

Papakura Post Office

a spazmodical



The London Cantos

The London Cantos





Photographs
by Max Reeves



Clerkenwell



Bishopsgate



West End



Broadgate

Having known Max Reeves and his camera lens – the two have become one – for thirteen years I could begin this zine forward from a number of angles. I could detail the script with a number of photographic nuances or structures within his photography. Or maybe I should focus on the zine images themselves, which are playing on a screen in front of me forming a slide show as I write. But I think I'd prefer to dwell on how we met and my regard for him as a photographer, along with the scientific explanation behind one of his greatest skills that resonates through a large part of his practice.

I first met Max when I co-owned a bar, gallery and performance space called The Foundry situated on the Apex of Old Street and Great Eastern Street in Shoreditch East London. It was an underground venue where art, music and popular culture met politics; where some groups came to meet and where others were formed – from Artists Against the War, Ma'm, The Wombles to the protest groups for the G20 to name a few. Max was a frequent exhibitor at the Foundry and soon started working there. Whether behind or in front of the bar Max always had his camera at hand ready to capture an action shot documenting what would have otherwise been just another lost memory. I have witnessed the same outside of the Foundry in events and protests where he captures an instantaneous happening as it occurs. Evidence of this can be seen in the zine's G20 protest images. I personally have a strong passion for jackdaws so I enjoy greatly Max's work with crows – the linear juxtapositions of man made aeroplane flight paths, the crows and CCTV cameras provoke thoughts on freedom and control – the images are all unsettling and leave one thinking about them long after the eye is averted from the photographs.

The most intriguing aspect of Max's work for me are the images he takes made up of random data. The objects or forms can consist of splattered human or animal faeces, sick, distressed road markings or a section of granite's natural formation and the like. Max shoots these in such a way that the image he perceives in the random data is more often than not conveyed directly to the audience, who are looking at the image as he sees it. The scientific term for this is Apophenia, coined by Klaus Conrad in 1958 when he defined it as the “unmotivated seeing of connections” expressing it further as a “specific experience of an abnormal meaningfulness”. He wrote of it representing the human tendency for the brain to make patterns and imagery out of random nature.

Apophenia is known as a ‘Type 1 Error’ in statistics when false patterns are detected in data and it is found in a variety of other areas such as gambling and religion and extremely evident within the realms of the conspiracy theorists. Frequently the television news runs stories of patterns forming religious iconography or symbols found in vegetables and other food – from the ohm symbol in a sliced aubergine, the symbol of a cross in a sliced potato to the image of Jesus on a slice of burnt toast. Many of us do this in gambling situations where rationality succumbs to apophenia – such as people seeing patterns in the occurrence of numbers on a lottery card and the apparent pat-



tern-making form on a roulette wheel: this is also known as gamblers fallacy. Patterns emerging from the number 23 are favoured by conspiracy theorists and this has become known as the 23 enigma.

The precise term given to Max's work on this subject is 'Pareidolia'. This is the making or perception of images in random stimuli – the common human experience of perceiving of faces in inanimate objects. Seeing the front of a car or lorry as forming a face, or the globally-familiar 'Man in the Moon' image, identified by children and adults alike.

I am writing this forward in the Welsh seaside town of Mumbles in Swansea and have decided to find some examples that best illustrate this area of Max's work which so inspires me. I have drawn upon Carl Jung's term 'synchronicity' for the 'simultaneous occurrence of two meaningful but not casually connected events'. As Jung suggests one attributes their own perspective to a sense of event, and in this case I have done so by finding an image of a fisherman in the broken yellow 'no parking' line in a road. Another example I came across was within a decaying wall where the outer layer had been eroded revealing a woman bent over as if battling the elements wearing a headscarf in the brick beneath it. I have perhaps embraced 'the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to a momentary subjective state' expressed by Jung.

Max's work continues to inspire me to find art and imagery in the many inanimate objects I come across. Within his Pareidolia-themed work the absence of a title to some of the photographs further inspire me as he asks the viewer to make their own image from what he has captured within the frame. Individuals' subjectivity will conjure up a selection of images from that one form presented. For example the woman bent over battling against the elements wearing a headscarf could also be viewed as a side portrait of Queen Nefertiti. Enjoy Max's creative eye and the powerful thought provoking imagery he produces from the socio-political to the pareidolia to the way he represents urban nature.





