

John Riddy and James Welling in Conversation. © John Riddy and James Welling 2019.

JW. I was amused to discover that you only really committed to photography in your mid-to -late twenties, because I had a similar late blooming, after studying painting and sculpture. I think it's fantastic to find another photographer who comes to photography late. But like many people you had earlier experiences of working in the darkroom. Can you talk a little about what that final push was towards photography and maybe go over your background leading up to that decision?

JR. My father was a keen amateur photographer and we did have a darkroom at home when I was a kid. Later, I became very interested in art at school. I had a fantastic art teacher.

JW. In high school or at college?

JR. At high school, near Coventry where I grew up. And I became more and more interested in photography at the same time. Eventually I asked my father to show me how to use the darkroom and teach me about developing film and printing. The first prints I made I cut up and turned into collages. I can remember that my parents found it quite odd that none of the photographs were of people. After school I had two years out wandering around but once I made the decision to go to art college, I made that decision very much with the determination that I wanted to be an artist and, as far as I understood it, being an artist involved making paintings or sculpture. I didn't really think of photographers as artists.

JW. The art school I went to, Carnegie-Mellon University, did not have photography, just painting and sculpture. Those were your two choices.

JR. It was pretty much the same in the UK. So when I went to Chelsea, for the first three years, I did painting as an undergraduate, and then a one year MA, where I made sculpture. I'd become more and more interested in constructed sculpture and I wrote my thesis on Anthony Caro. When I left college I worked as a bicycle courier and often carried a camera. But outside of the supportive atmosphere of art college I found it very hard to sustain making paintings or sculpture. I did set up a studio. I went there and put the kettle on and made tea and found myself wondering, what am I meant to do now? Somehow at that point it simply didn't work for me. Whereas taking photographs came out of daily life. So the whole thing developed quite naturally. And once I committed to making better photographs and became a lot more ambitious about what I was doing, I was determined to educate myself really well technically. So I used the three books by Ansel Adams: *The Camera*, *The Negative* and *The Print*. I really went to town and tried to learn that stuff inside out.

JW. Those books were so important to me as well. You feel you are standing beside Adams as he describes his procedures in the darkroom. I wonder if there was anyone you went to who helped you in terms of learning about the technical processes?

JR. Not really. Apart from my father. Most of the darkrooms I used I built myself. Often they were temporary structures wherever I happened to be living.

JW. I think that the act of building a darkroom—which I also did when I was twenty-five—is a turning point. A painting studio is just a room, as you said, with a tea kettle. But a darkroom represents a way of working, and it's so telling, because building a darkroom is the first sign of a real commitment to photography.

JR. Absolutely. And it has clear physical steps built into it that have to be followed which gives you an immediate plan of work.

JW. Yes, it's almost like a basic plan for a house. There are elements that you must have. You can alter them but in general there is a systematic flow in the darkroom that revolves around starting on the dry side and ending up on the wet side.

JR. I think each time I built a darkroom it marked a step forward technically and aesthetically. It was the moment for new ideas to crystallize and to be more ambitious.

JW. I first met you I think around 1996. I might have already seen your work at Galerie Paul Andriess in Amsterdam. One of the first photographs that I recall is of a church with a steeple in Normandy. What I loved about that picture, and I also see it in the pyramid in the "Rome" series, is this idea of the apex going up the photograph to the sharpest possible point. I still see your work through things that are going on in that picture. There is the attention to detail, but it's also the photographic grain, the rendition of light and dark and the subject matter combined. They are all in a musical key, if you will. It's your relationship to photography as a whole, all those elements working together, and not just the precision of the 5 x 4 camera you are using. Would you say those Normandy pictures mark the point at which you really got going photographically?

JR. Yes, I think so. They were also some of the first pictures I made with a large-format camera. It was when I began working with the 5 x 4 that I really started to find myself and this "complete" approach that you're describing.

JW. The other picture I saw—it may have been at Lawrence Markey in New York—was the bandstand image. That picture seems to me so characteristic of many of your visual concerns. It's interesting to look at that knowing that you came from making sculpture because it's really one of your most sculptural pictures: the decorative aspect of the metalwork, the relationship between the natural—those branches at the top—and the ironwork. I just love that picture. Also the way it captures the whole middle ground. The middle ground is almost transparent but it's still held by your camera.

