

**Interviewer:** [00:00:00] I'll just confirm that today is the 11th of August. I'm with Elena Moses to talk about the photographs she took for the Mill Road Depot Project. Thank you.

**Elena:** This was between Spring and Summer of this year. I made four visits altogether. Making my selection as a photographer of my favorite photographs was quite an experience. I've not done it before. This was a job for me, it was a project. I went there thinking, what is it about the site that should be documented? As a photographer, I am thinking about, "Well, should I take it from this angle or that angle? What does it look like? What kind of lens do I have?"

On the final visit, I found that I had a little bit more freedom because there are only two or three things that I needed to photograph that hadn't been done on previous visits. I had time to wander through the site and actually look at it visually, and think about what would actually make an interesting photograph as opposed to what would be a piece of documentation about the depot.

Let's start. The first photograph I've got has a very, very deep blue sky. I was a bit surprised that it did come out like this in my camera. It's just amazing. These blues and oranges and the yellows. I find it fascinating. What was fascinating was all these men waiting at the gate waiting to go in. I don't think they had any idea of what a beautiful composition [00:02:00] they were making. I just loved being there with them chatting with them.

They were interested in why I should want to take photographs of them hanging around. They were really friendly and some of them were interested in photography. Anyway, I've got that. That's a good memory. I've selected these two particular men because I came across them several times on other visits. I cannot remember the names, but I feel like I know them.

The next photograph is of a man sitting on his own. I like it as a photograph because the light just captures him sitting there with his mobile phone. He's either texting or reading something. The light just catches the whole of his upper body which is fluorescent orange. It's a nice photograph. It's visually very pleasing.

I like the composition, and I like the fact that he's there quietly on his own. It must be about 5:30, 6 O'clock in the morning. It's dark outside. There's a little bit of lights coming through from somewhere. I'm not sure where, but it's falling on him. He's probably, again, completely oblivious to the fact that he's actually part of a really pleasing composition.

Then a bit later, he's joined by some woman. In fact, they've parked their cars now and they pile into the mass. This is where it is. This is where they congregate. It was really too dark. The corners that they sat in were dark. I left. I went on another site and then I came back a bit [00:04:00] later and most of them were still there. What I learned was that this time was so important to them. It was like men bonding. Of course, my presence just changed everything. I couldn't be a fly on the wall, but it would have been really interesting to hear what they were talking about.

The other thing that struck me was that they came to work at least half an hour earlier than they had to in order to be together. That was a surprise for me, but really nice

one. I thought that's good because so much of the work that they do is just like full on physically that there's very little time to chat. That's what I discovered in talking to them.

The next photograph, I don't even know what you call it, but it's some kind of a road cleaner. It's got a brand name there. The day looks like it's really dawning in the sense that the sky is quite light, but you can still see the lights on this little truck. It's so cute. I took it because it was something that they do. They get up early, up they go on the streets. I liked it. It appealed to me because I couldn't quite believe that we have little vehicles like this that look like they've come out of nobby land really. Out of the picture books that I had when I was a child growing up in the 1950s.

The other thing [00:06:00] that struck me about it, why I think it's cute is that - and I suppose it's true of almost all of our vehicles - that the way that the lights are ordered in the front of the body, it reminds you of a human face. Maybe that's why it's appealing. Again, it's appealing to that bit of the brain that's hard-wired to be interested in human beings. Can I stop there? It feels like, "Ah."

**Interviewer:** [unintelligible 00:06:39] We'll edit this bit out. It's really funny you said about the 1950s picture books because I've just started writing my introduction to the thing. Of course, the two images I have in my head, one is the 1960s Ladybird book, *People Who Help Us*. The other one is *The Winter Of Discontent*. I've got these two, and it's amazing how you go to childhood. You don't realize how hardwired these things are.

The first thing I thought of with those two things from when I must have been, say, 9 and then when I was 12. It's amazing, isn't it? You spoke about 1950s, I think, "Yes, and I'm in the Ladybird books too." Isn't it funny?

**Elena:** It's interesting. I have Ladybird books. I think I loved [unintelligible 00:07:31] Of course, it was not PC afterwards. It's like, when you don't know about racism and things like that, golliwogs are just lovely, when you don't understand the connection with the words and things.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, as a child.

**Elena:** Yes. Here's another one. This one, the green machine, so this is a slightly different kind. Again, it's as exactly [00:08:00] the same. It's got those two big lights for eyes. I'm trying to think, if I was going to be modern now, what would be the kind of Pixar film like *Toy Story* but to do with cars and things? I haven't been to see it, but I think there is one.

