

Exchanging Perceptions

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We also thank our partner project delivery agencies, groups and facilitators in working with us to deliver the project, and note our particular gratitude to steering group member agencies including Ballymac Friendship Centre, Short Strand Community Forum, Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group and Oasis Caring in Action.

We'd like to gratefully acknowledge the support of Belfast City Council Peace III Programme Team in helping us to bring the Inner East Outer West project to completion.

Finally, this project would not have been the huge success it has been, without the talent, drive and dynamism of our photography workshop facilitator Stephen Wilson and without the enthusiasm and committment of project participants from Inner East and Outer West of the city. A big thank you to Stephen and to all who took part.

Chris O'Halloran,

Practice Coordinator, Belfast Interface Project.

Preface:

Belfast Interface Project

Belfast Interface Project (BIP), established in 1995, is a membership organisation committed to informing and supporting the development of effective regeneration strategies in Belfast's interface areas.

Our overall vision is of a Belfast in which today's interface communities:

- Are free of tension, intimidation and violence both within and between communities;
- Have come to terms with the legacies of the past;
- Are socially and economically vibrant, within an attractive physical environment;
- Enjoy freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services;
- Have respect for cultural difference and diversity.

BIP's aims:

- To influence policy and advocate for change;
- To advocate with agencies and others in order to address issues of safety in interface communities;
- To support interface communities to develop positive relationships;
- To ensure that our membership remains reflective of interface communities and that the organisation is managed efficiently and effectively.

The Inner East Outer West Project

The Inner East Outer West (IEOW) project is a local peace-building project in Belfast which was managed by Belfast Interface Project and funded through Belfast City Council's Good Relations Partnership under the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) PEACE III initiative over the period July 2012 to December 2013.

Short Strand is a predominantly Catholic/nationalist community on the inner-city edge of predominantly Protestant/unionist East Belfast.

'Inner East' Belfast is a term that describes communities living close to 'peacelines' which mark the boundaries between Short Strand and its neighbouring predominantly Protestant/unionist communities.

Suffolk estate is a small, predominantly Protestant/ unionist community on the outer edge of predominantly Catholic/nationalist West Belfast.

'Outer West' Belfast denotes the communities living close to the interfaces which mark the boundaries between Suffolk and its neighbouring predominantly Catholic/nationalist communities.

The IEOW project set out to facilitate groups of hard-to-reach young people, sometimes at risk of involvement in problem antisocial behaviour in Inner East Belfast and also in Outer West Belfast, as well as adult residents, to address issues relating to conflict and division, to meet through a facilitated contact programme, to identify and exchange perspectives and attitudes regarding their identities, and to develop positive relationships.

The aims of the project were to:

- Develop relationships across interfaces in Inner East and Outer West Belfast.
- Develop collaborative working relationships amongst community and voluntary groups across each interface and between areas.
- Increase levels of mobility amongst project participants.
- Reduce levels of inter-community tension and violence at these interfaces

Also, the project aimed to create opportunities for interaction and discussion of issues relating to conflict and division on a crossinterface basis and 'East meets West' of the city basis, including opportunities to visit each other's area.

'Exchanging Perceptions'

The 'Exchanging Perceptions' programme was a significant element within the larger Inner East Outer West project.

The programme included a series of six cross-community photography workshops in Inner East Belfast, and six workshops in Outer West Belfast, using disposable cameras, facilitated by a professional photographer, and attended by residents from within local interface communities.

The workshops examined themes including shapes and textures, shadows and reflections, and 'home', and participants were encouraged to photograph locally chosen sites and subjects.

Following from the photography workshops, an exhibition of the images produced was staged at the Waterfront Hall over the period October 14th to 24th 2013.

This publication contains a broader selection of photographs produced through the workshops together with accompanying narrative, including a number of interviews with workshop participants.

