



Fergus Heron

Albion Street, Brighton, 2017
English Urban Landscape Photography



University of Brighton



Fergus Heron
Albion Street (View from Studio) Brighton, 2017
C-type print 539 x 433 mm
© The artist

front image

Fergus Heron
Process photograph of interior of studio with window, Phoenix Brighton, 2017
Digital photograph
© The artist



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Albion Street (View toward Studio) Brighton, 2017
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This research project explores the possibility of developing an aesthetics of belonging and estrangement connected to ideas and images of place. Considered complex and interwoven, these ideas and images are approached through the realisation of a body of visual artwork in the form of urban landscape pictures including text. The pictures are realised in the photographic medium through a topographic approach as detailed, descriptive artefacts with a mixture of residential and cultural institutional buildings as subjects. Text is featured in the pictures as the word 'Albion' - the oldest of names for England.

Building upon longstanding practice-based research, these pictures add to and build upon projects across Fergus Heron's wider work including *Charles Church Houses* (1996-2007 and 2009-14) and *A View of London* (2014) addressing questions of place in which notions of the urban, rural, modern and traditional are considered as contingent points within a spectrum of interrelated ideas rather than binary opposites. This project is underpinned by theories of photography and the uncanny, informed by art historical concepts of landscape and national identity; the output imaginatively positions viewers in and out of place at the same time, revealing hidden political significance in immediate surroundings.

Albion Street, Brighton, 2017 is an artwork formed of two photographs paired. The first photograph depicts a view from the window of the artists' studio, the second a reciprocal view towards the building in which the studio is situated. The name of a street appearing in both photographs (and a street sign visible in one photograph) provides an overall title of the work. Both photographs are made using large format field camera technology, each individually realized for public exhibition as chromogenic prints on paper, mounted on archival board and conservation framed.

The pair of finished framed photographs is exhibited in museum gallery conditions on the wall side by side at a standard viewing height for close viewing and critical spectatorship. As a creative artefact, the pair of photographs constitutes the basis of a contribution to knowledge. Initial production and exhibition of the work took place in close proximity.

The research context comprises interrelated visual art practices and photography history and theory discourses situated across the artist studio, gallery, museum and university as connected sites. The project contributes to explorations of ideas of place situated broadly within this context, and more specifically, to investigations of the aesthetic properties of photography through the realisation and interpretation of pictured commonplace architecture and urban landscape.

The photographs forming the basis of the contribution to knowledge are partly inspired by early photographs depicting views from windows across rooftops and visually reference photography by Nicéphore Niépce (1826), Louis Daguerre (1839) and Eugene Atget (c.1920s).

Photographs by Victor Burgin from the series UK76 (1976) of everyday English scenes as unconscious places, and urban landscapes by John Davies (c.1980 - Present), form more recent contextual references. Contemporary peers include David Spero, James Smith, and Thom and Beth Atkinson, who have made work concentrated upon the social and historical significance of photographed urban architecture.

Surrealist theories of photographed deserted streets as evidence for historical occurrences and unconscious places of hidden political significance underpin the work (Benjamin, 1931; Foster, 1992; Keiller, 1994; Walker, 2007) with theories of photographed urban topography (Shinkle, 2014) and theories of picturing (Mitchell, 1995; Friday, 2001).

Within the context of Heron's ongoing practice-based research, *Albion Street, Brighton, 2017* aims to further consolidate relationships between projects by connecting work involving urban topography and elevated viewpoint in a single picture (*A View of London, 2014*) with other ongoing architectural pictures made in close proximity and in series (*Charles Church Houses, 2009-2014*), (*Harlands Pond, 2013-14*).

This project also extends and develops a strategy used in earlier series, of pairing pictures with opposite points of view, situated side by side, to invite comparative analytical viewing (*Motorways 2000-2004* and *Shopping Centre Interiors 2003-2013*). *Albion Street, Brighton, 2017* considers viewpoints between the artist studio and the surrounding residential urban environment formally and conceptually in posing the following questions:

- i. What does a commonly encountered view contain and potentially signify as a photograph?
- ii. Can photographs give visible form to an immediately encountered commonplace view and concentrate the process of looking in relation to national imagination?
- iii. How might corresponding and opposing points of view become photographically pictured, create detailed descriptions, imaginative inscriptions and renew interpretations of place?

The research process involved four closely connected staged activities of equal importance. The first stage in the process, as in most of Heron's work, is one of encounter and observation. These activities determined the views according to critical and formal criteria; a viewpoint from inside the studio looking out and another corresponding viewpoint from outside looking towards the studio building were selected. Additionally, daylight and weather conditions suitable to provide even illumination were identified in order to reveal high levels of detail in the completed pictures for close analytical viewing. The quality of illumination was chosen also to enable subtle colour and tonal qualities towards a desired aesthetic effect in the finished prints. Soft, bright overcast daylight produces a flattening effect by which the view begins to resemble a picture prior to becoming a photograph.

