

Brian Griffin

Face to Face, a retrospective

30th Sept – 21st Nov 2010
Snowhill, Birmingham



Self portrait, 1988 © Brian Griffin

A major retrospective of one of our most illustrious photographers, Brian Griffin, in the city of his birth.

Leading British photographer and film-maker **Brian Griffin** returns to Birmingham for *Face to Face*, his first major retrospective in his birth city.

Face to Face will take place in two adjacent locations in Birmingham's **Colmore Business District**. A large-scale outdoor retrospective will showcase Griffin's portraiture over the last 38 years, including many of his most prominent portraits of leading musicians, politicians and celebrities. Two accompanying indoor exhibitions will feature Griffin's award-winning series' *Team* and *The Water People*.

Brian Griffin said: *"I am a boy from the Black Country born in Birmingham. For that reason the city has always been close to my heart and it is an honour to be given this retrospective"*.

Known for the extraordinary composition and lighting of his portraits, Griffin's distinctive style was developed during his early career as a staff photographer at *Management Today*. Joining the magazine in 1972, Griffin's unique approach, with his witty and surreal touches, changed the face of corporate portraiture, leading to a series of significant commissions for leading companies around the world. Griffin went on to become one of the most revered portrait photographers of his generation, capturing the likes of **Kate Bush, Brian May, Ringo Starr, Iggy Pop, Helen Mirren** and **Vivienne Westwood**.

Presenting a vast collection of portraits, from the iconic to the never-before-seen, the external exhibition will be located outside Snow Hill Station, marking a return for Griffin to a significant location from his youth: Griffin commuted to Snow Hill everyday for 3 years whilst working the factory job that was to trigger his departure to photography school in 1969.



Donald Sutherland, Savoy Hotel London,
1985 © Brian Griffin



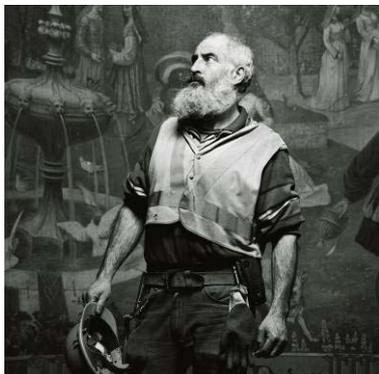
Ringo Starr, Monte Carlo 1988 © Brian Griffin



Margaret Thatcher, 10 Downing Street
1986 © Brian Griffin

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Griffin's influences are wide-ranging and include Renaissance painting, Surrealism, German expressionist cinema and film noir, all evidenced in his unconventional approach to corporate portraiture. *Face to Face* presents two of Griffin's major corporate series: *Team*, a commission in 2006 that saw a sense of heroism in his depiction of the people that built Britain's first ever high speed railway, and *The Water People*, a commission for Reykjavik Energy documenting a mythic tale of an adventure across the Icelandic landscape. Originally exhibited at Les Rencontres d'Arles in 2009, *Team* and *The Water People* will be displayed at the new development One Snowhill.



Liam. Steel Fixer. St. Pancras 2007 ©
Brian Griffin



Railway Compliance Group. Union Railways 2007 ©
Brian Griffin



A Water Person © Brian Griffin

The exhibition coincides with the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham in October, while the project itself is the result of innovative partnership between private and public sector, and a clear statement of Birmingham's continuing cultural ambition. Several entities have come together to develop cultural activities and regeneration in the Colmore Business District, including Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Central Library, Birmingham City University, and local business.

Following the exhibition, Griffin will be donating *Team* and *The Water People* to Birmingham Central Library on long-term deposit, augmenting the Library's existing collection of some 60 vintage prints, which include his images from the 1980s and his 2003 cultural portrait of Birmingham. They will be housed as part of the Library's Photography Collections in the new Library of Birmingham when it opens in 2013, giving the people of Birmingham the opportunity to enjoy what will be the largest public collection of Griffin's work in the world.