Participants:

Inner East

- 1. Louis Millan
- 2. Arlene Llewellyn
- 3. Jackie Upton
- 4. Bernie Murray
- 5. Bernie McConnell
- 6. Bridie Rooney
- 7. Collette McGuigan
- 8. Lily Crawford
- 9. Sheila Astbury
- 10. Shannon Upton
- 11. Mark Kennedy
- 12. Sue White
- 13. Muriel Ryan

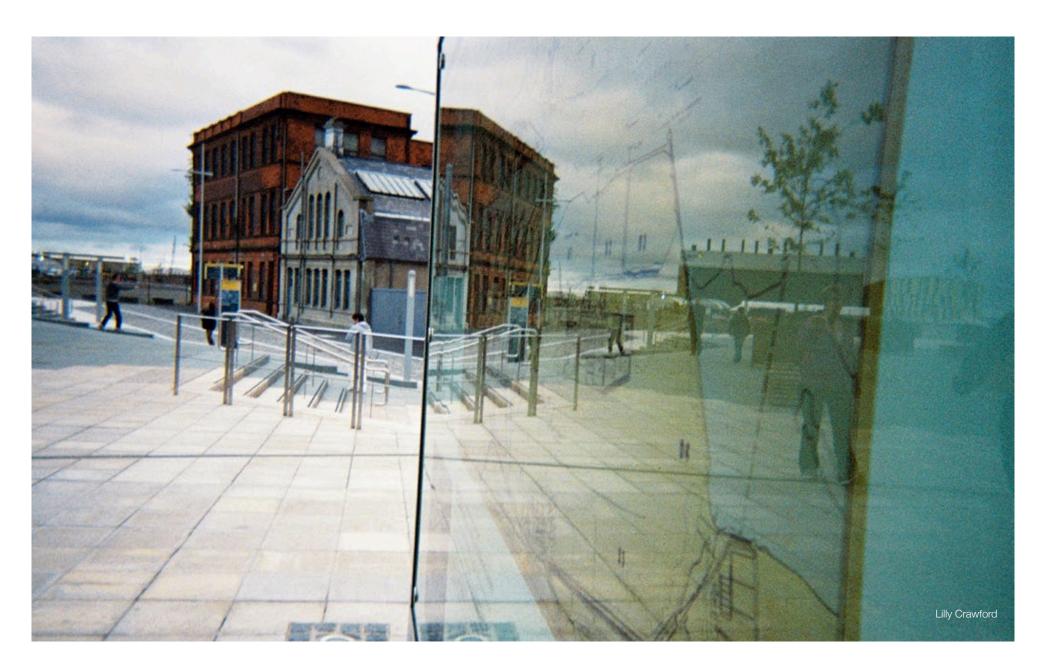
Outer West

- 14. Stuart Lavery
- 15. Neilly McDonnell
- 16. Linda Marie Hamill
- 17. Sarah Louise Robertson
- 18. Donna Maguire
- 19. Sean Paul Conlon
- 20. Gerard Forrestal
- 21. Louise Veal
- 22. Suzanne Lavery
- 23. Ilaria Zomer









































Jackie Upton

My turning point came in 1997 when I got involved in a prisoners' aid group to support prisoners and their families. My cross community work grew from there and the more involved I became the more I realised that we could achieve nothing unless we met with the other community and got to see where they were coming from.

I got involved with the photography workshop because it was a cross community project and I thought it would be interesting to learn a new skill. I wouldn't say I was a creative person but I thought the photography might give me a different perspective on things.

Cross community work is something I'm committed to but I thought this project would be interesting in that it was about more than talking through our similarities and differences. The photography would give us common ground right away and it would be fun.

My pictures were taken in Pitt Park, an interface area where I've lived my whole life. One is of a mural. It's a UVF soldier from the Somme but I focussed in on his eyes, watching over everything.

The other picture is in the local children's playground and, whatever way the sun was shining, it's created a rainbow effect over the whole scene. For me that summed what's happened to our community. That area is where children play but it's also seen its share of rioting. Only a couple of years ago the kids had to be taken to safety using trampolines as cover because of the riots - yet here was a rainbow.

Seeing my community through the lens of a camera has helped me see things in a different way.







