

# Remembering Raymond Moore

1920-1987

Recently Ray Moore, and his wife, the photographer Mary Cooper, and their young son David, were at our cottage in Dentdale, Cumbria. He was wanting to hear Brendel play Haydn sonatas on CD; and had brought a cassette of some pieces by Othmar Schoek and Frank Martin, recently heard on Radio 3, that he wanted us to know about. And, now, we have the news that he has died, finally done in by that bad heart of his. He had lived so long and valiantly with that faulty organ that he seemed impervious - and beyond it.

I have met no one in Britain with that beady eye of his. Very much the sombre, ancient albatross, with his sea-captain's beak and his (always) black sweater. He loved the act of *seeing*. His photographs are filled with extraordinary little touches and visual nuances. There is the one of the house called *Allonby 1982*, perhaps the ugliest house that one has ever seen, yet full of magical detail: white wires, black wires, little reflections, grasses, odd shadows in deed. What a relief his pictures are in a claustrophobic, bland country. The Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Whatever Party, Yuppies, The Poor, The Picturesque, The Documentary - now to do with this man's clear eye for northern light. 'One loves only form', as one poet said it once and for all.

I probably should have sat this sad evening and listened to his favourite, Franz Schubert, that late piano sonata, D. 960. Instead, I went for something bigger, because Raymond Moore was a world-class figure - and it's time the British realised it. The only place to go was to the Adagio of the Bruckner *Eighth Symphony*. The light in the Uplands of England has lost the man who saw it like no one else.

**Jonathan Williams**

I first met Raymond Moore 17 years ago on the station platform at Watford. We had never met before and we both puzzled then at the certain knowledge of our mutual recognition of each other in the midst of the rush hour crowd. I had seen Ray's photographs a few months before in Chicago and found them both mystifying and wonderful. Ray's vision was the kind that got me completely, something I felt deep in the bone, and Ray was such an amiably inquisitive man that it now seems only natural that we became close friends. Easily recognisable to each other.

We spent most of our time together talking about photographs. When we talked about his photographs there was a kind of unspoken acceptance of the language we should use. It was not the same language we used for other photographs. It was less verbose and it seemed to require only the flimsiest of definitions to make our observations understood. We were each captivated by the same mysteries, those often overlooked ambiguities of the substance of our lives wherein we find both our tragedies and the humour that enlivens us. Ray and I sought to understand those mysteries in different ways. He in the discovery of them, unearthing the secrets through the lens and I through some contemplative process that I rarely understand. Seeing those photographs made it seem all so simple, very complete and yet unfathomable.

Today's photographers in Britain will find it hard to fully appreciate just how much they owe to Ray Moore. He worked for nearly two decades in almost total isolation and it was frighteningly painful for him. Yet it was only through a few published pictures and few shows in the early seventies that he rekindled the adventure of the art in an emerging generation of photographers. He began to get a response that was very gratifying for him. The legacy that he leaves is a body of work that, while not physically large, is huge in its power to move us, to change our vision, to see what it is we have not found out about ourselves and to completely enjoy the experience.

**Russ Anderson**  
Weston Gallery, California

'...the first exhibition of the work of a living photographer to be presented by the Welsh Arts Council...' said the catalogue of our exhibition of Raymond Moore's work in June 1968. It should have said '...by any Arts Council in the British Isles'. The notion that photographs *were* visual art was still relatively novel in those days but seemed somehow to be taken for granted in Wales. The exhibition was a great success and toured for ages. It delighted us with its collection of mysterious landscapes, dramatic details and the occasional human incident.

Raymond Moore was a gentle man with a strong and forceful vision. We were glad that he knew Wales so well. He showed us many features of it that we had not previously absorbed in quite that way. Eric de Mare wrote, in the introduction to the catalogue, a passing defence of photography (as an art in its own right). Raymond Moore, he stated, was among the finest of artist-photographers.

Raymond Moore's own statement was as a manifesto dealing with 'the encounter', 'the mirror', 'intense awareness' and 'at-oneness'. He ended with a quotation from Seng Tsan of the seventh century which sought intuitive 'awakening'.