JR. I think it's one of the first pictures where you're invited into the picture—almost to look through it—but at the same time the all-over patterning seems to project in front of the print surface. The spring leaves and the ironwork and the repeating apertures in the background bring a very poetic quality to it. There's a lovely relationship between the intervals and the structure.

JW. Absolutely. It must also have been very satisfying looking at the negative.

JR. It's a good one.



*'Santiago De Compostela 1998' (Kodak T-Max Negative)*

JW. It strikes me that the photographs in this first section of the book announce pretty much all of the things that you'll be interested in right up to the present. The picture from Grand Central [*New York, 1994*,] could be a picture from "Low Relief," and I'm really amazed by a lot of the interiors from that early period. What I find special about your interiors is the way you're balancing the exposure. The interior is probably five or six stops darker than the outside but you manage to hold back the outside light yet still record it on the negative. It's not easy to capture that contrast range on film. Of course, this is something that Adams talks a lot about. I don't know exactly your darkroom steps but could you talk about how you photographed those interiors?

JR. It was definitely learning Adams's Zone System and using the spot meter that helped there. Also, right from the beginning, I was using Polaroid 55 when I took the photograph and I would always look at the Polaroid negative as well as the instant print.

JW. We should just say for people who may not know that Polaroid Type 55 was a very slow, high-quality positive-negative material that was discontinued about ten years ago. Not only did it give a good quality black-and-white print but also a very high-quality fine-grained negative that could be saved and used. It was an absolutely spectacular material.

So you were looking at the negative as well as the print while you were working ?

JR. Yes. The print was great for judging the composition, camera position etc... But what I liked about the negative was that although it didn't mimic what you would be able to do on film, it had a really good latitude and could record detail in extremely dark and bright areas. This meant that it gave you a good idea of what might be possible.

J.W. But doing all that slows you down quite a bit.

JR. Yes, but I got pretty adept. Having looked at the Polaroid I made a working negative on T-Max film. It also had a good latitude and could cope with a wide contrast range. I would always shoot more than one sheet of film and develop them individually. This meant I could develop a sheet and check if the highlights were burnt out at all. If so I would develop another one for less time to preserve more detail.

JW. In a tray?

JR. Yes—gently rocking!

JW. Right. And what was your preferred developer?

JR. I used the proprietary T-Max developer. I liked the smooth tones it gave.

JW. I was always a Tri-X person. I guess my initial experiences with T-Max were not great so I stuck with Tri-X film.

So—the curved window from *Photographs*...

JR. The De La Warr Pavilion [*Bexhill-on-Sea, 1998*].

JW. ...talking about Ansel Adams, your picture reminds me of his description of the water-bath development; this crazy system where you process the film in a tray of water and a tray of developer to control the contrast. What I love about that picture—a little bit like the bandstand—is that not only is it a tonally complicated and subtle image, but the image itself describes the optics of the lens in front of the camera. This rounded glass of the building bulges out slightly, like a lens, to form a convex curve. Then the subject behind—the row of houses like a British Walker Evans subject—is completely rectilinear. You have the dynamics of the lens and the glass and the subject behind like a double photograph, both in the window and in the camera.

JR. Yes I think a lot of those early photographs, especially the interiors, are partly about the mechanics of photography. That one in particular is a bit like a photograph of a camera obscura.

JW. In these pictures you're clearly interested in a certain kind of geometry. Those sleek interiors as opposed to some of the other work, where you're interested in more antiquated architecture.

JR. A lot of those 1930s British modernist buildings have a particular pathos or atmosphere for people of my generation because they're very much associated with institutional buildings like doctor's waiting rooms or hospitals or libraries. Also, it was a typical subject for photographers who really interested me, such as Werner Mantz or Ezra Stoller. I was interested in the way they made really poetic work but in the guise of commercial or everyday photography.

