

**LES DOUCHES
LA GALERIE**

PRESS KIT

HOMER SYKES

MY BRITAIN 1970-1980

SEPTEMBER 5 –OCTOBER 31, 2015

From Wednesday to Saturday, 2-7 pm and by appointment

Opening on September 5th , 2-7 pm



©Homer Sykes/Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie

The work of the British photographer Homer Sykes (born in 1949) remains largely unknown in France. It was at the beginning of the 1970s that this Canadian-born photographer became a photojournalist. He freelanced for various magazines and newspapers, such as The Observer, The Telegraph, Time and Newsweek, covering conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. It wasn't long however before Homer Sykes began to take an interest in his own country, in particular its typical customs and traditions. After the 2014 summer exhibition at the Maison de la Photographie Robert Doisneau in Gentilly, Les Douches la Galerie goes back over the 70's and 80's, two decades during which he was at the centre of everyday life, observing both the country's folklore and transformations, as the United Kingdom traversed a period of crisis, its society racked by doubt and seeking to reinvent itself through a new pop-rock culture.

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HOMER SYKES

MY BRITAIN 1970-1980

Homer Sykes belongs to a talented generation of British photographers alongside Martin Parr, Chris Killip, Graham Smith, Chris Steel Perkins and Ray-Jones; a generation which, from the very start, saw photography in terms of style and asserted their aesthetic choices in works that were as informative as they were creative. At the beginning of the 1970s, Sykes, who was on the look out for a new and rarely documented subject, decided to go to Lancashire in the North of England to take photos of the traditional Easter celebrations. He didn't know it at the time, but this would mark the start of a project that would last several years investigating Britain's customs and traditions. In 1977, he published his first book, *Once a Year – Some Traditional British Customs* that listed and illustrated Britain's festivals and folkloric customs at a period when his countrymen were losing touch with what it meant to be British. Some of these traditions, whose meaning and origins were lost in the mists of time, seemed completely anachronistic at the start of the 70s, in a world that was becoming more modern by the day.

The first twenty years of Homer Sykes' career coincided with a period of widespread economic transformation in the UK. The crisis provided the backdrop to all his photos in which he chronicled the working class, the working day and mining towns, where piles of coal littered the back yards, and in which his protagonists went about their tragic or burlesque lives. If humour is a constant in Sykes' work, it is never caustic or ironic: the poor and downtrodden and Britain's ruling classes are both observed with the same watchful eye, the same approach, which aims to show how they behave in banal or incongruous situations. And yet the juxtaposition of images of these two very different worlds is enough to perceive the gaping chasm that divides them, and to understand the reasons for the social malaise that prevailed in Britain at that time.

Most of the images selected for this exhibition are characterized by the presence of several people in the same frame. In fact, the structure of Homer Sykes' photos is often based on two or three main figures that stand out and reveal their character through their expressions or attitudes. There is no overly obvious 'mise en scène' or composition, just a keen eye and a systematic method of shooting using a short focal length. This is preceded by some preliminary observation and a certain English manner, both frank and courteous, of approaching people, whom he sometimes photographs at very close range. Surprisingly his subjects seem not to notice the photographer, present at the event, but invisible in the image. Discretion is Homer Sykes' trademark: "My pictures are about people, what they wear, how they look, how they interact with each other, against a background that sets the scene. They are not about me".

And finally, it would be hard to talk about Homer Sykes' photos without evoking the abundance of different musical styles that emerged in the UK over these two decades. In the 70s and 80s, England invented and exported Glam rock, Punk rock, Ska, New wave and New Romanticism, etc, with an impressive list of groups and singers who dominated the international music scene. If Homer Sykes rubbed shoulders with Paul and Linda McCartney

or the future Boy George, it wasn't with the idea of making them into icons, but only to follow and observe them in their everyday context, on tour or in clubs: "I am not a rock and pop photographer, I photograph people", he explained. Sykes approached pop music via the forms of sub and counter-culture that it gave birth to. He perceived in the punk and skinhead movements the fashion phenomenon that would soon become widespread in a generation of young people intent on rebellion. And if he went to the Blitz Club in Covent Garden (London) at the beginning of the 80s, it was simply to observe the New Romantics with their make-up and languid posing.

