



Martin Parr  
*Return to Manchester*

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Manchester Art Gallery





# Martin Parr *Return to Manchester*

16 November – 22 April 2019

I remember so well arriving into Manchester in 1970, having travelled from the safety of suburban Surrey. It was exciting and felt very real. Having been a regular visitor to the Bradford area to stay with my grandparents, I had tasted the north and always liked the friendliness and sense of community that was so difficult to find in Surrey.

Martin Parr

Martin Parr is endlessly curious about how we live our lives. He has developed an international reputation for his colourful photographs which capture our times – whether it is the food we eat, the fashions we wear, what we buy or our leisure activities. His images present the familiar in a new and wry way.

Starting his career in Manchester, Parr studied at Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University) from 1970-73. The city had a profound effect on him as it was so different from his childhood home in suburban, affluent Surrey. It sparked his curiosity about people's lives, what it is to live in a Northern, largely working class and diverse city and he embraced his new

context with enthusiasm. After his tutor's intervention which stopped him being expelled from the Polytechnic after his first year, he began making cohesive documentary projects which explored a particular subject.

Parr has revisited the city many times over the last 45 years to document the lives of Mancunians. Most recently, we invited Parr to create a new body of work - a portrait of the city and its people in 2018. A selection of these prints will enter the gallery's collection. The exhibition brings together Parr's Manchester photographs from his early work in black and white, through colour and then to digital. Ranging from the early 1970s to the present day, his work shows how the lives of Mancunians have changed but also how there is continuity in how we live.

An exhibition catalogue is available to buy in the shop, priced £25.

All images, except the Yates's Wine Lodge series, are shown courtesy Martin Parr

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# Gallery 17

## Early Works 1970 – 75

These individual images were taken while Parr was a student and after he graduated. Parr captured people in pubs, dances and on the street in various locations including Hulme, Moss Side, Rusholme and Longsight. This selection includes an image taken in 1970 which won Parr his first ever award and his first colour photograph taken in 1973 which was set as a student assignment.

## June Street with Daniel Meadows 1972

Parr and his fellow student Daniel Meadows wanted to find the 'real' Coronation Street. The actual road on which the TV soap was based had been demolished but they found a similar row of terraces nearby in June Street. This street was also due to be flattened and the images capture a community on the verge of disappearing. Parr and Meadows asked the residents if they could photograph them in their front rooms. Here we see the groups smiling, something which Parr later discouraged as it encourages us to connect with the pictures emotionally rather than engage with the visual elements of an image. The series has become a document of family life in Salford in the early 1970s, with family groups gathered around fireplaces or TVs, with ornaments, pictures, patterned wallpaper

and carpets. This was where Parr's interest in kitsch and decoration developed and started his lifelong fascination with the ordinariness of everyday life.

### **Bopper Girls 1973**

This small series depicts individual, young female fans of the American band The Osmonds before a concert in Belle Vue. Their devotion is manifest on their shirts, jackets and flared dungarees with badges, rosettes and messages of love to the band. Their similarities in dress and accessories demonstrate their belonging to this particular tribe but by photographing them singly, Parr invites us to see their individuality. This was the start of Parr's interest in self-decoration and ornamentation which has continued throughout his career. The consistent format of the work, with the girls posed in the centre of a square frame, allows us to engage with the subject immediately, without being distracted by elements of the composition.

### **Prestwich Mental Hospital 1972**

This was Parr's first cohesive documentary project. He was introduced to Prestwich Mental Hospital after the brother of his friend had been admitted. Parr said "I was so taken with the place I decided to do some work and sought out permission to photograph there, then got stuck in for the next three months, photographing constantly. Visually it was very striking. The whole atmosphere... you just knew there was scope there.

When you are a 19 year old photographer, you have aspirations, but it's difficult to know actually what to say. But suddenly I found something I wanted to articulate. That's when [my photography] really took off."

There was a lot of activity at the hospital including dances held every Wednesday, football games every Thursday afternoon in winter and an annual fancy dress dance. The images demonstrate Parr's engagement with the patients and how he was able to build a rapport so they felt comfortable having their photographs taken, a few even playing up to the camera. What could have been quite bleak, institutional images in fact reveal the humanity which Parr captured, even in the very early stages of his career.

### **Bad Weather 1981**

There are seven Manchester pictures in this larger series set across Britain and Ireland. They show people journeying through the city in bad weather. Weather is our national obsession, our favourite topic of conversation for small talk. Here people battle against bad visibility and driving rain, avoiding puddles, umbrellas blown inside out. Many of the images were captured with an underwater camera and flashgun, so that Parr could shoot in any weather condition. The use of flash allowed him to capture the falling rain which would otherwise be almost invisible and means that the weather comes to the fore within image.

## **Love Cubes 1972**

Parr created a board game, *Love Cubes*, which mixed his interest in photography with conceptual art. He photographed nine heterosexual couples on a rainy afternoon in Manchester city centre, firstly individually and then together; the object of the game was to match up each couple. There is no other information to help with the pairing process except for the details of each person's hair, height and clothes. It plays to the notion that we choose partners who resemble us or dress alike and invites us to get involved and make assumptions about identity. When this series was published in a newspaper 35 years later, one of the couples got in touch – they were still together. You are invited to match up the individuals into pairs.

