

Exhibiting feminist photography: the work of Sandra George (1957-2013) and Franki Raffles (1955-94), Jenny Brownrigg, ECA 26.11.24

Slide1:

Firstly, I'd like to thank Jamie Bell for this invitation, and also commend that this talk today has been part of a larger programme of your activity, including a visit to Craigmillar Now and a workshop with Christian Noelle Charles. This approach really helps triangulate sharing the work of Sandra George, in turn bringing a focus on the care, work and particular energy of the archive, and also, through Christian, the importance of Sandra's work in particular to a current generation of Black and POC artists, curators and writers. Thank you also for the opportunity to revisit the work of Franki Raffles, and to begin to see connections to Sandra George.

Slide 2:

Jamie has mentioned I am Exhibitions Director at The Glasgow School of Art, running Reid Gallery. As a researcher, one of my focuses is on 20th century women filmmakers and photographers in Scotland. What new knowledge can a curator bring to this subject, through exhibition making? This lecture will explore the ways in which a curator can engage with archival histories, in this case of two social documentary photographers who lived and worked in Edinburgh— Franki Raffles (**1955-94**) and Sandra George (**1957-2013**). Here are the two exhibition posters from 'Franki Raffles: Observing Women at Work' (2017) and Sandra George (2024).

Slide 3:

This lecture will explore what Raffles and George's archives- held in St Andrews Special Collections and Craigmillar Now respectively- can tell us about their aims and methods. In assessing who they chose to photograph, and the particular time the work was made in, I will look at the ongoing relevance and significance of their archival histories in contemporary art and society today. The lecture will also look at how the step of exhibition making with archives can further make connections that reveal more about the photographers' ways of working.

Both Raffles and George's work, can be described as social documentary feminist photography. As a categorisation, if we break this down, this means documentary photography that is concerned with social and feminist themes. Whereas 'documentary photography' can be photojournalism, or documenting historical events, social documentary photography can be concerned with the everyday, with highlighting social or environmental themes. I know in your course 'Art in Context 2', you have been exploring socially engaged art practice. If you consider what the 'social' aspect means here, in essence, to work with engage with others, to engage with social issues, this also applies to social documentary photography, which can involve capturing communities. It can record the subject overtime.

Feminist in this phrase, aligns with an approach or intention in the work, aligned with feminist principals, ethics, activities and focus, again which can be on the everyday.

Slide 4

As a further proviso, I should say, that Raffles and George are by no means the first women in Scotland to be chronicling communities through photography (and film). '*Glean: Early 20th century women filmmakers and photographers in Scotland*' was a survey show of 14 women that I curated in 22/23 at City Art Centre, Edinburgh. In that period, many of the women like Margaret Fay Shaw, Shetland filmmaker Jenny Gilbertson, Dr Beatrice Garvie in North Ronaldsay, Orkney and MEM (Mary Ethel Muir) Donaldson in Ardnamurchan, differed from their male peers by living in the communities for long periods of time. This, in the case of Margaret Fay Shaw, meant that her photographs of North Glendale in South Uist, showed the cycles of the year with crofting, and her friendships with the MacRae sisters, who we see here cutting oats and their neighbours.

Slide 5:

However, to bring it back to the 1980s and early 1990s, both Raffles and George were working, separately, in Edinburgh. There is no evidence to date that they were aware of each other.

To set the scene of this time in Scotland, we have to consider politically The Conservative party, under Margaret Thatcher were in government. After coming into power in 1979 they remained in UK government for eighteen years until 1997. We have to remember that Scotland was yet to have its own parliament, which was founded in 1999. Thatcher aimed to cut spending on the welfare state, to aid the British economy, believing that a collective provision for unemployment and sickness benefits demotivated working-class people's drive to work. Therefore, her economic, cultural and legal ethos was based on reward for the values of '*thrift, self-reliance and charity amongst the classes*', [1] which led to the cult of individualism. Thatcher was to say '*there is no such thing as society*', in her belief in the values of self-reliance and independence. Her social security policies therefore led to '*death by a thousand cuts*', a quote by political scientist Paul Pierson, where the aim was for social security to be the 'last resort for the poorest minority'. [2]

