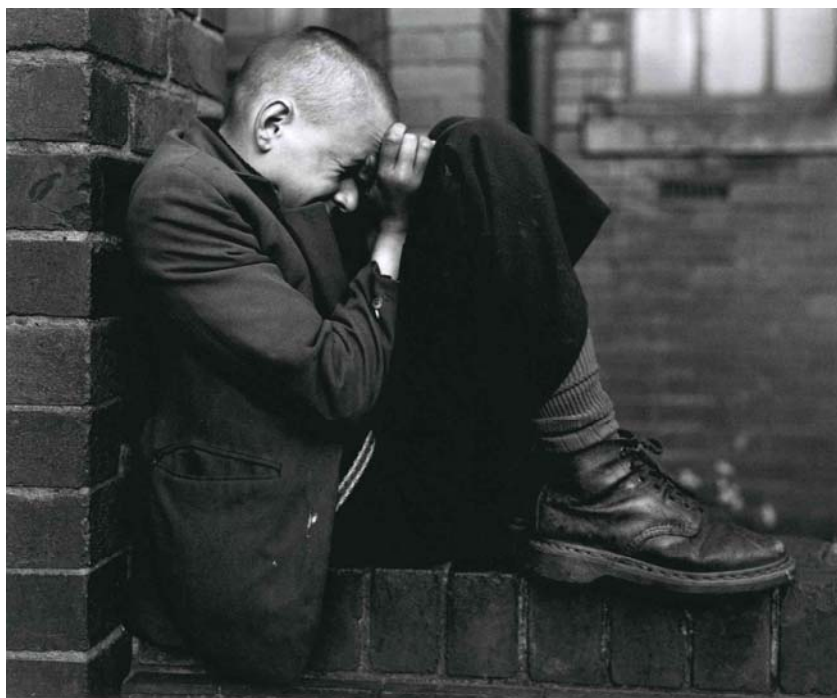


## Chris Killip trabajo / work



CHRIS KILLIP  
*Youth on Wall, Jarrow, Tyneside. Serie: North East, 1976*  
Copia al bromuro y gelatina de plata. Vintage  
43,4 x 52,7  
©Chris Killip

- DATES:** 1st October 2013 – 24th February 2014
- PLACE:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid)  
Sabatini building. Third floor
- ORGANISATION:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid) in collaboration  
with Museum Folkwang, Fotografische Sammlung (Essen, Germany)
- CURATOR:** Ute Eskildsen
- COORDINATOR:** Patricia Molins
- ITINERARY:** Museum Folkwang, Fotografische Sammlung, (Essen, Germany)  
(4th February – 15th April 2012)
- RELATED  
ACTIVITIES** *Encounter Chris Killip.* Guided visit to the exhibition by the artist  
2nd October 2013, 19:00 h

This exhibition reviews Chris Killip's work (Douglas, Man's Island, United Kingdom, 1946), fundamental figure of the documentary photography, where, since the 70's initiates a new route: the portrait of the working classes in full process of disappearance of the great industry that had created and supported them from beginning of the 19th century. The exhibition *Chris Killip trabajo / work*, organised in collaboration with Museum Folkwang, Fotografische Sammlung (Essen, Germany), includes **more than hundred pictures** that gather daily scenes of the life in the North of England between 1968 and 2004. For the artist it is not a question of showing the historical experience, but to reflect the real life.

The work of Chris Killip depicts the dismantling of the European industrial world during the second half of the 20th century, underlining the precarious conditions affecting a large part of the working class, seen with particular harshness in the 1980s. Chris Killip belongs to the generation of photographers who started out in photojournalism or, in the case of Killip, in advertising photography, and then forged an independent path starting in the 1970s, thanks to their engagement with the changes occurring in society and their decisive use of the camera as a political tool. Influenced by photographers such as Lewis Hine and Paul Strand and by the worker-photography movement, Killip recovers the documentary image through long observation of daily life, recorded in books and extensive photographic series.

