

ing, 2010

on Ahmed al Sharkawi, who was  
he beds inside the protest tent of the  
irut. An estimated 17,000 people  
nce the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to  
were abducted or killed at the hands of  
factions, Syria and Israel and their allies.  
a struggle for decades, trying to know

et Scene, Artemare, 2010

in southeast France and comes from  
exploring modern France as a street  
towns and cities. I am particularly  
h the flag, because it has such  
nces France's history of revolution.  
young boy was waving the flag  
people by Delacroix. The family had  
the Second World War in their attic,



nes street photographer Bill Cunningham  
s time in someone else's viewfinder

my Stein Fireman's Parade, Port Jervis, NY, 2004

very year I attend the Fireman's Parade in the small town of Port Jervis, New York. While the local fire brigades parade  
ough the streets, the townspeople come out to watch and socialise. These boys are waiting for the firemen to pass by.  
ve how small and sweet they are, while trying to appear tough, with their guns. The white T-shirt and sandals of the boy  
he front are especially nice details for me."

# my constitutes a new way of se

most have embraced digital. The internet  
has allowed photographers to bypass  
traditional gatekeepers such as publishers  
and gallerists.

"Ten years ago nobody talked about  
street photography," Turpin says. "It really  
wasn't a subject. *Bystander* was all about the  
past, the Sixties and the Seventies, and I  
thought: 'Why isn't there anybody working  
like this now?' And of course there was."

Having tracked them down, he set up  
iN-PUBLIC, a website dedicated to a net-  
work of street photographers, including  
Powell, across the world. "By showing a  
gallery of all of them in a single place, it  
reinforced this definition of street photo-  
graphy," Turpin says. "Now it has really  
become a big thing."

That was confirmed with the publication  
last year of *Street Photography Now*, a  
*Bystander* for the 21st century. To its pub-  
lisher's shock, the first print run sold out in  
three weeks. Sophie Howarth, who co-  
wrote the book with the photographer  
Stephen McLaren, says: "Now everyone is  
a photographer there's an increased  
appetite for this kind of work. It taps into  
the observer in all of us."

She, too, enthuses about the encourage-  
ment that online forums offer. "The kind of  
support that people are giving each other  
online has really blown me away," she says.  
"Now there is real peer-led coaching, and  
professionals and amateurs are rubbing  
shoulders in ways they didn't before."

Robertson, a Jamaican-born New Yorker  
who has been taking dynamic black-and-  
white street photographs for more than 30  
years, is delighted by this development. "It's  
amazing in terms of my street photography  
being seen by people who never would have  
had the chance to see me. There's a very,  
very active community of street photo-  
graphers and that's been a real revelation."

The most influential of these is Hardcore

# 'Great street photograph

Street photography can be traced back to Cartier-Bresson. Now  
mobile phones, digital cameras and photo-sharing websites are  
contributing to an explosion of the genre, says *Hermione Hoby*

G

us Powell was a street photographer before  
he even knew it. As a kid growing up in New  
York he used to "walk all over the place and  
bring home trash — you know, a crushed  
hubcap that looked like a hat that I thought  
was cool... all kinds of stuff".

Powell, now 36, still walks all over the  
place but instead of collecting interesting  
rubbish he makes pictures. The two things,  
it emerges, are almost one and the same pro-  
cess. He explains that when he was a teen-  
ager "the camera became a way to carry  
even more back from the street without  
having to carry it home and my mum get  
mad at me". He smiles. It's a very bright day  
in New York and, as we navigate the lunch-  
hour throng rushing along the pavements  
of Broadway, he talks about the pleasure of  
his work. His fingers rest on the camera  
around his neck all the while.

"We're all just cruising by, completely

invested in what we've left behind and  
where we're heading, but there are so many  
little quotidian delights that I think are  
worth pausing and looking at. I'm trying to  
get a fingerhold on these moments. Being  
able to grab your arms really wide around a  
bunch of things and try and hold them and  
organise them, that's exciting to me."

We walk on for a moment, then he stops.  
"This guy sitting here is nice," he says,  
nodding towards a man in a red T-shirt sit-  
ting on a fire hydrant. "And you know he's  
probably not going to go anywhere, so you  
can wait and see if something else comes. If  
somebody came round this corner wearing  
the same red as him..." Then, like some  
small miracle, a woman rounds the corner  
in a red cape and on the second that the two  
figures become parallel, Powell's shutter  
snaps. I'm speechless but he simply says:

"The city's so generous. You have a sense of  
what you want and you have some  
patience, and it comes."