It is against this backdrop that both Raffles and George purposefully worked with those minorities Thatcher sought to in essence demonise. As we shall see in Raffles body of work '*To Let You Understand*', a collaboration with Edinburgh District Council's Women's Committee, which focussed on low paid work, and in Sandra George's sensitive chronicling of disenfranchised communities in Wester Hailes, Niddrie and Craigmillar, in Edinburgh, both photographers intended to show the power of community. In doing so, both were working against the ruling dictates of the time, of the 'individual'.

Slide 6:

Franki Raffles introduction

Franki Raffles was born in Salford, and studied an MA (Hons) in Philosophy at St Andrews University 1973-77. As a student, Raffles was active in Womens' Liberation groups in St Andrews and nationally. As a teenager in 1971 she was in a youth group travelling to the Soviet Union. In 1984-85, she took a year off with her female partner Sandy and daughter Anna to travel across Soviet Union into China, Tibet, Nepal, India, Hong Kong and The Phillipines. She documented the lives of women on this trip, particularly women at work...

Slide 7:

...returning to the Soviet Union in summer 1989 on a three-month road trip with her young daughter, to specifically take further photographs of women at work. Her partner Sandy (From Franki Raffles digital archive) said:

'... but she always asked before she took someone's photograph'.

This work was exhibited as part of Glasgow's 1990 European City of Culture at Pearce Institute in 'Women Workers', Pearce Institute. Working with City of Edinburgh District Council's Women's Committee, a Labour Council in Thatcher's Britain, Raffles was firstly to chronicle the working conditions of women in low pay jobs in Edinburgh, in 1988. Raffles was to photograph women workers in workplaces including Scotmid, a since defunct supermarket, Burtons' Biscuits, Millers Sweets, and Western G Laundry. Through this work, the women's committee and Raffles developed a unique way of combining statistics with image.

Slide 8:

She then, with Evelyn Gillan, established the Zero Tolerance charity, and an ongoing campaign was developed in order to raise the issue of men's violence against women and children. Here is their first 'Zero Tolerance' campaign (1992), entitled 'Prevalence'. It was a ground-breaking campaign, as it did not portray women as victims. Elaine Samson, again from the Franki Raffles Interview Transcripts on Franki Raffles Digital Archive said:

People loved the photographs but of course the brilliance of it was that all the images empowered women. They showed them as very strong women and the notion that they could be suffering violence or experiencing violence was shocking.

You can see on the poster on the left the text is: *'She lives with a successful businessman, loving father and respected member of the community. Last week he hospitalised her'.*

Slide 9

The campaign rolled out in posters, on side of buses and even in a flowerbed showed that violence can happen to any class.

Slide 10:

If we return to the political system, in the UK at the time, Colin Cavers, the then education officer at Stills Gallery, in 1989, describes how Raffles, in her photographs of women, wishes to highlight the patriarchy writ large in the system:

Franki's [work] was more raw and visceral in some respects because it was about how women themselves entered these hierarchies and took on roles within it. Whilst arguing about patriarchy and the whole male domination, the system was such that once women were into that, they entered that system. She [Franki] wanted the hierarchy to be visible at all times... the focus was on women and their position and how they dealt with their immediate environments, their society and she tried to get below that. (Interview transcripts, Franki Raffles digital archive)

Here we have Raffles photograph of the doctor, who is the woman.

In 1994, at the age of 39, Raffles died as a result of complications during childbirth. Over twenty years later, Raffles' friend, Alistair Scott, with the support of her family, made a digital archive of her work, as part of his research project at Napier University, which gathered together her complete photographic practice, including her notebooks, diaries and press cuttings. Scott worked with St Andrews Special Collections, which now holds the physical archive relating to her work.

