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MS 2478 Papers and photographs deposited by Derek Bishton relating to his involvement with Sidelines agency; Ten.8 collective; Handprint project, and other activities, 1973-1999

Administrative History

Derek Bishton was born in 1948 and educated in Birmingham. He studied English at Cambridge and after graduating in 1970 joined a Thomson newspapers training scheme in Newcastle, working on the 'Newcastle Evening Chronicle' as a trainee reporter. He returned to Birmingham in 1973 to work on 'The Birmingham Post' as Deputy Features Editor. He became involved in work for 'Grapevine', the Birmingham alternative listings magazine, helping with text editing, production and design, and through this became friends with Brian Homer.

He left 'The Birmingham Post' in April 1975, and after a summer spent touring in Europe, started work for a short period as Publicity Officer for Birmingham Arts Lab, based in Tower Street until its amalgamation with Aston University, when it moved to Gosta Green. Bishton produced publicity material, taking photographs, writing copy, producing artwork, and distributing the finished product. He then began working with Brian Homer and 'Sidelines'.

The Sidelines design and publishing agency was conceived by Brian Homer as a 'sideline' to his editing work on the local paper 'Birmingham Broadside' in around 1977. Homer had become involved with producing design work for the Community Development Project in Birmingham, and for the Handsworth Law Centre, All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) and other organisations, and when community groups began making requests to him to carry out design and production work for their publications, he went freelance from 'Birmingham Broadside'. He separated himself from the magazine in 1978, having seen the potential for more work, and was joined on many of Sidelines original work projects by an informal network of artists, photographers and journalists, some of whom had previously worked on 'Grapevine' and 'Birmingham Broadside'. They transferred the knowledge and expertise gained through this work to set up Sidelines as an alternative design and publishing agency that specialised in working for community groups, offering a professional service at affordable rates. In addition to community organisations, work was commissioned by trade union groups and produced material for May Day demonstrations, and also designed 'Searchlight', the international anti-fascist magazine. It began by designing for print publications, but later became involved with bigger projects.

Derek Bishton had extensive input into Sidelines' production of the Birmingham Community Development Project final reports, and to publications for AFFOR. In 1977 Brian Homer and Derek Bishton agreed on a more formal working

partnership, and the agency moved to 81 Grove Lane in Handsworth, premises previously occupied by the Handsworth Law Centre. John Reardon, a photographer and journalist, joined Sidelines in 1979 to help to distribute 'Movement of the Jah People', published in collaboration with AFFOR. Derek Bishton and Brian Homer developed an interest in photography projects as a result of contact with people on the West Midlands Arts photography advisory committee, including Nick Hedges and John Taylor. One of these was the Handsworth Self Portrait project, undertaken by Bishton, Reardon and Homer as a separate initiative from Sidelines in the late summer of 1979. Sidelines also ran the community photography project at Westminster Endeavour for Learning and Development (WELD), a community arts and education project in Handsworth, working as tutors and running the dark room alongside their other contract work with the agency during the winter of 1979-1980.

The Ten.8 collective was established in 1979 by Bishton, Homer and Reardon together with other photographers working in Birmingham. It ran a magazine in various formats from 1979 and Derek Bishton remained on the editorial board until the publication closed in 1994. A number of Birmingham and West Midlands based photographers and writers were members of the collective, and were involved in editing and producing work for the magazine. Ten.8 received funding from West Midlands Arts, and from the Arts Council of Great Britain but towards the end of its existence it operated as Ten.8 Ltd. The exhibition service, Ten.8 Touring was set up in October 1986, and functioned until the early 1990s. This service was run by Rhonda Wilson, Darryl Georgiou and Richard Gagola, who was touring organiser. Ten.8 Touring aimed to promote local work in existing galleries and exhibition spaces and to establish new outlets for photographic work. For a more detailed history of Ten.8 magazine and Ten.8 Touring, see MS 2478/B/5.

Sidelines expanded at the end of the 1970s to run as a collective with Bishton, Homer and Reardon, and also Rhonda Wilson, Roy Peters and Orde Eliason. The agency ran into financial difficulties in 1981 and was dissolved, with the three founding members of the collective, Homer, Bishton and Reardon, taking on the financial burden. Brian Homer continued to work alone as Brian Homer Design with the same kind of clients that Sidelines had, and worked for a period with Mark Blackstock as Image Design. He did design work for Nick Hedges and also worked closely with Steve Bell. He moved to Wales in c.1989, and when he returned to Birmingham in c.1994 he set up Homer Creative.