Next photograph, well, there are two here that go together, "Don't do your doughnut, keep your jam in." I looked at that and I thought, "What the heck is that about?" I took the photograph initially because I didn't quite get it.

Whereas the next one, I really got because my previous incarnation was in organization development with local authorities just like the City Council. "Don't do your doughnut", well, I finally got it. I thought, "Yes, it's to do with your back, it's to do with your discs, it's to do with not kind of breaking your back and slipping your discs. I think that, to me, is what it says now.

The difference on this board between, "don't do your doughnut" and [laughs] **[unintelligible 00:09:14]**, the difference in the language. Also, for me as the photographer, the difference in the visual message of it, that does kind of speak very dramatically. It makes you stop, I didn't quite get it immediately, but it made me stop and think. Whereas this was just a piece of text. I thought, "Yes, yes, yes." I'm so familiar with that. I also know that objectives like that are so meaningless and less people are actually helping create them.

I've got **[00:10:00]** there as a reminder to me of how workers themselves are actually challenging that dull deadening bureaucracy that you find in organizations, and certainly, in local authorities. That was a nice bit of contrast.

Then I came across this. This is a shed with just all sorts of bits and pieces like salt for the road and I'm not sure what this is actually called, this shed. In amongst the salt cuts, lying on its side is this big banner, *The Middle Road Feast*. I think it's to do with a festival of food, but why it's there, I don't know. It's probably going to be used again, but it just looks like it's just lying around.

I find it interesting because I thought, shame is lying around, I just thought it'd be really nice to have it up on the wall somewhere, almost like a piece of art, as a reminder that this is what the council has been involved in or maybe it's not the council, I just don't get it.

Then here, now then, this is completely visual. It's a piece of machinery and I was attracted to it not knowing anything about it. It does not speak to me at a technological level because it's a mixture of buttons of different color, angles and shapes, lights and stripes. **[00:12:00]** It's a piece of metal gadgetry with little bits of plastic and wires and it just looks absolutely fascinating.

I appreciate it at the level of just visual interest, I did attempt, and I think from my memory, it's something to do with an old piece of cleaning equipment that they have there. I was attracted to it just by the colors in it and just by the shapes in it and I thought, somebody must have had some fun designing that. [laughs] It's bit more advanced than colored Lego.

Now, here we have a man's bottom with Pedal Revolution written all over it. The reason I took this is that I thought, "Yes, me taking a photograph of a man's bottom is not loaded in the same way as me taking photographs of a woman's bottom."

Also, the fact that women's bodies are used for selling all sorts of things, I was interested in that this is also selling something, but it was selling a concept, an idea rather than just a product. Pedal Revolution, I haven't looked them up but I thought, "Yes, this is really good."

**Automated Voice:** It's 15 hours.

**Elena:** [laughs] I know a little bit about him again, I've forgotten his name, but the fact that he had to cycle 14 miles **[00:14:00]** to work around trip just because he couldn't afford to live in Cambridge. This is how badly paid council workers are, and where he lives now I don't know but this is a few years back. I thought, yes, it's really great that you can pedal around town with your bum showing a slogan like that. I thought that's

good. Then here, again, I've selected this photograph because this man looks very pristine in his fluorescent jacket. I guess it's a fleece, but the light is falling on his face in a really lovely way.

He's got a beautiful smile on his face, so at that kind of human level. He was very, very shy. He didn't want to face me to take a photograph. I said, "You don't need to." I said, "You look absolutely lovely there [unintelligible 00:15:09]." I think he was a bit tickled by that, but he tried to keep talking to his colleagues who were there because he didn't really want to have his photograph taken, but on the other hand, he wasn't going to stop me. One or two of them did actually do that, but he didn't. I just thought it was really lovely.

Now, do you remember her name?

**Interviewer:** Tracy.

**Elena:** Tracy, yes. Well, I've got a photograph of Tracy here surrounded by her files and she's worked at the council for a very long time, and she's got the most wonderful smile on her face. The reason why I like this photograph is that it reminds me of [00:16:00] the need for diversity. [laughs] I would absolutely hate to be in a job like that, surrounded by files, and charts on the wall, and several in trays and up trays. She's got piles of things, and she probably knows exactly where everything is, and I wouldn't because I would want to be away from that as much as possible.

It's reminding me of my life because I did work in Health Authority, I did have a managerial job. I did have an office like this at one time and I'm so glad that I don't have to do it anymore. She looks as if she's completely suited and happy to it, and so much so that her daughter has come to her work at least for the holiday period for the City Council and probably doing something, same skills as her mom. That's why like that photograph.

