

University of the  
Arts London \* \* \* \*

# STORAGE

**UAL Professorial Platforms**  
**Professor Val Williams**

London College of Communication  
18th October 2011



ISBN 978-1906908-15-7

University of the Arts London  
Professorial Platform 2011

## PROFESSOR VAL WILLIAMS

### STORAGE

A film about the Val Williams' Archive,  
commissioned for this event.  
Finds 1, a group exhibition.  
Storage: a publication.

18th October 2011  
London College of Communication.

## UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON

University of the Arts London is a vibrant world centre for innovation in arts, design, fashion, communication, and performing arts. The university is a unique creative community that draws together six distinctive and distinguished Colleges: Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion, and Wimbledon College of Art.

Proudly associated with some of the most original thinkers and practitioners in the arts, the University continues to innovate, challenge convention, and nurture exceptional talents. One of our goals is to sustain and develop a world-class research culture that supports and informs the university's academic profile. As a leader in the arts and design sector, we aim to clearly articulate the practice-based nature of much of our research, and in doing so to demonstrate the importance of the creative arts to scholarly research.

The Professorial Platforms series is an opportunity for University colleagues and associates, as well as invited members of the public to learn more about the research undertaken in the University. The Platforms enable Professors to highlight their field of interest and the University, in turn, to recognise and commemorate their successes to date.

My first instinct when offered the opportunity of participating in the series of Professorial Platforms was to try to discover how some new creative work could emerge from this event. I had decided that I would like the Platform to be about my archive, material from all my past curatorial and publishing projects which I have been collecting and editing for over thirty years. The archive has had many homes- in the Shoreditch Biennale office in Hoxton Square in the mid 1990s, followed by a dark eight years spent in the attic of a house in East London. Then to Sussex, where it was based for a short time at a disused school in Rye, then up to the Beacon, an arts centre/home run by Judy Dewsbery in Hastings, and finally, in the last few weeks, to a shared studio space in Hastings Old Town. I have never wanted to share living space with my archive- too many memories, ghosts of past projects, excitement, event, travel and effort reduced to a pile of papers. But it is nevertheless an integral part of what I am and what I do, a narrative of people, projects, places and times.

Discussions with Belinda May and Wendy Short resulted in the idea 'Storage', a film about the archive. Wendy and Belinda worked with Hannah Blackmore to shoot the film in two visits to the archive in Hastings. Storage, along with Belinda May's spiders' web diagrams and reproductions of some of the objects in the archive has become the 'text' of this Platform. It is not linear, because the work of a curator flows along with currents of ideas, topical questions, attitudes and institutions. Projects come and go, present themselves or emerge from a confluence of ideas

and possibilities, coming about because of circumstances, fleeting ideas, conversations, aspirations. It has been interesting to continue this work in a university context, where working practices are more linear and questions about the meaning and position of the display are less evident.

Most of the projects that I have made have been in response to questions which seemed to require answers- ‘what does ‘family’ mean? How do we confront death? Why do we keep pets? How do women depict war? Are we really what we wear? Why does history contain no women photographers? What is ‘Englishness’?

These questions have resulted in a number of large-scale exhibitions, which I have curated and co- curated since the early 1980s- *Who’s Looking at the Family?* (1994); *The Dead* (1995); *New Natural History* (1998); *Warworks* (1994); *Look at Me*; (1998) *The Other Observers* (1986) *How We Are* (2007). Most recently, I have completed the book and exhibition *Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the 1970s and 1980s*, which opened in October 2011 at the National Media Museum and which continues my long-term research interest in British photography of the post-war years.

These exhibitions, and the publications which have accompanied them, are the partial answers to these questions. The archive contains documentation, both formal and informal, which gives clues to the process of curating and publishing. Lists of works, notes on scraps,

faded faxes, contracts, manuscripts, invitation cards, posters, photographs provide some of the clues to the making and production of large-scale exhibition projects.

People slip in and out of the archives and are frustratingly ephemeral evident through a scrawled signature, a hastily written postcard, a list, a reminder, an idea, a proposition. The talking that went alongside these documents is unrecorded and usually forgotten, but the whispers remain.

The archive contains a range of documents- letters and notes, postcards, and conveys serious intentions, shared jokes, small frustrations, irritations, disappointments, and successes. Projects which never happened, but which are preserved in the form of exhibition proposals, grant applications and book synopses. I have conserved this material because it is a record of ways of thinking about photography and culture which would not be mirrored in a more formal organizational archive. It is as well, an archive of friendships, relationships formed many years ago, some forgotten, some continuing. It is bedrock of memory, one way of preserving what was, and what might have been. It is quixotic, hard to nail down and to classify.