Slide 11:

Viewing Raffles' work in black-and-white from our current decade is not in any way a nostalgic activity. In her writing, she talked of wanting to use the camera as a political tool for change and the improvement of women's lives. The quotes she and the Women's Committee used, concentrate on high unemployment statistics for school leavers; impending privatisation; low pay; childcare issues, particularly free nursery places; income support; inadequate NHS funding; equal opportunities; and employee protection rights.

Fast-forward over three decades to 2024, following Thatcher, New Labour, BREXIT, and the pandemic, Raffles' work continues to be relevant to present-day working conditions and debates.

"Lots of women go out to work at night when he's in to look after the bairns – if you have to pay a childminder you can't afford to work. It's the only way to do it".

Part-time worker, Retail Industry, 1988

Slide 12:

Zero Tolerance as a campaign also continues. The impact of the power of Raffles' initial campaigns can be seen in Zero Tolerance's 2017 commission, 25 years on, of photographer Alicia Bruce. Bruce kept the same format, 'following in the footsteps of Raffles work', and re-assesses the women who are affected by 'men's violence against women with learning disabilities, BME women, gender-based violence in LGBT communities and commercial sexual exploitation.'

Slide 13

Sandra George introduction

In 2024, The Glasgow School of Art Exhibitions presented a solo exhibition of Sandra George (1957-2013), as part of the open Programme for Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 2024.

Born in Nottingham, Sandra George lived the first seven years of her life in Jamaica with her mother, before moving to Birmingham, and then Edinburgh, to live with her father. In the 1980s Sandra worked in Community Development in Wester Hailes. She gained her BA Photography in Napier University in 1982. In the 1990s she worked in Craigmillar, Edinburgh for organisations including McGovan House, the Thistle Foundation, and the Craigmillar Community Arts Centre. She later did her BA Hons 2001-2004 here at Edinburgh College of Art, specialising in Drawing and Painting. She then did Community Education at the University of Edinburgh in 2004. In 2008 she was Youth Services Manager with Hunter's Hall Cooperative, Craigmillar. That year she launched Niddrie Community Youth Group.

Slide 14

She was a prolific social-documentary photographer, taking thousands of images of community projects across Scotland between the late 1980s through to the late 2000s. George was a freelance photographer for over 30 years for organisations and publications such as the Sentinel, the Tollcross Community Newspaper, Shelter, and the Craigmillar Festival News and the Craigmillar Chronicle.

Whilst George did not exhibit in her lifetime, Craigmillar Now have curated Sandra George, Craigmillar 1988–1994; The White House, Craigmillar 2022; Sandra George, Craigmillar 1988–1994, Oman's Pub, Craigmillar 2023; and in the group exhibition We © Craigmillar, at The Craigmillar Heart's Community Club 2023.

Slide 15

Social justice and equity was at the heart of both George's community and artistic work.

Her black and white photography included subjects ranging from Braille classes in Royal Blind School Edinburgh, to capturing sessions with disabled musicians. Her perspective and insight as a Black female social documentary photographer and artist adds further importance to this collection – women photographers of colour capturing community life in Scotland over this time period are significantly underrepresented.

Slide 16: [Victo](#)

The message of her work – community, care, accessibility and equality in the arts and workplaces, ethics in working with others in under-reached communities, exploration of identity - are all relevant to issues and themes today. Her observations are always sensitive and surprising, here is a young couple at Victoria Hostel in Edinburgh. Her work represents an important and previously missing part of Edinburgh's social histories, of those communities whether by class, ethnicity or disability have been overlooked.

Jimmy Hewitt, Sandra George's former partner said:

'Sandra was photographing the women living in the hostel going about their daily lives. Sandra being Sandra would spend days and nights staying in the hostel with the women. I was there supervising a group of offenders on community service orders carrying out maintenance work on the building'.

It was while Hewitt was supervising the same work years later at Craigmillar Now - with offenders cleaning the garden around the centre - that Craigmillar Now connected with him. He gave them Sandra's collection for safe keeping.

Slide 17:

Her sensitive portrayals give people their agency every time, to learn, to play, to take collective action. George, writing on photography in her journal noted:

'Stop making assumptions about people'.... 'Start from the level people are based'.

Here we have her documentation of international women's day in 1989 with Shakti, a women's group.