Embankment



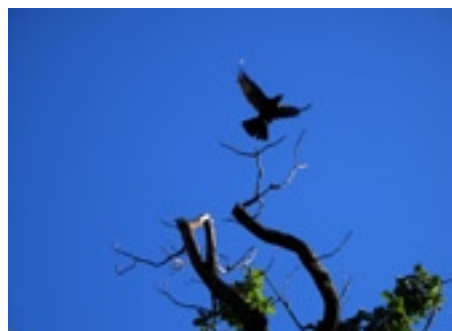
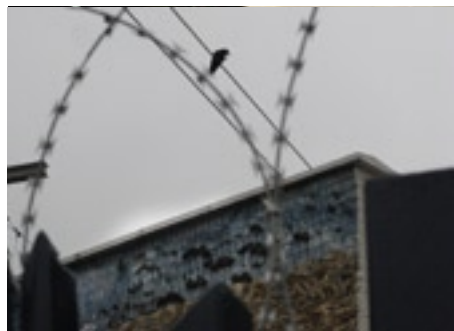
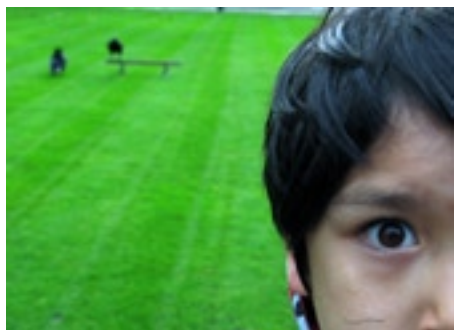
Charing Cross



Bunhill Fields



London Bridge





Brick Lane



Bethlem



Tower of London



City of London



Embankment



City of London



Leytonstone



Charing Cross



Spitalfields



CrossBones



City of London



Camden



Whitechapel



St Pauls



Smithfields



Spitalfields



Shoreditch



Forest Hill





West End



Southwark



Victoria



City of London



Hackney



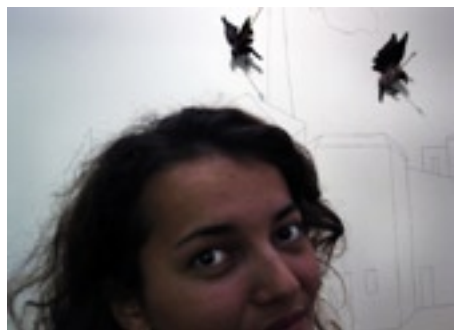
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Shoreditch