The second stage involves camerawork, preview and picture construction. The field camera system enables perspective control through functions that move the lens separately to the focal plane and utilizes large format negative film that registers high levels of detail. An extended set up time, and manual operation of the camera, slows the preview process to intensify seeing, anticipating extended viewing of the final print. The camera position, lens setting and focal plane adjustments are made independently to frame and organize the views as pictures precisely. In this work, the camera and tripod were mounted on a constructed platform positioned close to the studio window with blackout, flagging and hooding materials used to eliminate reflections. A location at an appropriate distance in which the camera was tripod mounted was selected for the opposing view. Light measurement decisions determined lens aperture and shutter speed settings to expose negatives with a large depth of field, even focus and heightened stillness. The camera elevation also involved precisely measured verticals to anticipate the wall as a potential space to view the finished picture. Exposure of the film was made when the picture structure, desired lighting and atmospheric conditions were in place, and when no movement occurred in the view, including any animals, human figures and vehicles. Four frames were exposed; two of the view from the studio with the same focal length lens, and two of the view toward the studio, with different focal length lenses, varying the angle of view to enable further selection options in later stages.

In the third production stage, latent images on the exposed film were laboratory processed into negatives for the production of prints. Processed negatives were contact printed and

selected images enlarged as tests for final prints. All prints were handmade by the artist with enlarger technology to image dimensions measured to hold the viewers gaze. Further decisions of exposure control and colour balance to achieve desired aesthetic qualities were exercised at this stage. A precisely measured border surrounds the printed image to reveal photographic material, create space between the picture and potential frame and concentrate the viewers' attention.

Test prints were displayed in the studio for review at the fourth stage of the process. At this stage, decisions about precise final print size take place in order to establish the scale and position of the work in relation to a potential viewer, and to enable critical reflection upon meaning and significance. Additionally, preparation for final prints to be mounted for framing and exhibition take place during this stage. Framing materials are selected to complement the picture as an artifact for exhibition, including frame molding dimensions and wood stain. This body of work had its initial production and final exhibition in the same place - studio and gallery - giving equal significance to each.

As with projects generally, study of related work by artists and photographers through museum collections, gallery exhibitions, and in book form, alongside contextualizing historical, literary and theoretical texts relevant to the work are read and re-read at this stage through library use. These activities inform reflection and assist in formulating how ideas and references might be given visual form, as well as complicated and challenged by the work. The first and fourth stages of the research process connect, forming a cycle; reflection and formulation at this stage inform dissemination activities including discussion of the work in exhibition and conference presentation, as well as further experiences of encounter and observation towards planning future projects, rethinking existing ongoing projects, and the overall coherence of the body of work that each project is part of.

This work contributes to the field of British landscape photography through English urban topography pictured and understood as a signifier of ambivalent attitudes to place. The making of pictures is informed by newly combined and interpreted knowledge of English landscape art traditions and European photographic antecedents, underpinned by theoretical references from the architectural uncanny and surrealist interpretations of documentary, to critical perspectives on landscape, national identity and theories of picturing. Words within the pictures perform relay functions producing readings that complicate images and ideas of national and cultural significance.

The work proposes that photography can visualize familiar kinds of places encountered everyday as strangely reimagined sites of hidden political significance. In connection, by situating directly related opposing viewpoints in close proximity, the work gives emphasis to photographic point of view as a potential signifier of current social being and a space for historical contemplation.

Through slow production of detailed still pictures in material form, the use of analog technology emphasizes the indexical properties and intensified realism of photography. The work also demonstrates how photographs picture - and put us into pictures - inviting a decelerated and intensified kind of looking and critical reflection on the essence and apparatus of photography.

In summary, as pictures expressing attitudes and ideas of place, the research restates how photography can intensify looking at the present, offer reflection on the past and an imaginative space for projection of possible futures.

The work was exhibited in the group exhibition *Present Tense* at Phoenix Gallery, Brighton in 2017 curated by Lucy Day
6 May – 4 June 2017

Curator tour and artist discussion of the exhibition
18 May 2017

Presented at conference *Visualising The Home*, Institute of the Arts, University of Cumbria
13-14 July 2017

Public display and discussion at Phoenix Brighton Open Studios
18 - 20 May 2018

Displayed at Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne as part of Sussex Open 2018 selected by Brian Cass, Tom Hammick and Jenny Lund
21 July – 30 September 2018

Public artist talk at Phoenix Brighton on as part of Brighton Photo Fringe during Brighton Photo Biennial 'A New Europe' 2018
22 October 2018

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Technical Specifications

Both photographs were made using tripod mounted large format view camera technology. The view from studio is made with a 90mm lens. View toward studio is made with a 135mm lens. Colour negative film formulated for daylight exposure in 5x4 inch format with an ASA

rating of 160 was exposed using a lens aperture of f16 at a shutter speed of 1 second and standard processed using a C41 deep tank line. Processed negatives were contact printed as a set of four images on photographic paper at 254mm x 304.8mm.

Selected negatives were subsequently exposed onto semi matte photographic paper as individual chromogenic prints using a floor standing dichromat enlarger. A printing mask with image dimensions of 539 x 433 mm was used for a paper area of 761mm x 661mm with a border rebate of 110mm (upper) x 110mm (sides) x 116mm (lower – to avoid 'optical drop' in exhibition display). Both prints are mounted on archival board substrate and framed in ash with a walnut stain. Frame molding dimensions: Width: 13mm, Depth: 37mm, Rebate: 31mm. Non-reflective glazing and a white 4mm spacer is situated between print and glass.



Exhibition Installation Views, L: Phoenix Brighton Gallery, R: Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne
Photography Courtesy of Phoenix Brighton and Towner
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