following this *Troubled Land*, shot in Northern Ireland during its darkest political time (1984–6), looks for clues at the political situation within the landscape.

In 1984 Graham returns to Northern Ireland at a turning point in its history, the first agreed ceasefire, to photograph the skies above the hotspots of trouble. The resulting calm but dramatic images of *Ceasefire – 6-8 April*, 1984 are almost the opposite of his earlier Northern Ireland works.

In *New Europe* 1988–96 Graham considers changes taking place across Europe in the context of European wide politics. Both here and in *Empty Heaven*, 1989–95, a unique and personal look at Japan’s culture and history, sees the beginning of Graham’s shift of style into a more poetic way of working. He gets much closer to his subjects, starts using flash photography and his use of diptychs and triptychs as a structural style begins.



From the series *A1: The Great North Road*, 1981–82.



From the series *Beyond Caring*



From the series *American Night*

As we move upstairs a series of evocative images of young clubbers in unspecified countries across Europe fill and dominate the space. The portraits in *End of an Age*, 1996-2006 are of a much larger scale, close up faces with blur, camera shake, grain and intense colour contrast with harshly lit flash portraits. The layout of images leads us in a circular movement around this group of anonymous clubbers.

The large-scale images of *American Night* 1998-2002, consider social conditions of the rich and poor, the haves and have-nots of the US. Over exposed 'white out' landscapes contrast with vivid, intensely colourful portraits of people on the street and wealthy modern developments in the suburbs, nicknamed 'Mc Mansions'. The invisibility of the poor is reflected in the style of the very overexposed and not corrected or manipulated 'White out' images. As our eyes begin to adapt and notice the details we see a single figure emerging from each landscape.

In 2002 Paul Graham moved to the US. Continuing the theme of journeys and linking back to his earlier works such as the *A1 Great North Road* he began driving through the states, exploring unknown territory with his camera. Graham took small journeys on foot creating *A Shimmer of Possibility*, 2004-06. These twelve short sequences, narratives of everyday life, go against the photographic idea of the single 'decisive moment', showing the ongoing ordinary moments of life we all experience as time passes. A couple carries home their shopping, someone smokes a cigarette and a man cuts the grass, is showered with rain but continues until the job is complete.

Paul Graham believes in photography books as a democratic and important way of looking at and sharing work, as something that should be made available to all. This led to his decision that the initial format should be a series of twelve individually bound books, currently on show in Gallery 9 in a case. The narratives are shown in this exhibition hung on the walls as a series of different size prints in sequence.

Questions

You can use these questions in relation to any of the images within this resource or exhibition

- What is happening in the photograph?
- When do you think this photograph was taken?
- Why do you think this photograph was taken?
- What might the photographers' intention have been when taking this photograph?
- Can you tell anything about the photographer from looking at this image?
- What kind of lighting has been used? -
- How does it make you feel?
- What story is being told here?



From the series *Troubled Land*



From the series *End of an Age*

Actions in the Gallery

1. What's in a Name

In the series *Ceasefire 6-8 April, 1984*, Paul Graham has titled each image with the name of a place, look carefully at the titles of each image and consider;

- Why might Paul Graham have given each image such a specific title?
- What do you think the titles mean?
- Can you make any connection between the title and the images you are seeing?
List and discuss these.
- How do they reflect Paul Grahams previous visits to Northern Ireland?

We have to trust Graham that these images were taken in Northern Ireland, they could have been taken anywhere but as Graham has said 'trust is at the heart of any ceasefire' this connects well to the trust we have to give when viewing photographs.

- In small groups create new titles for each image – share these with your group. What happens to the context, meaning and mood of these images when they have a new title?
- In pairs cut out 6 images from a magazine that could work together as a small sequence, give each image a title. Share your work with the other groups and ask them to make connections between the image and titles.

Paul Graham also had in mind landscape traditions in art and photography when making this work.

- Can you think of any other artists who have made art works featuring skies and clouds as a theme?



Bogside, Derry, April 1994



Anderson Town, Belfast, April 1994



Craigavon, Northern Ireland, April 1994
From the series *Ceasefire 6-8 April, 1984*



Shankill, Belfast, April 1994

2. Gestures and Narratives

Look at the two images - *Untitled, Belfast*, 1988 (Women smoking cigarette) and *Girl With White Face*, Tokyo, 1992 in gallery 1.

- Discuss what you think is happening in each image. Choose one of the two images, create a short story about what you think is happening. What is the story of this image - Where is she? Why is she there? What happened just before it was taken? What happens just after? What do the gestures in the photograph suggest?
- Think about the kinds of gestures we make everyday with our hands.
- In pairs use a camera to make a series of portraits of each other making simple hand gestures - think carefully about the gesture you are making, how many can you come up with?
- Print out the photographs, lay them out into a sequence and ask another group to explain what they think your gestures means.
- What happens if you put the photographs in a different order?
- What story can you tell through your gestures and pose?
- Discuss how we communicate with out hands. Does the meaning of a gesture change depending on who is looking at it?
- What happens when you add a background and props into your images?



Untitled, Belfast, 1988



Girl With White Face,
Tokyo, 1992

3. Diptychs and Triptychs, sequencing images

A diptych is made by placing two different or identical images side by side to make a single artistic statement. A triptych is the same but using three images. Paul Graham's begins using this technique in his series *New Europe* and *Empty Heaven*.

