

Jason Hynes

Hearing from Artists

Jason Hynes is a photographer who makes work reflecting on place and memory. He was born in and lives in Middlesbrough. In September 2020, MIMA is exhibiting a selection of works from his series The Few, a project made during the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown. He is in conversation with Elinor Morgan, Head of Programme, in September 2020.

EM: What is important to you about the medium of photography?

JH: Honesty is important to me in photography, in other photographers' work and in my own: the honesty of the idea, the story, the representation of the person photographed and ultimately being honest to myself in regards to the work, edit and outcome. But is photography an honest view of the world? I think only in the aspect that it records a moment of time at a certain point in time. Beyond that it is whatever idea, concept or meaning the artist or viewer places around it. Because of this, photography is very limiting but also limitless.

EM: Your work is deeply rooted in the Tees Valley where you grew up in and now live. You often document its people, domestic spaces and urban landscapes. How do you think about your relationship with place and memory?

JH: Place and memory are entwined and I don't think one can exist without the other.



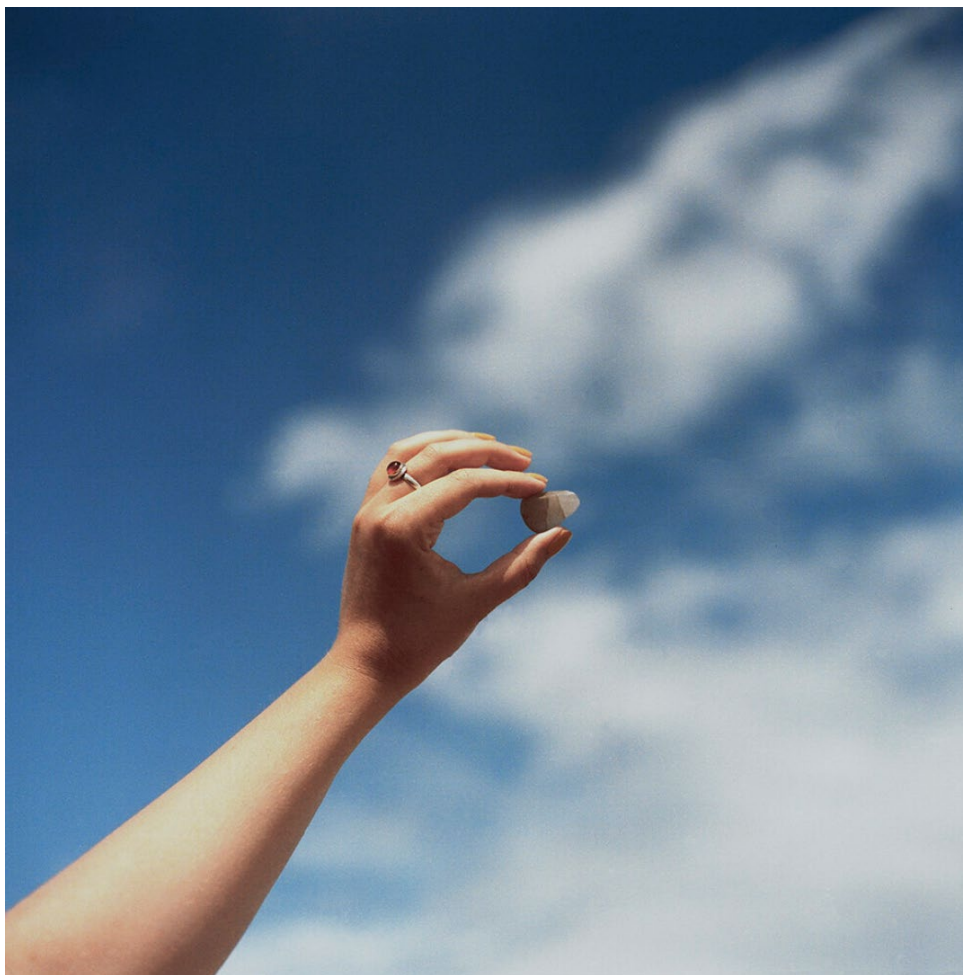
Untitled – Montrose Street, 2008, courtesy of the artist

Our memories have no hook to hang from if place is removed. I was born and brought up in Middlesbrough, so it is natural that my work would reflect the area but my relationship with place and memory isn't necessarily limited to Teesside, so other memories, places, experiences also inform my work, sometimes more so. A lot of my work explores people's memories of place and how they view their connection to their immediate environment; in many ways I see this as the foundation of my work.

