

**Chris Killip Retrospective**  
**Baltic 1<sup>st</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2023**  
**Audio Description Script**

The Chris Killip Retrospective exhibition is on the ground floor. On entering the gallery, the walls are painted white with a few feature walls that are a deep red colour. The floor is polished grey paving stones.

The white wall on our right runs to the bottom corner of the gallery. Halfway down this wall, a red wall juts out at 90 degrees and extends five meters across the gallery floor. Displayed on it are some of Chris Killip's early Tyneside photographs.

On the other side of this red wall there is a display cabinet that contains books and leaflets from Chris's work.

The photographs are hung at head height in long lines of single or double rows around the walls. The prints are mostly about 20 inches by 24 inches.

On each wall there are one or two larger prints roughly about 40 x 50 inches, and some groups of four prints hung in a cube shape. The photographs are mounted with a white border inside a thin black frame. The glass in the frame reflects light and other background images.

The point at which we enter is a space given over to Chris Killip's earliest work. From here, the exhibition will be described in an anti-clockwise direction, to follow the biographical order of Chris's work.

At significant points in the exhibition there is a description text on the wall that gives information about the photographs, locations, and people in each section. The descriptions are in black letters on white walls and white letters on the red walls.

After exploring the prints in the main gallery there is an alcove that leads to another smaller gallery where work from Chris's book **Inflagrante** is displayed.

### **Isle of Man 1970-73**

From the entrance we encounter Chris Killip's early photographs from his native Isle of Man. They feature scenes from farming and work. (*E.g. Ploughing, the local blacksmith and his son, a crowd of flat-capped farmers gathered for a farm sale*). There are also portraits of local people.

#### **The Mart, St Johns (1)**

In the foreground of the Mart is the corner of an auction ring. The floor of the ring is sawdust and earth. Farmers, dressed in long overcoats and flat caps, crowd behind fences, looking into the ring ready for the auction. A few female faces are scattered in the crowd.

On the left, the farmers sit side by side in two rows.

The front row is directly behind the fence. The second row sit on a raised platform and look across the heads of the men below.

More farmers stand and lean over the gates and robust wooden fence that runs from the ring corner across to the right side of the photograph.

High above, in the wooden beamed roof, is a narrow skylight that runs the length of the roof. A long shaft of light shines through and catches the flat caps and faces of the men on the front benches.

## **Mr Cubbon, Golden Meadow Mill, Castletown (2)**

Mr Cubbon stands outside the Mill with a pensive expression on his face. He rests his back against the wall and leans forward onto a stout stick, his hands folded one on top of the other.

His head is cocked to his left and he wears a flat cap at a jaunty angle, pushed to the right, so the cap slopes across his right eye.

Mr Cubbon's mouth is firmly shut and turns down. Light reflects on his long nose and the peak of his cap. Although his features appear craggy his skin is smooth, and a smudge of dark hair can be seen above his left ear.

Mr Cubbon wears a knitted V-neck jumper over an open shirt and the collar pokes up around his neck. He has a dark pair of thick work-trousers on, which are worn and creased, and a matching long jacket with wrinkled sleeves that are shiny with wear.

The wall that Mr Cubbon leans against is rendered. Set into the render behind him, on the left, part of a large, round millstone is visible.

## **Castletown Harbour (14)**

Sea waves surge along the harbour wall from the open sea.

Dark clouds crowd in above the houses built along the wall. The sky fills the top two thirds of the photograph.

At the bottom, the harbour wall runs in a long line across the photograph above the sea and a patch of beach. The wall ends on the far right where it meets the sea. Here the walls are crenelated. The backs of some buildings have been built to form part of the wall. There are no boats to be seen.

Streaks of light filter through the dark clouds at the top and the light reflects off the chimney pots on the buildings.

The house fronts are strangely illuminated with a warm glow despite the dark clouds. A four-storey building on the extreme left has five large windows on each storey. The windows seem lit up with the sunlight reflecting off curtains drawn in each window.

A vague outline of hills and trees behind the buildings can be seen through the mist and gloom.

## **Early Work Tyneside, 1974-77**

### **Youth on wall, Jarrow, Tyneside, 1975 ( 27)**

A larger print 40 inches by 49 inches.

A young teenage boy sits curled up on top of a back lane terrace wall. The wall is about waist high and borders the backyard of a brick house.

His back leans on a tall brick wall that divides the backyards.

He has pulled his feet up towards his thighs, so his knees point straight up. He bows his head and presses the top of his forehead on his clenched hand leaning against his knees. His eyes are screwed shut. His head has been shaved at the sides and a thin layer of hair has started to grow back. His hair is thicker on the top up the centre of his head.

