

Meet the locals

Roger Molloy, 31, photographer and gallerist

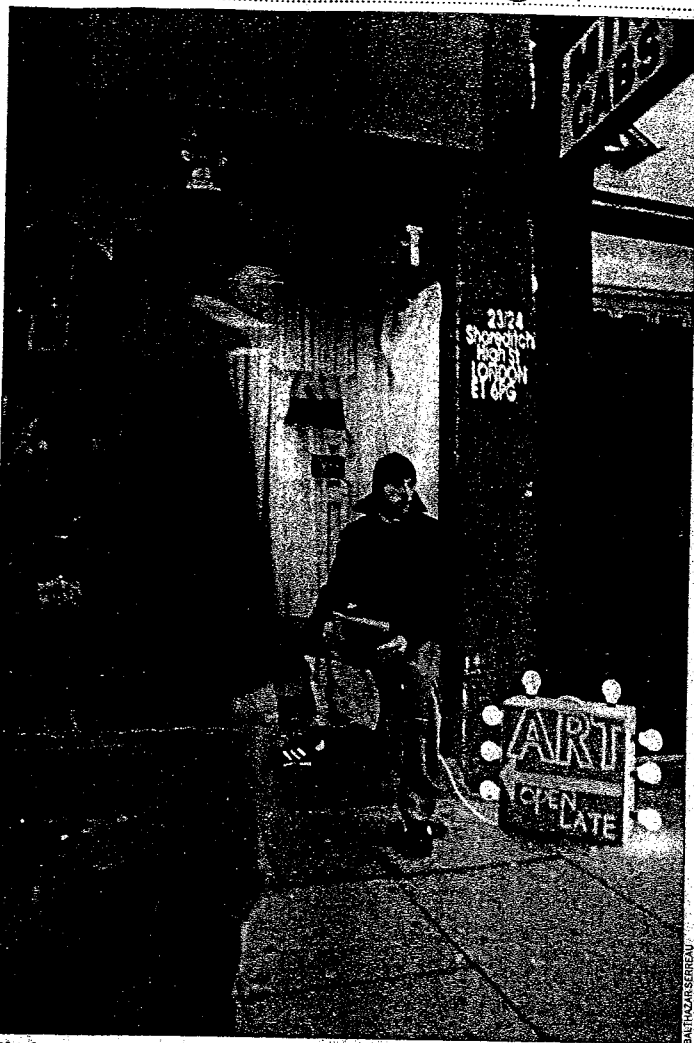


Photo opportunity Roger, selling pictures from his front step

I've been living on Shoreditch High Street for six months, and officially opened a gallery selling my photographs in my hallway on January 1. I'd actually been open for a few days before, testing it out, and started with a flimsy cardboard sign that said "Art Open" with a big arrow pointing at me, and a flame in a baked bean tin. Since the start of the year, I've sold 500 prints from my front step, for between £1 and £10 each.

I'm using what I've got and not making any excuses. I only have this little camera on my phone, but if I'm a photographer, I should be able to use this tool and hopefully make a profit – and I have been. I've stopped myself from taking photographs in the past because I didn't have the right equipment. Technically, I can use other equipment, but unfortunately my phone is all I have at the moment.

I was born in London, christened down the road at St John's in Bethnal Green. I grew up in the East End until I was 13 when I moved to Dagenham because my mum remarried. When I was 15, I was asked in art at school what I wanted to do for a project. I said I wanted to cut up a motorbike with a blowtorch to make a sculpture. I was being cheeky, pushing

things a bit, but they let me. When everyone else was painting like we always had done, I was in the yard with a blowtorch. The teachers suggested that I go to art school, but I wanted to get a trade and bring in some housekeeping for my mum, so I became a gardener. I didn't go into higher education; my twenties were spent travelling instead.

My photography career started at the Minehead Butlins in Somerset. I was selling batteries and cameras – I wasn't allowed to take pictures at first – but I worked my way up, eventually photographing absolutely everything from a nan's eightieth birthday with all the family to a crazy hen weekend. We would cover the whole shoot for free, then they could buy the pictures. I didn't have to pay for the bad prints which gave me the creative freedom to try new things. I worked on cruise ships too. I spent some time in the Bahamas in a five-star equivalent of Butlins – an amazing experience, but I got an insect bite that swelled up and I thought I might have cancer, so I headed back to the safety of London.

Then I embarked on a two-year project photographing 4,000 couples kissing on Neal Street in Covent Garden between

2001 and 2003. The theme was PDA – public displays of affection. When we see people being affectionate, there's an in-built voyeuristic urge to look at them. The photographs could only be viewed as if they were standing in front of you – they're on 35mm colour transparencies, side by side and backlit. The exhibition was held at Thomas Neal's festival; I really want to do a book about it one day.

For my current project, I started with 50 prints of "No Gray in My Day", a picture I took on Oxford Street, and sold those for £1 each. With the money I made, I bought some white material off a stall at Whitechapel Market, used it to drape the hallway walls, and did another run of prints. With the money I make, I take more pictures and get more prints made. I could have easily got a job. But I've taken a much more interesting route of doing it for myself. I'm totally solo and free-climbing, I don't receive any money except what I get from selling my photographs.

People seem to like watching the gallery grow and develop character. I've got a website up and running (www.nograyinmyday.com), and would like to raise money for more equipment. I'd get myself an Apple laptop, because that will do the job, and a Leica camera; they do a hybrid – it's digital, or take the back off and it's analogue.

There are some empty rooms upstairs; I'm hoping that the landlord will let me open them up as a commercial space. He's called some builders round to get some prices on turning it into a gallery. Or there are some empty shop fronts across the road. I would like to exhibit other artists' work. Now it feels like more something is

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actually happening; it'll go where it's going to go. It works with my philosophy of 'use what I have; – whether it's my cameraphone or showing my work at my own front door.

Something happened the other day: a guy just stopped and got the whole thing. He wrote "Made in London" above my door. That's the only name I've got right now; it meant a lot. All my pieces are taken here. You can't run out of inspiration in London.'

*Interview: Simone Baird
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E1 (www.nograyinmyday.com).*