

# Picturing their finest hour



Rubble trouble: Peter Mitchell's Quarry Hill Flats image features in the varied exhibition Picture: Project Space Leeds

## ART

### Photography and fine art are fused for Artist And Camera

This autumn marks the season of the snapper in Leeds and Bradford, when Ways Of Looking, a festival of photography and new media, takes place in both cities. It officially launches in September, with a programme ranging from new work from five photographers at the NMM, to Pixelvision, art films made using Fisher-Price's 1980s toy camcorder, at Hyde Park Picture House.

As a taste of what's to come, Leeds Art Gallery's exhibition, Artist And Camera, highlights key works from its permanent collection of contemporary photography. With Gilbert & George, and Cornelia Parker

► Here I am in the 21st century but stuck round 1975... I'm looking at my youth, and at a Leeds that no longer exists ◀

among featured names, it spans monochrome and colour photography, portraits, landscapes, still life and mixed media.

Photography took a long time to be accepted by the fine-art world. Leeds Art Gallery only acquired its first piece of contemporary photography, Richard Long's Five Stones, Iceland, in 1975. Around the same time, Peter Mitchell was turning his lens on the derelict buildings of Leeds' changing cityscape. His image titled Quarry Hill Flats, Priestley House, 12 February 1978 captures the last days of the housing development that had become an eyesore.

'At one time these would have been classed as documentary. But they're half fine art, half documentary,' Mitchell says. According to him, Leeds was ahead of many other galleries in collecting photography. 'The fine-art appreciation that's come into photography is actually very recent, in England only since the late 1980s.'

Mitchell's pictures are also unusual for their time by being in colour, an area of photography that took even longer to gain acceptance. 'I came to Leeds in 1972 and that was a time when everyone was shooting in black and white. It was something of a convention; a gritty realism kind of thing.' He suggests that colour printing's tendency to fade over time dents its status in the fine-art world. 'Even the newer inkjet prints will fade. Maybe that is part of the prejudice.'

Fortunately for Mitchell, his early pictures are now receiving the artistic attention they were denied 30 years ago. They can currently be seen in No Such Thing As Society, also at Leeds Art Gallery. 'Here I am in the 21st century, stuck round about 1975 to 1978 because this is the stuff people want to see now,' he laughs. 'They particularly like it because it's in colour.'

I'm looking at my youth here, and at a Leeds that no longer exists.'

Mitchell continues to photograph Leeds, using a traditional film camera. 'I've been photographing this city for 30-odd years and it's a kind of concentration that nobody else has done. People say, "Is there anything left to shoot in Leeds?" but every day is fresh. I'm quite curious about what's happening to the city at the moment.'

What does he think gives photography the edge over other media? 'I always regard it as the only insurance against death, somehow. You look at a photograph and it's real; you can place it. And I like the idea that it's light from the sun bouncing off people and on to your negative.'

*Abi Bliss*  
Until Nov 2, Leeds Art Gallery, The Headrow, Leeds, Mon and Tue 10am to 8pm, Wed noon to 8pm, Thu to Sat 10am to 5pm, Sun 1pm to 5pm. Tel: 0113 247 8256.  
[www.leeds.gov.uk/artgallery](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/artgallery)