

return to the real: contemporary photo-media

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This exhibition examines the shift towards a documentary style aesthetic amongst Australian photo-media artists. In contemporary Australian photo-media practice there is a revival of interest in street photography and the genre of personal documentary and, most interestingly, a renewed concern for photographic realism. This point is illustrated by the artists selected for this exhibition. Though their work is divergent in technique and style they all share a common thread in their work; they photograph scenes and subjects that form part of their everyday experience. Their photographs are seemingly objective and un-manipulated - put simply they all invoke the inviolability of the photographic medium as a record.

Photojournalism or editorial photography is not the aim of these artists, their intention is for their photographs to be exhibited and viewed in a gallery context and perceived as art objects rather than transparent vehicles of information. The exploration of contemporary culture and urban life are dominant elements in all their work; they are preoccupied with events or places that exist within their sphere of personal experience.

Consider the work of Narelle Autio, whose aerial views of people spending their leisure time relaxing upon the expansive lawns that lie beneath the Sydney Harbour Bridge bring to mind satellite views of everyday life captured by an unseen eye watching from above. Autio looks down upon familiar scenes of city life; children playing cricket, dogs being exercised and couples caressing under the shade of a tree. The individuals are oblivious to the photographer and they appear much like players in a miniature drama, performing for an unknown audience. Autio regularly walks over the bridge on her way to the city and these scenes form an integral part of her everyday experience. They are fused into the artist's psyche becoming part of her ambient visual memory. The photographs have an unusual aura of silence; they represent quiet little worlds, isolating people in moments of reverie seemingly unaware of the perpetual cacophony of the city roaring above.

On a different level, the romantic sensitivity of Andrew McLaughlin records the physical space around his family home. When he returns to the outer suburbs of Melbourne, McLaughlin talks of looking from the train window, watching as the endless suburbs flicker by in the fading twilight. He is drawn to the picturesque afternoon light, its warmth, softness and timeless sense of silence. The banality of McLaughlin's subject is mediated by the evocative quality of the twilight; the scenes take on a highly romanticised atmosphere that expresses the artist's own idealised view. He captures a forlorn sense of transition, the inexorable advance of change and his own feelings of trepidation and sadness. The photographs do not mock suburban life, or serve as political commentary upon class distinctions, rather they are acts of love and statements of fraternity telling us about McLaughlin's life and his familiar surroundings.

Glenn Sloggett has a more trenchant eye; he searches for the dark humour found in the commonplace, the strange juxtaposition of caption and image leading the viewer into a dark world of degeneration and abandonment. Sloggett's photographs of shopfronts and decaying suburbia suggest the dismantling of Australia's egalitarian society, the *fair go* and the *battler* are the clichés brought to mind by these acrid documents of social decay. The photographs contain little sense of hope for the future, evidenced by the satirical title of Sloggett's *Hope St.* (2001) where an outdated and hopelessly dilapidated suburban building inhabits an empty streetscape. Sloggett is a predatory photographer, hunting the back-blocks of the city for signs of desolation and decay. In this context his work continues the tradition of street photography, but interestingly his works are always devoid of people; they have a lifeless post-apocalyptic atmosphere - Mad Max meets the disasters of urban planning. There is a sense of sadness in these modern views of Australian metropolitan life, the loss of dreams, and the prospect of an unknown future.

Steven Lojewski explores a similar theme through the series *Urban Dilemmas*. A veteran documentary photographer, Lojewski has the practised eye and enviable ability to find the beautiful and poetic in the most prosaic of scenes. He searches for the old, overgrown, and obsolete in the dusty and neglected corners of the metropolitan fringe. The photographs act as archaeological records, documenting the urban environment during its gradual but inexorable decay; for example the restaurant with its empty tables, garish pink napkins and the 'sorry closed' sign leaning against the street window - there is a hint of optimism in this photograph but it is overwhelmed by a feeling of isolation and loneliness. Beneath Lojewski's apparent voyeuristic objectivity there is an undertone of personal commentary, an agenda that sensitively reveals the decaying yet still functioning sites of the urban landscape.