That Belinda, Wendy and Hannah should make a film for this Platform seemed appropriate and exciting . To produce a new creative effort emerging from a collection of papers, which in themselves represent a continuous wish to explore, to revise, revisit and reconstruct, seemed an interesting progression. The film brings the archive

to life, even more importantly, gives it another existence, makes it valid. The archive belongs to me, but the film belongs to them.

Being on the 'other side' of archive research has been an interesting experience and has helped me to understand the difficulties inherent in revisiting the past as mirrored through evidential fragments. There is so much in the archive that had to be placed in context, to be described, in order to give it form, shape and coherence. I became interested in what had been saved and what discarded, and was struck by the emotional force and memory contained within the most modest of documents. I realized how risky archives are, time bombs made of memories, partial records only.

The Archive is an uneven collection, in that some periods and activities are represented much more thoroughly than others. There is, for example, a near complete record of the Shoreditch Biennales of 1996 and 1998. Other projects, such as the Martin Parr retrospective at the Barbican Art Gallery in 2002, are represented only by a selection folder, publicity material and some proofing documents from the Phaidon book, which was published to coincide with the exhibition. Early material from Impressions Gallery is primarily personal- notebooks, letters , photographs, but also includes examples of catalogues and publications. The most extensive collections are from independent projects, where almost everything was preserved.



There are dummy books in the Archive, including the original dummy for Daniel Meadows' National Portraits and for The Artist and the Archive, and an interesting collection of 'ghost' projects- dummies and illustrated proposals which were never realized.

The central core of the archive is a collection of letters and postcards, some illustrated, from people working in photography in the 1970s and 80s. In my recent research projects on Martin Parr, Anna Fox and Daniel Meadows, this correspondence has been invaluable.

In this digital age, the materiality of the objects within the archive, particularly the collections of letters and postcards, is striking. This physical presence gives the archive its personality; it is a welter of letterheads, handwriting and exclamations.

Belinda May's diagrams, shown in the Platform publication, illustrate perfectly the pattern of a working life from the 1970s to the present. The term 'network' is now overused, but Belinda has shown in her spider diagrams, that networks are the basis for all projects and that everything is interconnected.

This Platform is made up of a film, a publication and a celebration. Having travelled to many small European photo festivals in the 1990s, I became aware of how important celebration is, and how much, in Britain, we neglect it as an expression of who we are and what we do. At the end of the 1970s, I became interested in

the English avant-garde, represented, to me, by Nancy Cunard, by Brian Howard, by Vanessa Bell and the Charleston set. More recently, I worked on Derek Ridgers' photographs of street and club culture in 80s London – here too was an avant garde which pushed the boundaries of culture a little further, just as Cunard and Howard had done in the 1920 and 30s. All were intrigued by the possibilities contained in the celebratory event. So an equally important part of this platform is the cocktail bar run by Nicholas Boddington assisted by Meri and Megan Williams, who are cocktail bar persons for the night. The heritage of celebratory events occupies an important one in the archive and so is continued here.

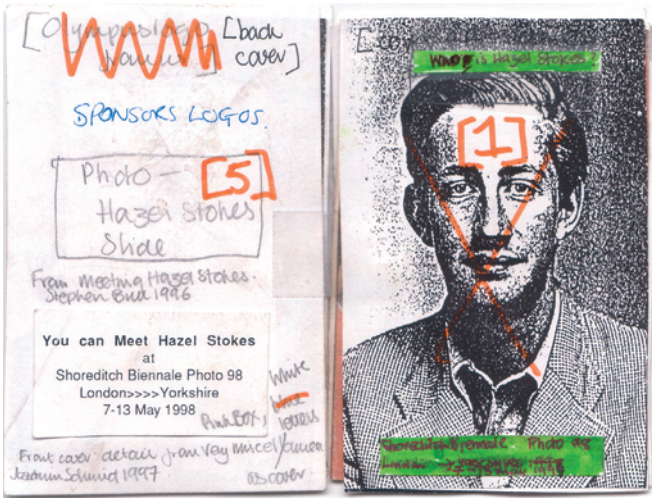
This Platform takes place to coincide with the exhibition Finds 1, curated by Sara Davidmann for the Photography and the Archive Research Centre, and including work by Wendy Short, Sara Davidmann, Alistair O' Neill, a selection of diagrams found in the laboratory of Phil Green at LCC, and works from my photograph collection. It will also be the London launch of Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the 70s and 80s, a project made by the Photography and the Archive Research Centre in partnership with the National Media Museum, Ffotogallery, Wales, Photoworks and Birmingham Libraries and Archives.

