



AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE
FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

In partnership with



Life's a Beach

Martin Parr

Education Kit

30 January - 27 March 2016

Recommended for

Year 9-12 High School Students

Stage 5-6

Visual Arts

Photographic and Digital Media

This education kit is designed to assist discussion and promote a deeper understanding of the themes and techniques presented in ACP's exhibition by focusing on selected works.

Want to book a visit for your school or find out how ACP can assist your students to learn about photography?

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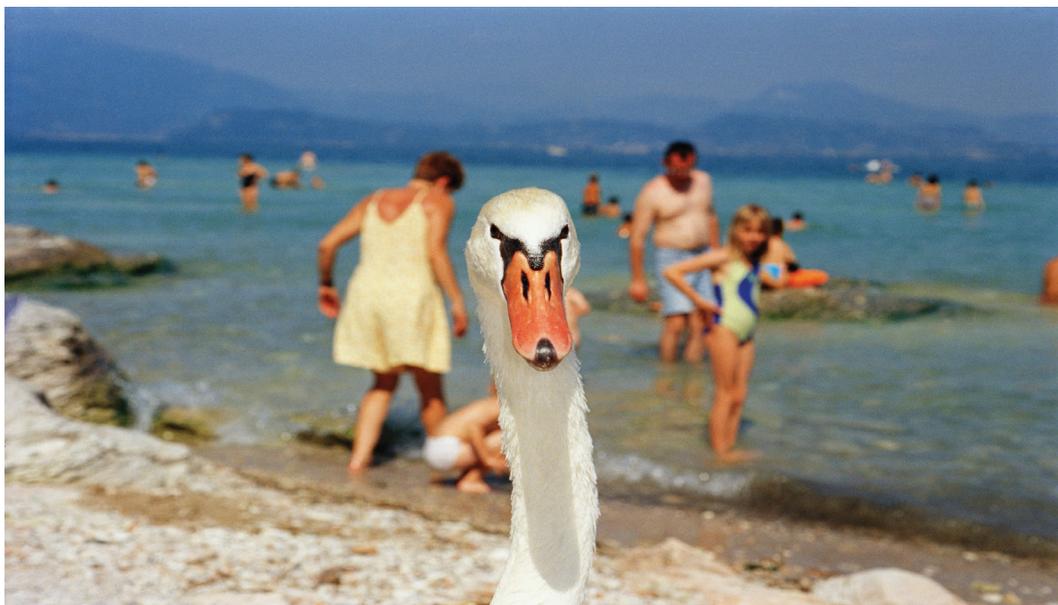
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EXHIBITION THEMES

National Behaviours
Absurdities
Humour
Commonalities
Beach Culture
Public Space
Stereotypes/Clichés

In the United Kingdom, one is never more than seventy-five miles away from the coast. With this much shoreline, it's not surprising that there is a strong British tradition of photography by the seaside. American photographers may have given birth to Street photography, but in the UK, we have the beach. Perhaps the natural outcome is Beach photography. Here people can relax, be themselves, and show off all those traces of mildly eccentric British behaviour.

I've photographed the beach over many decades, documenting all aspects of this tradition, including close-ups of sunbathers, rambunctious swimmers caught mid-plunge, and the eternal sandy picnic underway. I started photographing this subject in the 1970s and initially published *The Last Resort*, a book depicting the seaside resort of New Brighton, near Liverpool, in 1986. This led me to photograph beaches across the world, including those of Argentina, Brazil, China, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Japan, the United States, Mexico, Thailand, and of course, the UK.

One unifying activity is the selling of goods, for the beach is a prime place to sell pretty much anything—from ice cream in Brighton, to the services of an ear cleaner in Goa, India, to barbecued fish in Chile, to noodles in China. You can learn a lot about a country by looking at its beaches: across cultures, the beach is that rare public space in which all absurdities and quirky national behaviours can be found.