Paul Knight's panoramic photographs explore the concept of psychological residue in empty interior spaces; the contrived environments documented in Knight's works are permeated with the implication of invisible human presence. The *Squash Court* (2001) or *Peep Show* (2001) are sites of physical activity and human interaction, one combative the other passive but both evoke a sense of voyeurism. Latent tension pervades these photographs; traces of activity and inferred presence provide visual references to human physical interaction with the space. The black marks left by the rubber squash balls scarify the interior of the court, the creased vinyl mattress a witness to countless scenes of debasement lies abandoned within the disturbingly vibrant reflections of the peep show. The apparent objectiveness and virtuosic photographic clarity of Knight's images provoke a mysterious sense of foreboding; as if the camera is a silent witness to some portentous event that has, or is, yet to occur.

Lyndal Walker also records interior spaces, though these are spaces peopled by the unidentified denizens of the retail environment. Walker stalks her prey in shops and supermarkets, her approach is necessarily secretive, to capture the look of aimless rapture and entrancement on the faces of the shoppers. Walkers' photographs record the highly artificial world of the retail store; they are a cultural critique of the subtlest kind and an exercise in pure documentary photography. Walker records the scene as the camera sees it, the images have a raw appearance, they are crude and aesthetically imperfect, very different to the slick highly contrived images we usually see of retail environments. In *Saturday Morning Barbie* (2002) we see a young girl anxiously clutching her new toy, her face shows a mixture of fear and emotional excitement. Surely this image, more than any other, illustrates the insidiously persuasive power of consumer culture.

Michael Williams's practice is the antithesis to the snapshot technique favoured by Walker: he has a profoundly cinematic approach that lends his photographs a monumental quality. The remarkable verisimilitude and intense colour of his large panoramic photographs suggests a sense of sublime timelessness, with a warm picturesque light casting a glow upon every detail. Williams has an interest in the re-construction and transformation of the metropolitan environment, he has spent many years documenting the development of Melbourne's outer suburbs, recording the transformation of arid marginal farmland into utopian residential estates. The *Sanctuary Lakes* series chronicles the gradual construction of one such estate, from its infancy as piles of earth and empty roads; through to its conclusion as a idealised oasis with verdant lawns, artificial lake and the ubiquitous 18-hole golf course. In recording these sites of transformation, Williams creates humorously ironic memorials to the perpetual advance of urban development.

The actuality of photographic truth may be questionable, but there is currently a desire to re-evaluate the underlying tenets of modernist photographic purism; to instinctively record the subject without overt subjective manipulation. This new wave of realism raises questions surrounding the direction of contemporary photo-media practice, and seemingly represents a transition away from the methods of post-modern photographic art. The artists in this exhibition all invoke the undeniable ability of the photograph to record - in doing so they are reawakening the original basis of the medium, they are returning to the real.



untitled
2001



untitled
2002

andrew mclaughlin

Born Melbourne 1974. Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2003 *Photographs*, Level II Gallery, Melbourne.
2001 *Standstill*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.
1999 *Enclosed*, First Site Gallery, RMIT, Melbourne.
1998 *Darkness/Colour*, Photographers Gallery, Melbourne.

Awards/Prizes

- 2000 Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship (RMIT).
1998 (Winner) Photo Technica Award: New Australian Photo-Artists of the Year,
Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

007	006	005	004	003	002	001
untitled 2000 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2000 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2000 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2001 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2002 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2002 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm	untitled 2002 pigment inkjet print 1000 x 1000mm



kong's 1 hour dry cleaning
1998

Born Brisbane 1964. Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2002 *Photographica Australis*, ARCO 2002, Sale de Canal de Isabella II, Madrid, Spain.
2001 *New Australiana*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (toured nationally).
1999 *National Photographic Acquisition Award*, Albury Regional Art Gallery, NSW.
1999 *Empty*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.

Awards/Prizes

- 2001 John and Margaret Baker Fellowship.