'Follow your nature and accord with the Tao:

Saunter along and stop worrying.

If your thoughts are tied you spoil what is genuine  
Don't be antagonistic to the world of the senses.'

What a wonderful clue to Raymond Moore's attitude (and achievements) as an artist and photographer.

**Peter Jones**  
Arts Director, Welsh Arts Council

'Photography is a means of sifting  
or abstracting visual phenomena -  
it can be solely concerned with  
conveying factual information  
about objects in a particular  
position in time and space - or it  
can convey an awareness or  
revelation of the marvellous...'



The 1970s seemed like a long awaited heyday for

photography as an art medium, bringing more exhibitions, publications and systematic collecting by the Arts Council and the Victoria & Albert Museum. However, the 1981 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London was only the second accorded to a British photographer there. Bill Brandt's 1970 show awakened many gallery-goers to a new respect for the expressive potential of photographs and probably a new interest in the whole medium. Raymond Moore's exhibition is a most appropriate follow-up. He has long been valued internationally as among the few original photographers Britain has produced since the war. Unlike other significant photographic practice, Raymond Moore's work is intended precisely for viewing in the special conditions offered by a first class gallery. The prints unobtrusively reveal exacting graphic skills. However, it is his honesty which makes the exhibition timely. Knowing how his photographs must look to satisfy himself, Moore has hit on an interpretation of contemporary Britain. The photographs master an oblique, poetic accuracy which is very rare.

Raymond Moore was born in Wallasey, Cheshire in 1920. He studied painting at the local art school and at the Royal College of Art (1947-50). His style derived from the lyrical/realist concerns of the Euston Road School until the early 50s when he turned to experimental abstraction. Later he destroyed all but one of his paintings. By 1956 he had begun to photograph in earnest. He sustained his work for the next 20 odd years by teaching - first painting and then photography at Watford School of Art (1950-74), afterwards in the stimulating photography school at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham. He chose to leave to pursue his work completely and since 1979 has lived with his wife in Cumbria. The majestic, decaying countryside and coastline of the North West is the main focus of his current work.

At Watford Moore was in the bracing position of setting up a photography course, finding out over the weekend what his students would be taught on Monday. He used Ansel Adams' technical manuals and stressed non-utilitarian possibilities through books like Otto Steinert's *Subjektive Fotografie* (1952). This anthology was an impressive attempt to recover the Bauhaus spirit in hard times - to insist in response to the decades of catastrophe that technology at least be humanised. The camera had and has the symbolic properties of being highly engineered and popularly available. This spirit deeply attracted

Moore. In his time colleagues at Watford made the school internationally known for innovations in typography and printing which were inspired by the practice of Jan Tschichold and Moholy-Nagy. Steinert intended the word 'subjective' to emphasise 'the creative impulse of the individual' in contradistinction to applied, utilitarian or documentary fields. Moore's try-out pieces drew on models offered by Steinert himself and other photographers working in Europe - Christer Christian, Todd Webb, Daniel Masplet and Hugo Van Wadenoyen. Brandt had some influence on his early, dark, printing style and - outside the anthology but twice exhibited in London in the 50s - Cartier-Bresson gave Moore his photographic ideal. One he was wise enough never to imitate. The first pictures were mostly empty of human association and composed in Broad geometry. Their pictorial events were nuances of texture, the fall of light, elegantly drawn lines. Their laboratory was the Pembrokeshire coast at Marloes.

In the 60s Moore began to feel affinities with Minor White 'and Harry Callahan. Callahan had taught at Moholy's New Bauhaus in Chicago and later became the first photographer to represent the visual art of his country at the Venice Biennale. Moore became friends with both men when he had his first U.S. shows in 1970. He also speaks highly of the witty and often mordant urban realist Lee Friedlander.