The lad is dressed in a grey suit jacket and baggy black trousers that have been hiked up his shins by his sitting position, exposing fawn-shade long, thick socks with old style Doc Martin boots.

### **Looking East on Camp Road, Wallsend, 1975 (105) (three girls)**

A tarmac lane pushes up a small hill. A tall stone wall, on the right side of the lane, borders a railway with Swan Hunters shipyard beyond.

On the left, the lane cuts along the ends of numerous brick terraces that run down towards the shipyard.

A telegraph pole towers up from behind the wall. Beyond that, blotting out a chunk of sky, is an enormous super tanker the 'Tyne Pride', under construction in the shadow of a gigantic crane.

In the left foreground is a house built facing the shipyard. Three small girls play in the road in front of the house.

One girl sits on the kerb of the pavement outside the front door. Her feet sticking out into the road. The pavement curves around the corner of the house onto the adjoining terrace. There is a streetlight on the corner.

The roads are empty but for a parked car outside the end house on the terrace. A sign on the house, above the door reads 'Gerald St'.

The girls are playing a game. The girl on the curb talks to the two girls who stand to attention inside winding chalk lines that loop around the road.

### **Terraced housing, Wallsend 1975 [109]**

The same terraced houses. A thick layer of snow covers the ground. The Tyne Pride is gone, and the shipyard is empty.

The view is slightly further back so we can see a tall wall attached to the side of the front house. Sprayed on the wall in large letters are the words 'don't vote prepare for revolution'.

A small figure in a dark hooded coat trudges up the lane pulling a sledge. A man stands in the middle of the street with his hands in his pockets. His overcoat stands out darkly against the white snow.

### **Demolished housing, Wallsend 1977 [110]**

The same view two years after the photograph of the girls playing in the street. Rubble, bricks and masonry and rolled scraps of wallpaper, are strewn

across the gutters at the side of the road.

The house the girls played in front of is still standing, but its roof is gone. The adjoining wall and graffiti remain.

The terrace further up has completely vanished except for a jagged ruin on the corner with a front doorway and the street name on it. The telegraph pole and streetlight on the corner are still there. The shipyard is gone. The street is empty apart from a man who stands at the top of some steps that lead down to the railway. His hands are pushed into the pockets of his light-coloured coat.

### **West End Bingo Parlour, Newcastle, Tyneside, 1975**

The Bingo Parlour is small single-story building with a paved area in front. In huge capital letters PRIZE BINGO is written above the front entrance along the length of the building. Jutting out from the roof is a wooden overhang.

Underneath, the front of the Bingo Parlour is made with smooth panels below, and large smoked glass panes from waist height up. Metal frames that hold a metal grid have been fixed over the front panels and over the prize bingo sign.

It is a totally built-up area. A road slopes up on the side of the building on the left, with a high brick wall on the other side and a tiny patch of sky in the top left-hand corner.

In the middle at the front there is an open doorway revealing a row of Bingo players. Five women sit at tables in coats and headscarves. A line of five strip lights glare down from above their heads.

Outside a little boy about four years old, stands alone on the pavement. His anorak is zipped up and his trousers droop over his shoes. He holds his hands up to his mouth.

A young man stands inside the doorway looking towards the door.

### **Two girls, Grangetown, Middlesbrough, Teesside, 1976 [22]**

Two girls sit together on the curb of a pavement that runs across the picture, their feet resting on the road. The front of a brick house fills the right-hand side of the picture.

There's an open grassy area on the left.

Streets of houses run behind the open area and on the skyline are factory buildings and five or six tall chimneys partly obscured by the smoke that billows out of them. The smoke drifts sideways towards the left of the picture.

The girl on the right, with fair hair, wears a dark coat and has long white socks with black shoes. Her friend with black hair, wears a black cardigan and skirt and ankle socks with leather shoes. Their knees are bare.

The girl with fair hair is chatting to her friend and has turned towards her. Her friend, props her chin on her hand, listening.

## **Skinningrove 1982-84**

### **Bever, Skinningrove, N. Yorkshire, 1980 (20)**

Larger print, 40 by 48 inches.

Bever, a lad in his late teens, leans his left arm along the roof above the driver's door of a hatchback car. His friend has rolled down the window to chat and leans out, his right elbow hooked over the door and his hands linked together on top of the sill.

Bever has his head twisted to one side, away from the driver, with his eyes shut and his mouth slightly open. His mid-tone hair is long over his ears, cut evenly round to above his shoulders at the back. He has a long tattoo made-up of letters across his throat.

Bever wears a check design, V-neck sweater, with black sleeves. He hooks his right thumb into the pocket of his light-coloured jeans. The picture cuts to just above his knees.