Selected Bibliography

- 'Traces', *Photofile*, Issue #66, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2002.
Australian Art Collector, Issue #21, Sydney, 2002.
 'Built', *Photofile* (Portfolio), Issue #63, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2001.

Glenn Sloggett is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

005	004	003	002	001
kong's 1 hour dry cleaning	hope street	milk bar	cheaper & deeper	empty
1998	2000	1997	1996	1996
type c print	type c print	type c print	type c print	type c print
800 x 800mm	800 x 800mm	800 x 800mm	800 x 800mm	800 x 800mm





narelle autio
untitled 2001 (detail)



andrew mclaughlin
untitled 2000 (detail)



glenn sloggett
empty 1996 (detail)



steven lojewski
untitled 2000 (detail)



paul knight
squash court 2001 (detail)



lyndal walker
saturday morning barbie 2002 (detail)



michael williams
new growth 1998 (detail)





untitled
2000

Born Great Britain 1952. Lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions

- 1999 *Leica/CCP Documentary Photography Award*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.
 1996 *Photo Documentary - Recent Images of Everyday Life*, State Library of NSW, Sydney.
 1995 *On The Edge: Australian Photographers*, San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, USA.

Awards/Prizes

- 1988 Australian Bicentennial Authority (for the Bicentennial Photography Project).
 1983 The CSR Photography Project.

Selected Bibliography

- Alan Davies, 'Photo Documentary - Recent Images of Everyday Life', State Library of NSW, Sydney, 1996.
 'Sydney Photographed', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, October, 1994, Linda Michael, (Ed.).
 'On the Edge', San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, USA, 1994, Gael Newton, (Ed.).
 Helen Ennis, 'Australian Photography: The 1980's', Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1988.

Steven Lojewski is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

006
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 300 x 450mm

005
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 300 x 450mm

004
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 300 x 450mm

003
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 300 x 450mm

002
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 450 x 300mm

001
untitled
 2000
 inkjet print
 450 x 300mm



untitled (bar)
2002

Born Sydney 1976. Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2003 *Gold Coast Ulrick Schubert Photographic Art Award*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Queensland.
 2002 *Krater Crater*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.
 2002 *Occupied (empty space)*, Photo Technica Gallery, Sydney.
 2001 *Photo Technica Award, The Whole Picture: New Australian Photo-Artist of the year*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

Awards/Prizes

- 1999 George Hicks Memorial Award.

Selected Bibliography

- Helene Frichot, 'Between Place and Non-Place', *Photofile*, Issue #64, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2002.
 Daniel Palmer, 'Between Place and Non-Place: The poetics of empty space', *Photofile*, Issue #62, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney 2001.

Paul Knight acknowledges support from Gertrude Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne.

006	005	004	003	002	001
squash court	untitled #20	untitled (bar)	trompe-l'oeil	untitled #15	untitled #14
2001	2001	2002	2002	2001	2000
type c print	type c print	type c print	type c print	type c print	type c print
aluminium mounted	aluminium mounted	aluminium mounted	aluminium mounted	aluminium mounted	aluminium mounted
1200 x 1480mm	690 x 2070mm	700 x 2100mm	700 x 2100mm	690 x 2070mm	690 x 2070mm



the united colours
2002



sanctuary lakes 3
2000

Born Melbourne 1956. Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2002 *Selected Works*, Patrizia Autore Gallery, Melbourne.
 2000 *Life Sanctuary*, Patrizia Autore Gallery, Melbourne.
 1990 *Touch of Colour*, Gallery IL Diaframma, Milan, Italy.
 1989 *Projection*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France.

Collections

National Gallery of Victoria
 Monash Art Gallery, Melbourne
 Centre Nationale de Photographie, Paris

Selected Bibliography

'Trade', *Photofile*, Issue #65, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2002, Polixeni Papapetrou and Robert Nelson, (Ed.).

006
sanctuary lakes 1
 1998
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

005
sanctuary lakes 2
 1999
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

004
sanctuary lakes 3
 2000
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

003
life sanctuary
 1996
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

002
new growth
 1998
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

001
afterglow
 1999
 inkjet print
 1000 x 2000mm

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