- Look at the diptych *Atomic Cloud Photograph, Hiroshima and Cat Calender, Tokyo, 1989*. What connections can you make between these images? What is the photographers' intention by placing these images side by side? What comment might he be making about Japan's culture and history?
- Bring a selection of found images such as old postcards, magazine or newspaper images to the Gallery.
- Create a diptych or triptych from these found images. Think about the message you are trying to convey.
- What is the narrative or link that connects the images?
- Share your diptych / triptych with others in your group. Do they see something different from the message you intended?
- How many different interpretations were made?
- Does it matter if someone sees something different from what you had intended?

Ideas for extending this project

- Play with the size and scale of your diptych using a photocopier
- Blow up sections of an image and use these rather than a whole found image
- Create your own photographs and play with making different diptychs and triptychs, consider how the original images change when put with others.



Candy Wrapper, Tokyo And Kimino Pattern Flash Burn Photograph, Hiroshima, 1990

4. Drawing from Description

Looking at the 'White Out' over exposed images that are part of *American Night* gives the feeling your looking at something your not suppose to be looking at. The longer you look the more details appear. The huge size of the images engulfs you.

- Take pencils and A4 paper into the gallery
- In pairs choose one of the 'white out' images from American Night. One person will describe what they can see while the other closes their eyes and draws from the description given.
- Prompts for describing the image could be; How does the image unfold / reveal itself? What sounds might you hear? What do you think is happening? What happens the longer you look?
- Share and discuss your images



From the series *American Night*

Actions outside the Gallery

1. Journeys and explorations

Look at the sequences and narratives in *A shimmer of possibility*, 2004-06, This work continues the theme of the journeys in a new way and interesting format which goes against the photographic idea of the single decisive moment. The sequences have a sense of freedom that we get when exploring on foot. Here ordinary, usually overlooked moments are documented and placed in various sequences.

- What is the decisive moment in photography? How does Paul Graham move away from this in *A Shimmer of Possibility*? In what way is time relevant within these images?
- Inspired by *A Shimmer of Possibility* choose a journey you take regularly, somewhere familiar like a walk to school or work.
- Take a camera, several sheets of paper, a pencil and a plastic bag to help record your journey; you will be building up an impression of that area.
- Using your camera photograph what you find along the way, try to look at the familiar in a new way. Mix genres of photography as Paul Graham does in his A1 north road series. Try making landscapes, social documentary images, portraits, still lives, close ups and interiors shots.
- Also take notes, describing anything interesting you see or hear, make rubbings or pattern, make drawings, collect discarded objects you find along the way.
- When you get back make an edit of your photographs, choosing the images you find most interesting.
- Print out the images from your journey at a variety of sizes to make a sequence
- Working in pairs mix up your sequence, what happens to the narrative as you keep moving the sequence around? How many different ways can you tell your story?
- Once you have decided upon your final sequence of images put these into a book using a simple concertina format (see next page.)
- Think about how you can incorporate the other elements you have collected on route. How could you add elements of text into your book?
- What will you title the book?



From the series *A shimmer of possibility*, 2004-06

Cut out this shape as ONE PIECE. Fold on each solid line. Use the first section for your title. Write or paste whatever you want into the book. Glue the back of the last section to your lapbook.

Ideas for extending this project

- On your journey you could collect sound recordings that could be added to the photographs and the other elements you have collected. Find an interesting way to make these elements work together?
- What sounds fit with your images? Record new sounds that could fit with your sequence of images
- Make a map from your photographs and other collected items. Photocopy and incorporate maps.
- In groups choose a sequence of images to work with. Passing these to another group asking them to reinterpret your images and make new images in response.

2. End of an Age 1996-2006

These intensely colourful, evocative images of young people were shot in various nightclubs using the light available and flash photography.

What is the difference between the images taken using available light and those taken with flash? How does this change the mood and feeling of the photograph?

- What reason might Paul Graham have kept secret the countries these images were taken in?

Inspired by the mood of an End of an Age use different techniques to create a series of close up portraits.

- Try using different cameras such as a camera phone and a 35mm digital camera to make the portraits, compare the results
- Use available light
- Try to get a feeling of movement and blur
- Print out your images and photocopy them onto coloured paper
- Create a collage of your portraits to convey a particular mood



From the series *End of an Age*, 1996-2006

Research and discussion extended activities

1. Find out what a motif is. Research American photographers who made road trips such as Walker Evans and Robert Frank, along with pioneers of colour photography William Eggleston and Stephen Shore. Can you see any reoccurring motifs within their work / this style of photography? Research connections between the A1 series and road trip photography in American – can you see any motifs that reoccur in the photographs?
2. Consider the ways in which we use colour and black and white photography today. What kind of photographs are now made using black and white / colour? Paul Grahams use of colour over black and white was seen as controversial at the time, discuss why? How have things changed now? What might be considered controversial in photography today? What do we use photography for now?
3. What do you think is meant by the term ‘Social Documentary’? Is it easy or right to classify photographs into different categories? How many different types of photography do you see used everyday?
4. Consider the renewed relevance of the series Beyond Caring, taken in dole offices in the 80’s, to Britain’s current social situation.
5. Themes of journeys, both physical and conceptual, are underlying throughout Paul Grahams work, discuss what these are and the types of journeys you take regularly.



Whitechapel Gallery

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