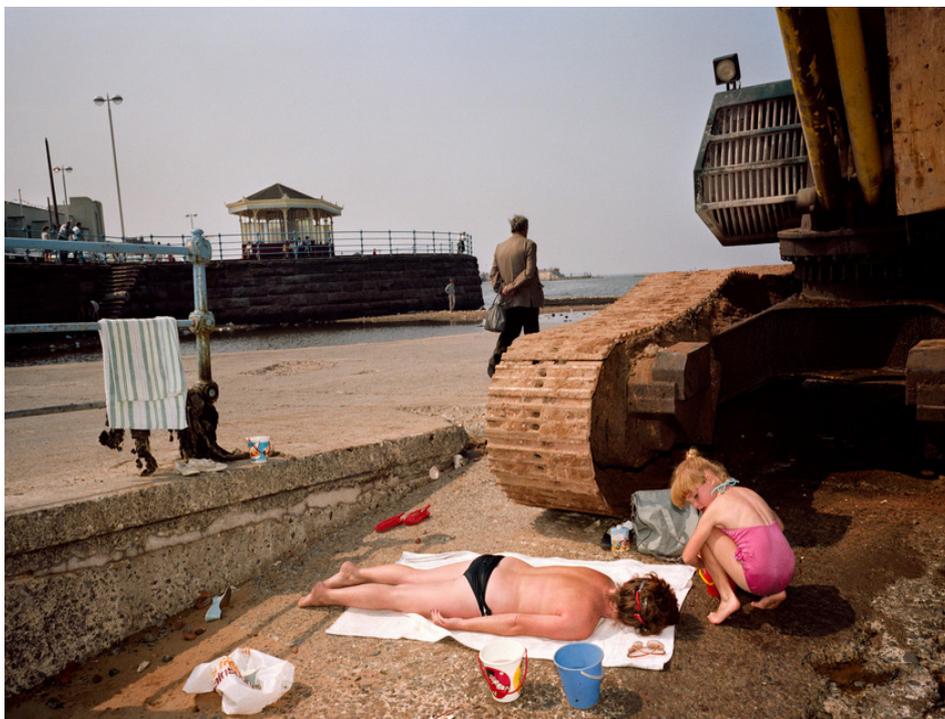
— Martin Parr

Life's a Beach is presented by the Australian Centre for Photography in partnership with the Waverley Council at Bondi Pavilion from 31 January - 27 March 2016.

Life's a Beach is an exhibition organised by Aperture Foundation, New York. Aperture, a not-for-profit foundation, connects the photo community with the most inspiring work, the sharpest ideas, and with each other – in print, in person and online.

THE WORK

New Brighton, UK, 1985.
© Martin Parr / Magnum Photos



Martin Parr

For more than 40 years UK Magnum photographer Martin Parr has made photographing the beach his obsession. Through his humorous and colourful photographs Parr explores the eccentricities of beach culture, targeting everyday mundane activities practised by people around the world to highlight these quirky national behaviours, in his own distinct way.

Questions:

Consider Parr's relationship to his subject matter. Does he present himself purely as an observer of behaviour? Do his photographs suggest an affinity with any one place? In what ways would his series differ if he had only presented photographs from one beach, or one country?

Read the early reviews of Parr's *The Last Resort* when it was published in 1986. Do you feel they are a fair representation of the artist's intention? How does the inclusion of works from this series in the exhibition *Life's a Beach* impact your viewing of them? How does Parr's interaction with one subject over a long period of time change the intention of the work?

Examine all the works included in *Life's a Beach*. Discuss the changes to the artist's approach over time and the impact of technical advancements and cultural shifts.

Activity:

Find your obsession. Like Parr, explore an everyday activity or hobby that people participate in but are unaware of its visual uniqueness. Start visiting and revisiting to photograph in isolation certain aspects of your selected obsession. *For example:* You could focus on a specific sport; the training, the games, the clothing, the crowd. By dedicating yourself to a subject in this way you can build a body of work that presents an insight into the everyday.

THE WORK

Margate, UK, 1986.

© Martin Parr / Magnum Photos



The Frames

The following four frames can be applied to artworks to give meaning, assist with interpretation and define the relationship between the artist – artwork – world – audience.