JW. Well recently Stoller is becoming better known, but for anybody who's interested in the history of architectural photography, he's a very important figure. Interestingly he was a friend of Paul Strand and Strand lent him his 10 x 8 camera in the 1940s for Stoller to get his start.

Am I right in thinking that all of these black-and-white photographs were printed on Oriental Seagull paper?

JR. Yes. Variable Contrast Seagull.

JW. I also printed on Oriental Seagull. I remember testing various photographic papers. Agfa Portriga Rapid was too expensive and a little bit too warm in tonality but Seagull had a cool neutrality without being cold. It was such a fantastic paper and then the company went bankrupt I think and photography just moved on. Could you say how you came across it?

JR. I believe Adam's mentions it in *The Print* or it may have been from somebody working at the suppliers where I bought my paper.

JW. It was a Japanese paper.

JR. Yes. It was quite expensive in the UK because it was imported and the supply could be intermittent but I got on well with it. I didn't want to make the kind of print that I associated with British documentary work, with a very harsh black-and-white look. I wanted to make something with a much more even palette of greys and plenty of mid-tones. It was easy to work with and a good fit with the T-Max negatives.

JW. So, coming to "Valencia," I think you said that you took those pictures in the space of seven days?

JR. Yes.

JW. I love the way you've rendered the blue sky in those pictures. Panchromatic film doesn't render blue sky as the eye sees it but you've avoided the traditional solution of darkening the sky by using a red or yellow filter. You've used the characteristic way that film renders the sky to make a kind of seamless grey backdrop to the buildings. That grey is very important to how that series works. It really underlines what you mentioned to me about trying to get away from an earlier style of very dramatic black-and-white rendition.

JR. My favorite work from that series is the diptych (*Valencia (Port)*, 1996,) The grey backdrop of the sky really helps tie the two panels together. It brings the sky up close to the buildings and flattens the space. I think that helps to emphasize the narrative of the two men looking through the gate. For me they're looking backwards in time, into that vacant lot where there were once buildings they knew. It's as if that space they're looking into goes further back than the flat curtain of the sky.

JW. And the irony of the white, black and yellow on the poster of the ... strawberries?

JR. They're human hearts. That was a very controversial advertising campaign by Benetton at the time. There's an element of globalization in that poster which contrasts with the local texture. The disused building, the political murals on the wall and the graffiti. Of course globalization wasn't a phrase or an issue that was talked about then. But the grey of the sky is also important to the way the billboard is pushed forward. That was the first time that I made a whole series about one place. I took the diptych right at the end. The grey remains pretty much the same throughout.

JW. There's a definite constancy to the light. That harsh southern light is something you seem to seek out. For example, in "Peninsula," where everything is very sharply rendered. Key to both series is this intense but slightly softened light description. It reminds me of the American New Topographics photographers who followed the sun, as it were, into the southern United States. There's a clarity to that light which as a photographer you know will sharpen everything. Almost as if a sharpening filter that has already been applied to the picture.

Coming to the "Rome" pictures, they seem to further open up the possibility that these structures have a past. You have that spectacular pyramid and the other picture from "Rome" which I'm really floored by, the *Villa Adriana* [*Villa Adriana*, 1999], with the little flowers and the brickwork and this incredible rendition of surface.

JR. I guess that's one of the first pictures I made where surface textures are so important to the image. Almost the same way that color itself can be the subject in a color photograph.

JW. Yes, but what brings it out is the way the photograph starts on the left, with the wall almost matt and slightly in shadow, and as your eye moves across to the right there's sunlight and then sharper shadows. But the gradation is very subtle and I can see that's not darkroom work but a characteristic of the surfaces and the light. Or maybe it is something to do with work in the darkroom—increased agitation of the film or something else.

JR. No, I think there was a bit of good fortune involved there. The sunlight was soft but just sharp enough to make the shadows. That image was one of those that fall nicely onto the paper.

JW. So it's a combination of the film, the developing, the paper; all these technical things coming together to bring something out which I'm sure was already there in the scene. But that interplay of the bricks, the flowers, the grass; it would be almost invisible in color. I think there's a way in which

the black and white allows you to capture something which is hard to discern. The descriptive power of black and white reveals the world more completely than color does. And it also reveals the world more sculpturally.

