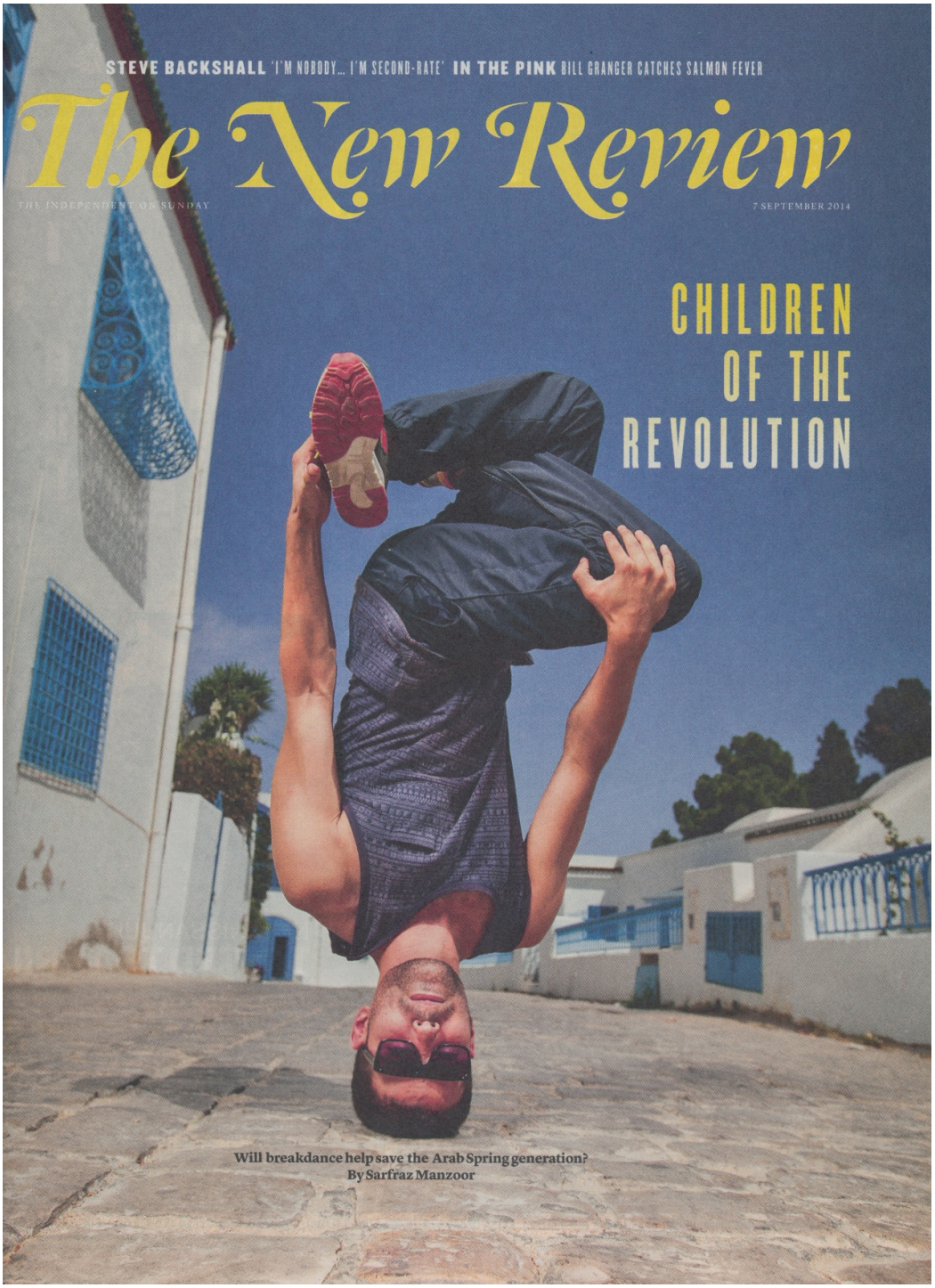
The Independent | The New Review
UK | Print
7 September 2014
Circulation: 104,488 | AVE: £78,300



Clockwise from top left: Dennis Monk provided this photograph of the Monk family hopping at Paddock Farm, circa 1920-1930; Rose Wright offered this shot of her mother and her brother's ex-fiancée; Maureen Hostler in a hop field with her family

KATHRIN BÖHM

A short hop away

WORDS BY GILLIAN ORR

BEFORE PACKAGE holidays and cheap flights brought the Med to our doorstep, Londoners wanting to escape the city during July and August were faced with limited options: to the coast, perhaps, if they could afford it – maybe even a trip to Wales.

But for far more, summers from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century meant time to leave for Kent, where thousands of east Londoners went to hop-pick at farms. For six weeks, groups mainly comprising women and children would stay in tin huts and spend their days working in the fields in order to enjoy the great outdoors, spend time with each other and earn some money.

The 45-year-old German-born artist Kathrin Böhm, who now lives in Hackney, came across this custom by chance and decided to find out more. After placing an ad in a local Dagenham newspaper,

Clockwise from left: Teresa Dimech's photograph of the Brown family children at Spring Farm, 1960-1961; Jean Aylward's shot of members of the Wilson and Hutton families, 1935; George Westbrook offered this photograph of hop-pickers from 1950

she was inundated with dozens of anecdotes, memories and, as seen here, photographs of summer holidays spent on farms.

"At first I thought the pictures were staged and I was suspicious; everyone looked so happy, even though I knew it was hard work," says Böhm. "Having met so many people who actually did it, I now realise there was a genuine spirit of togetherness. They had such fond memories of those times."

Partly inspired by the hop-pickers, the artist has herself now started a self-sustaining community co-operative in Dagenham and Barking, where residents can harvest fruits to be turned into drinks. •

'Company: Movements, Deals and Drinks' is a project by Myvillages, commissioned by Create and supported by Bank of America Merrill Lynch (createlondon.org)