Michael Houlette

HOMER SYKES

SELECTION OF WORKS

Margaret and Barry Kirkbride. Workington, Cumbria, 1975

Modern gelatin silver print, 2015

Image size: 18 x 12 inches

Print size: 20 x 16 inches

n° 1/4

Vintage gelatin silver print available

Size image: 9 x 6 inches

Print size: 12 x 9,5 inches

Printed by Grove Hardy



Blacksanding, sunday morning, under Brighton Pier looking for coins that are washed up. Brighton, Sussex, 1970

Modern gelatin silver print, 2015

Image size: 18 x 12 inches

Print size: 20 x 16 inches

n° 1/4



Couple ignoring the incoming tide, Southend on Sea, Essex, 1969

Modern gelatin silver print, 2015

Image size: 18 x 12 inches

Print size: 20 x 16 inches

n° 1/4



An English summer day, Southend on Sea, Essex, Saturday 17 August, 1974

Modern gelatin silver print, 2105

Image size: 18 x 12 inches

Print size: 20 x 16 inches

n° 1/4



Boys dancing together at the Blitz Club, Covent Garden, London. 1980

Modern gelatin silver print, 2015

Image size: 14 x 9 inches

Print size: 16 x 12 inches

n°1/8



Dancing The Night Away at the Blitz Club, Covent Garden, London. 1980

Modern gelatin silver print, 2105
Image size: 14 x 9 inches
Print size: 16 x 12 inches
n°1/8



Factory worker going home, Salts Cotton Mill, Saltaire, Yorkshire. 1981

Modern gelatin silver print, 2105
Image size: 14 x 9 inches
Print size: 16 x 12 inches
n°1/8

Vintage gelatin silver print available
Image size: 9 x 6 inches
Print size: 10 x 8 inches
Printed by Grove Hardy



Eton Harrow cricket match, 1975

Vintage gelatin silver print
Image size: 9 x 6 inches
Print size: 7,5 x 10 inches



Chef's Dinners East London, 1974

Modern gelatin silver print, 2105
Image size: 14 x 9 inches
Print size: 16 x 12 inches
n°1/8



Man jumping off the back of a lorry, 1970

Vintage gelatin silver print
Image size: 5,5 x 9 inches
Print size: 8 x 10 inches



HOMER SYKES

SOLO EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

- 2014 *England 1970–1980*, Maison de la photographie Robert Doisneau, Gentilly. France
- 2009 *Greens Man and Friends, photographs from the 1970s*, WPS Hastings. England
- 2005 *Festivals of Photography and Contemporary Art* Biella. Italy
- 2003 *Shanghai Odyssey*, Open Eye Gallery. Liverpool
- 2002 *On the Road Again*, Hereford town hall Hereford Photography Festival. England
- 1977 *Traditional British Calendar Customs*, Arnolfini Gallery. Bristol, Side Gallery Newcastle.

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2014 *The Male Gaze*. James Hyman Gallery. With Bill Brandt, Jacob Epstein, Lucian Freud, Henry Moore, Matthew Smith, Walter Sickert and Keith Vaughan. London
- 2013 *Photo 50: A Cyclical Poem Business Design Center With Dorothy Bohm*, Markéta Luskačová, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Brian Griffin, Chris Steele-Perkins, Ian Beesley and Paul Hill. London
- 2013 *Country Matters*. James Hyman Gallery, With Bert Hardy, Roger Mayne, Tony Ray-Jones, Colin Jones, Chris Killip, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Martin Parr, Mark Power, Anna Fox, Ken Grant. London
- 2013 *Picturing Derry*. Derry Londonderry City of Culture. The City Factory. Derry, With Gilles Caron, Brian Gill, Clive Limpkin, Willie Carson, Larry Doherty, Barney McMonagle, A. W. Martin, Eamon Melaugh, Seán Hillen, Willie Doherty and Victor Sloan. Derry-Irlande
- 2012 *Goodbye London: Radical art and politics in the seventies*, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst. With Stuart Brisley, Victor Burgin, David Hall, Margaret Harrison, Derek Jarman, Peter Kennard, Jo Spence, and John Savage. Berlin
- 2011 *Mass Photography: Blackpool through the Camera*, Grundy Art Gallery Blackpool.
- 2011 *A Record of England*. MAC. With Daniel Meadows. Birmingham
- 2010 *The Other Britain Revisited: Photographs from New Society*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
- 2008 *Unpopular culture*. De La Warr Pavilion. Bexhill. England
- 2008 *No Such Thing as Society: Photography in Britain 1968–1987*, Aberystwyth Arts Centre; Tullie House. Carlisle; Ujazdów Castle. Warsaw
- 2007 *How We Are: Photographing Britain*. Tate Britain. London
- 2007 *Viva, une agence photographique*, Jeu de Paume. Paris