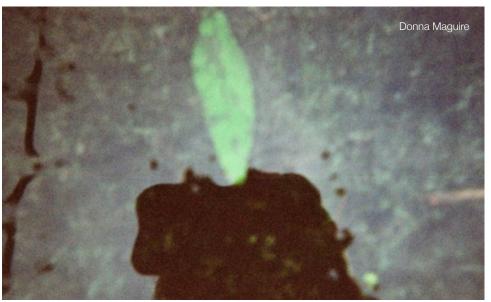














Inner East Outer West Project One: Shapes & Textures

On the first night of the photography workshops we were set the task of photographing shapes and textures in the local neighbourhood. This gives us the opportunity to look at the world which immediately surrounds us in a new and interesting way. We all too often walk past and ignore the things that make up our world. Small details like spilled paint or a broken window can go unnoticed in the busyness of our modern lives, but when something is photographed and taken out of context and shown back to us, we often see it in a new light. 'Is that really our street?' we ask ourselves. 'It's not really the place where I live and work.

How could I walk past every day and not see it?' These images are then edited by the group. This process gives us the opportunity to decide which of these things that we have observed in our neighbourhood we want to show. The process of photographing and recording our neighbourhood tells us a lot about where we live. The process of editing these images tells us a lot about what we think about where we live.













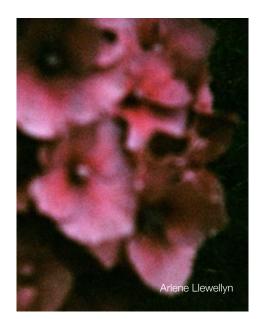


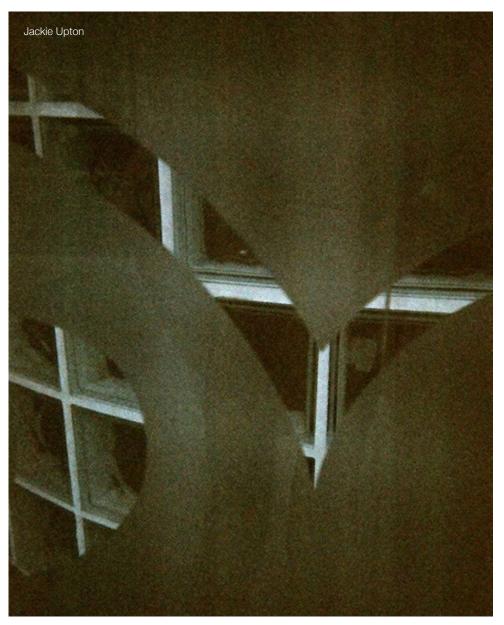


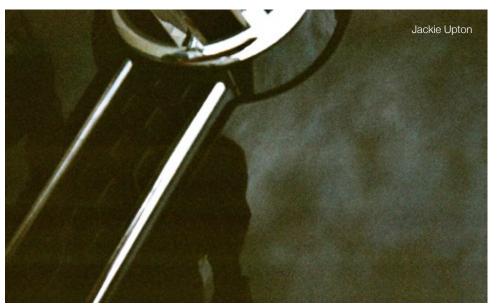
















BERNIE MURRAY

I thought this project was a great way for people like us to meet with those from the Newtownards Road and at the same time learn a new skill.

I got involved because I was interested in finding out more about photography. I'm interested in arts and crafts – I do arts and crafts classes with the senior citizens at our community centre, so this was a natural progression in a way.

It taught me about looking at the things around you in a different way. My picture is of the glass roof in our community centre and the beams running across it. It's not the sort of thing you'd maybe usually notice, but when you look at it the shapes and light are interesting.

Everyone enjoyed the workshops and we all got on well. We're planning to keep up the contact too, for that's important. Most people in our areas want to move forward and get out of this rut. We'll do that by groups like ours doing things like this.









LILLY CRAWFORD

For me this was about a whole lot more than taking pictures. Learning how to actually work a camera appealed to me and learning about shapes and textures too. But it was more important to me that by taking part in a cross community project people would get to know that work like this is going on and that people like us want peace.

I took my pictures at Titanic Quarter. I really enjoyed it. The whole experience meant a lot to me. When people look at my pictures I want them to know how much I enjoyed working with this group of people from across our community, for this area has changed so much.

I'm 78 so I remember when this was a happy place. People smiled and bid each other the time of day. Protestants and Catholics worked side by side – I worked until I was 70! We would have stood beside each other to watch the Twelfth. But this isn't a place where people talk anymore. Belfast is a sad place.