Leader of Birmingham City Council, Councillor Mike Whitby, said: *"The city council is proud to be involved in this cultural initiative, which is the fruit of both private and public endeavour, and a statement of the importance Birmingham attributes to ensuring culture is woven into the fabric of the city. Brian Griffin is a wonderful example of the industry and creativity that courses through this city's veins".*

Gary Gardin, Chairman of Colmore Business District, added: *"Colmore Business District supports and encourages art and cultural projects in the business district of Birmingham. This exhibition is a unique opportunity to display the iconic artwork of one of Birmingham's most highly acclaimed artists."*

Professor Christopher O Neil, Executive Dean of Birmingham Institute of Art and Design at BCU (Birmingham City University), commented: *"What makes Brian more than an expert is his empathy and sensitivity. Brian likes people, he finds them interesting, engaging and rewarding. So when we look at his photographs of people, something more than a record of their appearance is recorded, his work is not instant and a consequence of circumstance. It is profound."*

For more information on *Brian Griffin: Face to Face*, visit the website www.briangriffin-facetoface.co.uk.

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Editor's Notes

Brian Griffin

Born in Birmingham in 1948, Brian Griffin grew up in the Black Country town of Lye. After working in local factories and training as a draughtsman, he worked as a trainee nuclear pipe work estimator for the British Steel Corporation in Lloyd House. His life as a photographer began in 1966 when a factory foreman from Rapid Conveyors of Lye invited him to join the Hagley Camera Club. Three years later he applied to study photography at Manchester College of Art and Design.

In the art college library Griffin encountered some of the artistic movements that revealed their influences throughout his career - Renaissance painting, Constructivism, Symbolism, Expressionism and Surrealism. He subsequently discovered German expressionist cinema and film noir: these also became major inspirations for the composition and lighting of his extraordinary portraits.

After graduating in 1972 Griffin moved to London and tried to break into fashion photography - without success. After a few months Griffin was offered a job by the legendary art director Roland Schenk at the business magazine *Management Today* on the strength of his college portfolio. The magazine was to prove an extraordinary training ground and the pictures he made for Schenk showing businessmen in their environment redefined British portraiture.

Griffin opened his own studio in Rotherhithe, London, in 1980 and was soon working extensively for leading international magazines and advertising agencies. During the business boom in the 1980s Griffin was acknowledged as the expert in photographing businessmen and business. During the same decade he also created a series of iconic images of actors, musicians and album covers. He was awarded the Freedom of the City of Arles, France in 1987 and two years later *The Guardian* newspaper hailed him as 'Photographer of the Decade'. Shortly after receiving this accolade Griffin gave up stills work to concentrate on making a series of award-winning films, adverts and pop videos.

Griffin picked up his camera again in 2003 and began a series of major corporate commissions including a massive project to document the people who built Britain's first high speed railway. He was the first photographer invited to work on The National Portrait Gallery/BT Road to 2012 Project, depicting some of the key characters behind London's winning bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. He is currently working on a new project about the Black Country for an exhibition in Paris in November 2010.

Birmingham Central Library

Amongst the 2.5 million photographs forming the Library's collection are outstanding works from pioneers such as Roger Fenton, Edweard Muybridge, Sir Benjamin Stone, Francis Frith and Francis Bedford. This sits alongside extensive archives relating to modern photographers including Bill Brandt, Harold Edgerton, Paul Hill, Vanley Burke, John Blakemore, Stuart Whipps, Paul Fusco, Martin Parr and Peter Marlow. No other public library in the UK can boast a collection of this size and quality.

These will be permanently housed as part of the Library's Photography Collections in the new Library of Birmingham when it opens in 2013. The Library of Birmingham will be a centre of excellence for photography in the UK. It will open up access to all its globally significant treasures through interactive display and interpretation, innovative research facilities and exhibitions.

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