Slide 18

What do we see when we visit the archive? Both Raffles and George were working in a pre-digital era.

In University of St Andrews, the majority of Raffles' archives are in boxes and folders of negatives and contact sheets, with some original prints and work. Raffles work was, before the stage of accessing in to University of St Andrews, where she had studied, digitised in an Edinburgh Napier University project led by Professor Alistair Scott, a friend of Raffles.

The collection in Craigmillar Now's care consists of over 30 negative folders with thousands of images of community projects across Scotland between the late 1980s through to the late 2000s. Craigmillar Now continue, with their team and volunteers, to digitise the negatives in the archive. More of Sandra's work comes to light as her family, her son Tyler in particular finds it. A visit to the archive, in a former church, off a roundabout, is such a community focused experience. The rhythm of a work day at Craigmillar Now, as they care for George's archive, amongst others, is the heart of this archive. As volunteers take sections of her work to scan, chatting about the images that jump out, then the main table is cleared temporarily in order to stop to eat lunch - Craigmillar Now is, as Neil Cooper Neil Cooper in his article in Bella Caledonia, June 2022, a 'living archive'. Whilst there are boxes of original prints, and a collection of George's art and making, a sizable part of the archive is her negatives and contact sheets. The team shares these but also has a screen where they can show the folders of digitised photographs on, to any visitor.

Slide 19 [Maria Lind quote](#)

Exhibition making

What can curating and exhibition-making achieve when working with archives? Both Raffles' at the point of the initial exhibition of her work in 2017, and Sandra George's work had been missing from feminist art history discourse. Therefore, exhibitions are a way of making their particular contributions visible to a wider audience. As a curator, you are looking to understand someone's work, and the context it was made in, and find ways or devices in the exhibition to draw out these connections. In terms of exhibition-making, I would define my own curatorial methodology as aligned to Maria Lind who described the appraisal of an artist's work, in particular when they are not there, (as is the case of Raffles who died when she was 39 and George who was 56) requiring a 'context-sensitive' reading of the work itself in order to establish the logic of the subsequent exhibition (P.63, *The Curatorial, Maria Lind Selected Writing*, Sternberg Press, 2010). As we will see from examples, when in an archive you are looking for evidence of the photographer's aims and process, from the material present. This research can also be enhanced by looking for other primary sources – their own writing about their work for example. There are no recorded audio interviews with either photographer. In terms of other secondary sources, there is the opportunity to speak with those that knew them.

Slide 20

Through conversations with Prof Alistair Scott, who in essence represented Raffles family also, their main aim for Raffles' work and the archives was that it be engaged with by curators and scholars in a multitude of readings, interpretations and exhibitions over the next years to come. Therefore, it was the ethos of the Reid Gallery exhibition not to be the definitive exhibition by any means, referencing all the bodies of her work, in a quasi-retrospective, for example, that would have meant no-one else could approach her work for a while. Rather, the exhibition ethos was to focus on three bodies of work, looking at the theme of women and labour; considering how Raffles used her photography to communicate a message; and to begin to place her work in a historical and her contemporary context. It was also important to draw together a small publication that would, through Alistair's work, bring together key information including a timeline for the first time, acting as a reference for others in the near future, wishing to engage with her work.

So, the exhibition at the Glasgow School of Art in 2017 brought together three bodies of Raffles' work:

Slide 21

To Let You Understand... (1988), showed 14 digitally scanned and printed photographs from a larger series that was part of her year-long project initiated by City of Edinburgh District Council Women's Committee, documenting working women's lives in Edinburgh. This commissioned work combined quotes from women workers' in Edinburgh with photographs Raffles' made of women in these work places.

“My Mum works here and my aunty. The pay is good but it is boring”.

Line Worker, Bottling Plant, 1988

Slide 22

Women at Work, Russia (1989), showing 34 digitally scanned and printed photographs from a larger series from Raffles’ roadtrip to Russia, just before perestroika, capturing Soviet women at work in both rural and urban places.

