

A NEW WAY OF LOOKING

This month's Fenton House exhibition features the work of Armando Jongejan FRPS, whose documentary prints of Netherlands monastic life are making their first appearance in the UK



The result of a single minded personal quest, perhaps reminiscent of the work of the late James Ravilious FRPS, the photographs of Armando Jongejan FRPS are extraordinary. He once spent 18 months building up a relationship with Carmelite nuns in the Netherlands, before he was allowed to take even a single picture.

"It wasn't easy", he says. "They live cut off from the villagers in the surrounding area, in their nunnery, with their own gated garden.

"Even their graveyard was inside the

walls of their garden. Until 1969, there were barriers inside the nunnery, and it was strongly prohibited for men to enter the building."

After a few visits without a camera, he was allowed to make his first photographs in the garden of the nunnery. He showed the results to the abbess, and after a while she appreciated his work.

"The nuns were used to taking their own photographs with a simple compact camera", he says, "and they were very curious when I turned up with my Hasselblad, tri-

pod and 180mm lens.

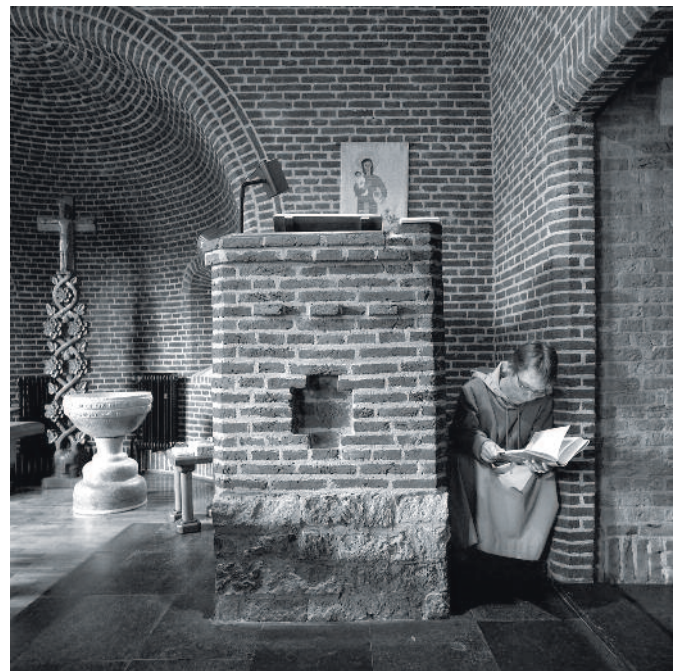
"I took a group photograph in an avenue of hawthorn trees, and they kept asking if I had enough light, and if I was too far away.

"This was 1996, so I was still shooting on film: T-Max 400. I had no digital camera, and worked in black and white, square format. When you only have 12 exposures on a roll of film, you work completely differently from when you use a DSLR with almost unlimited exposures."

The nuns were pleased with the results, and invited him to record daily life in the



Facing page: Carmelite nuns in an avenue of hawthorn trees.
Left: Sister Maria Theresia in meditation in church. Both from *Van binnenuit*.
Below left: Sister Lioba in the passage.
Below right: Sister Michal in the refectory. Both from *Thuiskomen*.

