

# RACE, PLACE AND DIVERSITY BY THE SEASIDE

## SUKI DHANDA



## **RACE, PLACE & DIVERSITY BY THE SEASIDE IS AN EXPLORATION OF HOW CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS EXPRESSED ALONG THE SHORE LINE OF PLYMOUTH AND THE SURROUNDING AREA.**

People from a multitude of backgrounds have historically congregated at the British seaside with their families and loved ones to take in the views, play in arcades, walk along the shore and swim in the sea.

Last year's Brexit vote has led many people to question their sense of belonging and their place in this country. Numerous theories have been put forward in the wake of the referendum result exploring why people voted to leave the European Union. These range from concerns with immigration levels, austerity, sovereignty, education and communities feeling left behind by the forces of globalisation.

Over a 6 month period, Dhanda has spent time visiting Plymouth (a city that she lived in as a student in the late 80's) capturing local residents and visitor's spending time relaxing with their friends and families by the coast.

This project explores the changing face of Plymouth's population and seeks to uncover and celebrate the diverse community of people who have made this city their home. It highlights the possibilities of co-existing in a shared space.

Suki Dhanda successfully combines a career as one of The Observer/Guardian Groups main portrait and editorial photographers, with her own personal practice focused on ethnicity, people and place. Suki is an alumni of Plymouth College of Art.