We walk through SoHo and then north  
into Washington Square Park, where a  
man is exuberantly playing *Here Comes the  
Sun* on an upright piano among the pigeons.  
It's a delightful sight and I turn to  
Powell expectantly.

"It's pretty great," he admits. "This isn't  
the picture, though. The picture is when  
he's pushing that thing along the sidewalk  
amid some other moment — that's the kind  
of thing where you might take a note."

More and more people are, like Powell,  
seizing cameras and "taking notes" on the  
streets around them. For some, street pho-

tography simply means any photo taken  
outside, but for most, the term comes with a  
set of values — of candour, spontaneity and  
the hope of capturing something extra-  
ordinary within the ordinary.

"It really is having a moment," says Grace  
Pattison, head of programming for the  
London Street Photography Festival,  
which will take place in July. "It's been there  
since the beginning of photography but it's  
never had the recognition it deserves and  
the momentum has just been building. It's  
kind of exploding now."

Louise Clements, the artistic director of  
Format, an international festival in Derby  
that this year is dedicated to street pho-  
tography and is showcasing the work of  
newcomers such as Ramiya, an all-women  
collective of Middle Eastern photo-  
graphers, and veterans such as the British  
photographer Brian Griffin and the Ameri-  
cans Joel Meyerowitz and Orville Robert-  
son, says: "Nearly everybody has a camera  
on their mobile phone now — that's really  
enabled us to tap into that empathy for  
street-generated images."

That empathy has been boosted by the  
advent of relatively cheap digital cameras,  
and the way that photo-sharing sites such  
as Flickr allow people around the world to  
publish and discuss their images. Techno-  
logy, then, has afforded the medium for this  
renaissance but it was also technology that  
began it: the genre was effectively born in  
Paris in the early 1930s when the first Leica  
rangefinders became available. These were  
the first to support rolls of film rather than

plates, allowing photographers to carry  
them with them as they walked. Among  
these photographers was Henri Cartier-  
Bresson, godfather of the genre, who  
credited the Leica 35mm rangefinder with  
affording him "the velvet hand and the  
hawk's eye". He spoke about "the simulta-  
neous recognition, in a fraction of a  
second, of the significance of an event", a  
notion that subsequently seized street  
photographers in 1970s New York. They  
included Meyerowitz, who, appropriately  
enough, met his fellow street photographer  
Garry Winogrand on the street. "The two of  
us worked together," Meyerowitz explained  
last week. "We discovered the language of  
street photography together and began to  
look at those leaders to educate us."

By 1994 Meyerowitz was ready to do  
some educating of his own: he co-wrote  
*Bystander: A History of Street Photography*  
with Colin Westerbeck. Clements calls the  
book the genre's bible. Nick Turpin has his  
career to thank for it: he was working as a  
photojournalist when he saw a review copy  
on the picture desk. "I 'borrowed' it," he  
says, "and read it from cover to cover. I was  
just so inspired by this work. It made me  
realise this was probably the hardest kind  
of photography there was. I left *The  
Independent* newspaper, where I had a staff  
job, so I could pursue street photography. A  
lot of people told me I was stupid."

Street photography certainly doesn't  
pay. "It's been incredibly relevant — part of  
the documentary tradition," Turpin says,  
"but you don't really hang it on your wall."  
As a result, it's not driven by galleries and  
print sales in the way that most other  
photography is. Now, though, there is a  
proliferation of virtual walls to hang it on  
and plenty of established and respected  
photographers who have only published  
their work online. Although some photo-  
graphers, including Powell, shoot in film,

Raghu Rai Woman Cart Pusher, Delhi, 1974, from the series

"Rare sight, where the wife was helping her husband to push the loaded cart so that he c  
chasing and clicking, not satisfied till I saw this building merging with the boxes they wer  
last frame of the 36 exposures. I couldn't have gone on but, as luck would have it, everyth  
create a wholesome experience."

public, was overturned. That doesn't  
nec-essarily mean that subjects here or  
elsewhere are amenable, though. In a forth-  
coming film about the renowned *New York  
Times* street fashion photographer Bill  
Cunningham, there's a scene in which he  
snaps two girls walking down the street.  
He's at least 15ft away, but they spot him.  
"Don't f\*\*\*ing take a picture of me!" one  
shouts. "I'll break that camera over your  
head!" the other screams.