Slide 23

and 3 posters, original artefacts and other related material from the first *Zero Tolerance campaign* (1993), entitled *Prevalence*. As mentioned, *Zero Tolerance* was a charity established by Franki Raffles and Edinburgh District Council Women’s Committee in the late 1980s, to raise awareness of the issue of men’s violence against women and children.

Slide 24

From a first assessment of existing archival material that I selected Raffles’ two bodies of work referencing women at work; one in Soviet Union and one in Scotland, in order to draw out her interest in political systems, using the exhibition layout to contrast those systems to imply what the photographer perceived to be the difference in condition for women workers. There is a palpable difference in the women workers, with the strength of the women working in the Soviet Union; versus the more resigned air of the women workers in Edinburgh. Here we have the women plasterers in Russia, as opposed to the supermarket stackers and chambermaids in Edinburgh, whose backs are all to the camera.

Raffles’ work in Russia and other countries demonstrates the international scope of Raffles’ work which is unique when compared to other feminist practitioners looking at this subject in the 1980s and 1990s.

Slide 25

In terms of exhibition schema, to represent the Soviet emphasis on the collective, *Soviet Women* was shown across two walls as a non-linear gathering, ranging from rural to urban workplace when reading left to right.

Slide 26

To Let You Understand... was hung uniformly in a modest single line.

Slide 27

I selected the third body of work, *‘Zero Tolerance’*, a graphic advertising campaign, to demonstrate that Raffles’ saw her work as having to function by communicating a message. This work showed how Raffles’ used her photography in a campaign format. As part of my archival research for the exhibition, I reviewed material of Raffles’ own documentation of

the *Zero Tolerance* campaign in Edinburgh as it rolled out across billboards and the sides of buses. This prompted the exhibition-making decision to print the *Zero Tolerance* logo to the scale of a billboard and paste it directly onto the gallery wall. The presence of this large billboard-esque size paste-up, undermined the sovereignty of framed photographic work in the gallery space, thus aligning with the photographer's aim for her work to communicate a message beyond being an art object. The inclusion of the graphic campaign and billboard sized *Zero Tolerance* image in the gallery, aimed to subvert the gallery white cube as principal holder of this exhibition when Raffles' made her work predominantly for a public domain.

Slide 28

From the visit to St Andrews Archives, I utilised the formal aspects of Raffles' processes, such as her inclusion through captioning the dialogue with those she is photographing, to become formal exhibition devices. Where possible those captions appear as vinyl lettering under framed works in the Reid Gallery exhibition. This also showed Raffles' aim to clearly give the women a voice, and draw out the ethnographic methodology in Raffles' work, through inclusion of her captioning of the subjects. The quotations are important as they include the voice of the women.

Here we have road builders in Caucasus:

Two women who have built over 100 kilometres of roads together. One says, "You have people called housewives don't you".

Slide 29:

The captions provide information, they are humorous at times and they capture the 'on the ground' interaction between Raffles and the women she photographs. In *'Potato Lifting, State Farm, Caucasus'* of 1989, a woman in her overall, standing with her hands on the small of her back, says to Raffles:

'... 'Why don't you come over and live here. I could get you a job no problem. I said 'I've got a job already'. She said 'Yeah, taking photographs of me'.

The roles conferred by work create equality between the person behind and in front of the camera.

Slide 30

I experimented with the scale of Raffles' works, in order to visually test out what information could be gained from a variance in scale. This was because there was no archival evidence of how Raffles' displayed her work in galleries (*Women in China*, The Corridor Gallery, Fife, 1988, *Picturing Women*, Stills, Edinburgh, 1989, *Women Workers*, Pearce Institute, Glasgow & Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 1990) beyond one comment in a visitors comment book saying the photographs by Raffles' on display were 'too small and difficult to see.

I wished to place Raffles' work in a wider context by showing examples of her work alongside four other historical and contemporary women photographers and collectives who also engaged with the theme of women and work. The Reid Gallery is architecturally formed of two spaces which allowed for this formal shift. The larger scale in the first 'room' offered the opportunity to see the 'lurking' figures in the margins of photographs, more often than not, men. In the second room, where individual works of Raffles were placed next to other historical and contemporary photographers work, I ensured that all works, including Raffles' images were printed to a small, intimate scale, echoing the size of early prints in the photographic albums of Margaret Fay Shaw.