**[SUKIDHANDA.COM](#)**



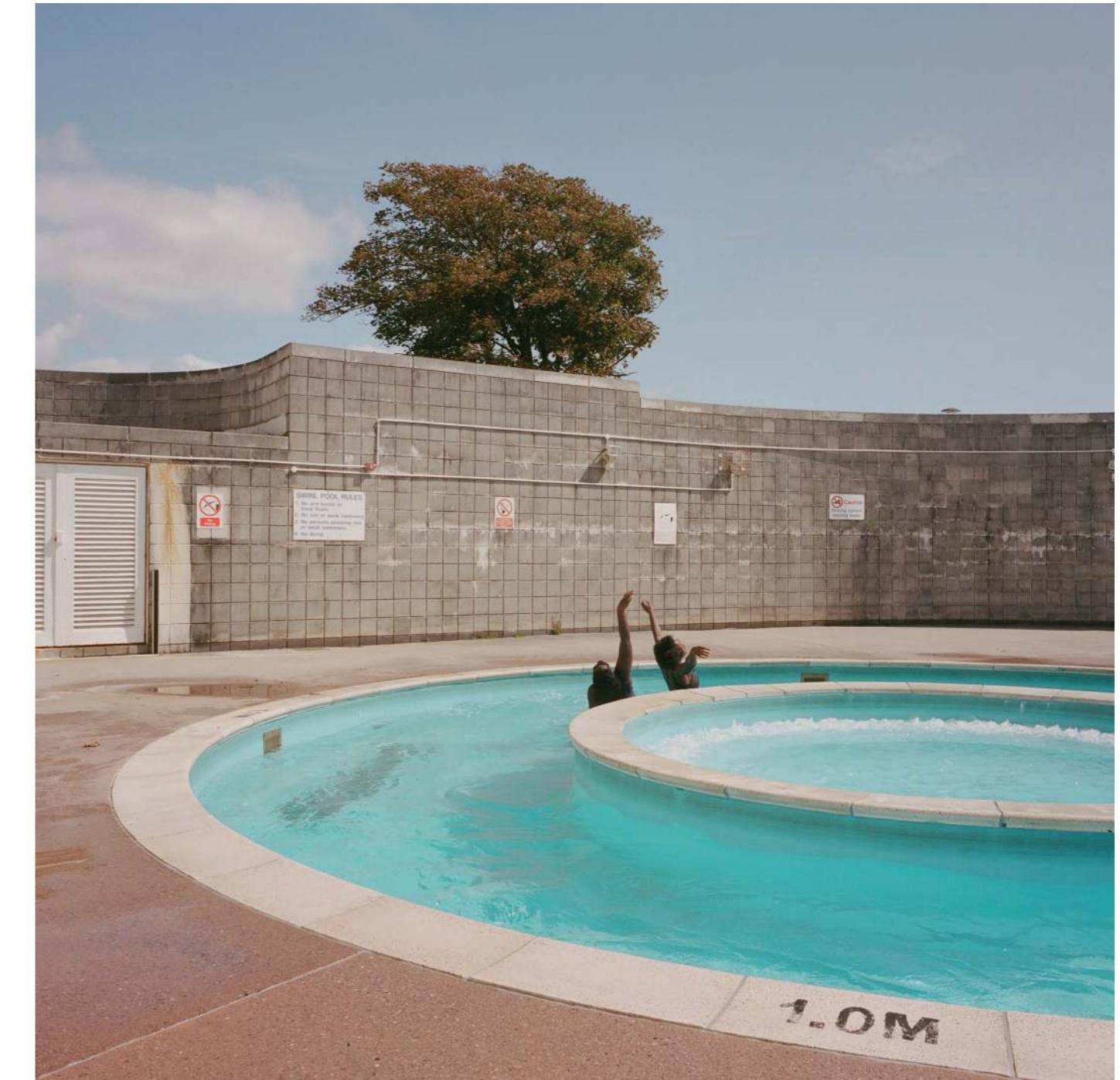
ELAF, YASEEN, THE HOE



FAMILY, DEVIL'S POINT



FOSTER FAMILY, JENNY CLIFF



GIRLS, MOUNTWISE



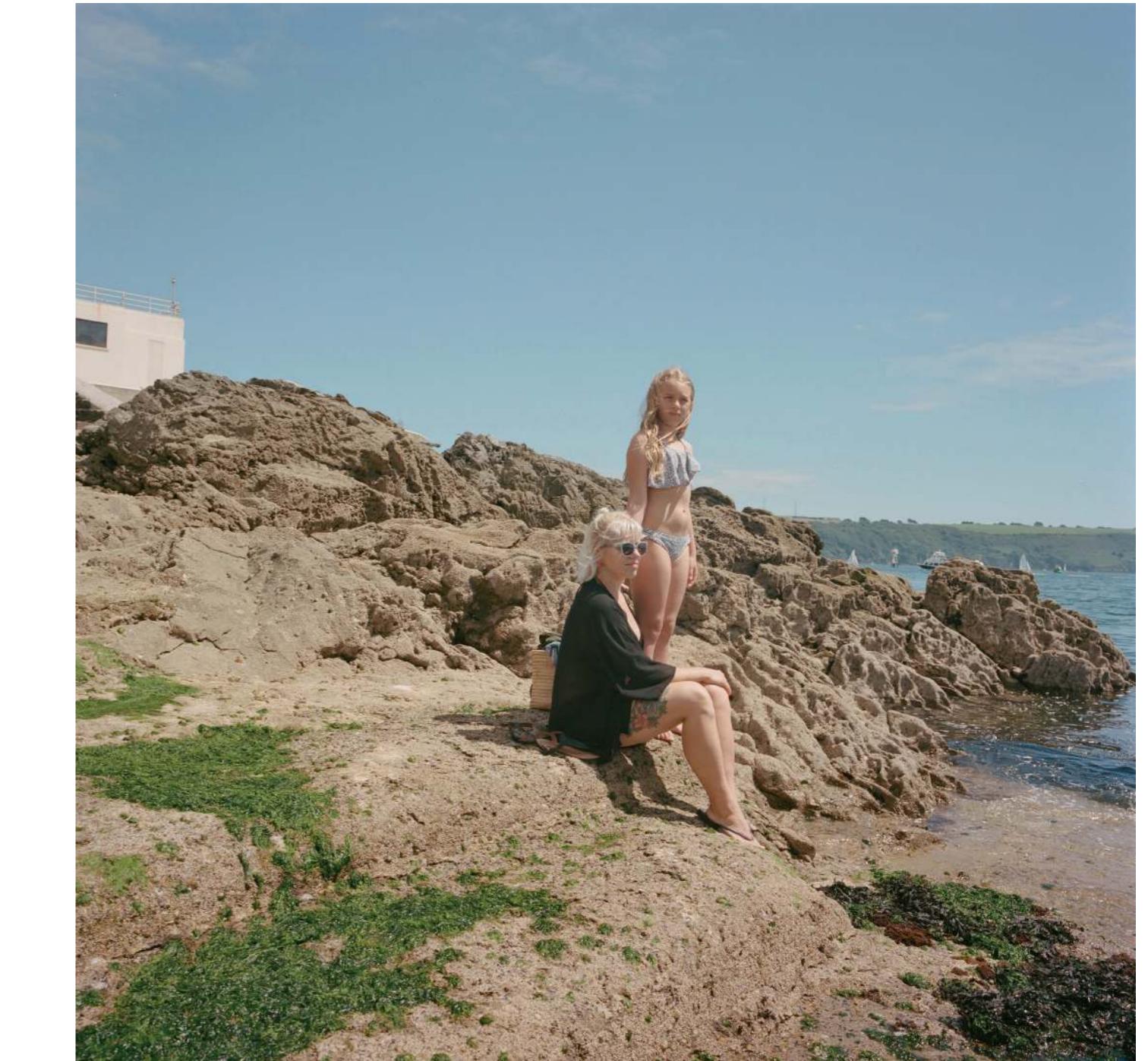
JERRY & LEE, THE HOE



JOHN WITH FAMILY, THE HOE



KRISTIAN & HARRY, THE HOE



MARGO + DAUGHTER, THE HOE



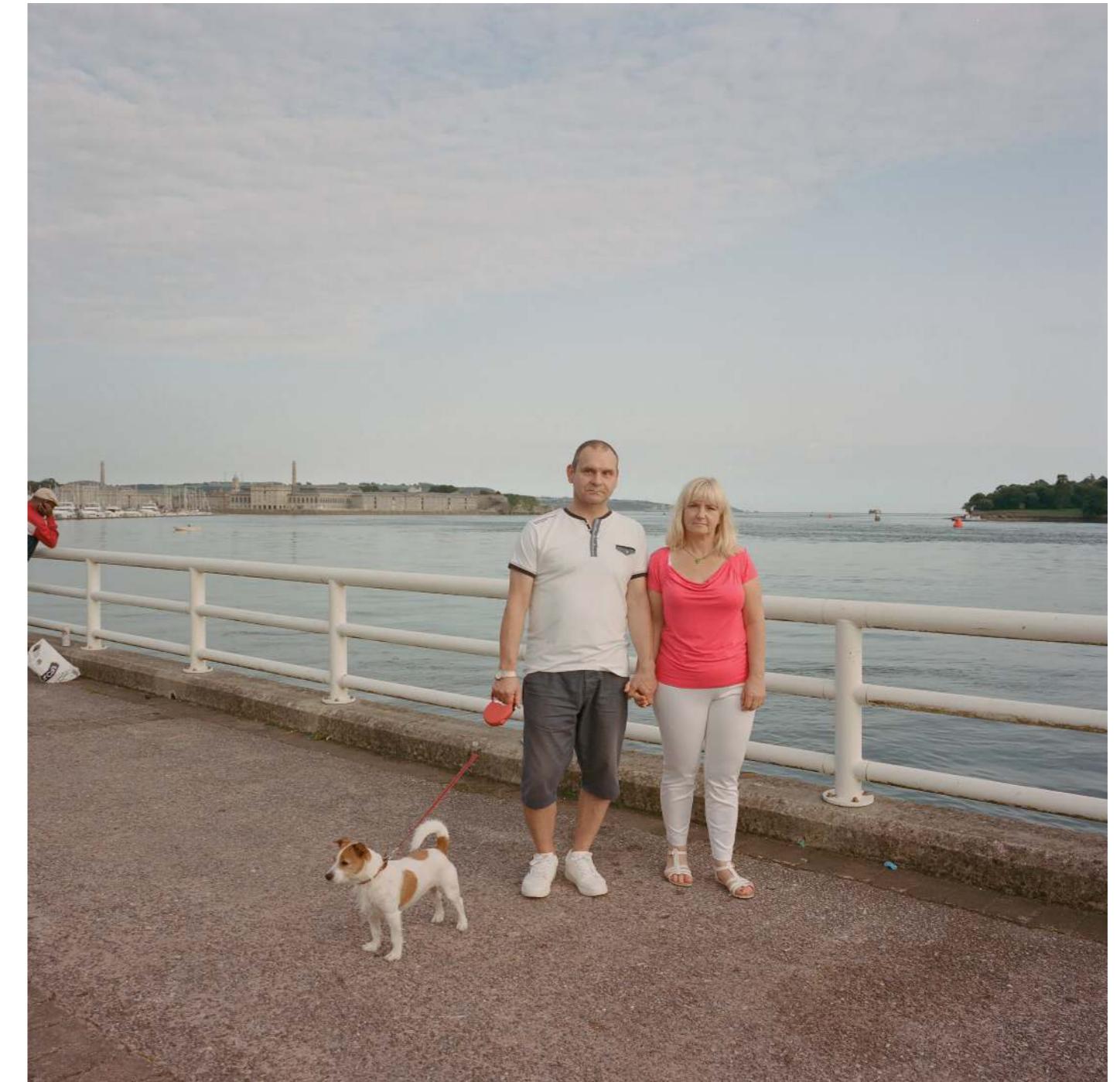
MCCOY FAMILY, RAVEL STOKE BEACH



MISHARI & AHMAD, THE HOE



MANASSEH WITH NIECE OYE, MOUNTWISE



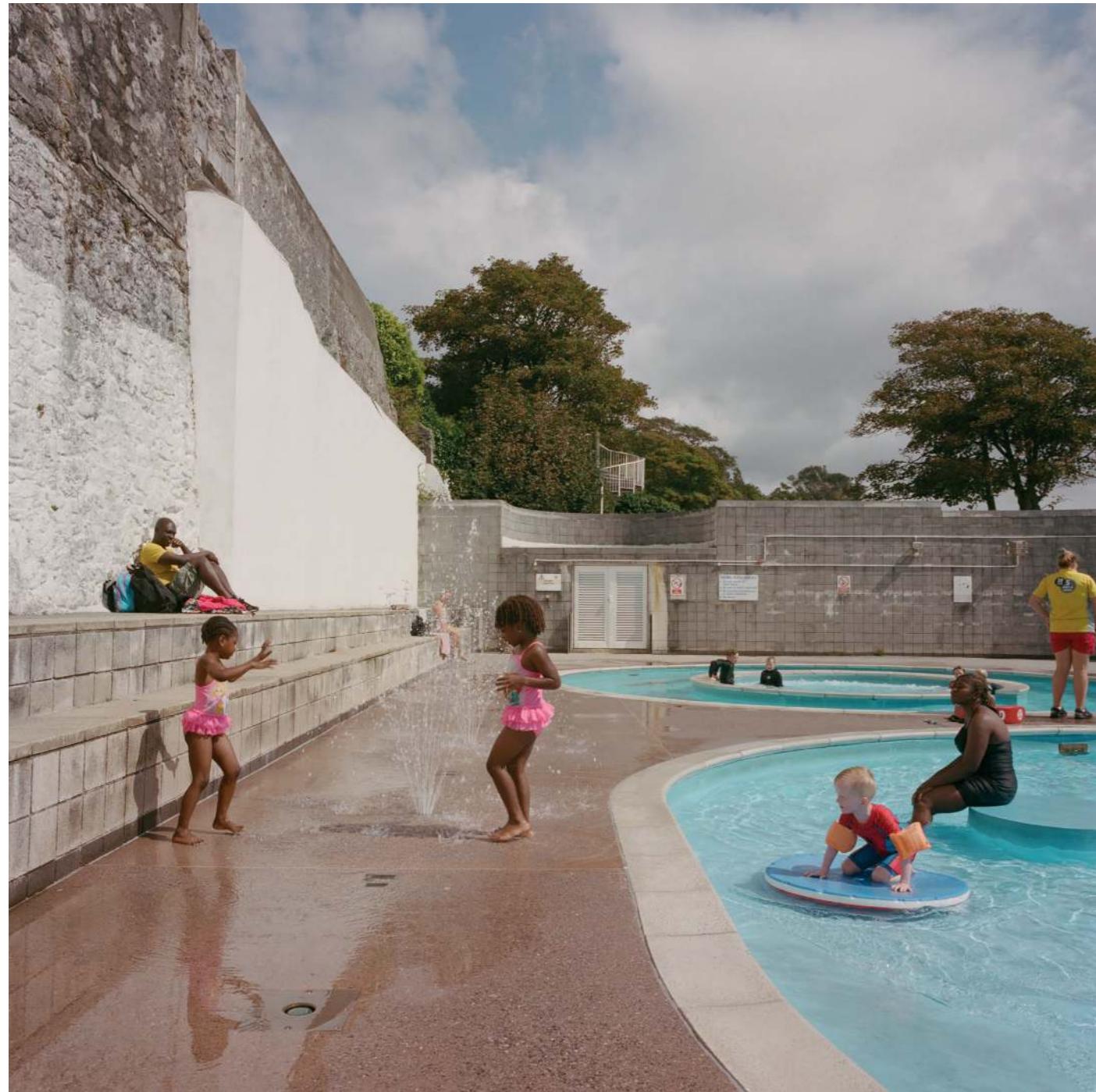
MOUNT WISE



MOUNTWISE



MUHAMMAD & SUMERA FAMILY, THE HOE



NEIZER FAMILY, MOUNT WISE



