

NOW THEN

**Chris Killip and the
Making of *In Flagrante***



The J. Paul Getty Museum

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In 1988 photographer Chris Killip (born 1946, Isle of Man) released *In Flagrante*, one of the most incisive and influential photobooks to examine life in postwar Britain. Its enigmatic, legalistic title, which translates into the colloquial phrase “caught in the act,” complements its dark, poetic documentation of towns and communities in north-east England grappling with deindustrialization. The photographs were made between 1973 and 1985, when both Conservative and Labour Party prime ministers were in office.

Central to this exhibition are the photographs from *In Flagrante*, which Killip revised and republished in 2015. Also on view are two series—*Seacoal* and *Skinningrove*—he developed simultaneously in the early 1980s, featured selectively in *In Flagrante*, and revisited in recent years. Shown together for the first time, these interconnected projects constitute a complex, often heartbreaking portrait of working-class England. They also reveal how time shapes creative production.

The act of reexamining previous bodies of work to create new projects is evoked in the exhibition title, a phrase derived from an observation Killip made while generating the photographs on view here. He noticed that Skinningrove residents greeted one another with “Now then,” a much more challenging salutation than the standard “Hello.” This regional expression encapsulates the spirit of Killip’s working process, which brings the past into the present.



IN FLAGRANTE

Upon receiving a Northern Arts Fellowship in 1975, Killip relocated from London to Newcastle upon Tyne. By that time, the process of deindustrialization in northeast England—considered the backbone of British shipbuilding and mining industries—was underway. Killip not only witnessed the impending demise of traditional manufacturing in the region but also unofficially and informally documented its economic and social impact while living there. Ultimately denied permission to photograph inside factories and shipyards, he effectively chronicled the “lack of work, the denial of work, being outside of work”^{*} as he photographed the “de-industrial revolution” and working-class communities teetering on the brink of collapse.

In 1988 Killip compiled and published a group of fifty pictures in the form of *In Flagrante*. The book represented the malaise and disrepair of the socioeconomic system of the time, which he felt regarded the working class as “disposable.”^{*} While some photographs resulted from chance encounters between Killip and his subjects, many evolved from personal, intense relationships he formed with the individuals and places depicted. In 2015 Killip released *In Flagrante Two*, which included three photographs not reproduced in the first book. Images from both editions are on view [here](#).

^{*}Chris Killip in “Contemporary Dialogues: Chris Killip,” an interview by Shane Lavalette, May 2009.



SEACOAL

Between 1976 and 1981, Killip attempted unsuccessfully to photograph at Lynemouth, a coastal village where a community of people “eke[d] out a subsistence living”* by collecting coal that washed ashore after it was expelled as waste from the nearby mine. The “seacoalers” chased Killip away, fearing that he was spying on them to gather evidence of their undocumented income, which undermined their claims for unemployment benefits. He finally gained access in October 1982, after encountering Trevor Critchlow, the “main man” of the seacoal beach, in the local pub. The following year Killip moved into a caravan on the beach, where he lived intermittently for fourteen months to document the inner workings of the seacoal camp. By 1984, as the proposed closure of coal mines across the Midlands provoked mineworkers to strike, the supply of coal had dwindled and consequently the seacoalers were forced to find alternate sources of income. While fourteen photographs from this period were included in *In Flagrante*, Killip revisited the material decades later and produced the book *Seacoal* (2012) expressly about his experience in Lynemouth.



*Gerry Badger, “Dispatches from a War Zone,” in *In Flagrante* (Errata Editions, 2008).

SKINNINGROVE

The isolated village of Skinningrove sits along the northeast coast of England, about forty miles south of Newcastle upon Tyne. Described by Killip as “fiercely independent, fiercely protective, and . . . very hostile to strangers,”* Skinningrove was known as the “valley of iron” in its prime. Many of the residents held jobs at the local ironworks—in operation until 1971 and later replaced by a steel-rolling mill. By the mid-1970s, the closure of both sites had forced many people to work as fishermen.

Killip first encountered Skinningrove by accident while traveling around Britain in 1974. He was instantly fascinated by its strange and insular environment, and by the quality of the light that bounced off the neighboring sea. In the 1980s he visited Skinningrove during the summers and got to know the younger men who often appear in the images. Killip became a familiar presence and, despite his large-format Linhof Technika plate camera, could work discreetly to capture intimate moments. Never published in its entirety, the body of work is represented in *In Flagrante* by only two photographs.



*Chris Killip, *Skinningrove* (Survival Media Inc., 2013), directed by Michael Almereyda.

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