His friend looks a little older, with his dark hair cut neatly short. He wears a white polo shirt, and his arms are bare. He has a large watch on his left wrist.

Behind the lads is a wide, tarmacked slipway that slopes down to the left towards the beach. A larger hatchback, like an old Ford Fiesta, is parked on the edge of the slipway, pointing downwards. In front of the car's bonnet, breaking waves can be seen down below on a small triangle of beach at the edge of the picture. Beyond is the distant horizon of the sea with a flat grey sky above.

Up the bank, behind Bever, is a wooden shed. The door stands open and a lobster pot hangs outside by a rope. The top half of a stable door been opened in the side of the shed.

### **Whippet holding LP 'punk and disorderly', Toothy and Bever 1983 Skinningrove (100)**

Three lads are gathered by a boat on the beach. Whippet in his punk clothing and Mohican hairstyle sits in the foreground, dangling his legs from the covered bonnet of a tractor. He clutches a copy of the Punk and Disorderly LP in his right hand, and it rests behind his right leg which is pushed up against the tractor's front tyre.

The boat is 15 feet long and mounted on a low loader that they use to get the boat in and out of the sea. The boat hull is shaped from beautifully curved wood. It's name, **Patsy Joy**, is painted in white letters on the side of the pointed bow next to where Whippet is sitting.

On the right is a pile of neatly stacked lobster pots made from wooden frames with sturdy netting. Bever, dressed in overalls tucked into his wellies, sorts the pots from the pile to pass to Toothy in the stern of the boat.



### **Leso at sea (90)**

The figure of Leso, from the top of his legs up, dominates the picture as he stands at the tiller of his fishing boat. The wooden tiller is jointed directly to the top of the rudder on the stern of his little fishing vessel. Leso holds the tiller in his left hand, and he leans, almost sitting, on the starboard side of the boat where he rests his right hand.

The sea surrounds him, and the right-hand side of the picture is filled with the North Sea to the horizon.

Leso casts a steady gaze over the sea. He has turned his head and looks sideways across his left shoulder, his face in profile. Leso has strong features with a firm mouth. His fair hair is cut neatly and brushed forwards on the top and shaped, so we see his right ear. Sunlight reflects off his face as he guides his ship across the North Sea.

The sea churns in the wake of the boat. There is a hazy quality to the ocean that diffuses the light.

The sun glitters on the water. It's light splinters in the choppy waves. A corridor of light runs up the sea on the right to the horizon that can be discerned where the bright, reflected light stops, and the murky mist of the sky takes over.

### **Sea-coal 1981-84**

#### **Gordon on Critch's Cart 1982 (80)**

A young man drives a cart through the breaking surf of Seacoal Beach. Waves crash over the cart's tyre wheels into the seething foam. More large waves form and start to roll in from the open sea behind.

The man is dressed in a flat cap, sweater, waistcoat and waterproof trousers. He stands braced at the front of the flat trailer cart, holding a rein in each hand at chest height. He pulls the right rein back to turn the black cob towards the beach. The pony in the shafts has turned its head towards us, revealing a white blaze down its nose. Its eyes are obscured by large blinkers.

The waves surge, hock deep, around the horse's legs.

Wispy dark grey clouds drift across a light grey sky. The swelling tide on the horizon shimmers as it catches a shaft of sunlight. The man, cart, and pony stand dark against the sky and the foaming waves.

### **Boo on a horse, Seacoal Camp, Lynemouth, Northumbria 1984 (32)**

The frame is filled with the image of Boo, a young teenage boy, sitting on a white pony. He rides without a saddle. His lower leg is tucked inside a Wellington boot.

Boo swivels around to look over his right shoulder. He wears a black duffel coat. His head is covered by the coat's hood, and his face in profile, has a serious expression. Boo's long fair fringe falls across his eyes and nose from under the hood.

The pony's head twists in the other direction from Boo to the left, so we see the crest of its neck and not its face. A thick white mane covers the pony's neck in long wavy strands. The boy's bare right hand grips a rope rein suggesting the pony wears a rope halter.

Boo's black duffel coat splays out across the pony's white back and ribs and creates a dark outline against a misty sky. The white pony stands against a large pile of black sea coal and the bare grey hills behind.

The smooth sides of the pieces of coal catch the light with a dull shine.

**Helen and her hula hoop, Seacoal Camp, Lynemouth,**

**Northumbria 1984 (29)** Young girl, Helen, faces towards us as she plays with her hula-hoop on wasteland on the edge of the Sea Coal camp. She wears a dark, quilted anorak, zipped up to her neck and a black skirt to just below her knees. She has thick, white, patterned socks pulled up to her knees and flat sandals tied on with a buckled strap. The strap on her right sandal is missing.