NUBIA, DEVIL'S POINT



SAKALS FAMILY, JENNY CLIFF



SIKH FAMILY, BIGBURY ON SEA



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SISTERS, THE HOE



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STOFFREGEN FAMILY, MOTHERCOMBE BEACH



UNKNOWN, DEVIL'S POINT



UNKNOWN GROUP, THE HOE



WIN & TERTULIEN, THE HOE



YARA WITH FRIENDS, THE HOE

# Leah Harris, Exhibitions Coordinator at Plymouth College of Art, sits down to chat with Suki Dhanda about her connection to Plymouth and her ongoing interest in profiling diversity in her work.

## LH: CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOU AND YOUR PRACTICE?

**SD:** I'm a freelance photographer, based in London. I've been working professionally as a photographer for about 20 years. I mainly work in editorial photography - my biggest break into the industry was being offered work by The Observer newspaper. Taking on this regular work eventually led to a freelance contract which I still have today. My commissions have included shooting varied subjects from actors, musicians, dancers to politicians, farmers, scientists to everyday people in all sorts of environments. I have also been fortunate enough to be sent to a lot of different countries in my career, experiences that I probably would not have had were it not for the work.

Working for the Guardian Media Group has opened many other doors, introducing me to new clients and opportunities. Over the years, as well as working on commercial jobs, it has been really important to develop my own personal projects. This work has been largely influenced by my own upbringing., exploring ideas of ethnicity, diversity belonging. My parents settled here from India in the mid 60's. I was born here and identify myself as a British Asian, raised with a mix of both English and Asian culture.