Subjective frame

Focuses on the personal and imaginative viewing of artworks. Through this frame students can explore their own deeply felt experiences or retrieve individual memories. Students can uncover the varied meanings and interpretations of artworks, as well as their expressive qualities.

Cultural frame

Through this frame artists may be seen as agents for the documentation of social and cultural structures and formations. The cultural frame views artworks as reflections of social, cultural and community interests. Students explore how notions of cultural identity inform artistic practice.

Structural frame

This frame explores the formal organisation and visual qualities of an artwork to form a symbolic language that can communicate to audiences. Students deconstruct these visual conventions to interpret the artist's meaning and to develop an understanding of how these signs and symbols are employed by the artist.

Postmodern frame

The postmodern frame challenges and reveals mainstream assumptions about art, power relations and contradictions, through the artist's use of parody, irony, satire and appropriation. Students explore the meaning of art within the constantly shifting contemporary world and investigate how artworks can challenge authority and widely held beliefs.

For more information visit http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/visual_arts_710_syl.pdf

THE WORK

Ocean Dome, Miyazaki, Japan, 1996.
© Martin Parr / Magnum Photos



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The following questions can be used as a guide for applying the frames to Martin Parr's photograph *Ocean Dome, Miyazaki, Japan, 1996*.

How do you relate to the image above? Does it feel different from your own experience of the beach? If so, why? Are there any visual similarities?

How does the artist capture the beach culture of Japan? What elements of the image inform the viewer of its location? How necessary is the image caption in shedding light on aspects of Japan's beach culture?

What lens has the artist chosen and why? How important is the framing of the image? If you were to crop the top quarter of the image, would the image have the same impact? Discuss the artist's use of leading lines and balance.

In what way does the image challenge your preception of Japan and our assumptions regarding their pastimes? How does the use of photography as a medium impact the subject?

THE WORK

Broome, Australia, 2012.
© Martin Parr / Magnum Photos



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The following questions can be used as a guide for applying the frames to Martin Parr's photograph *Broome, Australia, 2012*.

Does the image look appealing to you? What does the image remind you of? Does it remind you of advertising images? Why would the artist have chosen a BBQ on the beach to photograph?

Do you think the image offers an authentic visual representation of Australia's beach culture? How does the image reaffirm clichés of Australian pastimes? There are only two images from Australia in the exhibition *Life's a Beach*, how might this impact the viewer's understanding of Australia's beach culture?

How has the artist positioned themselves to lead the viewer's gaze and why? How important is the background? Does the inclusion of the blue marker have any relevance? When comparing *Broome, Australia, 2012* with *Ocean Dome, Miyazaki, Japan, 1996*, can you see changes in the artist's equipment? Consider colour, format and style.

How does this image compare with Australian travel adverts you have seen? Do you think the artist is commenting on Australian stereotypes? How might the artist be reflecting on national identity?

THE WORK

Weymouth, UK, 1999.
© Martin Parr / Magnum Photos



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The following questions can be used as a guide for applying the frames to Martin Parr's photograph *Weymouth, UK, 1999* and to the exhibition *Life's a Beach*.

What do you, as the viewer, first identify with when you look at this photograph? What does it remind you of – a selfie, a tourist pic? Why do you think the artist has chosen to present the subject in this way?

How does the image and the image caption inform your understanding of UK seaside towns? Consider clothing, structures and signage. Research Weymouth, UK during the 1990s and today. Does the image reflect your new understanding of its original context. If you were to take this picture in Weymouth, UK today what distinct differences might you expect to see?

What photographic elements and techniques have been employed by the artist? What impact does the use of colour and its repetition make? Discuss the focus of the image and how the artist has created tension between foreground and background.

What issues and concerns are reflected in Parr's work which might be suggestive of a postmodernist practice? Discuss the work in reference to today's 'selfie' culture. How does the exhibition as a whole draw attention to issues around privacy and photography in public space? How does the artist use humour and satire to challenge society's view of art?