Across the ground rough grass is growing up through piles of stone. There are poles with wire strung across on the land behind. The beach and the sea are in the distance on the right.

On the left, a large pile of black sea coal looms on the horizon. The horizon tilts sideways from the top left corner to a quarter of the way down the picture on the right, creating a giddy, unbalanced feeling to the photograph. The sea is on a slant.

Where Helen plays there has been a bonfire, pale ashes and burnt-out tin cans lie behind her. Beyond the bonfire, an old armchair lies upside down, it's back on the ground and its arms pointing up to the sky. Further back the metal bones of a bedstead lie abandoned.

A strong breeze is blowing the waves on the sea over into white foam. Helen's long blonde hair is swept across her back to her left side, exposing her right ear. Short wisps of hair escape and fly across her face. Her forehead is a little furrowed with concentration, her lips are parted.

Helen is poised like a flamenco dancer. Her left leg thrust forwards and her skirt is tight around her knee. Her arms are wide at shoulder height, one hand curled up and the other curled down. The hoop has dropped from her waist to the back of her thighs and has just hit the floor at the front.

## **In the time of Inflagrante 1976-87**

### **Royal wedding celebration, North Shields, Tyneside 1981 (62)**

A section of a long table, covered in a white tablecloth fills the foreground. Abandoned plates, half filled with sandwiches and cakes, are strewn across the table.

The table runs up the middle of a terraced street. Across the street, two front doors stand side by side in the centre of the picture.

The door on the left is completely covered in a union flag decoration. The flag runs sideways up the door, and a grinning portrait of Charles and Diana is stuck in the middle, with more pictures of the couple at the top and bottom. Another union flag covers the window above the door.

The neighbour's door is completely bare.

The street is in shadow, but the table catches the sun. Shadow gathers under the edges of the plates and two square patches of shadow fall across the table from some out of sight bunting.

A child, about 10 years old, leans against the stone window ledge of a large sash window of the house on the right. Another child walks past him heading away, the movement has blurred his face and legs.

On the left a woman in a dark jumper and leggings and black, slip-on sandals, walks in the opposite direction, her head is obscured by balloons hanging on a lamp post. The lamp post is on the edge of the picture.

The balloons, two round and three long ones, catch the sun and bob sideways in a breeze.

The street is empty in the middle. Bits of paper rubbish, a squashed cup, and a plate, lie in the gutter by the pavement.

On the table a paper beaker stands in the centre of a pile of half empty plates. There are sandwiches cut into triangles, sausage rolls, and hand decorated cupcakes with smarties in the centre. Paper plates lie empty, covered in crumbs.

### **Durham Miner's gala, Durham, County Durham 1984 (47)**

Miners have gathered for the annual Gala under a flat grey sky. Standing against the sky, in the top left corner, banners from the local pits are held aloft.

In the foreground on the right, a woman stands looking towards the banners. She shelters under an umbrella. The woman has a small child with her. The toddler reaches high to put her hands on the handles of a small upright pram. A large leather bag takes up the seat of the pram.

In the middle ground stand a disparate gathering of three figures who all bear placards. A woman stands looking out to the left with her placard leaning upside down on her legs. It says, 'we can win'. She is wrapped in a cream-coloured long skirt and cardigan with a headscarf tied under her chin.

Behind her, in the middle of the picture, are two men. One holds a large placard up in front of him, so we only see his legs and the bottom of his jacket. The placard reads 'Victory to the miners'. Next to him is a man in a dark suit top and a white shirt tucked into fawn trousers. He stands with his hands in his pockets. The top of his face is covered in a pig mask with a snout and shining cheeks. The pig wears a policeman's helmet with two ears poking through the front. Behind, the crowd mills about with umbrellas and more placards. A long line of miners stands ready to set off on the parade.

### **Father and son watching a parade, West End of Newcastle, Tyneside 1980 (56)**

A large print 40 x 48 inches.

A portrait of a man carrying his son on his shoulders.

The photograph is from the man's waist upwards. Their dark outline contrasts with a sky full of clouds behind. A telegraph pole is silhouetted against bright white cloud in the background.

The man wears a grey suit jacket with a white shirt buttoned to the neck.

His son is about five years old and wears a black duffel coat with his hood up. A fringe hangs down the middle of his forehead. His legs are bare, his feet are tucked into black socks and sandals.

The child's legs dangle down from his dad's shoulders, pushing his dad's suit jacket out of shape. His dad links his arms across his son's legs above his feet. His fingers link together locking into a strong hold.

Father and son look in the same direction. Dad looks out at the parade grinning. His big smile exposes where his front dentures meet his gums.

The boy rests his right arm casually across his father's head, messing up his dad's hair. He rests his other hand on his hip as he gazes out, watching the parade with his dad.