



The Art of Street Photography

Martin Parr

05

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01 Martin Parr

Martin Parr is a chronicler of our age. In the face of the constantly growing flood of images released by the media, his photographs offer us the opportunity to see the world from his unique perspective. Leisure, consumption, and communication are the core areas Parr has been exploring, for several decades through his worldwide travels. His native Great Britain has been another key focus. Throughout his fifty-year career, Parr has worked to compile an extensive archive exploring contemporary British life, producing numerous bodies of work such as the seminal *The Last Resort* along the way.

“I’ve been photographing for fifty years and I’m as excited now about what I can go and photograph as I have been all through my career. So the sense of fulfilment of going out and photographing, it can never be underestimated. I get cabin fever if I haven’t been shooting for a few days, so I just want to get out there and start photographing because that’s really when you’re free to be yourself.”

“With photography, I like to create fiction out of reality. I try and do this by taking society’s natural prejudice and giving this a twist.”

Martin Parr’s Beach Therapy

Martin Parr famously uses the beach as a place of experimentation. [Learn more](#) about the technical evolution of his practice as a photographer through the beaches he has photographed.

Martin Parr
England, 2000.

[Get the signed poster](#)



Martin Parr
England, 2000.



Martin Parr
England, 1996.

[Get the stamped poster](#)



02

North Somerset Show: Results

During this lesson, we follow Parr as he navigates a classically British affair; an agricultural show, located in North Somerset, not far from Parr's hometown of Bristol. Parr is a regular attendee to events like this and says he'll never tire of them because, for him, "where there are people, there are photographs".

Martin Parr
England, 2018.





Martin Parr
England, 2018.







03 Chelsea Flower Show: Results

Our second on-location segment features Parr on assignment at the Chelsea Flower Show, London. Parr shot during the sell-off event, when the flowers on display become available for purchase, resulting in bizarre scenes as a mass-exodus of customers carrying flowers and plants ensues.

“With something like Chelsea where it’s coming at you left, right and center, it’s sort of chaotic and you’ve got to create order out of the chaos, yet keep the spirit of it being chaotic. That’s not as easy as it looks. You have to keep hammering away, shooting, shooting, and then hopefully some of these pictures will actually have that element of order and chaos.”



Martin Parr
England, 2018.





04 Reflection

Martin Parr offers some key advice as he guides us through his editing process.

Parr's Process

Parr's editing process is comprised of a number of key stages. He begins with a "generous" first edit of the work produced on any given shoot, on his computer screen. This initial selection is then printed, after which he begins his second layer of editing which is more ruthless, reducing the final selection to a handful of photographs that convey the essence of the event.

"I like the idea of making the final selection of the images from prints rather than on the screen because if there are two or three shots of the same subject, I can put them all together to determine which one works best. And also, I think it's much more unforgiving to see [a photograph] as a print rather than on a screen because you can really see how good or bad a picture is."

The failure rate is huge,
so keep on taking the rubbish.

Parr explains that in order to produce a great picture, you might need to take a lot of rubbish ones. Even for someone like Parr, with years of experience and know-how, to end up with two or three pictures from any given shoot is a good result.

“The basic theory is the more rubbish you take, the better the chances of a good photo emerging, so keep on taking the rubbish.”

You want every element
to work for you.

The details in a picture are “everything” and it is only when all the different elements are working for you that a photograph is truly successful. We see Parr examining his images, excluding the ones that, despite having some strong components, do not quite make the grade. Every element of the photograph, from composition to technique, has to work together in order for the image to contribute to the same basic goal: to create images that offer the viewer a moment of joy, interest or revelation.

The easiest person to con is yourself.

It is important to be tough on yourself during the editing process. You may have spent the day photographing at an event or on the street, and felt you captured it well, but in reality, the results may not be as strong as you had hoped. This happens to everyone, but be honest with yourself and don't allow your memories or the work that went into making an image override your decision making.



05 Assignment: Photograph an Event

Events can be a great source of photographs because they offer many opportunities: there are lots of people and a variety of scenarios to be encountered. For this assignment, Parr would like you to find an event near you and attempt to create five images that capture the essence of the day. He also reminds you to not allow your memories or emotions from the day to cloud your judgment when editing! And don't be lazy!

Share your pictures from this assignment using the hashtags:

#magnumlearn

#photographanevent

06

Further Reading

[Martin Parr's Beach Therapy](#)

[Martin Parr's Advice to Documentary Photographers](#)

[Martin Parr, Bad Weather](#)

[Martin Parr, Common Sense](#)

[Martin Parr, Autoportrait](#)

[Martin Parr, Up and Down Peachtree:
Photographs of Atlanta](#)

[Martin Parr, Black Country Stories](#)

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