I remember his name, his name is Lee and he is a Union Rep. He's new in this office, so he's just getting used to it. He was so friendly, so welcoming, very happy to have his photo taken and we had a little chat. It's reminding me that on so many occasions, it would have been just gorgeous to linger longer and talk to people about their work and I didn't have the time to do that. It's reminding me too that people are doing so many things behind the scenes to keep our city functioning well, and that most of us don't have a clue really as to what's going on. [00:18:00] Here we have the bike man's face, I can't remember his name. It's not Martin, is it? Mark. Mark is very happy to have his photograph taken. Anyway, I think it's quite nice to have a face as well as the bottom. [laughs] This is what I think so that you don't objectify it.

I think people are in their faces so much, so much of what they are and who they are is there for everybody to see in their face.

Now this one is four men in the lorry, and I think I was really surprised that four of them could travel together. Again, I'm thinking, yes, they're really squeezed tight in there as a team and they're smiling at me taking a photograph of them as they're approaching me. It's not as if I've asked for their permission or anything yet, I had to do that afterwards, but there they are, happy to be photographed.

It made me think actually to what extent a project like this does make a difference to people. Will these workers go and visit the website? Will they have any idea of how exciting and what a privilege it is for somebody like me and you to go in and just get a sense of what their work is about?

Here we have John. [laughs] I'm not sure what John is doing. It looks like he's just landed on the desk, [laughs] [00:20:00] or he's trying to do some kind of maneuver that involves him not standing with his feet on the floor. It's almost like office yoga, I think. That was the other thing I learned about really how much of a laugh people do have when they're at work so that it just makes the monotony of an office job bearable.

Can't remember his name. Do you remember his name? He worked in the stores.

**Interviewer:** Is that Bob? I think he's called Bob?

**Elena:** Yes, it's Bob. Here we are, this looks like Bob the Builder shifting bricks. [laughs] I'm not sure why I like it, I think he's looking around, I don't know whether he's about to maneuver and just checking where he's going or what, but his gaze is not ahead.

I like the fact that there's a pale blue sky and there's a yellow Caterpillar, which is a forklift truck which he's driving. Again, there's color, there's something that looks like a red tank on the back of this, whether that holds some hydraulic fluid or whether it's diesel or what, I've got no idea. Actually, just looking at these photographs, way beyond capturing the moment just gets me thinking and I realized just how much I don't know.

All right, now [laughs] the next one of a big poster about recycling in Cambridge, advertising that you can recycle these things [00:22:00] at this site, whatever the site is going to be. I think that for years, I just felt quite obligated as a good citizen to do the recycling.

Now as I do it, I think I've got a very, very different view, I think about recycling as one of the ways really that capitalism gets you to work harder and harder as a human being, you have to do this. I look at this and I get to feel quite angry, I get angry about why aren't all supermarkets providing us with strong paper bags? Why is there still so much plastic when we could be using other things?

Yes, there's the things like the cardboard and the paper and glass, I've no problems about that, but there's something about this whole setup again that requires you to do the work when companies who are packaging this stuff could be actually sorting and solving the problem at stores rather than in a sense, we have to pay for it because we are the ones that are having to work for them.

Next, these photographs were taken by me at about six o'clock in the morning in October of a previous year. I decided to go out to see what I would find in Cambridge early in the morning before the rush hour starts. I really hadn't expected to see men horsing down [00:24:00] Petty Cury and the Guildhall in amongst the market traders putting up their wares.

Again, it struck me that so much of the work that people do in providing us with a clean space is quite solitary work. This man was on his own, and he must have been there for a good hour as I wandered around the market.

Now we come to [laughs] photographs which were taken on my last visit, and which I've chosen purely really because I like them on artistic marriage, but that's not to say that they don't have any other meaning either. There's a couple here with a wall that's not really used in any way and nature has asserted itself and got between the cracks. There're beautiful grasses which are now dried out in the photos that I took. I think it just reminds me of the cycle of life as well because behind it is a building which is now way past its usefulness and it's boarded up.

I think this is the building that had a danger sign on it. The building essentially is dead and it's going to be demolished and then these grasses have also served their purpose, but even in decay they look beautiful. I think even the building in decay also looks beautiful [laughs] [00:26:00] with all these different brickwork.

I guess I do feel sad, if I linger for a few moments on the thought that this is going to be demolished. I suppose because I don't have quite a recycling mind or-- Not that I don't have a recycling mind, I don't have the kind of a recycling as an engineer kind of mind.

Are these bricks going to be crushed just because the building is past its usefulness on the depot? What's going to happen to the actual fabric of the building? It's making me wonder if we actually said, "Well, we need the depot for housing, how can we use the depot without demolishing it for housing?" [laughs] That would have been perhaps an interesting little exercise.