Born in 1946 in the Isle of Man, Chris Killip, began his career in photography in 1964 as an assistant to the advertising photographer Adrian Flowers in London. During a trip to New York in 1969 he saw his first exhibition of photographs, which was on the work of Bill Brandt, at the Museum of Modern Art, as well as work from the permanent collection by Eugene Atget, August Sander, Paul Strand, Walker Evans and Robert Frank. He was so impressed by the mediums potential that he abandoned his imagined career as a commercial photographer. Instead he turned his attention to the people and places he knew and returned in 1969 to photograph his homeland, the ***Isle of Man (Isla de Man) (1970-1973)***. "I am a Manxman, a native of the Isle of Man, which is an island in the middle of the Irish Sea. I left there for London in 1964 when I was eighteen years old to work as an assistant to various advertising photographers. I returned to photograph from 1970-73, working at night as a barman in my father's pub. The people I photographed were sometimes my relations or knew my mother or my father, but more often they knew who my grandparents were. And, in that way felt they knew me", Chris Killip tells. At the same time this work was the beginning of the ***Portraits (Retratos) (1969-1981) series***. "The first portraits that I made were as a beach photographer in 1964, working on commission and saying 'smile please'. Portraiture is a unifying thread throughout all of my work. Although since my time as a mercenary beach photographer, I have had an aversion to asking anyone to pose", the artist claims.

The majority of the photographs exhibited here were made in the 1970's and 80's during the period when deindustrialization was defining the everyday lives of so many people in the North of England. It was also a time when documentary photography was receiving increasing public funding and the magazines *Creative Camera* and *Album* had created a platform for discussion and analysis.

The Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned Chris Killip's ***Huddersfield (1973-1974)*** series before he moved to Newcastle in the North East of England in 1975. "In 1973 I was one of eight photographers commissioned to photograph in two different towns by the British Arts Council. Huddersfield, and its textile mills, was one of the towns I was sent to.

It was my first encounter with industrial Britain and important for me in the way that it helped to change my work from the conventional formality of the Isle of Man series and greatly increased my interest in working in industrial working class Britain”, the photographer says.

The North East of England was an area where the heavy industries of coal mining, steelmaking and shipbuilding had employed people over generations creating tight knit communities that were now at the mercy of great structural change. This period of deindustrialization and growing unemployment is the underlying theme of his series **North East (Nordeste) (1975-1988)** where he mixes strict documentary with subjective commentary. “I came to Newcastle on a two-year fellowship in 1975 and stayed for sixteen years. I more than liked this part of the world, which was inextricably bound to the heavy industries of the industrial revolution because of its wealth of coal and iron ore. The working class people who populated these towns and villages were mainly descendents of the nineteenth century farm workers displaced by mechanization or by immigrants from Ireland's great famine, which also coincided with the North's wave of industrialization. People, like my people, but different, as the Isle of Man never had an industrial revolution. My time there coincided with great change and this work can now also be seen as a chronicle of the area's de-industrial revolution”, Chris Killip explains. A founding member of Newcastle's Side Gallery, for which Killip served for at a time as director and then curator, serves to underline his commitment to independent documentary photography.

“As a former beach photographer I am very drawn to the seaside, especially to the easily accessible resorts that are popular with working people. What interests me most is how people are changed by the purposefulness of relaxation and how they become something that they are not when at work or at home. It has to do with my upbringing in a pub in a small fishing town where, as a child, I used to watch the grocer and the baker and the various other pub patrons gather together in the 'singing room' on a Saturday night. There, when singing their individual songs, they would transform themselves in front of my eyes, making me understand that there was a lot more to them than I had previously realized”, the artist tells about **Seaside (Costa) (1975-1977)** series.

While the scenes of leisure in *Seaside* recall holidays, **Skinningrove (1981-1983)** highlights the struggles of a marginal fishing village on the North East coast. “I was drawn to this small, bolshie, stubborn, insular village between Whitby and Middlesbrough on the North East coast of England because of its values, which revolved around fishing and the sea. Other people, wary of the place, would say “Skinningrove, that's where they eat their babies”. There the fishing boats were launched from the shore, using cradles pulled by old secondhand tractors. It was an area of high unemployment and the men were part-time lobster fishermen who regarded the waters in front of Skinningrove as their own territory, fiercely resenting intrusion of any kind”, the artist remember.

