

Child's Play

3 February - 30 April 2017



The Foundling Museum presents a major new project by artist Mark Neville exploring childhood play

Child's Play brings together an exhibition of photographs, a symposium and a book by Mark Neville, an artist who works at the intersection of art and documentary. Renowned for his socially focused projects, often based upon research by expert sociologists, this new project aims to raise awareness and generate debate around the complex nature of child's play, and to advocate for improved provision for this universal right, as identified by the UN in the 2013 General Comment on Article 31 (the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

At a time when up to 13 million children have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict, and traditional public space is being privatised, *Child's Play* reinforces our responsibility to ensure that children the world over have full opportunity for play and recreation.

Neville presents a series of images of children at play in diverse environments around the world. Immersing himself in communities from Port Glasgow to North London, and in the war zones of Afghanistan and Ukraine, the artist has captured beautiful moments of free, spontaneous play. The exhibition includes new photographs of internally displaced children in Ukraine; residents of Kakuma, Kenya's second largest refugee

camp; and depictions of children at play in London adventure playgrounds, all made especially for this project.

Neville's work challenges the romantic ideal of play with the reality of children's lives, which is often harsher and more complex. We imagine we understand play – it's a release from social and physical constraints or the intense engagement of imaginative pretense – and we instinctively know it is important for a healthy and happy childhood. Yet it is a notoriously difficult concept to define, and we often overlook its more subversive and aggressive elements – the importance of free, autonomous play for children in asserting power and expressing their identities. Through his photographs Neville captures children's spontaneous urge to play and their determination to do so in the most unfavourable environments. His images reveal how, through play, children claim a place of power, safety and freedom.

Presenting the images on display along with an overview of the groundbreaking work in the field of child's play, a book will seek to raise awareness of this universal right, and also focus attention on attitudes towards play in the UK and how the conditions for children can be improved. Adrian Voce – playworker, writer and former director of the campaigning body Play England – gives an overview of the national and international work in the field of child's play, alongside a review of cultural representations of children at play and historical attitudes towards childhood, as seen through the prism of the Foundling Hospital, by curator Nicola Freeman. Copies of the book will be disseminated free to key policy makers and government departments, experts in the field, and to each of the UK's 433 local councils, in order to directly impact upon government policy thinking and strategy. A symposium on 20 March will explore the issue of spaces for play, looking at the real and imagined barriers to play in our cities, and focusing in particular on the privatisation of space.

In the context of the Museum, the idea of spontaneous play is set against the institutional play evidenced at the Foundling Hospital. Founded in 1739, the history of the Hospital mirrors the growing recognition of the distinctive needs of children, and the role of play in their lives – from the proliferation of children's toys and books in the 18th century and campaigns for playgrounds throughout the 19th century, to the closing of the Bloomsbury estate in the early 20th century, now within a fully developed area of London, to give the children better access to fresh air and nature.

Caro Howell, Director of the Foundling Museum, said: 'Play is creative, disruptive and a universal human drive. Mark Neville's powerful images demonstrate its essential role in enabling a child to make sense of the

world and to shape their place in it, no matter how challenging the environment.'

Mark Neville said: 'The Foundling Museum is an extremely powerful context in which to explore and examine this barely discussed, yet fundamental human right: the right of the child to play. The Foundling has a long and an unparalleled history of working with artists in order to improve the rights of vulnerable children. We aim to use the Museum as a space for debate and an instrument for social change. By addressing the issues through three symbiotic strategies – an exhibition at the Museum, a hardback photobook with a targeted dissemination, and a symposium – we believe we can really make an impact on this forgotten right.'

A public programme will accompany the project to comprise artist tours of the exhibition; a programme of short films; and a course run jointly with the British Library investigating the history of photography and conflict, including a session with Mark Neville at the Museum on his work in war zones today.

The book is supported by Outset Family.

Press Enquiries

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Notes to Editors

Mark Neville is a British artist who has had solo exhibitions at the Imperial War Museum and the Photographers' Gallery. He works at the intersection of art and documentary, investigating the social function of photography. His photographic projects to date have frequently made the communities he portrays the primary audience for the work. In 2012 the Andy Warhol Museum exhibited a body of newly commissioned photographic works by Neville which focused upon issues of race and the legacy of the steel industry in Pittsburgh. In the same year The New York Times Magazine commissioned Neville to make the critically acclaimed photo essay *Here Is London*, which they subsequently nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. These two bodies of work were exhibited together at the Alan Cristea Gallery in 2014, and explored themes of wealth inequality in Britain and America.

In 2011 Neville spent three months working on the front line in Helmand, Afghanistan, as an official war artist. The films and photographs he made there featured in a major solo show at the Imperial War Museum London in 2014, and have more recently resulted in 'The Battle Against Stigma Book Project' with the aim of challenging the stigma of mental health problems in the military. His

work has been exhibited at venues including Tate Britain, London, Haus Der Kunst, Munich, and Jeu de Paume, Paris, and in 2016 Steidl published a major monograph on Neville's socially engaged projects from the past ten years.

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of exhibitions and events celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 275 years.

The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frederic Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of his Messiah. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way in which the arts can support philanthropy.

Coram has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas. coram.org.uk

Visitor Information

The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ
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foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 10:00 - 17:00, Sunday 11:00 - 17:00, Monday closed

Admission: Permanent collection + exhibition: £10.25 adults / £7.50 concessions (incl Gift Aid), free for children and Foundling Friends

Tube and train: Russell Square, King's Cross St Pancras and Euston