Moore's style evolved, as it should from a community of interests. The key ingredient is Moore's sense of what is authentic in himself and the surrounding environment. Not one without the other. True to this necessary equation he worked for the love of what he knew and what had to be discovered again and again. This effort has nothing to do with photojournalism. It is true that in Britain we have at least two major photojournalists - McCullin and Jones-Griffiths - but these redoubtable reporters have so far told us few if unforgettable truths about our country. In contrast, Moore did not write in headlines but has become, like a Philip Larkin, one who quietly and precisely breaks the conspiratorial silence about daily actuality and gradually finds himself essential reading.

Moore's work spares us the solecisms of explaining to us, to adapt Susan Sontag, that there are people in Britain and that they are British, and on the other hand that remote and beautiful places have not changed remotely since 18th century water colours. All his life drawn to such places,

mostly to islands like Skomer, Moore chose to look the other way - into windows, mirrors, and his own mind. The oblique transfiguring light of his photographs illuminates the mood in which most people contemplate their lives at the outset, or onset, of the 1980s.

Years ago, in the catalogue of his first important exhibition, arranged by the Welsh Arts Council in 1968, Moore described his subject:

For me - the no-man's land between the real and fantasy - the mystery in the commonplace - the uncommonness of the commonplace.

Alertness to this fugitive combination of realities shines from the prints on the wall.

Somehow all artists summarise their deepest intentions in a handful of works which inform the whole work. Cartier-Bresson's picture of playing children who ran towards him in some Spanish ruins in the early 30s vouches for the vitality and care of the complete work. Dennis Healey was marvellously exact when he went on TV to review Cartier-Bresson's Hayward show. He found in Blake the skeleton key which opens the complete work: 'He who kisses the joy as it flies/Lives in eternity's sunrise'. One of the equivalent pictures in Moore is the hopscotch pattern marked on a beach, rakingly lit by a low sun before it dips beneath the sea. Without either the hopscotch or the late sunlight there would be no picture. There's no need for Moore to show the dancing gymnastics of the game - we can recall that. He talks of photography as a way of making marks on paper. He chooses evanescence to control the deliberation with which he himself sets down the marks.

Even more revealing of the themes of his work is the dog seen in a mirror in a drab street on Alderney. Reflection opens the world of instinctive sensation experienced by this sunlit creature and places the whole scene under a completely different light. There is the picture of a hillside suspended in its snow like an oriental screen whose calligraphy is spiked with telephone poles and wires. The 'hillside' is actually a coal tip in Nottinghamshire. What is 'timeless' he regards as *timefull* and paradoxically congruous with the ephemeral. Country and town lap each other's shores. Driving through the Connor Pass to the mountains he salutes the final outpost of suburbia which waves a home-made B & B sign and underwrites the strange romance of the whole undertaking. The mountains - he does not need to photograph them.

Interested in transposing hierarchies of value, it seems appropriate that Moore should use a supposedly demotic instrument. He says that the vastly improved lenses of small cameras vitiate the old alternative of

view cameras - which he tried until he realised that the subject (presumably the light) had often gone by the time he'd set up. Habitually photographing with a 35mm camera Moore shows us, like others before him, that there is no mystique in mere technique. Mystique is everywhere except inside a camera. His prints are as satisfying as any being made today, but we can take them as refreshing tourist snapshots if we please. Only we are touring our own terrain, and it is littered with our lives and signs.

**R**aymond Moore's work feeds, I am sure, on the modern poetry he loves and the music he listens to avidly, but feeds most on the taproot of a specific sense of place. He is much associated with the beautiful island of Skomer where he summered for many years, but he grew up in a landscape which is unique in Britain. The Wirral peninsular is an empty plain with nodal points of relatively high ground. To the north is the industrialised waterway of Merseyside. To the south, across the River Dee, are the mountain tops of North Wales. He can still recall very early memories, like the look of light on a building, as far back as the age of two. Exhilarating, complex and flat, this first landscape seems to inform the work. As with Moore's Cumbrian habitat there is some likeness to the childhood landscape glimpsed in the poetry of W.H. Auden, the 'dilapidated province' of the West Midlands. Moore's picture-making recalls Auden's derelict but intricate and vivid topography, which is probably best remembered in *In Praise of Limestone*. Raymond Moore's photographs also embody the difficult virtues of imagination and effort which the poem celebrates. I think particularly of the lines:

