

## ANCIENT & MODERN

### PRESS RELEASE

#### ALAN KANE AND HUMPHREY SPENDER

11 JANUARY - 17 FEBRUARY

ANCIENT & MODERN presents photographs by Alan Kane and Humphrey Spender. Predominantly taken in and around bars, these images document drinking cultures in Bolton in the 1930s and in London in the 1990s. They are, however, more than simply documentary photographs. Spender's research based images witness the birth of domestic sociological enquiry and modern marketing whilst Kane's are part of a wider exploration into the blurring of art and audience.

Alan Kane sees the act of photography, as with other aspects of his practice, as 'a way of sustaining, generating and focusing on' the epiphany that something prosaic has greater significance. Kane sees art in every aspect of our daily lives and artists in all of us. His practice as much frames this as makes something new. He suggests that it is more about distributing pictures than making them.

The photographs included in this exhibition, taken from a series entitled 'Trying to Die Happy', see Kane operate not as a passive observer but as a flaneur, losing himself within his subject matter, and as an auteur, encouraging or perhaps provoking his subjects to respond to the camera. He describes the camera as "an invitation to perform, a microscope and a pair of blinkers".

In contrast, Humphrey Spender (1910-2005) documented his surroundings using a concealed camera to pursue an objective 'truth'. In 1937 Spender joined Mass Observation, the social research organisation that grew out of anthropology and surrealism. Mass Observation had been founded earlier that year by Tom Harrison, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge to produce an 'anthropology of ourselves'. Observers were recruited to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain. Initial research was concentrated in Bolton (or, as they classified it for the purposes of their study, 'Worktown'). The photographs presented in this exhibition were taken by Spender for Mass Observation in Bolton during 1937 and 1938.

Spender wrote of photography "as time passes, social-documentary photographs gain in interest, whereas the 'beautiful' photograph ... progressively loses interest, becomes boring."

Biographical information:

Alan Kane is best known for 'Folk Archive; Contemporary Popular Art from the UK'. This project (realised with Jeremy Deller) first featured in the inaugural Tate Triennial, 2000. 'Folk Archive' has since been presented in the Barbican Curve; Milton Keynes Gallery; Spacex, Exeter; The New Art Gallery, Walsall; Aberystwyth Arts Centre; The Lowry, Salford and at Kunsthalle Basel. It is now in the care of the British Council who will take it to Belgrade in March 2007.

Kane has held solo exhibitions at The Showroom Gallery, London and at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow and has participated in group exhibitions and realised projects for City Racing, London; The New Art Gallery Walsall; Milton Keynes Gallery; The Modern Institute, Glasgow; Portikus, Frankfurt a.M and Wolverhampton Art Gallery. Working collaboratively with Jeremy Deller, Kane has also realised projects for Dundee Contemporary Arts; Art Basel Miami; PS1, New York; The Home Office, London and for Turner Contemporary, Margate.

Although trained as an architect Humphrey Spender (1910-2005) first worked as a freelance photojournalist. In 1934 he was invited by a probation officer to photograph homes in London's East End in order to provide evidence of the poor conditions that were thought to contribute to crime in the area. He was subsequently commissioned by the Left Review to photograph the Jarrow Crusade and a British Union of Fascists rally at the Albert Hall. Between 1935 and 1937 he worked as a photographer for the Daily Mirror. Spender went on to photograph 'real life' in cities across Britain for Picture Post and worked as an official war photographer during the early 1940s. In the 1950s he largely abandoned photography to concentrate on painting and producing murals, mosaics, wallpaper designs and textiles. For 20 years, he taught in the Royal College of Art textile department. In 2004 Spender was enrolled as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society.

Humphrey Spender's photographs are presented courtesy of Bolton Museums and Archives Service and with the support of his Estate.

ANCIENT & MODERN is directed by Bruce Haines and Rob Tufnell.

Exhibition preview: Wednesday 10 January, 6 - 8pm  
Open Thursdays - Saturdays 12 - 6pm and by appointment.

For further information and images please contact [mail@ancientandmodern.org](mailto:mail@ancientandmodern.org)