EM: How did your series, *The Few*, initiated during Covid-19 lockdown, come about?

JH: When it became apparent that Covid-19 was going to drastically alter the way we lived our lives in the short term and possibly for many years to come I realised that I had to document this time in some way. There were constraints: no travel outside of the area, social distancing etc., so the project already had its limitations to work with. But those limitations gave me a structure to work from.

I contacted all of the places that were on the government's checklist of key workers and waited for a yes or a no to my proposal of photographing their portrait. Many came back with a no, which was understandable given the circumstances but the positive responses came in gradually too, and like many projects, when one door opens another one opens a little more.



Untitled – Solstice (ongoing project), 2020, courtesy of the artist

Anne, a food bank lead volunteer, helped enormously and got four more people on board. The generosity of people's time and spirit is probably the greatest thing I will take from the project, that and the hope that the project shines a greater light on the importance of those whose work is too often overlooked or undermined by governments and employers.

EM: Do you consider your work to be political?

JH: My work rarely begins as a political idea; the majority of my projects are born from a thought, memory or story and from there it develops into a project that may or may not be politically charged. Having grown up and living in the north east, especially during the 1980's, I can't really not be politicised.

EM: How do you go about capturing images? What is your process of scoping, composing and editing your work?

JH: I don't have a definitive way of approaching a project, some I shoot quickly others are long term projects. All are photographed on film, and this is purely because I have always separated my commercial work, which is shot digitally, from my personal project work, which is shot on film, I see differently through a film camera than a digital camera. I don't fully understand this, maybe it is the familiarity of film, the history and my personal history with it.

Composition tends to be something that I don't think about. From a very young age, I've always drawn and painted so I have a strong sense of composition and it is now something that comes naturally when working. My editing process is unusual for someone using film as I find it easier to edit on a screen. I'll scan the negatives and create a slideshow and move the images around until I find an edit that works. The majority of the time I use instinct to get a basic edit and from there hone it into a more concise edit.



Dean; Neighbourhood Safety Warden – *The Few*, 2020, courtesy of the artist



Untitled – *The River* (ongoing project), 2019, courtesy of the artist

EM: How has your practice shifted with the increased presence of social media and its use of images.

JH: Social media is ultimately a marketing and self-promotional tool; it hasn't shifted my practice in the sense of how I photograph or think of photography. Having said this, it has added to how I research or find new photography, photographers, galleries, agencies and other interesting contacts and creative people.

EM: You recently initiated *A Little Forest*, which is a library and archive of photographic publications. How does this work and what do you hope will come from it?

JH: *A Little Forest* works by subscription, a one of fee of £25 a year gets the subscriber a choice of zines/publications to read which are posted out to them and then once read they return with in a month. It's still early days for ALF

and I am looking at how things can improve in regards to subscriptions and generating more publications for the library such as donations from photographers and companies. The main emphasis is the sharing of new and established photographers' work and building a community around this which will hopefully one day expand from a library to a publisher of photographers' publications.

EM: What are you currently working on and planning for the future?

JH: I am currently working on three personal projects all based in Middlesbrough.

Let Your Light Shine is a project that takes me back to the Pallister Park estate in Middlesbrough. My secondary school's motto was 'Let Your Light Shine' and working with young people at Pallister Park Community Centre I will be exploring the idea of talent, particularly the burgeoning talent amongst



John - Hometown (ongoing project), 2020, courtesy of the artist

the young people of the area now, as well as exploring its fragility and what can motivate or hinder a talented individual with their progression.

The River is a project that explores the idea of identity and place. Working with refugees and asylum-seekers in Middlesbrough I will be exploring how their use of the River Tees, from Middlesbrough to Stockton, relates to the immediate environment and social and economic history of the town and river as a beacon for new settlers.

Hometown is a project that will celebrate 200 years of Middlesbrough in 2030. Once completed, it will be a series of 200 portraits of people from Middlesbrough, whether they were born here, relocated to the area, or have moved away, who regard Middlesbrough as their hometown. With each portrait a handwritten personal testimony of memories, recollections and thoughts about Middlesbrough is collected and will be exhibited alongside the portraits. A book will also be produced and donated to the town. People wanting to be involved in *Hometown* should contact me at jason@jasonhynes.uk.