... these  
 Are our Common Prayer, whose greatest gift  
 comfort is music  
 Which can be made anywhere

Moore said, somewhat surprisingly, that he was 'violently against self-expression in photography'. His work is refreshingly free of obvious stylization and not easy to classify. It touches on a kind of realism and a kind of topography but is clearly neither. It is most helpful to see his original prints. They are made out of delicate relationships of orders of *light*. This has much to tell us about his pursuit of the marvellous as it can be reflected through a graphic medium. His photographs are probably best described as, in a quite literal but also interior and metaphorical way, illuminations.

**Mark Haworth-Booth**  
**Victoria & Albert Museum**



Raymond Moore (with camera) and Aaron Siskind teaching a workshop at The Photographers' Place, Derbyshire, 1979

I never have anything critical to say about someone's work. I have to leave that to you guys.

Ray came through Providence in 1970 and we had an enjoyable afternoon together. We happily agreed in our approach to photography. I liked very much his personal and thereby original photographs.

We shall certainly miss him.

**Harry Callahan  
Photographer**

The request to write something on Ray arrived on the morning when I was setting off to the funeral at Chapel Knowe. En route and throughout the funeral I kept thinking of Ray and how best to respond to his photographs.

Instead of the usual church service Mary had organised something altogether more personal which consisted of his favourite music interspersed with readings. At one point we were invited to look at the photographs reproduced in *Every So Often* while listening to the music of Martin.

It was then that I decided to write not a critical piece but a series of responses, much like turning over the pages of one of his books, and this is what I have done.

Never look directly, straight on  
Observe closely but obliquely  
Those things which are inconsequential  
To others but take on a new meaning  
When seen freshly.

Light on the sea  
Light on reflecting puddles  
Piebald house ideogramatically hiding  
Highway street furniture punctuating a junction  
War Memorial signalling peace to debris  
Chromatic reduction of arched spaces  
Starkly sounding above the soft hum of grass.  
Tea towels, bath towels straining to be free  
Marks  
Tracks  
Strata in wind-blown snow  
Poetic intersections of sorrel and saw grass

Wind rattled  
Ice colour, photographic neutrality  
photographic tonality.  
Sheep on the high wire, ascending bleating to the snow  
Wet tracks circling across the sunken asphalt.  
The very stuff that surrounds us  
None of this matters to those that never see  
We all must remember  
These.

**Roger Taylor  
Photographer/Historian**

Although Ray, because of his age, and stature as one of Europe's finest photographic artists, was often regarded by younger teaching colleagues and students alike as the course's elder statesman he was always thought of as a contemporary. He was never seen as representing old fashioned traditions or outmoded concepts. Ray was very much of his time and his work bears true testimony to that. He was also a gentle and reticent man.

I learned so much from him about *making* photographs and about what it means to be an artist and a thoughtful teacher that I will, like many, many others, profoundly miss him.

Because his mind was frequently preoccupied with visual ideas, the resonance of a particular place just visited, and pictures that were still to be made, Ray sometimes appeared detached from the *real* world. But there was a very earthbound side to his nature and one that we both shared - a love of curries and scones and cream. The essential research that we carried out to find the best Indian restaurant in Nottingham and the place that served the finest cream tea in Derbyshire was always exhaustive, often exciting, frequently expensive, and invariably good fun.

**Paul Hill  
Photographer and teacher**

My first meeting with Ray was at Trent Polytechnic in 1974, where he was one of my tutors. I didn't understand much about him then, but we connected through a love of music. This continued to be an important point of contact between us.

I saw more of Ray and Mary when they moved up to the North West. During this time I learned to know and love Ray, and to appreciate his work. Wherever we met, he liked to take the opportunity to express strong views on the state of photography in the region. He was living and working in the land of social documentary where he received little support and recognition, and he had to defend his position even after a lifetime's commitment.