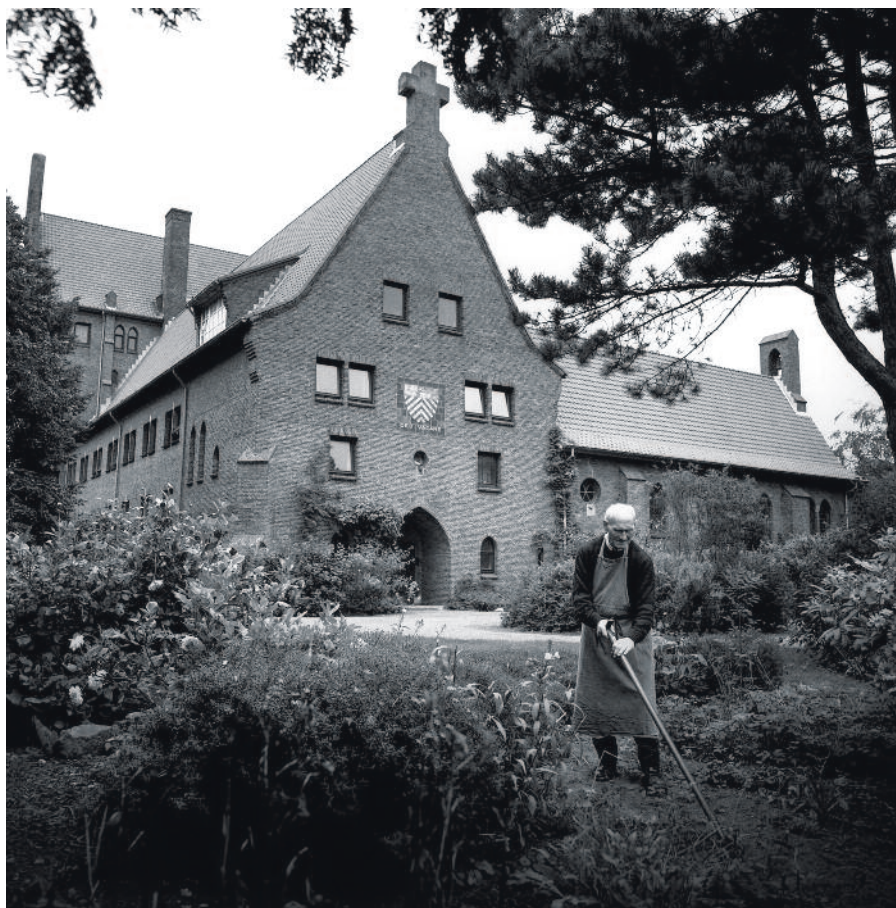
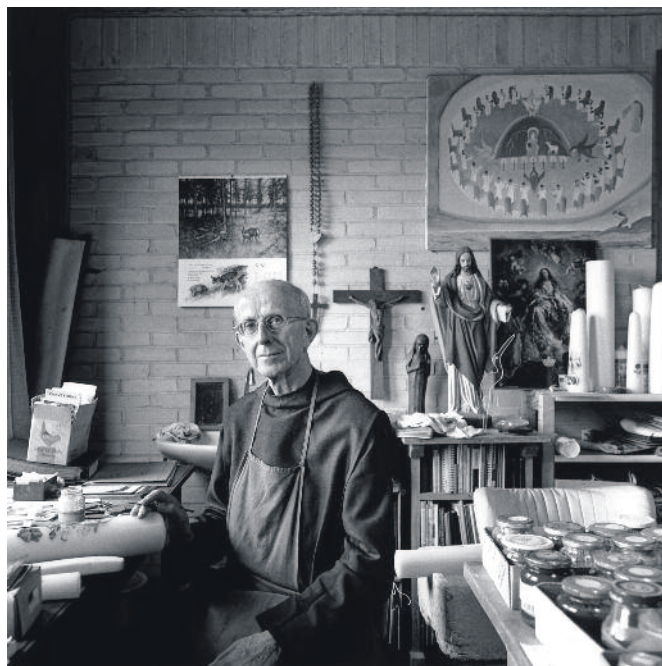


convent, including prayer, cleaning, washing, eating and their one hour of spare time each week.

Jongejan was even allowed to photograph

some of the nuns in their own cells, and was surprised to discover one had a computer and internet connection - hi-tech for the mid-1990s!

The resulting book was published in 2000, as *Van binnenuit* (From the inside). The abbot of Sint-Adelbertabdij at Egmond-Binnen then invited Jongejan to make a



Above left: Brother Nico on the third floor staircase.

Above right: Brother Kees in his workshop.

Left: Brother Cor in the garden of the abbey. All from *Een zoektocht*.

He was born in Egmond aan Zee, and has remained there for almost all his life. "If you are travelling abroad, everything is new and you recognise what makes a good picture", he says, "whereas it is difficult to recognise what is interesting when you stay in the same place. In your own village, you have to learn to look at things in a new way."

Egmond is made up of three different communities: Egmond aan Zee (6000 people), Egmond aan den Hoef (2500 people) and Egmond-Binnen (3000 people). Taken together, it is still a village on a small scale, but it is host to three Roman Catholic monasteries.

Although non-religious, Jongejan developed an interest in monastic life, and included a few images of nuns - at the St Lioba nunnery - in his first photobook, *Egmondse dorpsportretten* (Villagers of Egmond) (1996).

By the time he had finished photographing the three Egmond monasteries, he had captured a total of nearly six years of monastic life.

"I never orchestrated a situation", he says. "I just took photographs of whatever the nuns or monks happened to be doing during the few hours in which I visited them."

info
ARMANDO JONGEJAN FRPS
Daily Life in Three
Monasteries in Egmond

Fenton House

1-30 May

<http://tinyurl.com/7haceyt>

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similar record of his community.

Jongejan spent even more time - 20 months - building his relationships with the monks and photographing their life. The images from Sint-Adelbertabdij were published in 2004 as *Een zoektocht* (A Quest).

The final part of Jongejan's photographic tour of the monasteries of Egmond took place at Sint-Lioba, also in Egmond-Binnen, famed for its creativity (see *RPS Journal*, May 2011, Vol 151, No 4).

The nuns of Sint-Lioba express themselves

through batik, fashion, pottery, sculpture, weaving, and copper and silver work, which they then sell. There is very little time for recreation, but Jongejan did manage to capture an image of one of the nuns trampolining in the back yard! Jongejan's photographs from Sint-Lioba were published in 2011 as *Thuiskomen* (Coming Home).

Jongejan, who studied at the Photo Academy in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands, is inspired by people's daily lives, photographing them in their natural habitat.