With many thanks to: Betty Woessner; Lynne Finn; Wendy Short; Belinda May; Nicholas Boddington; Grace Lau; Hannah Blackmore; Dean Pavitt; LCC Technicians; Judy Dewsbery; Sara Davidmann; Les Claridge; Meri Williams; Megan Williams and Dan Davies.





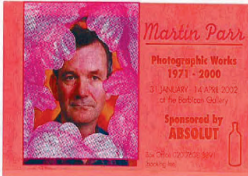




barbican art

# Martin Parr

Photographic Works 1971–2000  
Barbican Gallery, 31 January–14 April 2002  
Free Gallery Guide



**Martin Parr**  
Photographic Works  
1971–2000  
31 JANUARY – 14 APRIL 2002  
of The Barbican Gallery  
Sponsored by  
**ABSOLUT**  
for 30 JANUARY 2002 ONLY  
Serving hot

**ABSOLUT CHERRY BLOSSOM**  
ABSOLUT Vodka • Cherry Blossom • Syrup de Caramel • Caramel de Malt

Valid on: 28/2/02 4/3/02 20/3/02 3/4/02 THE BARBICAN GALLERY  
Route to The Barbican  
FROM BARBICAN TUBE FOLLOW SIGNS FOR THE BARBICAN CENTRE

Cost: £7 ADULTS. £5 CHILD.  
This card entitles the bearer to ONE FREE ABSOLUT COCKTAIL\*  
\*This offer is available at The Barbican Gallery only on dates of operation as specified. Participants must be 18 years or over. Vodka and/or tax. Only original tickets will be accepted. London: Heston UK, Carls Beer, Park, 5100/ND 100/401.

barbican art

# Martin Parr

We request the pleasure of  
your company at the Media View  
of Martin Parr: Photographic  
Works 1971–2000 on Wednesday  
30 January 2002

3 B' Monkey - on page 105 ✓  
in GAP.

- ★ Antares 289. • Snow by Moon! ✓  
★ 292 Cattle by Ice " ! ✓  
★ (300) 293 Xmas Party. ✓  
★ 306. Shattered Stand. ✓  
★ 312 Anting's Parkroom *smaller* ✓  
★ 344. • Snowscape with figures ✓  
★ 352 Parkroom + men ✓  
★ 354. Anting drawing slides ✓  
★ 376. Complete Party. 70 ✓  
★ 374 Supplies on - rocks ✓  
★ 384. Gushman in Bed Drinking by stone ✓  
★ 400. Sunset over sea ✓  
★ 485 Figure Study ✓



50. ~~Player Piano~~ + Telephoto
515. ~~Portraiture Camera in Snow~~
- \* 504. Sugar ration ✓
- \* 511. Figure Study. ✓
- \* 513. Seakane + clouds ✓
58. ~~Arctic Art Making~~ ✗
- \* 529. Snow boots Study ✓
- \* 552. Miot on Weddel Sea ✓
7. Struck in Pack Ice ✓
- \* 15. Discovery in pack ice. (Vertical shot) ✓
- \* 58. View of Niamey thru bottom ice with 2 figs \*  
small
- \* 59A " " " " outside view  
small
- \* 66. Petals. ? chick ruler Skuas.
- \* 112. Camping - having a meal ✓
119. Erecting shed ✓
- \* 129. Dog team sledge + 2 figs in silhouette 90