Broadgate





Bethlem



Cheapside



Whitehall



Soho



Hackney



Trafalgar Square



Brick Lane



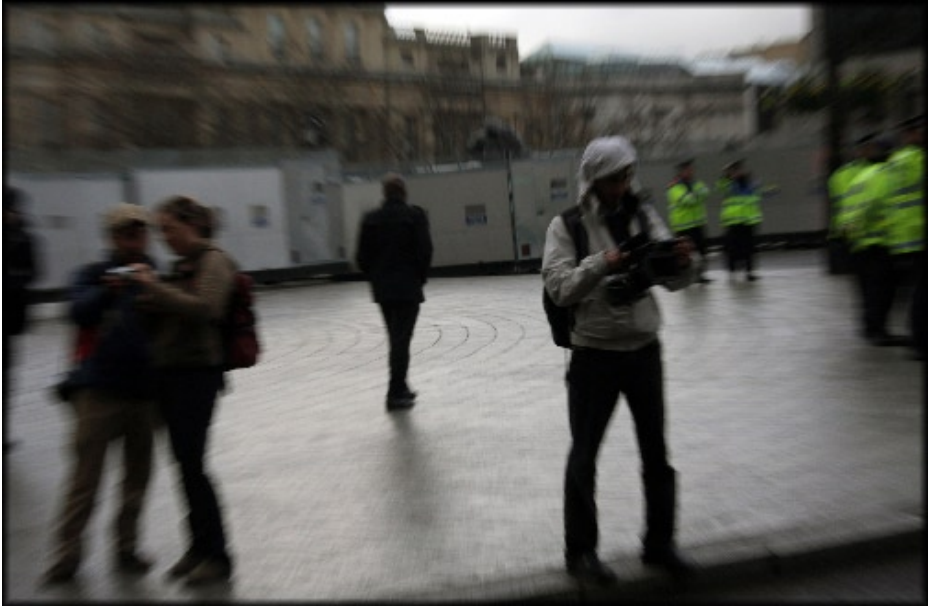
Soho



Fleet Street



Cheapside



Trafalgar Square



Bloomsbury



St Pauls



Bow



Trafalgar Square



City of London



Whitechapel



Fleet Street





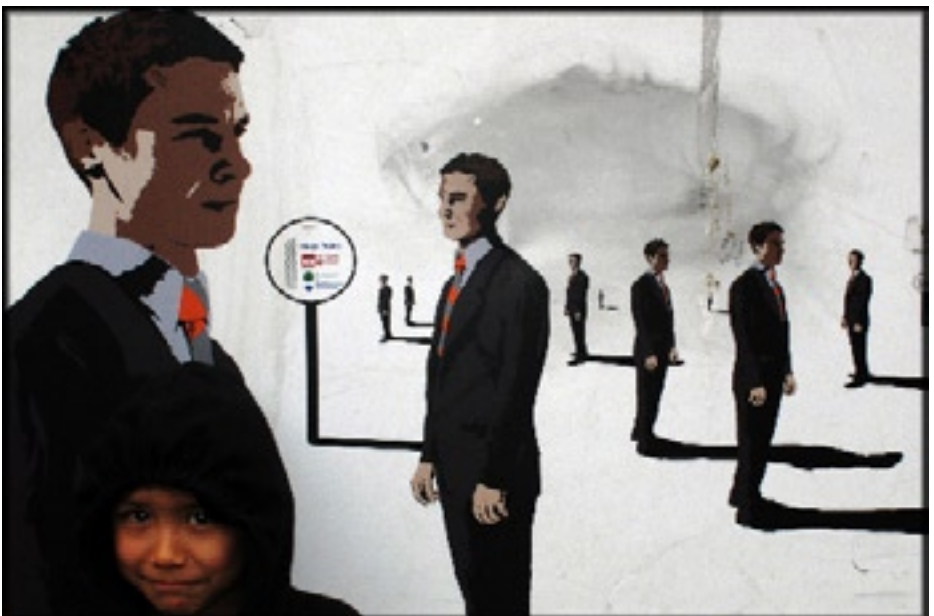
Soho



Brick Lane



Norton Folgate



Bethnal Green



Brixton



Trafalgar Square



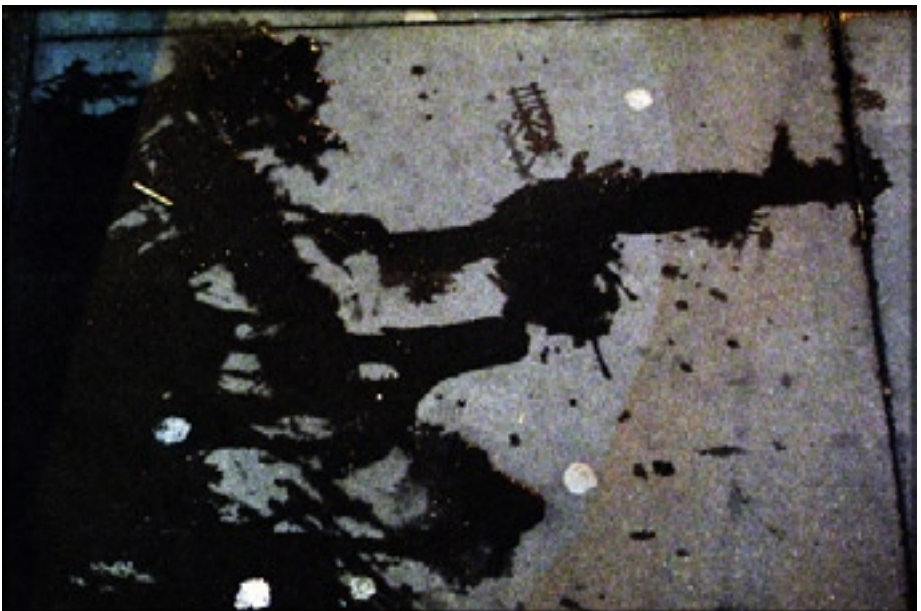
Trafalgar Square



Islington



Clapton



Smithfields



Deptford



Hackney

Max Reeves: The Photographer of Everyday Life

You could write an essay about any single one of Max Reeves photographs. Each image tells a unique story, which deserves to be heard. That task might however lead to the production of a library of Babylon proportions. And I simply don't have the time. The subjects in the photos are broad and varied, but seem to circulate around specific social and geographic locations. Images of family and friends are intertwined with protest marches, the police, occupied buildings and riots all somehow imbued with the spirit of William Blake's London. The images are a constant blurring of twenty first century grossness and beauty. What really unites Max's photographs however, is Max. More than photographs, we should view the work as a diary of Max Reeves life, presented through the medium of photography. He shows us what he sees. Obsessively, unedited and unfettered. In order to write this text, Max gave me a stack of about two hundred photographs, and asked me to "write something about my work". I selected twenty or so images which stand out and speak loudest to me, personally. The reason I find these particular images so appealing is that they offer a uniquely alternative view of subjects which are highly familiar and that we think we know well. Images of riots from around the world and various protests have all become something of a lingua franca for mainstream media. What Max's images do, is to re-humanise the scenes that pass by him. He is not a neutral by-stander in the events he captures, this actually is his life. He may well know the people in the newsworthy scenes he captures and will have certainly been marching beside many of them and against a few. (It not hard to work out which). It's the fact that Max doesn't, to use the hip-hop parlance, "need a ghetto pass" that also gives his images an extra edge. While the average news reporter