Me and people like me want peace. I'm a great great granny and I do worry about the children and what lies ahead.









BRIDIE ROONEY

My friend at our local community centre got me involved with the photographic workshop. My picture was of one of the big cranes down at the shipyard. To me that says, 'Belfast'. I didn't know if the picture would come out but it did. When I started the workshop I wasn't even sure what way round to hold the camera!

But things are so different today from what they were when I was young. I'm 76 now. I worked in the local Goblin vacuum-making factory with hundreds of Protestants and we all just got on with it. When I was young my mother told me that I shouldn't let anyone disrespect my religion – but she also stressed that I should respect other people's too.

I don't believe in violence or murder or the people doing those things. I just wish they'd waken up and smell the roses, isn't that what they say! We all just want to get on with our lives. The people of the Short Strand are fed up. Every night I pray for peace. When we're coming out of mass on a Sunday everyone's saying, 'I hope to God this isn't going to start again.' I've sat on my own and cried at times because I was afraid to go out because of all the trouble.

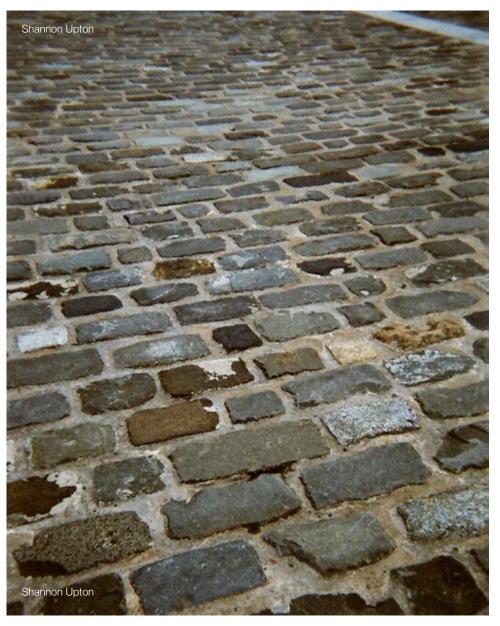
Before the workshop I'd have been afraid to come up here but sure you have to take a chance in life sometimes and now I've made friends that I'm going to carry on meeting. Everyone needs to come together and look towards ahead. It's about the kids now, their future.







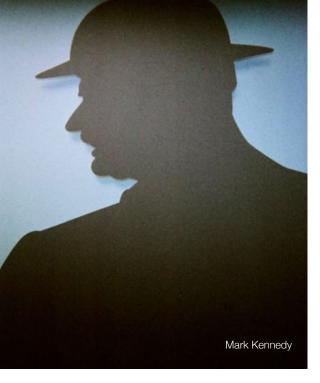






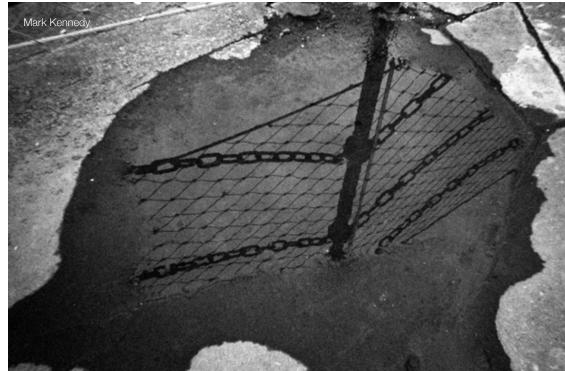








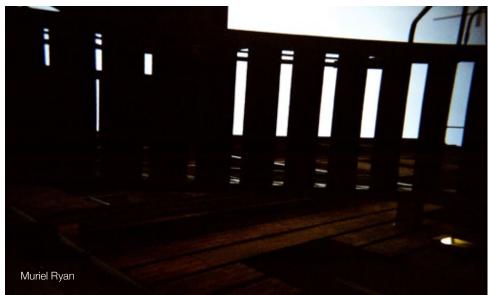
































































Sean Paul Conlon

Living in Suffolk and being called Sean is fairly unusual. My house was attacked a few weeks ago but generally it's never really been a problem because I've lived and worked in the area for 15 years so people know me and when people know you they know you're not a threat.

