

# PROFILE: SEEN FIFTEEN



AGENCE MYOP INSTALLATION AT SEEN FIFTEEN, 2015 ©HEATHER SHUKER/SEEN FIFTEEN

**IN OUR PROFILE SERIES WE TALK TO THOSE BRAVE SOULS WHO HAVE ESTABLISHED NEW VENTURES IN PHOTOGRAPHY; WHETHER IT IS A GALLERY SPACE, BOOKSHOP OR A PUBLISHING TITLE, WE GET TO**

## KNOW THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE INITIATIVE TO INSPIRE AND INFORM YOU.

**We recently sat down with Vivienne Gamble, the Director of [Seen Fifteen](#), a curatorial project based in Peckham, London, who are just about to open the doors of a brand new gallery space.**

**SMBH:** Tell us a bit about the history of Seen Fifteen so far, how did it come about?

**VG:** Seen Fifteen launched during the inaugural [Photo London](#) week in May last year. I had been planning it in the background ever since I started my MA in Photography in September 2013. In the first week of the MA course one of the tutors asked if anyone thought they might end up starting up their own project or gallery space. Instinctively I answered, “yes!”. Over the next 14 months I kept a notebook of ideas about how I might make a gallery happen, where it would be and what it would be like.

When I went to [Les Rencontres D’Arles](#) in the summer of 2014, I stumbled upon an off-programme exhibition that blew my mind. A derelict hotel in the centre of town had been taken over by a Parisian collective called [Agence MYOP](#). Their exhibition was like an adventure for the viewer – photographs were displayed up a grand marble

staircase, in old crumbling rooms and into an open-air courtyard. They had music on, a wine box in the corner and the photographers were all there enjoying themselves. I thought, “This is it!”, this is exactly the sort of thing I want to do in London. I got in touch with MYOP, and we ended up working together to bring the same concept to two derelict Victorian houses in Peckham during Photo London.



AGENCE MYOP AT SEEN FIFTEEN, 2015 ©HEATHER SHUKER/SEEN FIFTEEN





AGENCE MYOP INSTALLATION AT SEEN FIFTEEN ©HEATHER SHUKER/SEEN FIFTEEN

**SMBH:** Are there any particular subjects or themes that are close to your heart, which you see the gallery championing?

**VG:** One thing that I'm passionate about is gallery experience. From the artist's perspective I'm keen for Seen Fifteen to operate without some of the usual gallery restrictions. I've deliberately chosen a space that feels a little bit like a cross between an artist's studio and a gallery because I want artists to feel like they are free to experiment and be creative with their installation plans. As a viewer, I personally love it if an exhibition has the power to make you feel like you've entered another world while you're there. I'm hoping that by giving artists freedom with the space,

this will allow us to create immersive exhibition experiences that make a real impact on the viewer. The reason that I'm doing this is because I'm passionate about looking at photography, and I love working directly with artists – so I hope that this will all shine through in the quality of the exhibitions that we put on together at Seen Fifteen.

**SMBH:** Do you think there needs to be more emphasis put on the work of emerging artists in the UK and Ireland?

**VG:** Although there's always room for more emphasis, I believe it's an interesting time for photography in the UK and Ireland right now and there are some exciting opportunities for emerging artists that didn't exist a few years ago. With Photo London we now have an annual date in the diary when the photography art world descends upon our city. In its inaugural year in 2015, Photo London brought a tremendous buzz and enthusiasm city-wide. It's an opportunity for emerging artists not only to participate in the fair itself, but to initiate their own events on the fringe. There's also a great festival for the grassroots contemporary art scene called [Art Licks Weekend](#) that we participated in last year with Seen Fifteen. Art Licks Weekend is a three-day festival for artist-run projects, curatorial collectives and young galleries across London – it takes place in the run up to Frieze, anyone can apply and last year over 90 different spaces opened up their doors to take part.