from The Daily whatever, would most likely be told to "fuck off", He is already there, up among it, down the front, snapping away. Max captures the chaos "out there" from inside. While party politics, economics, the mass media, more and more seem have run their course. It's good to have people keeping track of things as they happen, so in years to come we'll be able to look back and say, "that what it felt like, at the time".

CL-Your photos mix the personal and the political-- how do you categorise your subjects, if you do at all?

MR-I don't really...that is my problem I think...Press people say I'm 'too arty' and Arty people say I'm 'too reportage'... It's a common problem I think. Also I have a spectacular inability to edit. It comes I think from my mental health history and 'marginal' status. I'm very indecisive. Also I mix reportage style with snapshot, street photography, portrait, Vanitas, Cityscape and accidents. I have many non-photography inspirations but I try to use Pound's Cantos as a model...lots of different styles and subjects that blend into a larger than whole...hopefully...into a psychologically involved portrait of London...

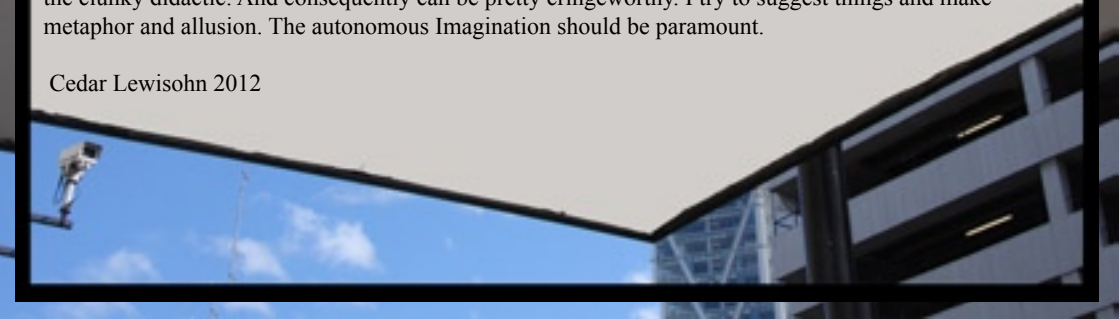
CL-You take photos in some extreme situations; can you talk about any particularly fraught moments?

MR-Not especially...I'm pretty daydreamy...having said that my poor cameras and I have been attacked by just about everyone...the last year it included the EDL, Black Bloc, Police, Rioters, A royalist, Turkish Gypsy kids and others... I think a cop fractured my arm bone a couple years ago at Liverpool Street. Everyone seems to hate photographers these days...

CL-When art and politics mix, art is very often the loser, with some notable exceptions, people with a political agenda often don't have time for aesthetic considerations-- do you feel your work could lose its political power if it was taken on as high art?

MR-I don't know...I call myself a photographer not an artist. If my photography is considered to be art then good. But who really cares? I think good art needs grace. Much political art I suppose tends towards the clunky didactic. And consequently can be pretty cringeworthy. I try to suggest things and make metaphor and allusion. The autonomous Imagination should be paramount.

Cedar Lewisohn 2012





R.I.P. Patrick, aka Spontaneous Search Party.
1965-2012 Broken Angel

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THINK SMALL