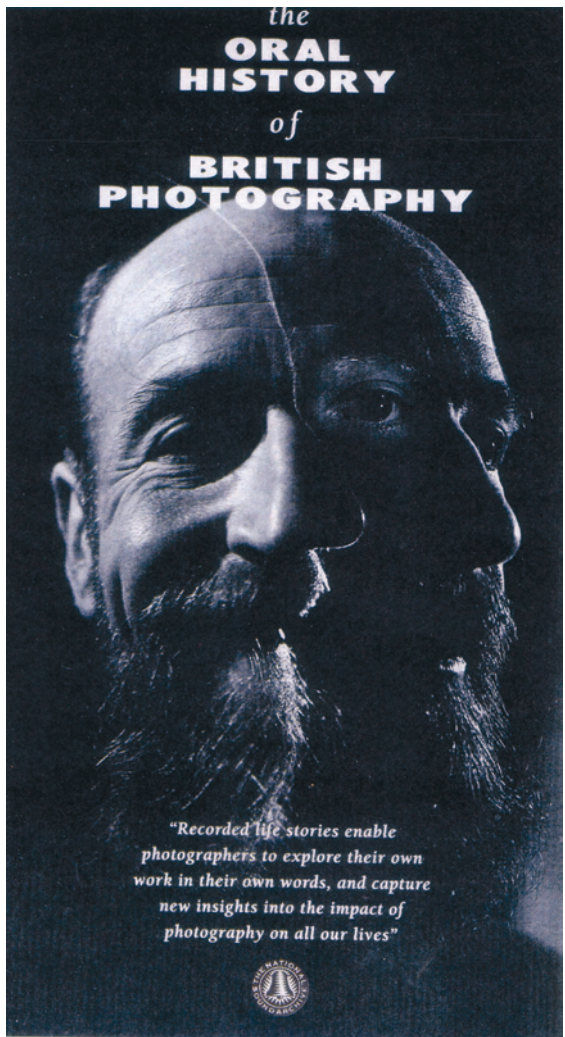






Amos McL Bean  
76

the  
**ORAL  
HISTORY**  
of  
**BRITISH  
PHOTOGRAPHY**



*"Recorded life stories enable  
photographers to explore their own  
work in their own words, and capture  
new insights into the impact of  
photography on all our lives"*



**SPENCER PLACE**  
**(the bad end)**



**Happy**  
**X<sup>m</sup>aS!**











impressions gallery of photography

## press release

17 colliergate, york, uk. yo1 2bn tel(0904) 54724

Release Immediate

### SHAPES OF THINGS TO COME

An exhibition to be shown for the first time at Impressions Gallery of Photography from Saturday 31 May to Monday 30 June 1980, to coincide with the York Festival of the Arts. After this initial showing in York, the exhibition will travel to other venues throughout the UK.

John Havinden



## SHAPES OF THINGS TO COME

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
JOHN HAVINDEN  
FROM THE  
NINETEEN-THIRTIES

AN IMPRESSIONS GALLERY OF PHOTOGRAPHY TRAVELLING EXHIBITION 1980

Press releases will be available shortly before the exhibition opens and press photographs and further details are available from now on - please contact Impressions Gallery of Photography (0904) 54724 for these.

Impressions Gallery is open to the public from 10 am to 6 pm from Monday to Saturday during June and also from 2 pm to 5 pm on Sundays during the York Festival.

Impressions Gallery of Photography receives financial assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

impressions  
impressions

## Illustrations

Cover: This torn fragment was part of a poster used to publicise the 1998 Shoreditch Biennale. 200 posters were produced by colour Xerox and flyposted around Hoxton Square and Shoreditch. We then recorded what happened to them. Many remained in situ, but this one was taken down and left in the street. The image was taken from a passport photograph of Megan Williams.  
Source: Shoreditch File/Val Williams Archive.

Page 9: Handmade Envelope, 1998. Source: Shoreditch File/Val Williams Archive.

Page 10: Spider Diagram 1, Created by Belinda May.

Page 11: English Murders, Shoreditch Biennale, 1998. These large laminated injet prints were installed on the street. The photographs were selected by Val Williams and Greg Hobson from the Daily Herald collection at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television.

Page 12: Dummy for Shoreditch Biennale leaflet, annotated by Val Williams and Anna Fox, 1998.  
Source: Shoreditch File/Val Williams Archive.

Page 13: Printed material for the 2002 Martin Parr retrospective, curated by Val Williams.  
Top: Folder for a set of postcards, based on a similar one made for Parr's Home Sweet Home exhibition at Impressions in the early 1970s.

Left: Travel pass holder created for the Martin Parr retrospective, sponsored by Absolut and given away at central London underground stations.

Right: Invitation for the Media View, Martin Parr retrospective. Source: Martin Parr File/Val Williams Archive.

Pages 14 & 15: A page from Andrew Sproxtton's notebook, listing photographs to be included in the Herbert Ponting exhibition at Impressions Gallery, mid 1970's.

Source: Impressions Gallery File/Val Williams Archive.

Pages 16 & 17: Spider Diagram 2, Created by Belinda May.

Page 18: Catalogue for Angus McBean retrospective, Impressions Gallery, 1976. Val Williams and Andrew Sproxtton visited McBean at his home in Suffolk in 1975. Their exhibition prompted an international resurgence of interest in his work. The signature is McBean's own. Source: Catalogue file/Val Williams Archive.

