Anna Fox

_Cockroach Diary & other stories_

2 July to 7 September 2008

This exhibition brings together works spanning more than twenty-five years and is the first retrospective exhibition by Anna Fox, one of the most significant photographers to emerge from the new wave of British colour documentary of the 1980s.

Anna Fox’s photographs document the everyday. She is fascinated by the rituals that take place both in the home and in the villages of middle England. Her photographs are often autobiographical, giving us a glimpse into her world, as well as telling stories about life behind the scenes in the rural South.

**The Village** (1993), made in collaboration with curator Val Williams, is a body of work looking at domestic life in a rural West Sussex village. The specially made room has been re-created as an installation for the first time in fifteen years, using obsolete projection equipment and the original slides. On the outside of the darkened box are a series of black and white photographs. These depict gardens, photographed secretly through hedges and fences, as if they are settings for the next village drama. Inside the projection box, larger than life size colour projections display such events as family weddings, fêtes and women’s domestic lives. A surround soundtrack whispers secrets revealed in interviews with women from the village. As Fox explains “I wanted to spend time investigating the realities (which I felt were hidden) lying behind the façade of the typical English picture postcard village”

**Country Girls** (1996-2001) is a collaboration between Anna Fox and singer/songwriter Alison Goldfrapp. It explores the lives of women growing up in rural southern England and the story of Sweet Fanny Adams, which fascinated them both as young girls. The photographs, often disturbingly violent, act as metaphors for the feeling of suffocation they both felt as young women growing up in the countryside in the 1970’s. Fox says “We went out into the landscape, often at night or early morning, and made photographs that summed up our memories.”
Pictures of Linda (1983-2008) is the result of an ongoing documentation of musician Linda Lunas and show their relationship through a set of playful performance based portraits. Fox first photographed Linda at a party, and inspired by the punk movement, in which Linda and her band Fashionable Living Death were involved, went on to continue photographing Linda’s ever changing costumes and hairstyles. As their friendship grew, Linda became more obsessed with documenting herself dressed in different ways, and recording all theses changes she made to herself. In 2007 Fox created the film Pictures of Linda Lunus where Linda speaks, touchingly, about her life, her experiences and her response to being photographed for such a long period of time.

Back to the Village (1999-2008) is an ongoing photographic project observing the uniquely English rituals that take place in the picturesque villages of Hampshire. On her return to Selborne (after moving out of London in 1999) Fox became more aware of how significant the various events that take place in the countryside can be. Citing the 19th Century photographer Sir Benjamin Stone as an influence, Fox has created a collection of photographs documenting the customs - such as nativity plays, Halloween festivities and Guy Fawkes night - that take place in local villages.

41 Hewitt Road (1996–1999), designed as a series of book dummy pages by Dean Pavitt at Loup Design, is a series of colour photographs accompanied by a set of emails describing 41 Hewitt Road (This is the London home which Fox shared with family and friends, and is also the setting for Cockroach Diary). The photographs appear as if made by an archaeologist discovering a site of interest, recently deserted, but the emails tell a different story. As Fox says “The house was a chaotic place to live, so photographing the rooms enabled me to distance myself from the place”
Notes From Home (2000 -2003) is a set of intimate works produced in a series of artists’ books, designed and made by Riikka Kassinen. The work started when Anna Fox found herself immersed back into village life after leaving London in 1999. Once again she turned the camera on herself and her immediate family and started to closely document the domestic activities that were happening in her new home. Each series of photographs form short stories about very simple activities - such as baking cakes and biscuits.

Making Cakes is collaboration between Anna and her son Louis and shows a variety of decorative themed cakes. The Rise and Fall of Father Christmas records the life size model of Father Christmas her son Felix made for the village art competition. Pete’s Food & Flowers documents the strange and extraordinary range of meals made by Pete, who lodged in the house, and records the wild flowers he picked every day. Supersnacks are a series of self-portraits. Gifts from the Cats shows a record of all the dead animals the cats brought into the house as presents.

My Mothers Cupboards and My Fathers Words (1999), designed originally as a miniature book using images and texts, tells an unusual story about family relationships. While her father was ill for many years Anna kept a notebook recording his outbursts that were mainly directed at the female members of his family. His quotes paired with a series of claustrophobic images of her mothers’ neatly kept cupboards reveal a couple struggling to keep an even keel in the wake of a rapidly debilitating disease.

The darkly humorous Cockroach Diary (1996-1999) documents an infestation of cockroaches at Fox’s North London (41 Hewitt Rd) home where she lived with her children, partner and a number of lodgers. First published in 1999 by Shoredtich Biennale, it tells a wicked tale of how an invasion of cockroaches affected the people who lived there. The work combines a series of colour photographs with a handwritten diary that she kept until the cockroaches eventually left.
Cockroach Diary & other stories is curated by Anne McNeill and funded by Impressions Gallery, The National Lottery through Arts Council England, University College for the Creative Arts and Goldenshot. Impressions Gallery is funded by Arts Council, England and Bradford Metropolitan District Council

To find out more browse the reading table in our Lounge, or watch the specially made film featuring an interview with Anna Fox.

Anna Fox: Photographs 1983-2007 by Val Williams, published by Photoworks, in association with Impressions Gallery, is available to buy from our Shop, priced £24.99