Slide 31

The second room of the gallery was key in placing Raffles' work in a wider context of women photographers exploring gender, women and labour. This comparative methodology through exhibition-making allowed for a revisionist process of placing Raffles' work in a wider set of histories. These photographers and collectives I placed certain of Raffles' works with were: Helen Muspratt (1907-2001), Margaret Fay Shaw (1903-2004), Doris Ullmann (1882-1934) and Hackney Flashers Collective.

In the first pairing, original photographs by Helen Muspratt from 1936 of Russian women workers in a field were shown alongside a Raffles 1989 photograph of Soviet women workers in the field of a state farm. A small display of materials relating to Muspratt, showing two examples of how she used her photographs for dissemination on her return to the UK were present in a display case. By placing her work next to Helen Muspratt's there was an alignment of political ideologies – here was a representative from an earlier generation of women photographers had been drawn through political ideology to also photograph Soviet women at work.

Slide 32

Comparison also allowed for analysing the difference between photographers' composition of shot, by showing Raffles' photograph of Soviet women knitting on a street corner, alongside American photographer Doris Ullmann's photographs of women's lives and in particular, working on craft, in the Appalachian Mountains in the 1920s' and '30s'. Whilst Raffles' favoured a mid-shot, placing women in their environments, Doris Ullman as a comparative example in the gallery, showed a photographer favouring close-ups of hands working.

Slide 33

A similarity in composition was brought out in the pairing of Margaret Fay Shaw and Raffles, with Raffles' *Sheep Shearing, The Fank, Lewis* (1981) alongside Shaw's *Mairi MacRae shearing, North Glendale, South Uist* (1934). This offered the opportunity to analyse the woman as central figure to both photographers' ways of working – in this case the composition echoes this, with a woman shearing as the central figure in the frame, around whom others in the group rotate.

Slide 34

The final pairing, brought together Raffles with The Hackney Flashers, in order to begin to place her work within the timeframe it was made, in the 1980s, where womens' collectives were also interrogating themes around women's labour. Raffles' photograph of a Soviet woman working in a shoe factory, was shown alongside a work by the Hackney Flashers Collective, who were commissioned by Hackney Trades Council in 1975 to document women's working conditions. This feminist and socialist collective was set up in 1974 and included members Ann Dekker, Sally Greenhill, Elizabeth Heron, Michael Ann Mullen, Maggie Murray, Christine Roche, Jo Spence and Julia Vellacott. This reprinted work was from their *Women and Work* series.

Slide 35

To conclude, the Reid Gallery exhibition schema was aimed to confront the audience in the following ways: On entering the gallery, the viewer was immediately confronted by the volume of images of women in workplaces. The exhibition-goer's experience was to be surrounded by a society entirely comprising of women, who moreover were undertaking roles more associated with males. Through this repetition of gender, each photograph included in the exhibition reinforced Raffles' feminist agenda.

By fore-fronting in the exhibition the issues that Raffles was commenting on- inequality of pay, capitalism and labour, violence against women – the exhibition goer could make the connection that such issues remain relevant today.

This comparative method, drawn from placing Raffle's work in the context of others, allowed the focus to be an active analysis of the work itself. It was a key method to move away from the monograph approach of a 'solo exhibition'. It also moved the gallery-goer away from considering biography more important than process, aims and methods of a photographer's work.

Sandra George, 5 Florence St, Glasgow, 2024

Slide 36

Sandra George, at 5 Florence Street, took place in 2024 and was one of the exhibitions that was part of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art. I curated this exhibition in partnership with Craigmillar Now, a community-led arts and heritage organisation based in Craigmillar, Edinburgh who hold George's collection.

This solo exhibition of George's work presented her photography and a selection from her wider artistic multi-disciplinary practice which includes printing, painting, bookworks, textiles and jewellery.