I'd always been interested in photography but had just never had an opportunity like this. I thoroughly enjoyed the course. It made you look at your area through new eyes.

You walk past things every day and think nothing of them but once you've a lens in your hands you see them differently. It gives you a new way to look at your surroundings – and indeed the world.

I took some pictures of reflections. I thought they gave a different perspective on our estate. People have a preconceived idea what life on a working class estate in west Belfast is like but this maybe challenges that.

When people see these photographs I want them to look at them without preconceptions and misconceptions and without the conditioning that has 'told' them what life in Inner East or Outer West Belfast should be.

I hope they give them a fresh perspective and a realisation that people here can be creative. People tend not to question where their preconceptions come from – they just accept them. Maybe these photos will give them a chance to change their ideas.









SUZANNE LAVERY

I've lived in this area all my life, close to the interface, and now I'm involved in cross community work.

Living beside the interface never really affected me growing up. It was just part of life. But when I had my children I started to think more about the dangers there were at the interface and how they affect my children.

I'm bringing them up to believe that both communities are just the same and they are making the right choices.

My older boy could be out with his friends but he chooses not to because very often they're up on the interface. I'd like for him to be able to be out with his friends but, because of the way things are, I'm glad he isn't.

My photo was of the mark left by a paint bomb on the pavement up at the interface. I took the picture to show that kids throw stuff like this across the interface and that they're not only leaving physical scars behind but mental scars too.

Just beside where that paint bomb landed there's a young family. They have to live in a house with grills on their windows every day due to fears of something hitting their windows and this is the reality for people living there.

There are so many mental barriers in this area. We need to tackle those before we can think about physical barriers – peace walls, interfaces. I hope these pictures help young people think more about this.





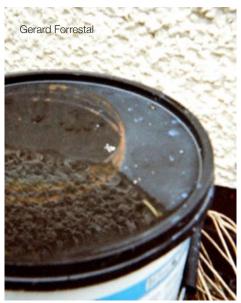












GERARD FORRESTAL

Photographs are like snowflakes – every one is unique. The moment you capture will never be repeated.

I think taking photos made us look at things from a different viewpoint – a different perception. My photos were of reflections and you have to look hard at them to tell what is what.

People will see different things in my pictures and perception is such a massive thing – especially in Northern Ireland. People on one side of the community perceive the other side one way – and vice versa.

The workshop was a wonderful opportunity to just spend time with people and have a bit of craic, without any contentious issues. We were just people taking pictures and seeing things from each other's perspective. It felt good to be in a group having a laugh.

Inner East Outer West Project Two: Shadows & Reflections

Our second trip was not in the streets around where we met, but this time we travelled to another location, somewhere which is not near our home or neighbourhood.

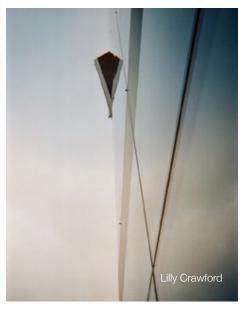
Dislocation gives us the chance to look for unusual and interesting things in another context. Here the topic was shadows and reflections - sometimes these are easy to find, sometimes almost impossible. Whether the topic is easy or hard it gives us the opportunity to look and make photographs. Through these photographs we are given the opportunity to understand the world around us.



























LOUIS MILLAN

When I heard about the workshop I just went for it for I enjoy learning new things. I want to keep improving myself.

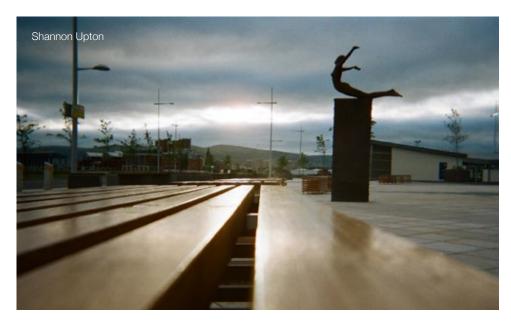
I'd been involved in cross community schemes when I was at school but to be honest people's religion doesn't bother me. I enjoy fishing and I fish all over Ireland. Don't get me wrong, there are tensions but they're not always portrayed as they are, or as I see them. We all come into the world and we'll all leave it the same way, so we should try to get on when we're here.