Derek Bishton continued to do some work with Brian Homer after the dissolution of Sidelines, and worked with John Reardon to create Home Front. This evolved out of work Sidelines had published in the Observer after the 1981 uprisings which formed part of an increasing archive of images taken by Reardon and Bishton, both from commissioned work and personal interest, that related to communities in Handsworth. A selection of photographs from this collection was gathered for a book published in 1984 by Jonathan Cape with an introduction by

Salman Rushdie and text by Derek Bishton. A laminated exhibition of Home Front prints was held at the Triangle Photography Gallery, and a smaller exhibition of prints, largely those by John Reardon, was held at the Photographers Gallery in London. Derek Bishton left Sidelines c.1984, although there was no decisive break as such. John Reardon also left around this time to become a freelance photographer with Katz pictures in London, and travelled extensively. He was also picture editor of 'The Observer' in the mid 1990s. Bishton became more involved in his own photography work, which had matured out of projects he had worked on with Sidelines. These included Blackheart Man: a journey into Rasta (Chatto and Windus), published as a book in 1986 and exhibited as photographs in 1987, and a laminated exhibition of prints taken at the 1983 Sunsplash reggae festival in Jamaica. He was also director of the Triangle Photography Gallery between c.1984 and 1987.

Derek Bishton met Merrise Crooks at WELD in 1979, where she ran literacy lessons. She was also an education worker for Handsworth Alternative Scheme, a National Association for the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NACRO) project. Bishton and Merrise Crooks began working together to create teaching materials that Merrise could use in her work with young black offenders, many of whom had underachieved at school and had become unemployed and involved in petty crime. Merrise had an idea for producing educational materials which reflected black histories and experiences for use in basic education in order to engage with a disaffected audience, and she and Bishton travelled to Jamaica in 1981 to collect resources for this project. These included books, photographs, taped interviews and a selection of slides and tapes. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) granted funding to Handprint Project which was set up in 1983. The project was initially funded as a two year research project to produce a set of pilot publications. It was co-ordinated by Merrise Crooks, with Derek Bishton as Materials Development, and Jennifer Daley as part time secretary. The project also employed several artists and researchers on short term contracts, including Ifemu Omari, Maxine Walker, Claudette Holmes, Alan Hughes and Pogus Caesar. It produced a range of teaching materials, and also created a press cuttings library for use as an educational resource. At the end of the initial research period, Handprint obtained short term funding from other organisations, including the Cadbury Trust fund, West Midlands County Council, Birmingham Inner City Partnership Funding, Tudor Trust, and the World Council of Churches. In 1988 the project obtained tapered funding from the Birmingham Economic Development Unit for three years, with the proviso that it became self financing. Handprint therefore became a Limited Company with premises at Keyhill Drive in Hockley. The project rented out spaces to various arts organisations, including Ten.8 magazine. Handprint began to expand its range of educational publications, which were marketed nationally and internationally. It also distributed a range of black history books and posters from the USA, and produced publications for a range of community groups in Birmingham and elsewhere, in the same way as Sidelines had done, through its Desk Top

Publishing department, headed by Derek Bishton. The project also offered computer training.

By 1991 Handprint was self-financing, but was affected by the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of the groups that had provided the project with income stopped functioning, and despite restructuring and seeking funding, Handprint was forced to close in 1995. Merrise Crooks continued to work in adult education, and is currently a tutor with responsibility for literacy, numeracy, language and dyslexia support at Birmingham City College.

Derek Bishton also worked on two projects with Mark Sealy and Autograph. The first was an audio visual presentation of work by Black British photographers called Rencontres au Noir, which was screened at the Arles international photography festival in July 1993. David Hinds, leader of Birmingham's Steele Pulse reggae bank helped mix the soundtrack, creating a new version of Handsworth Revolution for the show. The second was a revised version of the Arles presentation filmed with a commentary by Professor Stuart Hall and screened at the Photo 98 Festival in Yorkshire

From 1995-2004 Derek Bishton was editor of The Daily Telegraph's website. He is currently a Consultant Editor for the Telegraph Group.

Sources: Interview with Brian Homer July 2005; email exchange with Derek Bishton June 2005; Handprint Project Report 1985; Notes on Handprint provided by Merrise Crooks August 2005

Custodial History

This material came into the possession of Derek Bishton in the course of his work with Sidelines and Ten.8. Papers relating to the Handprint project were in the possession of Derek Bishton and Merrise Crooks. The collection as a whole was deposited with Birmingham City Archives by Derek Bishton in 2001.

Arrangement

The papers have been arranged into three series by type of material.

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This arrangement also broadly reflects the main creative activities of the different agencies and organisations with which Derek Bishton was involved. Material within sections A and B has been arranged chronologically as far as possible. The arrangement of section C retains the original order of the material as it was used by Handprint project.

Description

Photographic prints; related documentary material; publications; press cuttings; posters; and other promotional material collected by Derek Bishton relating to his work for the Ten.8 collective during the late 1970s and 1980s, but also to other organisations that he established or was involved with, including the Ten.8 Touring exhibition service; Sidelines design and publishing agency; and Handprint education project. This material includes various publications of, and promotional material for, community organisations, groups and initiatives in Birmingham for which Bishton undertook documentary photography and design work from the early 1970s until the early 1990s, as well as published work produced by Sidelines, Ten.8 and Handprint.