Cunningham is positively meek com-  
pared with many street photographers.  
Bruce Gilden's portraits are, for example,  
taken in his unsuspecting subjects' faces  
and it's this intrusiveness that makes the  
images so arresting. Meyerowitz recently

**'When you take a  
still moment from  
everyday life, it  
transforms the  
everyday. It's Zen-like'**

suggested that this method is becoming  
more difficult. "Back in the Sixties and  
Seventies," the 73-year-old said, "people  
didn't pay attention to photographers. We  
were invisible and so there was a kind of  
soft, sweet spot in the world that you could  
occupy. Now when you raise your camera  
everyone's eyes dart to you."

The current popularity for street pho-  
tography has stirred interest in Meyerowitz's  
work and that of others who began pho-  
tographing decades before Flickr and the  
rest. There have been fresh discoveries, too,  
such as the work of Vivian Maier, a nanny  
who left behind about 100,000 unseen  
negatives of Chicago street images when  
she died in 2009. When her pictures were

discovered, people began "unearthing ref-  
erences", Clements says, "to contextualise  
her and make sense of the enormity of the  
discovery: who she's as good as, who she's  
better than." This in turn stoked interest in  
contemporaries of hers such as the New  
Yorker Helen Levitt, who also died in 2009.

Turpin calls street photography "sort of  
Chaplinesque — it's tragic and humorous  
at the same time, just like our experiences  
in life". But he also thinks that "the pictures  
we take on Oxford Street are as important  
as pictures made in Tahrir Square. They're  
all different sides of the same coin. I  
actually think street photographers are  
serving an important social purpose."

For some, though, it's simply a matter of  
pleasure. "I can't do anything else," Robert-  
son says. "It's deep within my heart, my  
brain; I can't stop doing it. It's just a way for  
me to see the world. There's no conscious  
effort at style; it's just the way I see things."

That candour and directness are a huge  
part of the medium's appeal. "You have this  
rectangle and a shutter button, and those  
are the two tools you make street pho-  
tographs with," Turpin says. "No lighting, no  
styling, no models, no filters: nothing to  
hide behind, you can do it or you can't,  
there's no bullshit. And I think in the  
conceptual art world there's a great deal of  
..." he pauses meaningfully, "... talk."

Turpin also cites "the whole Photoshop  
thing, where everything is manipulated  
like crazy — I think people are reacting  
against that".

But the proliferation of street images also  
raises the question of quality. Everyone can  
be a street photographer but, according to  
Griffin, few can be good street photo-  
graphers. "There are more images of tech-  
nical competence than we've ever experi-  
enced before, but to be superior to the great  
masters of the past? We might find one or  
two in the next 50 years, maybe."

So what makes a great street photo-  
graph? Griffin, with an air of finality,  
answers: "It's when it constitutes a new way  
of seeing." For Turpin, that is exemplified in  
Meyerowitz's 1967 photograph *The Fallen  
Man*, of a suited Parisian on the ground at a  
Métro entrance, seemingly having a fit. "It  
looks like this little tragedy is part of a much  
wider, citywide event," he says. "All the  
traffic has stopped. The other thing I love  
about it is there's probably 25 or 30 people  
in that picture but none of them is going to  
help that guy. They're fascinated by him  
and concerned, but they're also repulsed by  
this failure of health. They look unreal  
these pictures but they all are real. It's  
intoxicating really."

Clements echoes that sentiment: "When  
you take a still moment from everyday life,  
it transforms the everyday; you reflect on  
your place in the world with a new mind.  
The philosophy of street photography is  
almost Zen-like; becoming part of the  
crowd and observing it with a new perspec-  
tive. It's you in the moment transposing  
and composing with life."

Back in the midst of Manhattan life,  
Powell is coming to the end of his walk  
when the street throws up one of those  
"quotidian delights" that he talked about. A  
very short man in an immaculate suit turns  
a corner, hurrying towards us with an enor-  
mous transparent ringbinder resting open  
on his palms, empty. He's gazing down at it  
disconsolately as he walks, so absorbed in  
whatever thought he's having that he  
doesn't even notice Powell scramble to cap-  
ture it. He misses and the man is gone.  
Powell smiles and shrugs. "Those little  
moments of beatitude. I love them."

**Format International Photography  
Festival Right Here Right Now: Exposures  
from the Public Realm runs until April 3  
in venues across Derby and beyond;  
formatfestival.com**