Things like the photographic workshop are great. There aren't enough things like that. When I was a kid there were loads of youth clubs and then they all seemed to close. We need that sort of grass roots stuff.

My picture was taken at Vickie (Victoria) Park. I liked the way the sun made reflections on the water. It's hard to tell which way is the right way up for the picture. It makes you think a bit. I like that.

No two people will ever see the same thing the same way but it's not about taking a beautiful picture. It's about taking a picture of a beautiful thing – that's what our tutor at the workshop told us and when he said that it made so much sense.

I love being out in nature. I was in Fermanagh recently when a storm broke out over a lake. It was amazing – I just wished I'd had my camera!





























MURIAL RYAN

Even with kids and grandchildren I would never have had that much contact with the other community but I got involved with the workshop because it's time for us all to get together. If there is ever going to be peace we have to be involved with the other side and let them see we're not all bad.

My picture was taken down at the Titanic Quarter. I could see a reflection of the new development down there in a window of the old drawing office there and I liked what that seemed to say to me. It showed the old and the new, the past and the present together. To me it means that even with the past still there, the future can come forward.

We're supposed to have peace. Where? When you hear about bomb scares and shootings you think it's all going to start again and I couldn't go through another 30 years of that.

When people look at my pictures I'd like them to get a sense that Belfast can be a better place if people will let it happen.









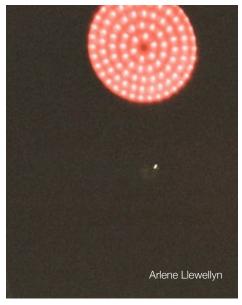


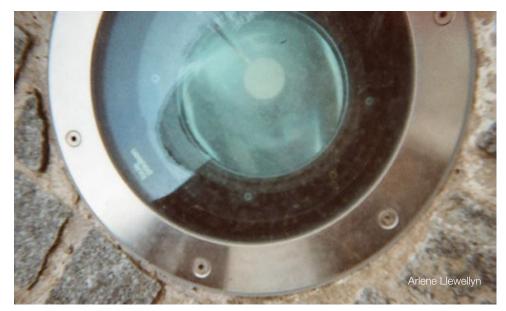












ARLENE LLEWELLYN

I thought the photographic workshop would be a great way to meet people and taking photographs helped me look at things in a different way. No two people will ever see the same thing the same way.

My pictures were of the Titanic Building. I picked it because of the history and the fact I think it's beautiful, although I know not everyone does! I like the shapes, reflections and textures. I think it's an amazing place and for me it represents my community in a positive way.

I live in Pitt Park yet there are many women in our area have never met the women who live in the Short Strand just across the road. I'm a volunteer with the Pitt Park Women's Group. I'm there every evening but making a difference is what drives us. We have so many ambitions for the group and our cross community work is going really well. We're planning to continue with it even though the project has ended.

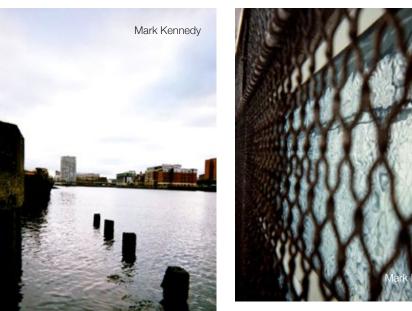
We just have to keep doing what we're doing and make sure people hear about the positive stories in our area – not just the negative.