## LH: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR IDEAS BEHIND THE EXHIBITION?

**SD:** My inspiration for the project was a reaction to the Brexit vote. I found the idea that Britain was heading towards Brexit very depressing, it was a shock. That weekend, I went to Margate and the weather was beautifully sunny. I noticed the beach was full of people from different backgrounds, colours and ethnicities. It almost looked like a celebration - the sun was out and everyone seemed to have forgotten about Brexit. It felt like people just wanted to have a nice time with their family and friends, forget about their day to day worries and enjoy the sun. I used to go to Margate as a kid and I remember it always being a friendly place.

I still had that image in my mind when I was approached by The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art to develop some new work for an exhibition. I started thinking about the scene in Margate and whether it translated to other places in the UK. I decided I wanted to investigate the diversity of Plymouth and how people celebrate the place they are in, the environment around them.



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RITA ORA

I thought it was going to be a challenge to capture the idea of diversity and multiculturalism in Plymouth as I remember when I was studying at the college in the late 80s there were hardly any black or asian people. Going to Plymouth College of Art was great fun, I met so many different types of people from all over Britain, and to be honest, I didn't feel put off being in a minority in the city. I never felt discriminated against, I just remember that the students tended to stick together.

**LH: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY YOU WANTED TO PROFILE THE DIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH'S COMMUNITY? WHY PLYMOUTH SPECIFICALLY?**

**SD:** It has been interesting spending time in Plymouth during this project because I was looking for diversity and expecting it to be the same as when I was studying here. I've actually been amazed at how many different types of groups there are in Plymouth. From Eastern Europeans to refugees and foreign students. It does make me think, what do the 'born and bred' Plymouthians think? Why did this city vote for Brexit? Maybe they weren't ready for this. One of the families I worked with and photographed for this project are from Germany and they live and work in Plymouth. The whole idea of Brexit has made them question where they belong, where their children belong - and their kids were born here.

**LH: YOU HAVE PHOTOGRAPHED A LOT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE IN YOUR CAREER, HOW DIFFERENT IS IT PHOTOGRAPHING PEOPLE YOU APPROACH PERSONALLY FOR YOUR OWN CREATIVE PRACTICE?**

**SD:** When photographing celebrities everything is always carefully organised and scheduled, I have a specific slot to photograph them, and there's always a time limit - I just have to do the job. It is difficult to engage in a normal conversation with celebrities as a lot of them are just not interested in talking to you - they want their photo taken as quickly as possible!

It is a very different experience to meeting people on the street, or when I approach subjects personally. It is much more intimate. Also I think there is an art to starting a conversation, you need to have a particular approach, always helps to smile! I never force people to do anything they are not comfortable doing, so if they do not want to be photographed I just leave it at that. I think people appreciate that approach and as a photographer you have to be sensitive and have empathy for people. That's how I work anyway.

**LH: WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE TAKE FROM YOUR WORK IN THE EXHIBITION?**

**WHAT DO YOU WANT IT TO ACHIEVE?**

**SD:** I'd like the exhibition to act as a kind of invitation to different groups of people. People who might not usually go to see exhibitions. I am not only trying to celebrate diversity in the photographs I create, but I am also capturing the area, showcasing the beauty of being by the sea, of being in Plymouth and visiting the surrounding beaches. So I suppose there are two elements there, and maybe people will just forget about the skin colour of the person in the picture, or where they might come from. Just focussing on the overall environment and that person's relationship with the place. I hope that the photographs might start a conversation, that's always good.



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SUMMER 2017

Suki Dhanda successfully combines a career as one of The Observer / Guardian group's main portrait and editorial photographers, with her own personal practice focused on ethnicity, people and place. In her commercial work, Suki has photographed some of the world's most famous faces - from Tony Blair to Sir David Attenborough, and Yoko Ono to Beth Ditto. Suki Dhanda is an alumni of Plymouth College of Art.

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