

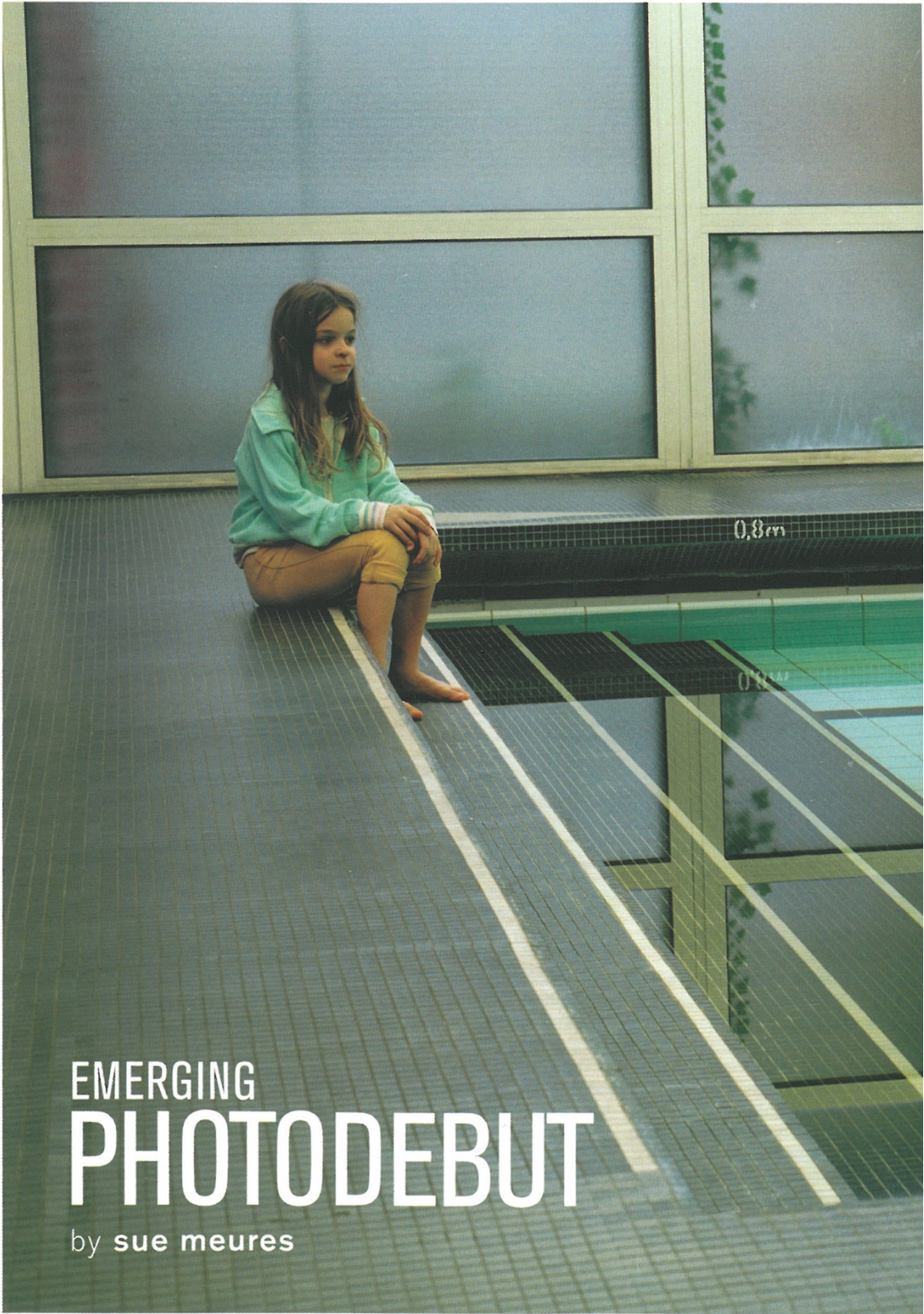
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ART-COMMERCE ANTHOLOGY
ROBERTA BAYLEY
PHOTODEBUT
VISA POUR L'IMAGE
CHARLIE WAITE
RIITTA PÄIVÄLÄINEN
DAVID PARKER
THE VALLEY REVIEWED



EMERGING
PHOTODEBUT

by sue meures



DESERT RIDER, 2003 © Jan von Holleben

completely alone was quite of a shock. With photodebut I wanted to create something similar, a group dynamic like I had experienced at University, only more sophisticated", says von Holleben. To get the collective up and running he joined forces with college friends, Andy Porter and Esther Teichmann, both of whom he'd worked with previously.

The tone of the future project was quickly set. It wasn't open to just anyone: would-be members had to complete a five-page application form, followed by a portfolio interview. There are eighteen members and, so far, around 150 others have been turned down. The plain statement was and still is: the collective is not about desperate photographers trying to break into the industry and looking for help, but an opportunity for people, who have already successfully established themselves, to share contacts and collaborate on ideas and projects. The concept appeals, the collective receives around five applications a week.

Unlike other photographic organisations, which only take commercial photographers under their wings, photodebut is addressing a new generation of multi-disciplinary photographers. Each member is successful in the industry in one way or the other, but it is not necessarily taking images that provides their main income. As different as each member's photographic background is, equally as different was everyone's reason to join the group. Gael Roussel, who runs the photographers agency Calypso de Sigaldi, expected to "gain an insight into other photographers understanding of the medium" and was looking to further his own personal projects. Adam Green, who teaches photography at Roehampton University and who has already produced highly successful artwork, was looking "to establish a continuing critical debate and gain access to a support network", while Emer O'Brien, who works as a photographic artist and teaches art at Holloway prison, was initially hoping for



WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, 2003 © Emer O'Brien

The independent achievements are fundamental to the overall success of photodebut. But while there is no doubt that most members could have achieved such success alone, the collective has proven its importance over and over again. From shared job opportunities - members who are offered work they can't accept will pass opportunities on to others in the group - to the emotional and intellectual support a collective provides, photodebut members have found the group invaluable. Externally too, the way a collective offers an identity and forum for ideas is being noticed. "photodebut is an energetic and eclectic mix of people, ideas and styles", says Susan Bright, who works for the V&A, Tate Britain and National Portrait Gallery. "It shows initiative and is an important and creative force in the wide and varied field of photography." And the group is also expanding into the areas that would be difficult for members to do alone, such as getting involved in educational projects. In the future the group will be offering lectures and talks, in conjunction with photographic institutions, and portfolio viewings.

The main point of photodebut, however, remains creativity - and this is where its work focuses. Future projects will be about much more than just showing member's work collectively: the idea is to produce collaborative projects.

"The group encourages me, keeps me out there, pushes me and I love the latent competition", says von Holleben. This is what defines the atmosphere of photodebut meetings best: heated discussions and critical viewings of each other's work, be it personal work, work produced for upcoming competitions or the group shows, it is at all times greatly challenging. O'Brien sums it up, "The group is a smaller arena, instead of being isolated from your direct competition, it is like befriending the enemy". **HS**

Catch photodebut's next exhibition:

It Went Dark & I Saw

*2-15 November The Vinopolis Gallery No.1 Bank End
London SE1 9BU*

Contact: www.photodebut.org info@photodebut.org