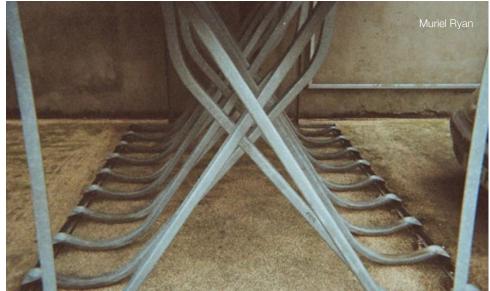


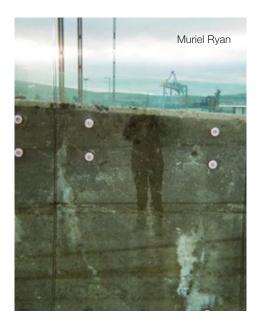


















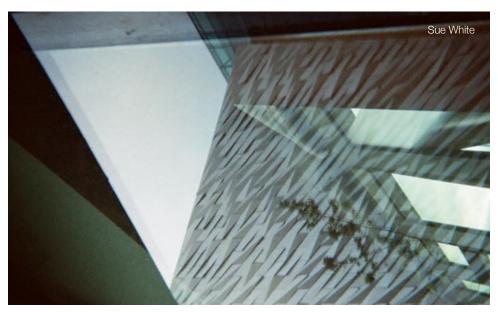






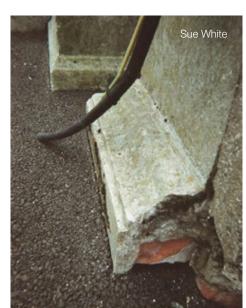








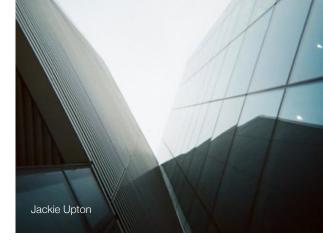












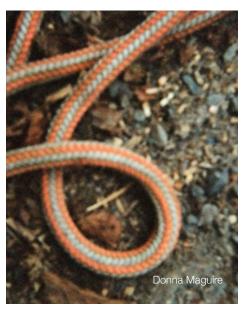














































Inner East Outer West

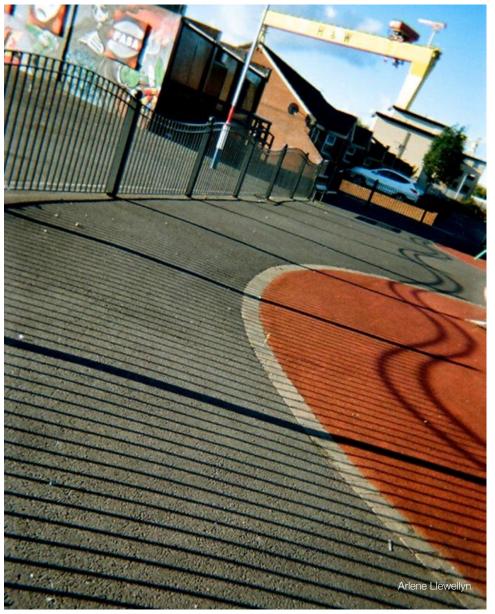
Project Three: Home / Half Moon Lake

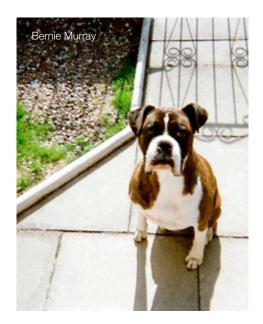
The third project was the culmination of the workshops. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their own setting and location. After some discussion the Inner East group decided to base their project around the word "Home."

What does home mean to us? How do we want others to see our home? This is a personal project and gives us the opportunity to decide how much we want others to see our private lives and that of our community. The Outer West group decided to go on a trip together to the nearby half Moon Lake. This lake is an inner city park, popular with both local fishermen and young drinkers. The choice of this location offers the opportunity to see good and bad in one situation. What we take away from this location not only depends on who else is there at the time, but also what has happened over recent years. Here, images that were produced can be viewed in many different ways. One image which to some viewers may look sad or potentially scary, can to another viewer seem completely mundane or innocuous. Here, reflections and shadows can take on many meanings.