JR. Absolutely. Don't forget I was still using the Polaroid 55 and looking at the instant print. It's really exciting to see those qualities revealed on paper while you're standing there. It's immediate confirmation that you've seen something that others might miss. For me there's a parallel to the sculptural thing of taking a found object, a throwaway, and converting it into something special and complex. Transforming the everyday or something neglected.

JW. I remember Ansel Adams suggested that you use a tobacco filter for working in black and white. It deadens the colors you are looking at and allows you to see the scene more tonally. But by using this paper print to evaluate the scene photographically it's almost as if you already had a filter that gives you this additional pre-visualization. Of course, this is something that Adams and his circle were so interested in. This notion of the photographer seeing the photograph in the mind before they made the exposure.

JR. Also it's more critical if you're working with quite a minimal subject. It was only when I saw it in on a rectangular piece of paper that I could really know whether there were enough elements within the frame to make it worthwhile. It's partly about how little you are choosing to include.

JW. I think we should talk a little bit about the way the past and the recent past, these temporal segments, are combined in "Praeterita,".

JR. When I was working in Rome I was very concerned with making images that are in the present but seem to refer to a period of time within the image that's more ambiguous and extended than that moment. It's a particular kind of photographic illusion. And in a way, Ruskin's *Praeterita* is a book about that kind of illusion and the failing nature of memory. It's his autobiography. *Praeterita* can be translated as "of things past." But instead of writing a conventional autobiography he writes a kind of travelogue that mirrors his life. It starts in London, crosses the channel to Paris and down over the Alps and into Italy. So there was a very clear framework for making that book. There are twenty-eight chapters and I went to a location in each chapter and made a photograph. It's really a book about a book.

JW. Interesting; that explains the completely different character of these mountain photographs in comparison to, say, the Oxford photographs.

JR. Yes, Oxford is his time at university. The Alps are part of a summer trip that he made every year to walk and paint.

J W. The British have a very special relationship to the Alps. I remember Turner made watercolors in the Alps.

JR. And of course Turner was the painter who Ruskin promoted more than any other in his critical writings. At the time I was reading W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*. Have you read that?

JW. Yes.

JR. So the whole thing struck a chord. This idea of journeying, reflection, memory, cultural association, the collaging and mixing of times and events. And then Sebald's use of black-and-white photographs within the text. I liked his unpredictable choices of imagery.

JW. I think it must have been about this time, around 2000, that you first told me about fiber-based or traditional papers being used to print digitally. The "Praeterita" prints were clearly still analogue prints made in a traditional darkroom, but I remember you had been researching these technical advances and you were really my conduit, my inside line, on what was coming in terms of digital printing. The digital revolution began to make itself felt in the late nineties with the first inkjet prints and then with the digital C-type and the digital fiber-based print. So that starts to come into your work with "Views from Shin-Fuji". I can see that's also a kind of journey or tour around the town. I went to Shin-Fuji yesterday on Google Street View.

JR. What did you think ?

JW. The mountain is there but visually it's very low-lying near the station. I'm assuming that you must have gone quite a way north out of town to get the views. How did you first start?

JR. I showed some work in Japan and while I was there I was keen to go and see Mount Fuji. Partly because I have always been fascinated by woodcut prints—Hokusai etc. I caught the train to Shin-Fuji. I thought I was going to get off to find myself in a national park setting with long clear views of the mountain and lots of trees. But I found myself in this very mundane semi-industrial town. Very low-lying, as you say, with the mountain hovering above. I had all my gear with me and I made the first picture that day about 100 meters from the station. That was *Street* [*Street*, 2005]. I was knocked out by the scene in front of me with the T-junction centrally placed and the iconic form of the mountain at the end. I went back to the hotel with my Polaroid print and having spent the evening looking at it and liking it more and more, I went straight back the next day and carried on walking around.

