

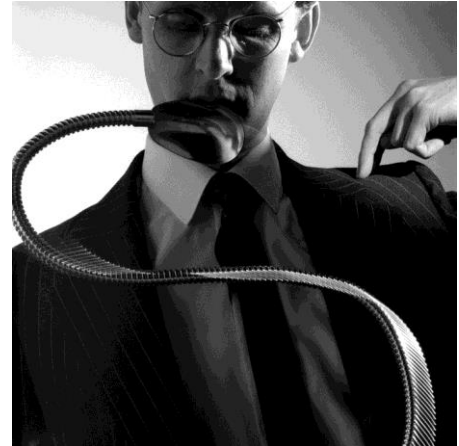
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## Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism

Exhibition: February 25<sup>th</sup> – April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Opening Reception: February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 6 – 8 PM

Steven Kasher Gallery is pleased to present *Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism*, the first solo exhibition in the United States of the renowned British photographer. The show features over 75 black and white and color photographs, most dating from the Thatcher years, 1979-90. Griffin's great theme is the worldwide disruption of globalization. Brian Griffin has been called "the most unpredictable and influential British portrait photographer of the last decades" by the British Journal of Photography in 2005, and "one of Britain's most influential photographers" by the World Photography Organization in 2015.



Griffin turned the tables on commercial assignment portraiture with a style all his own. When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, business was empowered and labor was belittled. To capture the heroes and victims of Thatcherism and globalization, Griffin invented a new photographic style, Capitalist Realism, parodying Socialist Realism. Griffin's photographs embody the essence of the decade, modish white-collars, rock bands suited up in business-casual and tin lunch-pail toting masons. Inspired by the bureaucratic and claustrophobic world of Kafka, by the French filmmaker Jacques Tati and by German Expressionist cinema, Griffin turned the workplaces in which he photographed into stages and his subjects into actors.

When Griffin made commissioned portraits of businessmen and statesmen he invented a complex ironical approach so that the subjects can be read as sexy, inventive, oblivious, foolish, clever or pompous. Griffin's laborers are monumentalized, but also shown as vulnerable, reclining with the tools of their trade like dead kings in a cathedral. Influenced by the religious iconography encountered in his Christian upbringing, his businessmen and workers are stripped of their personal attributes and their identities are revealed by the historical and social symbols of their professions.

Griffin was recognized early on as one of the key British photographers of the 70s and 80s, even called "the photographer of the decade" by the Guardian Newspaper in 1989. Along with Martin Parr, Paul Graham, Graham Smith, Jo Spence and Victor Burgin, Griffin was included in the most important exhibitions devoted to contemporary British photography: *Young British Photographers* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1975 (later touring Europe and the United States); *Portraits*

*of Our Time* at the Photographer's Gallery in London in 1978; *Three Perspectives on Photography: Recent British Photography* at the Hayward Gallery in 1979; *Ten Contemporary British Photographers* at MIT in 1982; and *British Contemporary Photography Coming of Age* at the Houston Fotofest in 1986.

Griffin is renowned for the idiosyncratic album covers he produced in the 80s for the bands Depeche Mode, Elvis Costello & the Attractions, Devo, Iggy Pop, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Echo and the Bunnymen, and more. In 1991 Griffin "walked away from photography," as he himself remarked, to concentrate on directing advertising commercials and music videos. He returned to photography in 2002. Since 2000 Griffin has had more than fifteen solo shows and four retrospectives worldwide of his photography.

Born in Birmingham in 1948, Brian Griffin grew up in the Black Country in the beleaguered industrial heartland of England. Starting at sixteen years of age, he worked for five years in engineering, firstly at a company making conveyors then at a company manufacturing and installing pipework in nuclear power stations. In 1969, at twenty-one, he enrolled in Manchester Polytechnic to study photography. His first solo show was mounted in London in 1981, followed by solo shows in the UK, France, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Portugal, Austria and Japan, including at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1984, at Rencontres d'Arles in 1987, and at the National Gallery in London in 1988. Griffin has published twenty books between 1978 and 2015. He was awarded the Best Photography Book in the World prize at the Barcelona Primavera Fotografica 1991.

Griffin has won many awards for his photography and video work, including four Most Outstanding Awards by the British association Design and Art Direction between 1984 and 1989. In 1987 he was granted the Freedom of the City of Arles award during the photo festival Les Rencontres d'Arles. In 2013 he received the Centenary Medal from the Royal Photographic Society in recognition of a lifetime achievement in photography. In 2014 he received an Honorary Doctorate from Birmingham City University for his lifetime contribution to the City of Birmingham.

Brian Griffin's photographs are held in the permanent collections of major art institutions including the Victoria & Albert Museum; the National Portrait Gallery, London; the Museum Folkwang, Essen; the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; the Arts Council of Great Britain; the British Council; the Mast Foundation, Bologna; the Art Museum Reykjavik; and the Museu da Imagem, Braga.

*Brian Griffin: Capitalist Realism* will be on view February 25<sup>th</sup> – April 9<sup>th</sup>, 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. For more information about the exhibition and all other general inquiries, please contact Cassandra Johnson, 212 966 3978, [cassandra@stevenkasher.com](mailto:cassandra@stevenkasher.com)