

CRISTIN TIERNEY



# Tate Exhibition Celebrates a Riotous Decade in British Photography

From tumultuous political events to countercultural visibility, Tate Britain show examines the 1980s through the work of Martin Parr, Chris Killip and many others

Simon Bainbridge

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“The Tate is so woke at the moment, they probably plumped for that more hardline, left-wing agenda of Ten.8and Camerawork [magazines],” says the UK photographer Martin Parr about the inclusion of the photography publications in Tate Britain’s forthcoming exhibition *The 80s: Photographing Britain*.

It is a reminder that the 1980s was a time of highly contested opinion, and a challenge to anyone who tries to catalogue the many strands of emergent photographic practices in that formative decade. The 1980s were all about “upending narratives”, says the co-curator Jasmine Chohan.

Parr—who is represented in the show by two seminal series, *The Last Resort* (1983-85) and *The Cost of Living*(1986-89)—was upending romantic depictions of class, photographing the nuances of everyday life as opposed to pictorial grandeur or current affairs. For him, the 1980s was about “the Plaubel generation”, a reference to the camera

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that he and many like-minded photographers started using. The larger negatives in a compact-sized body, twinned with newly improved colour film, helped create their forensic observations.

## **Unfiltered perspectives**

Some of this new generation will be seen in a room devoted to “Colour”, including Anna Fox, Peter Fraser and Paul Reas. The so-called New Colour photographers—alongside people like Chris Killip and Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen in the North East shooting black and white—made long-term self-assignments that were unapologetically subjective. Yet the works were shockingly real in their unfiltered perspectives, at least to those who had been photographing in the dominant humanistic tradition.

The show will bring together work by more than 70 individuals and collectives, including conceptual images by Victor Burgin, a key theorist of the era, alongside those looking to represent their own communities, such as Roy Mehta and Vanley Burke. There will be feminist art from Jo Spence and Maud Sulter and photographs attempting to assert the visibility of queer identities, by the likes of Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Tessa Boffin. There will be images of turbulent events, such as the miners’ strike, anti-racism demonstrations and the poll tax riots by photographers including Brenda Prince, Syd Shelton and David Hoffman, but also images that celebrate counterculture by the likes of Ingrid Pollard and Franklyn Rodgers, as well as fashion photography by Jason Evans working with the stylist Simon Foxton.

“So much of what happened in the 80s is still reverberating through to today,” Chohan says. “We really tried to contextualise it, but also draw connections to the moments we’re living through.”