Lloyd, Joe. 'Steve McQueen returns to Tate Britain with a joyous work of cinematic time and scale'. *British Journal of Photography*. January 2020.

**Editor’s Introduction**

**Cool + Noteworthy**

As we head towards the end of the year, we bring you some of our highlights of the preceding 12 months, abandoning our usual magazine sections to offer an idiosyncratic annual review of sorts.

Having marked the passing of photography’s great legend, Robert Frank, in last month’s issue, our eighth Cool + Noteworthy edition is determinedly about things we’ve loved about photography in 2019, but for one reason or another haven’t made it into our preceding 11 editions. So, we celebrate the arrival of new galleries and museums, from Lumen in the Italian Dolomites to the Institut pour la photographie in northern France, while also recognising fledgling initiatives, such as LagosPhoto, which has gone from strength to strength. As always, there’s an emphasis on inspired collaborations, from Aída Muluneh’s commission from WaterAid, and Steve McQueen’s *Year 3* project featuring 76,146 London schoolchildren, to a bonkers partnership between AES+F and an Italian theatre director to restage a Puccini opera in Palermo.

Of course, we couldn’t entirely ignore the year’s big talking point here in the UK – Brexit. It’s a subject that we address indirectly with our annual Portrait of Britain, but one that’s been curiously underexplored by photographers from these shores. Perhaps, as Mark Duffy notes in this issue, it’s the lack of visual evidence that is the challenge. Yet, as the official House of Commons photographer, it was a subject he couldn’t ignore. In fact, it became an obsession, even after he was dismissed for “bringing parliament into disrepute” – a charge our elected politicians seem to have embraced without sanction. We also bring you the first chapter of Rob Hornstra’s *The Europeans*: an attempt to provide the wider narrative of the continent as it navigates a perilous new era.

**Simon Bainbridge**

Editor
Steve McQueen returns to Tate Britain with a joyous work of cinematic time and scale

Year 3
Words by Joe Lloyd

The first thing that strikes you about Year 3, artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen's latest project showing around London and at Tate Britain, is its sheer scale. The museum's 300ft-long Duveen Galleries have been sheathed in white boards. Mounted on these are some 3128 photographs, each depicting a single Year 3 class in a London primary school. Some 76,146 children beam out from gymnasiuims and assembly halls. It might be the largest collection of smiles ever gathered in one place. The enormity of the whole contrasts with the seeming mundanity of each A4-sized photograph, identical to those usually displayed in schools.

And yet Year 3 (for which Tate partnered with public art producer, Artangel, and London-based non-profit, A New Direction) is anything but mundane. It is a mass survey of London's seven-to-eight-year-olds at a critical age, where they establish an identity beyond their family and start to develop confidence for their future paths. It captures a moment of togetherness before divergence. For all the smiles, Year 3 carries a sense of an ending.

McQueen made his name in the 1990s as a video artist, receiving the Turner Prize at Tate Britain two decades ago, before segueing towards feature-length films, directing a string of critically acclaimed movies, including Shame and the Academy Award-winning 12 Years a Slave. While many of his early artworks were low-key, self-produced pieces, Year 3 owes something to the collaborative, many-pronged processes of cinema. The project took three years to realise, much of which was spent in preparation. Working with the NSPCC to ensure due diligence was paid towards child safety, A New Direction set about convincing London's primary schools to take part in the project, a process which involved gaining permission from every parent. Over several months, a fleet of photographers was dispatched to all the schools that responded, before the best take of each class was chosen, printed and finally installed.

The ultimate installation thrums with tension between the micro and the macro, and between the rigid logic of the photographic format and the individuality of the people they depict. Recurring backgrounds – red assembly hall curtains, wooden gym equipment, shiny banquet and linoleum floors – can sometimes trick you into believing you’ve seen the same school twice, before the pupils indicate otherwise. As well as surveying London’s youth, Year 3 also shines a light on those drawn to the teaching profession. They range from the just-graduated...
to the old-hand, some wearing suits and ties, others T-shirts and shorts – although their variety is eclipsed by the heterogeneity of the children they nurture.

The multitude of the photographs reveals London’s diversities and differences. Some photographs show all-male classes in swish west London preparatory schools, while others feature the religious paraphernalia of faith schools. There are 20-strong academical classes and smaller Special and Pupil Referral Unit groups. A few photographs even cover the home-schooled. By placing them all in the same position, Year 3 achieves a levelling not yet matched in society itself.

As well as the Tate Britain exhibition, Year 3 has also sprawled out into the surrounding city. A second manifestation, curated by Artangel’s James Lingwood, sees some 613 photographs placed on billboards (overleaf) across London’s 33 boroughs, many prominently displayed in Underground and National Rail stations. It is public art on the grandest of scales. Year 3’s ambitions stretch even further than this. “At Tate,” says senior curator Clairie Wallas, “we hope it will have a meaningful legacy in connecting children with art and showing just why creativity matters.” After the exhibition closes in May, the photographs will be posted to their schools, disseminating it across the city.

During the project’s execution, A New Direction ran 90-minute workshops at each school and provided online educational resources. All of the schools involved have been invited to visit Tate Britain, providing an access to art that many are denied. “When you get out to boroughs like Bromley,” explains assistant curator Nathan Ladd, “some of the schools don’t think of themselves as part of London. Many have never been to central London and institutions like the Tate.”

During the media view, one of the classes featured in the project came to pose for a shot with McQueen, before being let loose across the galleries. As they discovered the installation for themselves, their voices echoing ebulliently across the empty halls, it becomes abundantly clear that, as much as an artwork, Year 3 is an educational project — and one from which there is a lot to learn. http://tate.org.uk
THOMAS DANE GALLERY