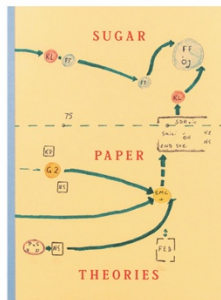


Jack Latham: Sugar Paper Theories – Exhibition Resource 1/3

These resources have been produced in support of Jack Latham's 'Sugar Paper Theories', hosted at RPS House, Bristol from 12 October 2019. For further insights, activities and discussion points, visit photopedagogy.com/sugar-paper-theories

Jack Latham is a contemporary photographer who produces original imagery and utilises existing work to tell complex stories. Sugar Paper Theories is his second major project, developed in response to a notorious unresolved double murder investigation in Iceland. The work won the Bar Tur Photobook Award in 2016. The exhibition and resulting photobook are an innovative combination of original and archive images and text.



Images from *Sugar Paper Theories*: Clockwise, from top left: *Sugar Paper Theories* (photobook cover); Hamarsbraut 11, Hafnarfjörður; Penni #1; Conspiracy Theorist's desk, Reykjavík; Kristján #9.

Forty years ago, two men went missing in southwest Iceland: An 18-year-old set off from a nightclub, drunk, on a 10-kilometre walk home in the depths of Icelandic winter. Some months later, a family man failed to return from a meeting with a mysterious stranger. They have never been found. However, rather than being classified as missing persons, the Gudmundur and Geirfinnur case became the biggest and most controversial murder investigation in Icelandic history.

Sugar Paper Theories might be considered a type of document. It refers to events from the past utilising text and photography. It also utilises recent documentary photography to capture events, places and people in the present. The photobook and exhibition are works of art expressing the interests of the artist/photographer through aesthetic decisions. In some ways, *Sugar Paper Theories* is about the very notion of documentary uncertainty.

For discussion

- How do we use photographs to help us remember - and how influential are photographs upon our memories?
- How reliable are our memories? How reliable are photographs as a form of evidence?

For further information visit photopedagogy.com/sugar-paper-theories

Jack Latham: Sugar Paper Theories – Exhibition Resource 2/3

Sugar Paper Theories contains a number of old photographs from police archives. Given that the original investigation took place in the 1970s, Latham has included these images to help tell the story of what happened then and how these events have reverberated down the years.

An unusual amount of trust can be placed in photographs as sources of evidence. Perhaps this is because they appear to simply copy observable reality and create a visual facsimile of a fraction of a moment in time. However, photographs are much stranger than this. The world is not flat. It doesn't have an edge. Photographs are neither fixed in meaning or context. They can present us with the illusion of reality but, in fact, they are highly artificial, even those that don't look so at first glance.



Images from Sugar Paper Theories: Clockwise, from top left: Keflavik harbour; Karl Schütz's Task Force, August 1976; Interior of Grettisgata, Reykjavik; Red Mill, Keflavik.

These images were made by the police to document aspects of the original criminal investigation. However, with the passing of time, they can now be seen differently. We might be drawn to their aesthetic qualities, their ability to suggest a particular atmosphere, the way that light plays across the various surfaces. We might wonder about the identities of the people in the group portrait or who lives and works in the buildings. The bunker-like room might evoke a range of feelings - claustrophobia, fear, intrigue etc. Interspersed throughout the book and exhibition, these photographs are far from being direct and reliable sources of evidence. Each viewer might see something different in them, feel differently about them. Jack Latham calls into question the relationship between memory and truth.

Activity

- **Find an old family photograph** featuring several individuals. Either, (a) interview all the surviving subjects in the photograph, asking them to remember the occasion in as much detail as possible - what happened, how did they feel before, during and after the photograph was taken, what was their life like then? OR (b) invent a series of short stories/descriptions in which you imagine the lives of each of the subjects in the photograph.

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Jack Latham: Sugar Paper Theories – Exhibition Resource 3/3

Police and forensic photography can comprise of different genres, for example, Identification portraits (of suspects and criminals - commonly referred to as 'mug shots'); location shots (e.g. buildings and streetscapes where crimes may have been committed); or still life images (e.g. collections of objects as evidence). Forensic photographs may be taken at distance (e.g. to provide an overview of a scene); from a mid-way point (e.g. to document distance and relationships between evidence); or close-up (e.g. to provide specific details, such as wounds on a victim).

Of course, Jack Latham's own pictures were taken long after the original crime and do not depict the criminals or victims. However, he is able to reinforce themes of investigation through association and by using the typology of crime photographs.



Images from *Sugar Paper Theories*: Red Mill Interior; Grettisgata Alleyway

“*Sugar Paper Theories* revels in its inconsistencies and mistakes, and its overt embrace of blind alleys and dead ends gives the photobook its originality. It’s a smart example of an intentional, unsolvable muddle, giving form to the vexing uncertainty of human memory.” -- from a review by **Loring Knoblauch**

Activity

- Imagine you are a forensic photographer. Stage and document an imaginary crime scene. Think carefully about location and props. Consider the different types of images you could make - wide, medium and close-ups. Think about the time of day and lighting. Will you need to use flash? Will you photograph some of the evidence separately (as if you were in a forensic laboratory) or only on location? Don't forget to take two pictures - one with and one without a ruler. Present your photographs in an official looking dossier or display comparable to courtroom or Police files.

Alternatively, choose a familiar location - a place perceived as safe and comfortable. Then, without staging or intervention, photograph this forensically. Is it possible through your choice of framing and focus to imbue a new sense of tension, fear or suspicion?

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