return to the real: contemporary photo-media
return to the real: contemporary photo-media
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 McLachlin records the physical space around his family home. When he returns to the outer suburbs of Melbourne, McLachlin 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 McLachlin'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 McLachlin'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 cliché's 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. Walker’s 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.
narelle autio


Selected Exhibitions
2002 Not of This Earth, Stills Gallery, Sydney.
2001 Mercy Street: Australian Road Kill, World Press Photo Award Exhibition.
2001 Leica/CCP Documentary Photography Award, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (toured nationally).
2000 The Seventh Wave (with Trent Parke), Stills Gallery, Sydney.

Awards/Prizes
2002 Leica Oskar Barnack Award.
2001 World Press Photo Award (Roadkill, Australia).
2000 Walkley Award for Journalism (Feature Photography).

Selected Bibliography

Narelle Autio is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

**Selected Exhibitions**
- 1999  *Enclosed*, First Site Gallery, RMIT, Melbourne.

**Awards/Prizes**
- 2000  Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship (RMIT).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
<th>untitled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
<td><em>pigment inkjet</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
<td><em>print</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
<td>1000 x 1000mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Born Brisbane 1964, Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.

Selected Exhibitions
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
'Built', Photofile (Portfolio), Issue #63, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2001.

Glenn Sloggett is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.
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)
Born Great Britain 1952. Lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

**Selected Exhibitions**

1999  
*Leica/CCP Documentary Photography Award*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.

1996  

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**


---

Steven Lojewski is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>006</th>
<th>005</th>
<th>004</th>
<th>003</th>
<th>002</th>
<th>001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
<td><strong>untitled</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inkjet print</td>
<td>inkjet print</td>
<td>inkjet print</td>
<td>inkjet print</td>
<td>inkjet print</td>
<td>inkjet print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 x 450mm</td>
<td>300 x 450mm</td>
<td>300 x 450mm</td>
<td>300 x 450mm</td>
<td>450 x 300mm</td>
<td>450 x 300mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paul Knight


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.

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.

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

Selected Exhibitions
2002  Shop Til You Drop, 1st Floor, Melbourne.
2001  All New Personal Style, Modern Culture, New York.
2001  Syntax of Style, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.
2000  Tectonic, La Panaderia, Mexico City.

Awards/Prizes
2002  Residency at Chateau La Napoule Art Foundation, France.

Selected Bibliography
'Surface Tension', (Portfolio), Photofile, Issue #67, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2002.
Stephen O'Connell, 'Satisfaction or your money back', Arttext, Los Angeles, August-October, 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
acknowledgements

The curator would like to acknowledge the generous support of the participating artists and their representatives in the creation of this exhibition. Special thanks to Pat Brassington, Paul Zika, Michael Edwards, Karen Jackson from Stills Gallery, Phillip Hutch, Tracey Allen, Sarah Hawson, Mat Wearne and members of the Plimsoll Gallery Committee.
Catalogue design elements derived from the work of Narelle Autio and Paul Knight.

Exhibition curator: Anthony Curtis
Catalogue essay: Anthony Curtis
Exhibitions Co-ordinator: Pat Brassington
Graphic design: Mat Wearne and Sarah Hawson
Printer: Monotone Art Printers, Hobart

Copyright: The artists, author and the University of Tasmania

ISBN 1 86295 093 8

Return to the Real: Contemporary Photo-media
Plimsoll Gallery, Tasmanian School of Art, Centre for the Arts, Hunter Street, Hobart
11 April – 4 May, 2003

This exhibition received Exhibition Development Funds from CAST (Contemporary Art Services Tasmania).

The University of Tasmania's exhibitions program is assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Premier, Minister for the Arts.