John Latham said *'The context is half the work'*, which can apply to curating too. The exhibition was at an old school building, 5 Florence St, which meant I could select two classrooms to show the work in, thus being able to present a room on her community work and wider portraiture, and a second room on Sandra's biography, which also included the

other artforms Sandra had worked in when a mature student at Edinburgh College of Art. The context of the school, rather than a gallery space, also echoed the types of spaces that Sandra worked in.

Slide 37

From my assessment of the archive, Sandra made numerous images in sequence of the groups she photographed. Each of the images from the sequence would tell a different part of the story. Rather than select and show singular images from each group, I chose to select strong sequences for each 'story' to begin to show her process as a photographer. So here is the wider Blindcraft series. The Edinburgh Blindcraft Bed Factory was based in Craigmillar and closed in 2011. It had operated since 1793, when it had been established as the Royal Blind Asylum, making beds and mattresses. At the point of Edinburgh City Council shutting it down, citing the factory was loss-making, more than 60% of Blindcraft's employees were people with disabilities or visually impaired. In Sandra's series, we see the receptionist, Robert, at work. Sandra takes shots of him from different angles, showing how he works the particular tools of his trade – the tannoy speaker system as well as the braille. As well as being inside his little office, she then goes out into the showroom, to look in. you can just make out the jar that is collecting for a Christmas Pensioners event.

Slide 38

And here is the wider Shakti series, showing the international women's day event and also the women in their office, protesting and at a lunch break. By showing this work in sequence, it begins to illustrate that Sandra spent real time with the groups she photographed, going back repeatedly, as distinct from just treating it like an assignment.

Slide 39

The sequential reading of Sandra's work, in particular for the community photographs, became the focus of the first classroom. The architecture of the classroom meant we could have three freestanding walls down the central space. The photograph groupings were: 'Victoria Hostel', 'Blindcraft', 'Shakti Womens Group', 'Royal Blind School', 'Disabled Musicians at North British Hotel, Edinburgh' and a sequence from a shop which had been targeted with racist graffiti.

Slide 40

On the original classroom walls, I grouped photographs from Sandra's documentation of protests undertaken over an almost twenty-year period, which included an Elderly People's Demo (1981), an 'Unemployment Demo', a demonstration on the Mound, Princes Street, organised by Access Ability (1998), an Anti Sex Shop Demo (1981) and 'A Night for the ANC'.

Slide 41

On the opposing wall, after this focus on sequences that built a bigger nuanced picture, I wished to show the breadth of Sandra's wider work, so selected another curatorial method that would hint at a different route in her work – that of the singular portrait. Here we have Marmion, Edinburgh, (1995), commissioned by Margaret Blackwood. Marmion, founded in

1972 by Dr Blackwood, was a national Housing and Care provider specialising in homes and case service for people with disabilities.

Slide 42

Conversations with the Craigmillar Now team, and with Tyler, Sandra's son, provided insight and turning points in the selection of works and shape of the exhibition. In talking with him about the number of the original selection of works, he was disappointed it was a smaller number due to the available wall space. He suggested bringing in screens to add to the available hanging space. In the archives, I saw this snapshot of an exhibition Sandra had, I think help organised, with these vivid blue screens. We therefore made two sets of screens for 5 Florence St. Sandra was adept in photographing children, again getting down to their level and capturing how they played. One of the screens was dedicated to this subject, moving from the more formal play of school to wild play.

Slide 43

The second screen was dedicated to place, as Sandra's observations of different areas in Edinburgh, including Wester Hailes, Niddrie, Oxfords, Craigmillar, Granton and Greendykes, were keen portraits of the different areas. Whilst some would record the ruinous architecture of some areas, equally Sandra showed the power of the community self-organising different events such as gala days and free concerts – again her approach was the antithesis of showing only the multiple deprecation.

Slide 44

in Sandra George's practice, there was an equally strong strand of self-portrait and works on family, in particular charting her son Tyler from baby through the first childhood years.

