

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Now Then: Chris Killip and the Making of *In Flagrante*

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

LOS ANGELES

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In Flagrante is a monograph of fifty black-and-white photographs by Chris Killip documenting working-class communities in northern England in the 1970s and '80s. After it was published in 1988, it was hailed as one of the most important books to chronicle the impact of deindustrialization on these working-class communities. *In Flagrante* was reprinted in 2008, becoming available to new audiences, and then rereleased in 2015 as *In Flagrante Two*, including three photographs not in the original. In *In Flagrante Two*, Killip wanted to correct design issues in the original (e.g., the images crossed the gutter) as well as address the notion that it was a criticism of Margaret Thatcher. Killip did this by including this factual text:

The photographs date from 1973 to 1985 when the prime ministers were: Edward Heath, Conservative (1970–1974), Harold Wilson, Labour (1974–1976), James Callaghan, Labour (1976–1979), Margaret Thatcher, Conservative (1979–1990).

Killip created the images for *In Flagrante* between 1973 and 1985: Born in 1946 on the Isle of Man, Killip moved to London in 1964 and embarked on his career as a photographer. After receiving a grant in 1972 to photograph the towns of Huddersfield and Bury St Edmunds, he continued to focus on these same communities in northern England. Through multiple visits to the communities over time, he developed relationships and the trust of the villagers, who wondered about the man with the large-format camera.

What distinguishes Killip's black-and-white documentary style photographs is the way they tell a story. Although Killip was seen

as a stranger, his sensitivity and compassion engendered his subjects to let down their guard and let him into their lives. The photographs have varying points of view and were shot both close up and from afar, establishing a sense of place and tracking changes in the landscape, as well as the people, over time.

Nini Having Lunch, Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth from the series *In Flagrante* (1973–85) by Chris Killip; © Chris Killip; courtesy the J. Paul Getty Museum



Killip knew his subjects by name and documented the young as they grew. He was there for births and deaths, and even recounts a story of being able to provide a couple with an album of photographs of their deceased son from ages thirteen to seventeen, as they did not have any images of him. A short documentary by Michael Almereyda on view in the exhibition (*Skinningrove*, 2013), features Killip's voiceover eloquently describing the people in the images, what they did, and his relationship to them over time while the films depicts a sequence of his photographs.

In the film, when the photograph *Boat Repair, Skinningrove, North Yorkshire* (1983, printed 2014) appears, Killip talks about how his familiar presence allows him to capture intimate moments. The photograph pictures seven young men, two of whom are working on a grounded boat in a drab rowhouse landscape. One boy looks down, listening to his cassette player. One walks away from the scene, two others look to their left and right, and one has his back to the camera. In the film, Killip also describes that while he is present with his large camera, no one in the photograph looks his way. They are all caught up in their own thoughts, paying him no mind, which allows him to make such a complex composition. Another remarkable image is *Simon Being Taken out to Sea for the First Time since His Father Drowned, Skinningrove, North Yorkshire* (negative 1983, print 2014). Here, a formally dressed young boy sits in the bow of a boat, eyes gazing down, clearly cold as his jacket is buttoned up. He is not enjoying the outing, however necessary it is for him to become comfortable with the sea that took his father.

In addition to the individual photographs from *In Flagrante*, pictures from two rarely exhibited projects, *Seacoal* (1982–84) and *Skinningrove* (shot in the 1980s), are also on view. Taken around the same time as the images from *In Flagrante*, these photographs also document the changing economic climate in northern England and its effects on the people in these communities. Interspersed with the actual images are work prints and contact sheets that give viewers insight into Killip's process as well as the photographer's maquettes for the earlier editions of *In Flagrante*. It is a rare opportunity to be able to compare and contrast the differences in these editions.

Like any straightforward show of black-and-white photographs in a museum setting, the images are thematically installed, allowing viewers to move from picture to picture around the perimeter of the space. For exhibitions like this to succeed, the images have to grab the viewer in some way, and Killip's are seductive, beautifully printed, and emotionally charged. The poetics of Killip's images derive from his openness, keen eye, and ability to see the bigger picture. *Now Then: Chris Killip and the Making of In Flagrante* presents works taken in the 1970s and '80s that continue to resonate, especially in these troubled times. This visit to the past, as the exhibition title suggests, invites viewers to think about the interconnectedness of now and then.

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