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Brian Griffin at Steven Kasher Gallery

February 27, 2016



Steven Kasher Gallery presents *Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism*, the first solo exhibition in the United States of the renowned British photographer. The show features over 60 black and white and color photographs, most dating from the Thatcher years, 1979-90. Griffin's great theme is the worldwide disruption of globalization. Brian Griffin has been called "the most unpredictable and influential British portrait photographer of the last decades" by the British Journal of Photography in 2005, and "one of Britain's most influential photographers" by the World Photography Organization in 2015.

Griffin turned the tables on commercial assignment portraiture with a style all his own. When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, business was empowered and labor was belittled. To capture the heroes and victims of Thatcherism and globalization, Griffin invented a new photographic style, *Capitalist Realism*, parodying *Socialist Realism*. Griffin's photographs embody the essence of the decade, modish white-collars, rock

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bands suited up in business-casual and tin lunch-pail toting masons. Inspired by the bureaucratic and claustrophobic world of Kafka, by the French filmmaker Jacques Tati and by German Expressionist cinema, Griffin turned the workplaces in which he photographed into stages and his subjects into actors.



When Griffin made commissioned portraits of businessmen and statesmen he invented a complex ironical approach so that the subjects can be read as sexy, inventive, oblivious, foolish, clever or pompous. Griffin's laborers are monumentalized, but also shown as vulnerable, reclining with the tools of their trade like dead kings in a cathedral. Influenced by the religious iconography encountered in his Christian upbringing, his businessmen and workers are stripped of their personal attributes and their identities are revealed by the historical and social symbols of their professions.

Griffin also explores the impact of this new public order on everyday life. The exhibition includes photographs from two of Griffin's early series' which employ potent metaphors; *Copyright*, 1978, a reproduction of the persecution of Jesus Christ in his own apartment and *London By Night*, 1983, which shows the aftermath of a fictitious nuclear

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attack on London, echoing the fear of the Cold War. Contrary to his whimsical series of businessmen and laborers, *Copyright* and *London by Night* tap into the darker side of the new political agenda; fear, death and loneliness.



Griffin was recognized early on as one of the key British photographers of the 70s and 80s, even called “the photographer of the decade” by the Guardian Newspaper in 1989. Along with Martin Parr, Paul Graham, Graham Smith, Jo Spence and Victor Burgin, Griffin was included in the most important exhibitions devoted to contemporary British photography: *Young British Photographers* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1975 (later touring Europe and the United States); *Portraits of Our Time* at the Photographer’s Gallery in London in 1978; *Three Perspectives on Photography: Recent British Photography* at the Hayward Gallery in 1979; *Ten Contemporary British Photographers* at MIT in 1982; and *British Contemporary Photography Coming of Age* at the Houston Fotofest in 1986.

Griffin is renowned for the idiosyncratic album covers he produced in the 80s for the bands Depeche Mode, Elvis Costello & the Attractions, Devo, Iggy Pop, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Echo and the Bunnymen, and more. In 1991 Griffin “walked away from

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photography,” as he himself remarked, to concentrate on directing advertising commercials and music videos. He returned to photography in 2002. Since 2000 Griffin has had more than fifteen solo shows and four retrospectives worldwide of his photography.