We had over 500 people come to see our exhibition with [Jill Quigley](#), which was amazing – if you're an emerging artist, emerging gallery or collective, I strongly recommend taking part.



JILL QUIGLEY INSTALLATION AT SEEN FIFTEEN ©SEEN FIFTEEN

**SMBH:** You have just moved into a new space in the [Bussey Building](#), a well-known location for the creative community in London. What, in your opinion, is the value of such spaces in a city like London?

**VG:** I'm biased but I honestly don't think there's anywhere else in London quite like the Bussey Building, and I'm delighted that we have managed to get a space there. It has a unique collaborative spirit, and

has been the cornerstone of the creative scene in Peckham for over a decade. There's a real sense of pride that the building was saved from demolition in 2007, and it's a great example of what can happen if people rise up and campaign against development plans. We definitely need more places like the Bussey Building that encourage young creative projects and enterprises – but it takes a determined team of people to make places like this exist, and I think that's why it is one of a kind.

**SMBH:** What is it about Peckham in particular that made you want to settle there?

**VG:** I have lived in the area ever since I moved to London in 1999. It's a happy accident that when I decided I wanted to open a gallery that there was a vibrant emerging art scene right on my doorstep. I'm a big admirer of what pioneering galleries like [Hannah Barry Gallery](#), [The Sunday Painter](#) and [Arcadia Missa](#) have done to establish Peckham's presence in the contemporary art world. I find it exciting that the scene here is new, and growing – it feels like there's room to join in with a photography-focused proposition and positively contribute to that growth.

**SMBH:** What has been the most challenging aspect of starting a new curatorial project like Seen Fifteen?



**VG:** The most challenging thing has been not to give up when the going gets tough – there are a lot of scary moments involved in making your dream come true. The uncertainty and risk can all become a bit overwhelming at times. However, when I'm feeling like that, all that needs to happen is to have an inspiring conversation with an artist or a curator to get me re-energised and back on track. I've started, so I'll finish!



WORKS FROM JAN MCCULLOUGH'S HOME INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL



**SMBH:** Your next show is a full-scale installation of [Jan McCullough](#)'s *Home Instruction Manual*. Did you know Jan already, how did this come about?

**VG:** I met Jan McCullough through Ciara Hickey at [Belfast Exposed Gallery](#). Ciara had just launched a new programme called *Belfast Exposed Futures*, and she introduced me to the artists she'd selected for debut solo shows – Jan McCullough was one of them. When I met Jan she'd just found out that she'd won the [Kassel Fotobook Festival Dummy Award](#) for *Home Instruction Manual*, and she was brimming with excitement and ideas about the forthcoming book. I was really impressed with Jan's tenacity – to make *Home Instruction Manual*, she rented a house specifically for the project. She spent two months there, creating and then photographing a fictional 'perfect home', all driven by a conversation she observed in an internet chatroom. I thought it was both bizarre and brilliant at the same time. For the exhibition we're going to be transforming the gallery into a space where the virtual chatroom conversation collides with the real rooms that Jan created.

**SMBH:** So, you'll be celebrating the opening of the new space and the exhibition on February 11th. You must be nervous?

**VG:** I'm nervous and excited at the same time. My current 'to do' list seems like it's never ending. But, when I've got through it, I'm looking

forward to throwing open the doors of Unit B1:1 Bussey Building for the first time and inviting everyone in for a beer to celebrate.

**SMBH:** What are your plans for the rest of 2016?

**VG:** I'm 'time-sharing' the gallery space at the Bussey Building with another gallery called [South Kiosk](#). After Jan's exhibition closes at the end of February, South Kiosk will take over for March and Seen Fifteen will be back again for April. In May, because it will be Photo London 2016, we are planning to co-curate a show and some events between the two galleries. So, 2016 is going to be full of more new experiences and challenges, and for that I can't wait.



Seen Fifteen

Unit B1:1

Bussey Building

Copeland Park

133 Copeland Road

London SE15 3SN