The photographic prints include work by several documentary photographers based in Birmingham and the West Midlands during the 1980s who had work featured in Ten.8 magazine, or included in West Midlands Arts and Ten.8 Touring exhibitions, including Nick Hedges, Roy Peters, Anna Arnone, Armet Francis, Vanley Burke, Orde Eliason, Janine Wiedel and Rhonda Wilson. There are also some photographs by Derek Bishton, including laminated exhibitions of photographs from the Sunsplash reggae festival in Jamaica, and the laminated exhibition of photographs from the Home Front project by John Reardon and Derek Bishton. In addition, the collection includes photographs taken by members of community arts groups in Birmingham and the surrounding area, and by photography students at Stourbridge College of Art. There is also an amount of photographic and administrative material relating to the Handsworth Self Portrait project, conceived by Bishton together with Brian Homer and John Reardon.

In addition, the collection contains the extensive press cuttings library of the Handprint education project, largely consisting of cuttings relating to issues affecting black people in Britain and abroad during the 1980s and early 1990s. Further information about the scope and content of the press cuttings library can be found at series level, MS 2478/C.

Although the photographs and papers may appear disparate on first examination, they are linked by the emphasis placed by Bishton and his colleagues on social documentary and community photography, and on the need to support groups working for social justice. The artists and photographers whose work is represented here were motivated by a desire to document the lives and experiences of people in inner city communities, and the work of Sidelines to produce publications at affordable rates for organisations providing welfare and support services for black and Asian communities in Birmingham, and for groups tackling racism and discrimination reflects this ethos. With Handprint project, Merrise Crooks, with help from Derek Bishton, provided important resources and support for young black people who felt excluded from adult education provision because of the lack of materials reflecting black experience in a positive way. Handprint publications, and the creation of the Handprint press cuttings library, made a significant contribution to changing this situation.

Taken together, the collection constitutes a valuable source for the study of documentary and community photography in Birmingham during the late 1970s and 1980s, and for the study of the work of community arts, education, welfare and activist groups and organisations active in areas of Birmingham with large black and Asian communities, particularly Handsworth. The Handprint press cuttings library provides a resource to view these activities in the wider context of political developments and race relations during this period.

Related material

See also MS 2546: Home Front exhibition prints, stored in Birmingham Central Library Local Studies and History; MS 2547: Blackheart Man exhibition prints, stored in Birmingham Central Library Local Studies and History; complete set of Ten.8 magazines, stored in Birmingham Central Library Arts Languages and Literature, Store BQ779Z028433.

Birmingham City Archives also holds a deposit of photographs by Brian Homer; and some Ten.8 exhibition material. These are not yet catalogued. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) holds forty-four of the original prints from the Handsworth Self Portrait exhibition. Digital images of these prints are available to view on the BMAG online database, BMAGiC, in the topographical views section of the picture library, reference code 1997V184 <http://www.bmagic.org.uk/>

Notes

This catalogue has been prepared as part of the Connecting Histories Project. After consultation among the project team members and advisory board, it was decided to use the terminology developed by the CASBAH project to describe people in the catalogue. Therefore: "the term 'Black' is used to refer to peoples of African descent or those whose ancestry lies either directly, or in part, in the black African or Caribbean diasporas. The term 'Asian' is used to refer to peoples with recent or direct links with Asian countries, in particular those with recent or direct origins in Bangladesh, India, Kashmir, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Both terms include Asian and Black peoples of 'dual heritage' or mixed 'race'. Black and Asian are used as sociopolitical signifiers, and the sociological, political, as well as psychological implications of sharing, or being perceived as belonging to these two 'umbrella' groups must be understood in historical as well as contemporary contexts"

The full wording of the CASBAH project's terminology document can be accessed online at '<http://www.casbah.ac.uk/scope.stm>'. The CASBAH project is "a demonstrator project funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) with the aim of identifying and mapping national research resources relating to Caribbean Studies and the history of Black and Asian people in the UK".

Access status

Access: Partially closed.

Access conditions

Unless otherwise stated, papers are open. A small amount of material in section C of this catalogue is closed under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 and is therefore not available for consultation. This is indicated at file level

Photographic material in this collection may not be reproduced in any format without permission of the copyright holder. In some cases this will be Derek Bishton, but there are a number of photographs in the collection by other photographers, who hold copyright over their work.

Birmingham City Archives will assist where possible in identifying copyright holders, and all reproduction enquiries and requests will be passed on to the photographers concerned.

Copyright: With depositor. Copyright for photographs in this collection rests with the photographer in all cases.

Condition: The condition of material in this collection is good, unless otherwise stated