I was glad of his presence which encouraged me. He would make suggestions, a poet, a piece of music, or a photographer to reflect upon. Although the opportunity to share time with Ray is past, his work remains to teach all who care to see. His photographs are a testament to his life of spiritual practice, quiet metaphors. In my search for a way to honour his memory, I continue to learn from him. I remember a man of wit and generosity, discrete and exactly discriminating.

**Izabela Jędrzejczyk  
Photographer**

I met Raymond Moore in 1962 during his exhibition at the Artist's International Association Gallery in London. He showed mainly nature photographs and abstractions which I greatly admired. The following year I introduced him to America with a block of ten photographs in my exhibition *Creative Photography 1926 to the Present* at the Detroit Institute of Art.

Apart from reportage there were not many creative photographers in Britain in the 50s and 60s and they badly needed encouragement until Sue Davies and The Photographers' Gallery took over the lead which the *Royal* refused to give. Like most artists Raymond was very modest, grateful for any appreciation considering that the official accolade of British recognition was bestowed upon him rather late in life - in 1977 - long after he had made his name in the USA.

While I was living in London we met occasionally either at my home or his. Raymond and Ray Howard-Jones, the abstract painter with whom he lived for 15 years or more and whose work exercised considerable influence on his, supported each other wonderfully. I believe it was during the London years that Raymond produced his best work. When he moved to Nottingham his style changed. His compositions became freer, simpler; his landscapes more general with occasional touches of banality. The concentration on detail was gone. Raymond himself would look back on his abstractions as things of the past, something he had outgrown like Ray. He started a new liaison.

Following my residence in Southern Switzerland we did not meet again until in 1977 a seminar brought me to Derbyshire College. This provided a long awaited opportunity to see Raymond's recent work. Many photographs had a strong graphic design - man-made or natural. Puddles and traffic mirrors had a special fascination for him. I also remember superb rock formations in Pembrokeshire, fences and some clothes blowing in the wind. My favourite of this period is a suburban scene in Reading with a traffic mirror and a crouching man on the left, afraid of spoiling the picture, yet actually making it.

No doubt, the portfolios in the *Creative Camera Yearbook 1976* and in *Camera* the following year as well as the solo shows had at last given Raymond Moore an international reputation. He was an unconventional man creating unconventional images. Not as varied or as creative as Bill Brandt or a whole string of fine British reportage photographers besides the great Angus McBean, yet very good in his own inimitable way.

**Helmut Gernsheim  
Photographic Historian**



'A blank mind like a clean mirror - sensitive ■ capable of receiving and giving.

Different mirrors receive and interpret differently. A mirror clouded by self-consciousness or preconceived ideas inhibits true awareness. The mirror of the mind changes with experience - a development occurs. Intense awareness - Recognition - generates a desire to frame and record a photo abstract of a moment of life...'

He was at his best in terrain on the margins of things: on the coast in the evening, on a B road amongst strictly local traffic. To his eye there was never an ordinary nor a typical landscape; his Britain was always seen again, and with astonishment.

**Ian Jeffrey**  
Art Historian

I first met Ray Moore at a formal interview in August 1976. We became colleagues at Nottingham in 1977 and we left Trent Polytechnic together at the end of 1978.

The A614 North from Nottingham led to our country retreats: Ray's was a modest house in Old Clipstone Village and mine a damp cottage on a farm. Both were deep in the coalmining belt of Sherwood Forest.

Ray drove a lemon yellow Citroen Dyane; I had a cream one. His was much rustier than mine even though it was several years younger. Ray didn't mind about the state of his car; I always had plans to rub mine down but never did. He often seemed content to drive in 3rd gear and he refused to open the canvas roof even on the warmest days.

For a couple of years we had a tentative friendship. I found his work difficult, perhaps impenetrable.

It was at the exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* at the Hayward Gallery in 1979 that I began to see Ray's pictures. During the installation I became increasingly aware of the insistent strengths of these seemingly empty photographs. A glance at my own work which was hung opposite Ray's, made it abundantly clear that Ray and his work had already exerted a profound influence on my own struggles as an artist.