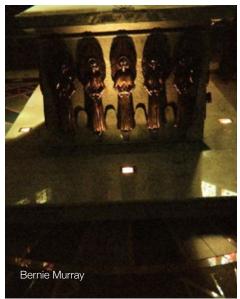






















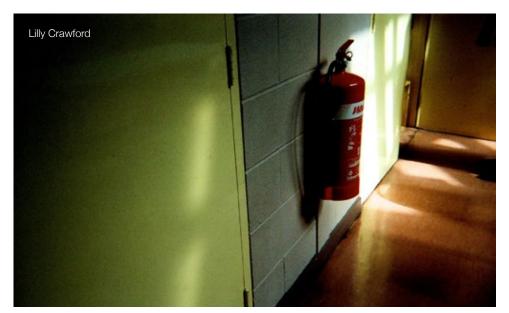








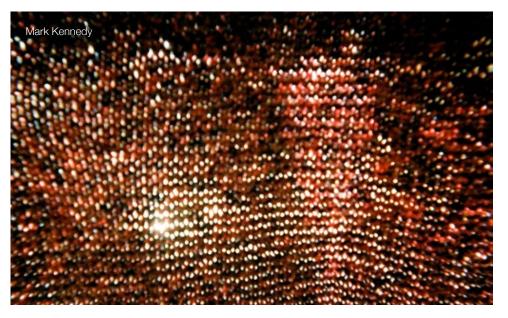


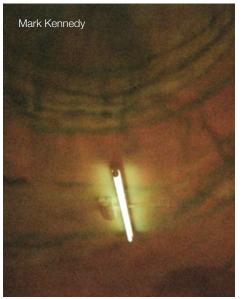




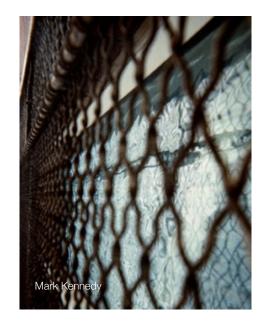










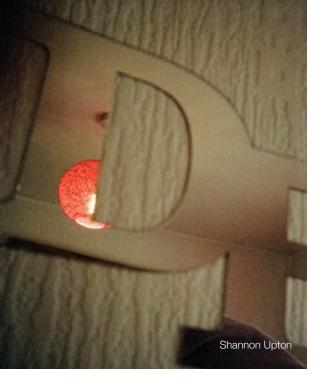














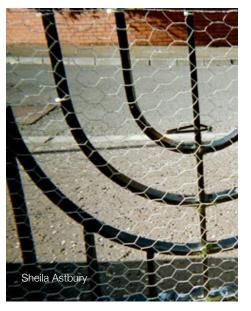


















DONNA MAGUIRE

I know parents usually set the example for children but I actually got involved with this cross community project because of my daughter.

She had taken part in a project with the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group in the summer and made a best friend of a wee girl from Black's Road – they've kept up with each other. It's something neither of us would ever have thought was possible.

Because of that I got involved in the photography workshop. I've made friends too with people from the other community. In fact, I've even visited one of the girls who also lives on Black's Road.

I'd never even been to Black's Road before – even though it's only across the street. I suppose it was fear of the unknown. You'd have seen people from Suffolk at the shops but now I'll stop and talk to them – that's something I'd never even have contemplated before.

My picture is of a pink flower taken down at Half Moon Lake. I loved the vibrant colour – there's not a lot of colour in our area – that's why it stood out.

When people look at the picture it'll maybe help them realise that there's beauty in all communities - and in all people.













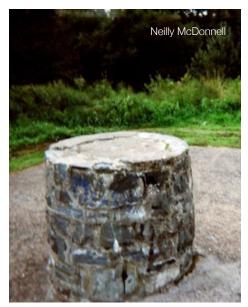
















STUART LAVERY

I'm on the management committee of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group and I take quite a few of the photographs for the group's publicity. I got involved with the workshop because I thought it would useful to build some more capacity and expertise within the group.

The pictures I took were in a local park area. I wanted to show the ugliness of urban decay and the sense that nature was almost taking over in some areas. I like how they show the juxtaposition between nature and the built environment. I look at my surroundings differently now.

The cross community element of the workshop was important to me as well, though I think there are more things that unite us than divide us – youth unemployment, changes to benefits, poor educational attainment, substance abuse and the high suicide rates in working class areas of Belfast.

Projects like this workshop are one way to try to bridge the communities and give people a chance to see the things they have in common.