Slide 45

Sandra was very much in her self portraits exploring her own identity as a Black woman. Her work is so important as biography is of key importance in terms of representation and equality, when archives have been a predominantly white pursuit, both for audiences and for a current generation of Black and POC practitioners. I was also very much aware of my position as a white curator, so rather than 'extract' from Sandra's work, the exhibition was very much developed with her family and also Craigmillar Now. I was also from this position very much aware of the 'pitfalls'. From an essay 'The Nature of Photography' (1989) written by Maud Sulter, published in 'Shining Lights: Black Women Photographers in the 1980s-90s Britain', edited by Joy Gregory with Taous Dahmani:

'Black women have been using cameras ever since they were invented. Part of the difficulty for those of us engaged in the reconstruction of that participation, our herstory, is the lack of documentation and the difficulties in trying to reclaim it. There are many Black photographers who are trying to explore the naming of that which remains un-named however to succeed in the face of the almost insurmountable odds which are stacked against

us the adage must always be remembered: You cannot dismantle the masters house using the master's tools.'

This is sobering reading as it shows the disadvantage Sandra George was at. She had no exhibitions in her lifetime.

Slide 46

Therefore, the second room of the exhibition, which operated as a biography type of room for Sandra, and was of equal importance, offering the opportunity to show a whole series of Sandra's self portraits and work on her family.

Slide 47

There was also as part of the project an archive commission call-out, to commission a Black or Person of Colour contemporary photographer /artist/ community worker or curator to engage with the archive and develop an event for Gi. Christian Noelle Charles developed 'An Evening for Sandra George' and created a panel discussion with Zoe Lorimer and Titilayo Farukuoye. Christian, Zoe and Titilayo held a reflective dialogue, on the experience of living as Black women in Scotland and the role of community in navigating challenges and fostering resilience. The event offered a space for meaningful conversation and connection, honoring Sandra's contributions while highlighting the ongoing importance of amplifying Black voices in the arts.

All participants continue to explore Sandra's archive beyond this exhibition and will bring their own readings to her work.

Slide 48:

Conclusion

In the intervening years there has been increasing academic scholarship and curatorship around Franki Raffles. In the last seven years (through the work of Prof Alistair Scott, Dr Catherine Spencer and Kuang Vivian Sheng), and in particular with the current '*Franki Raffles: Photography, Activism, Campaign Works*' at Baltic Newcastle, which runs until 16 March 2025. This will no doubt deservedly so, be built over the next few years on Sandra George. How can a critical mass and tipping point be reached with their work for it to be widely known and enjoyed? Whilst Raffles work was included by the curator Lynsey Young, in the feminist epic 'Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990' (on until 26 Jan 2024 at National Galleries of Scotland), neither Raffles nor George appear in the Tate Britain's current '*The 80s: Photographing Britain*'. Indeed, the only two Scottish or Scotland based photographers in this show are Thomas Joshua Cooper and Maud Sulter. This could be for a number of reasons, including the two archives of Raffles and George only coming into being relatively recently, in the last decade. However, it also, in terms of the Tate Britain show, could be the knowledge reach from a London epicentre only travels up so far North. There is also, the awkward relationship between white cube spaces and work that focuses on community. Whilst George sadly did not exhibit her work in her lifetime, to be

able to enjoy the response it has since achieved with audiences, Raffles, although showing in Stills in 1989, as part of a group show 'Picturing women', put together by Stills Gallery with Scottish Film Council and the Arts Council, chose to exhibit her work in community spaces. It also is not without a sense of irony, to make the statement that there are other women photographers of a current generation in Scotland who get overlooked. However, if Raffles and George's work was to continue to be overlooked on a wider national and international stage, as a curatorial glance shifts from the 80s to other decades, much would be lost in how these two women documented a far more equal view of communities.

However, I believe a collective rather than Thatcherite individualistic approach to their work, in terms of many people working with it, bringing their own experiences and readings to it, and caring for it, will fittingly raise the profile of their work. This seems to me to be more in keeping with the ethos of both women and how they would wish their message to reach others.

Footnotes

[1] History and Policy website

[2] Ibid