

# Personal Fictions: Martin Parr [C1]

Divertenti e irriverenti, ma anche critiche. Le sue foto uniscono la cultura pop all'arte: immagini da cartolina, ma degne di essere esposte nei musei più prestigiosi!

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Martin Parr is a renowned documentary photographer, photojournalist and photobook collector. Since 1994, he has been a member of the prestigious photographic cooperative Magnum Photos, and served as its president between 2013 and 2017. Born in Surrey, in the south of England, in 1952, Parr developed his own photographic style that **blended** 'high' and 'low' culture. His interest in the **quirky** moments of common English life led to expansive UK-based projects on national food and weather, on **ailing** seaside resorts, and on the aspirations of the middle classes. Parr was invited to speak at a photography festival in Barcelona sponsored by Fujifilm, a Japanese company specialising in the photography and optical sector. As Parr explained, his projects have been defined by the development of new camera technology, **driven** by an interest in human nature, and made unique by curiosity and experimentation. He began by talking about his early influences. **Martin Parr (English accent):** My grandfather was a very **keen** photographer and it was he who got me excited about it **way back** when I was a teenager. So we went out shooting together, processed the film, made prints. So by about the age of thirteen or fourteen, I decided that I wanted to be a photographer. I went to Manchester Polytechnic from 1970 to 1973 and had a great time there! I used to argue a lot with the teachers because they wanted me **to cut short** some of the projects I was involved with, so I learned how **to argue my case** by being in a college where they didn't really appreciate what I was doing.

## UNLIKELY LOCATIONS

In 1975, Parr **moved** to a town in Yorkshire called Hebden Bridge, where he and his friends set up a little art and photography studio-workshop. **Martin Parr:** I **moved** there with some of my friends from art college. And we

decided to set up the Albert Street workshop together. And we had a painter, we had a bicycle mechanic, a designer, an architect, and myself. And as you walked into the Albert Street workshop, on the right-hand side, there was a wall where I was able to show the photographs that I was taking as I went along. When I did portraits of people, I would make a print for them and they could pick it up in the Albert Street workshop.

## LOCAL LIFE

At that time, the town had conservative traditions, but also a strong sense of community. Parr decided he wanted to capture that somehow. He focused on an annual anniversary service held in one of the town's Methodist chapels. **Martin Parr:** I decided to concentrate on one particular chapel. It was run by a community of farmers who were farming in that valley. And I got to know them very well. I would go to their farmhouses, photograph their daily life and did a whole project about life in that valley. So I think it was those sort of small details that I was discovering as I went around my Hebden Bridge work, which really moved me, which really made me think this is an ideal way to touch the soul of that community.

## GETTING WET

Parr then decided to try and think up a project that he could do in different places around Britain. He decided on the unifying theme of the changeable British weather. **Martin Parr:** I came up with this idea of photographing in and around bad weather. In Britain, we talk about the weather all the time because it's very changeable. So I liked the idea of taking this national obsession and going in and exploring that. I decided to go and buy an underwater camera and an underwater flash gun. And this gave me the freedom to photograph wherever I wanted without worrying about getting water in my camera. When they sold me the camera, they said I was the only non-swimmer that had ever bought an underwater camera. And I started to explore what was possible with this combination.

## EMBRACING BOREDOM

Photography depends on light, and the wrong light can create unwanted effects. Rather than avoid wrong things, Parr decided to make them the focus of the final image. **Martin Parr:** If you photograph in the magic hour, just when the light is fading, and it's raining or snowing, you've got these blobs on the images. And I decided to actually exploit these blobs. And I did a lot more photographs around that. And one of the other things I was thinking: I want to photograph in as boring [a] place as possible. So I went to motorway service stations, I went to supermarket car parks, just to see is it possible to take an interesting photograph in a very boring place.

## PROPAGANDA

In the 1970s, 'serious photographs' had to be in black and white. Colour was regarded as cheap and commercial. However, by the 1980s, colour exhibitions were being taken seriously in the US. Parr was impressed. **Martin Parr:** In 1982, I decided I would move from black and white to colour, and I bought myself a newly-introduced camera called a Ploughbell. It was very easy to use, quite small. And just down the road from where I lived, there was a seaside resort called New Brighton, and I went there and did a project called The Last Resort. New Brighton was a very shabby, rather run-down seaside resort, but my job was to actually contrast the background being shabby with families going out there, having their day out at the seaside. So it's the contrast between those two things I was keen to illustrate. I would take myself down there when I knew the litter was at its worst. Because, remember, I'm creating a fiction out of reality.

## THE MARTIN PARR FOUNDATION

The Martin Parr Foundation was founded in Bristol in the south-west of England in 2017 to provide a platform for British and Irish documentary photographers. It has a gallery where Parr sometimes shows his own work, but most of the time other photographers are invited to put theirs on display. Every October a popular festival is held, with 60 publishers bringing

new photography books. There is a bookshop, with regular talks by experts, and a library, holding over 5,000 photography books from the UK and abroad dating back to the Second World War. If you want to know more about this topic, read the article [Martin Parr: The Right Shutter Speed](#)

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# Glossary

- **somehow** = in qualche modo
- **moved** = emozionare
- **exploit** = sfruttare
- **ailing** = in difficoltà
- **to cut short** = tagliar corto, abbreviare
- **regarded** = considerare
- **litter** = spazzatura
- **driven** = spingere, stimolare
- **way back** = molto tempo fa
- **keen** = appassionato
- **avoid** = evitare
- **fading** = affievolirsi
- **shabby** = squallido, trasandato
- **run-down** = fatiscente, malandato
- **blended** = mescolare
- **quirky** = bizzarri, strambi
- **think up** = ideare
- **blobs** = macchie, chiazze
- **to argue my case** = discutere le tue ragioni, perorare la tua causa
- **run** = gestire