At first I was irresistibly drawn to walking north towards the mountain, exactly as you say, but in fact the further I got out of town in search of a better view, the less interesting things became. I realized it was all about the collage of the town and the mountain. Because it's a visual icon, the mountain just seems to float above the town in its own space. I made another three trips to complete the project. It took a lot of time and walking to get the twelve or so images that make up the series because, unlike that very first day, there simply weren't that many situations where everything fell into place. Also, as you saw on Street View, the mountain is often behind cloud. So I had to adopt various techniques for checking that beforehand. There was a live web-cam of Mount Fuji, so I would go to the computer suite in the hotel and check that before I set out. Like all mountains, Fuji has its own weather system, so it's very unpredictable.

JW. This is one of the problems with having a great first photograph in a body of work. Often it becomes extremely hard to get close to that again and you have to work and work to realize that initial vision.

JR. Yes. Even though you know from experience that it never is, you can't help thinking "Wow, this is going to be easy." Phones didn't have satellite navigation then, but I'd love to know how many kilometers I walked making that series. It was all done on foot and I never use a guide, so the whole process was extremely non-verbal. You might have an exchange over the breakfast buffet in the morning but often that was it for the next twenty-four hours.



Katsushika Hokusai 'A Sketch of the Mitsui Shop in Suruga Street in Edo' c1830 (Woodblock Print)

JW. Interestingly, in the late 1990s, Fuji brought out Fuji Crystal Archive, which was a great paper for printing color negatives on. But these are Lambda prints made on the same paper?

JR. Yes. I think Crystal Archive was the paper of choice for that process. I really liked its intense gloss and the color rendition. So I used Fuji 5 x 4 film, which I scanned myself, and then provided the file for the lab to use. And I quickly realized there was something special about having Fuji as a subject, shot on Fuji film, and printed on Fuji paper. The earlier work from "Skies" and "Middle Ground" was shot and printed on Kodak. But I really liked the Fuji colors and the way they related to the subject

JW. I like the reciprocity between photographing in Japan and using materials manufactured there. These are your most "colorful" pictures, in that you are really working with color as a subject. Color is always partly the subject of color photography but again, because it's one place and you have this continuity of light, the color palette has a real identity.

JR. I think that's the only series where I worked with color in that way. With "Low Relief" or "Half-light" when I started using the Epson printer I started to think about color in a very different way.

JW. Using the inkjet ?

JR. Yes

JW. I can see that in your digital scan and print of *Maputo Train* [*Maputo (Train)*, 2002,] the neutrals are more neutral and defined compared to the C-type print. The greys are more clearly separated. I can imagine that's important to you. So coming to "Low Relief" and "Half-light" later on, I can see in both series you're very interested in yellows and browns. In the *Black Star* pictures, behind the Whitney there's this yellowish apartment block that forms a square right in the middle of the photograph.

JR. Yes, it's a kind of fulcrum around which the rest of the picture is organized.

JW. Exactly. It's hard to talk about brown or dirty yellow as primaries but that's how it feels here. It's the same with the incandescent lights in *Wyndham Road* [*London (Wyndham Road)*, 2008,] and the range of yellows you have there. The subject is important but the subtle color range also seems critical. Then in the *Garrick* [*London (Garrick)*, 2008,] you have those reds in the windows which strike such a discordant, jarring note.

JR. It's just as with the earlier pictures. The work developed alongside the technical possibilities. Those colors are partly there because suddenly they're available. I don't think you could manage that interplay between the very complex greys and the reds in a C-type print.

JW. Yeah, I agree. You wouldn't get that with analogue.

JR. One of the things I immediately liked about making the inkjets was being able to print dirty half-colors that have a better correspondence to what we see. If they are not wedded to the chemical palette then they're more specific. Being able to record subtle modulations in those colors is fundamental to the pictures in "Low Relief."

JW. But looking at your files, for example the file for the *Garrick*, you're not really making a lot of moves. It's the same with the "Shin-Fuji" files. I'm surprised at how little transformation goes on in the file. It's subtle but significant. So in a way the film is quite good at capturing these colors but it's the chromogenic printing process where things get lost, and the scan combined with the inkjet allows you to bring them out. You're drawing out what's there in the film, holding on to colors that tended to get flattened out in the earlier analogue printing processes. They're small but vital changes.