This was the first of many times in which we really talked about our work. I enjoyed and greatly respected Ray's reticence and self-effacement. These were essential facets of his character and central to the quietly assertive tonality of his pictures.

Our last meeting occurred in September 1987. As the Glasgow train stopped at Carlisle, Ray and his son David were on the platform. Mary and I had met by chance on the train from London. I spoke briefly and joyfully with Ray and David before continuing my journey to Glasgow. Clearly Ray and I would see far more of each other now that we were both living in Scotland.

**Roger Palmer**  
Artist

Do Ray Me:

I remember having dinner with Ray and Mary in a somewhat undistinguished restaurant and getting the best from the menu and the wine list, we seemed to agree that the quality of life was just as important as the quality of photography.

The best of his photography became apparent to me on looking at the *naked* prints previous to hanging in the Hayward exhibition. The pictures seemed to glow and intimately reveal something of the love with which the man treated the world and the medium to which he gave so much. In the show Ray's presence in the pictures seemed more removed, his sensitive craftsmanship hidden behind reflecting blue-green glass. I was forced to appreciate my surroundings and reflect on the path that Ray walked so well in photography, translating ordinary, everyday, reality through his own unique human warmth - perhaps he had planned it that we should all have a few minutes self reflection? Every black and white B & B sign should be signed Raymond Moore, as proof that he saw it first, and in the way of great artists, created order out of chaos and reflected on the age in which he lived.

**Peter Goldfield**  
Photographer and teacher

To voice one's appreciation of Ray Moore is relatively easy. Ray, in essence, was the first British 'independent.' For those of us back in the 60s, searching desperately for the inspiration of a mature, cogent native photographic voice, that says it all. Ray was the first example of that independent, wholly intelligent vision, setting a standard to which young British photographers could aspire. He was a singular, lonely torch bearer for us at a time when most serious British photography was tied firmly to the semi-commercial precepts of photojournalism, or else reduced to neat formalist gestures culled by distinct inferiors from Bill Brandt or Dr. Steinart.

Ray probably never knew his importance at that time, because his fellow travellers were a disparate, scattered, furtive bunch, as much outside the establishment as he ever was. He was never fully appreciated, but then the British still do not appreciate PHOTOGRAPHY, as opposed to something done with cameras.

So I salute Ray, in short, as a PHOTOGRAPHER. He was one of the few British photographers, before or since, whose work evinces a first rate, wholly photographic quality. That is to say, it is pre-

cise, discrete, understated, documentary in character. Above all, it is of the world and experience, not of art - which makes Ray all the greater artist.

**Gerry Badger**  
Photographer/Critic

From the first time I saw Raymond Moore's work at the Photographers' Gallery in 1973 he was one of my heroes. Rather than make a personal tribute to his work, I would like to take this opportunity to express my concern that a really substantial collection of his work should now be published. This is not to decry the excellent *Travelling Light* book published at the time of his exhibition in 1981, but Ray did a good deal of work since then, and I feel a fuller summing up should now be published.

A few years ago, the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, sent me and many others a handsome collection by a little known photographer, Laurie Wilson, who had just died. Ray Moore was internationally known and respected, and although his work is not likely to prove enormously commercial even now, I am certain there would be a steady sale for it. Given the poverty of our institutions, might it be possible for, say, a museum of the stature of the Victoria and Albert Museum to co-publish with a commercial publisher? Possibly subsidies might be available from the Arts Council and/or the Scottish Arts Council. It might also be possible to raise extra finance through subscription to a numbered special edition. Let us show, in the face of the regrettable dearth of coverage in the national press, that the photographic community do indeed wish to pay tribute to Raymond Moore and celebrate his work.

**Fay Godwin**  
Photographer

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'Photography is concerned with short periods of time. Photographing a fraction of the subject' s life, the photographer reveals his own. Totally absorbed and committed for a fleeting moment in something outside his limited entity - must result in a personal statement...'

