

CRAIG EASTON: IS ANYBODY LISTENING?

‘My job is to shine a light into dark corners, and I want to hold people to account for what I find there.’
Craig Easton.

Is Anybody Listening? is a touring exhibition showcasing two award-winning series of works by photographer and University alumnus Craig Easton. Passionate about politics since his teenage years, Easton aims to challenge the ‘accepted’ narratives and stereotypes presented by and through the mainstream media.

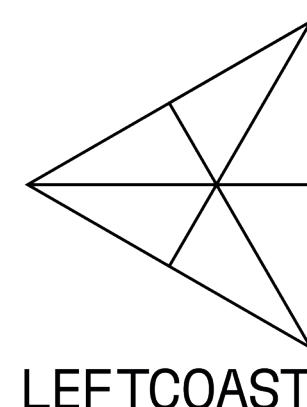
In 2021, Easton was named Photographer of the Year at the prestigious Sony World Photography Awards for his series Bank Top, shot in Blackburn between 2019 and 2021 (before and during Covid). He was awarded second place in the documentary category for the series Thatcher’s Children, started in 1992 and continued in 2016-22. The exhibition brings these two important series of work to a wider audience across the Northwest.

Easton describes his work as being ‘deeply rooted in the documentary tradition’. In order to build trust with his subjects, he invests time getting to know the individuals, families, communities and places. His approach varies, from standing with his large wooden view camera on a street corner in Bank Top, through to attending a Williams’ family wedding. The resulting photographs are beautiful and intimate portraits, full of sensitivity and respect, which provide alternative perspectives to the stereotypes around northern communities, poverty and the notion of ‘culture wars’ so often portrayed by policymakers and the media. These powerful images present an important picture of long-term systemic failure by successive governments to deal with the root causes of inequality and social deprivation. They give a voice to those who are rarely heard.

The exhibition is presented in two parts in Salford with Thatcher’s Children running from 11 September – 27 October in New Adelphi Exhibition Gallery. From 3 November to 22 December Bank Top is displayed both in the gallery and in New Adelphi Atrium alongside work made in response to the project by recent graduates and young people from Little Hulton who have an interest in photography. Both exhibitions aim to encourage and enable conversation and debate about the historical and contemporary policy roots of social inequality, about media representation and about the political rhetoric and track record of governments. Through the wider regional engagement programme Our Time, Our Place, emerging photographers are working with Easton to give them agency in telling their own stories about their lives and communities. Work in progress will be presented at The Northern Eye International Photography Festival in North Wales in October. Final work will be displayed at the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead from 25 January to 30 March 2024.

Craig Easton was born in Edinburgh, brought up in Liverpool and lives in Wirral. He studied Physics at the University of Salford in the 1980’s where he fell in love with photography after joining the student darkroom. He started his career as a photojournalist for The Independent in the early 1990s. BANK TOP, his first monograph published in 2022, was shortlisted for the Rencontres d’Arles Book Awards 2022 and for the Aperture/ParisPhoto Book Award 2022 in the first Photo Book category. His photographs are widely collected by private and public collections including the University of Salford Art Collection, Hull Maritime Museum and St Andrews University Special Collections.

Bank Top and Thatcher’s Children are now available as books published by GOST Books.
20% of proceeds from direct sales of Thatcher’s Children will be donated to The Trussell Trust.
Both books are available from www.craigeaston.com



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BANK TOP

2019 – 2021

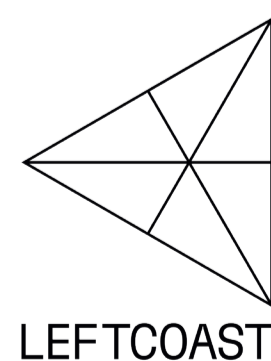
In 2019, Craig Easton was commissioned by Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery to respond to the national media's portrayal of the town as segregated and divided.

Working in Bank Top, a small neighbourhood in Blackburn, Easton has created a portrait of a community. Over a period of time, mainly during the 2020 Covid restrictions, Easton went to Bank Top, took out his large format view camera, and set up his tripod on different street corners. This made him very visible, and residents were curious and approached him to ask what he was doing. Through this process of informal conversations, he was able to build relationships and trust with members of the community he went on to photograph.

Many of the residents are children or grandchildren of immigrants from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities who originally came to Bank Top for work – including those from Ireland and Poland after the Second World War, South Asia in the 1960s and 1970s or more recent arrivals from Eastern Europe. Bank Top is now a diverse and multicultural community with connections across the globe.

Easton often works in collaboration with others. For Bank Top he worked closely with local writer, poet and social researcher Abdul Aziz Hafiz. His poem *Do you SEE me? What do YOU see?* introduces the exhibition, and there is an accompanying essay in the book.

Bank Top also won the prestigious 2023 Arnold Newman Prize for New Directions in Photographic Portraiture (USA).



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THATCHER'S CHILDREN

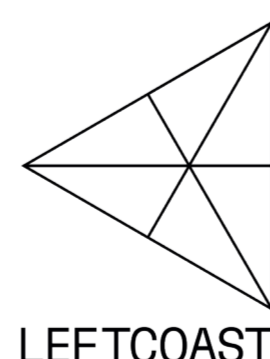
1992, 2016 - 2022

Thatcher's Children is a long-term project, started in 1992 as a series documenting the Williams family - two parents and their six children living in a hostel for homeless families in Blackpool – and trapped in a cycle of unemployment and poverty.

In 2016, Easton reconnected with those six children, now adults spread across Northern England and with more than two dozen children between them. Most of the family are now in work, yet still living in poverty.

The original connection that Easton built in 1992 continued – and the family invited him back in. He visited regularly – accompanying them in their daily life – from shopping and playing in the park to witnessing moments of joy and despair.

These intimate and personal moments of family life tell a much wider story – one of the cyclical nature of poverty and social deprivation, exacerbated by successive governments' failure to tackle social policy, as evidenced by the current cost of living crisis.



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