This and this, I was just looking at the mosses growing in the cracks between the bricks and then I realized there was a little dinky toy on top of the wall. [laughs] I thought somebody has put it there. Why is this little dinky toy there? Who actually brought it there and left it there?

Here's another face. [laughs] This again is another piece of machinery. It's something to do, vehicle lift number two power on and it's got a big [00:28:00] keyhole in it. It's like two black eyes and a red snout, it looks like a dog to me, [laughs] but there's something just so funny and childlike about it, I just had to snap it.

Here we are, this is one of the post-Holocaust photographs of corrugated zinc, close up, looking dark. Why do I think it's beautiful? It's very hard to say, I think sometimes you just can't explain why you think something is beautiful. I just do, but I think that within that beauty there are other things embodied in it that I can't get away from the fact that there's paint peeling on the louvers of the window. Somebody painted those and the paint is now peeled away.

I just can't get away from the involvement of human beings in the creation of things. I guess what I'm thinking of is, when we create and we put love into making things, do we also realize that one day it's going to go? That people are going to look at it and think it's a piece of junk or it's a piece of rubbish.

The next one is a building that was very dark, I couldn't really see much inside it, but it did have a metal gate with a grid, **[unintelligible 00:29:58]** just about pier 3, but **[00:30:00]** it was locked and somebody had painted "keep locked" on one of the resting posts. It must have been painted a very long time ago because the paint is really quite faded.

Again, I find rust fascinating. The patterns in rust. The colors of rust. Rust isn't just one color. It's just lots and lots and lots of textures in rust as well, so there we are, it's very earthy iron.

Now we come to the garage. Well, [laughs] when I first saw this I thought, "Gosh, this is just like an art installation." [laughs] Rusting bits of tools hung up on a blue painted wall. Somebody had quite a bit of fun drawing the outlines of them. I suppose it just makes it a lot easier for you to figure out where something goes just from the shape of it.

Somebody must have had a lot of fun at one time. Just crazy like a jigsaw puzzle of fitting all these tools together in perhaps the most efficient way because it looks like a beautiful jigsaw puzzle piece to me. Really, really lovely. I like that a lot.

I think what the depot brought to me over and over again was that here we have something so useful, so utilitarian, something so industrial, something so mechanical and yet **[00:32:00]** with my eyes, the photographer, I could see so much art there in a way that perhaps most people didn't. Because once or twice I was asked, "Well, why are you taking a photo of that?" I think it's probably the eyes of someone who comes with curiosity, because this is so new to me.

Again, things that took my attention were this workshop has been accident-free for 805 days. Now, I don't know if that has actually changed every single day or whether that's got ossified in time. Because what I did discover was that lots of different bits of the depot had been ossified so the depot was an industrial museum, an archaeological museum in itself. So many things harked back to times gone and did not represent the function of the depot now.

This one UPVC window manufacturing unit, once upon a time they made UPVC windows on this site. This huge piece of signage is still up but it's cracked, it's broken. Underneath it is the logo, "Working For The Community", and even that's partly peeled away.

I think that's quite a profound thing to think about working for the community. I just found it quite poignant really that it was almost like working for the community is peeling away and that the whole concept of public goods and public service is also **[00:34:00]** peeling away.

Then this is the little corner that really surprised me. I thought, "What the heck is this?" Because there's piles and piles of very ancient plastic trays with "Safeway" written on them and lots and lots of cartons of baking potatoes. This puzzled me enormously and so I didn't know this, but parts of the council depot now are leased out to other small businesses and charities. It doesn't quite explain whose they are, but it just didn't sit with my notion of what a council depot was all about to see these supermarket trades.

Then this is just like a funny thing to find. [laughs] Especially since 2007, '8, to find a box in the garage, a black metal deed box with housing mortgages written on it and placed on top of another container; big orange metal container with a dangerous sign underneath it. [laughs] I thought, people here do have humor. [laughs] I thought that was wonderful. It makes a really nice photograph, I think because of the colors in it. It's very dramatic so I like it compositionally. Whoever set this up had an eye but an eye for the absurd as well. **[00:36:00]**

This next one is, again, working for the community. This time the sign is intact, but whatever it was, this piece of the depot is not clearly understandable. I think it's an area where lots of bits and pieces are just kept. This is the kind of box room area, but I liked it compositionally, again, because it's what the depot is about. The brickwork is still fine. The metal bits are rusting away.

The sign is there valiantly working for the community. Still hanging on, and yet, underneath it, whatever it was, is full of decay and isn't really quite understandable now. I think that represents the state that the depot is in for me.