Page 19: Launch publication for the Oral History of British Photography, British Library National Sound Archive, 1992. Val Williams was the first interviewer for the project. The cover image is a self portrait by Angus McBean.

Page 20: Peter Mitchell's 1990 Christmas Card. Mitchell and Val Williams worked together extensively

in the 1970s. Mitchell's exhibition 'A New Refutation of the Viking 1V Space Mission' was shown at the gallery in the mid 1970s. Mitchell has sent hand-made Christmas cards since the early 1970s, and the Archive contains almost a full set. He lived in Spencer Place in Leeds, and documented the surrounding area extensively. His photographs were included in the Williams&Bright exhibition 'How We Are' at Tate Britain in 2007.  
Source: Mitchell File/Val Williams Archive

Page 21: Spider Diagram 3, Created by Belinda May.

Page 22: Found Photograph, c 1970's. Won in an auction in Leytonstone, east London, 2006.

Page 23: Installation photograph of the entrance to 'How We Are' at Tate Britain in 2007. The exhibition was co-curated by Val Williams and Susan Bright and included work by Anna Fox, Martin Parr, Peter Mitchell and John Havinden, among many other exhibitors. The exhibition explored photography from the 1850s to 2007. Alumni of UAL selected for the show included Richard Primrose, Homer Sykes and Douglas Abuelo. Source: How We Are File/Val Williams Archive

Page 24: Leaflet for Impressions Gallery's John Havinden retrospective, Impressions Gallery, 1980. Val Williams and David Mellor made a number of visits to Havinden in Somerset to select the work, which had been shown since the 1930s. Source: Catalogue File/Val Williams Archive.

## Biography

Val Williams is a writer and curator, and Professor of the History and Culture of Photography at the University of the Arts London. She is the director of the UAL Photography and the Archive Research Centre, based at the London College of Communication and is also a co-editor of the peer-reviewed Journal of Photography & Culture. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the London College of Fashion.

Val Williams began her career as co-Director of Impressions Gallery in York, with Andrew Sproxton, in 1972. After leaving York at the beginning of the 1980s, she worked as an independent curator, based in London, with organizations including the Barbican Art Gallery, the V&A and the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. She became interested in the history of women in photography, producing a major touring show for the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in 1986, accompanied by a book published by Virago.

In the 1990s, she became Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at the Hasselblad Foundation (Hasselblad Centre) in Gothenburg, Sweden, and was the first curator of the Printemps de Septembre á Toulouse in 2001. She maintains a keen interest in Nordic photography and has recently joined the Board of the Expressions of Humankind Foundation in Stockholm, and is currently researching the work of Swedish photographer Sune Jonsson for a forthcoming publication.

She has taught on the Joop Swart Masterclass (World Press Photo) and has been a member of numerous award panels, including the Citibank Prize and the Cartier Bresson Award, and has recently joined the National Museum of Science and Industry Research Board. She was the founder co-director of the Shoreditch Biennale (with Anna Fox) in 1996 and 1998 and has interviewed numerous photographers, editors and curators for the Oral History of British Photography at the British Library National Sound Archive.

Exhibition projects include: How We Are: Photographing Britain from 1860- (with Susan Bright) Tate Britain 2007; Martin Parr: Photographic Works 1972- Barbican Art Gallery and tour, 2002-; Look at Me: Photographing Fashion in Britain (with Brett Rogers) 1998, British Council tour; The Dead (with Greg Hobson) National Museum of Photography Film and Television, 1995, and Warworks (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1994).

Books include: Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the 70s and 80s, 2011, Photoworks; How We Are (with Susan Bright) 2007, Tate Publishing. Martin Parr: Photographic Works, 2002, Phaidon; Anna Fox: Photographs 1983-2007, 2007, Photoworks; When We Were Young: Club and Street Portraits by Derek Ridgers 1978-1987, 2004 Photoworks; Who's Looking at the Family? Barbican Art Gallery, 1994; National Portraits, 1997, Viewpoint Gallery; The Artist and the Archive, 1998, Shoreditch Biennale; The Forest: Photographs

by Paul Seawright, 2001, Shoreditch Biennale; *Ida Kar: Photographs*, 1989, Virago; *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain*, 1986, Virago.

Research grants include *The New Photography in Britain 1967-1981* (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and *ROAD: Acme Artists and the Stop the M11 Link Road Campaign 1984-1995* [Arts and Humanities Research Council]; University of the Arts London Sabbatical Award.





Produced by UAL RMA Communications  
Published in England, October 2011.  
ISBN 978-1-906908-15-7