“Shipbuilding and the shipyards alongside the River Tyne in Newcastle were unusual because of the proximity of the housing that overlooked the shipyards. Life and work were inseparable as everyone could see the ships being built in front of them. In my time they were building supertankers. I had no idea in 1975 that in six years time this would all come to an end”, Chris Killip explains about **Shipbuilding (Astilleros) (1975-1981)** series. The proximity of the row houses to the huge shipyards, and their separation from the same shipyards in the series *Shipbuilding* is in complete contrast to the way in which the people in **Seacoal (Carbón marino) (1982-1984)** earn their living gathering washed

up coal along the shore. “Lynemouth, a village 15 miles north of Newcastle, had a coal mine at the water’s edge that got its coal from four miles out under the North Sea. This coal was relayed directly into the power station next to it and when the coal mine had finished trying to separate rock from the coal it tipped this remaining waste into the sea. The tide then carried it out to sea and any remaining coal eventually broke loose. Coal floats and with the right wind and tide it washed back on to the beach. When I first saw the beach in 1976 I recognized the industry above it but nothing else that I was seeing. Beneath me men were standing in the water next to their horses and carts, using small wire nets attached to poles to fish out the coal from the water beneath them. The place confounded time; here the Middle Ages and the twentieth century intertwined. It was a place that I had to photograph”, the artist tells.

Chris Killip’s photography is distinguished by its empathy, its acute observation coupled with its unsparing closeness. The people, their social relations and their relations to their surroundings are the emphasis of his work. He tells stories about a part of society for whom disappearing industrial jobs was a reality. ***The Coal Miners Strike (La huelga de mineros del carbón) (1984)*** was the most decisive moment in postwar British labour history. “The defeat of the miners was seen as a great victory for the conservative government and Margaret Thatcher. In March 1984 the National Coal Board announced that they were going to close twenty mines with a loss of 20,000 jobs. The strike that was called was unusual in that the miners were not striking for more pay but were fighting for the right to work. Mining towns and villages in the North of England have only the coal mine, they have no other industries. The miners wanted a planned job creation scheme, replacing the mines with alternative industries. The government’s stance against the miners was ideological, so this was an alternative that was never going to happen”, Chris Killip analyses.

Photographs of a world of work that is almost completely submerged in the darkness of a factory, were made for the tyre maker ***Pirelli (1989)***. “I wanted to show the men in this tire making factory as clearly as I could. Because of the darkness of the interior I had to use flash to light them. I embraced the artificiality of this look and its relationship to fashion, film noir and even Soviet realism. This workplace had become, in a real sense for me, a theatre. I was recording the perpetual reenactment of an enforced ritual with its own demanding tune, the one that we call work”, Chris Killip explains. In 1998 Chris Killip published a large number of his photographs from the North East of England in his much admired book *In Flagrante* for which he received the Henri Cartier-Bresson Prize the following year. For his most recent projects, *History on places of memory*, and *Pilgrims* his work from Ireland, Chris Killip used color photography for the first time.

About the last series shown at the exhibition, ***History (Historia) (1990-1996)***, the photographer says: “The moment you make a photograph you consign whatever you photograph to the past as that specific moment no longer exists, it is history. The photography that I practice takes place in a specific time and place, depicting real moments in people’s lives. In some ways I think of myself as a historian, but not of the word. History is most often written from a distance, and rarely from the viewpoint of those who endured it”, the artist finishes.

### **More information about the artist**

Chris Killip (Douglas, Isle of Man, 1946) is a photographer and professor at Harvard University's Department of Visual and Environmental Studies (VES). Since the 1970s he has been documenting Great Britain's industrial past in photographs. In 1977 he helped created the pioneer independent gallery Side Gallery, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and he served as its director for two years. He won the Henri Cartier Bresson Prize in 1989. With his independent photographic work and curatorial initiatives, he proved an important influence in the 1980's and 90's and continues to be for a younger generation of photographers. Since 1994, Chris Killip has been a professor in the department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University in the USA. His work can be found in the permanent collection of museums such as New York City's MoMA, the George Eastman House in Rochester, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

### **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

#### **Encounter Chris Killip**

This talk, organised in connection with the exhibition *Chris Killip. trabajo / work*, is a unique opportunity to learn about the work of one of today's most important documentary photographers. The artist himself leads the visit through the exhibition, in which his photography is shown as a real and poetic document of the living conditions of the British working class, within the tradition of direct photography. Este encuentro, planteado en relación a la exposición *Chris Killip. trabajo/work*, supone una ocasión única para conocer la obra de uno de los fotógrafos documentales más destacados. El propio artista propone un recorrido comentado por la muestra, en la que su fotografía se articula como un documento real y poético de las condiciones de vida de la clase obrera británica, dentro de la tradición de la fotografía directa.

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