Then there's this interesting piece. Well, I guess I haven't visited a bathroom show for a very long time, [laughs] but when I visited the stores, there were all sorts of things in the stores that I was surprised about. One of the things is that they keep, in the stores, things for council houses that they have to replace every so often, so there were baths in there. I was just very surprised to see this bath protected by cardboard, but beautifully and artistically decked in cardboard, so I had to take a photo of that.

This next photo, this is the photograph of Linda in her office. **[00:38:00]** Linda has retired. Now, she retired when I was visiting. She'd worked there for years and years and years, probably since she left school. Her office is like no other. She must have about 2,000 elephants in it. [laughs] I think what made me laugh about this was that, if you like, indulgences are allowed, it's so bizarre to have a collection of things in your office, but it also transports you away from the mundaneness of your job to have exotic animals from African and Indian continents covering your shelves.

Elephants on the walls, everywhere you turned there were elephants, and she just got on with her work. Again, I would have really liked to have had a chat with her about how long this collection had been in the making. I do know that other people would bring her elephants, but this is what you would find in some of the offices on the depot that people's idiosyncrasies were indulged on it. Just made the working environment human and interesting.

Here are the men together now, and it's light and they're chatting again. I like this photograph because they all look so relaxed and they're having a laugh together. **[00:40:00]** I don't quite know whether they're just going out on a different shift compared to the others, but this is not my time.

This one is of Bruce. Bruce works in an office and I think the photograph is an absolutely beautiful photograph, again, because he's not sitting next to a window, but there is lights coming in from the window into this room that just catches him as he's sitting back, relaxed in his chair and catches his face. Again, I think he looks relaxed, he looks alert and I'm thinking I could never look like that sitting in an office, not next to a window. [laughs]



It says a lot about me and the fact that other people can tolerate things that I can't because I think Bruce has worked there for a very long time too. I think almost all of these photographs, the things I've selected because I realized that I could look at these photographs for a long time and come back to them and look and find something different in them yet again. There's just so much there to reflect on.

This is a nice contradiction. This is in the old house and yet this is a piece of modern architecture within it. I really like this and I think it just goes to show that **[00:42:00]** you can have modernism and traditional kind of living, living together.

I would imagine that there are some things that are really quite unusual here. Like there's a big pillar here and it properly, I just wonder whether it's a tube that's carrying all sorts of cables and things from one floor to the next, but it just looks good there. I like looking at the lines of it and there are lots of vertical lines there are diagonal lines. It's quite pleasing with light and shadow, just like looking at it, the colors are soft. It's a very relaxing photograph to look at.

This, I have chosen because what's in focus is the map of what Cambridge City Council owns behind, I think he's the director of planning and that to me is just so interesting. All these orange bits are what the City Council owns inland. I think I'm quite surprised that it actually owns so much, but I would imagine that quite a few of these pieces from the size of them are green spaces.

As I thought about it, I thought, "Given that the university owns such a lot of the land, it's surprising, but actually, I'd like there to be more big orange spaces there that would be available for the public to use." Ideally, I would like to just examine it and get a better sense because here, it's just almost like teasing me. **[00:44:00]** I can't get quite close enough to it. I can't blow it up big enough to see what we actually own as the Citizens of Cambridge.

This, I like this because [laughs] I think this sums up the kind of the level of friendliness in the place that you've got a manager fixing one of her colleague's coats. [laughs] The look on his face is just happy and relaxed and he doesn't mind it. It's not like intrusive on him. There's an ease between him and her that's completely acceptable to both of them.

All right. Now, this is a notice board. I just wonder, is it used again, is this a piece of gear that's just been abandoned just because it isn't used, and it's not removed, it's there. It's a list of men's names and who's out with one tick, Richard is out. I think it's 11:90 that's written on it. [laughs] Or is it 11:10? I can't quite read it, I'd have to blow it up. I'm thinking, how old is it, when was that written? There's something about it that isn't modern, and yet nobody has removed it.

There's still a pen **[00:46:00]** sitting on top of this and there's still a duster there to wipe it out. It could be used, but there are so many people whose names are written down on it and there's nothing to indicate where they've gone all the time that they're due back. I think that's what makes me think that it's just not functional anymore, and yet there it is. It's a reminder of how people worked. They signed themselves out, they signed themselves in.

Nearby are some metal boxes, key boxes, and they're all open. Most of them have got one key in them and yet again, they're clean, and yet they have a look of abandon about them. I think that the reason why that's appealing as a photograph to me, it begs the question, but also as a photograph, I quite like the fact that there are a series of things in there. Not quite symmetrical, but there's a repeat pattern there that is pleasing on the eye.

**[00:47:31] [END OF AUDIO]**