JR. Sure. And if I tell someone that I've just spent the day in Photoshop I'm sure they have a vision of masking and moving things around; making wholesale changes to the image. In fact often I've spent three hours agonizing over how blue or yellow a grey is. I'm involved in a very small area of what Photoshop can do but I use that area extensively.

JW. Those are subtle changes which you can't even see on the screen very well but only when you print it out. You probably do a lot of printing out.

JR. Yes, and a lot of time living with the trials on the studio wall. That was my problem with printing at the lab. There is such a big difference between what you decide with someone else in a ten-minute conversation in front of a print at a lab, and your next move in a print that's been on the studio wall for weeks.

JW. So coming up to the present, have you pretty much abandoned film now?

JR. Yes. I wasn't so keen to move to digital. I had no problem with shooting and scanning film. It was when Polaroid 55 came to an end. That was the killer blow for me. It was impossible for me to review what I was doing when I was out working. Also I started to find that the development of sheet film at the lab became a bit more hit and miss because so little film was actually going through the chemistry. So various factors built up to the point where I just thought it was time to move on and get a digital back.

JW. So you use a digital back on your Linhof 5 x 4?

JR. No I use the smaller Linhof field camera that's been specifically made for the digital back. You compose on a ground glass and then slide the back into place to make the exposure.

JW. Similar to using a roll-film back on a large-format camera ?

JR. Exactly.

JW. So "Palermo" is your first work shooting that way and you have one of your few live subjects—a sleeping dog! I love that picture. I mean the dog could have gotten up and walked away as you moved the back in to place.

JR. That one comes from the first time I wasn't just walking around the city getting the feel of things, but actually making work. I'd visited the post office many times before. Not only did I have to set up the camera and work quickly to take the picture but having done so I made a further exposure of the wall above the dog. Using the digital back allows you to do that by moving the back to record more of what the lens is capturing. Later you can join the files together on the computer. So that image is two files stitched together. I made the second exposure of the wall to get more height above the dog but I made sure I shot the dog first before it moved on.



*Gustave Le Gray 'Palazzo Carini, Palermo' 1860 (Albumen Print)*

JW. It's interesting that although these are digital photographs processed on the computer and printed digitally, you're still making prints with a palette of greys and a tonal range that's very similar to the early black and whites on *Oriental Seagull*. That picture of the wonderful Ficus tree is so evocative [*Piazza Marina, 2012.*]. The light coming through the foliage has that very particular halation where the white is burning through. It could be a nineteenth-century photograph. It's very much an optical artifact. Not a big thing but I find it very pleasing to look at that softening where the light and the dark meet each other.

JR. There are a lot of echoes of nineteenth-century photography in that series. It all started with my fascination with a Gustave Le Gray image. It shows the destruction after Garibaldi's battle to take control of the city in 1860. Having spent time looking at it, I just felt that I had to go and look at Palermo now because that image has what I think of as an expanded timescale. It could be a contemporary war zone. The composition feels very modern with the rhythms and textures working across the image and the dark surfaces making a backdrop for the illuminated sculptures. It's very much a picture of the middle ground. The more time I spent in Palermo the more I became aware that those are visual elements that are present and recordable today, especially in black and white.

JW. What kind of paper did you use for these?

JR. These are printed on a digital baryta paper that's designed to look and feel like a traditional darkroom paper.

JW. Epson has settings which allow you to control how cool or warm the greys are in black- and-white printing. Do you use those?

JR I use a separate piece of software that does the same job. It allows you to control the amount of color in the greys and also the level of contrast in the print. It feels like you are using the settings on an enlarger in a traditional darkroom. I'm sure I use a very narrow area of its potential, but what I get from it is really useful. So for "Peninsula" I made the prints a bit warmer than "Palermo." I think it suits the scale and the subject matter.

JW. Yes I can see they're a little bit warmer. So how did "Peninsula" come about ?

