

Allusions of Value

Exploring the Public Sphere in Cumberland



Created to accompany the exhibition 'Allusions of Value:
Exploring the Public Sphere in Cumberland'.

At Tullie, Carlisle 22nd June - 19th July 2023.



“The field and the roadside, the shop and the mill, the institute of the poor the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street... are the topics of the time that art should treat”.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Preface

Celebrating Cumberland and its citizens in all its diversity these images make the essential point that we are all part of one world, a global public sphere within which we live our lives and which we all contribute to and are confronted by. They also look to represent issues we address every day, diversity, urban decay, environmental degradation, loneliness, and globalisation.

For an organisation like Cumberland Council we need a convincing answer to how we address these issues we face now and in the future. To this end Cumberland Council are delighted to work in collaboration with Westlakes Research Limited and UCLan in their public value project which focuses upon the relationship between citizens and society in the communities of Cumberland.

Mark Fryer, Leader of Cumberland Council.

Introduction

This exhibition focuses upon the scope and substance of public value looking at the world we live in and representing the things we value by exploring the public sphere in Cumberland.

The idea of this exhibition came from work in the Applied Policy Science Unit at the University of Central Lancashire's Westlakes campus in partnership with Westlakes Research Limited. For almost a decade we've been engaged in assessing and advising on the concept of public value, working with colleagues from organisations as diverse as the European Space Agency and the National Nuclear Archive in Caithness. A key question we've found in our work is how to articulate what public value is and express where it is to be found. Oftentimes, organisations create public value without realising it, they make a contribution to society without appreciating its scope and scale. However, there is usually an emphasis solely upon money and markets, which are undoubtedly important, but do not give a complete assessment of value.

The concept of 'Public value' focuses upon what the public values looking at the level of the individual citizen seen through the lens of their beliefs and values - the universal human value set which we all hold, which we individually and contextually arrange. Shaped by our eternal past and influenced by the perpetual present in which we live and the sometimes-uncertain future we aspire to, the concept of human values is a revealing way of representing our world inside which we use to make sense of, and interact with, the world we live in.

Public value is constantly created, it is a dialogic process which reflects the human values which form its foundation. The active public value making process is an essentially dialogic, human process, it's about our relationship with the world, with the public sphere in which we live and with others who live in it. The concept of public value foregrounds the notion of putting human values at the heart of policy design and implementation, it comes into being when people perceive a positive contribution has been made to society. Public value is an inclusive, relational and democratic notion based upon what constitutes and contributes to the 'Common Good'.

But how to represent public value? Public value draws attention to the conditions of society and its people, in the settings in which they live and with which they are familiar. Photographs of social settings can be a source of understanding here and may be regarded as a window through which we see, but also as a mirror of the subjectivity and sensibility of the photographer. What we have tried to do here is show settings and situations which reflect and reveal public value, the wider human experience and suggest the issues which bear upon us all and shape the public sphere in which we live.

What we've aimed for with this exhibition is to create a visual experience appreciating the aesthetic of the everyday world we live in and of the scope and scale of public value. With this exhibition we hope that we can express those relations and how they 'resonate' with us.

The photographs in this exhibition are arranged into three 'chapters' each containing elements which foreground a particular aspect of the public sphere within which we live. These are...

- The social world of family, people and society;
- The material world of things, objects, and artifacts; and
- The wider world, of relationships to nature, religion, history, life and ultimate reality as a whole.

This exhibition creates an aesthetic of human experience through which we are encouraged to explore and reflect on the public sphere. We hope that it gives the viewer an experience which celebrates our relationship with our environment and each other, the forces which bear upon it and wider, public value of the world we live in.

**Michael Heaslip,
Chairman of Westlakes Research Limited**

Forewords

This exhibition is part of our public value programme at Westlakes Research Limited in partnership with UCLan's Applied Policy Science Unit. It is about the public sphere and our relationship with it, about the places and spaces we live in and the things which resonate with us, which draw our attention and which we value.

The camera is good at recording what's in front of it, but the photographer must have the idea, without which you have only description. In these images Rick's photographs reveal insights about the world we live in, they explore the importance of the spaces and settings in which we live - vignettes of daily lives in Cumberland alluding to the value of these spaces and places.

The images presented in a very deliberate yet apparently casual way, each fragment of reality revealing an aspect of the warp and weft of the social and cultural fabric of Cumberland. Street views from pavements and pathways showing details sometimes enhanced by the fall of light, capturing roads, housing and homes, signs and shops, cemeteries and the fleeting moments of cars and lorries passing by.

These images allude to relationships, to the economy, to the passage of time and the things we do and use in our daily lives, the impact on the natural environment, and the wider things we respect and reach for in our lives and which transcend the commonplace, yet which shape our lives. There is also an undercurrent of alienation in these photographs, from nature, from ourselves from each other and from the present as we are encouraged to focus on the future as society confronts commercialisation, climate change, digitalisation, globalisation and diversity.

In the exhibition's five dozen pictures Rick alludes to relationships, to learning, travel, work, the speed and scale of our daily lives, to life and death and to the presence of a wider connection with the world, to pressures of living, the pleasures of people around us and the presence of our history.

These photographs aim to be accessible, to have 'space' in them for you to read and make your own interpretation of them - the photographer hasn't built a structure that keeps you out but instead has left some room that allows you to have your own 'experience' and form your own view of our relationship with the settings and spaces in which we live and from which as members of the public we derive value.

Professor John Fyfe CBE

An answer to the 'What do these pictures mean' question I would suggest is more likely to be found by examining my intuitive response to the 'What are they telling me about the community in which I live' question. What are they reflecting back to me about my relationship with the place I know?

From the borderlands of Bewcastle to the mountains and valleys of Borrowdale against industrial Workington and Whitehaven; to the estuaries and communities around Ravenglass, against the grandeur of the landscape and settlements of Cumberland; Rick Wylie sets the places we live and lives we lead firmly between a shared past and an uncertain future.

This exhibition focuses upon the public sphere in Cumberland - exploring those spaces and places where we live our lives - and our dialogue with them. The images are not about the picturesque or the grandiose, these pictures draw our attention to human constructions, to the shadow of man cast upon the landscape, to the outputs and outcomes of policy, markets, commerce and to the imprint of the labour of centuries of Cumbrians.

We appreciate that these images make us aware of the here and now, the everyday and the commonplace in the spaces and settings in which we live. They reflect the impact on our communities of the material issues of globalisation, climate change and the digital revolution alongside the dissonance of inequality, exclusion and alienation. These are massive problems which require values - led, as well as technical, solutions. In addressing these complex issues, the 'public value' lens provides an acutely focussed, more nuanced picture that will provoke and inform a conversation which ensures equality, inclusion and a resonating sense of material, personal and mindful wellbeing.

Willie Slavin MBE

Challenged by the universe of relationships between objects in the visual world I'm inspired to select elements that describe our relationship with the world we live in and the forces and issues which bear upon us and shape our lives.

This choice between these elements has been informed by our work in public value which these snapshots of settings from the places in which we live our lives seek to represent.

From these representations of the public sphere hopefully some insights into public value may be revealed.

Dr. Rick Wylie LRPS





























































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