## **Point of Sale, Salford 1986**

This colour series about changes in shopping habits was commissioned by the Documentary Archive in Salford. Parr's images straddle two worlds. The first are the traditional shops, embedded in the community with shopkeepers who know their customers and offer a high level of service. These are places like neighbourhood hair salons, bakers, ladies outfitters and corner shops or home shopping facilitated by the Avon lady, the Tupperware or lingerie representative. The second world is that of the hypermarkets and soulless shopping centre, heralding the rise of a new brand of impersonal consumerism. In the large anonymous stores, he used



fill in flash which increased the sense of alienation. This series demonstrates how ways of life and communities were changing. Parr's images are wistful for the past but also are imbued with his excitement about the future.

As part of the commission Parr was required to keep a diary, the first of only a few occasions when he has done so. He reflected "One thing is dawning on me: one breed of shops that has survived very well are barbers and hairdressers, these cannot be replaced by hypermarkets, the personal service is vital. As the corner shop slowly vanishes, the centre of gossip and chat must be in these establishments."

### **The Guardian Cities 2008**

In 2008 Parr was commissioned by the Guardian to produce ten exclusive photo-essay supplements, documenting ten British Cities: Manchester, Brighton, Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast, Newcastle, Cambridge and Leeds. Each supplement had 16 pages with about 20 photos in each and text by Parr.

He roamed Greater Manchester, taking pictures in places including Eccles, Stockport, Failsworth, Manchester Ship Canal, The Trafford Centre, Salford Quays, Denton, Moss Side and the Northern Quarter. He remarked on the changes to Manchester since his last visit, the dominance of the supermarket over neighbourhood shops and the regeneration after the 1996 IRA bomb which began Manchester's journey to becoming the internationally important economic and cultural centre it is today.

Parr said "Life moves on, and many of the people and stories I encountered during my brief visit showed me that, while they can build as many supermarkets and hotels as they like, there is still a natural warmth to be found on the streets of Manchester."

This series is his first Manchester work using a digital camera, which he adopted in 2006.

### **Yates's Wine Lodge 1982-3**

Yates's Wine Lodges are the oldest pub chain in the UK, founded in 1884 in Oldham by Peter Yates. Within 20 years there were nearly 20 lodges around Lancashire and whilst they spread nationwide, they retained a stronghold in the North of England. Yates's marketed themselves on being open all day and providing good value food and drink. Parr decided to make a series documenting every branch of Yates's at that time which were mainly in the North West but also further afield in Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham and Wakefield. He was interested in the rituals around drinking and socialising and the people who frequented them. The day in the life of a pub is captured, with people drinking on their own or with friends, the queuing system of drinkers forming an orderly line behind a rail and how the atmosphere changed whether the pub was full or empty. Parr said "the unspoilt, original wine lodges, with their high ceilings and bare floorboards, their pillars and rails for propping yourself upright, seem clearly designed for the determined and joyless business

of taking the quickest route to oblivion.” The images aren’t posed and show Parr’s interest in gestures, glances, movement and composition, which prefigures his more familiar contemporary colour reportage work. On loan from The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

## **Resource Room**

Film by Maria Ruban 2018,  
Duration: 7 minutes 49 seconds

### **Fill in a Postcard**

What memories of Manchester do these images inspire for you? If you were photographing Manchester in 2018, what or who would you include?

# Gallery 18

## Manchester 2018

Ten years after the Guardian Cities project, Parr returned to Manchester again to capture the city and its people in 2018. Commissioned by Manchester Art Gallery, a selection of these images will go into our collection, a permanent legacy from this project. Parr made a number of visits to Manchester from April to August, meeting people shopping, in hairdressers, in a Mosque, in cafes, at markets, in factories, at parties, playing sport and in the gay village. He has captured scientists doing ground-breaking research at the University of Manchester, fans of the city's world famous football teams and the state of the art facilities at the BBC in Media City. During this time the Royal Wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle took place, and Parr was particularly keen to see how Manchester celebrated that occasion. He also spent time at Pride, capturing the celebration of gay culture. This series reveals a diverse, inclusive and multi-cultural city and the breadth of activity which takes place here. It uncovers people's passions, skills, relationships, idiosyncrasies – celebrating the humanity of the everyday.

# Events

**Friday 16 November 12-1pm**

Martin Parr in conversation with Senior Curator  
Natasha Howes  
**Ticket required**

**Wednesday 5 December 7-8pm**

Writers Benjamin Myers and Adelle Stripe read their  
new writings inspired by Martin Parr's photographs.  
**Free admission, ticket required via Manchester  
Literature Festival**

**Wednesday 13th February 1-1.45pm**

Dr Samantha Lackey, Senior Curator, the Whitworth  
and Curator of The Rhubarb Triangle and Other Stories:  
Photographs by Martin Parr at the Hepworth, Wakefield  
in 2016, gives her response to the exhibition.  
**Free admission, no ticket required**

**Friday 29th March 1-1.45pm**

Natasha Howes, curator of Return to Manchester, will  
give a tour of the exhibition.  
**Free admission, no ticket required**

**Wednesday 6 March 6.30-7.30pm**

Simon Bray, Photographer and Producer of the new  
commissioned work gives his insights into working  
with Martin Parr.  
**Free admission, no ticket required**

**Wednesday 3 April 7-8pm**

Paul Herrmann, Photographer and Director of Redeye, The Photography Network, gives his response to the exhibition.

**Free admission, no ticket required**





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