

# BALTIC

## Media Release

Friday 1 March 2024

## Franki Raffles: *Photography, Activism, Campaign Works*

11 May – 17 November 2024

In May this year, Baltic will present the first ever major retrospective exhibition of Franki Raffles' work titled *Photography, Activism, Campaign Works*. The exhibition will explore her astonishing creative output over a period of ten years from 1984–94 years when she was most active. During this time, she produced around 40,000 images, the majority now residing in the Franki Raffles Photography Collection at the University of St. Andrews.



The exhibition will bring together around three hundred photographs, all printed from original negatives and transparencies, alongside archive material contextualising her work. It will explore how Franki Raffles' photography operated to focus attention on women's lives and work, inequality, gender violence, disability, activism and sisterhood, in her own words, photography as 'a tool for change.' The selection of works will reveal connections between her work at home in Scotland and internationally in the Soviet Union (Russia, Georgia and Ukraine), China, Zimbabwe, the Caribbean, and Israel, where she travelled. The photographs gave an insight into women's lives and the issues that really mattered.

A core section of the exhibition will focus on her major body of work *To Let You Understand*, exploring the possibilities and challenges in the instigation of feminist solidarity between different geographic sites, including a publication and essay examining how 'globalising processes led to gendered divisions and inequalities in labour.' One of Raffles' key projects was with Edinburgh City Council's Women's Unit – titled *Zero Tolerance* Raffles created images and text for a campaign to raise awareness of male violence against women. Her large-scale black and white images of women and girls in staged tableaux were displayed on billboards and buses across Edinburgh and other British cities. These positive images, which avoided presenting women as victims, were juxtaposed with short captions in bold text, which summarised shocking, evidence-based research about the prevalence of male violence against women. The campaign was acknowledged and praised as an innovative campaign delivering a feminist message to a mass audience.

Raffles sadly passed away just before the *Zero Tolerance* campaign was being picked up nationally in 1995. Her extraordinary body of work is not widely known beyond a core group of specialist scholars and photographers, though it is part of an important moment in feminist documentary photography when societal issues, most notably women's labour and gendered violence, were being more widely discussed. Her peers include the Hackney Flashers, Chris Killip and Tish Murtha.

### **Biography**

Raffles was born in Salford and studied at University of St. Andrews. Following her graduation, she moved to Lewis, then to Edinburgh. She documented the lives of women and their work in the UK, predominantly in Scotland, and during travels with her family in the 1980s across Russia, China, Tibet, Nepal, India, Hong Kong and the Philippines. In 1992–93 she secured a Wingate Trust

Scholarship to travel to Israel. In Edinburgh she worked as a freelance photographer with schools and women's groups. She exhibited in Stills Gallery, Edinburgh; Mercury Gallery, London; The Corridor Gallery, Fife; Pearce Institute, Glasgow; and First of May Gallery, Edinburgh. Raffles' life was tragically cut short when she died in childbirth at the age of only thirty-nine.

The Baltic presentation will be the first since the Reid Gallery's exhibition *Franki Raffles: Observing Women at Work* at The Glasgow School of Art in 2017. A large number of the images in the exhibition will be shown publicly for the first time.

### **Note to editors**

About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

Baltic is supported by Arts Council England, Gateshead Council and Northumbria University.

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