

Images of Liberation: Sally Fraser's photography of women's protest



Unseen images capture the fiery beginnings of the UK women's liberation movement in the first exhibition of work by activist photographer Sally Fraser.

On a snowy International Women's Day in 1971, thousands of people marched through central London. Inspired by the founding Women's Liberation Conference held in Oxford the previous year, this was the first-ever national demonstration for equal rights and pay for women.

The 50th anniversary of the march and its history is celebrated in a fascinating exhibition of photographs by Sally Fraser, who both documented and participated in the protests. *Images of Liberation: Sally Fraser's photography of women's protest* runs as part of Photo Oxford 2021. It will be shown at the site of Ruskin (now Exeter) College, where the founding conference took place in February 1970.

Sally Fraser's images capture the genesis of second wave feminism in Britain, at its landmark conference in Oxford and on the capital's streets, a half-century ago. Conference attendees include leading feminist thinkers and activists Sally Alexander, Sue Crockford, Anna Davin, Annie Freud, Selma James, Juliet Mitchell, Sheila Rowbotham, Michelene Wandor and Audrey Wise, later MP for Coventry South West, among others. The conference creche, run by fathers, shows a youthful Stuart Hall holding a baby. Busts of 'great men' in the Oxford Union are humorously covered by scarfs, paper bags and banana skins. This subversive creativity is further seen on the Women's March, where women are dressed for a satirical beauty pageant, and a crucified shop dummy is held aloft, draped with articles of women's oppression.

The exhibition provides an invaluable record of a key moment in 20th century British radical social history, the launch pad of what Sheila Rowbotham envisaged as 'an entirely new kind of politics'.

ENDS

Notes For Editors

Images of Liberation: Sally Fraser's photographs of women's protest

Exhibition launch event - Sunday 17 October, 2-4pm

15 October - 15 November 2021

Free admission. Opening hours 10am-4pm daily.

Cohen Quad, Exeter College Oxford

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Talks - two public talks will take place online during the exhibition. Further information see: www.fourcornersfilm.co.uk

Sally Fraser

In the late 1960s Chandan Fraser - then known as Sally Fraser - studied photography at the London College of Printing and became an activist in the city's increasingly politicised scene. She captured images of the emerging movements of which she was part: the huge anti-Vietnam war protests and influential student activism at Hornsey College of Art in 1968. She joined the Tufnell Park women's group and headed to Oxford in 1970 to photograph the inaugural national women's liberation movement conference. A year later, she went on the first International Women's Day march through central London. Some of her images appeared in pioneering journals, notably *Black Dwarf* and *Spare Rib*, others featured in the mainstream press, distributed through the Report agency. Shortly after, Chandan Fraser gave up photography. 'I wanted not to be continuously in the observer position. I wanted to be part of it.' She took up her camera again for last year's gathering in Oxford to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first women's liberation conference. Chandan has never had an exhibition of her work in the UK. She lives in France.

First National Women's Liberation Conference, 1970

The first-ever National Women's Liberation Conference took place at Ruskin College, Oxford, 27 February and 1 March 1970. It was organised by a group of women participants, including Ruskin students Arielle Aberson and Sally Alexander, alongside historian Sheila Rowbotham. They expected a couple of hundred people, but over 500 turned up with their sleeping bags on the Friday night. The conference expanded into the male bastion of the Oxford Union, renowned for producing future prime ministers. A conference creche of around 40 children was run by a group of fathers. At the final session, attendees voted unanimously on four demands: equal pay; equal educational and job opportunities; free contraception and abortion on demand; and free 24-hour nurseries. It was one of the biggest landmarks in British women's history, the moment at which, according to Sheila - Rowbotham, "a movement could be said to exist" (*Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation*, interviews by Michelene Wandor, 1990.)

Four Corners

Four Corners is a centre for film and photographic arts, based in East London for nearly 50 years. Our exhibitions explore hidden histories of community action and protest, and share stories from the margins that might not otherwise be told.

Images of Liberation: Sally Fraser's photography of women's protest is a Four Corners exhibition, produced in collaboration with Chandan Fraser and historian Andrew Whitehead. A second exhibition of Sally Fraser's photographs takes place at Four Corners' gallery, in London, in March 2022.

Photo Oxford

[Photo Oxford](#) runs 15 October to 15 November 2021, and explores the theme of *Women and Photography – Ways of Seeing and Being Seen*, bringing to light women behind and in front of the lens, as curators, collectors, researchers, commentators.

The festival brings high-quality, local, national and international photography and photographic debate to the public in Oxford and connecting with the wider world. We aim to bring photography to existing and new audiences of all ages and backgrounds, inspire creativity, nurture emerging photographers, raise awareness of photography within the visual arts, and build connections across diverse communities. Previous festivals have showcased the work of a wide range of established and emerging photographers and curators, attracted growing audiences and excellent feedback, and developed collaborative partnerships locally, nationally and internationally, with organisations including Photoworks, the V&A museum, the Royal Photographic Society and The Photographers Gallery.

This exhibition is generously supported by the Barry Amiel & Norman Melburn Trust and the Lipman-Miliband Trust.



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