JR. For about ten years I've been walking and cycling in the Cape Peninsula in South Africa and after a while it seemed natural to start making work there. But it's a complex landscape. You are surrounded by extraordinary natural beauty and light but then there are the townships and informal settlements, many of which belong to a very scarred history of displacement and enforced segregation. There's an extraordinary visual disparity. The landscape itself has a scorched quality because of the rocks and the bushfires. The light is very sharp. When all of this comes together in the frame, it makes for a very layered image. I decided to make the prints quite small—the classic 10 x 8. I was intrigued to see how that looks now. But I like the way they feel in relation to the subject matter and the intensity of the detail within the smaller frame. Being in control of the printing I've become more and more interested in scale. I don't just mean I suddenly became interested in doing huge prints but in making quite incremental decisions at a smaller scale.

JW. I think one of the characteristics of these photographs and the communities that you're recording—for example there's one photograph where you're looking down into a backyard [*Red Hill (4), 2014,*—is that these very humble residences almost feel like they are turned inside out. There's not a lot of shelter there. The living conditions are so straightforward whereas in more affluent

communities things are more opaque and invisible. It's almost as if as you go higher up the economic scale there's more of a sameness to communities and there is a hidden quality. The smallness of the pictures reflects the extreme visibility of these lives. If you made large photographs of these impoverished homes you would see too much.

JR. Definitely. That became clear to me as I was making the work. But I wanted to keep the kind of layering that we are used to from working at a larger scale.

JW. So in a way you've come full circle here. The subject is typical of the kind of documentary photography you reacted against at the outset, but it feels as if you've found a way to deal with that kind of subject matter on your own terms.

JR. I hope so. I had a lot of reservations about making those pictures. I spent a lot of time printing and thinking before I committed to showing them. The subject matter and the intense light meant that they were composed in a more unified way than a lot of earlier works. That took a bit of getting used to. In "Low Relief," say, the structure behind the image is built from pockets of activity and layers within the image. There are frames within the images that modify each other as you scan across the print. But in "Peninsula" the image is more clearly a description of one time and place. It's much less referential to other art forms. So when it came to composing and working on the *Black Star* images from New York, I think the work I did on "Peninsula" influenced my approach. The composition is almost purposefully arbitrary; more like a scan of the world made from a fixed vantage point.

JW. But light is also an issue in the *Black Star* pictures. In effect they're an animation of changing lighting conditions.

JR. Yes, I wanted them to be firmly attached to the moment when they were made. Tying the sequence to the movement of clouds and the changing light allowed me to make an intense physical image of a subject—the view towards Ground Zero—that was already laden with history. The weather gave the imagery an atmosphere that I took as the starting point for the other works in the series.

JW. Well looking at the walls, you could certainly describe those as scans, too. There is an intense level of detail there that's appropriate to that idea. The cross lighting also "pins" them to a moment in time. But the interplay of temporal modalities across these works is interesting. The *Black Star* images capture a rapidly changing scene, whereas the walls describe fifty years of embedded grime.

JR. Working on the walls, I was thinking a lot about painters whose work has been important for me. I wanted the textures, the scale, the light and the color to work together to make something very intense; to take this sort of down-at-heel everyday subject and make it hit a note in a way that you wouldn't normally expect from a photograph.

JW. I love *Lambeth Road 4* [*London (Lambeth Road 4)*, 2017,] with the water running down the dirty wall—the wetness of the wall and then the dryness of the print. The trees [*London (Herne Hill 1 and 2)*, 2017,] are very different. How did they come about?

JR. They came from taking night walks locally. A lot of the street lighting in our neighborhood has recently been changed to LED lighting. It gives off this very intense white light. I like the way it articulates the form of the trees.

JW. I call LEDs "digital light." It's almost as if the head of a scanner has recorded the scene.

JR. Those pictures were very hard to take. They had to be done at about four in the morning when there was absolutely no wind because of the long exposure. But also no clouds, otherwise you didn't get that deep spacey blue behind. They only happened because I was so "in the zone" working on the walls and the *Black Star* images in the studio. That's one of the key things about the working pattern I've ended up with. It's digital. A lot of it is processed on the computer. But the bit that really counts is as old as the hills. All the time I spend making in the studio leads to more awareness of what might work when I get outside. So when it's going well it's circular and it carries you forward.