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## Capitalist Realism: Portraits of Businessmen and Laborers

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From February 25 2016, the walls of the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York will be graced with the work of one of Britain's most influential photographers, Brian Griffin. The show, which contains over 75 images both colour and black-and-white with special focus on the Thatcher years (1979-90), will mark his first solo exhibition in the United States.

Born in Birmingham in 1948, Griffin was reared in the Black Country, once the beleaguered coal-mining region in the West Midlands of England. He grew up in a simple two-up-two-down house in a small village called Lye. Between the ages of 16 and 21 Griffin worked in engineering, helping out in local factories and at the British Steel Corporation. His life as a photographer however, began in 1966 when a factory foreman

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invited him to join the local camera club, and his talent was recognized a few years following while studying at Manchester Polytechnic's School of Photography.

Entering his career as a corporate photographer, Griffin was surprisingly quick to develop a personal style, and he soon began to focus on his own personal projects, usually exploring themes of worldwide disruption of globalization.

When Thatcher came into power in 1979 and the mines began to seal their doors all across Britain, Griffin began capturing both the heroes and victims of Thatcherism and globalization. The title of the show, Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism, is actually a reference to the photographic style he adapted for this project, which was jokingly termed Capitalist Realism – a parody of Socialist Realism (an art movement that glorified Communist values). In his quirky portraits of businessmen and labourers, Griffin turned the workplaces in which he photographed into stages and his subjects into actors. While the labourers are monumentalized as heroic figures, they are also shown as vulnerable beings, and we see them reclining with the tools of their trade like dead kings.

Some of his work also touches the darker side of the new political agenda. For example, his London by Night series which addressed people's anxieties surrounding the Cold War, by visualizing London held in the grip of a nuclear crisis.



*Brian Griffin, Construction Time Again, Switzerland, 1983 © Courtesy Steven Kasher Gallery, New York*

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Greatly influenced by classical art, Griffin is perhaps most famous for his portraits. Even if you've never heard of Brian Griffin, it's more than likely you will have seen one of his images before. During the eighties, Griffin shot iconic and famously idiosyncratic album covers for musicians and bands, such as Depeche Mode, Elvis Costello & the Attractions, Devo, Iggy Pop, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Echo and the Bunnymen.

Present in each of Griffin's photographs is something remarkable that manages to pull his portraits way beyond the conventions of typical portraiture and into the realms of fine art. Gifted for his ability to respond to a brief and produce astonishing results each time, Griffin was called "the most unpredictable and influential British portrait photographer of the last decades" (British Journal of Photography, 2005), able to transform the ordinary into something super-extraordinary.

Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism will be on view February 25th – April 9th, 2016. Steven Kasher Gallery is located at 515 W. 26th St., New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 6 PM.